

Media Release

Thursday, 16 June 2022

SOCIAL SERVICES PEAK: “THIS NSW BUDGET NEEDS TO INCLUDE MORE SOCIAL HOUSING AND A BOOST FOR SOCIAL SERVICES”

More social housing, measures to ease the strain on social services, and recognition of the vital role the sector plays when disasters strike should be front and centre in the upcoming NSW Budget.

NCOSS CEO, Joanna Quilty, said that as the Treasurer Matt Kean prepares to deliver his first Budget, he needs to think about how to better support those doing it tough right now across NSW, and the organisations who do the heavy lifting.

“We have spoken to our members and other frontline services that have supported communities through bushfires, drought, floods and multiple COVID-19 outbreaks,” Ms Quilty said.

“The resounding message from social services organisations throughout NSW is that more households are doing it tough because of cost of living pressures and communities need more support, specifically around affordable housing.

“The affordable housing crisis was prevalent before the pandemic, COVID-19 has worsened it and it has also been exacerbated by an unholy trinity of flood, fire and drought.”

“The increasingly tight rental market is putting further pressure on families with overcrowding, substandard living arrangements and homelessness on the rise.

“In the Northern Rivers, we now have a housing crisis on top of a housing crisis. Many people have been displaced and are experiencing the trauma of not knowing what the future holds.

“To combat this, we are calling on the NSW Government to commit to building at least 5,000 additional units of social housing every year over the next 10 years – and to prioritise a ‘rebuild, repair and construct’ program in the Northern Rivers region.”

Ms Quilty also called for a 20 per cent increase to the baseline funding for the social services sector.

“Another pressing issue is a lack of sufficient resources in the face of rising demand, which puts both our sector and the communities they serve at a real disadvantage,” she said.

“Many organisations have had no real increase in baseline funding since the 1990s and constantly face the uncertainty of short-term contracts, funding programs coming to an end and not knowing each year if they will receive adequate indexation.

“The cumulative impact is job insecurity, stress and burnout for the largely female workforce, with many choosing to leave the social services sector for better pay and conditions elsewhere.

“Our sector stepped up to the plate during the litany of recent disasters, from bushfires to the pandemic and now floods, but without an increase in baseline funding they are under increased strain with no reprieve in sight.

“The frequency and severity of extreme weather events will increase over time, and disadvantaged households and communities will be most impacted and least prepared.

“We absolutely acknowledge the NSW Government’s support during these events, but most of the one-off funding injections are now coming to an end, leaving NGOs – and the people they support - in a tenuous position.

Ms Quilty also welcomed the Budget initiatives already announced by the NSW Government to assist with the pressures of the cost of living.

These include Energy Accounts Payment Assistance program addressing financial hardship and energy bills; the investment into the ECEC sector, and increased funding for disaster management and recovery.

“These are much needed initiatives, but there is more to do – the social services sector is where people turn when they are in need, when they cannot afford the basic necessities.

“Without bolstered funding to the sector, including funding indexation that keeps pace with the recent Fair Work wage determination, we will struggle to maintain services and support people who are struggling to survive.

“Addressing these challenges is no small feat, but it will deliver economic and social dividends, driving job creation and boosting NSW’s economic recovery.

“That’s why today I am calling on the NSW Treasurer to prioritise social housing and social services funding to better support our community as we continue to build back after a tough few years.”

NCOSS has put forward three recommendations for the NSW Treasurer to consider in the upcoming Budget which include:

- 1. Ensuring people have a safe, healthy, accessible and affordable place to call home by building 5,000 additional units of social housing every year for the next 10 years.**
- 2. Investing in essential support, social cohesion and job security for women by boosting recurrent baseline funding for the social services sector by 20 per cent.**
- 3. Embedding place-based NGOs in emergency management systems to improve local emergency responses and recovery.**

For more information, and to read a copy of the NCOSS Pre-Budget Submission, visit www.ncoss.org.au

Media contact: Nick Trainor 0407 078 138