



Annual Report
2020/2021



ncoss
NSW Council of Social Service

About NCOSS

The NSW Council of Social Service (NCOSS) is the peak body for the community sector in NSW. With over 400 members and a wider network of organisations and individuals who share our values, we work to alleviate poverty and disadvantage in NSW. We advocate, collaborate and connect, as an independent public voice, to build inclusive communities where everyone can thrive, supported by a strong, diverse and effective community sector. We act ethically and transparently to be an independent public voice on issues concerning poverty and disadvantage. Our work is driven by the experiences of people affected by poverty and disadvantage, and the community organisations who support them. We take an evidence-informed, consultative and collaborative approach to develop credible solutions that strengthen communities and support the sector. We partner with diverse communities and stakeholders, including government, the private sector and others to maximise impact and achieve results. We honour and respect that Aboriginal peoples sovereignty has never been ceded, that Aboriginal people continue to experience extreme disadvantage and injustice, that self-determination must be at the heart of their connection to culture and heritage and that their connection to the land and water is vital to their wellbeing.

Acknowledgement to Country

NCOSS acknowledges First Nations peoples as the sovereign custodians of Country, and pays respect to Elders of past, present and future generations. We acknowledge and value the distinct culture, customs and practices present in the many and diverse tribal nations across NSW.

NCOSS accepts the invitation of the Uluru Statement from the Heart and supports a First Nations Voice to Parliament enshrined in the Australian Constitution.



NSW Council of Social Service

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“ In the face of widening disadvantage and the risk of vulnerable households being left behind, NCOSS will continue to prosecute the case for certainty and sustainability when it comes to essential services.”

David Fisher, NCOSS President

President’s Message



2020-21 was another year when NCOSS punched above its weight. I’m incredibly proud to have been the President of the NCOSS Board over that 12 month period, and to be part of this sector and of what we have achieved together.

As with 2019-20, COVID-19 dominated the agenda - highlighting the essential role of our sector as government support payments ended, households felt the pressure and demand rose. This underscored the value of effective peak bodies, advocating for those organisations on the ground going ‘above and beyond’ to support communities across NSW.

The year was also about collaboration and partnerships, strengthening existing relationships and forging new ones. For me, key highlights included:

- With fellow peaks, commissioning ground-breaking modelling and research to highlight the social and economic value of our sector, and how investing in initiatives like social and affordable housing can contribute to NSW’s recovery and jobs growth.
- Securing, through our combined advocacy efforts, the NSW Government’s \$50 million investment (Social Sector Transformation Fund), helping the sector modernise operations and build capability.
- Collaborating with Homelessness NSW, local community organisations and NSW Government agencies to prepare and plan for, and prevent, COVID-19 in high-rise public housing units, and ensure the safety and wellbeing of tenants.
- Partnering with Aboriginal organisations and leaders, to explore how our sector can improve its practices, contribute to self determination and be better allies.

We know many NGOs are grappling with the impacts of COVID-19 on their operating models and financial viability. In the face of widening disadvantage and the risk of vulnerable households being left behind, NCOSS will continue to prosecute the case for certainty and sustainability when it comes to essential services.

Finally, I’d like to thank our hard-working CEO and her team for their efforts during what has been another relentless year; NCOSS Board members for their individual and collective efforts in guiding the organisation in its important work; our members at the frontline keeping those doing it toughest safe and well; and for the support of all of the people and organisations we work with, and for.

David Fisher
NCOSS President



CEO's message

While NSW avoided widespread COVID-19 lockdowns during 2020-21, it remained a challenging year with the health and economic impacts of the pandemic leaving their mark on communities across the state. For the social services sector, this period has been defined by resilience, teamwork and professionalism - going 'above and beyond' in trying circumstances.

In our cities, suburbs and regions, our sector has been there for vulnerable communities and those facing precarious circumstances. Our focus at NCOSS has been to support these frontline services, advocate for improved outcomes and inform the policy debate.

The economic modelling we commissioned with other peak bodies was pivotal in highlighting COVID impacts and the groups and locations most affected. It supported us to engage with political leaders and policy makers; bring evidence to the table; and successfully advocate for targeted measures to address widening inequality in NSW.

We also seized the chance to build on the growing recognition of our sector's vital role in providing essential support - especially in times of crises. By highlighting the rapid growth in social service jobs, the \$20 billion in economic output that the sector contributed during 2019-20, and our role as an industry of the future, we are changing the narrative.

We are not charitable do-gooders performing menial work of little value. We are hard-working professionals who undertake vital roles and bring expertise and ingenuity to tackle complex issues - supporting opportunity, well-being and better outcomes for those doing it tough. And we make a significant contribution to the NSW economy, with an estimated ten-fold return on investment for key elements of our sector.

These efforts are paying off. From indexation that better reflects the cost of service provision, to pay equity gains being built into baseline funding, to the establishment of the Social Sector Transformation Fund. While we still have a way to go, these are positive steps that show that our work is seen and our message is cutting through.

In a busy year, other developments of note included the Board's decision to call time on our involvement in the NSW ClubGRANTS process. This followed extensive review, analysis and consultation with our members and other stakeholders - overwhelmingly demonstrating that this is not a scheme that aligns with our values or represents good use of taxpayer funds.

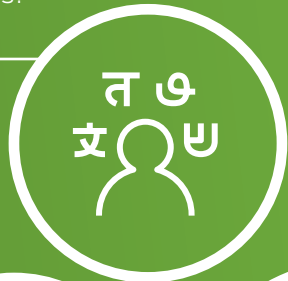
We were also excited to commence our School Gateway project. Funded by the Allan and Gill Gray Foundation, NCOSS is partnering with a school community in South West Sydney to bring whole-of-family support and opportunities into the school setting. Our role as facilitator enables us to explore, in a NSW context - a proven model for driving educational and social outcomes for children and young people, in collaboration with community members, leaders, NGOs and government.

In fact, collaboration has been at the heart of our work for 2020-21. Whether it be with our members, peak bodies, government, academics, other industries or interest groups - we couldn't do what we do without the support, encouragement and inspiration of others. And central to this, is the NCOSS team - small but powerful, undeterred by setbacks and dedicated to the task of making a difference. They are an amazing bunch of people! And our Board is pretty fabulous too. It makes me proud to be CEO.

Joanna Quilty
Chief Executive Officer

2020-21 Highlights

We undertook important new research to shed light on the experience of people living with poverty and disadvantage in NSW - including access to health services, digitisation and literacy barriers, young people's use of buy now pay later products, and vaccination concerns for CALD communities.



We were instrumental in establishing the \$50 million Social Sector Transformation Fund - a vital, one-off boost for small to medium-sized NGOs to modernise their operations and remain efficient, effective and viable.



Our modelling of COVID-19 impacts on rates of disadvantage across NSW forecast worsening outcomes in key areas and informed the case for increased investment in social services - resulting in Budget allocations for social housing maintenance, educational and mental health supports for vulnerable students, and a new fund for the sector.



We secured important indexation wins for the sector and a commitment to build hard-won equal pay gains into baseline funding - halting the backward slide.

Our post-budget event with the then NSW Treasurer, the Hon Dominic Perrottet MP and other political leaders was attended by over 300 participants - providing an opportunity to engage directly on the issues confronting our sector and those doing it toughest.



We continued to support the sector's response to COVID-19 - through our centralised resource hub, joint DCJ/NCOSS videos, tailored learning opportunities and forums to connect with each other and key decision makers.

We applied an economic lens to our sector - changing the narrative by highlighting its \$20 billion annual contribution to the NSW economy, its estimated ten-fold return on investment and potential for job creation.



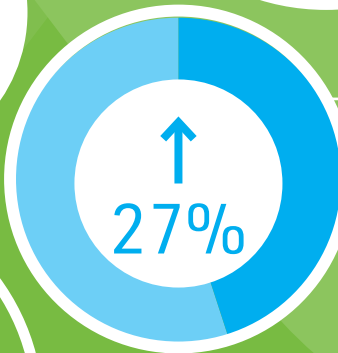
We advocated and advised across government - meeting with senior officials and policy makers to bring to their attention the centrality of our sector's work and the consequences of widening inequality in NSW.

We delivered 171 support packages to 163 organisations involving 1775 support hours under the Targeted Early Intervention (TEI) Sector Assistance Strategy - assisting services to apply an outcomes framework, collate data and measure impact.

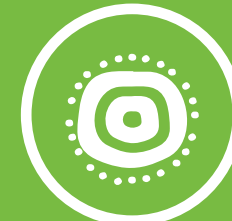


We collaborated with the NSW Government to prepare, plan for and prevent COVID-19 in high rise public housing, to keep vulnerable tenants safe and supported.

We consulted with over 100 frontline staff and surveyed 150 organisations to inform our submission to A Housing Strategy for NSW, Discussion Paper - highlighting the flow-on, lifetime impacts arising from lack of stable affordable housing.



We grew NCSS membership by 10% and revenue from memberships by 27% - demonstrating the value of effective peak bodies during challenging times.



We partnered with Aboriginal organisations and leaders - exploring how our sector can improve its practices, contribute to self determination and be better allies.

We called time on our long-standing involvement in the NSW ClubGRANTS scheme - highlighting its lack of transparency, non-alignment with NCSS mission and values, and failure to deliver sufficient value for taxpayer funds.



Our three-year School Gateway project, funded by the Allan and Gill Gray Foundation, got underway in South West Sydney - to bring whole-of-family and community support into the educational setting and deliver improved outcomes for children and young people.



In view of the uncertain operating environment, we revisited our strategic direction, including risk settings and financial management, to ensure a flexible and agile approach, a safe, secure and supportive work environment and a sustainable organisation.



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GOAL 1

Amplifying the experience of people affected by poverty and disadvantage

As restrictions eased and the NSW economy bounced back faster than expected, the impacts of COVID-19 continued to be felt by disadvantaged groups and locations.

The welcome relief of the JobSeeker supplement tapered off and disappeared in March. 2020-21 underscored the importance of access to essential supports for those doing it toughest - from crisis accommodation, social housing and healthcare, to food relief, technology, parenting support, and mental health and domestic violence services. But gaps in this safety net widened, particularly in regards to the fundamental need for safe, secure housing. In such an uncertain environment, shining a light on the experience of people living with poverty and disadvantage was more crucial than ever.

Modelling the impacts of the COVID-19 economic recession

In October, NCOSS and a coalition of peak bodies released new research [A Wave of Disadvantage Across NSW: Impact of the COVID-19 Recession](#) by Equity Economics, forecasting the impact of rising unemployment on disadvantage in NSW by June 2021. Focusing on five key domains, the modelling estimated that without interventions, there would be increased housing stress and homelessness, more reports of domestic violence, more children at risk of harm, and heightened psychological distress and educational disengagement for young people. It highlighted that particular locations and already disadvantaged groups would be most at risk.



increased housing stress and homelessness



more reports of domestic violence



more children at risk of harm



heightened psychological distress



educational disengagement for young people

The report pointed to proven solutions that would make a difference for vulnerable individuals, families and communities across NSW in the months and years ahead. Generating considerable interest from media, political leaders and policy makers, it led to opportunities to put the case for increased investment to mitigate the long term costs of the pandemic. These advocacy efforts bore fruit in the delayed 2020-21 State Budget (see below).



Experiences and expectations accessing vital health services

Also in October, NCOSS released [Mapping Patient Experience and Economic Disadvantage in NSW](#) and accompanying interactive maps, undertaken by the National Centre for Social and Economic Modelling (NATSEM). The research drew on 2018-19 ABS data to explore costs, delays and expectations in accessing GPs, dental services and medical specialists in NSW. It highlighted that not everyone's experience is equal, there is significant variation by region, and unemployed people report the most dissatisfaction.

A companion report by Health Consumers NSW [Consumer Stories of Patient Experience and Economic Disadvantage in NSW](#) put a human face to the NATSEM data, starkly illustrating the challenges and compounding impacts from lack of timely access to affordable health care.

Practical steps to ease literacy barriers

In collaboration with the National Reading Writing Hotline, we released the [Helping Clients Fill In Forms Report](#) in December. Involving 70 community organisations, the research explored how poorly designed forms and application processes, combined with increased digitisation, can prevent people with literacy challenges from accessing support. It found that local NGOs are increasingly taking on the role of 'literacy mediator' to help clients understand instructions and navigate complex systems. Identifying the worst offending forms, it put forward practical steps to simplify processes and improve access.

In 2021, NCOSS organised site visits and a roundtable discussion with the Reading Writing Hotline for staff from the Customer Experience Unit in the Department of Customer Service to facilitate better understanding of the difficulties for people dealing with literacy and other challenges, and the simple steps that could make a difference.

Social issues in the mix for the Upper Hunter by-election

In the lead up to the Upper Hunter by-election in May, we compiled relevant regional data and analysis to alert candidates about issues of concern in the electorate, and the flow-on impacts for already stretched NGOs. We asked for and shared relevant policies, kept our members in the loop, facilitated linkups between services and candidates, and pushed for rising homelessness, domestic violence and mental health concerns to be in the mix.

Understanding issues and impacts for hard-hit groups

During 2021 we progressed research to inform our understanding of the different impacts of COVID-19 and other disasters for particular groups and communities.

In partnership with Youth Action, in March we recruited 297 young people to participate in our annual Cost of Living survey, focused on the use of Buy Now Pay Later products. With technology providing easy access to new financing options and young people's job security worsening during the pandemic, we wanted to understand their use and experience of these increasingly common payment platforms.

To learn about vaccination concerns and barriers for culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) communities, from April to June we engaged Social Equity Works to undertake field work in diverse communities in Western Sydney, Illawarra Shoalhaven and Murrumbidgee regions. Via local community organisations and an online survey, we connected with 199 people from different cultural backgrounds to understand their views on the COVID-19 vaccine.

In partnership with the NSW Mental Health Commission (MHC) and the University of Canberra, we also progressed our Community Resilience, Wellbeing and Recovery project. Funded by the MHC, this project is focused on five case study communities from across regional NSW - each with experience of different disasters - to explore the role that key local 'assets' play in disaster recovery and resilience-building. It will inform the development of practical resources for local 'on-the-ground' organisations and groups, and the larger agencies that play a more time-limited role.

These projects will be finalised in 2021-22, providing important insights and useful guidance on the experience of different groups and communities who have been impacted - in different ways - by COVID-19 and other disasters.

297

297 young people participated in our annual Cost of Living survey

199

199 people of different cultural backgrounds surveyed to understand their views on the COVID-19 vaccine

5

Community Resilience, Wellbeing and Recovery project focused on five case study communities



Putting the case to our political leaders and decision makers

“All state and territory governments should demand the Federal Government step up and play its part instead of passing the buck and operating under the false assumption that decreasing JobSeeker saves money.”

NCOSS CEO,
SMH 4 Jan 2021

Together with ACOSS and the COSS network, we continued to advocate for a permanent rise to the JobSeeker rate to lift it above the poverty line, and for the Australian Government to invest in social housing.

Ahead of the Australian Government's determination of the first increase to unemployment support in almost three decades, we ramped up our efforts as part of the Raise the Rate for Good Campaign. Our January 2021 opinion piece in *The Sydney Morning Herald* highlighted the cost-shifting and flow-on impacts for state-funded services arising from families and individuals being forced to live below the poverty line. When the Government's Bill to legislate an increase stalled and was referred to a Senate inquiry, we made a submission and supported our members and others to do the same. The end result - a rise \$3.57 per day - was profoundly disappointing.

We made submissions to a range of other inquiries, reviews and legislative processes - including IPART's review of rural and regional bus fares 2021-25 and the Gaming Machines Amendment (Gambling Harm Minimisation) Bill 2020 (see Appendix A for full list of submissions made). We appeared before the Parliamentary Inquiry into the NSW Government's handling of the pandemic, to highlight the rising tide of disadvantage in the wake of the economic downturn.

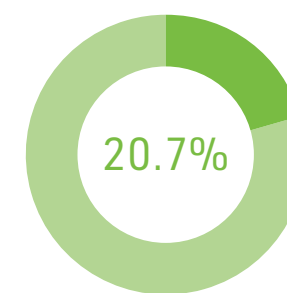


Driving the conversation and informing public debate

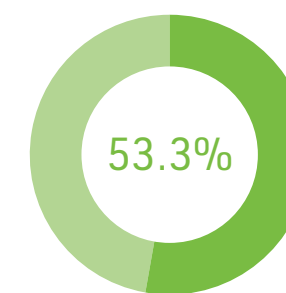
During 2020-21, NCOSS continued to grow its media presence, driving the conversation and keeping issues for people impacted by disadvantage on the public agenda. This complimented our advocacy initiatives, providing the 'surround-sound' in support of our asks to government while raising our profile among key stakeholders and the general public.

Drawing on our research and analysis, NCOSS media mentions for 2020-21 grew by 20.7 per cent and audience reach by 53.3 per cent - equating to approximately 1,215 mentions and a potential audience of 8,998,000.

Policy areas and initiatives which drew the most coverage included housing and homelessness issues, the release of NCOSS-commissioned research and our responses to government announcements. Importantly, coverage was spread across the state from metropolitan areas to regional, rural and remote locations, ensuring our voice was heard in all corners of NSW.



media mentions
grew by 20.7%



audience reach grew
by 53.3%

equating to approximately
1,215 mentions
and a potential
audience of 8,998,000



NCOSS in the Media

Media Mentions

2019-20

1,007
Media Mentions

25,439,100
Total Potential Reach

2020-21

1,215
Media Mentions

38,998,000
Total Potential Reach

↑ **20.7%**
Growth in Media Mentions

↑ **53.3%**
Growth in Potential Reach

Our Digital Footprint

Our digital platforms and communication channels enable us to broaden our reach and exposure, engaging with our members and key stakeholders and garnering support for our advocacy and campaigns. During 2020-21, we grew our social media by nearly 10% to reach over 8,200 accounts and more than doubled our followers on LinkedIn.

Facebook

f **2,543**
Followers
on 30 June 2020

2,694
Followers
on 30 June 2021

↑ **5.9%**
growth

LinkedIn

in **643**
Followers
on 30 June 2020

1,018
Followers
on 30 June 2021

↑ **58.3%**
growth

Twitter

t **4,322**
Followers
on 30 June 2020

4,524
Followers
on 30 June 2021

↑ **4.7%**
growth

Total accounts

7,508
Total accounts on social media as of 30 June 2020

8,236
Total accounts on social media as of 30 June 2021

↑ **9.7%**
growth





GOAL 2

Supporting a diverse, collaborative and innovative community sector

Our focus for 2020-21 was to build on the growing recognition of our sector's vital role in providing essential support to struggling communities, especially during crises.

Key priorities were to advocate for adequate resourcing of over-stretched frontline services in the face of rising demand; and to provide information, resources and meaningful opportunities for engagement. Our successes included indexation better aligned to the cost of service provision; ongoing commitment to equal pay gains; additional funding for small to medium-sized organisations to modernize operations; and important research highlighting the breadth, scope and economic contribution of our sector.

Practical support for the sector through COVID-19 and other disasters

During 2020-21 we supported the sector's response to the pandemic and other crises through:

- Maintaining and updating our [COVID-19 Community Sector Resource](#), providing a centralised, one-stop-shop for the sector to access information, resources and advice, including updates to the staged vaccination rollout from March 2020.
- Participating in four joint [DCJ/NCOSS videos](#), involving then DCJ Deputy Secretary Simone Walker and NCOSS CEO Joanna Quilty, to provide consistent messaging for both the sector and DCJ district staff on service challenges, support available and other COVID-related matters.
- Participating in NSW Health's NGO Community of Practice, enabling sharing of information and resources and the promotion of consistent, cross-government responses.
- Convening seven meetings of NSW peak bodies, facilitating access to decision makers and a coordinated approach to supporting the sector in response to the pandemic.
- Holding six meetings of the Federation of Non-Government Agencies (FONGA), providing the opportunity to focus on pandemic-related issues, hear from guest speakers and share insights from 'the coalface'.
- Developing a [Flood Relief and Assistance Resource](#) as part of our online Sector Hub, to assist organisations understand support available for their communities, following extreme rainfall and widespread flooding across NSW in March 2021.
- Distributing 24 editions of NCOSS eNews, containing insights, news, links and access to upcoming opportunities.



Applying an economic lens to the social services sector

In partnership with a coalition of peaks and with sponsorship from HESTA, NCOSS commissioned research in the latter part of 2020 to demonstrate the economic contribution of the social services sector in NSW, and its potential for job creation, economic recovery and growth.

The report *The Social Sector in NSW: Capitalising the potential for growth*, released in March 2021, included original modelling and analysis, and identified opportunities, challenges and recommendations to capitalise on employment potential, meet future demand and ensure a sustainable sector. It was launched in March 2021 - in the week of International Women's Day - via a webinar, with over 150 participants joining a panel of sector leaders, and Equity Economics' Dr Angela Jackson, to discuss the research findings.

The report was widely distributed, and led to briefings with Ministers and MPs, as well as public sector, business and community leaders.

“In applying an economic lens, it has helped to quantify our sector's value and shift the narrative.”

“\$1 billion net investment in care industries by government could lift economic activity in NSW by \$10 billion per year through direct generation of jobs and freeing up informal carers to participate in the labour market.”

The Social Sector in NSW: Realising the Potential for Growth (2021)

Over
150
participants



Pre-Budget Submissions – double the fun!

COVID-19 resulted in a NSW Budget delayed until November 2020. An updated NCOSS Pre-Budget Submission - reissued in September - reflected the changed economic conditions and the need to bolster recovery across NSW. We drew on previously commissioned modelling to argue for a social and affordable housing boom to create jobs; targeted supports to protect vulnerable people; and greater funding and certainty for essential community services.

Our online post-budget event attracted over 300 participants to hear from then NSW Treasurer the Hon. Dominic Perrottet MP, Opposition Treasurer the Hon. Walt Secord MLC, and Lead Economist with Equity Economics, Dr Angela Jackson.

“It was a well organised and highly skilled session - Thank you!”

- Post-Budget event attendee

The Budget went some way to addressing our asks - including a disappointing \$812 million for social housing; secure funding for essential services whose future had been uncertain; and increased investment in educational and mental health supports for vulnerable students. Importantly, it included a \$50 million Social Sector Transformation Fund to enable small to medium-sized NGOs modernise their operations and improve efficiency, effectiveness and sustainability.

No sooner had our 2020-21 post-budget event concluded, than preparations for the 2021-22 State Budget began. We analysed DCJ funding allocations across key programs over a five year period to highlight lack of transparency and a diminishing funding pool. Our *Pre-Budget Submission*, a summary of which was released in February, called for an injection of additional funds to return to previous levels; a 20% increase in funding to Specialist Homelessness Services; 5,000 additional social housing properties every year for the next 10 years; and bolstered funds for social housing repairs and maintenance.

In the lead-up to the State Budget in June, we ran training in conjunction with Shelter NSW to skill-up fellow peak body policy officers in the art of reading and interpreting budget papers.

The 2021-22 State Budget delivered increased funding for domestic and family violence services; expansion of the Together Home program by 250 packages, enabling longer term solutions for those temporarily housed during the COVID-19 lockdown; additional, long overdue funding for new and refurbished Aboriginal housing; and the establishment of mental health response teams to provide vital support to vulnerable young people.



More than
300
participants

Halting the backward slide – indexation and equal pay wins

For cash-strapped community organisations, every dollar counts. Advocacy from NCOSS secured an interim 2020-21 indexation rate of 1.4%, ahead of the delayed NSW Budget. This rate was then included in the Budget handed down in November, which was unfortunately insufficient to cover the Fair Work Commission’s mandated 1.75% minimum wage increase. Our advocacy resulted in the NSW Government overturning this decision in support of 1.75%, backdated to July 2020 and bringing indexation for DCJ-funded organisations and health-funded NGOs into alignment.

Along with others, we also successfully advocated for hard-won Equal Remuneration Order payments – arising from the Fair Work Commission’s landmark decision in 2012 to address systemic, gender-based pay discrimination in various non-government community service occupations – to be built into baseline contractual funding, as the ‘phase-in’ period for legislated award increases and supplementary payments drew to a close.

In the lead up to the 2021-22 NSW Budget, we again pushed for adequate indexation, this time to cover a rise in the Superannuation Guarantee Levy as well as the minimum wage, with a result of 2%.

“These were important wins, enabling the sector to continue to maintain pay equity gains and more adequately meet the rising cost of service provision.”

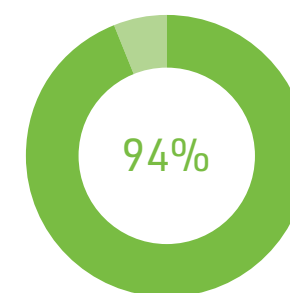


Targeted Early Intervention reform – supporting the sector’s transition

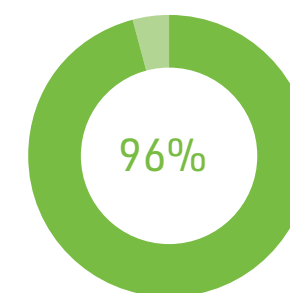
DCJ’s Sector Assistance Strategy has been a staged approach to supporting existing Targeted Early Intervention (TEI) services to transition to the new TEI program and improve outcomes for children, young people, families and communities across NSW.

Over 2018-19 and 2019-20, supports successfully delivered by NCOSS under Stage 2 included practice forums, learning circles and one-on-one support for service providers. Building on this, DCJ engaged NCOSS to deliver further individualised support packages under Stage 3.

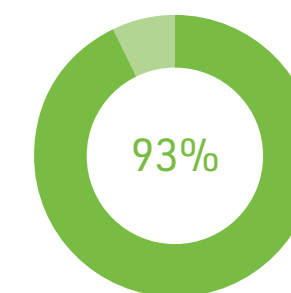
This involved a panel of 15 suitably qualified ‘support providers’ delivering 171 support packages to 163 organisations, involving 1,775 support hours. Feedback from participating service providers indicated that:



94% strongly agreed/agreed that their goal was achieved



96% were satisfied with the support provided



93% felt they had the skills to meet identified TEI milestones

“We initially needed support with Program Logic.....but we ended up with MUCH MORE - we were gifted with two position descriptions, an organisational chart and a succession plan. We feel like we won the lottery.”

“Successful delivery of Stage 3 of the TEI Sector Assistance Strategy in circumstances that were far from ‘business as usual’ was testament to the TEI sector’s resilience, the strength of NCOSS partnerships and the robustness of the project model.”

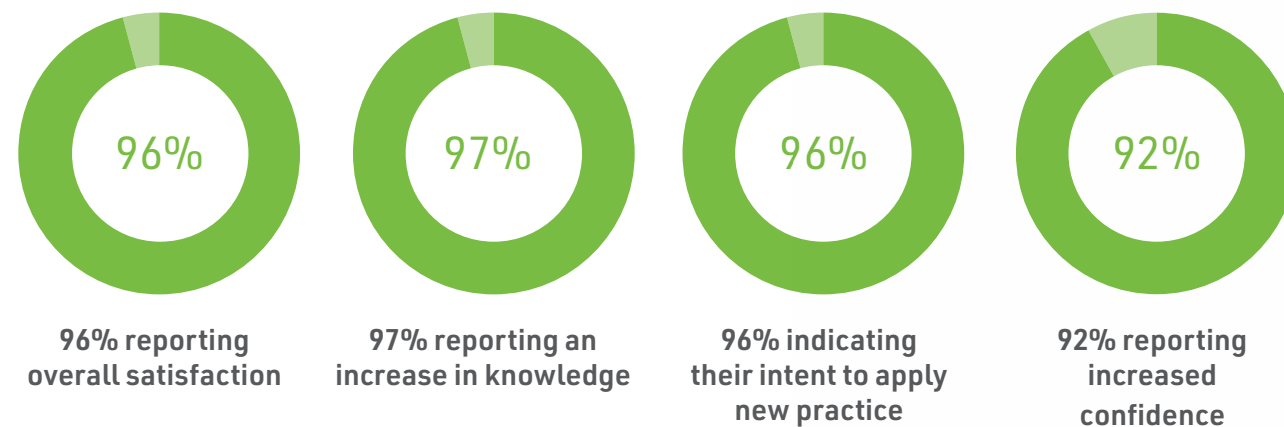
Building sector capability during uncertainty

NCOSS learning opportunities in 2020-21 aimed to enhance NGO capabilities to respond to changes in a crisis environment. 185 people across metropolitan and regional areas participated in nine learning events (averaging 23 per session):

- [‘Leading in Crisis Recovery’ series](#) – a series of five online sessions in July-Sept 2020, exploring strategies and tools for creating effective online experiences with clients and communities.
- [NCOSS Customer Satisfaction Survey Toolkit](#) – two online sessions in December 2020 involving eight CALD organisations discussing research design principles.
- [‘Working During the Pandemic: From Resistance to Revolution’](#) – a facilitated ‘best practice for remote work’ discussion in March 2021.
- ‘Have your say: Parliamentary Inquiries’ – a face-to-face workshop held in May 2021.

Training impact

131 participants (71%) provided post-session feedback, with average results across all offerings including:



Participant feedback

- “ Really emboldens us, we’ll get to try (techniques) with others trying to achieve same outcomes...gives us tools to use in our own workshops.”
- “ Thank you for sharing tools...last activity was absolutely interesting and intimate, considering we’re all doing it on Zoom, it was really amazing.”
- “ Thank you for telling us that you trialled things which didn’t work. Gives me courage to experiment.”

A Housing Strategy for NSW – perspectives from the frontline

We submitted our response to the NSW Government’s [A Housing Strategy for NSW – Discussion Paper](#) in September 2020. It was based on consultations with over 100 frontline staff and a survey of 150 organisations, to understand the impacts of lack of stable, affordable housing on people’s wellbeing and the service system overall; and was an opportunity to comprehensively engage with our membership to inform our policy and advocacy. It led to meetings with the Land and Housing Corporation’s team responsible for the strategy as they sought our advice in the finalisation process.



Celebrating the sector’s achievements

To recognise the sector’s efforts during a tough year, we used our Annual General Meeting on 27 November to take a light-hearted, entertaining look at 2020. After the formal business, MC Julian Morrow hosted a panel of sector ‘luminaries’ as they reflected on their experiences and insights from the previous 12 months.

With Homelessness NSW, NCOSS also produced a series of [short videos from well-known faces thanking the community sector](#) for its efforts to keep vulnerable people safe through bushfires, drought and COVID-19. Contributors included the then Premier of NSW, then NSW Opposition Leader, the former Minister for Families, Communities and Disability Services, Resilience NSW Commissioner Shane Fitzsimmons, Lord Mayor of Sydney Clover Moore, refugee advocate Craig Foster and rock star Jimmy Barnes. The videos were launched at the final FONGA meeting of the year on 11 December and promoted on social media.

Perspectives from the frontline

“ An inability to meet rental payments means money is shifted away from other important household items, like access to Wi-Fi and good computers for school. If these kids, living in these conditions, cannot access a good education, the poverty cycle continues.”
Child and family service, metropolitan Sydney

“ The housing problem is directly related to child protection involvement. It contributes to child removal and is a huge barrier to reunification.”
Family preservation service, Regional NSW

“ Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people living with disability are living in inaccessible housing at twice the rate of other people and are the most disadvantaged people living in our country today. The lack of appropriate housing across all regions and demographics is prolific...”
Aboriginal advocacy organisation

“ Many bushfire victims are still housed with friends, families or – those unlucky enough not to have anyone to take them in – are sleeping rough in the areas where they were burnt out.”
Community centre, Regional NSW



GOAL 3

Forming constructive partnerships to deliver outcomes

As a small organisation with a large remit, partnering with others is essential to maximise our impact - better solutions are possible when a variety of perspectives and expertise are brought to the table.

During the COVID-19 crisis we have seen unprecedented levels of collaboration within our sector, and between it and government, to rapidly respond and keep the most vulnerable safe and supported. Other partnerships continue to be important - with support from philanthropic, academic and corporate entities enabling pursuit of mutual interests. It is also important to periodically review partnerships to ensure they continue to meet their intent.

Collaboration across peak bodies

We continued to collaborate with NSW social service peak bodies to influence and inform the NSW Government's commissioning approach. This built on the Sydney Policy Lab's 'All Together: a new future for commissioning human services in NSW' report and related work led by Fams in 2019 - focused on putting people and communities at the heart of human service design and delivery. We drew on the report to engage with DCJ, through the Commissioning Co-Governance Group, in reconsidering its model to take a partnership rather than 'top down' approach.

Coordination and preparation deliver results

Following Melbourne's public housing lockdown, NCOSS and Homelessness NSW wrote to relevant NSW Government Ministers. We asked them to undertake a planning and preparedness process, with sector input, aimed at preventing a COVID-19 outbreak in high rise public housing and, if it did, ensuring a coordinated and supportive response that put the health and wellbeing of tenants at the fore.

DCJ responded positively and tasked NCOSS, with support from Shelter NSW, to identify lead place-based NGOs for each of the relevant estates to play a local advisory, coordination and triaging role. Guidelines were developed by NSW Health and DCJ, a weekly NGO consultative forum established and extensive preparation and planning undertaken. This has limited the need for sudden lockdowns and has enabled provision of coordinated support and practical assistance to impacted individuals and families.

Bringing services, support and opportunities into the school setting

In late 2020, NCOSS was informed that our proposal to the Allan & Gill Gray Foundation was successful, providing funding over 3 years to enable us to adapt, in a NSW setting, a successful place-based approach to improving outcomes for children and families in disadvantaged communities. Based on Victoria's Doveton College model, our School Gateway project aims to leverage one of the most important community assets - the school - to bring together in one location early learning, education and wrap-around support for children, young people and their families.

The first six months of the project have been exploratory, seeking buy-in from the Departments of Education and Communities and Justice, learning from the Victorian experience and identifying other relevant initiatives. With South West Sydney identified, early on, as the region of interest, our exploration of locations and schools highlighted postcode 2168 as the likely LGA, and the focus for our engagement with school communities, Council, local service providers and other key stakeholders. In 2021-22, we will move into the establishment phase, commencing with announcement of the participating school, a partnership agreement to formalise arrangements, and engagement with students, families and the broader community to bring the project to life.

Partnering with Aboriginal leaders and organisations

Given the disproportionate rate at which Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians continue to experience poverty and disadvantage in NSW, partnering with Aboriginal leaders, member organisations and other First Nations bodies to be better allies is an essential focus for our work. In 2020-21 this included:

- Seeking expert advice from our members including AbSec, Aboriginal Health and Medical Research Council, Poche Centre for Indigenous Health and Yerin Aboriginal Health Service to inform development of our Reconciliation Action Plan.
- Holding a panel discussion Lifting our Game during Reconciliation Week in June 2021 with Dana Clark, CEO of Burran Dalai Corporation and Belinda Field, CEO of Yerin Aboriginal Health Service to explore how as a sector we can improve our practices, overcome systemic racism and contribute to self determination.
- Including a priority focus on and input from Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations (ACCOs) in our policy, advocacy and research work; and backing in and supporting the policy, advocacy and research work of ACCOs to ensure culturally appropriate service delivery, self-determination and better outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders.
- Ensuring that our March 2021 International Women's Day panel, shining a light on the under-valued contribution of the sector's female workforce, included representation from an Aboriginal leader - Jenna Roberts, CEO of Wagga Wagga Family Support Service and Deputy Commissioner, NSW Mental Health Commission.



A vital one-off boost for NGOs – the Social Sector Transformation Fund

NCOSS advocacy played a key role in the establishment of the Social Sector Transformation Fund (SSTF), aimed at helping small and medium-sized NFPs modernise their operations to remain efficient, effective and viable.

Along with other nominated peaks, we participated with NSW Treasury and DCJ representatives on the SSTF Steering Committee - set up in late 2020 to advise on objectives, design features and desired outcomes, as part of the overarching SSTF program framework.

The SSTF comprises three funding rounds: direct grant payments to all eligible service providers; an open application process; and a select tender process to provide consultancy and advisory services to small to medium-sized NGOs in areas such as governance and strategy, workforce development, IT, legal and evaluation.

Along with other small to medium sized NGOs, NCOSS benefitted from SSTF allocations under rounds 1 and 2, enabling us to retrospectively cover part of the cost of our CRM and website upgrades undertaken earlier in the year, and commence planning for other improvements. We were also approached to participate in the select tender for round 3 and commenced developing proposals for this purpose.

Calling time on an outmoded arrangement

Since 1998, NCOSS has had a role in the NSW ClubGRANTS scheme - allowing registered clubs to claim tax rebates on pokie profits over \$1 million (capped at 1.85% of those profits), when they make grants to eligible community projects. Our participation secured cross-bench support in the Legislative Council to pass the scheme's enabling legislation.

At the end of 2019-20, we were funded by the Office of Responsible Gambling to review this role. Under the Ministerial Guidelines governing the scheme, NCOSS or our nominated member organisations are purportedly members of the Local Committees that advise clubs on priorities for grant allocations each year. Not being resourced for this role, our administration of the Local Committee process and related responsibilities has been poor. Our review aimed to develop systems and processes to support this role and improve governance, transparency and accountability.

In progressing the review, we spoke with NCOSS members, local councils and other peak bodies with involvement in or knowledge of the Local Committee process. We examined the Guidelines, undertook research and desktop analysis, and reviewed available information about the operation and outcomes of the scheme. We also sought the views of the Regulator (Liquor & Gaming NSW) and ClubsNSW.

We found that the scheme and the Local Committee process lacked transparency, did not always assist the most disadvantaged, drew on the considerable goodwill of many, but did not represent good use of taxpayer funds. In particular:

- The Guidelines are poorly written, contradictory and misunderstood;
- Clubs are the ultimate decision makers, Local Committee advice is routinely ignored and the process can be by-passed altogether;
- Clubs can direct funds to their own projects or those of related entities; and
- The Regulator does not routinely seek Local Committee advice to ensure compliance with the Guidelines before passing on the rebate, as required by relevant legislation.

At its June 2021 meeting the NCOSS Board determined that, on the basis of these findings and the perceived unwillingness of the Regulator or ClubsNSW to improve the scheme, NCOSS should formally withdraw its involvement. We finalised [our report](#) on that basis, with a view to notifying the Minister for Customer Service, the Office of Responsible Gambling and our members of this decision.

Collaborating to promote health equity

NCOSS continued to convene the Health Equity Alliance virtually throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, providing for information sharing and discussion of emerging issues affecting health equity in NSW communities. Guest presentations included the Western Sydney Regional Organisation of Councils (WSROC) on their HeatSmart project to support community organisations prepare for heatwaves; and Health Consumers NSW on their consumer-led research on patient perspectives of telehealth. During the 12 months, the Health Equity Alliance also progressed its joint statement on health-focused priorities for climate action, and its joint research project on barriers to virtual care.



University of Sydney research partnership

NCOSS worked with the University of Sydney's Faculty of Arts and Sciences Policy Reform Program to develop briefs for students, working with peers and academic supervisors, to deliver research papers on topics including gambling and homelessness; transparency of electronic gaming machines revenue taxation; impact of debt on youth wellbeing; barriers to vaccination for vulnerable people; and patient experience of telehealth services. These have helped inform NCOSS projects, including our recent research on perceptions of the COVID-19 vaccine in CALD communities, and the upcoming Health Equity Alliance research project on barriers to virtual care.

We also secured a grant from the University to reinvigorate the NSW NGO Researchers Forum, which will provide the opportunity for participants from across the sector to share research knowledge and expertise, and collaborate on strategic projects.

Providing expert input to Government policy processes

Over the 12 month period we met with senior executives from across Government - including NSW Treasury, Department of Premier and Cabinet, Regional NSW, Resilience NSW, Department of Customer Service and Department of Education, as well as NSW Health and DCJ - to advise them of issues concerning vulnerable people and communities impacted by poverty and disadvantage.

We also participated on various government advisory boards and panels, including:

- Social Impact Investment Advisory Board - NSW Office of Impact Investment
- State Infrastructure Strategy 2022 Expert Advisory Panel - Infrastructure NSW
- Commissioning Co-Governance Group - Department of Communities and Justice
- Hardship Scheme and Tenancy Protections Working Group, NSW Property Tax Reform Proposal - NSW Treasury



GOAL 4

Building a strong, effective and sustainable NCOSS

Like many in the social services sector, our recurrent funding is supplemented by grants for short-term projects. This enables us to focus intensively on a particular issue and delivers benefits; but it doesn't support our ongoing, core functions.

The COVID-19 pandemic saw a rise in requests for our expertise from across government, at the same time that we saw a drop-off in revenue generated through independent sources. We were able to cross-subsidise our core business and additional services to government through JobKeeper payments and other one-off gains, but this is not sustainable. The NCOSS Board and management will continue to pursue strategies to strengthen our financial position and ensure a strong, sustainable organisation.

Progressing our commitment to reconciliation

We progressed development of our REFLECT Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP), an exciting first step on our journey to formalise our genuine commitment to reconciliation. We know that, historically, our sector has not always got it right when working with First Nations People and that institutional racism persists. We engaged Rowena Lawrie, Director of Yamurrah, and sought guidance from Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations and other expert advisors from First Nations bodies. We will register our RAP in 2021-22 and use it to guide our endeavours to be better allies and listen to, learn from, and walk alongside First Nations People.

Strong governance in uncertain times

In June 2020, the NCOSS Board held a planning session, facilitated by Professor Marc Stears from Sydney Policy Lab, University of Sydney, to review the organisation's strategic direction and priorities for the year ahead. This was an opportunity to recalibrate our strategic settings in light of the impacts of COVID-19.

It confirmed the need for an agile and flexible approach to respond to the evolving situation; the priority of a safe, secure and supportive work environment for staff; and the importance of adding to the evidence base and applying an economic lens to understand impacts and support robust advocacy. It has resulted in the review and update of our Risk Register to reflect the COVID-19 operating environment; the continued application of COVID-safe work practices; and exploration of options to improve our financial position and certainty for the future.

At the 2020 AGM, we welcomed three new faces to the NCOSS Board:

- **Beverly Baker**, Chair of the NSW Older Women's Network and Executive Officer, Aboriginal Education Council
- **James Christian**, then CEO NSW Aboriginal Lands Council, now COO, Generation One, Minderoo Foundation
- **Jack Whitney**, President, the Australian Association of Social Workers, NSW Branch and Strategy and Operations Lead, St Vincent's Health Network

NCOSS Board Members 2020-21



Beverly Baker
Chair of the NSW Older Women's Network and Executive Officer, Aboriginal Education Council



Brad Webb
CEO of Castle



David Fisher
CEO of HousingPlus
(NCOSS President 2020-21)



Elfa Moraitakis
CEO of SydWest Multicultural Services



Jack Whitney
President, the Australian Association of Social Workers, NSW Branch and Strategy and Operations Lead, St Vincent's Health Network



James Christian
then CEO NSW Aboriginal Lands Council, now COO, Generation One, Minderoo Foundation



John Robertson
CEO of Foodbank NSW & ACT Limited



Katherine McKernan
CEO of Homelessness NSW



Wendy Foote
Associate Professor, University of Newcastle



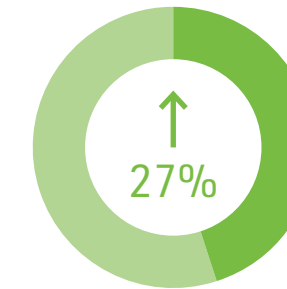
Ying Zhang,
CFO Advisory, PwC Australia
(NCOSS Treasurer 2020-21)

Membership increases despite tough times

2020-21 saw membership numbers rise by over 10%, translating to a 27% increase in membership revenue and bringing total members to 449. In a year that has challenged the financial viability and business models of parts of the sector, it is positive that the benefits of NCOSS membership are recognised. It highlights the importance of peak bodies, particularly during challenging times.



10% increase
in membership
numbers



27% increase
in membership
revenue

A positive financial result but challenges ahead

Through prudent financial management, we delivered a positive financial result for 2020-21, with an end-of-year surplus of \$476,740. This included returns (including unrealised gains) from our invested cash reserves, the sale of C21 shares (see below) and Australian Government COVID-19 support payments. It ensured continued employment security for our staff in an uncertain, fast evolving environment.

When one-off or less predictable sources are excluded, our operating income was not sufficient to cover our day-to-day expenses for the year, despite our grant funding increasing by approximately \$200,000 compared with 2019-20 (primarily through non-recurrent funding from the NSW Mental Health Commission and Allan and Gill Gray Foundation). This was because:

- Our recurrent funding increased by CPI only, and did not reflect the increased workload for NCOSS arising from COVID-19
- Our employee and consultant costs increased, to ensure the right expertise to deliver on our new projects and to meet the increased work demands associated with COVID-19
- Our independent business revenue generated by events, training, our JobsBoard and sponsorship declined because of COVID-19 impacts.

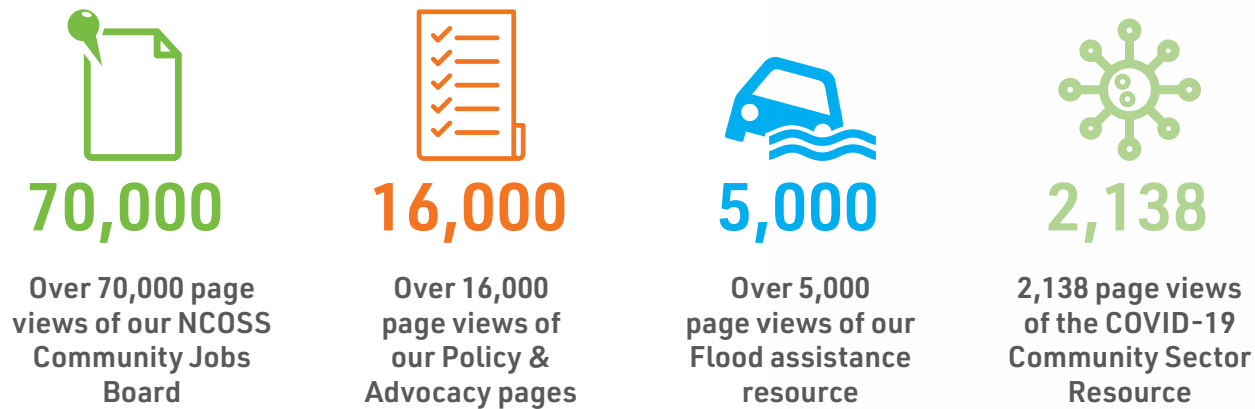
We were fortunate this year to be able to make up our operating shortfall; and to strengthen our financial buffer to help weather any future shocks and the uncertainty associated with non-recurrent grants. This supports prudent financial management, allowing us to mitigate risk and plan for the future. It ensures we are able to meet our obligations and deliver on our core mission - a NSW free from poverty and disadvantage - for the foreseeable future.

The NCOSS Board and management will continue to pursue strategies to strengthen our financial position and ensure a strong, sustainable organisation.

Modernising our communication and engagement platforms



During 2020-21 we completed projects to upgrade our CRM and website to improve functionality and the user experience. As a result we saw:



Community 21 investment pays off

Formed in 2001 by 21 community organisations across Australia, Community 21 (C21) came into existence for the purpose of entering a joint venture with Bendigo and Adelaide Bank (BAB) to form a community sector bank. The intention was to provide tailored banking products and better meet the banking and finance needs of the growing community sector. Along with 37 other organisations, NCOSS drew on its savings at the time and bought shares in the joint venture.

At the instigation of BAB, the joint venture came to an end in early 2020, resulting in the sale of C21 shares to BAB. The C21 Board stepped up to the challenge and negotiated a favourable sale price of \$5.77 million, resulting in the distribution of dividends to C21 shareholders, including \$117,365 to NCOSS for 2020-21.

Appendix A

We made the following submissions during 2020-21:

- Housing Strategy for NSW - A Discussion Paper (Aug 2020)
- IPART Review of Rural & Regional Bus Fares 2021-25 (Sept 2020)
- Inquiry into the integrity, efficacy and value for money of NSW Government grants programs (Sept 2020)
- Gaming Machines Amendment (Gambling Harm Minimisation) Bill 2020 (Dec 2020)
- Social Service Legislation Amendment (Strengthening Income Support) Bill 2021 (March 2021)
- NCOSS submission to the Property Tax Proposal consultation (March 2021)

Statement of Comprehensive Income

For the year ended 30 June 2021

	Note	2021 \$	2020 \$
Revenue	2	2,790,044	2,404,746
Interest revenue calculated using the effective interest rate method		9,053	17,236
Net realised and unrealised gains/(losses) on financial assets held at fair value through profit or loss		151,155	(15,790)
Expenses:			
Administration expenses		(38,897)	(106,391)
Brokerage and sponsorships expense		(290,172)	(105,312)
Conference expenses		(6,423)	(9,366)
Consultants expenses		(250,478)	(93,078)
Depreciation and amortisation expense	3	(136,572)	(237,802)
Employee benefits expense		(1,497,560)	(1,360,194)
Finance costs		(9,169)	(19,634)
Insurance expense		(17,366)	(15,762)
Office overheads expense		(12,573)	(14,288)
Premises expenses		(67,475)	(70,486)
Travel expenses		(23,526)	(26,191)
Other expenses		(123,301)	(172,058)
Surplus for the year		476,740	175,630
Other comprehensive income		-	-
Total comprehensive income for the year		476,740	175,630

Statement of Financial Position

As at 30 June 2021

	Note	2021 \$	2020 \$
ASSETS			
CURRENT ASSETS			
Cash and cash equivalents	4	2,435,143	488,764
Trade and other receivables	5	57,728	261,383
Financial assets	7	2,100,088	1,940,823
Other current assets	6	15,636	14,816
TOTAL CURRENT ASSETS		4,608,595	2,705,786
NON-CURRENT ASSETS			
Financial assets	7	20,000	20,000
Plant and equipment	8	10,049	4,350
Lease assets	9	184,885	317,227
Other assets	6	55,466	54,673
TOTAL NON-CURRENT ASSETS		270,400	396,250
TOTAL ASSETS		4,878,995	3,102,036
LIABILITIES			
CURRENT LIABILITIES			
Lease liabilities	9	177,898	172,299
Trade and other payables	10	2,082,767	656,764
Provisions	11	13,865	2,972
TOTAL CURRENT LIABILITIES		2,274,530	832,035
NON-CURRENT LIABILITIES			
Lease liabilities	9	-	148,622
Provisions	11	117,066	110,720
TOTAL NON-CURRENT LIABILITIES		117,066	259,342
TOTAL LIABILITIES		2,391,596	1,091,377
NET ASSETS		2,487,399	2,010,659
EQUITY			
Accumulated surplus		2,487,399	2,010,659
TOTAL EQUITY		2,487,399	2,010,659



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