

JOINT STATEMENT

FROM PEAK ORGANISATIONS REGARDING STRENGTHENING NON-GOVERNMENT ORGANISATIONS AGENDA

On behalf of:

COTA National
Seniors



Mackay Regional Council for Social Development



September 2005

We would like to take this opportunity to welcome Minister Pitt's initiative in relation to the Strengthening Non-Government Organisations agenda, and congratulate him on the progress to date. We look forward to working with him, with his Parliamentary Secretary, Kerry Shine, and with the Departments of Communities and Disability Services on this important initiative.

There are a number of reasons why it is so important:

- It is the first time for many years that the Government has come out strongly supporting the significant role the non-government sector plays in community service delivery in this State.
- Most importantly, it has backed this up with new funding - \$24m. over four years. And the peaks will play a role in ensuring as much of this as possible gets to the community sector.
- The agenda is important because there are many changes occurring which are impacting on the role of the community services sector
 - clients and communities are presenting with increasingly complex problems and issues and our caseloads are increasing
 - the costs of providing services is increasing, for example, to attract qualified staff, to pay escalating insurance costs, and to install more sophisticated IT for matters such as recording data, reporting performance and case management
 - there is an increased need to demonstrate our professional competency and our ability to provide quality services. We have no problems with this. We have always been committed to the importance of quality service delivery and want to continuously improve this. But there are costs involved.

For all of these reasons we believe this agenda is timely and it is important for the community services industry to engage in the debate and the strengthening activities that will occur over the next few years.

The organisations we represent come from a number of different perspectives:

ACROD has already played a lead role in the disability services industry in contracting with Disability Services Queensland to firstly introduce the Queensland Disability Sector Quality System to the disability service sector and then provide an Industry Development and Learning role in the roll-out of the quality agenda. ACROD wants to emphasise that there are a number of principle points that have underpinned the successful take up of that system so far. They are:

- the importance of quality service delivery and continuous improvement is accepted by all that government and the sector agreed on the importance of the sector itself taking the lead and promoting and assisting the organisational change, so that it is owned by the sector.
- That government committed to a developmental approach (rather than compliance and monitoring).
- That government provided adequate resources and has followed through on those commitments.
- That resourcing is provided directly to the services for them to implement their organisations quality system and a continuous improvement regime.

- That there is acknowledgment by government that there are core costs involved in the provision of quality services, in a sustainable service sector including the costs of on-going training and development of staff.

Volunteering Queensland wishes to emphasise the important role this agenda can play in supporting voluntary management committee members and volunteers who support service delivery and social action. There is increased interest in volunteering and there are new and challenging ways that people are choosing to participate. Non-Government organisations need to have good systems in place that support voluntary participation. This strategy acknowledges the importance of this work and we look forward to some concrete support for volunteering initiatives.

The Community Centres and Family Support Network of Queensland represents over 200 funded and unfunded neighbourhood and community centres and family support programs in six regions across Queensland. As an active and well-connected network they are very aware of the challenges that organisations in rural and regional Queensland in particular face in delivering essential community services to community members. They are generally situated in localities of high socio-economic disadvantage, and the demands on their services are high. It is hoped that this initiative of the State Government will enable them to better deliver essential services to Queenslanders.

Representing over 300 members from the community youth sector across **Queensland, Youth Affairs Network of Queensland (YANQ)** promotes the interests and wellbeing of young people, particularly the interests of disadvantaged and marginalised young people. YANQ promotes the interest of the youth sector and is a major contributor to the development of the youth sector through networking, research and information provision. As a Registered Training Provider (RTO), YANQ offers a Nationally Recognised Certificate III and Certificate IV in Youth Work Studies. YANQ utilises its extensive Regional Youth Interagency Networks, Multicultural Network and its Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Reference Group to ensure it is representative of youth sector issues in rural, regional as well as the metropolitan parts of the state. The Strengthening NGOs Agenda provides an ideal opportunity for YANQ to work closely with other Peaks and State-wide organisation as well as the Queensland Government to increase the viability of the youth sector and to contribute to the development and growth of a vibrant community sector in Queensland.

The vision of the **Queensland Alliance** of mental illness and psychiatric disability groups is for people to be able to access a diverse range of services and resources to support their recovery and well being. The Alliance works to promote, strengthen and develop the growth of non-government, community-based, recovery-oriented responses to the needs of people with mental illness and psychiatric disability in Queensland. The organisation represents non-government, non-profit organisations who meet the needs of people with mental illness or psychiatric disability, including consumer groups, carer and family groups and non-government community-based service providers across Queensland. They currently have 155 members. The Alliance is prepared to work with the Queensland Government, wherever it is able, to strengthening the non-government organisations that provide these vital services.

Council on the Ageing (COTA) National Seniors deals with over 200 senior organisations and 100,000 individual seniors in Queensland. It is the largest membership organisation representing the concerns and interests of Queenslanders aged 50 and over. CNS has a pre-eminent role in representing, advocating for and serving older Australians. Issues and concerns are identified by seniors, families, carers, service providers, the general public and through SeniorsInfoLinks a web based information service. CNS develops policy based on input from programs & projects and members including through Branches & Seniors Organisations Forums. A Queensland Policy Council determines CNS policies and positions.

PeakCare is a peak body for the safety and well being of children, young people and the support of their families. PeakCare's members are organisations that provide the range of services across a continuum of care that incorporates prevention and early intervention with a specific focus on strengthening families to protect children. PeakCare welcomes the Strengthening NGOs Project and looks forward to working with all stakeholders to ensure an effective implementation process across Queensland.

The Queensland Community Services and Health Industries Training Council is governed by a multiple partite Board draw from across the industries and representing regions, employers, peaks, employees and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander groups. They provide the primary source of advice to the industries and the Queensland Government on vocational education and training and workforce development issues in these industries across the State. They have a major role in supporting the development of the many and varied sectors of the industry to provide high quality outcomes for consumers. We do this by using a community engagement framework focused on:

- Creating alliances, collaboration and connections that enhance the capacity;
- Being a voice to influence government, industry, work and training policy; and
- Creating opportunities for community skilling through developing the capacity and quality of our workforces.
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The Industries Training Council Inc. have been performing a key role in the development of capacity within community service organization through the management of the Integrated Skills Development Strategy and the Disability Sector Training Fund. These sector development strategies target in excess of 1500 services. Additionally they seek to support the skill development of volunteers and unpaid carers and the parents and carers of people with a disability. They are focused on supporting the development of the skill and workforce capability within the industries and see that the initiatives identified within this agenda provide a clear base upon which this can be further developed. The Strengthening NGO initiatives provide an ideal opportunity for the Industries Training Council to work closely with Peaks and Government to support the further development of capacity within these sectors.

The Mackay Regional Council for Social Development (MRCSD) is a regional social planning and community development organisation which facilitates peoples collective voices and the identification of possible solutions around sub-regional and regional issues. Its organisational performance criterion is: “an increased capacity of individuals, groups, organizations and locations in relations to: participation, ownership and resolutions of local issues, increased knowledge and skills and the creation of structural alliances, collaboration and connections at a horizontal and vertical level.

MRCSD works closely with a range of peak bodies and has a Memorandum of Understanding with the Queensland Council of Social Service. It is also a social sector representative on the WHAM Regional Planning Advisory Committee.

MRCSD welcomes the opportunity of working with the community and government sectors around the Strengthening NGO agenda.

QCOSS has over seven hundred community service organisations as members. It provides a voice for and with Queenslanders affected by poverty and inequality and acts as the state-wide council that leads on issues of significance to the social, community and health sectors. QCOSS, therefore, is vitally interested in the Strengthening NGOs agenda, both for the benefits it might provide to community service organisations, but most importantly, for the individuals, families and communities who are experience hardship and disadvantage in this State. QCOSS believes some fundamental principles need to underline the sector's approach to this agenda:

- The community sector needs to own the strengthening agenda and provide a proactive and lead role in formulating and developing strengthening activities over the next couple of years. QCOSS has already provided the government with a submission as to how this might occur so that the sector is actively engaged in guiding the agenda and ensuring that it works for us.
- Critical to this is the need for government to respect the differences in services, locations and resources that make up this important industry and the need for strengthening resources to be targeted to accommodate the different needs that this generates in different organisations. In our submission to government we have proposed that resources be located in existing regional networks to assist organisations and ensure their needs are met.
- Above all, we will continue to push for resources and support for organisations to undertake these strengthening activities.

While none of the organisations listed above speak for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander funded community organisations, we all support the need for specific and targeted resources being made available to these organisations through the Strengthening NGOs project. They provide an invaluable and irreplaceable service to their communities and strong and viable services are essential to the well-being of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

Minister/ Kerry Shine/ Linda Apelt, all of the peak organisations above are keen to work with you to ensure this agenda benefits community organisations and the people and communities with whom they work. We are keen to work in partnership with each other and with you on this to achieve the best possible outcomes for NGOs and communities.

We do of course reserve the right to speak out on issues which we believe the Strengthening NGOs agenda should address but hasn't to date. You have yourself raised the issue of a fair price for service provision. This has not been addressed. This is a critical component and we are more than happy to work with you and your department on this issue.

In the meantime, we congratulate you on the work to date, in particular on your stated and obvious commitment to the strength of the community services sector.