

Neighbourhood Centres Queensland

Queensland Budget Submission 2022-2023

Neighbourhood & Community Centres Need a \$25M Boost to Deliver \$170M¹ in Social Value for Queenslanders

Each day, 140+ supportive spaces across Queensland open their doors to welcome and empower community members to connect, learn and grow. Neighbourhood and Community Centres (NCCs) form the beating heart of communities. 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 Queenslanders and contributing to improvements in community development, public health, social connection, disaster preparedness and resilience. NCCs foster opportunities for participation, contribution, inclusion and belonging.

As a network, Neighbourhood and Community Centres are the largest community-led infrastructure in Queensland. In 2020-21 alone, NCCs had over 2.3 million interactions with community members, producing over \$90million in social value for communities.² Yet with median government baseline funding of just \$126, 501, the Neighbourhood Centre sector is one of the most underfunded community services in Queensland. Numerous reports on the sector from 2017 have demonstrated the need for much larger investment from the Queensland Government³.

This was recently highlighted in the Queensland Government's Parliamentary Inquiry into Loneliness and Social Isolation. 53 Neighbourhood Centres lodged submissions to this inquiry and a further 17 gave public briefings, highlighting the enormous impact Neighbourhood Centres have in communities across the state. As one community member told a Neighbourhood Centre Coordinator on their way to speak at the Parliamentary Inquiry;

"Tell them that if it wasn't for your centre, I'd be under the train, not on it".

Comprehensive sector research by Neighbourhood Centres Queensland reinforces this message. Neighbourhood and Community Centres generate \$4.81 of social value for every dollar invested by the Queensland Government⁴. In the 2020-21 FY, NCCs provided \$15.9m in emergency assistance. This included 680,184kgs of food assistance and \$2.3 million in other emergency relief. One million people participate in centre activities each week across Queensland, alongside 2,745 community members volunteering to support their local community.

Neighbourhood Centres Queensland, along with our members, communities, and partners, call for an investment of \$25million into Neighbourhood Centres in the 2022-2023 state budget. This is critical to alleviate the enormous pressure Queensland communities are currently facing, exacerbated by Queensland's projected growth over the next 10 years. Neighbourhood Centres offer unique solutions to community issues not matched by any other service across the state. To deliver this unique place-based model NCQ recommends investment in these 5 key areas outlined in the table below.

¹ Based on combined current and requested QLD Government funding for NCCs, and multiplied by social value of \$4.69 generated per \$1 invested by Queensland Government.

² NCQ Annual Survey Data, 2021.

³ <https://www.qcross.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/Neighbourhood-Centre-IMS-Report-FINAL-for-web-1.pdf>, Griffith University Policy and Innovation Hub (2019), QFCA Annual Survey Report (2020).

⁴, ⁵, ⁶ NCQ Annual Survey Data, 2021.

RECOMMENDATION 1

1
Increase base funding for Neighbourhood Centres to meet the community's emerging needs**Investment** \$15.2+ million**Impact** Increased ability to respond to growing community need, along with improved safety of community members, staff and volunteers. The social impact of Neighbourhood Centres will rise from \$90 million to an estimated \$170million.⁷

RECOMMENDATION 2

2
Fund 10 new Neighbourhood Centres sites to ensure Queenslanders have access to vital services**Investment** \$2.56 million over 3 years**Impact** Increased disaster resilience, social capital and wellbeing for 10 communities in Queensland, producing flow on effects including improved employment & health outcomes and less strain on other funded services through preventative support.

RECOMMENDATION 3

3
Fund Brief Intervention Workers for People Experiencing Crisis and Financial Hardship**Investment** \$6.7 million**Impact** At-risk community members experiencing homelessness, domestic violence and food insecurity supported. Respond to the increase in acute financial crisis in local communities as the result of Covid-19, natural disasters, and significant community hardship across Queensland. This will produce flow on effects including reduction in homelessness and minimising strain on other services through preventative support.

RECOMMENDATION 4

4
Implement Reporting and Performance Framework for Neighbourhood Centres**Investment** \$220,000 (Year 1)**Impact** Community Outcomes of Public Investment measured and communicated. Meaningful data collected on the impact of Neighbourhood and Community Centres programs throughout Queensland, allowing for better informed government spending and decision making, and improvement of programs and services.

RECOMMENDATION 5

5
Increase Funding for NCQ to Support Frontline Workers and Build Sector Capacity**Investment** Additional \$250,000+ per year**Impact** Maximise increased investment in Neighbourhood Centres and ensure the success of the sector reform work through funding the peak body to grow the connectivity, capability, and resourcing across the Queensland NCC network.⁷ NCQ Annual Survey Data, 2021.

Overall Value of Supporting the Neighbourhood and Community Centre sector

A total investment of \$25M will ensure that all Queenslanders are given the opportunity to participate, connect, belong and be included in their local community.

This investment will result in the sector providing an overall minimum of \$165.5M in social value for Queenslanders per year and reduce further service costs to Government through place-based responses across the state.

RECOMMENDATION 1

Increase base funding for Neighbourhood Centres to meet the community's emerging needs

1

Investment \$15.2+ million

Impact Increased ability to respond to growing community need, along with improved safety of community members, staff and volunteers. The social impact of Neighbourhood Centres will rise from \$90 million to an estimated \$170million.⁷

Recommendation 1 Detail

Background

The Neighbourhood Centre program is one of the lowest funded services in Queensland. Neighbourhood Centre funding for 127 centres by the Queensland Government ranges from \$121,952 to \$494,827 however the median amount is \$126, 501 equating to just one worker per 250 community members.

Problem

- Low funding has created a substantial wage gap which impacts NCCs ability to support, retain and ensure safety of staff and volunteers, threatening the sustainability and quality of services. (Productivity Commission, 2010: XXIV)
- Loneliness and Social Isolation for many community members not addressed
- Centres don't have enough funds to address increased needs in local communities
- Limited opening hours
- Restricted capacity to recruit volunteers and students
- High organisational overheads result in less frontline program delivery
- Poor workforce conditions – gender pay inequity, safety issues and staff burnout

Solution

As outlined in the NCQ submission to the Parliamentary Inquiry into Social Isolation and Loneliness and supported by our members and partners including QCOSS and QCA, Neighbourhood Centres Queensland advises that a **base operational amount of 2.5 workers is required to safely run the key components of a Neighbourhood or Community Centre**. This lifts the base funding for every Neighbourhood Centre to **\$256,000**. This increased resourcing to 2.5 workers ensures community centre doors stay open and are safe environments for staff, volunteers, and visitors. This will also ensure that neighbourhood centres have capacity to participate in the Queensland Government Sector Reform processes and invest in workforce development and organisational capability. **A \$15.2M additional investment per year is required⁷.**

⁷ NCQ Annual Survey Data, 2021.

We also recommend the NCC Strategic Repositioning Committee consider **additional supplementation funding** for centres privately renting or mortgaging their main premises, affected by compounding natural disasters and/or centres in regional and rural areas.

Outcomes

- Increase total Social Impact of Neighbourhood Centres from \$88.6 million to \$153.5million⁸
- Increased ability to respond to Loneliness and Social Isolation in Communities
- Ability to run additional programs targeting unique issues in localities
- Community led solutions to local problems and interests
- Increased capacity to recruit volunteers and students
- Increased local networking between, and resourcing of, local agencies and community groups
- Healthy and safe work environment
- Increased understanding and on-the-ground data on the issues affecting Queensland communities
- Supplements for high cost infrastructure results in more frontline delivery

⁸ NCQ Annual Survey Data, 2021.

RECOMMENDATION 2

2

Fund 10 new Neighbourhood Centres sites to ensure Queenslanders have access to vital services

Investment \$2.56 million over 3 years

Impact Increased disaster resilience, social capital and wellbeing for 10 communities in Queensland, producing flow on effects including improved employment & health outcomes and less strain on other funded services through preventative support.

Recommendation 2 Detail

Background

All people deserve access to spaces for belonging, connection and support. Over the next 10 years, Queensland will grow to a population of over 6.5 million and additional social infrastructure is needed to create vibrant, welcoming, and inclusive communities. This facilitates strong local economies by creating attractive regions to live, work and play. We need a clear and transparent framework to both adequately fund existing place-based social infrastructure and establish new Neighbourhood Centres across Queensland.

Problem

- Lack of social infrastructure to address Loneliness and Social Isolation.
- Reduced social capital and low disaster resilience in areas with limited place-based infrastructure
- People in some key regions do not have access to Neighbourhood Centre, despite need as demonstrated in the SEIFA index e.g. Rockhampton and Warwick
- Some Neighbourhood Centres are running 2+ centres to meet the need in their region, yet received funding for just one centre
- Ongoing funding of Neighbourhood Centres are rarely master planned into new developments

Solution

In addition to ongoing base funding amounts, funding for new Neighbourhood Centre sites is required to ensure Queenslanders have equitable access to these vital services. NCQ recommends **\$2.56M be allocated for base level funding for 10 new Neighbourhood Centre sites over the next 3 years**. A transparent process should be used to allocate new NCC funding to communities that either lack or are currently self-funding this vital infrastructure.

Outcomes

- Social Capital and Community Resilience built into the fabric of new and existing localities
- Investment in preventative community-based support and engagement reduces costs and strain on key government services such as hospitals

- Social Infrastructure growth matching population growth
- Increase capacity of centres running 2 or more sites
- Community led solutions to local issues and interests
- Growing the social capital of each area through facilitating network development and support of other community groups and agencies
- Increased understanding and on-the-ground data on the issues affecting Queensland communities
- Gaps in service delivery addressed
- New NCC placements based on community factors
- Increase social impact by a further \$12million

Fund Brief Intervention Workers for People Experiencing Crisis and Financial Hardship

Investment \$6.7 million

Impact At-risk community members experiencing homelessness, domestic violence and food insecurity supported. Respond to the increase in acute financial crisis in local communities as the result of Covid-19, natural disasters, and significant community hardship across Queensland. This will produce flow on effects including reduction in homelessness and minimising strain on other services through preventative support.

Recommendation 3 Detail

Background

Neighbourhood Centres are increasingly responding to individual crisis experienced by community members. This includes issues of food security, financial hardship, homelessness, domestic and family violence and the effects of disasters.

Problem

- Some Communities are experiencing multiple disasters – monsoon, drought, bushfires and COVID 19
- There is an Urgent Housing Crisis in Queensland
- Increase in the complexity of client needs and lack of referral pathways
- Neighbourhood Centres not funded for crisis staff
- Emergency Relief is delivered by NCC's without any ER funding using local community resources

Solution

Neighbourhood Centres are currently responding to acute crisis in local communities as the result of COVID-19, natural disasters, and significant community hardship. Research conducted by NCQ in 2021 indicates that 74% of Neighbourhood Centres are undertaking Emergency Relief to Queenslanders experiencing poverty and homelessness. The NCC Survey showed an average of 370 interactions and almost 50 referrals at a neighbourhood centre each week, which is on par with research conducted by DCDHE in 2021. Along with QCA and QCOS, we recommend that a pool of **\$6.7M be established to fund brief intervention workers** for NCCs working with people experiencing crisis and financial hardship.

Outcomes

- Food, housing and safety provided to vulnerable people including children
- Service gaps addressed in communities
- Centres delivering immediate disaster response in localities cut off from other support
- Flexible funding model for specific communities experiencing unique challenges
- Neighbourhood Centres use base funding to deliver developmental solutions alongside crisis response.

Implement Reporting and Performance Framework for Neighbourhood Centres

4

Investment \$220,000 (Year 1)

Impact Community Outcomes of Public Investment measured and communicated. Meaningful data collected on the impact of Neighbourhood and Community Centres programs throughout Queensland, allowing for better informed government spending and decision making, and improvement of programs and services.

Recommendation 4 Detail

Background

There is limited meaningful data being collected by the Queensland Government on the impact Neighbourhood Centres have on local communities. In 2020, The Department of Communities funded NCQ (formerly QFCA) to co-design a new reporting and performance framework with the sector. The new framework was developed with input from 52 individuals from 20 NCCs, 6 peak bodies and 4 research bodies. This framework has not yet been implemented.

Problem

- Measurement tools used to measure community impact inadequate
- Time consuming qualitative data taking away from frontline delivery
- Lack of accountability for Government expenditure
- No current framework for measuring social connectedness in local communities
- Lack of public knowledge on the role and impact of Neighbourhood Centres

Solution

Fund Neighbourhood Centres Queensland to update and implement the new Reporting and Performance Framework for Neighbourhood Centres. This framework was co-designed by NCQ with the NCC sector, Department of Communities, Digital Economy and Housing, peak organisations and research bodies in 2020. **Implementation cost for the first year is \$220,000.**

Outcomes

- Meaningful data collected on Neighbourhood Centre impact in local communities
- Case studies gathered for internal and external communications increasing awareness of Neighbourhood Centres
- Data can be aggregated with Neighbourhood Centres nationally and further data sets
- Data can be used to assist individual NCC's to seek greater resourcing and increase local knowledge.
- Accountability of Government expenditure

RECOMMENDATION 5

Increase Funding for NCQ to Support Frontline Workers and Build Sector Capacity

5

Investment Additional \$250,000+ per year

Impact Maximise increased investment in Neighbourhood Centres and ensure the success of the sector reform work through funding the peak body to grow the connectivity, capability, and resourcing across the Queensland NCC network.

Recommendation 5 Detail

Background

Supporting frontline workers and building sector capacity is core to the work of the peak body, Neighbourhood Centres Queensland. NCQ has a membership of over 90% of funded NCCs across Queensland, long-established and in-depth understanding of centres' strengths and challenges, and is established as the go-to source for timely and relevant information, resources, and connections.

NCQ has robust digital infrastructure (Salesforce CMS) to manage the details and needs of centres, and a recently launched a new website (ncq.org.au).

Our Members Area (launching in early 2022) is an online learning and sharing platform designed specifically for the benefit of Queensland Neighbourhood & Community Centres. It offers tailored training, tools and templates, as well as opportunities for centres to contribute and share learnings, successes, or to ask questions and seek peer support.

NCQ also has a history of creating tailored training, structured mentoring, university partnerships and coordinated student placements.

The Recommendations of the Parliamentary Inquiry Report⁸ includes workforce and sector support. NCQ acknowledges this as well as the need to better support frontline workers and build sector capacity in the areas of disaster resilience, domestic and family violence, financial resilience, and Covid-19 responses.

Problem

- Neighbourhood Centres Queensland (NCQ) is the lowest funded peak body in Queensland. At just \$153,568 per year, the peak funding for NCQ mirrors the low investment of the Queensland Government into the Neighbourhood Centre sector. Whilst NCQ has the capability to build sector capacity and support frontline workers, the financial capacity is limited. Additional resourcing is urgently required to maintain and grow NCQ's capacity to continue support frontline workers and build sector capacity.

⁸ <https://documents.parliament.qld.gov.au/TableOffice/TabledPapers/2021/5721T2070.pdf>

⁹ Carey, G., Weier, G., Barnes, E., Muir, K. (2020:14). Moving the Conversation Forward: A decade of reform recommendations for the community services sector. Centre for Social Impact UNSW, Sydney.

¹⁰ Betts, H., Ingamells, A. and Odgers, N. (2021) Enhancing Community Development in Neighbourhood and Community Centres. Queensland Families & Communities Association and Griffith University, Queensland.

- There has been a major increase on demands for neighbourhood centres – including increased service demands (in part due to Covid-19, rise in natural disasters, and financial insecurity in communities), increased requirements of compliance and risk management⁹, and ongoing resource constraints for the NCC sector.
- Research conducted by Griffith University and NCQ has demonstrated the need for tailored, relevant, and affordable Neighbourhood Centre training, professional development, and resources to support centres and frontline workers to respond to emerging community issues whilst also engaging in community development and engagement activities¹⁰.
- Individual centres are “reinventing the wheel” without a platform to share collective resources, policies and procedures or bulk-purchase key operational functions. This effectively reduces time on community-based work.
- Lack of HR and Employee Assistance Programs catered towards NCC sector
- All of these problems produce flow on effects which lead to reduced outcomes for Queenslanders.

Solution

An **additional \$250,000 per year¹¹ would enable NCQ to leverage its current capability and digital infrastructure to dramatically increase its reach and support across Queensland.** This investment would enable NCQ to build connectivity, capability, and resourcing across the Queensland NCC network. This will maximise the Queensland Government’s critical social infrastructure investment in the NCC sector. The work will focus on the following key elements:

- Tailored training, mentoring, peer support and key resources co-developed and delivered with NCC staff and volunteers.
- Workforce planning, continuous improvement and embedding sector reforms
- Mapping and growing local, regional, and state-level connections, strengths and capability, monitoring community and NCC trends, and sharing key information across stakeholders
- Applying for large collaborative grants and sponsorships to access federal and philanthropic funds and build the Australian NCC network
- Facilitation and development of regional network meetings and other collaborative networks
- Enhanced digital infrastructure for building networks, peer support and resource sharing amongst NCCs.

Outcomes

- Improved likelihood of sector reform success and realisation of 10-year vision for Neighbourhood Centres
- Increased effectiveness and ease of core management and compliance functions of individual NCCs through improved resource sharing and access to affordable, tailored products (may include insurance, Employee Assistance Program and Human Resource advice)
- Community- and regional-level trends and insights readily available for rapid policy response to emerging issues

¹² QFCA (NCQ) receives the lowest amount of DCHDE Community Services Peak Funding, p105. <https://documents.parliament.qld.gov.au/TableOffice/TabledPapers/2021/5721T2070.pdf>

- Growth in sector resourcing and visibility through increased partnerships, federal and philanthropic funding, and increased collaboration
- Increased University research and student placements in NCC's leading to a growth in the workforce and evidence base for place-based development.
- Reduced staff turnover and increased workforce capacity, leading to enhanced community engagement and impact at the NCC level
- Improved experience and outcomes for community members seeking support, connection and engagement