LCSA Policy Platform 2023

About Neighbourhood and Community Centres

Local Community Services Association (LCSA) is the peak body and membership organisation for Neighbourhood and Community Centres in NSW. Our purpose is to represent the interests of our diverse place-based, locally-governed members with a particular emphasis on community development.

Our network of 175 NCCs are the largest community-led infrastructure network in NSW. NCCs are uniquely placed to know and respond to the needs and aspirations of their communities. They facilitate community development projects, coordinate service delivery, and they are an integral part of frontline responses to, and recovery from, natural disasters. NCCs are recognised as service providers in a diverse community services sector.

What's not working?

NCCs are not recognised in an ongoing way by the NSW Government for the valuable role they perform in place-based, community-led work. They are also not recognised for their local presence in times of disasters and pandemics.

NSW is one of the few states and territories in Australia to not support NCCs through the provision of ongoing and realistic core funding.

The policy solution

Recognise NCCs as essential social infrastructure and appropriately resource them.

4-point plan

1. A formal partnership between the NSW Government and LCSA enshrining place-based consultation with NCCs and collaboration on community development, health, education, the environment, social planning and transport.

2. An annual Social Infrastructure Investment of $51,238,250 comprising $292,790 per NCC each year; and a one-off $5,000,000 Community Investment Fund to which organisations can apply to either top up their baseline funding or create new NCCs.

3. A one-off Loneliness Investment Fund of $3,680,000.

4. Fund two dedicated full-time positions at LCSA to support capacity building of the sector.

The NSW Council of Social Services (NCOSS) in their election policy platform are supporting a large part of LCSA's platform:
https://www.ncoss.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/NCOSS_policyPlatform_Nov22_FINAL.pdf

The role and value of Neighbourhood and Community Centres

Neighbourhood and Community Centres (NCCs) provide opportunities for participation, inclusion, belonging and contribution to the wider community. As community-based, non-profit organisations, NCCs leverage local resources, strengths and knowledge to create stronger communities. They provide tangible support and assistance to thousands of people across NSW and contribute to improvements in community wellbeing, public health, social connection, disaster preparedness and resilience.

Research in other Australian states has shown the enormous community value of NCCs. In Queensland, NCCs generate $4.81 of social value for every dollar invested by the Queensland Government in 2020. In Victoria, Neighbourhood Houses generated $4,253,583 in measurable community value in just four days in COVID-restricted settings in 2021 across the state. LCSA is currently undertaking research on the community value produced by NCCs in NSW which will be available in early 2023.

Recommendation 1

Create a formal partnership between the NSW Government and LCSA enshrining in social policy place-based consultation with NCCs and collaboration on community development, health, education, the environment, social planning and transport.

Background

The NSW Government has already recognised the vibrant and vast network of LCSA's membership. This was demonstrated recently when the Department of Communities and Justice approached LCSA to coordinate the rollout of free RATs for pension card holders in NSW through NCCs. In Tasmania, 'The Shared Commitment to Collaboration' formalises the relationship between the Tasmanian Government and Neighbourhood Houses Tasmania.

What's not working?

- No formal, coordinated approach between the NSW Government and NCCs, the largest community-led infrastructure network in NSW

- Minimal consultation with NCCs on issues where rich community context and knowledge are relevant to deliver effective local services and programs

- No current commitment or cohesive approach to community development in NSW

How we can fix it

A formal partnership between the NSW Government and LCSA can facilitate processes between the Government and the LCSA network of NCCs around consultation, community development and the rollout of programs and initiatives.

The partnership would also be responsible for defining eligibility for NCC core funding and the allocation of that funding across NSW.

LCSA and the NSW Government should work together to set the terms of a formal partnership agreement, including in-built mechanisms for regular consultation with the sector on policy in which the sector is implicated.

Further reading

Shared Commitment to Collaboration, the formal partnership agreement between Neighbourhood Houses Tasmania and the Tasmanian Government: https://www.dpac.tas.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0024/228057/Tasmanian_Government_and_Neighbourhood_Houses_Shared_Commitment_to_Collaboration.pdf

Recommendation 2

An annual Social Infrastructure Investment of $52,702,250, plus a one-off cost of $5 million for a Community Investment Fund over the next four years.

Background

Currently in NSW, NCCs rely on diverse program funding streams from the local, state and federal governments. The primary funding stream is Targeted Early Intervention (TEI) funding from the NSW Department of Communities and Justice. Most program funding is tied to specific service delivery requirements.

In 2022, the Queensland Government recognised the essential role NCCs in that state play, and almost doubled core funding to all NCCs in Queensland based on the minimum 2.5 FTE staffing model at a cost of $230,000 per NCC.

What's not working?

- Funding is often short-term and inflexible
- Most funding sources do not include funding for staffing, infrastructure or operational requirements
- Applying for funding is labour-intensive which is a challenge for NCCs that already have incredibly stretched resources
- There is not enough funding for community development work, which NCCs are uniquely placed to deliver
- Inadequate staffing levels - many NCCs in NSW currently have only one staff member onsite per day, leading to either an unsafe working environment or closing their doors to the public at short notice
- There is no funding available to establish new NCCs in growth areas across NSW

How we can fix it

By guaranteeing core funding for every NCC in NSW that can be flexibly applied to meet the needs of every NCC and guarantees security of funding for staffing, operational expenses and community development work. Community development is key to building community strength and resilience.

Core funding elements

	Cost per LCSA member organisation p.a.	Cost for 175 LCSA members p.a.
Community Development Worker (SCHADS 5.1)	$102,071	$17,862,425
EO (SCHADS 8.1 for 32h/wk) & Admin (SCHADS 3.1 for 15h/wk)	$140,719	$24,625,825
Operational costs	$50,000	$8,750,000
Total	$292,790	$51,238,250

Figures bases on the 2022 SCHADS Award

LCSA advises that a base operational amount of 2.5 workers is required to safely run the key components of NCCs. This ensures NCC's doors stay open and are safe environments for staff, volunteers, and visitors. Hiring a community development worker at every centre would create employment for 160-180 people across NSW.

The Community Investment Fund will allow NCCs to apply to top-up their funding and for organisations to apply to establish new NCCs in growth areas.

Further reading

Neighbourhood House Survey (2021), Neighbourhood Houses Victoria: https://www.nhvic.org.au/Handlers/Download.ashx?IDMF=723ebecc-9cb0-431b-9406-7bbe649b2024

Recommendation 3

A one-off Loneliness Investment Fund of $3,680,000, including:

→$20,000 one-off project funding for 175 local organisations

→$180,000 for project coordination by peak body.

Background

Loneliness is defined as an aversive and subjective feeling of social isolation that arises when an individual perceives the quality or quantity of social relationships they have is less than what they desire (Peplau & Perlman, 1982). According to a 2020 Swinburne University study, one in four Australians aged 12-89 reported feeling lonely all or part of the time before the COVID-19 pandemic. A 2022 KPMG report, Connections Matter, found that 54% of people are lonelier after the COVID-19 pandemic, and it also found that lonely people have a 26% increased risk of death. The 2020 White Paper from Ending Loneliness Together characterises loneliness as a critical issue of our time, and notes that loneliness carries risks associated with poorer health outcomes, lower workplace productivity, and decreased quality of life. Loneliness is a consequence of a multitude of factors, and a one-size-fits-all approach will not work.

What's not working

- Loneliness is occurring at epidemic levels and there is currently no national or state-level strategy to address it

- Australians are more likely to have contact with and call on family and friends for help, but rarely look to their community for assistance, reflecting lonely communities (Ending Loneliness Together White Paper, p.21)

- Loneliness is not routinely monitored and consequently, not well managed

How we can fix it

By investing in the social infrastructure network of NCCs, the NSW Government can roll out a coordinated and comprehensive response to loneliness for the first time in NSW. This response would be place-based and locally led and could meet Ending Loneliness Together's recommendations to 'develop and deliver system-wide frameworks' and to 'connect and empower people to take action'. A community development approach is both cost-effective in reconnecting the disconnected, and efficient in reaching people early through prevention. Ending Loneliness Together notes that we need to design and build safe environments for people to come together and interact and open up engagement pathways with NCCs (Ending Loneliness Together White Paper, p.21).

Current activities within NCCs include social group activities, one-to-one and group therapies, partnerships with local health providers and activities using information and communication technology. Evidence indicates that facilitating involvement in purposeful activities within a group environment is an effective strategy for reducing both social isolation and loneliness.

This investment will address loneliness through a coordinated, place-based approach that reduces the current burden on the health and social services systems. This approach demonstrates the value and efficiencies created for both government and communities by utilising LCSA's network.

The project coordination funding allocated to LCSA should include a research and evidence component.

Further reading

Ending Loneliness Together (2020), 'Ending Loneliness Together in Australia', https://www.endingloneliness.com.au/resources/whitepaper/ending-loneliness-together-in-australia

KPMG & Groundswell Foundation (2022), 'Connections Matter – a report on the impacts of loneliness in Australia'. https://home.kpmg/au/en/home/media/press-releases/2022/11/connections-matter-australians-impacted-by-loneliness-7-november-2022.html

Peplau L, Perlman D. Perspectives on loneliness. In: Peplau L, Perlman D, editors. *Loneliness: a sourcebook of current theory, research and therapy*; 1982, p.1-20.

Swinburne University of Technology (2020), 'Survey of Health and Wellbeing – Monitoring the Impact of COVID-19. https://www.swinburne.edu.au/media/swinburneeduau/research-institutes/iverson-health/Loneliness-in-COVID-19-15-07-20_final.pdf

Windle K, Francis J, C C. (2011*), Preventing loneliness and social isolation: interventions and outcomes*, London: Social Care Institute for Excellence. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/273445886_Preventing_loneliness_and_social_isolation_interventions_and_outcomes

Recommendation 4

Fund two dedicated full-time positions at LCSA to support the capacity building of the sector, at a cost of $223,030 p.a.

Background

LCSA is a small organisation with 3.5 FTE staff. Additional staff will be needed to support recommendations 1 and 2.

What's not working?

Currently, there is not staff capacity at LCSA to lead and oversee the rollout of recommendations 1 and 2.

How we can fix it

With extra staff, LCSA can support the roll-out of core funding to NCCs, support members to work within a community development framework and support members in best practices of disaster preparedness, response and recovery.

Additionally, LCSA needs to be better resourced as a state peak to provide in-depth and accurate assistance to the government in planning, policy development and implementation.

Cost breakdown

2 x Sector Development positions (SCHADS 6.1) p.a.	$193,939
On-costs	$29,091
Total p.a.	$223,030

Figures based on the 2022 SCHADS Award