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Community Sector Public consultation
Community Cohesion Branch
Department of Social Services
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Canberra, ACT 2601

Re: A stronger, more diverse and independent community sector

About ANHCA

The Australian Neighbourhood Houses and Centres Association (ANHCA) is the national peak body for Neighbourhood Houses and Centres in Australia. With a vision for strong local communities, ANCHA represents over 1000 Neighbourhood Houses/Centres across all of Australia. This is the generic name used for centres nationally known by a variety of names including Community Houses, Learning Centres, and Community Centres. Each of these are member organisations of their state peak representative bodies. They are all community sector organisations.

Each year there are more than 14 million visits to Neighbourhood Houses/Centres in Australia.

ANHCA is committed to the development of place based solutions to meet the economic, social and civic opportunities and challenges that are currently facing Australian communities. To achieve this, ANHCA works to support the evolution of strong local communities through the empowerment of engaged local leaders and the creation of community partnerships.

Strategic Advocacy

ANHCA has an important role in leading co-ordinated advocacy to the Federal Government. The ANHCA Board are pleased to take this opportunity to provide a summary response to the Stronger More Diverse and Independent Community Sector Discussion Paper.

Individual state response have been provided by the following member peaks:

- Community Centres South Australia
- Linkwest (Western Australia)
- Local Community Services Association (New South Wales)
- Neighbourhood Houses Victoria
- Neighbourhood Centres Queensland

These localised responses reflect the diversity of Australian communities and the philanthropic and state funding environments that are unique to each state. This summary response from ANHCA emphasises the three key actions that we believe will best enable ANHCA members and their communities to thrive.

1. Place based

- ANHCA seeks **consistent Federal Government investment in the, often small, organisations** who are known and trusted in their communities. These are the organisations that hold lasting relationships with people and places and are the beating heart of their communities.
- ANHCA recommends 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. This approach also enables more localised design and delivery to meet the specific context of a place (including local understanding of community needs, cultural context and awareness of existing workforce and service supply)

2. Strength based

- ANHCA asks for a **shift in policy from a deficit model to a strength based community development approach**. Neighbourhood Houses are leaders in community development practice, facilitating people in a place to set priorities, identify solutions and play an active role in delivery, evaluation and ongoing sustainability.

3. Flexible

- ANHCA supports **longer grant terms** that enable communities to enhance their local social infrastructure over time and ensure sustainable outcomes are achieved. Sustainable community development takes time and requires grants terms of no less than 5 years, ideally working on 7-10 terms).
- ANHCA 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.

4. Adequate

ANHCA considers **'adequate' to include sufficient funding and less restricted grant guidelines** that provide for:

- **full operational costs to set up and deliver activities**. Too often grants are limited to service delivery, without development costs related to organisation capability, capacity or continuous improvement included. The rising cost of insurances, compliance requirements and accreditation need to be adequately recognised in grant funds.
- sufficient funding to **enable place-based models to be established into communities without the existing infrastructure**. These facilities are then available as hubs for specialist services and organisations, but remain as a community asset that is able to evolve and adapt to changing community needs (instead of the current model of funding specialist services for which demand changes over time)
- **recognition and inclusion of the costs associated with community engagement in co-design** (including evaluation). Organisations which hold a trusted relationship with their communities (at community and not condition or specialist service) are well placed to inform grant design, identification of outcomes and evaluation of outcomes at a community level. Neighbourhood Houses are repeatedly approached by other community sector organisations to support them to reach community members. Very rarely are Neighbourhood Houses funded directly for this engagement and other community sector organisation rarely have this costed into their own grant budget.

ANHCA encourages the DSS and other government departments to invest time and resourcing to sector peaks. 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 for each small community sector organisation. 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.

ANHCA is proud to partner with Sidney Myer Fund to provide the Supporting Stronger Communities grants program. This model of grant holding and grant distribution offers an option for DSS and other government departments who want to be sure their investment is reaching and impacting the communities it intends. ANHCA welcomes the opportunity to present this model and the impact of this approach to the DSS.

Please invite ANHCA to the table as an Advisory Group representative. ANHCA will ensure that grassroots, place-based perspectives are informing decisions. Our 1000 Centre strong Neighbourhood and Community House Sector provides unique access and insight to the diversity of communities and their strengths, needs and contexts across Australia.

ANHCA is encouraged by the increased discussion and emphasis on place-based models for services and funding. We believe that this will best be realised through strengthened relationships with peak bodies including ANHCA.

Please reach out to the ANHCA Board to continue this discussion and engage our support in affecting the changes needed to establish a world leading strong, diverse and independent community sector across Australia.

Regards,

The Australian Neighbourhood Houses and Centres Association (ANHCA) Board

