

The Hon. Dominic Perrottet MP
NSW Treasurer
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LCSA Pre-Budget Submission 2021

Dear Treasurer Perrottet,

Thank you for giving us the opportunity to make a Pre-Budget Submission for the NSW State Budget 2021-2022.

The Local Community Services Association (LCSA) is the peak body for Community and Neighbourhood Centres representing 166 locally-based, locally-governed member organisations; and the recognised voice for Community Development in NSW. We advocate on behalf of our members (and their communities), represent their interests to government, and facilitate, as well as support, capacity building and organisational governance.

1. Investment into Social Infrastructure

Community and Neighbourhood Centres are an essential part of a diverse, capable and responsive community services system.

To ensure the long-term sustainability of Community and Neighbourhood Centres, new investment supported by improved and new policies are required that will:

- Recognise Neighbourhood Centres as part of **social infrastructure**, along with other public facilities such as libraries, playgrounds and parks; and better utilise the opportunities afforded by Neighbourhood Centres to engage local communities and help to better deliver government funded services.
- Strengthen the essential and specialist role of **community development in service delivery** across all NSW Human Services Department portfolios.¹

Recommendation 1: Social Infrastructure Investment of \$33,200,000 into Neighbourhood Centres (\$200,000 p.a. core funding per Community and Neighbourhood Centres to provide essential staff and operational expenses, based on the current process and precedent set by the Tasmanian Government)

This investment will:

a) establish a *new and separately identifiable* program budget allocation for Community and Neighbourhood Centres that provides basic core funding for physical premises, essential staff (coordination and administration), overheads and infrastructure maintenance.

¹ LCSA Policy Position, page 1

b) prepare the integration of the costs of establishing and operating new Community and Neighbourhood Centres into the planning for new housing estate and suburb (re)developments, along with other essential social infrastructure.

For details and policy recommendations please refer to the LCSA Policy Position below. Also attached is the National Impact Statement developed by the Australian Neighbourhood Houses and Centres Association (ANHCA) with a 20% contribution from NSW.

Attachment: [LCSA Policy Position](#)

2. An innovative and more effective investment into Resilience and Community Development during natural disasters and pandemics

In 2019 and 2020, communities and community-based organisations across New South Wales faced significant challenges, from the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, to the 2019-2020 bushfire season, flooding, and drought. Community and Neighbourhood Centres have been at the forefront of disaster preparedness and response. This includes the members of LCSA. In August 2020, LCSA and WESTIR Limited worked in partnership to develop a comprehensive evidence base to record perceptions, and actual roles, responses, and resilience of these organisations through times of crisis.

The [“Resilience Through Disasters Report”](#) demonstrates that over half of participating LCSA members were impacted by more than one disaster in the year preceding the research. Critically, organisations have been experiencing this *compounding effect* of being impacted with a number of disasters at different stages at the same time.

The report acknowledges that “...despite disruptions, LCSA members embraced innovation and hope, reflecting a confidence in remaining viable and with an optimism for coping with potential future disasters. Further support must be made available if community organisations are to continue operating in healthy, sustainable, and effective ways as backbones in the communities that they work with. To this effect, the report makes six recommendations:

1. Provide ongoing, targeted funding for Community and Neighbourhood Centres to adequately cover the costs of disasters.
2. Enhance mental health support for clients and workers of Community and Neighbourhood Centres.
3. Encourage greater collaboration and coordination between community services and local emergency management agencies.
4. Encourage innovative practices and partnerships for Community and Neighbourhood Centres to respond to disasters.
5. Adequately resource sector planning, training, and infrastructure to help Community and Neighbourhood Centres better prepare and respond to disasters.
6. Undertake further investigation into how Community and Neighbourhood Centres navigate flood events and support flood victims.” (*Resilience Through Disaster Report, October 2020 – WESTIR/LCSA, p. 2*)

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Recommendation 2: Community Resilience Investment of \$16,600,000 into Neighbourhood Centres

The greatest impact for communities would be to support a full-time (or part-time) community development worker in each Community and Neighbourhood Centre. The cost would be up to \$100,000 p.a. per location, creating employment for at least 160-180 people across the state, with community development workers dedicated to implementing the 6 recommendations from the report.

Alternately, district roles could be created as a minimum action, led by the LCSA.

Attachment: [Resilience Through Disasters Report](#)

3. Seeking investment in place-based community responses to address Loneliness

The impact of loneliness and social isolation on health and well-being outcomes is increasingly a concern and a cost to the health and service systems. Recent studies establish that as many as 1 in 4 Australians report feeling lonely, with numbers on the rise due to the direct effects of the COVID19 pandemic and the related public health orders. ([One in four Australians are lonely, which affects their physical and mental health, Dr. M. Lim, Swinburne University](#))

We are calling on the NSW Government to commit to further building social capital and resilience by addressing social isolation and loneliness. Research points to suggesting that community engagement in meaningful group activities, combined with mental well-being support, as being the best way to connect people experiencing loneliness and social isolation – which are closely related, but distinctively separate issues.

An investment into local strategies to effectively tackling loneliness is much needed. Investing into the social infrastructure network of Community and Neighbourhood Centres would give the NSW Government a coordinated and comprehensive response to loneliness for the first time in NSW. There are notable examples from other jurisdictions – namely the UK ([see Loneliness Annual Report](#)) - which can be built on.

Current activities within Community and Neighbourhood Centres include social group activities, one-to-one and group therapies, partnerships with local health providers (social prescription) and activities using information and communication technology. Due to the complexity of Loneliness as a social and health issue, there are significant gaps in the research and evidence base of what intervention and service delivery type work best. LCSA commends a community development approach which is both cost-effective in reconnecting the disconnected and efficient in reaching people early through prevention. An investment in this area, if funded, would include a research and evidence outcome.

Recommendation 3: Loneliness Investment Fund of \$3,500,000

(\$20,000 one-off project funding for 166 local organisations, \$180,000 for project coordination by peak body)

This investment will enable a consistent and concurrent approach to address loneliness through a coordinated, place-based approach and reduce the cost and pressure on the health and social services systems.

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We would be delighted to meet with you to discuss our submission in detail. References are listed below.

Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any questions.

Yours sincerely,



Can Yaşmut, LCSA Executive Officer
Sydney, 11 February 2021

References and Attachments

Local Community Services Association

[LCSA Policy Position](#)

WESTIR and LCSA

[Resilience Through Disasters Report](#)

A Meta-Analysis of Interventions to Reduce Loneliness

<https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/1088868310377394>

Ending Loneliness Together

https://endingloneliness.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/Ending-Loneliness-Together-in-Australia_Nov20.pdf

Health and wellbeing survey: Monitoring the impact of COVID-19, Swinburne University

<https://www.swinburne.edu.au/research/institutes/iverson-health-innovation/shaw-laboratory/>

<https://www.swinburne.edu.au/news/2018/11/one-in-four-australians-are-lonely-which-affects-their-physical-and-mental-health/>

UK Minister for Loneliness - Annual Report January 2020

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/loneliness-annual-report-the-first-year/loneliness-annual-report-january-2020--2>

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