

Speaking points

Below are some suggested speaking notes for each of the recommendations. These can be supported by the data in the fact sheets as well.

1) Respond to rising energy prices

- Our cost-of-living crisis is affecting everyone, but our most vulnerable are being hit the hardest and more and more people are struggling to make ends meet.
- They wake up wondering how they will afford to feed their families, pay the bills, and just get by.
- Our research tells us that energy costs are consuming low income household expenditure, second only to food.
- 11% of respondents in NCOSS' cost-of-living research were aware of the Energy Accounts Payment (EAPA) scheme but only 1.7% accessed it.
- 21% of respondents were aware of the Low Income Household Rebate but only 4.7% had used it.

2) Improve access to dental care

- Good oral health is fundamental to wellbeing, yet it is overlooked in our health care system.
- It's not covered under Medicare, leaving individuals to fork out the costs.
- Many simply can't afford it, causing unnecessary pain and stigma. 1 in 5 people are avoiding going to the dentist because of cost.
- First Nations communities, particularly in rural and remote areas, experience poor oral health outcomes.

3) Make renting more secure and affordable

- Across NSW, rental increases and the rising cost of living have placed even more stress on households and increased the risk of homelessness for many.
- Those on low incomes are most at risk, especially when disasters occur.
- Renting across the state has increased by 17.6% since 2016.
- An estimated 54,000 households have entered or experienced a worsening of housing stress since the start of the pandemic.

4) Invest in social infrastructure so that essential support reaches those in need

- Neighbourhood centres and others such as multicultural services and Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations have been lifelines during recent disasters.

- They are an essential service that provide social connection, psychological support and practical assistance for those most in need, yet don't receive core funding to operate.
- The Queensland government recently doubled core funding to their 127 neighbourhood centres. NSW must follow suit and provide core funding to cover the cost of new centres or locations/circumstances necessitating additional resourcing.

5) Enhance safety, security and wellbeing for women impacted by domestic and family violence

- The housing crisis continues to worsen in NSW, particularly for those who are most vulnerable.
- Since the pandemic, housing insecurity has worsened for women in NSW – 60,000 women experienced domestic and family violence for the first time and a further 46,000 experienced an escalation in violence.
- 4,812 women and their children experiencing violence who currently face homelessness, or returning to violence because of a lack of safe, secure and affordable housing

6) Bolster children's safety, social development and educational outcomes

- The extreme events of the past three years have significantly impacted the safety, wellbeing and development of our children.
- The closure of schools and childcare has impacted learning and social development. Between 2018 and 2021, there was a 13.4% increase in children from low socio-economic areas starting school developmentally vulnerable.
- Our service system continues to be crisis orientated and families struggle to connect with the right support at the right time.
- Reports of risk of significant harm has increased by 13.5% in the three years to 2020-21, up by more than 20% in some locations.
- For Aboriginal children, over the five years to 2019-20, there was a 40% increase.

7) Limit the harm caused by pokies on vulnerable communities

- Across NSW, in the first half of 2022, punters lost almost \$4 billion playing the pokies. This is worrying, particularly when low level income Local Government Areas have the highest number of pokie machines and experience the greatest losses.
- Evidence supports a well-designed cashless gaming card minimising gambling harm.

8) Strengthen sustainability of the NSW social service sector as a growth industry and key employer of women

- Our sector is the largest employer in Australia and is projected to grow even further, contributing \$15.4 billion each year to the NSW economy.
- Our sector employs more than 240,000 staff and provides care and support to over one million people each year.
- In the face of recent upheavals, demand for social services in NSW is rising yet government support remains stagnant.
- The sector is highly feminised and characterised by low pay, poor conditions and a large gender pay gap.

