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10-year analysis shows Territory life under threat from cost of living.

- New report shows dramatic cost of living increases over the last decade.
- Territorians struggling to meet basic needs, with highest rents nationally, transport costs skyrocketing and remote communities spending 40% more on food.
- NTCOSS & sector leaders proposing solutions for Federal and Territory Government to prevent Territorians being entrenched in poverty.

The Northern Territory Council of Social Service (NTCOSS) has today released the *Cost of Living in the Northern Territory: A Ten-Year Comparison 2016-2026* revealing that people in the Northern Territory are finding it harder to access housing, energy, transport and food than a decade ago.

With incomes failing to rise at the same rate as the cost of essentials for many Territorians, more NT households are unable to afford their basic needs.

Key findings of the report include:

- All working age income support payments are currently well beneath the poverty line.
- The NT has the highest average rent in Australia, with the number of available private rentals plummeting from 1,354 in 2016 to just 257 this year.
- Weekly transport costs now consume almost a fifth of the average household budget, and rising fuel costs continue to affect remote Territorians disproportionately. With no public transport networks outside of Darwin and Alice Springs, taxi fares have increased by over 26% in the last decade.
- Almost 1 in 2 Territorians experienced food insecurity in 2025 (46% compared to just 33% nationally). The average cost of a healthy food basket in a remote NT store was 40% more than in district centres.
- NT home loan repayments have more than doubled in the past decade with average weekly payments up 142% since 2016.

NTCOSS Interim Chief Executive, Claire Pirrett said the data proved that a significant amount of Territory families were vulnerable to falling into poverty, if not there already.

“The everyday Territorian is struggling with the cost of living, and these numbers tell us exactly why. They also tell us that those on low incomes are impacted most.”

“Over the last decade in the Northern Territory, we have seen housing become unobtainable for many, rent has gone up 55 per cent, and Territorians are literally unable to keep the lights on, as seen by the number of involuntary disconnections from power.”

“People here in Alice could be spending \$88 more to fill their car than those in Darwin, and in Nhulunbuy taxi prices have gone up by more than a quarter.”

Ms Pirrett said the report showed that while those in remote communities had been affected more by rising costs, the entire Territory is under strain.

“Last year almost half of the Territory experienced food insecurity, meaning they were worried about running out of food, or had to go hungry.”

"We need to recognise that we have unacceptable levels of poverty here and people all over the Territory are experiencing significant hardship. All levels of Government need to take meaningful steps to ease pressure on people"

"By identifying how lives have changed over the last decade for households in the NT, this report also identifies the levers decision makers can pull to provide relief for families and individuals." Ms Pirrett said.

Key recommendations from the report for Federal and Territory Governments include:

- Substantially and immediately increase the Remote Area Allowance and other income support payments, to above the poverty line.
- Set a needs-based national target for social housing, and embedding social and affordable housing in any new NT developments.
- Amending rental protection legislation to provide NT renters with the same protections as renters everywhere else in the country.
- Making the NT Concessions Scheme benefits easier to access for eligible Territorians, and extending eligibility to all Services Australia Health Care Card holders.
- Indexing the MVR concession.
- Extend the 30 essential items subsidy to include more healthy food options for remote stores.

Leaders from across the social services sector have raised their voices in acknowledging the report and supporting the call for urgent action.

Craig Kelly, CEO of Anglicare said that "The NTCOSS 10 Year Cost of Living Report highlights a difficult reality of this generation; that living in poverty is no longer reserved for the unemployed, young or disadvantaged. When comparing the cost of living in 2016 and 2026 its clear costs are rising but income isn't keeping up. Financial stress has become a pervasive issue that affects more people each year. "

"Importantly, this report builds a decade-long evidence base that helps us understand how cost-of-living pressures are changing in the Northern Territory and how those pressures affect our communities. It reinforces the need for continued policy action and investment to ensure all Territorians can afford the basics and live with dignity"

Annie Taylor, CEO of NT Shelter said that the report showed the entire Territory lifestyle was at risk.

"Our businesses, hospitals, schools, and major projects are running on the efforts of workers who can no longer afford rents. We need a shift in housing supply that matches the scale of need. Investing in social and affordable housing now will have tangible benefits across health, justice and economy."

Michael Klerck, Senior Policy Officer at Aboriginal Housing NT said that the report showed that rising costs were affecting remote Aboriginal communities more than most, with the full scale not even fully reported.

"Some of our most vulnerable households face cost-of-living pressures that remain largely hidden because residents of remote communities have utilities subject to far fewer regulatory reporting requirements and consumer protections than those in town. The NT does not publish utilities disconnection data for remote communities, despite now having the ability to measure this. There is no longer any excuse to make people invisible."

Regarding the report recommendation to increase indexation, Susan Richards, Executive Manager Northern Territory at Lutheran Care said: "When funding fails to keep pace with the real cost of

delivering services, it's the community that pays the price. Organisations are forced to make difficult decisions about staffing and service delivery, meaning fewer people can access the support they need.

“Proper indexation isn't about giving community organisations more. It's about ensuring we can continue delivering the services we're already funded to provide. Without it, services shrink at the very time communities need them most.”

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