



Annual Report  
2021/2022



**ncoss**  
NSW Council of Social Service

## About NCOSS

The NSW Council of Social Service (NCOSS) is the peak body for the social service sector in NSW. With over 400 members and a wider network of organisations and individuals who share our values, we work to make NSW free from poverty and disadvantage.

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 social service sector.

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 developing 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.

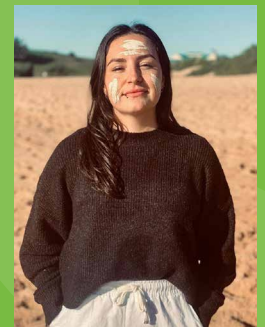
## Acknowledgement of Country

NCOSS acknowledges First Nations peoples as the sovereign custodians of Country, which was never ceded. We pay respect to Elders of past, present and future generations. We acknowledge, respect 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.

## About the artist

Our 2021-22 Annual Report cover and design draws on elements of the work we commissioned for our Reflect Reconciliation Plan, launched in June 2021. The work, by Karlie Stewart, a very talented Wandj Wandj woman from Yuin Country on the South Coast of NSW, is titled One Step of Many More. Karlie is also Program Manager, Aboriginal Healing with NCOSS member organisation, Weave, a Lecturer in Social Work at the University of Wollongong, and a member of NCOSS' Partners and Advisors Group, which is helping to guide the implementation of our RAP.



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# President's message

With NSW receiving more than its fair share of extreme weather, on top of ongoing COVID impacts and a growing cost of living crisis, the work of our social service sector has never been more vital. We know that it's low-income and other disadvantaged groups who are hardest hit by these events. It is only frontline community organisations who are there for them.



In these challenging times, the value of a peak body like NCOSS comes to the fore – ensuring the needs of those who are struggling are front of mind, brokering solutions between government and services on the ground, and advocating for more resources in the face of rising demand.

But across our sector, the perennial issue of organisational sustainability looms large. Our Strategic Plan refresh, undertaken in 2021, was the opportunity for NCOSS itself to consider this issue, and to check in with members and stakeholders on how we are going.

It was heartening to receive feedback showing very high rates of satisfaction with recent achievements. There was strong support for our focus on housing insecurity and homelessness, workforce challenges, and gender equity issues, and agreement that building a robust evidence base, including economic modelling, has garnered Government and public attention.

There was useful feedback about where we need to hone our efforts. This included increasing our engagement on rural and regional priorities and with First Nation organisations, and establishing a lived experience group.

In setting our direction for the next three years, the Board and management have taken on this feedback. We have also been mindful that, compared to our COSS counterparts in other states and territories, NCOSS has the lowest revenue per head of population and receives the lowest proportion of government funding.

Without resources to match the size of NSW and the scope of our remit, 2022-23 will involve considerable prioritisation, including not doing work for free and saying no to projects where funding doesn't reflect the costs. This isn't about point scoring or playing politics, it's about ensuring manageable workloads, staff wellbeing, and properly valuing the work of NCOSS and our staff.

At the heart of what we do are our people. I want to acknowledge the outstanding work of our CEO, Joanna Quilty, and the NCOSS team for their steadfast commitment and delivery over the last 12 months, my fellow Board members for their active contribution to steering the organisation, and to our members in communities across NSW who, everyday, rise to the challenge.

**John Robertson**  
President



## CEO's message

If we had been hoping for a quieter year, it didn't arrive: 2021-22 proved to be as demanding as 2020-21, with COVID-19, natural disasters and the cost of living continuing to challenge. Across NSW, many households were pushed to the brink as were the frontline organisations supporting them.

In such an environment, the importance of bringing the sector together to provide mutual support and draw on each other's collective wisdom and experience was paramount. We saw this with our Multicultural Services CEO forum, convened during the harsh Delta lockdowns, with our Northern Rivers flood working group, established in March, and with our revitalised Regional Members Meeting. It is also the guiding force behind our Partners and Advisers group of First Nations leaders, who are providing cultural and intellectual oversight of our Reflect Reconciliation Action Plan.

Far from being talkfests, these forums have provided platforms for identifying what is and isn't working, and connecting into government to strengthen two-way communication and inform solutions. They have been invaluable sources of real-time information and intelligence about what's going on in communities, which too often can be missing from decision-making processes.

Our philanthropically funded School Gateway project has also provided us insights to the barriers faced on the ground trying to connect struggling families with the right support at the right time. We have been lucky to partner with Ashcroft Public School in South West Sydney, and its fantastic school leadership team, to explore how to lift educational outcomes for kids through whole-of-family engagement, along with access to health and social services in the school setting. It's highlighting that building trust – and providing a welcoming, inclusive environment – have to be the starting point.

Our *High Cost of Doing Business* report called out the popular belief that small to medium-sized NGOs are inefficient, demonstrating that it is, in fact, the disparate system or systems within which they operate that gives rise to duplication, unnecessary transaction and discontinuity costs, and regulatory requirements that are disproportionate to the value of the grants involved. It also pointed out the measures that could reduce this administrative burden to free up resources for the frontline.

In the face of these challenges, social service sector staff right across the state have continued to turn up, every day, to support people experiencing poverty, racism, mental health challenges, homelessness, domestic violence and other types of trauma, those who need help with daily activities, or who simply crave a sense of belonging. Despite the low pay, poor conditions, lack of job security and the stress of multiple natural disasters, the commitment of our largely female workforce to supporting their communities is second to none.

NCOSS will continue to be a strong independent voice for a vibrant, professional and sustainable social service sector – one that is valued, trusted and adequately resourced – and for a NSW where everyone has the opportunity to lead a decent life. This is not an impossible task, and we look forward to continuing to work with you to achieve it.

**Joanna Quilty**  
CEO

**“ Despite the low pay, poor conditions, lack of job security and the stress of multiple natural disasters, the commitment of our largely female workforce to supporting their communities is second to none.**

# 2021-22 Highlights



## Strengthening our focus on multicultural communities and the services supporting them

In July, we launched our research report, *Issues, Barriers and Perceptions about the COVID-19 Vaccine among Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Communities in NSW*. It presented the findings of a survey, and focus groups with almost 200 people from diverse communities across metropolitan and regional areas, informing communication and engagement strategies, and furthering understanding of the issues driving vaccine hesitancy in CALD communities.

During the Delta lockdowns, we also established our Multicultural CEOs forum, representing the frontline NGOs in West and South West Sydney working to respond to the impacts on their communities. It proved a useful mechanism for peer support, sharing information, strengthening two-way communication and engagement with government, and problem solving.

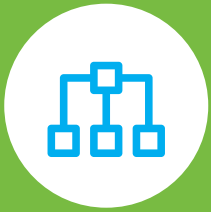


## Championing improvements to women's economic security

Our pink hi-vis campaign got underway during Anti-Poverty Week 2021, advocating for investing in better outcomes for women given their disproportionate exposure to the fallout from COVID-19. We sent a copy of our jointly commissioned research, *Rebuilding for Women's Economic Security*, to every NSW Member of Parliament, both state and federal, along with a pink hi-vis vest. It preceded a major NSW Government investment in domestic violence related initiatives including expansion of the 'core and cluster' refuge model.

We released our research, *Long Way to the Top: Career opportunities and barriers for women in the NSW social service sector*, to mark International Women's Day. This included the results of a survey of 560 sector employees. Our submission to the NSW Treasurer's Review of Women's Economic Opportunities drew on this research and other analysis, highlighting the essential role that our female dominated sector plays, and also how its growth potential and economic contribution are undermined by poor pay and conditions and lack of job security.





## Staying connected

During difficult times, the opportunity to come together to share expertise and provide peer support has been essential. In-person events held during the year included our 2021 Annual General Meeting and *Celebrating the Sector!* event at Casula Powerhouse, and our 2022-23 Post Budget Breakfast at NSW Parliament House, where around 200 joined us to hear from the NSW Treasurer and Opposition Treasurer and engage in lively debate. But connecting via Zoom remained a powerful tool, enabling us to engage with non-metropolitan members via our quarterly Regional Members Meeting, and with our Northern Rivers members dealing with the aftermath of February's devastating floods.



## Building Resilience in Emergency Responses

This NSW Government Social Sector Transformation Fund (SSTF) funded project enabled us to ramp up support for frontline organisations impacted by disasters through acting as a link into government and brokering solutions to emerging issues. This included:

- Securing flexible, time-limited grants for identified locations to enable organisations to respond to increased demand
- Working with Resilience NSW to further their understanding of our sector's expertise and capability
- Engaging with other government agencies to streamline processes and remove barriers to support wherever possible.



## Securing a win on indexation

Our persistent advocacy to highlight the essential role of our sector – and the imperative of adequate indexation in the face of increasing demand and rising costs – paid off. While, unfortunately, it didn't cover the whole of the social service sector, the 5.5% applied to Department of Communities and Justice funded services, and some other NSW Government funded programs, was welcomed by those who received it and set the benchmark for other jurisdictions.



## Being guided by First Nations partners

Supported by our cultural adviser Rowena Laurie, we launched our Reflect Reconciliation Action Plan, at the same time unveiling our specially commissioned artwork *One Step of Many More* by Wandj Wandian artist, Karlie Stewart, from Yuin country on the South Coast. We also established our Partners and Advisors Group, drawing on the knowledge and expertise of respected First Nations leaders to help guide the implementation of our RAP.

In our events, advocacy, engagement, and research, we endeavour to provide a platform for Aboriginal perspectives and ways of being, doing and knowing; to walk alongside, and lend support to, our First Nations colleagues who are leading the way on key issues.



## Finding a home for our School Gateway project

Our philanthropically funded School Gateway Project found a home at the Ashcroft Public School in Sydney's South West. Named the Mirrung Hub – the Dharug word for belonging – it's growing its role as an integral part of the school and a central focus for families. It provides a place for them to come together, engage in programs and activities, access services and supports, and feel part of the school community. Strong leadership, and a supportive school community, are proving to be critical to driving this integrated approach to lifting educational outcomes through whole-of-family support.





## GOAL 1

# Working to amplify the experiences of people affected by poverty and disadvantage

As NSW continued to experience unprecedented upheaval and disruption from COVID-19 and natural disasters, we saw already disadvantaged groups disproportionately impacted and inequality widen. In this climate, a strong independent voice speaking up for people affected by poverty and disadvantage – bringing their issues and experiences to the fore – was more important than ever.



## Continued advocacy and action to improve COVID-19 responses for vulnerable communities

COVID-19 continued its dominant presence during 2021-22, as did our advocacy and action to amplify the needs of vulnerable communities, and recognition of our sector's essential role.

### CALD communities and vaccinations

Our [Issues, Barriers and Perceptions about the COVID-19 Vaccine among Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Communities in NSW](#) report was released in July. Based on a survey, and focus groups involving 199 people drawn from culturally diverse communities in metropolitan Sydney and two regional areas, it highlighted:

- 1 the underlying concerns driving vaccine hesitancy;
- 2 the limitations of government messaging and engagement; and
- 3 the benefits of partnering with trusted services and leaders on the ground.

It led to meetings with the Department of Customer Service, Multicultural NSW and the Department of Communities and Justice to discuss ways to improve engagement, and to community organisations developing their own video messages in community languages using trusted local leaders and staff.



## Advocacy to keep vulnerable groups safe and supported

Alongside national advocacy efforts by ACOSS, we were successful in urging the NSW Government to push for access to disaster payments for those on Jobseeker and Youth Allowance who lost work hours, but were initially excluded. This contributed to the Australian Government revising its decision and giving more income support recipients access to this vital lifeline.

We also successfully advocated for free Rapid Antigen Tests for community organisations supporting disadvantaged and vulnerable members of the community, and for additional short-term funding for organisations at the frontline in COVID 'hotspots' (see Goal 2: Supporting a diverse, collaborative, and innovative sector).

## Tapping into the expertise and trusted role of our sector

As COVID numbers began to climb and a growing number of 'LGAs of concern' were identified throughout West and South West Sydney, NCOSS moved quickly to tap into the knowledge and expertise of place-based NGOs in the affected locations. This provided a means of understanding 'on the ground' issues, such as impacts for vulnerable groups, system blockages, and other concerns. We then fed this information into relevant parts of government, assisting with problem solving on key matters such as pathways for food relief and addressing conflicting messaging.

This initial approach evolved into our Building Resilience in Emergency Responses Project, funded through the NSW Government's \$50 million Social Sector Transformation Fund (see Section 3 - Forming constructive partnerships to achieve outcomes).

## Keeping the sector in the loop

Joint sector video updates with Department of Communities and Justice Deputy Secretary, Simone Walker, and NCOSS CEO, Joanna Quilty, recommenced. We continued to update our [COVID-19 Community Sector resource webpage](#) as a one-stop shop for information and advice. We also held a series of meetings with the NSW Treasurer's office, as they sought to gain insights into impacts for vulnerable population groups and frontline community organisations.



## Prioritising women's economic security

Given the over-representation of women among people experiencing poverty and disadvantage, as well as those impacted by the COVID-19 downturn and employed in our underpaid and overworked sector, a focus on women's economic security was a priority on multiple fronts.

### Pink hi-vis campaign

Our Anti-Poverty Week Campaign (17 - 23 October 2021) focused on the impact of the pandemic on women, and the opportunity to bolster NSW's economic recovery by investing in essential services and social infrastructure.

The campaign included the launch of [Rebuilding for Women's Economic Security: investing in social housing in NSW](#), a report commissioned by NCOSS, Homelessness NSW, the Community Industry Housing Association (CHIA), and DVNSW. This modelled the impacts of rising domestic violence, female job loss and homelessness among women across NSW, and in Sydney's West in particular. It set out the opportunity to improve social and economic outcomes by investing in 5,000 units of social housing for those women experiencing domestic violence, who each year end up homeless, or staying in a violent relationship because of the lack of suitable housing options.

A copy of the report – and a pink hi-vis vest – were sent to all state and federal Members of Parliament in NSW, during Anti-Poverty Week. Our Anti-Poverty Week partners, including NSW CWA, Local Government NSW, PCYC, St Vincent de Paul, the Older Women's Network and others, mobilised their networks via social media to don a pink hi-vis vest in support of our collective asks.

The campaign preceded an announcement, on 19 October, from the NSW Government of a major package of domestic violence-focused measures including:



\$426.6 million over four years to expand the 'core and cluster' crisis accommodation model to deliver 75 extra women's refuges



\$52.5 million over four years to provide approximately 200 social and affordable housing dwellings for women experiencing domestic violence, in partnership with the community housing sector



\$5.2 million for initiatives focused on children impacted by domestic violence.

## International Women's Day – breaking the bias

To mark International Women's Day 2022 and its theme of 'Break the Bias,' we released our [Long Way to the top: career opportunities and obstacles for women in the NSW social sector](#) report. It included analysis of women's under-representation in leadership roles in larger NGOs, and our sector's yawning gender pay gap. It presented the results of a survey of 560 workers across NSW, highlighting career development experiences and barriers. These included:

- 1 the lack of opportunity for women from culturally diverse backgrounds and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women;
- 2 the high rates of stress and burnout; and
- 3 the impact of job insecurity;
- 4 leading to one in two respondents considering leaving the sector within five years.



## Women's Economic Opportunities Review

Our research reports contributed to our submission to the NSW Treasurer's Women's Economic Opportunities Review, announced in early 2022 with the intention of guiding the 2022-23 State Budget. Our submission highlighted the essential role our female-dominated sector played during COVID and other disasters and its significant economic contribution as part of NSW's fastest growing industry. It pointed out the opportunities to improve job security and outcomes for women through better pay and entitlements, adequate funding to cover the real cost of service provision, longer-term and fairer service contracts, and a strategic approach to leadership, career pathways and workforce development.

# NCOSS in the Media

We continued to generate media coverage on important social policy issues to contribute to informed public debate on growing inequality and impacts for people doing it toughest.

## Media Mentions\*



## 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 2021-22 we grew our social media by 6.6% to reach over 8,786 accounts, including increasing our followers by 708.



\*These figures are an approximation only. Due to a change of media monitoring services in the middle of the 2021-22 financial year, we cannot accurately compare the 2021-22 financial year with the previous year.



## Advice to government across portfolios

During 2021-22, NCOSS was formally invited to contribute expert advice through appointment to government advisory structures on a fee-for-service basis. These included:

**1** Infrastructure NSW's Expert Advisory Panel to inform the State Infrastructure Strategy 2022-2042

**2** The NSW Department of Planning and Environment's Expert Housing Advisory Panel, overseeing the delivery of *Housing 2041: NSW Housing Strategy*.

Both provided the opportunity to draw on NCOSS-commissioned economic analysis and other research to bring the needs of vulnerable population groups and locations into the mix, and to put forward proven solutions to deliver fairer outcomes for all residents of NSW, including those whose voices can be missing from deliberations. The need for greater investment by the NSW Government in social and affordable housing to tackle our growing housing crisis, along with other essential social infrastructure to support those doing it tough, was our constant emphasis.

Throughout the year, NCOSS also put forward a range of submissions to various inquiries and reviews. These have been mentioned throughout this Annual Report and are listed as follows.

- NCOSS Pre-Budget Submission 2022-23 (November 2021)
- Submission: Women's Economic Opportunities Review (March 2022)
- Submission: NSW Independent Flood Inquiry (May 2022).





## Keeping social policy issues on the political agenda

### Engaging with our political leaders through the State Budget process

Our 2021-22 post budget event, held on 2 July 2021, was a virtual affair due to the evolving COVID situation and the advice of NSW Health. Moderated by SBS journalist Catalina Flores, over 150 NCOSS members and supporters joined us to hear from (then) NSW Treasurer, Dominic Perrottet MP, newly appointed Minister for Families, Communities and Disability Services, Alistair Henskens SC MP, and Leader of the Opposition in the Legislative Council, Penny Sharpe MLC.

Our panellists – Belinda Field, CEO of Yerin Eleanor Duncan Health Services, Nemat Kharboutli, A/CEO of Muslim Women Australia, and Hunter-based social justice advocate, Sister Carmel Hanson RSJ – shared their diverse perspectives, helped us unpack the political-speak and ensured a lively discussion.

The NCOSS Pre-Budget Submission 2022-23, [\*After the pandemic: building a more resilient and inclusive NSW\*](#), was released in November 2021 and distributed to members, Ministers, NSW Parliamentarians, and key departmental and other stakeholders.

We met with the new Minister for Families, Communities and Disability Services, Natasha Maclaren-Jones, the NSW Resilience Commissioner, the NSW Treasurer's office, the NSW Leader of the Opposition, Chris Minns MP, and the NSW Opposition Treasurer, Daniel Mookhey MP, as well as other key decision makers, to advocate for its recommendations. These included ensuring people have safe affordable homes, boosting funding to the sector to improve access to essential support and job security for women, and embedding place-based NGOs in emergency management.

Held at NSW Parliament House on 30 June, the 2022-23 Post Budget Breakfast was a welcome return to coming together. Some 200 members and supporters gathered in-person, as well as online, to hear from our elected leaders and the alternative NSW Government, on what the budget means for those doing it toughest in NSW and the services that support them.

This year we celebrated our 'win' of 5.5% indexation for many (but not all) of the NSW government funding programs under which community organisations operate. As well as Treasurer, Matt Keane and Opposition Treasurer Daniel Mookhey, we also heard from respected economist, Dr Angela Jackson, and a strong panel of sector leaders, who spoke of issues for struggling communities in the face of multiple disasters.

### By-election business

In the lead up to the four state by-elections held in February 2022, NCOSS focused on understanding and sharing candidate positions on priority social policy issues such as housing and homelessness, cost of living pressures and domestic violence. We collated available data to put to candidates, recorded interviews with those who made themselves available, and published these and related policy positions on our website.

## Listening to the voices of young people

NCOSS released our [Cost of Living in NSW – Young People and Buy Now Pay Later](#) research in September 2021. Undertaken in partnership with Youth Action, it involved a survey of 297 young people (aged 18 to 24), to understand their attitudes towards and use of Buy Now Pay Later products. Bringing an oftentimes missing perspective into the public debate, the report highlighted that the majority of young people were using BNPL products carefully and often for necessities, with most making their repayments on time. It highlighted issues for further investigation and was reported on in the Australian Financial Review and distributed to a broad network of stakeholders.

## Progressing our Lived Experience Framework

In partnership with a Lived Experience advocate, we finalised our Lived Experience Framework, aimed at ensuring that NCOSS incorporates voices of lived experience into our ways of working in a transparent, respectful, consistent and supportive way. We are now progressing an implementation plan, including the establishment of a lived experience advocacy group.

## Measuring the impact of economic shocks

Fieldwork for our 2022 Cost of Living survey took place in April, involving 1,025 NSW households on low incomes or living below the poverty line, with 22 participating in focus group and interview discussions to add qualitative depth to the data. Undertaken by the University of Technology's Institute for Public Policy and Governance, the survey was designed to enable a regional breakdown of data focused on housing, employment, income and experiences of financial hardship. The final report was released in July.

In partnership with a coalition of NSW peak bodies, in late 2021 NCOSS commissioned Impact Economics and Policy to model the long-term impacts of COVID and natural disasters on the wellbeing of people in NSW, across four domains – mental health, domestic violence, housing security, and child wellbeing and development. Drawing on the best available data, the research will estimate impacts and associated economic costs to 2025, highlighting the groups and locations most affected, and the policy solutions needed to ameliorate negative outcomes.





## GOAL 2

# Supporting a diverse, collaborative and innovative sector

The resilience and resourcefulness of our sector was called on again during 2021-22 as households and communities buckled under pressure and demand for services and support continued to rise. Additional, temporary resources and a surprising indexation result signalled growing recognition from the NSW Government of the essential role played by social services. But significant challenges – including poor wages and conditions, staffing shortages and system-level inefficiencies – remain.

## Resources for the sector during tough times

During the 2021 lockdowns, we successfully advocated on behalf of the sector to the NSW Government for a widening of its JobSaver scheme so that NGOs affected by lost fee-for-service business could apply, and for additional resources for community organisations in the 12 LGAs of concern. These organisations faced rising demand, including following up households required to isolate or experiencing other challenges. The Department of Communities and Justice allocated partnership grants (albeit very short-term) to eligible organisations through a streamlined process that minimised red tape and provided a degree of flexibility in how the funding was used.

When the Northern Rivers' floods hit in late February, we again successfully advocated for similar flexible funding but over a longer period – to enable community organisations to respond to heightened and ongoing community need in the face of the devastation caused.

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## Social Sector Transformation Fund rolls out

NCOSS had successfully advocated, in 2020-21, for the Social Sector Transformation Fund (SSTF) – the NSW Government's \$50 million fund to assist small to medium sized organisations modernise their operations, upgrade outdated technology and business models, and access specialist advisory and support services, in a rapidly changing operating environment.

NCOSS participated in early design discussions for the Fund, led by NSW Treasury and DCJ. The SSTF was rolled out in 2021-22 in three tranches, involving a mix of direct funding allocations for Tranche 1; a streamlined application process for Tranche 2; and a select tender process with identified providers for Tranche 3 information and advisory services.

As well as being a recipient of Tranche 1 and 2 funding, enabling upgrade of technology and system improvements (see Goal 4), NCOSS was awarded funding under Tranche 3 for delivery of two projects designed to support and deliver value to the sector. These were the Building Resilience in Emergency Responses project (see Goal 3), and the *Vision, Voice, Value* symposium, to reflect on and learn from the upheaval of the last few years, the benefits of the SSTF and challenges ahead.

The Department of Communities and Justice also asked NCOSS to take on the coordination role for providers of SSTF Tranche 3 information and advisory services. This involved chairing regular meetings with service providers and DCJ and coordinating reports for DCJ on agreed performance measures.

Our planning for the Vision, Voice, Value symposium got underway in late 2021 with a view to delivering an engaging, high quality and thought provoking face-to-face experience for small to medium sized organisations. Guided by a steering group of Tranche 3 providers, interested peak bodies, and DCJ representatives, preparations and planning were progressed for the October 2022 event.

## The High Cost of Doing Business

Our [\*The High Cost of Doing Business: Administrative and management overload for smaller NGOs\*](#) report, undertaken in conjunction with Ask Insight, was released on 9 June. Using a case study approach, it highlighted the increasingly complex operating environment for small to medium-sized NGOs and the growing administrative burden they bear, exacerbated by COVID and other disasters. This included the impact of multiple funding agreements, inadequate recognition of back-office requirements, and the 'discontinuity' costs associated with short term grants.

The report put forward practical steps to reduce administrative overload such as using the ACNC's 'charity passport' data to reduce duplicate reporting; establishing a prequalification register; applying common definitions, templates and portals; and funding for core organisational infrastructure. It was circulated to relevant Ministers, departmental staff and local MPs, generating media interest and providing evidence that major inefficiencies reside at the systems, rather than organisational, level.

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## Indexation win

In advance of the Fair Work Commission's decision on minimum wage increases, NCOSS engaged with the Treasurer's Office and others to stress the need for wage and superannuation increases to be reflected in annual indexation. We coordinated a joint letter, with other peak bodies, to each Minister with funding responsibilities for our sector and undertook media on the issue. Our efforts paid off, at least in part, with indexation of 5.5% announced – initially for Department of Communities and Justice funded services and then, following additional advocacy, extended to tenants' advice and financial counselling services funded through Fair Trading, and community legal centres funded through Legal Aid.

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## Evidence Talks

The 'Evidence Talks' three-part series examining the application of a Theory of Change and building an evidence base to underpin practice was very popular, with over 150 attending each session. Feedback results showed 90%, 95% and 88% of respondents (for session 1, 2 and 3 respectively) said they 'would recommend the series to others.'

## Community resilience, wellbeing and recovery project

In November, we launched our Community Resilience, Wellbeing and Recovery project, undertaken over 18 months in partnership with the NSW Mental Health Commission. The project looked at the role of key community assets – such as neighbourhood centres, local support services, community groups and voluntary associations – in supporting resilience and recovery following natural disasters.

Using a case study approach, the project examined five NSW communities with experience of multiple disasters (Bega, Blue Mountains, Forbes, Snowy Monaro and Wentworth), the role of community assets, and the factors that can assist or hinder recovery. Drawing on interviews and workshops with community members, as well as available data and literature, the project resulted in a range of resources including five case study reports, a literature review and an Insights paper.

It also produced two practical guides. One is for local community assets, to assist them clarify and prepare for their role, attract additional resources, and work effectively with larger government and non-government disaster management agencies. The other is for 'outside' agencies, to assist them better support and collaborate with local assets to maximise community-led recovery.



## Applying a human rights framework

In 2021, a three-part webinar series exploring human rights approaches to community services was held with over 150 participants across the three sessions. In 2022, a second series was undertaken, involving 75 participants and a more in-depth look at key issues, including working with those with lived experience and First Nations communities. Among the 98 participants across the two series who gave feedback, 99% would recommend the session they attended to others, and 89% intended to apply a new practice as a result of participating.

150

150 participants  
across 3 sessions

99%

99% would recommend  
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to others

89%

89% intended to apply a  
new practice as a result of  
participating.

# NCOSS School Gateway Project – the Mirrung Hub and Strategy take shape

Our School Gateway project progressed to establishment and the early phases of implementation, despite the disruptions and delay caused by COVID-19. Funded through Allan and Gill Gray Philanthropy Australasia over three years (2021-23), it aims to lift children’s educational outcomes in economically disadvantaged locations by bringing social and health services, along with enrichment activities, into the school setting.

Modelled on Victoria’s Our Place program, the underlying premise is that by facilitating ready access to whole-of-family services, support and engagement, families will be better placed to play an active role in their children’s education, provide a nurturing environment and deal with life’s challenges.





## Key milestones for the project in 2021-22 included:

- 1** Following extensive consultation with education networks, the highly culturally diverse Ashcroft Public School was selected as the project site, bringing outstanding leadership to the project via a supportive school principal and enthusiastic school leadership team
- 2** With the support of the South West Sydney Aboriginal Education Consultative Group, the name of Mirrung Wellbeing Hub and Strategy was decided on for the project – Mirrung being the Dharug word for 'Belonging'
- 3** The relationship between NCOSS and the Ashcroft school leadership team went from strength to strength, providing a strong foundation for and shared commitment to the project. This was aided by a joint visit, also involving Departments of Education and Communities and Justice officials, to Victoria to see the Our Place model in action
- 4** Western Sydney University's Transforming early Education And Child Health Research Centre (TeEACH) was engaged to deliver a comprehensive program of community engagement to understand strengths, aspirations and challenges for children, young people and families from the Ashcroft community; and to inform development of a shared vision, along with outcomes, measurement and evaluation frameworks
- 5** Connecting with health and social services in South West Sydney continued, a preliminary service mapping exercise was undertaken, and support for the project garnered from Council, district offices of relevant government departments and philanthropic networks
- 6** Engagement with the student leadership team commenced, seeking their input and support and empowering them to spread 'the Mirrung message' among fellow students
- 7** The introduction of parents of kindergarten students to Mirrung got underway through activities designed to promote connection, build trust and encourage their engagement in the hub and their child's learning
- 8** The first activities in a program of enrichment were delivered via a well-attended afterschool dance class program in Term 3 and holiday sports day in the Spring school holidays
- 9** Planning for the delivery of health and services through the Mirrung Hub progressed, including a mobile dental clinic in term four; and employment of the Mirrung team is progressing.



## GOAL 3

# Forming constructive partnerships to deliver outcomes

As a small peak body with a broad remit, partnerships and collaboration – with our members, fellow peaks, government authorities, academics, philanthropy and other bodies – are at the heart of everything we do.

## Forums for information exchange, collaboration and strategic alignment

During the 2021 lockdown period, we increased the frequency of meetings with relevant NSW peak bodies, coming together 5 times to share information, understand impacts for different population groups and agree the way forward. In uncertain and evolving circumstances, this opportunity to share, collaborate and unite on key issues was essential.

The value of our longstanding Federation of Non-Government Agencies (FONGA) bi-monthly member meetings also came to the fore, enabling a variety of perspectives to be shared from across the state and providing a platform to hear from different experts and authorities. Six meetings were held in 2021-22, with guest speakers including Professor Greg Dore from the Kirby Institute providing expertise on the epidemiology of COVID-19, and Dr Andy Marks from Western Sydney University helping us to interpret the 2022 federal election results and the forces at play in Western Sydney.

The first of our revitalised quarterly Regional Members Meeting was held on 7 December with 33 participants from 31 regional services across NSW. The follow up meeting in March featured a panel of First Nations leaders sharing their innovative responses to keeping their communities safe during bushfires, floods and the pandemic; and provided an opportunity to engage with Resilience NSW and inform their understanding of the sector's role, on-the-ground issues and the frustrations experienced.

33

Regional  
Members Meeting  
participants

31

Participants came  
from 31 regional  
services across NSW

## Health Equity Alliance Climate Statement

The Health Equity Alliance, led by NCOSS, met four times over 2021-22. In November, it released a joint Climate Statement in recognition of the 2021 Glasgow Climate Change Conference. The Statement highlights the direct and indirect impacts that climate change will have on health outcomes in NSW particularly for disadvantaged groups, and calls on the NSW Government to taken seven steps towards climate action, introducing a NSW Climate Change Act, and embedding climate change assessment, mitigation and adaption into budgetary processes.

## Collaborating on community-led research

With a grant from the University of Sydney's Neighbourhood Research Hub, we explored the possibility of reigniting the NGO Researchers' Forum to promote community-led research; and as a platform for researchers in the NGO sector to come together, share their research efforts and collaborate on a collective agenda. Following planning workshops, two forums were held focused on co-design methods, including those centred on the involvement of people with lived experience.

Also with the University of Sydney, we partnered with the Faculty of Social Sciences to produce student research papers exploring topics aligned with NCOSS priorities, including working with people with lived experience and the implementation of human rights frameworks.

## Recognising and thanking the NSW social service sector

Our 2021 Annual General Meeting on 26 November was also an opportunity to thank the sector for its efforts over an extraordinary period that required more than the usual 'stepping up' for communities during difficult times. Held at the Casula Powerhouse, with South West Sydney local and journalist, Sarina Andaloro, as MC, it featured a thank you video from NSW leaders including the Premier of NSW, Dominic Perrottet MP; Leader of the Opposition, Chris Minns MP; NSW Chief Medical Officer, Dr Kerry Chant; NSW Aboriginal Woman of the Year, June Reimer; and longstanding diversity champion, social entrepreneur and CEO of Settlement Services International, Violet Roumeliotis AM.

The AGM was followed by a panel discussion featuring multicultural service CEOs – and Nene Brown, the owner of local business, Kallico Catering – reflecting on how their organisations and communities worked together to survive the pandemic's disproportionate impacts on Sydney's West and South West. It was also an opportunity to host SydWest Multicultural Services' beautiful *Capturing the Moment* photo exhibition, depicting community members and their life journeys, and to showcase the talents of young Aboriginal artist and South West Sydney local, Jessie Waratah.





GOAL 3

# Building Resilience in Emergency Responses Project

The Building Resilience in Emergency Responses Project was the result of a successful NCOSS application under the Social Sector Transformation Fund's Tranche 3. This funded information, support and advisory services to assist small to medium sized NGOs improve their efficiency and effectiveness in an uncertain environment.

Commencing in August 2021, the project grew out of the COVID emergency and the lack of opportunity for frontline NGOs to connect with each other for support, collaboration and information sharing – or to meaningfully connect in with government to provide a ground-up perspective and inform decision making and a partnership approach.

As project lead, NCOSS' role was one of coordination, facilitation and support. We acted as a conduit between the sector and different parts of government, to relay information, strengthen two-way communication, problem-solve and drive greater alignment. The project was also designed to build enduring resources and tools, drawing on the sector's collective wisdom and experience to assist each other – and authorities – prepare for, and respond to, future disasters.

The success of this 'ground up' approach during the COVID Delta outbreak led to it being replicated, in March 2022, following the devastating Northern Rivers floods.

## Key initiatives and achievements of the project include:



Establishing, and convening seven meetings of, the Multicultural Services Forum, comprising CEOs of Multicultural Resource Centres in West and South West Sydney, in response to the Delta outbreak and the restrictions and impacts that followed



Regular meetings between members of the Forum and Deputy Police Commissioner, Mal Lanyon, to discuss police tactics, highlight traumatic impacts, and improve community relations in West and South West Sydney



Advocating, on behalf of the forum, to the Minister for Health and the Minister for Multiculturalism for a more collaborative and informed approach to encouraging vaccination uptake, including a follow up meeting with the Minister for Multiculturalism, Mark Coure MP



Developing a COVID-19 Vax Risk Assessment Toolkit, in response to the Department of Communities and Justice's decision to devolve responsibility regarding vaccination requirements to individual organisations



Publishing accounts from member services of how they supported their communities through COVID-19, bushfires and floods in a collection of case studies and podcasts, housed on the Building Resilience in Emergency Responses page on the NCOSS website



Building relationships with Resilience NSW, local councils and other key stakeholders to further greater understanding of our sector's capabilities and expertise during disasters, and reduce duplication and disconnection



Advocating for free Rapid Antigen Tests for cash-strapped NGOs across NSW



With Muslim Women Australia, making a submission to the NSW Parliament Committee on Community Service's inquiry into improving crisis communications to culturally and linguistically diverse communities, and appearing at an Inquiry hearing



Making a submission to the Independent Review of Australia's COVID-19 Response, undertaken by The Paul Ramsay Foundation and other philanthropic bodies



Establishing, in March 2022, the Northern Rivers Flood Working Group for health and social service NGOs located in flood-impacted communities in the Northern Rivers region. The Flood Working Group has been convened 12 times and connected with Minister for Emergency Services and Flood Recovery, Steph Cooke MP; the Northern Rivers Reconstruction Corporation; and senior executives from the Department of Communities and Justice, Resilience NSW and NSW Police to inform understanding and decision making, and improve communication and collaboration



Attending the Ministerial Roundtable in Lismore to discuss staffing shortages for health and social services, made worse by the floods



Working with Southern Cross University to facilitate local NGOs leveraging the opportunity of student placements to assist with skills shortages, and engaging research students to support the working group and investigate disaster management practices in other jurisdictions



Advocating, with the Flood Working Group, for improved and streamlined administration with regards to the distribution of mental health grants, and the processing of temporary accommodation applications



Sitting on the Northern NSW Health and Wellbeing Subcommittee of the Regional Recovery Committee



Making submissions to the Independent Inquiry and the Parliamentary Inquiry into the Flood Response, including a follow-up meeting with the Independent Inquiry's secretariat to highlight inadequate recognition of the social service sector in the Inquiry's final report and promote better alignment between reconstruction and social recovery



Applying to Resilience NSW's Disaster Risk Reduction Fund, in partnership with AbSec and LCSA, to pilot a 'ground up' approach to disaster planning, preparation and coordination in three locations, to bring vulnerable population groups and social services into the frame and better linked to formal emergency management processes from the outset.





## GOAL 4

# Building a strong, effective and sustainable NCOSS

With additional one-off funding coming NCOSS's way during 2021-22, staffing levels and administrative effort increased to support our new projects. The need to rapidly scale up and then scale down is, unfortunately, all too common for small NGOs in a funding environment characterised by short term contracts and insufficient recognition of back-office costs. NCOSS is lucky to have a small but dedicated team of staff who cope with this uncertainty and prove themselves to be highly flexible and dedicated to the organisation and its role.



## Continued strong governance

Our 2021 AGM saw existing Directors – Katherine McKernan, CEO, Homelessness NSW; John Robertson, CEO, Foodbank NSW/ACT Ltd; and Brad Webb, an individual member and CEO of Castle Employment Services – re-elected to the Board. With David Fisher, CEO of Housing Plus, deciding not to seek another year in the role, the Board elected John Robertson as President and re-elected Brad Webb as Treasurer.

We farewelled James Christian, when his exciting new role with the Minderoo Foundation required him to relocate to Western Australia and Jenni Beetson-Mortimer stepped into the casual vacancy his departure created. A descendant of the Ngemba people, Jenni's agreement to serve on the Board also allowed NCOSS to continue to meet the important requirement of our Constitution to have, at all times, at least one First Nations Board member.

## The market delivers a hit to our bottom line

Last year, we delivered a \$476,740 surplus through prudent financial management and also strong returns on investments (including unrealised gains). This year, we posted a loss of \$161,425, largely because of unrealised losses as economic headwinds hit the market.

Like last year, however, when one-off grants or less predictable sources of revenue (or losses, like market movements) are excluded, operating income was insufficient to cover our costs. With no room to pare back expenses without impacting on what we can deliver, NCOSS – like the rest of the sector – needs the NSW Government to commit to sustainable funding.

## Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP)

Under the guidance of our Cultural Adviser Rowena Lawrie and in consultation with First Nations members and partners, our first Reflect Reconciliation Action Plan was officially endorsed by Reconciliation Australia in May 2022. The launch event, held on 10 June 2022, also provided the opportunity to unveil our beautiful RAP artwork, *One Step of Many More*, created by talented young Aboriginal artist Karlie Stewart.

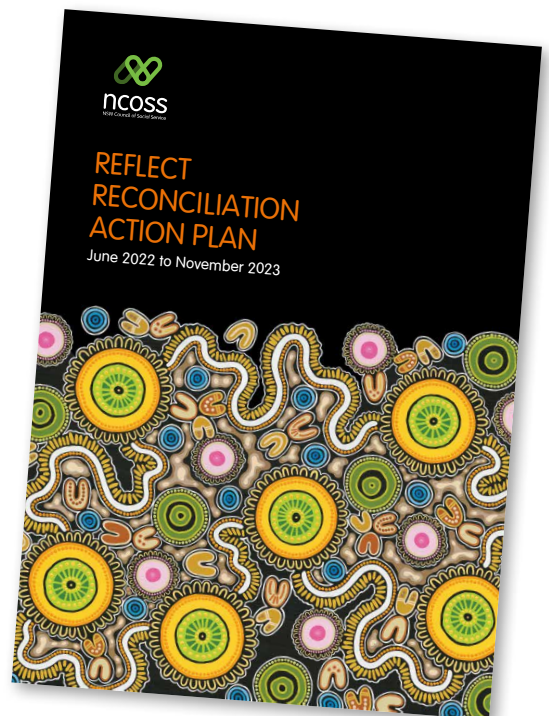
Along with other respected Aboriginal leaders, Karlie forms part of our First Nations Partners and Advisors Group, providing intellectual and cultural oversight and guidance on key strategic elements of the RAP. Under co-chairs Belinda Field (CEO, Yerin Eleanor Duncan Health Service) and Boe Rambaldini (Elder and Associate Professor, Macquarie University), the group held its first meeting in May and a second meeting in July.

A RAP working party of NCOSS staff has also been established to progress commitments under our RAP action plan. Actions taken to date include:

- 1 Giving prominence to First Nations voices in our public events and engagement opportunities
- 2 Backing in and supporting First Nations colleagues in their research, policy and advocacy work
- 3 Incorporating First Nations issues and perspectives into our research, policy and advocacy work guided by our First Nations colleagues
- 4 Enabling opportunities for non-Indigenous organisations to listen to and learn from First Nations leaders and colleagues

In March 2022, NCOSS was approached by NSW Aboriginal Affairs and NSW CAPO (Coalition of Aboriginal Peak Organisations) to organise a Roundtable for non-Indigenous NGOs, to explore how they can grow Aboriginal employment and leadership opportunities in their own organisations and across the sector more generally. The Roundtable was intended to support and progress NSW's Closing the Gap Implementation Plan, in particular Priority Reform Three, which seeks to hold Government organisations and services accountable for Closing the Gap and for effective, culturally appropriate service delivery.

We saw the opportunity to lead the sector in important reflection, conversations and commitment to action and agreed to work with NSW Aboriginal Affairs and CAPO to deliver the Roundtable in August 2022.



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## NCOSS on the move

In May, NCOSS re-located to Yirranma Place in Darlinghurst, joining the sector hub set up by the Paul Ramsay Foundation. We now benefit from subsidised accommodation in a beautifully renovated, landmark building and increased opportunities to collaborate and connect with like-minded organisations and individuals. Along with tweaks to our organisational structure as staff have moved on, this move has helped us to further reduce operational expenses in a challenging funding environment.



## Strategic Plan refresh

A review of the NCROSS Strategic Plan was undertaken, to reflect on the past three years and the changed landscape, seek feedback from staff, our Board, members and other stakeholders, and adjust our strategic direction for 2022-23 and beyond.

At 90%, our member survey highlighted a high degree of satisfaction with recent achievements, and also pointed to where we can strengthen our efforts.

It also provided evidence that, on a per capita basis, state government funding to NCROSS falls well behind that provided to Councils of Social Service in other states/territories. It confirmed the importance of prioritising our efforts on core deliverables, and not over-delivering or undertaking work for free when there are risks to staff health and wellbeing.

## ICT improvements

NCROSS used its allocation from the Social Sector Transformation Fund to review its ICT needs resulting in a series of further improvements including upgraded equipment, migration to the cloud (Office 365), greater optimisation of CRM and website functionality, and additional security measures.

As a result of these improvements we saw: (123,370 page views)

**Community  
Jobs Board**

**87,928**  
page visits

**Policy and  
Advocacy pages**

**13,606**  
page visits

**Flood Assistance  
resource**

**19,166**  
page visits

**COVID  
resource**

**2,670**  
page visits

# NCOSS Board Members 2021-22



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



**Brad Webb**  
CEO of Castle  
NCOSS Treasurer 2021-22



**David Fisher**  
CEO of HousingPlus



**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



**Jenni Beetson-Mortimer**  
CEO, Northern Rivers Community Gateway  
Director, Homelessness Australia



**John Robertson**  
CEO of Foodbank, NSW & ACT Limited  
NCOSS President 2021-22



**Katherine McKernan**  
CEO of Homelessness NSW



**Wendy Foote**  
Associate Professor,  
University of Newcastle

# Statement of Comprehensive Income

## For the year ended 30 June 2022

	Note	2022 \$	2021 \$
<b>Revenue</b>	2	2,881,784	2,790,044
Interest revenue method calculated using the effective interest rate		4,281	9,053
Net realised and unrealised gains/(losses) on financial assets			
held at fair value through profit or loss		(369,215)	151,155
<b>Expenses</b>			
Administration expenses		(39,284)	(38,897)
Brokerage and sponsorships expense		(60,455)	(290,172)
Conference expenses		(48,116)	(6,423)
Consultants expenses		(307,357)	(250,478)
Depreciation and amortisation expense	3	(163,216)	(136,572)
Employee benefits expense		(1,806,414)	(1,497,560)
Finance costs		(4,006)	(9,169)
Insurance expense		(18,269)	(17,366)
Office overheads expense		(12,635)	(12,573)
Premises expenses		(91,816)	(67,475)
Travel expenses		(16,018)	(23,526)
Other expenses		(110,689)	(123,301)
<b>(Loss) / Surplus for the year</b>		<b>(161,425)</b>	<b>476,740</b>
<b>Other comprehensive income</b>		<b>-</b>	<b>-</b>
<b>Total comprehensive income for the year</b>		<b>(161,425)</b>	<b>476,740</b>

# Statement of Financial Position

## As at 30 June 2022

<b>ASSETS</b>	<b>ASSETS</b>	<b>Note</b>	<b>2022 \$</b>	<b>2021 \$</b>
Cash and cash equivalents		4	798,447	2,435,143
Trade and other receivables		5	97,822	57,728
Financial assets		7	2,614,816	2,100,088
Other current assets		6	27,704	15,636
<b>TOTAL CURRENT ASSETS</b>			<b>3,538,789</b>	<b>4,608,595</b>
<b>NON-CURRENT ASSETS</b>				
Financial assets		7	-	20,000
Plant and equipment		8	17,508	10,049
Lease assets		9	-	184,885
Other assets		6	56,270	55,466
<b>TOTAL NON-CURRENT ASSETS</b>			<b>73,778</b>	<b>270,400</b>
<b>TOTAL ASSETS</b>			<b>3,612,567</b>	<b>4,878,995</b>
<b>LIABILITIES</b>				
<b>CURRENT LIABILITIES</b>				
Lease liabilities		9	-	177,898
Trade and other payables		10	1,241,752	2,082,767
Provisions		11	17,555	13,865
<b>TOTAL CURRENT LIABILITIES</b>			<b>1,259,307</b>	<b>2,274,530</b>
<b>NON-CURRENT LIABILITIES</b>				
Provisions		11	27,286	117,066
<b>TOTAL NON-CURRENT LIABILITIES</b>			<b>27,286</b>	<b>117,066</b>
<b>TOTAL LIABILITIES</b>			<b>1,286,593</b>	<b>2,391,596</b>
<b>NET ASSETS</b>			<b>2,325,974</b>	<b>2,487,399</b>
<b>EQUITY</b>				
Accumulated surplus			2,325,974	2,487,399
<b>TOTAL EQUITY</b>			<b>2,325,974</b>	<b>2,487,399</b>





NSW Council of Social Service

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