

QCOSS

Queensland Council
of Social Service

QCOSS Budget Priority Statement 2018-19

Leading the movement for change



April 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 nearly 60 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 a 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).

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Introduction

For the past few years, Queensland Council of Social Service (QCOSS) has been laying the foundation for a new way of working in Queensland. We have been building our expertise, our connections and the evidence to support this new approach. This approach was first hinted at through our 2017-18 Budget Priority Statement, was further articulated in our *Queensland Election Statement 2017 - a Manifesto for Change* and has been followed through into our 2018 Conference, a Movement for Change.

This our Budget Priority Statement for 2018-19, builds on this approach. This is work that QCOSS believes is fundamentally important if we are to build strong and connected communities and address seriously poverty and disadvantage in Queensland.

We know that this work is not easy, but it is necessary. We know that the time is right now and that we need to partner with others to be successful and that it needs to happen at many levels.

Communities around the world are changing with a resurgence and focus on the public good, the common good, the shared goal. This is accompanied by a desire by all parts of the community to be heard, to be listened to, and for their views to be acted upon. It is time to think about the stories we tell about ourselves and about others – and really think, are these the right stories? Is this how we want to see and be seen? How do these stories affect the future we create?

Governments continue to tell us that they have no more money yet always find it, particularly at election time. This is resulting in an increasing focus on the crisis end of service delivery rather than in the prevention and early intervention area that is required to make a real difference. Governments need to prioritise, and leadership is required for different and more meaningful approaches.

Media cycles have created an environment in which decisions are made quickly and under pressure – an environment which makes collaboration and working together difficult. But we know we need to do things differently if we are to truly make a difference to people's lives, particularly those at risk of being marginalised or isolated in their communities. Investment must be aligned and coordinated to achieve an overarching purpose or vision of wellbeing for all individuals and communities across the state; it must be focussed on the long term, seeking real change and real impact.

Election cycles and the increasing partisanship of politics have created an environment of risk aversion. Yet, the challenges and the opportunities that face us require new approaches – they require testing, they require innovation. There must be a willingness to try something new to solve the issues and create the opportunities that face us all.

In this context QCOSS continues to call for the Queensland Government to govern differently, to work differently, to truly lead our state into the future. To approach the many challenges and opportunities that we have with renewed vigour and an appetite for vision-led change.

The time for a bold vision is **now**. One that that the whole community can be part of.

People are shouting and not being heard – we need to hear their stories.

We continue our call 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.

Making it Real

So what does this mean in the context of a budget? QCOSS believes that to truly make a difference in Queensland communities, our way of governance, our way of service delivery and our way of investment must change. We must work together, all governments, the community sector and with communities. And we must all commit to do things differently with people and their communities as our focus.

We know that place-based approaches work. That community-led and governed approaches are the best way to support outcomes for the members of that community. Creating a local vision, building local action plans, guided by local governance, has benefits across multiple domains. This is work that takes time and works to transform communities. Bringing communities together, working together, to build better communities for all.

To be truly effective this must be accompanied by investment that is guided and delivered to focus on outcomes and in ways that are identified by the community. Investment that is unshackled from programmatic, departmental and jurisdictional rules. That is bound by accountability, not bound by rules.

Doing this takes strategic governance that can approve investment, support sound policy development and guide implementation of these approaches across Queensland. This governance body must include government and non-government members, must be independent of individual organisations, and must have authority and accountability. It would provide strategic leadership for place-based approaches, social investment and leads a social vision for Queensland.

This is systemic and substantial reform in the way we do business in Queensland. Communities must be ready and so we call for a staged approach – we continue our call for support for 10 place based initiatives over the next ten years. In line with the Queensland Productivity Commission review, we call for five of these to be remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

Many communities are ready and many in government and in the sector know that the time is right.

Taking the pulse...

In early 2018 QCOSS undertook 22 community conversations around the state. QCOSS Pulse saw people come together to share stories about their communities and the stories they wanted to tell in the future. They were asked to share stories that inspired them in which it was clear that all communities have significant strengths to be drawn on, and so many things were working well.

“...local solutions by local people. Self-determination in addressing issues,” QCOSS Pulse attendee, Mackay.

They centred around working together towards the same goal; leaving agendas behind; doing things in your own way because you can demonstrate that they work; not waiting for government to solve everything; harnessing the collective wisdom and expertise that exists in the community. It was about working together, locally, to create change.

It was clear in every session that what really made community was you and I - it is all about the people and how we connect.

What we heard from the QCOSS Pulse and our work across the past few years have informed the development of the actions outlined in this document. It will also play a critical role as we move into our State Conference, Movement for Change and beyond.

“Real people, real feelings, real stories,” QCOSS Pulse attendee, Townsville.

Actions for change

In our election statement we established two foundational pieces that we believe lie at the heart of good governance. These remain critical, foundational pieces that see the rights of citizens enshrined and protected and which focus attention on those individuals and communities that are at risk of being left behind. These are:

A Human Rights Act for Queensland – it is pleasing to see a clear election commitment to the implementation of a Human Rights Act for Queensland and we call on Government to progress this work as a matter of priority.

Reform of Service Delivery in Indigenous Communities – it will be critical for the state budget to have a clear commitment to the package of reforms recommended in the draft report of the Queensland Productivity Commission Inquiry into Service Delivery in Queensland’s Remote and Discrete Indigenous Communities.

Place-based approaches

Fundamental to our call for a new way of working is the implementation of place-based approaches. For several years now, we have been working with communities to strengthen community capacity for local understanding of challenges and opportunities, to drive local action. This work positions local organisations and people who experience poverty and disadvantage as the central reference point of the work and collective impact for the purpose.

As we outlined earlier, this approach connects the local with the strategic. It places communities as drivers of their own wellbeing and connects them to policy and strategy at a state-wide level. Outcomes from this work may include (but not be limited to): stronger communities; stronger partnerships across sectors; strengthened capacity to collaborate and co-create locally; and an opportunity to model new and innovative approaches.

Why is it important?

- Engaging communities in understanding the issues and opportunities in their community and asking them to seek new solutions is essential in creating thriving communities and reducing poverty and disadvantage.
- Place-based approaches provide the opportunity to create systems that are focussed on the needs of all in a community.
- This approach requires access to quality data, the ability to interpret data and define problems in the local context, and processes to help generate solutions collectively. It uses good process facilitation and the ability to engage multiple parts of the service system – specialised and universal, citizens and business community – building ownership across the community.
- A place-based approach ensures that the many unique qualities and environments for Queensland’s regionalised communities are not only recognised but also treated with the attention they need.

“Lots of excellent services in communities working in isolation because coordinating these services is a full-time job that nobody has the time to do well,” QCOSS Member.

The place-based work already undertaken by QCOSS and others has demonstrated considerable success. Across many sectors – homelessness, child and families, mental health and disability – place-based activities are engaging a diverse range of stakeholders to better use existing resources. This better coordination between stakeholders has provided

easier access to a range of services and greater seamlessness in the delivery of these services. Prototyped projects are now driving innovation in communities with opportunity for systemic change.

However, across all the projects delivered, participants highlighted the benefit of having additional resources available to undertake the work required to support and drive the coordination and integration of the work. This is not work that can be done within the existing resources of organisations or communities.

“The total dependence in funding, on services without any resources going into community development - i.e. working with the people themselves to input into policies... the importance of strong regional infrastructure is not resourced. The majority of policy decisions are occurring outside the region,” QCOSS Member.

Moving to true outcomes-based investment can be supported through place-based community planning with a shared community goal with strategic governance. With government, the community sector, business sector, the community and people experiencing poverty and disadvantage all at the table to make decisions there will be social and economic benefit for everyone.

Actions to assist in implementing the new approach

- Provide funding of \$2.5 million to establish a 10-year strategy to develop 10 place-based responses across Queensland communities in urban, regional and remote contexts. Five of these should be in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities as per the Productivity Commission report. New executive leadership arrangements will be required to support devolved local governance and integrated social investment in these communities. This leadership should take the form of a government / community sector partnership led at a senior political and sector level.
- Provide an additional annual \$1 million “innovation fund” for each of those 10 years to support prototype projects from place-based work that address a community-identified need with a community-identified solution.
- Commit to work towards social investment approaches including outcomes-based funding based on community identified goals. To create an effectively joined-up service system, a positive approach would be to focus on a specific outcome area across a broad range of program streams and multiple funding contracts. Pilot funding to be made available through the innovation fund.

Citizen-led policy development

With around one in eight Queenslanders experiencing poverty¹, policy decisions that support vulnerable people to participate and contribute to the social and economic wellbeing of the community are critical.

It is also critical that the voice of people experiencing vulnerability is part of the policy development and decision-making process. This includes a diversity of representation including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders, culturally and linguistically diverse communities, across regions, people with disability and many more.

These voices bring to the fore the experience of living with circumstances traditional policy makers may not understand; it allows the voices of lived experience to be heard; and provides an opportunity to highlight the impacts decisions have on people.

QCOSS is committed to working on a range of strategies to engage individuals in our policy and program development. Through our place-based work, effort is made to ensure the voices of lived experience are heard and the community is engaged. The QCOSS Emerging Voices Project supported a program of empowering current and potential consumers to have a voice in key policy reforms, collective problem solving, and generating community-based ideas and action.

“A tough but important ask.”

“It’s important to hear from the people affected by government policies and have their voices heard,”
QCOSS Member.

¹ QCOSS Indicators of Poverty and Disadvantage Report, 2013

Using the strengths of the community, seeking advice and learnings, and building on existing structures will support all members of communities to be engaged in conversations about what matters to them.

“We need more participation and acceptance of ideas from local people with proper discussion in developing policies for the society, promotes more wellbeing in the community,” QCOSS Pulse attendee, Cairns.

Why is it important?

- There has been much commentary on the need to engage individuals who feel marginalised by the political, economic and social systems.
- Policy and program decisions and implementation have a significant impact on access to services and the opportunities individuals have to participate in and contribute to the social and economic life of their communities.
- Including the perspectives and needs of service users, past, current and potential, in policy and program decision-making processes is fundamental to achieving optimal individual and community outcomes.

- Building a culture of engaging service users as part of the system requires development of the confidence and capability of both consumers and policy makers over time. Such an approach honours the fundamental principle of a democratic state – that power is to be exercised through, and resides in, its citizens.²

Actions to assist in implementing the new approach

- Funding of \$5 million over three years to develop a comprehensive and coordinated program of citizen engagement based on community strengths and capacity. This will ensure system users are supported to provide advice, views and information of their lived experience and the communities in which they live to guide the development of Queensland direction and policy development.

Cost-of-living advocacy

QCOSS plays an important role in advocating to government and industry on initiatives to reduce cost-of-living pressures for individuals and families. While incomes remain flat and calls for changes to income support levels remain unheeded, addressing costs remains essential to support those living in poverty or at risk of being driven into poverty.

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 and adequate health care.³

Housing affordability has been a focus through 2017. This is a necessary policy problem to solve, requiring action by many across many parts of a community. In recognition of the need to think differently, QCOSS has been working with the Property Council of Australia to develop a joint position paper on housing affordability that:

- articulates housing affordability issues and solutions across the housing continuum
- identifies the need for shared vision and common data sets

² Homes, B, Citizens' engagement in policymaking and the design of public services, Department of Parliamentary Services, 22 July 2011.

³ Robinson, E. & Adams, R. (2008), Housing stress and the mental health and wellbeing of families, AFRC Briefing No. 12 — June 2008

- sees all stakeholders work together.

Through our substantial expertise on energy pricing and literacy we have been delivering a range of projects focused on cost-of-living issues facing low-income households including energy pricing and supply and the availability of services and products to support consumers at risk of vulnerability.

Why is it important?

- Queensland has the nation's highest proportion of low-income households in housing stress (paying more than 30 per cent of their weekly household income).⁴
- When housing costs are high as a proportion of income, households are often forced to reduce their spending on other goods and services to meet these costs.⁵
- Electricity is an essential service. Access to electricity that is affordable and reliable is vital to our health, wellbeing and quality of life. A recent report by consumer organisation Choice, noted that electricity bills are still the Australian consumer's number one worry, with 81 per cent of those surveyed saying that this is the household cost that concerns them the most.⁶
- More than 430,000 Queenslanders are in poverty and action to reduce costs for people are critical.
- Life is harder for tenants experiencing vulnerability. Decreasing housing, energy and water costs for low-income households can increase the long-term capacity of these households to achieve home ownership or rental stability, playing an integral part in preventing intergenerational poverty.
- QCOSS' Choice and Control?⁷ report highlights a number of issues including: improving the security of tenure for renters including the tightening of the ability for lessors to terminate tenancies 'without grounds' and development and implementation of minimum energy performance standards for housing, including undertaking an audit of government-owned housing stock to identify opportunities for improving minimum energy performance standards in social housing.
- Cost of living pressures occur across Queensland, with housing costs in many regional centres still out of reach of many households who also experience additional costs such as transport.

“Affordable housing major issue especially for ATSI community. Overcrowding common and impacts on family wellbeing,”
QCOSS Pulse Attendee, Mt Isa.

⁴ Prepared by Urbis; Source ABS

⁵ Yates J and Gabriel M (2006), *Housing Affordability in Australia*, National Research Venture 3: Housing Affordability for Lower Income Australians Research Paper 3, Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute.

⁶ Choice Consumer Pulse (July 2016), <https://www.choice.com.au/money/budget/consumer-pulse/articles/electricity-costs-biggest-concern-july-2016>

⁷ QCOSS, Choice and Control? The experiences of renters in the energy market, 2017, <https://www.qcoss.org.au/choice-and-control-experiences-renters-energy-market>

Actions to assist in implementing the new approach

- We recommend the Queensland Government introduce flexible payment options, including Centrepay and monthly payment options, to assist those who are unable to cover their annual registration costs. It is important that these options are implemented at no additional cost to customers to minimise the adverse impacts they may face.
- Provide ongoing support for low-income and vulnerable households 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.
- Continue to support the provision of solar power on social and public housing, building on the successful Sunny Savers pilot in Cairns, Rockhampton and Logan.

Sector capacity and capability building

A key role for QCOSS as the peak body for the community services sector is to build on the significant strength and capability of the community sector to support Queenslanders experiencing vulnerability and disadvantage. QCOSS has been pleased to be working with the sector and the Queensland Government for decades on key initiatives that support the capacity and sustainability of the sector.

In 2017 we were pleased to work with the Queensland Families and Communities Association(QFCA) to engage with all Queensland Neighbourhood and Community Centres. What we heard so clearly, is that neighbourhood and community centres are critical place based infrastructure in their communities, playing an important role in supporting individuals who are increasingly in crisis. The funding model for these centres needs to be corrected and expanded to recognise the critical role these organisations play in responding to increasing demand and complexity of need.

Five-year contracts provide certainty and we congratulate the Departments of Housing and Public Works; Communities, Disabilities and Seniors; and Child Safety, Women and Youth for their work in this area. The Department of Housing and Public Works Partnering for Impact builds on this foundation to create a Compact with the sector that has the potential to drive improvements in outcomes for those made vulnerable in our communities.

However, responsibility for funding of many social services sits across both State and Federal Governments. The two levels of government must work together to ensure that services are adequately funded and that outcomes are not jeopardised through lack of collaboration. Two critical issues for 2018-19 are: ensuring support for remote Indigenous housing and the development of strategies for the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) in rural and remote areas of the state.

Why is it important?

- A strong safety net is important for individuals and families who find themselves in need of support and assistance.
- A level of certainty of funding is important to organisations in planning for the future and ensuring ongoing service delivery for communities.

“The community works together.”

**QCOSS Pulse Attendee,
Hervey Bay.**

- A greater number and complexity of issues facing individuals and families and demographic factors such as an aging population are placing greater demands on services, particularly in regional, rural and remote areas of the state. In many communities neighbourhood centres are in the frontline of this increased demand and the current base funding model is inadequate and unsafe for workers and service users.
- The health and community services industry is currently Queensland's largest employing industry and has experienced extraordinary growth to become the biggest economic driver of job growth in Queensland representing 14.7 per cent of the workforce.⁸ This growth is expected to continue with the implementation of the NDIS expected to result in creating an additional 19,400 full-time equivalent jobs.⁹
- The government and community sector must work together in partnership to genuinely co-design policies, programs and procurement that will provide benefits to both the sector and Queenslanders experiencing poverty and disadvantage.

Actions to assist in implementing the new approach

- Recognise the critical role neighbourhood centres play in creating thriving communities by:
 - Review the program model and increase annual state-wide funding to neighbourhood and community centres from \$15 million to \$30 million (over three years).
 - Expand the Community Connect Worker trial to add capacity to neighbourhood and community centres.
 - Address infrastructure inequities across premises, building maintenance arrangements and information technology.
- Undertake strong negotiation with the Australian Government to ensure continuity of service delivery and support for those that need it most, particularly for those in rural and remote areas of the state including:
 - Driving action on the "Provider of Last Resort" Policy for the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) and
 - Maintain existing investment levels for housing strategies in remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities without impact broader housing and homelessness services.
- Continue the rollout of five-year contracts across Queensland Government Departments to ensure the sustainability of services required to meet the needs of people across the State.

“Our centre is a vital resource to the local community and without our presence community members would be isolated and fall through the cracks... The one-person model needs to be addressed... due to increasing statistics with people presenting at the centre in crisis.”
Neighbourhood Centre Consultation participant

⁸ ABS, Labour force statistics 2018.

⁹ NDIS,

<https://www.ndis.gov.au/html/sites/default/files/documents/Market%20Position%20Statement/FINAL%20QLD%20MPS.pdf>

Summary of Actions

QCOSS is calling on the incoming Queensland Government to govern differently, to work differently, to truly lead our state into the future. To approach the many challenges and opportunities that we have with renewed vigour and an appetite for vision-led change.

We are calling for...

... a government that leads with vision

... a government that listens

... a government that acts together.

To eliminate poverty and disadvantage, we are also calling for the following:

Foundational actions

- **A Human Rights Act for Queensland** – it is pleasing to see a clear election commitment to the implementation of a Human Rights Act for Queensland and we call on Government to progress this work as a matter of priority.
- **Reform of Service Delivery in Indigenous Communities** – it will be critical for the state budget to have a clear commitment to the package of reforms recommended in the draft report of the Queensland Productivity Commission Inquiry into Service Delivery in Queensland's Remote and Discrete Indigenous Communities.

Actions to progress place-based approaches

- Provide funding of \$2.5 million to establish a 10-year strategy to develop 10 place-based responses across Queensland communities in urban, regional and remote contexts. Five of these should be in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities as per the Productivity Commission report. New executive leadership arrangements will be required to support devolved local governance and integrated social investment in these communities. This leadership should take the form of a government / community sector partnership led at a senior political and sector level.
- Commit to work towards social investment approaches including outcomes-based funding based on community identified goals. To create an effectively joined-up service system, a positive approach would be to focus on a specific outcome area across a broad range of program streams and multiple funding contracts. Pilot funding to be made available through the innovation fund.

Actions to progress citizen-led policy development

- Funding of \$5 million over three years to develop a comprehensive and coordinated program of citizen engagement based on community strengths and capacity. This will ensure system users are supported to provide advice, views and information of their lived experience and the communities in which they live to guide the development of Queensland direction and policy development.

Actions to progress cost-of-living relief

- We recommend the Queensland Government introduce flexible payment options, including Centrepay and monthly payment options, to assist those who are unable to cover their annual registration costs. It is important that these options are implemented at no additional cost to customers to minimise the adverse impacts they may face.
- Provide ongoing support for low-income and vulnerable households 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.

- Continue to support the provision of solar power on social and public housing, building on the successful Sunny Savers pilot in Cairns, Rockhampton and Logan.

Actions to progress sector capability and capacity building

- Recognise the critical role neighbourhood centres play in creating thriving communities by:
 - Review the program model and increase annual state-wide funding to neighbourhood and community centres from \$15 million to \$30 million (over three years).
 - Expand the Community Connect Worker trial to add capacity to neighbourhood and community centres.
 - Address infrastructure inequities across premises, building maintenance arrangements and information technology.
- Undertake strong negotiation with the Australian Government to ensure continuity of service delivery and support for those that need it most, particularly for those in rural and remote areas of the state including:
 - Driving action on the “Provider of Last Resort’ Policy for the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) and
 - Maintain existing investment levels for housing strategies in remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities without impact broader housing and homelessness services.
- Continue the rollout of five-year contracts across Queensland Government Departments to ensure the sustainability of services required to meet the needs of people across the State.