

Organisation name

Wyong Neighbourhood centre Inc

1.1 What would a partnership between CSOs and the government that achieves outcomes for Australians being supported by the community sector look like?

One where locally based and operated services deliver a more sustainable and reliable support to the most disadvantaged people. Government recognises the need to fund services with an adequate amount of funding to operate brick and mortar outlets for people to visit and get support, referral, advice and information that will allow them to live well and supported while they seek to improve their overall position, through education and skills development. The government understands and recognises that, although independence from welfare support is possible with the right set of circumstances, that many of the people seeking support have not had the right set of circumstances to make this possible and are not greatly benefiting from access to emergency support a couple of times a year, which is the extent that most services can afford to provide. These individuals and families are stuck in the constant exhausting and futile exercise of researching and seeking out multiple services (funded and unfunded) to assist them to make ends meet. Many times they will be turned away because they have exceeded limits set by the service or they are given minimal amounts of food which gets them through a single night and necessitates a renewed search for support the next day. The best outcome we could imagine is that services are adequately resourced to provide enough support to a single household to enable them to cease the daily search and settle into a fortnightly rhythm where they receive a combination of benefits and social supports while they participate in activities that create community connections and skills development.

1.2 How can CSOs and government streamline the sharing of information, particularly through utilising technology to effectively engage, distribute, share, influence and inform in a timely and efficient manner?

The pathways for information sharing exist already through DEx, however, adequately funding services to operate with trained staff who can report through DEx in a more professional and sustainable fashion would provide better data and story telling.

1.3 How can government ensure the community sector, including service users, and those not able to access services, have an opportunity to contribute to program design without imposing significant burdens?

Questions in the census and/or as part of annual tax return. Services could participate in annual survey to collect ideas for program design. In all honesty, it is clear that services provide insight to their project managers already and that this insight is largely lost because project managers don't have the tools to contribute this insight to those higher up the chain or those higher up the chain simply don't listen or want to hear. Perhaps they don't actually have the capacity to change anything. Contract renegotiation or tendering processes need to be more regular and not delayed due to changes in government or instability in the government departments. If recontracting/tendering is not possible, then reviews of funding needs should be done more regularly and not just tied to natural disasters, as we have seen in recent years. Our service has been severely underfunded for the last 6 years but is feeling particularly strain since extra bushfire/flood/COVID supplement payments have ceased. This has been communicated but not addressed adequately.

2.1 What would adequate and flexible funding look like?

EMERGENCY RELIEF - MATERIAL AID

\$60,000 base funding for a small to medium service to contract a paid staff member to deliver the support and report outcomes/outputs.

\$10,000 base funding to a small to medium service to administer the program.

\$30,000 base funding per consortium partner in a consortium project for program administration and delivery.

At least \$250 per client/household the service, and its partners, supports (based on the data already supplied through DEx) assessed twice yearly. This amount should be reviewed periodically to make sure it meets the demand/cost of living increases. Our service currently supplies less than \$40 per client/household. This is just not enough to properly address needs.

FINANCIAL COUNSELLING

\$200,000 base funding to employ financial counselling staff (minimum 2 FTE). It's not good for staff to work in isolation.

\$30,000 base funding to employ intake/administration staff to ease the initial burden on FC staff as they work on cases.

\$10,000 base funding for administration costs of the organisation/contribution to operations.

2.2 What administrative and overhead costs are not being considered in current grant funding?

All of them
Wages/on costs of staff to deliver programs
Wages/on costs of manager/administrator
Rent
Utilities
Maintenance
Insurance
Costs to partner organisations delivering assistance

2.3 How are rising operational costs impacting the delivery of community services?

This should be an obvious answer, higher operational costs plus stagnant funding equals less actual support being offered to the community. The less obvious impacts are stress on staff, who constantly try to make the resources stretch further, resulting in less client satisfaction and more complaints and disgruntled/aggressive responses from community members. Burnout is an increased risk under these circumstances. Risk of psychological injury to staff and volunteers is also very high. The burden to impose strict/invasive assessment criteria and processes onto community members who will receive inadequate support at the end of it all, has become a normal occurrence and it is wearing very thin with everyone involved.

2.4 What have been your experiences with and reflections on the supplementation and change to indexation?

Supplementation following natural disasters and COVID has been very welcome. Indexation seems inadequate as it is not addressing increased demand for service or the increase cost of operations. If supplemental funds were available or we were made aware they could be available in the event we ran out of funding, we may have more confidence to ration support less and provide adequate support more often.

2.5 How can CSOs and the department work together to determine where funds are needed most to ensure equitable and responsive distribution of funds?

The department could actually read the DEx data and monthly financial reporting and interpret the need a particular service is attempting to address. They could also provide opportunity for services to report unmet need or instances of rationing assistance so the department can better understand what the service actually needs to meet the needs of the community. Currently, this information is conveyed to project managers but service managers don't receive any feedback about how this information is communicated up the chain to the department, or if any change will come from reporting this information. In the case of financial counselling, client numbers and waitlist or referrals out of the organisation should be considered as unmet need and therefore an opportunity to increase funding to that service to increase their impact.

3.1 What length grants are CSOs seeking to provide certainty and stability for ongoing service delivery?

Ideally, recurrent contracts (guaranteed unless there is a problem with service delivery) 5 year grants with annual funding reviews to ensure the amount allocated to actual cash assistance is adequate to meet the need in the community.

3.2 What timeframes should the government aim for, at a minimum, to provide final outcomes on grant variations/extensions before the current grant ceases?

6 months minimum to allow for appeal or budgeting adjustments, recruitment or redundancies of staff.

3.3 What funding flexibility do CSOs require to enable service delivery and innovation?

Ability to add services or service locations as need is assessed or discovered. Additional funding to meet the new need could be made more accessible through conversation with department project managers.

4.1 How can the government ensure opportunities are available for new and emerging organisations to access funding?

Consider moving funding from big NGOs with little or no local face to face distribution locations and provide more funding to smaller locally based community orgs with greater, personalised reach. Encourage and reward consortiums of local community/neighbourhood centres who will work together to ensure community members can access support in their own communities from people they are comfortable with interacting face to face with. Make the process of applying less onerous and more realistic. Give smaller orgs the opportunity to present their real costs and have them recognised.

4.2 What programs, supports and information are already available for smaller CSOs to help build capacity of the organisation? Are these working?

I'm not aware of anything that is working well to support smaller orgs.

4.3 How could larger CSOs support smaller CSOs? What are the barriers to providing this support?

Larger orgs could provide funding for administration of programs rather than just offering bundles of shopping cards with higher levels of paperwork attached. Handshake reporting agreements at a minimum so that DEX reporting can be continued as normal.

Barriers include a set and forget mentality that leads to smaller orgs doing all the actual work and absorbing all the delivery costs for the larger organisation who then just employ a worker to sit in an office somewhere or funnel money to the wealth building of their organisation.

5.1 What is your experience with and reflections on place-based funding approaches?

Place-based is the only way to deliver successful support programs. Community members need the comfort and security of interacting with a single service to get support for a range of issues when they are most vulnerable. They don't need the constant stress and strain of service hopping.

5.2 What innovative approaches could be implemented to ensure the grant funding reaches trusted community organisations with strong local links?

Encourage consortiums of smaller community organisations in accessible community centres, rather than always rewarding big NGOs with no or little community presence.