

# QCOSS

Queensland Council  
of Social Service

*Are we investing for the change  
we want and need?*

*QCOSS Queensland State  
Budget Commentary 2018-19*



*June 2018*

## About QCOSS

The Queensland Council of Social Service (QCOSS) is the state-wide peak body representing the interests of individuals experiencing or at risk of experiencing poverty and disadvantage, and organisations working in the social and community service sector.

For more than 50 years, QCOSS has been a leading force for social change to build social and economic wellbeing for all. With members across the state, QCOSS supports a strong community service sector.

QCOSS, together with our members continues to play a crucial lobbying and advocacy role in broad number of areas including:

- Place-based approaches
- Citizen-led policy development
- Cost-of-living advocacy
- Sector capacity and capability building

QCOSS is part of the national network of Councils of Social Service lending support and gaining essential insight to national and other state issues.

QCOSS is supported by the vice-regal patronage of His Excellency the Honourable Paul de Jersey AC, Governor of Queensland.

Lend your voice and your organisation's voice to this vision by joining QCOSS. To join visit [the QCOSS website](http://www.QCOSS.org.au) (www.QCOSS.org.au).

*QCOSS acknowledges Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the original inhabitants of Australia and recognises these unique cultures as part of the cultural heritage of all Australians. We pay our respect to the Elders of this land; past, present and future.*

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## Introduction

The Palaszczuk Government has delivered another budget that is in their words unashamedly all about jobs and infrastructure. With the State's unemployment projected to remain above six per cent, this focus is not surprising.

We know that having a job is crucial for social and economic inclusion and individual wellbeing. It is also encouraging to see that 65 per cent of this infrastructure spending will be in the regions where people are doing it tougher.

However, we are keen to see is that this investment is used to facilitate change in communities, to support access and engagement of all Queenslanders. The benefits need to flow across Queensland and to all Queenslanders. We want to see that all Queenslanders have the opportunity to have the good life they all aspire to.

We believe the Queensland Government has many of the levers necessary to facilitate this change and it is encouraging to see some of these levers embraced and enhanced in this budget. In particular, we are pleased to see a focus on providing opportunities for the unemployed and young people to access skills through an increase in funding to the Skilling Queenslanders for Work program; the support for the unemployed through the Back to Work program; and the expansion of the Jobs and Regional Growth Fund for regions with high unemployment.

The reintroduction of the Building and Asset Services program sees the Queensland Government embrace its important role as a provider of entry level positions and training opportunities for Queenslanders. Along with enhanced compliance with the Queensland Government Building and Construction Training Policy this will ensure that this infrastructure spend includes new opportunities for apprentices and trainees and employment for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders. Social procurement policies and guidelines are also important levers to ensure that this spend maximise benefits for Queensland businesses which importantly include social enterprises.

However, we would like to see a more holistic approach to regional capacity building. Jobs and infrastructure are certainly important, but they need to be complemented with community-based social infrastructure, including adequately-resourced community services and opportunities for communities to set and drive their own directions. A focus on infrastructure cannot distract us from the need for well-resourced community services. As an example, while the capital investment for new neighbourhood centres is welcome, existing centres continue to operate with insufficient funding putting services and staff at risk. This is critical investment. It is important that investment occurs with a focus on prevention and early intervention. This is investment that creates positive and long-term outcomes and building community capacity. We need to see this focus in future budgets.

Housing is infrastructure too. The Queensland Housing Strategy, a centrepiece of the previous year's budget, provided a way forward for housing across the forward estimates. We noted then that the investment was insufficient to meet demand, particularly for social and affordable housing – and this has not changed in this budget. A key area of concern is housing for remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. While the Queensland Government has committed funds to support this activity, the federal government continues to offer no commitment on the National Partnership on Remote Housing. We strongly caution the Queensland Government against making up this shortfall by reducing funding for other important housing programs.

We support the Government's continued pledge to tackle cost-of-living pressures through energy rebates and concessions. Further work is needed to assist eligible people to access these concessions. The smart savings website is a start but it is clearly not enough when three quarters of people are not accessing the financial relief they are eligible for. Community services need to be supported to assist Queenslanders, particularly those in crisis, to access this relief. We will continue to advocate for enhanced education and awareness programs for communities.

Cost-of-living pressures continue to be felt by families and households across Queensland and we are disappointed that issues of concessions for water usage remain unaddressed in this budget. Car registration is also set to rise – disproportionately impacting on rural, regional and remote Queenslanders. We will continue to advocate for issues on cost of living including water concessions, payment options for car registration and increases to payments and incomes including Newstart.

The highlight of this budget from the QCOSS perspective is the commitment to funding the operation of a Human Rights Act for Queensland. This is fundamental to enshrine and protect citizens' rights. Filling this hole in our legal framework has been a long time coming, and we look forward to working with the Government on operationalising this legislation so that it has the teeth it needs to protect Queenslanders who may otherwise experience vulnerability.

## **Advancing Queensland communities**

What is missing from this budget is communities. We have been excited to see the creation of a department with a clear focus, and a clear mandate to create thriving communities. This is an opportunity to not only focus attention on the outcomes of government in community, but also focus on how government works with community.

Creating thriving communities happens with energy, with commitment and compassion. We have these. But it also requires vision, resources and a cross government focus.

In our 2017 Election Statement - a Manifesto for Change, QCOSS called for the incoming Queensland Government to govern differently, to work differently, to truly lead our state into the future. These messages were repeated in our Budget Priority Statement 2018-19 – in which we again called for ....

... **a government that leads with vision**... the development and articulation of a clear vision for the future and setting aspirational goals to build a better future for all of us, but particularly those who are experiencing the highest vulnerability in our community our children, youth, people with disability, seniors, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders, new arrivals, and people who rely on low incomes.

... **a government that listens**... to engage the whole community in a conversation about who we want to be; where we want to be; how we want to be; and to commit to getting there. This supports the development of a shared vision for the future, one that we have all had a part in developing and can all believe in.

... **a government that acts together**... to achieve our vision requires a clear plan for the future. A plan that seeks to enhance our collective wealth while reducing inequality, that builds human capital through promoting individual and community strengths. The challenges and opportunities that are all around will only be realised with concerted and combined action. This is a time in which we know that doing things alone, that doing things the same way will not cut it.

The budget provides an opportunity to realise this vision for Queensland's communities.

We see glimmers of hope in the approach being taken by this Government through the Our Future State: Advancing Queensland Priorities. Through this document the Queensland Government identifies the following priorities for the Queensland community:

- Create jobs and a strong economy
- Give all our children a great start
- Keep Queenslanders healthy
- Keep communities safe
- Protect the Great Barrier Reef
- Be a responsive government.

QCOSS is encouraged by this attempt to articulate priorities to advance Queensland. This seems to acknowledge that there is another way of framing the budget, around a vision for Queensland – its people and its communities.

But there is more to be done. The connection between the 2018-19 Budget and this plan must be embedded across government. It must articulate an investment approach to public policy that places people and communities at the centre of all that we do. It must also recognise and understand that the way government works with communities to achieve this future state is just as important.

Effective engagement and participation of citizens and communities is essential to building relationships that promote community wellbeing outcomes.

Queenslanders, their communities, and community-based organisations, are best placed to determine what is required to address the challenges they face. The community must be engaged at all phases of planning, design, delivery, and review of the policies, programs and projects concerning their wellbeing.

The message from the Premier says that the government will “*put Queenslanders at the heart of our policy making*”. Let’s work together to make this a reality. Let’s embed this different way of working with funding and supporting communities to achieve their wellbeing goals. This requires a paradigm shift within Government in people, systems, and business processes. We need a new way of thinking about investment decisions, using the budget to more effectively promote thriving communities and understanding that this is what a strong economy, and a strong state, is built on.

## Wellbeing measures

The Queensland State Budget is a core piece of the democratic system of governance in Queensland. It provides an opportunity for Queenslanders to clearly see the priorities of the government of the day and examine the way in which public monies are being spent. It provides transparency and fiscal accountability.

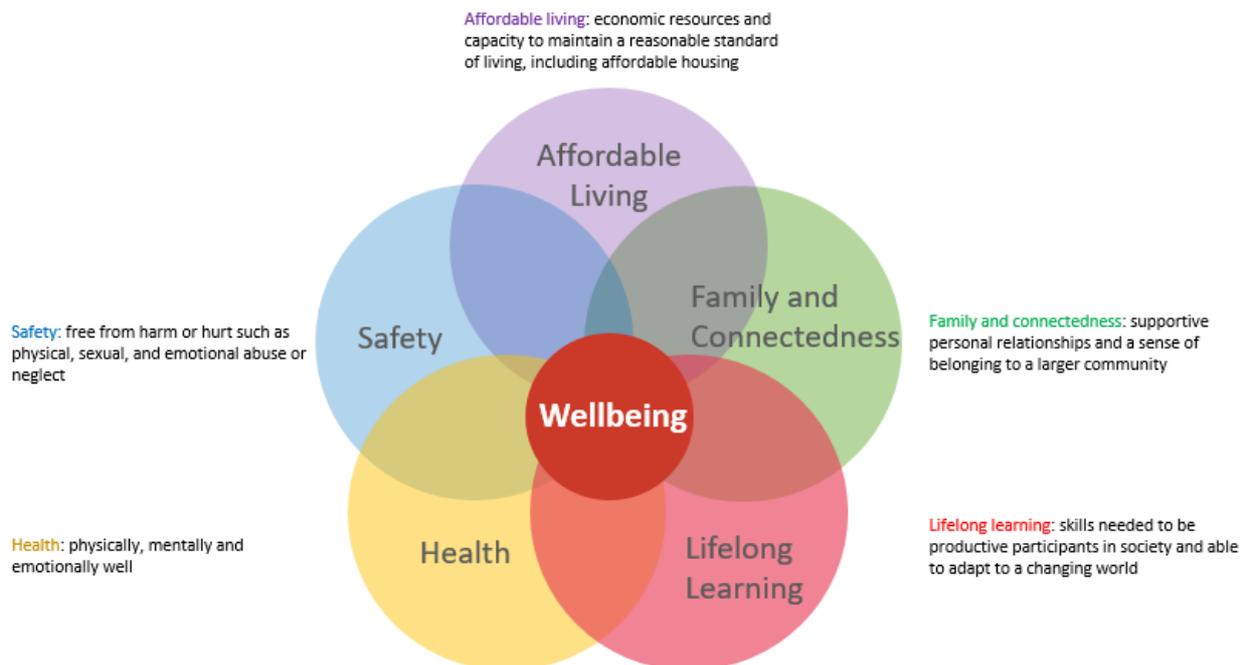
The budget should be a tool for supporting a collective vision, for demonstrating how the government is choosing to support community and individual outcomes and a good life for all.

To this end, our commentary is framed around core elements of wellbeing:

- Affordable living
- Safety
- Lifelong learning
- Health
- Family and connectedness

We have added some critical areas to highlight for Queensland. These are:

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples
- People with disability
- Climate change - a just and fair transition
- Human Rights Act for Queensland



## Affordable living

### Jobs and infrastructure

This budget offers a significant infrastructure program of almost \$45.8 billion over four years, the biggest capital works program since the 2011 flood recovery effort. In 2018-19, the spend will be \$11.6 billion in capital works which is projected to directly support more than 38,000 jobs.

We are pleased to see that more than half (65 per cent) of the infrastructure commitment is allocated outside of Greater Brisbane. We hope that the new Queensland Social Procurement policies and guidelines will be usefully put into effect by government buyers to ensure that social enterprises and Indigenous businesses benefit from these significant spends to deliver longer-term value for the communities involved.

We know that jobs are important. They are a lifeline for people out of poverty and disadvantage, however, what is important is that these jobs are sustainable and that they are accessible for all.

There is increased funding in the budget to support skilling pathways which will go some way to assisting unemployed people into sustainable jobs.

- Skilling Queenslanders for Work has been increased by \$180 million over three years from 2018-19 (\$20 million in 2018-19 and \$80 million in each of the two following years) to fund more apprenticeships and increase workforce participation through a suite of targeted skills and training programs.
- Back to Work which was announced in the 2016-17 budget has been increased by \$155 million over four years from 2017-18 (\$45 million in 2018-19) to extend the regional program to 30 June 2021 (with applications open until 30 June 2020) to continue to provide employer support payments to employers hiring eligible unemployed jobseekers in regional Queensland.
- Back to Work in South East Queensland also has an additional \$31.5 million over three years (\$15.1 million in 2018-19) to respond to high demand and support for the program in South East Queensland.
- Mature age worker boost: provides funding of \$5 million in the 2017-18 year to introduce a Back to Work Mature Aged Worker Boost and support delivery of a Mature Aged Ambassador.
- Expansion of the Jobs and Regional Growth Fund: increased funding of \$20 million for the Jobs and Regional Growth Fund to help facilitate private sector projects which create employment and economic growth opportunities in regional Queensland by focussing on regions with higher than average unemployment.
- Driving Queensland Agriculture and Rural Jobs Growth: additional funding of \$19.2 million over three years (\$7.4 million in 2018-19) to support Queensland agriculture and rural jobs.
- Payroll tax rebate: \$26 million has been committed to maintaining a 50 per cent rebate on payroll tax to support 26,000 apprentices and trainees throughout the year.

## **Housing and homelessness**

Housing is a basic human right and provides the foundation for a range of social and economic outcomes for all Australians, none more than in our remote communities. Outcomes from this investment go beyond providing housing infrastructure to include improvements in mental and physical health, and school attendance, and decreases in domestic and family violence, and youth offending.

The Government's capital investment in social housing in 2018-19 includes:

- \$270.1 million allocated towards construction of new dwellings and upgrades to existing social housing properties.
- \$41.2 million of capital grants budgeted to assist non-government organisations and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities to construct and upgrade social housing dwellings.

This capital investment includes \$124.2 million for social housing in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities to deliver social housing dwellings, upgrade existing housing, and support transfer of social housing for home ownership on Indigenous land.

It is very disappointing that the federal government has walked away from the continuation of essential funding for remote Indigenous housing. The Queensland Minister has previously stated that the Queensland Government is committed to continuing and increasing our level of investment in remote indigenous housing and this is to be applauded.

However, the budget papers state that delivery of social housing may need to be amended in recognition of the end of the National Partnership on Remote Housing funding, pending further negotiations with the Australian Government. QCOSS strongly urges the government to stick to the commitment of the Housing Construction Jobs Program in the Queensland Housing Strategy. Any reduction in social housing programs to offset a lack of Commonwealth Government commitment in remote housing will be strongly opposed.

It is good to see a modest increase of \$8.8 million in the 2018-19 year to deliver on the commitment to service transformation and a reprioritisation of \$623,000 over three years from 2018-19 to improve housing responses for young people in the youth justice system and their families at risk of homelessness.

It is disappointing that the Queensland First Home Owner's Grant remains untargeted this year. While it may be beneficial for regional home owners, evidence suggests that this kind of investment does not generally support housing affordability or supply. It is hoped that next year this \$32 million is used to support targeted initiatives for affordable and/or accessible housing.

## **Concessions**

QCOSS is acutely aware of the financial pressures which Queenslanders are experiencing. The constant stress associated with a lack of money has been found to contribute to health problems and stress on family relationships as well as financial hardship outcomes such as children missing out on school activities, adequate health care and homelessness.

The Budget includes \$5.6 billion to continue to fund a range of concessions for electricity, water, transport, education and housing to address cost of living pressures. This is an increase of \$200 million on the previous year. It includes additional funding:

- The previously announced \$100 million Electricity Asset Ownership Dividend over two years from 2017-18.
- Extension of the half-price public transport concession to include the 19,000 Department of Veterans' Affairs White Card holders under 64 years.

This is welcomed, but efforts need to go into ensuring that concessions are targeted to those who really need them and that all eligible Queenslanders can access the concessions available.

Currently, three quarters of eligible households are missing out on their power bill rebate. Promotion is not enough to ensure that everyone who is eligible gets these electricity and transport concessions. There needs to be legislative reform that puts the obligation on retailers and government to ensure that everyone who is eligible gets a concession.

Low-income and vulnerable households also need ongoing support to understand their energy usage and costs; access new technologies; and navigate a deregulated energy market in South East Queensland. A place-based approach, using local community sector organisations can ensure community capacity is built and outcomes are sustainable. There is a need for continued proactive and preventative measures to reduce low-income and vulnerable households' exposure to rising energy costs in the longer term. QCOSS welcomes the continuation of the Energy Savvy Families program in this budget and calls for continuation of the Sunny Savers Program to other sites.

QCOSS is also well aware of cost-of-living pressures in other areas such as the cost of vehicle registration and cost of water for renters. In this budget the cost of vehicle registration is going up by 3.5 per cent which continues an upward trend in recent years and disproportionately impacts on regional and rural households. At a minimum, low-income households should have payment options to avoid getting penalised if they cannot afford an upfront payment. There is also a need to extend the current water concession to all pensioner concession and health care card holders who pay for water and rent and not just home owners. We are disappointed that this much needed reform continues to be ignored.

## Safety

### Domestic and family violence

Funding of \$64.3 million has been allocated to Domestic and Family Violence and Sexual Assault services which includes leading the implementation of the *Queensland Domestic and Family Violence Prevention Strategy*.

- \$14.2 million has been allocated for new and enhanced domestic and family violence services to respond to service gaps
- \$2.9 million has been allocated for additional perpetrator interventions
- \$2.1 million has been allocated to build the capacity of workplaces to identify, prevent and respond to domestic and family violence.

Investment in responding to domestic and family violence include ongoing funding of \$4million to fund 24 new domestic and family violence coordinators in the Queensland Policy Service.

### Child safety

\$52.8 million has been allocated in 2018-19 to continue implementation of reforms to the child protection system, including:

- additional child safety frontline support positions
- continued implementation of the quality improvement program
- improving support for foster and kinship carers
- continuing the recruitment campaign to encourage more Queensland families to become foster and kinship carers
- continuing initiatives to strengthen links between the child protection system and the justice, police, education, health, mental health, housing and disability systems.

Increased funding of \$40 million over two years from 2017-18 has been provided to the department to support children and young people in care with complex and challenging behaviours and funding of \$3 million is allocated this year as part of the *Action on Ice* package, to support families involved in the child protection system to overcome ice issues.

The over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in the tertiary child protection system remains a key concern. While the government is continuing to implement the *Our Way Strategy* and *Changing Tracks Action Plan*, it is disappointing that there has been no additional focus of this work, either through direct funding allocation, additional resourcing of the Family Matters Campaign, or identification of the new roles for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workers. It is disappointing that the investment profile for child and family services still appears to be weighted towards crisis services instead of prevention and early intervention.

## Justice

This year sees a significant spend on the justice system. Highlights include:

- \$8.1 million over four years for the expansion of the Townsville Specialist Domestic and Family Violence Court (including circuit courts in Mount Isa and Palm Island) to include criminal domestic and family violence matters.
- Increased funding for a range of initiatives to support the criminal justice system, including \$7.4 million over four years for additional frontline investigators to combat major crime and corruption.
- \$6.9 million over four years from 2018-19 for the continued delivery of the Queensland Sentencing Advisory Council which educates the community about the justice system and sentencing, collates statistical information about sentencing, and researches the effectiveness of sentencing practices in reducing crime.
- Increased funding of \$9.1 million over four years and \$2.5 million ongoing to support the continued delivery of the Murri Court and expansion of the Court Link services to Southport, Mount Isa and Ipswich.

\$40.7 million over four years has been allocated for youth justice support measures, including:

- \$2.9 million to continue partnerships across government on critical intervention strategies under the Community Youth Response initiative in Townsville.
- \$11.7 million over three years from 2018-19, and internally reprioritised funding of \$11.3 million over four years, to reduce remand of children and young people in custody.
- \$2.5 million in 2018-19 to continue the Transition to Success initiative, which aims to reduce reoffending by providing training and employment pathways to young people on youth justice community-based orders.
- \$6.5 million in 2018-19 to continue to implement the government response to the recommendations of the Independent Review of Youth Detention in Queensland to improve practices and services pivotal to the safety, wellbeing and rehabilitation of young people in youth detention.
- Development of a whole-of-government youth justice strategy to reduce offending and address the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people in the youth justice system.

We are encouraged to see a focus on keeping young offenders out of the prison system and reducing reoffending through training. However, we need to shift the investment profile to a prevention model, with a long-term intergenerational approach, to stop people coming into contact with the justice system in the first place.

The Budget has also allocated funding for significantly more front-line workers, including:

- \$171.9 million over four years for 400 police officers
- \$55.1 million over four years for 85 counter-terrorism officers
- \$29.5 million over four years for 100 firefighters and 12 fire communication officers.

## **Blue Card**

\$17 million has been allocated over the next three years for reforms to the State's Blue Card system. This will be used to implement the "No Card, No Start" policy, which will prevent Blue Card applicants from commencing work until their application has been approved and the Blue Card issued – helping to ensure the safety of children across Queensland. This includes automated application systems; improved processing times; and an organisational portal to assist employers to meet their obligations.

## **Lifelong learning**

### **Schools**

The record education budget of \$14.1 billion is largely focused on improvements to schools across Queensland.

- \$250 million will be spent over the next two years to build more infrastructure in nearly 60 Queensland state high schools by 2020, when there will be full cohorts in all six years of secondary schooling for the first time.
- New state high schools will be built at Coomera, Yarrabilba, Ripley and Mango Hill. A new primary school is to be built at Ripley and a new special school is to be built at Caboolture.

The Budget has also allocated funding for more teachers, including: employing more than 1,000 teachers as part of a four-year commitment to employ more than 3,700 teachers.

### **Early years**

We welcome the continued support for the First Five Forever program and the School Breakfast program. This includes:

- \$20 million over four years has been allocated to continue the First 5 Forever program. The program builds strong early years literacy foundations for children up to five years, by directly connecting parents and caregivers to a range of resources at public libraries across Queensland.
- \$1 million over four years will go to Foodbank Queensland to expand the School Breakfast Program to additional schools across Queensland.

The budget also includes funding of \$31 million over four years to support centres of learning and well-being to support staff in rural and remote Queensland. This approach is supported and it is hoped that this effort can be extended to the early childhood education and care workforce in these areas. Our work has highlighted to us the critical need for ongoing support for workers in rural and remote areas of the state to ensure they have access to quality training, professional development, mentoring and support.

Missing from this budget is any new commitment to addressing disadvantage in early childhood. QCOSS would like to see continued funding of integrated early years services in areas of need, which bring together health, family support and learning services, similar to the commitments made in Tara and Redlands in previous years.

## **Health**

### **Front-line health workers**

The health budget amounts to a record \$18.3 billion, including \$985.5 million for health infrastructure.

This includes allocated funding for more front-line workers, including continuing the commitment for 3,500 additional nurses and midwives and \$109 million over two years to increase the number of nurse navigators in public hospitals to 400.

These initiatives are all welcomed. However, record spending itself does not guarantee improved health outcomes. QCOSS welcomes new spending on mental health facilities, youth justice assessments and disabilities services. However, we also urge the government to maintain a focus on prevention and early intervention in parallel with funding services targeting acute health needs.

### **Mental health**

A key initiative is \$28.1 million for adolescent mental health facilities in South East Queensland, including a new Adolescent Extended Treatment Facility at The Prince Charles Hospital in Brisbane.

Funding (\$4.7 million) has been reprioritised to improve mental health assessments of young people in the youth justice system. The government is also providing additional funding of \$2.9 million in 2018-19 to improve service delivery for prisoners with a disability or mental illness.

These initiatives are welcome but much more needs to be done to address the serious and growing impact of poor mental health. Rising rates of suicide and emergency department presentations are having a devastating effect on families and communities. Early intervention provided by community services can help people before they reach crisis point.

QCOSS notes that the government's statement on Advancing Queensland's priorities lists reducing suicides as a key indicator to be regularly reported on. Significant investment in prevention and early intervention services will be needed to reduce suicides by the target of 50 per cent by 2026.

### **Gambling**

Taxation can be one effective strategy to address public health problems like problem gambling, (alongside properly funded research, information, advocacy and treatment services). QCOSS cautiously welcomes the government's new 'Point of Consumption' Betting Tax at a rate of 15 per cent on taxable wagering revenue. This is expected to raise \$367 million over four years, and contributes to the already significant government revenue from gambling taxes and levies of \$1.3 billion per year (9.2 per cent of all revenue).

While we also welcome the increased funding of \$21.2 million over four years for the Gambling Help Service, this is dwarfed by the revenue the government receives from gambling activities. QCOSS urges the government to adequately consult with stakeholders about the application of this new revenue, and to focus on proven initiatives to address problem gambling, rather than on industry support or compensation.

## **Family and connectedness**

### **Neighbourhood and community centres**

Neighbourhood and community centres are critical place-based infrastructure providing essential services across Queensland communities. During 2017-18 we partnered with the Queensland Family and Community Association to engage with neighbourhood and community centres to develop recommendations for future funding models for these crucial services. This included highlighting the inadequate funding base for these services and it is very disappointing that these recommendations remain unheeded and that these centres remain underfunded, placing services and staff at risk.

The budget does include \$12.7 million for the upgrade and construction program for multi-purpose community and neighbourhood centres. This includes the construction of three new centres and acquisition of land for two more.

This expenditure is welcome and while we don't want to take away from communities in need, it is important to make sure all these services are adequately resourced to provide high quality assistance to vulnerable Queenslanders.

We also welcome the ongoing funding of community hubs and support for targeted place-based approaches for identified communities. This includes \$1.7 million to acquire land for new centres at Bowen and Wilsonton and for the design development of Kallangur, Yarrabilba/Jimboomba and the Thursday Island Community Hub.

### **Disaster preparedness**

A key budget initiative for communities is \$38 million over four years to establish the Disaster Resilience Fund to assist local governments, state agencies and non-government organisations to deliver mitigation and resilience projects. This is an important commitment for the many Queensland communities that have been devastated by natural disasters in recent years.

### **Citizen engagement**

Many of the other community-based initiatives in the budget focussed on safety, rather than recognising and supporting the great work already being done by existing community-based services such as community justice groups, financial counsellors and resilience workers, community and neighbourhood centres and Indigenous knowledge centres.

QCOSS calls on government to fund a comprehensive and coordinated program of citizen engagement based on community strengths and capacity to inform the prioritisation, development and funding of community-based initiatives.

### **Culturally and linguistically diverse communities**

The Budget includes record funding of \$15.5 million for Multicultural Affairs through the 2018-19 allocation, intended to help make Queensland more inclusive. This includes doubling funding for multicultural events and projects through the Celebrating Multicultural Queensland (CMQ) Grants Program, from \$1 million to \$2 million each year. This extra \$3 million over the next three years will bring the total investment in the CMQ grants program to \$6 million over the next three years. QCOSS welcomes the restoration of this funding for Multicultural Affairs.

## Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples

Queensland's first nations people continue to experience the negative impacts of colonisation and over 200 years of systemic discrimination. It is critical that the Queensland Government continue a strong focus on improving social and economic outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and communities and that as a state we embrace the rich and sophisticated culture over 60,000 years in the making.

We applaud the government's commitment to reconciliation including the establishment of an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander themed cabinet meeting and a ministerial advisory mechanism. These are positive steps forward.

Spending on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and communities includes:

- \$239 million to continue to deliver improved housing options for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, including through the Remote Home Ownership Program. This includes expanding and improving social rental housing, and activities to support private home ownership in discrete Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.
- \$16 million over two years to further expand the Deadly Choices Healthy Lifestyles Program which aims to empower Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to make healthy lifestyle choices for themselves and their families.
- \$12 million over two years to upgrade the Torres Shire Council's drinking water treatment infrastructure.
- \$5 million over two years to remove waste metal build-up including vehicle stockpiles from communities located in the Torres Strait Island Regional Council, Palm Island Aboriginal Shire Council and Torres Shire Council areas.
- \$910,000 increase in funding in 2018-19 to support the continued delivery of the Restorative Justice Program and increased funding of \$512,000 in 2018-19 to continue the prisoner reintegration program in Aurukun.
- Funding for Kowanyama Men's Shed and Women's Meeting Place (\$2.7million over four years and \$416,000 per annum); and Cape York Splash Parks (\$4million)
- \$1million over three years for the Kupai Omasker program to engage with Torres Strait Islander communities about how traditional Torres Strait Islander child rearing practices can be recognised in law

We are disappointed that there is no response in the budget to the Queensland Productivity Commission Inquiry into Service Delivery in Queensland's Remote and Discrete Indigenous Communities. The government has just over a week left to respond to the Inquiry. It would make sense to include an adequate allocation in this Budget to address the substantial reforms recommended by the Commission. This is a major gap in the budget. While we note comments that the Queensland Government are engaging with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities on the response, the much-needed changes to the service delivery architecture must be addressed immediately.

As highlighted earlier, housing investment in remote communities is also at risk. This is investment that only provides much needed housing to these communities, but that supports social and economic outcomes across the spectrum.

QCOSS will continue to advocate strongly on both issues and looks forward to working with the Queensland Government to support investment and outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, particularly those in the remote areas of the state.

## People with disability

The National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) continues to offer life changing opportunities for people with a disability across Queensland. 2018-19 will see the roll out of the NDIS in Queensland completed with the transition of people in Far North Queensland, Maryborough, Sunshine Coast, Gold Coast, Logan, Redlands and Brisbane.

However, some risks in implementation remain and it is critical that the Queensland Government continues a focus on: supporting individuals to access the system; ensuring people have access to independent advocacy; and continuing support for those who may not be eligible. Investments in this area in the budget include:

- \$9.5 million over three years for disability advocacy support services, including additional funding of \$750,000 in 2018-19 for the Queenslanders with Disability Network to provide peer-to-peer advocacy for people with disability who are yet to enter the NDIS and increased funding of \$8.7 million over two years to 2020-21 to assist disability advocacy services after the state fully transitions to NDIS.
- Increased funding of \$10 million in 2018-19 to maintain existing community nursing and allied health services for NDIS participants whose NDIS plans do not include these services.
- \$1.7million over three years to support the National Clearance Database to support nationally consistent worker screening including an interface with Queensland Police Service.

The NDIS provides not only opportunities for people with a disability, but a significant contributor to the jobs agenda through the projected 19,000 plus new jobs expected.

We are particularly pleased about the investment of \$5 million for the industry-led National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) Training and Skills Support Strategy over three years to support NDIS training and workforce development needs particularly in regional communities. This work builds on the success of the WorkAbility program and is critical to supporting the successful roll out of the NDIS in Queensland.

## Climate change - a fair and just transition

Supporting Queensland communities to respond to climate change is critical if Queenslanders are to thrive through the transition. It is important that actions taken to support this transition, consider the impacts on all Queenslanders, but particularly those who may be experiencing vulnerability or disadvantage.

We welcome efforts to increase renewable energy projects. This industry has the potential to create many jobs particularly in north and central Queensland where many local economies are struggling with high unemployment and the legacies of mining and gas booms. The Budget also includes \$50 million as a capital grant to support the development of concentrated solar thermal with storage projects to provide clean baseload power.

Solar and energy efficiency measures are also supported, but it will be important to ensure that access to these by low income families, households and communities is maximised. We have been very pleased to work with the Queensland Government on the Sunny Savers Program to provide solar panels to social housing tenants. We support the extension of this program to other sites across Queensland as well as further trials for the private rental market to improve energy affordability and access to sustainable energy for low income tenants and renters throughout Queensland.

Energy efficiency measures are also important for businesses and services. The budget includes funding over three years from 2017-18 for solar and energy efficiency measures through the \$97 million Advancing Clean Energy Schools program, including \$47 million in 2018-19. QCOSS supports this initiative, and would welcome any targeting of schools in low socio-economic areas to enable money saved to be invested in much needed teaching and resourcing in these schools.

Likewise the additional investment in the EcoBiz program is welcomed and we are looking forward to working with CCIQ to include community services in this program. Identifying and achieve financial savings and eco-efficiency across energy, water and waste in community services will see additional resources being redirected to service delivery to families and individuals in need.

### **Renewable Energy**

We acknowledge the continued action on the 50 per cent renewables target and establishing CleanCo, both of which are expected to bring down costs for energy consumers. QCOSS also welcomes improving the environmental sustainability and performance of social housing. We welcome the Reef Island Decarbonisation initiative and look forward to seeing sustainable energy action in the Daintree, communities that often miss out and send a strong message about the need for planned community transition.

We strongly support the Electricity Asset Ownership Dividend and no-interest loans to help Queenslanders without access to the upfront capital required, to invest in solar and battery technologies, but would like to see more targeted outcome to low income households to improve affordability and wellness to those who really need it.

### **Human Rights Act**

We are encouraged to see that the government has committed an additional \$2.5 million over four years to support the operation and administration of a Human Rights Act for Queensland including \$200,000 over two years for system enhancements. This has been a significant gap in our legislative framework for protecting Queenslanders made vulnerable through policy and legislation. We look forward to working with the government and the Anti-Discrimination Commission to operationalise this legislation in a way that promotes social, economic and cultural inclusion for all Queenslanders.







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