







Submission: A Stronger More Diverse and Independent Community Sector

 is Australia's leading not-for-profit organisation supporting premature and sick babies, their families and the hospitals that care for them.

Every year in Australia, approximately 48,000 newborn babies require care in a neonatal unit. The need for care is either from being born premature or being critically ill.

Since 2005,  has provided vital peer support programs, education and resources to vulnerable families impacted by the traumatic and emotional journey of having a baby born premature or sick. Partnering with health professionals, the organisation has been operating to help fill a need within the healthcare system, however, continues to do this without regular Government funding toward its programs or major secure funding. Relying heavily on community fundraising to deliver more than half of its income each year, the organisation is limited in its ability to expand beyond reaching 1 in 4 families.

Like many smaller charitable organisations, the need for greater secure funding for   has never been so important with the proportion of Australians giving continuing to decline.

Giving in Australia (including individual giving) as a percentage of GDP continues to lag behind its global peers.

Giving the sector the voice and respect it deserves through a meaningful working partnership

Charities deliver important societal and economic benefits:

- Preventing the onset of mental illness
- Improving overall wellbeing
- Improving social connectedness
- Providing access to free information
- Providing access to free support services for vulnerable groups
- Providing access to essential items

“Charities fulfil an important role in our society. They deliver vital services, respond to disasters, and address a wide range of community needs. They have a unique capacity to respond to specific issues and conditions that aren’t addressed by mainstream services or systems – local causes or rare conditions can find advocacy and support through a charity, often championed by individuals driven to make a difference. Charities also represent the spirit of giving and helping – an outlet for our best intentions and a channel for our desire to reach out to others and support our communities.”¹

“...charities are here to fill the gaps and provide dedicated resources to help the most vulnerable.”

Those with lived experience are important informers, advisors and contributors to policy and reforms, and have the ability to greatly influence positive change within the community.

“People with lived experience bring unique expertise in the work they do regardless of the capacity they hold when they take on roles of consultants, members on advisory boards, committees and councils and so forth. They have been recognised as important players in service delivery, development and leadership.”²

Greater support for the charity sector, and partnership between Government and not-for-profit organisations will impact the broader community.

“We look after babies medically, physically, and developmentally. The care we can give is world class but if we don’t also look after the emotional stability of the families we send them home to, we are only doing half our job. That’s where ██████████ can have an impact.” – ██████████, Neonatologist

Providing grants that reflect the real cost of delivering quality services

“Produced with support from the Paul Ramsay Foundation and Origin Energy Foundation, the report found that indirect costs – such as IT, finance and human resources – comprised an average 33 per cent of the total cost of running a charity. However, funding agreements typically accounted for indirect costs of just 10 to 20 per cent...Caps on indirect costs by funders leads to lower capability and effectiveness.”³

¹ <https://www.acnc.gov.au/media/news/australian-charities-report-shows-importance-sector>

² [Sunkel, C and Sartor, C \(2022\) Perspectives: Involving persons with lived experience of mental health conditions in service delivery, development and leadership. BJPsych Bulletin 46\(3\), 160–164](#)

³ <https://probonoaustralia.com.au/news/2022/03/australian-charities-locked-into-funding-starvation-mode/#:~:text=Australian%20charities%20are%20being%20hamstrung,Australians%2C%20new%20research%20has%20found.>

Staff Funding

For not-for-profit organisations heavily reliant on volunteer support, the delivery of services is becoming increasingly difficult.

Since 2019, the decline in volunteering has greatly impacted the charity sector.

“1 in 4 (25%) Australians aged 15 and over participated in unpaid voluntary work through an organisation or group in 2020 – lower than 30% in 2019.”⁴

Exacerbating the impact of a decline in volunteering are additional protocols in place following the COVID Pandemic which have placed further stress on organisations like [REDACTED]. With hospitals now enforcing a single contact to deliver services per hospital, this has forced a move away from a large, diverse, rotating volunteer roster to single paid staff members to deliver these services per hospital, leading to increased costs for the organisation.

Outside of Programs, there are number of essential personnel involved in the day-to-day running of an organisation, currently there is very limited access to funding for not-for-profit organisations for these roles. There is a need for increased availability of funding support for staff roles outside of Programs which are required to generate income and awareness for the organisation to ensure a sustainable future, these roles include Fundraising, Grants Officers, and Marketing/Communications. Also, further funding support is needed for operational roles including HR, Administration, IT and Finance to enhance and maintain quality and effective management of the organisation.

Rising operations costs

For charities operating out of a single main hub whilst delivering national programs including delivering items nationally, increasing costs related to couriers and postage are having an impact. Regular price increases place a huge burden particularly on small charities relying on community fundraising.

<https://www.smartcompany.com.au/industries/retail/small-businesses-brace-australia-post-price-hike-july-3/>

Specific support to cover postage and courier costs for organisations would assist in relieving organisations and prevent them from having to reduce operations (leading to vulnerable people within the community going without access to this vital support).

Currently [REDACTED] distributes approximately 10,000 resource packs to hospitals across Australia each year. These resource packs are provided by [REDACTED] team members in each state, or by the hospital staff to families with a baby in specialised medical care within the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit or Special Care Nursery. These resources are valued and demanded by medical professionals and are provided completely free to the hospitals to distribute to these families. All costs are covered by the [REDACTED].

⁴ <https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/australias-welfare/volunteers>

Enabling Education, Training, Learning & Collaboration

Training and education:

The delivery of quality services within the community is reliant on continued upskilling and access to up-to-date training to ensure correct protocols are in place, knowledge and skills meet the standards required, and efficiencies are achieved.

Investment in comprehensive training and education is an expense often first cut out of the budget when funding becomes tight.

Enabling collaboration and developing relationships:

Collaboration within the charity sector is paramount. This includes collaboration within the charity sector, but also with relevant professionals, the corporate sector and researchers. Travel is often required to attend meetings, conferences and workshops to enable and enhance this collaboration which will lead to greater alignment, innovation and a bigger impact across the board.

Employee Engagement and Wellbeing Programs, Tools and Initiatives

“Nearly one in four employees are experiencing burnout symptoms, resulting in six times more employees wanting to leave their jobs within the next three to six months.

While burnout affects workers in all sectors around the world, nonprofit organizations appear to be among those particularly vulnerable to it. In Australia, social-sector leaders are facing immense pressure, with a substantial increase in demand for services such as mental health support, food banks, and crisis response. In fact, demand for some services has increased by 80 percent over the past five years, reflecting the severe pressure many ordinary Australians are facing. Given the current economic climate, including rising inflation and cost-of-living pressures, and continued COVID-19 effects, many Australians are likely to continue to depend on these services to meet basic needs.”⁵

Access to adequate, secure and affordable office space

Currently, there is a lack of known, available funding particularly for small-medium and even large charities in Australia to invest in adequately sized and located, safe rented office spaces. The barriers faced by the expense of rental spaces forces charities into less desirable properties or locations, this can have a role to play in preventing organisations within the sector from attracting and maintaining talent. Storage or packing space is also often limited, requiring offsite storage, which has an impact on the ability to effectively deliver programs to meet time demands. Poor conditions in affordable rental office spaces can affect the health of not-for-profit employees and volunteers (who may themselves be vulnerable due to health conditions or age).

⁵ [Supporting resilience and preventing burnout in nonprofits:
https://www.mckinsey.com/industries/social-sector/our-insights/supporting-resilience-and-preventing-burnout-in-nonprofits](https://www.mckinsey.com/industries/social-sector/our-insights/supporting-resilience-and-preventing-burnout-in-nonprofits)

In the last 18 years, [REDACTED] has moved between three locations. Secure, affordable rental properties have been a challenge. The [REDACTED] continues to face challenges with the location of the office space and facilities available within provided funding.

Costs directly linked to office space such as rent, electricity bills, repairs and maintenance currently cost the [REDACTED] around 10% of its total income.

In the UK 'Ethical Property' organisation provides support to not-for-profit organisations seeking office space: <https://www.ethicalproperty.co.uk/charity-nonprofit-office-space>.

Providing longer grant agreement terms

Unforeseen external factors impacting ability to deliver program within the short Grant funding timeframe

The COVID pandemic placed great stress on the organisation's ability to fulfil Grant requirements within the required timeframe. Impacted by the timelines of the Health Department on lifting restrictions, the [REDACTED] had no ability to recommence its services with [REDACTED] support staff and volunteers unable to enter the Hospitals. Once restrictions were lifted and procedures followed to reinstate services at these Hospitals, the funding term was exhausted, therefore funds were required to be reallocated or forfeited.

Longer grant terms would allow for greater flexibility to deliver programs that may be met with temporary challenges, without losing its important and much needed funding.

Ensuring grant funding flows to a greater diversity of community sector organisations (CSOs)

Preventative Mental Health and 'niche' support services lacking available funding - vulnerable groups falling through the cracks

Peer support is a widely-accepted evidence-based practice for the treatment of mental illness and is an important factor in recovery and quality of life of those experiencing mental illness (Mead, 2003; Felton et al (1995).

The importance of improving mental health for Australians has become increasingly important.

For parents who have had a baby spend time in the NICU or Special Care Nursery, the risk of post-natal depression, anxiety and PTSD is heightened, with parents of extreme premature babies 2.5 times more likely to suffer from PND in particular. However, the onset of severe mental illness can be prevented through the early introduction of peer support. This support is available currently via not-for-profit organisations who are struggling with the resources and funding to reach all families in need.

“Peer support has been shown to reduce parental stress, anxiety and depression for parents of preterm infants in the NICU [1, 2] and for parents of children with chronic conditions.”⁶

Sadly, preventative support programs which have the ability to reach those at greater risk of developing mental illness, are vastly under-represented in secure funding. Integration within the health system for early intervention peer support services specific to vulnerable groups currently ‘slipping through the cracks’ would lead to more thriving children and their families.

Partnering with trusted community organisations with strong local links.

Collaboration with local organisations can improve community trust. Local understanding is paramount in successfully delivering much needed initiatives to improve community wellbeing. The perspectives of local citizens can be shared, highlighted, and advocated for in forums where they may not otherwise have a voice.

Local community organisations have relationships with and access to diverse networks on the ground, from thousands of families with lived experience, to local health professionals, educators, clinicians, Rotary, and other similar groups/organisations and individual or business supporters who are invested in the cause due to broad experiences, exposure and expertise.

Further links:

<https://www.socialventures.com.au/assets/Vital-support-building-resilient-charities-to-support-Australias-wellbeing-SVA-CSI.pdf>

We thank you for the opportunity to provide input into this important submission, we hope the outcome will lead to greater opportunities for funding for more charities of various scale to continue to expand their vital work within the Australian community.

Yours faithfully,

[Redacted signature]

[Redacted name]

[Redacted title]

[Redacted address line 1]

[Redacted address line 2]

[Redacted address line 3]

⁶ Giving parents support: a randomized trial of peer support for parents after NICU discharge: <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC9184279/#:~:text=Peer%20support%20has%20been%20shown,with%20chronic%20conditions%20%5B3%5D>.