

Organisation name

Neighbourhood Houses Victoria (NHVic)

Email

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

Neighbourhood Houses Victoria (NHVic) seeks to see a fairer, more equitable partnership ecosystem with the government for community sector organisations (CSOs).

NHVic wants recognition of CSOs' capacity to provide diverse, quality services in Victoria within a fair and equitable framework. There is a need to review the actual cost benefits to CSOs of delivering government services, especially in remote and poorly resourced communities.

This would include a strategy to broaden funding opportunities for organisations, such as our members, to deliver quality services with fair and appropriate recognition of the actual cost of service delivery.

NHVic's extensive reach includes over 400 member organisations, fostering a better understanding of local issues and effective engagement. They have demonstrated their capabilities as a peak body, as have their member organisations in the delivery of quality outcomes. At least 10% of Australia's Neighbourhood Houses and Centres provide contracted services for Services Australia, either as an Agency or Access Point. Neighbourhood Houses and Centres make up 23% of all Centrelink Access Points and Agents.

There's a significant gap between the service value NHVic provides across its service deliverables broadly (\$746,152,763) and income received (\$214,840,775) (2022). This highlights the need for transparency in service efficiencies and contract outcomes more broadly. No CSO should be negatively impacted when delivering a service on behalf of the government. Closing this gap is crucial for NHVic to continue delivering valuable services and programs, without negatively impacting its predominantly female workforce, especially as our many member organisations deliver vital services in remote and regional communities.

That State and sector Peaks are funded to hold and distribute grants locally. This reduces local duplication and increases collaboration and co-funding, which can be difficult to identify and manage from Canberra.

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?

Government should recognise the vital role of CSOs like NHVic and its members to broaden its reach and enhance impact. Neighbourhood Houses and Centres offer experience, knowledge, and community engagement with resources capable of achieving government objectives effectively across the country.

Partnering with CSOs, like NHVic and ANCHA, gives access to a network of over 400 member organisations in Victoria and 1000 across Australia. Their processes, expertise, and extensive reach are invaluable.

Collaboration enables improved information sharing and tailored solutions to address diverse needs in Australia. An example is in health prevention, where investment in CSOs like Neighbourhood Houses and Centres can have a significant impact in the preventative model utilising existing assets and established relational capital in diverse communities.

National and state peak bodies are key information dissemination resources but this capacity needs to be valued.

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?

Engage at our Peak body level. Peak associations at a state level and at a federate level have an important role and relationship with government that is not possible or sustainable by each community sector organisation. NHVic encourages the DSS and other government departments to invest time and resourcing to sector peaks. We are all capable of confidently and accurately representing the needs and interest of our members and are well positioned to work with government to inform priorities and address challenges.

Value the input of smaller CSOs in assisting in the gathering of community feedback and co-design inputs. We can organise communities of practice and include diverse geographical and cultural CSOs in an

organised and efficient way. Adequate resources are required to fulfill this deliverable, including incentives for smaller organisations to participate.

Our members represent established Neighbourhood Houses and Centres, who have the relational investment and trust of grass roots community members and the capacity to effectively engage service users.

2.1 What would adequate and flexible funding look like?

Funding must reflect the actual cost of delivery. Centrelink agencies and other contracted services are not achieving this but it varies from stream to stream. Evaluations must seek to test this and government should balance their contribution with in-kind values and work toward greater equity. Processes in acquittal and feedback evaluations need to be developed that help address this issue.

NHvic supports longer grant terms that enable communities to enhance their social infrastructure over time and ensure sustainable outcomes are achieved.

NHvic promotes taking a continuous quality improvement approach to grant delivery that allows for, and encourages, community sector organisations to remain agile and flexible to meet the changing needs of communities over time.

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

The intersection of prolonged inadequate indexation and a spike in operating costs is resulting in sustained losses and reduction of services in the Victorian Neighbourhood Houses and Centres sector.

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

Generally this has been inadequate and delivered well after, if at all, indexation pressures are felt.

Grants that are delivered in an year with sharp increases in inflation, as we have seen in the last year, become a liability for the CSO delivering the project or program. Actions to support the delivery of quality outcomes needs to be considered by the government and not be the burden of CSOs delivering on behalf of the government.

Greater forward communications of the opportunity to re-evaluate the outcomes against realistic budget pressures needs to be adopted.

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 cost of delivering services is not equal in all localities. Considerations of relative advantage derived from demographic data, geography etc, combined with needs analysis, needs greater consideration.

Example: Remote rural communities with limited staff and resources need more funding than metro areas to deliver similar projects. Scaling outcomes is not the solution but bigger picture considerations need to be developed.

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

Co-design all reporting requirements with the relevant sector peak. NHvic has successfully utilised a central project reporting model that allows CSOs to focus on quality service delivery. Data is feed to NHvic who then does the formal reporting to government. Key to this model is well run, efficient communities of practice that understand the time and financial burden of meetings.

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

NHvic supports longer grant terms that enable communities to enhance their social infrastructure over time and ensure sustainable outcomes are achieved.

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

Channel to small local organisations such as Neighbourhood Houses and Centres directly or through peak bodies. Many CSOs work closely with each other so broad reach is available by utilising existing local connections.

Utilising political avenues, although helpful, assumes the knowledge of the local CSO ecosystem is known.

Broader advocacy from the government is needed to provide the knowledge of where to look for grants, tenders and service delivery partnerships. Education campaigns could be facilitated through peak bodies to their member organisations in partnership. NHVic membership represents over 400 CSO across Victoria who have influence within each of these communities.

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

As a peak body, NHVic actively shares opportunities as they become aware of them through to members. Formalising and valuing a partnered approach with government would provide greater reach and therefore build greater capacity. This work needs to be valued as it brings a value add to the government.

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

Competition and resultant patch protection, reliance on personal relationships make this difficult. [Joined-Up-Service-System-Network-Analysis-Final-Report-July-2018.pdf](https://www.huonvalley.tas.gov.au/SharedAssets/Joined-Up-Service-System-Network-Analysis-Final-Report-July-2018.pdf) (huonvalley.tas.gov.au). The implication is that larger CSOs can add value to smaller ones however they sometimes use smaller CSOs connections to community to deliver on their own contracts in a non-reciprocal exploitative way. Small, locally trusted organisations often have better capacity to reach people, respond rapidly and utilise local networks.

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

Neighbourhood Houses and Centres are place-based, responsive, nimble actively and fill service gaps in an effective and community impacting way.

There is a tendency for duplication of services, especially in the psychosocial support and preventative health space. A more effective model would be to invest in well established community CSOs such as Neighbourhood Houses and Centres. The cost to develop infrastructure, build trust and deliver quality outcomes in service areas that already exist in these communities rather than to seek partnerships or challenge applicants to partner is a growing concern.

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

Use peaks such as NHVic for distribution, Neighbourhood Houses and Centres are an extensive network of locally embedded and flexible services and with an evidence base of success in a number of areas including social prescription, civic participation, addressing social isolation, general health and wellbeing programs and meaningful connection.

5.3 Which areas do you consider have duplicative funding or gaps you think need to be addressed, and what is the evidence?

Gap is in programs for engagement, funding as a preventative health measure to foster community connections. Strengthen capacity of local services to offer diverse programs tailored to community need. Social prescribing is a necessity but community destinations must be supported. Just five referrals to Neighbourhood Houses and Centres from each FTE GP in Vic equals 70 new participants on average in every (400) Neighbourhood Houses and Centres.

Preventative health initiatives are best placed in non-health contexts. Community sees health settings as a need once there is a decline in health. Neighbourhood Houses and Centres provide an existing audience to deliver key messages in the health prevention space. Example: Ambulance Victoria came into many Neighbourhood Houses and Centres to deliver 'Call, Push, Shock' training and were able to train large numbers of existing participants in partnership. In Cloverdale Community Centre, a Corio/Norlane based CSO suburb with poor health statistics, Corio/Norlane based CSO, over 150 people were trained alone.

5.4 Where there is a community-led change initiative, could shared accountability to community and funders (government) strengthen service delivery?

CSOs carry the burden of accountability and it comes at a cost. We seek greater awareness by government in scaling application and reporting processes in line with funding amounts. Many CSOs have limited resources and rely on volunteers. An awareness of this pressure and effective use of our time and resources needs to be highlighted in this area. Partnerships at what cost? Any added burdens of responsibility or community-led change initiative needs the government to value community input and the value it returns.

6.3 What does success look like?

Peak associations at a state level have an important role and relationship with government that is not possible or sustainable by each community sector organisation. NHVic along with our other state equivalents, encourages the DSS and other government departments to invest time and resourcing to sector peaks. We are all capable of confidently and accurately representing the needs and interest of our members and are well positioned to work with government to inform priorities and address challenges.