

Organisation name

Zoe Support Australia

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

A successful partnership between government and CSOs would consult with CSOs more regularly, particularly smaller CSOs who are on the ground in their communities and understand the needs of the Australians they are supporting. This survey is a good opportunity for government to hear feedback from across Australia from organisations who may not have a big enough footprint to attract government funding but are making significant impacts in the lives of the local people they support. It may also be helpful to provide opportunity for these organisations to share what they are offering and achieving so that government funding could be allocated to existing successful programs, rather than waiting for open grants or tender opportunities where organisations are required to develop a service to suit government program guidelines that may not be as effective as what is already being delivered. It is common knowledge through funding guidelines and feedback sessions on grant and tender applications that government and philanthropic funders do not fund programs that are already running, even if these programs are showing great promise and would be forced to cease without further funding. It may be less of a risk for government to support a proven model even if it is in its early stages, rather than prioritising new programs.

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?

Creating and implementing a shared tool using an epidemiology approach that tracks referrals, interventions and outcomes with families they support. Rather than being state-based, it would be better to have a federal approach for family services as families move from one state to another, or reside on a border. The same tool could be used by all CSOs nationwide and created to be de-identified when being accessed by other agencies unless consent to share information has been obtained by the family. This would also provide opportunities for CSOs to share evidence-based practices that are working. We are all working in this industry to support families to achieve their best outcomes. We believe working together to achieve this is more important than competing for funding.

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?

As previously stated, speaking with CSOs and asking them what is working and how they are engaging with their service users would support government to understand why people do and don't engage with services. It would also be beneficial for government to ask CSOs what isn't working to help identify common barriers. Consulting with not-for-profit and charities working in communities who may not yet be a registered CSO with a government service agreement may also prove beneficial, providing opportunity for a wider input into how families and clients are engaging with all types of services, not only those already recognised or funded by government.

Going out into the communities where it is known to government that there are no available services and having face-to-face conversations with community members about what their needs are and how they can be supported to achieve these would also be beneficial. Federal and state members could be involved in this consultation process as they are the voice to government for their constituents.

We have seen evidence of specific funding programs that will not fund a wraparound approach and continue to show barriers to engagement due to out-of-scope services; these include, but are not limited to, transport, Centrelink support, birth registration and birth certificate applications, food hampers, social programs and visa applications. The hours our case managers have spent supporting young mothers with these out-of-scope services is immense. We have spoken to other agencies including Early Help service providers to try and see who may work in this space and unfortunately there is no government funded program available. At this stage, we provide this service through philanthropic funding.

2.1 What would adequate and flexible funding look like?

As a local, grassroots community service organisation that offers our services to upwards of 100 young mothers each financial year, adequate and flexible funding would provide a secure, sustainable model that we already know can lead to successful outcomes. By supporting our existing programs and services, we could build our capacity to monitor and track outcomes to provide an evidence-based model of wraparound holistic support which could be shared nationwide. Flexible funding would enable organisations to spend money across the organisation where it is most needed, with the focus being on overall outcomes, rather than specific, siloed program funding.

We currently receive Victorian government funding for our Integrated Family Services program which sits within our wider support service. While this funding supports staff wages, brokerage for clients and administration costs of the IFS program, philanthropic funding works to support outcomes within this government funded program by allowing us to provide a wider range of services which support outcomes

for clients. IFS clients can access our transport service, practical supplies, skills-based and social programs, playgroup, and childcare, all of which are funded outside of this IFS program. Furthermore, while we provide support to over 100 clients each financial year, we can only support 22 per year in this IFS program, making philanthropic funding crucial to support. For this reason, if government funding was expanded to include wraparound support or to allow organisations to meet currently out-of-scope overheads as well as program delivery, it would be much easier for organisations to effectively support clients.

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

Most often in philanthropic and government grant funding applications they are looking for new innovative programs and/or ideas. We are unable to apply for funding to pay staff wages or rent/mortgage/utility overheads, even though we require staff and building space to facilitate programs. If grant funding considered existing programs that are already successful, this would build capacity and evidence-based outcomes, in turn, allowing for these programs to grow.

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

Philanthropic grant funding does not increase every financial year in line with CPI and, most often, this is our major source of funding across our organisation. As such, while wages, rent, fuel, rates, utilities and brokerage costs increase, funding to support this does not always increase at the same rate. This means more of our funding is allocated to overhead costs and less to actual program delivery, which may limit the services we are able to provide to clients. Thankfully, our current government funding from DFFH has increased in line with CPI, meaning these programs can maintain staff and facilities with the rising cost of living. Aside from organisational capacity, rising cost of living is also impacting service delivery because it leads to increased vulnerabilities amongst our client cohort, meaning that resources are more often directed to crisis support for clients who are struggling to provide for their families.

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?

It would be beneficial for the Department to consult with more of the smaller community service organisations who are working in their local communities and often achieving improved outcomes with smaller amounts of funding. This may provide the government with more of an understanding about how they could allocate funding to these organisations who are already making a difference, enabling them to expand their service delivery. Responsive distribution of funds would allocate funding to programs that are already working, rather than seek proposals of new programs or require organisations to develop new programs when they can't necessarily maintain the programs that they already deliver and are already successful. Rather than asking organisations to fit within a government-directed program stream, find out what organisations are delivering and allocate funding accordingly as the outcomes being achieved probably already address government priority areas.

2.6 How can government streamline reporting requirements, including across multiple grants, to reduce administrative burden on CSOs?

Government could work with program developers to create a software program that could be utilised for all reporting requirements. At the moment, different programs within government are reported through different software platforms. We are currently using two programs across our organisation to report to government which does not include excel reports and surveys which are compiled internally to ensure service delivery continues to improve and provides tailored support to clients.

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

Three to five year grants make ongoing service delivery more effective because it makes the organisation more appealing to prospective and current community service employees. Recruitment of skilled and qualified staff is a significant challenge in itself; short-term funding of 1-2 years makes this even harder as it does not provide stability for staff. Secure funding of three plus years makes a position more appealing for staff which leads to more effective program delivery. Additionally, funding of three years or more provides stability for clients who can access a service for long enough for it to make a long-term impact in their lives. We engage clients from the moment they are pregnant until they turn 25, providing them with a long-term support service that makes it more likely they will achieve long-term success for their families, particularly if they have multiple children. Funding of three plus years provides stability of programs so that clients don't lose access to vital services before they have a chance to make an impact in their lives.

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?

No less than six months would support organisations with forward planning and stability, also allowing for staff changes and recruitment if funding is ceasing or altering.

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

- Funding to conduct evaluations to understand outcomes and consult with clients, leading to the development of more innovative solutions based on existing success.
- Funding to provide wraparound services to engage clients - transport, Centrelink and paperwork support for clients, birth certificate and Medicare support, appointment support etc.
- Flexibility to spend money where it is most needed within an organisation, even if it is not on a specific government program, as this leads to overall success and stable service delivery for clients. While this may seem a risk to government, it could be tracked in such a way where organisations must show outcomes based on expenditure so that purchases can be monitored and justified to the tax payer.

3.4 What flexibility is required by CSOs in acquittal processes to support and encourage sector innovation?

Funding support or evaluation templates for organisations to evaluate outcomes and provide a social return on investment or cost analysis of services. This may also mean consultation support to assist organisations to gather relevant data and report on outcomes. Many organisations cannot afford to pay staff to conduct evaluations and so data collection methods need to be streamlined and efficient so that staff who are already working with clients and juggling different roles can also support data collection within their day. This may also include the government providing frameworks and templates for data collection and visiting CSOs in person to offer evaluation support. Funding could also be provided for CSOs to work alongside universities who can provide research and analysis support, bolstering an organisation's ability to monitor outcomes but also helping to build a rigorous body of research based in and tailored to Australian clients, demographics, needs, challenges and outcomes.

3.5 How can government improve the variation process, with consideration that CSOs must demonstrate alignment with the grant agreement and provide evidence of value for money outcomes?

Open communication with both CSO's and government at regular intervals to discuss funding.

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

Provide an open forum for these organisations to share with government what they are doing. It often seems like the only way for organisations to make themselves known to government is through open grant rounds where they may need to develop new programs that align with grant guidelines. Opportunity for organisations to share exactly what they are doing and how it is working, outside of a grant round, would be beneficial and may lead to funding being allocated to organisations that need it and are already doing good work. Whether this be through their local MP or direct to Departments, opportunity to share services and outcomes would make government more aware of organisations that are successful and provide CSOs with the opportunity to apply for further funding.

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

Most of these resources come from philanthropic foundations who provide financial support for organisations to build capacity, but also often offer webinars, workshops, information, research reports and communities of practice to support organisations to work together. These resources are extremely beneficial, but can become limited when the grant funding ends; most philanthropic foundations only like to fund the same organisation once or twice, spreading the funding around to other organisations who need it. This means the level of support is dependent on the philanthropic foundations currently funding CSOs.

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

Where a smaller CSO provides a service that fills the gap of a larger CSO, it would be great to see these organisations working together through client referrals and through shared funding. If a smaller CSO can offer something for the clients of a larger CSO, perhaps the larger CSO could allocate a portion of funding to the smaller to help support effective service delivery for the client. Advocacy is also extremely important for smaller CSOs; where a larger CSO hears about the work of a smaller CSO, perhaps they could share this work with government, some of their larger funders and partners to highlight the work being done and possibly open avenues of financial support to smaller CSOs. Additionally, larger CSOs often have more funding available for training and staff support; it would be great if they could reach out to smaller CSOs and provide these training opportunities to their staff. This would strengthen partnerships between CSOs and provide more opportunity for CSOs to work together, understand where they can work together to meet client needs and provide a better service experience for clients and their local communities.

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

Place-based funding can often be allocated to larger CSOs in communities who already receive significant government funding, rather than providing opportunity for the smaller CSOs in that community to access the funding. While smaller CSOs may seem like more of a risk to government, the programs at these CSOs may be more effective than the larger ones and funding may enable them to expand their service delivery, providing a better service for the community. To minimise this risk, government could work closely with CSOs in the first 1-2 years of funding to support them to meet government requirements, achieve outcomes and report on outcomes, providing templates and training to set smaller CSOs up for success. Smaller CSOs could also be partnered up with larger CSOs in the community for mentoring and support to ensure successful programs.

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

- Consult with local MPs who often have the best understanding of their community, the CSOs that are working to support their community members and what resources they need to be more effective.
- Provide smaller, place-based CSOs with the opportunity to present their work to government.
- Ask service users about the CSOs they access, maybe through a myGov survey. Analyse this data by region to find out about local CSOs.

6.3 What does success look like?

Service users are actively engaged in programs and their voices are heard on the goals and outcomes they want to achieve. All CSOs have the means to offer a wraparound support model without trying to find philanthropic funding or community donations to provide services that fall out of scope. CSOs have suitable facilities, buildings and overhead support to provide tailored services for clients.