



**Annual Report  
2023-24**

**NCOSS**   
NSW Council of Social Service



# About NCOSS

The NSW Council of Social Service (NCOSS) is the peak body for the social service sector in NSW. With over 400 members and a wider network of organisations and individuals who share our values, we work to make NSW free from poverty and disadvantage.

We advocate, collaborate and connect, as an independent public voice, to build inclusive communities where everyone can thrive, supported by a strong, diverse and effective social service sector.

Our work is guided by the real experiences of people facing poverty and disadvantage and the community organisations that support them.

We work closely with communities and partners to create credible, evidence-based solutions.

By teaming up with government, the private sector, and other stakeholders, we're able to maximise impact and make a real difference.

## Acknowledgement of Country

NCOSS acknowledges First Nations peoples as the sovereign custodians of Country, which was never ceded. We pay respect to Elders of past, present and future generations.

We acknowledge, respect and value the distinct culture, customs and practices present in the many and diverse tribal nations across NSW.

## Cover Art

The front cover was designed by Natalie Abraham, a 22-year-old Wadi Wadi/Wodi Wodi woman. Her design was chosen by a panel of judges based on the theme of Towards Self-Determination. The judges were NCOSS RAP Artist and member of our PAG Advisory Group, Wandi Wandian woman Karlie Stewart, and two NCOSS First Nations Directors, Jenni Beetson-Mortimer and John Leha.

Natalie says: "Self-determination is incredibly important to me and my community. It's about reclaiming our right to decide our future, while honouring the strength of our communities."

Read more about Natalie and this artwork at our website: [www.ncoss.org.au](http://www.ncoss.org.au)

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NSW Council of Social Service

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# 2023-24 Highlights

## Advocating for social infrastructure in South West Sydney



Our report *Beyond Roads and Bridges: Critical Social Infrastructure for South West Sydney* was released in December 2023 and highlighted the unmet community need and the neglect of social services in this area.

South West Sydney will boom by 30% in the next 16 years. Our report found an additional \$3 billion of funding is needed each year in social housing, mental health care, and domestic violence help. Without this funding, poverty will become more entrenched in one of NSW's most disadvantaged communities.

## Legislation passed for portable long service leave scheme

NCOSS has long lobbied for a portable long service leave scheme, and we were thrilled that in June 2024, the NSW Parliament passed legislation to enact it. Sector workers often move between employers, making it hard for them to accrue long service leave entitlements. It also makes a career in social services a more attractive option for workers, supporting the sustainability of the sector. This scheme allows workers to access paid long service leave after 7 years, regardless of how many employers they've had. Their entitlements remain valid even after a 4-year break between jobs. It is planned to be effective from July 2025.

## Discussing challenges in regional and rural NSW

We had several fruitful Regional Members Meetings throughout the year which provided a forum to talk about the challenges rural NSW communities face.

In August 2023, the key topic was the Voice to Parliament. We had meetings in Taree (November 2023) and Dubbo (May 2024) where we talked about poverty, healthcare, disaster preparedness, housing, and community safety.

These meetings led to two comprehensive reports which contributed to the NSW Parliamentary Inquiry into Community Safety in Regional and Rural Communities. We hope these discussions and outcomes will inform policy and advocacy for the specific needs of rural areas.



At the Regional Forum in Dubbo. David Gbogbo (NCOSS), Jessica Phelps (Mission Australia), Megan Boshell (Mission Australia), Francesca Cathie (NCOSS), Dale Towns (Mission Australia), Neha Shah (NCOSS). Back row: Tanya Molloy (Mission Australia), Ben McAlpine (NCOSS).



## Extension of the Mirrung School Gateway Project

The NCOSS School Gateway Project aims to demonstrate that integrated whole-of-family services, accessed through local schools, will deliver better education and well-being outcomes for kids in disadvantaged communities. We were delighted that funding for the Mirrung School Gateway Project wellbeing hub at Ashcroft Public School was extended for two more years. It's a great recognition of the team's hard work and the positive impact this program has had on children's education and wellbeing.

We also released a report called *Mirrung – Creating a Thriving Learning Community* where we detailed our achievements to date. This wellbeing hub approach is increasingly recognised as a way to promote education equity.

With this success and extended funding, NCOSS will work closely with Ashcroft Public School to ensure that Mirrung is sustainable beyond our engagement. We will also continue to work with government and other partners to advocate for this approach as a future framework for education and service delivery across the state.

## Launch of the Lived Experience Advisory Panel (LEAP)

This year, we recruited our first LEAP members, who have since shared their experiences at events like the Post Budget Breakfast. The LEAP provided input on the pre-budget submission, cost-of-living research, and health projects. The panel also completed a successful staff induction, with the goal of embedding the Lived Experience framework into our work.



Parents at Ashcroft Public School use the Mirrung kitchen to prepare food and chat.



## Exploring the experience of virtual care in NSW



We examined the benefits and challenges of telehealth in our report [\*An Exploration of the Experiences of Virtual Care in NSW\*](#). Virtual care can be convenient and affordable, but it's not always accessible for everyone. It can lead to

digital exclusion, especially for those who are socially isolated.

Our report looked at how participants faced barriers like poor internet access, lack of digital understanding, and reduced communication with healthcare providers. The study emphasised that telehealth needs to be a choice and gave recommendations of ways to improve it so the community can benefit.

## Community Sector Disaster Capability Program (CSDC)

The CSDC aimed to improve disaster management in four locations across NSW (Northern Rivers, Hawkesbury, Snowy Monaro and Eurobodalla/Bega). We collaborated with NGOs and local community to provide tools, training and resources. Our goal was to help improve emergency preparedness, especially for vulnerable groups.

The program also contributed to the Community Sector Involvement in Disaster Management report. It emphasised the crucial role of NGOs during events like the Northern Rivers floods. The CSDC program finished in June 2024.

## Highlighting the cost-of-living crisis

In August 2023, we released our annual cost-of-living research called [\*Barely Hanging On: The Cost-of-Living Crisis in NSW\*](#). Our findings showed the crisis is getting worse. Many people who were just keeping their heads above water in previous years now can't pay their bills.

The report found single parents, First Nations people, and people with disabilities are particularly affected. We also released a supplementary paper with recommendations including building an additional 5,000 social housing residences.

Our report received significant media attention, and we were pleased to see a \$5.1 billion investment in social housing in the most recent NSW budget.



*This workshop in the Hawkesbury was held to allow NGOs to engage with Emergency Management. Clear communication is important during disasters.*



## Our Vision

A NSW free from poverty and disadvantage.

## Purpose

We are an independent public voice collaborating, advising and advocating for a better deal for people experiencing poverty or disadvantage, and the social service sector that supports them.

## Stakeholders

- Not for Profit organisations that make up the NSW social service sector
- Other Peaks and Councils of Social Service
- Individuals and private sector entities who share our values and mission
- Government agencies, Members of Parliament, decision makers, philanthropists, people with lived experience of poverty and disadvantage, academics and researchers.

## Values



### Courage

We have the courage to advocate and act for those who are voiceless and those who support them.



### Integrity

We act, speak and support with integrity and honesty as an independent public voice for the disadvantaged.



### Fairness

We strive for a state free from poverty, where everyone can prosper no matter their background.



### Inclusion

We believe that a more equitable society starts with a more inclusive society where people's differences are valued and their needs recognised.



# President's message



No review of 2023-24 can avoid how difficult it has been for our First Nations friends and colleagues. The outcome of the Voice referendum and the hurtful commentary surrounding it was incredibly disappointing.

On a brighter note, we know that most First Nations peoples supported the Voice, as did 40% of Australians.

Over the past 12 months, the cost-of-living crisis has escalated. The title of our 2023-24 report – *Barely Hanging On: The Cost-of-Living Crisis in NSW* – sums it up. We saw more people skipping meals, going without medication and health care, and increasingly relying on Buy Now Pay Later to cover the essentials.

Those who were already facing their fair share of challenges have been hit hardest. These include First Nations people, people with disabilities, single-parent families, those from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, and households below the poverty line.

We're increasingly seeing people who have never had to rely on support from social service organisations seeking help. Families with two incomes who used to earn enough for their rent or mortgage have drained their savings and now struggle to put food on the table.

We're also hearing from our members that social service organisations are being tested with rising costs, growing unmet community need and increasing case complexity.

The NSW Government has taken some good first steps. They've promised an impressive \$5.1B investment in social housing, an end to no ground evictions which is due to be legislated in September 2024, and a promised portable residential bond scheme.

The NSW Government is also looking into initiatives to reduce gambling harm, improving job security and funding certainty, and to improve employment condition by implementing a portable long service leave scheme.

I also would like to acknowledge that the NSW Labor Government has honoured their election commitment to boost NCOSS's funding by

\$1.3M a year. This brings NCOSS's per capita government funding more into line with the level of funding that our counterparts in other states and territories receive. It will support our work as we seek to put low-income households at the centre of decision-making and help us continue to advocate for a sustainable social service sector.

I want to thank the NCOSS team for their hard work and commitment over the last 12 months. The year saw significant change as we farewelled former CEO, Joanna Quilty, and welcomed new CEO, Cara Varian. Thanks also to Ben McAlpine for his leadership during the transition.

I'd like to thank my fellow board members for their contribution helping steer the organisation.

One of our directors, Karlie Stewart, stepped down during the year. Another director, Jenna Roberts, left the Board to take a new role as Assistant Commissioner of the inaugural Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence Commission. Our Treasurer, Brad Webb, and Chair of our Risk and Compliance Committee, Katherine McKernan, will also step down at our 2024 AGM.

We are extremely grateful for the time they gave us. Their hard work has helped make NCOSS a stronger, focused and more vocal advocate for the sector.

Finally, I'd like to thank all our members in social service organisations across NSW. Every day, you're on the frontline, meeting challenges and tirelessly working towards a NSW that is free from poverty and disadvantage.

You and the individuals, families and communities you work with are why NCOSS does the work we do.

**John Robertson**  
President



# CEO's message

Since joining NCOSS in January, I've been deeply humbled by the warmth and generosity extended to me by our members and sector colleagues across New South Wales.



It has been an absolute privilege to meet with individuals and organisations on the frontline of social services, learning about their unique challenges and shared aspirations.

Since joining NCOSS in January, I've been deeply humbled by the warmth and generosity extended to me by our members and sector colleagues across New South Wales. It has been an absolute privilege to meet with individuals and organisations on the frontline of social services, learning about their unique challenges and shared aspirations.

I've been continually inspired by the resilience, strength, and selfless dedication demonstrated by our sector, day in and day out. Their tireless efforts to support vulnerable communities are a testament to the power of human compassion.

In recent months, I've had the opportunity to engage with numerous stakeholders, including parliamentarians, government officials, business leaders, and media representatives. These connections will be instrumental in fostering innovative solutions and driving positive change for those experiencing poverty and inequality.

I want to acknowledge the exceptional leadership of my predecessors, Joanna Quilty and Ben McAlpine, whose passion and professionalism have significantly contributed to NCOSS's success. Their legacy will continue to inspire us as we move forward.

A key focus for NCOSS in the coming year is our involvement in the NSW Government's Secure Jobs and Funding Certainty Taskforce. We are committed to advocating for a sustainable and strong social service sector, one that empowers organisations to deliver high-quality services and support those in need.

Our Mirrung and Community Sector Disaster Capability projects have made significant strides. These initiatives are teaching us valuable lessons about the importance of integrated and collaborative approaches. By breaking down silos and fostering partnerships between government agencies and not-for-profit organisations, we can achieve better outcomes for communities across NSW.

We must strive for a future where human services are delivered in a flexible, responsive, and locally-driven way. By empowering frontline workers and investing in evidence-based practices, we can create a more equitable and caring society.

As we embark on this new chapter, I am excited about the potential for positive change. We have the opportunity to create a new era of collaboration and impact. By working together, we can build a stronger, more resilient, and more inclusive New South Wales.

I am particularly committed to addressing the systemic challenges faced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. By working in partnership with Indigenous-led organisations, we can dismantle barriers and create opportunities for self-determination and empowerment.

**Cara Varian**  
CEO



# GOAL 1

Amplify the experience of people affected by poverty or disadvantage to inform inclusive and equitable policy and decision making.

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Our primary goal in 2023-4 was to be a voice for the people in NSW who are experiencing poverty or disadvantage. We did this through community reports, public campaigns and political advocacy.

We highlight the authentic stories of the people most affected by poverty and disadvantage as we believe this helps pressure decision-makers to prioritise inclusive and fair policies.



# Our reports on poverty, disadvantage and vitally needed services

## Barely Hanging on: The Cost-of-Living Crisis in NSW

We know that the cost-of-living crisis continues to affect many families in NSW. In August 2023, we released our annual cost-of-living report '[Barely Hanging On: The Cost-of-Living Crisis in NSW](#)' which shows just how much.

We worked with The Institute of Public Policy and Governance from the University of Technology on the report. It highlighted the housing, employment income and financial hardships for NSW residents on low incomes, with an additional spotlight on Cultural and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) households.

The research took place in April and May 2023. We surveyed 1,134 NSW residents online and 23 people gave a personal perspective through focus groups and interviews. The report compared our 2022 survey results to show how the past 12 months have changed for NSW households.

The research showed increasing numbers of people in NSW are affected by the cost-of-living crisis. Many people who were just keeping their heads above water in the 2022 report were now struggling to pay their bills. Single parents, First Nations people, people with disability and carers were particularly affected.

Our [supplementary paper](#) included key recommendations for the NSW Government. Some of these recommendations were:

- Build an additional 5,000 social housing residences each year.
- Improve conditions and protections for renters by implementing fair limits on rent increases, and banning no grounds evictions.
- Make it easier for low-income households to access and benefit from cost-of-living support.

*Continued next page*



# 69%

of respondents were experiencing housing stress.



# 83%

of households living below the poverty line and experiencing housing stress.



# 79%

of private renters are spending 30% or more of their income on housing.



# 67%

of private renters reported having had a rent increase in the past 12 months.



## GOAL 1

The report received significant media attention, including Fairfax metropolitan and regional press and interviews on Sydney and regional radio stations.

We were pleased that there was a \$5.1 billion investment into social housing announced in the 2024 NSW budget. New laws were also introduced in July 2024 to make renting fairer including reforms that limit rent increases, provide stronger protections against evictions, and enhance tenants' rights.

We continue to work with the NSW Government to address the widening inequality we're seeing across NSW.

*“It's not only those living below the poverty line who are in this invidious position. Increasingly it is low-income households who are also cracking under the strain, as they watch their living costs exponentially increase while their incomes fail to keep pace. For many, there are few, if any, budgetary cuts left to make.”*

Former NCOSS CEO Joanna Quilty



**45%**

of respondents reporting they were unable to pay utility bills on time.



**53%**

reported cutting back on personal care services e.g., haircuts.



**30%**

rise in the numbers of respondents skipping meals.



**41%**

of respondents said they had used 'Buy Now Pay Later' to pay for essential goods.

## Beyond Roads and Bridges

*The \$3B a year shortfall in critical social infrastructure for South West Sydney.*

South West Sydney is growing and the NSW Government has focused heavily on physical infrastructure. However, it has neglected vital social services like social and affordable housing, mental health, and domestic violence support.

We commissioned research from Impact Economics and Policy to understand what social infrastructure is needed in NSW's fastest growing region. The report *Beyond roads and bridges: Critical social infrastructure for South West Sydney* was released in December 2023.

It looked at eight areas of social infrastructure - social housing, community facilities, disability services, community mental health, domestic and family violence support, child protection, migrant and refugee services, and financial counselling.

The study found residents in South West Sydney already face some of the highest levels of financial and social hardship in the state.

With South West Sydney set to boom by 30% in the next 16 years, an additional \$3 billion of funding is needed each year for these essential services.

*The current funding trajectory risks entrenching poverty and failing to support some of our most disadvantaged communities.*

This includes:

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**\$1.9 billion**  
in social housing and housing assistance.

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**\$426 million**  
in community mental health services.

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**\$422 million**  
in child protection services.

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**\$109 million**  
in domestic and family violence services.

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**\$51 million**  
in migrant and refugee services.

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# Providing a voice for vulnerable and disadvantaged people

## An Exploration of the Experience of Virtual Care in NSW

During the COVID-19 pandemic, virtual care, otherwise known as telehealth, snowballed. Many people saw their GP, mental health provider or specialist using telehealth and often they found it to be convenient, flexible and safer.

However, not everyone feels that way and some struggle to access and use telehealth services.

We wanted to understand the lived experience of telehealth, so we commissioned a qualitative study called [\*An Exploration of the Experiences of Virtual Care in NSW\*](#). It was undertaken by the Social Work and Policy Studies Program at the University of Sydney.

**“ ..it gives access to service that’s not there. So, there aren’t many psychologists there, so it gives access to those hard to find, but it also gives anonymity and privacy which is really hard to find.”**

Rural/Remote participant

The participants were from urban, regional, rural and remote areas of NSW and included a variety of groups including public housing tenants, those with chronic health conditions, carers and people who spoke a language other than English. Over 60% of participants were living on low income.

The study found that virtual care can be convenient, affordable and beneficial, particularly for people living in rural and remote areas.

**“ If it means this person’s forced to buy a mobile phone and learn it, then perhaps they can’t afford the ridiculous prices mobile phones are. Well, they fall through the crack, so I would want those things to be thought about.”**

Regional

However, those who are most at risk of being excluded from virtual care include people who are socially isolated and digitally excluded. Telehealth services can impact the quality of care a person receives when they have issues with computer and internet access and have reduced communication skills.

We provided a series of recommendations to improve the way the community accesses and receives virtual care to make sure they can benefit from it.

Virtual care needs to be a choice, and we need to make sure health practitioners and patients have the right skills to provide access to vulnerable and disadvantaged communities. [Read the full report and recommendations.](#)

**“ It’s only when things go wrong, I suppose that I find it hard to talk on the phone about things that I don’t understand myself.”**

Regional, 75+ years

# Engaging and lobbying state and federal governments

## NSW Budgets: September 2023 and June 2024

After their election in March 2023, the NSW Labor Government released two budgets in 2023-24, the 2023-24 budget in September 2023 and the 2024-25 budget in June 2024.

### 2023-24 NSW Budget

Following the 2023-24 NSW budget, we published our [budget analysis](#) and then held a post-budget breakfast on Tuesday, 26 September 2023 at NSW Parliament House and by livestream. Hosted by Channel 9's State Political Reporter Liz Daniels, we heard from Treasurer, Daniel Mookhey, and Shadow Treasurer, Damien Tudehope.

We did not make our usual pre-budget submission to the 2023-24 budget, as the NSW Government was not calling for them.

We also heard from special guests:

- **Maha Abdo**, CEO of Muslim Women Australia
- **Pauline Cook**, CEO of Monaro Family Support Service
- **Wendy Spencer**, Project Manager of Yuwaya Ngarra-li for Dharriwaa Elders Group in Walgett
- **Sharyn White**, CEO of Human Nature
- **Tina Williams**, Operations Manager at Rekindling the Spirit.

It was our lived experience advocate Emma Warren who made the biggest impact. She shared with us the reality of living on income support in NSW's uncertain private rental market while managing serious health issues.

## 2024-25 NSW Budget

Ahead of the 2024-25 NSW Budget, NCOSS drew on our recent research and consulted with members to develop our pre-budget submission, [Choosing A Better Future](#). We called on the NSW Government to choose a better future for our state by supporting those doing it toughest in the cost-of-living crisis and dismantling the deep and growing inequities, to avoid further entrenching poverty for generations to come.

The submission's recommendations focussed on five key areas:

- 1. Cost of Living:** Urgent and targeted support for communities barely hanging on.
- 2. Housing:** Invest in the housing system to address decades of neglect.
- 3. Children, Young People and Families:** Invest in children, young people, and families so they can thrive.
- 4. First Nations:** Enable self-determination for First Nations communities.
- 5. Social Service Sector:** Strengthen the social service sector so that essential support reaches those most in need.

We were pleased that there was a significant investment in social housing in the 2024-25 budget, which is a good first step. We were concerned that other areas of the underfunded social service sector are missing out. Read our [analysis](#) of the impact of the budget on specific policy areas.

*Continued next page*



After the 2024-25 NSW Budget was handed down, we held our post-budget breakfast at NSW Parliament House on Tuesday, 25 June 2024. Hosted by Channel 10's Ashleigh Raper, we heard from Treasurer Daniel Mookhey and Shadow Treasurer Damien Tudehope on their budget plans for the social service sector.

We held a panel with:

- **Rebecca Pinkstone** from HomesNSW
- **Paul Coe** from Birribee Housing
- **John Leha** from AbSec
- **Jessica Innes** from Peppercorn Services

We discussed the impact of disasters, child protection, building accessible homes, the chronic underfunding of the sector and lack of funding certainty.

We also heard from Makeeta Stubbings from our Lived Experience Panel, who gave a personal perspective on the cost-of-living crisis as a single parent of five children. She spoke about the work she has done to break the cycle of trauma and how important it is to get the support you need so you can live the kind of life you want to live.

We continue to work with the NSW Government on key issues facing the social service sector.



Post Budget Breakfast 2024 panel

## Some other work we did in 2023-24 to advocate for change and influence decision-makers

- **In August 2023**, NCOSS made a [submission](#) to the Australian Government's Independent Review of Commonwealth Disaster Funding, calling for place-based sector organisations, at a local or regional level, to be funded to lead community sector disaster planning, coordination and collaboration, as well as to act as a conduit to Government and emergency service organisations.
- **In September 2023**, NCOSS made a [submission](#) to the Australian Government's Senate Community Affairs References Committee – The Worsening Rental Crisis in Australia (see submission 106).

We also made a [submission](#) to the NSW Parliament's Inquiry into Equity, Accessibility and Appropriate Delivery of Outpatient and Community Mental Health Care in New South Wales, supporting NCOSS member organisation, the Mental Health Coordinating Council's, submission.
- **In October 2023**, NCOSS made a [submission](#) to consultations on the National Housing and Homelessness Plan.
- **In November 2023**, NCOSS made a submission to the Sydney North Planning Panel addressing Patyegarang Planning Proposal PP-2022-3802. This supported the Metropolitan Local Aboriginal Land Council's proposal to sensitively develop the Patyegarang site, with the aim of transforming a land asset into economic, social, and cultural opportunities for Aboriginal people.
- **In December 2023**, NCOSS made a [joint submission](#) to the Office of Energy and Climate Change's Energy Accounts Payment Assistance (EAPA) Public Consultation Paper. This submission was made with the Public Interest Advocacy Centre and Financial Counsellors' Association of NSW and supported making access to the scheme adequate, accessible and adaptable.
- **In March 2024**, NCOSS made a [submission](#) to the NSW Government's review of the ClubGRANTS. You can read more about our submission on page 19 of this report.
- **In April 2024**, NCOSS made a [submission](#) to the NSW Parliament's Inquiry into the implementation of Portfolio Committee No. 2 recommendations relating to the delivery of specific health services and specialist care in remote, rural and regional NSW. On 31 May 2024, Director of Policy & Advocacy, Ben McAlpine, and Policy Lead, Elyse Cain, gave evidence to the inquiry.
- **In May 2024**, NCOSS made a [submission](#) to the consultation on the Community Services Portable Long Service Leave Scheme.
- **In June 2024**, NCOSS CEO, Cara Varian, and Policy Lead, Andrea Angeles, gave evidence to the NSW Parliament's Legislative Council's Inquiry into Equity, accessibility and appropriate delivery of outpatient and community mental health care in New South Wales. NCOSS also made a [submission](#) to the Review of the NSW Reconstruction Authority Act.



## Ongoing advocacy

### NCOSS joins the fight on public school funding

In February 2024, we joined forces with social service groups across Australia to push for better funding for public schools. We sent a [joint letter to Federal Education Minister Jason Clare](#) asking for at least 25% federal funding to help public schools reach the School Resources Standard by 2028.

In 2024, NSW public schools receive 7.3% less funding than they should under the Schooling Resource Standard. Public schools are educating more higher needs students, including those from disadvantaged backgrounds, rural and remote areas, students with a disability and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. Without enough funding, we're worried these children will fall further behind.

“We don't need another report, another meeting, another review or another stopgap measure: we need public schools to be 100 per cent properly funded right now.”

NCOSS CEO Cara Varian



Ashcroft Public School welcomed families into their school during Public Education Week.

## Independent Panel on Gaming Reform and ClubGRANTS review

We have been part of the Independent Panel on Gaming Reform. Our goal is to reduce gambling harm, which includes regulating pokies and trialling cashless gaming technology.

The Panel is being chaired by **Michael Foggo**, with **Ursula Stephens** and **Niall Blair** forming the Executive Committee.

Other Panel members include:

- **David Hudson**, Deputy Commissioner, NSW Police
- **Tony Chapman**, NSW Chief Cyber Security Officer, Cyber Security NSW
- **Rebecca Riant**, Chief Executive Officer, Clubs NSW
- **John Whelan**, Chief Executive Officer, Australian Hotels Association (AHA) NSW
- **Jinesh Patel**, Chief Executive Officer, Gaming Technologies Association
- **Don Hammond**, Chief Executive Officer, Leagues Clubs Australia
- **Professor Joel Negin**, Trustee, Responsible Gambling Fund
- **Rev Stu Cameron**, Chief Executive Officer and Superintendent, Wesley Mission
- **Dario Mujkic**, Executive Director, United Workers Union
- **Professor Sally Gainsbury**, Director, Gambling Treatment and Research Centre, Brain and Mind Centre, Sydney University
- **Professor Melanie Randle**, Dean of Research, Development and Integrity, Wollongong University.
- **Nick McGhie**, lived experience Panel member.

More information about the [Panel](#) and its [work](#) is available on the Liquor & Gaming NSW website.

Recommendations will be delivered to the Minister for Gaming and Racing, David Harris, in November 2024.

**“ Universal and mandatory account-based gambling can help people take control of their spending. By supporting harm reduction measures, we can help protect individuals, families, and communities from the severe impacts of gambling harm.**

NCOSS CEO Cara Varian

We also made a submission into the ClubGRANTS review, which is being led by Liquor & Gaming NSW in consultation with The Cabinet Office and NSW Treasury. We called on the NSW Government to overhaul the scheme and refocus it on people living on low incomes and experiencing disadvantage.

**“ It is critically important that we put the wellbeing and safety of our community ahead of pokies profits.”**

NCOSS CEO Cara Varian



## Bus Industry Taskforce

We have been attending fortnightly meetings for the Bus Industry Taskforce. We represent the voices of the communities living with socio-economic disadvantage, as they're the group most reliant on public transport.

Some issues being worked on include growing services based on community need, particularly in Western Sydney and regional NSW.

## The economic impact of child poverty

We engaged Impact Economics and Policy to create a report on the economic costs of child poverty in Australia. This will be a first of its kind report that will include a literature review of health, crime, housing, education and economic exclusion areas.

The report will be released in November 2024 and aims to strengthen advocacy efforts in reducing child poverty.

## Regional Development Reference Group

We joined the Regional Development Reference Group, organised by the Department of Regional NSW. In this role, we share insights on regional opportunities and challenges to help guide the Regional Development Roadmap initiatives.

The advice from this group will help in deciding how to use the Regional Development Trust Fund.

## Patient Experience and Economic Disadvantage

We have started a project with the University of Canberra to update 2020 research about how the location of a person's home impacts their experience as a patient.

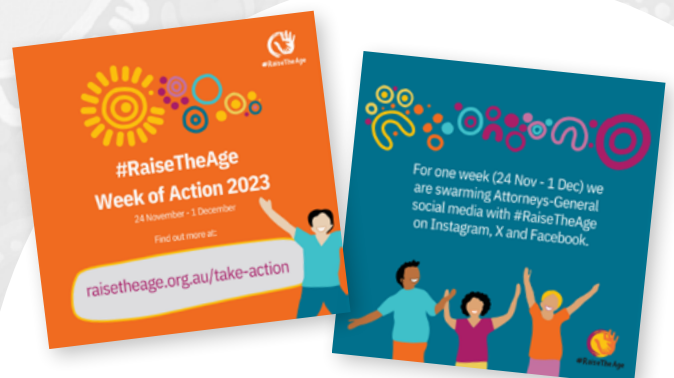
It will update and compare findings on barriers to accessing dental, GP and specialist services and will include new data from hospital emergency departments. We will also include case studies of actual experiences to go with the data. The report is expected in October 2024.

## Raise the age NSW campaign

We're taking part in the Raise the Age NSW campaign where we're calling to raise the age of criminal responsibility to 14 years.

A group of organisations including NCOSS [made a submission](#) to the NSW parliamentary inquiry into community safety. We called for:

1. Resource and support for Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations
2. Investment in services to help prevent crime from the start
3. Funding services that help kids to better, learn accountability if they go off track
4. Be guided by evidence.



# GOAL 2

Identify and advocate for the foundations of a sustainable, connected, strong and diverse social service sector.

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With the cost-of-living crisis severely impacting many NSW residents, it has never been more important for the social services sector to be sustainable, connected, strong and diverse.

NCOSS has taken part in many initiatives to boost the sector, including advocating for a portable long service scheme and working on disaster resilience with the Community Sector Disaster Capability Program.



# Bringing members together to share knowledge and build a stronger sector

## Portable long service leave

We've always advocated for portable long service leave because we believe it will make the sector more sustainable and a more attractive place to work.

NCOSS has been discussing this issue with the offices of Minister Cotsis (Minister for Industrial Relations) and Minister Washington (Minister for Families and Communities) since the 2023 election commitment. We also provided a [submission](#) for consultation, where we included discussions with member organisations and feedback from a survey to make sure it reflects the views across our sector.

In June 2024, the NSW Parliament passed legislation to establish the portable long service scheme which is due to start on 1st

July 2025. It means workers can access paid long service leave after 7 years in the sector, even if they've had multiple employers. Workers can also take up to 4 years off between jobs and still keep their entitlements. The scheme will be managed by the NSW Long Service Corporation (LSC).

We support the scheme, however we have two concerns that need to be addressed before it begins:

- The NSW Government must increase sector funding to cover the extra costs of the Portable Long Service Leave Scheme levy.
- The administrative requirements should be reviewed, and the burden reduced through better regulation.



Australian Services Union members campaigning for portable long service leave. (Australian Services Union NSW & ACT/FB.)

### Community Sector Disaster Capability Program

We continued our work on the [Community Sector Disaster Capability Program](#) in collaboration with the Local Community Services Association, AbSec and local partners, including:

- Peppercorn Services and Bligh Park Community Services in the Hawkesbury.
- Resilient Lismore in Northern Rivers along with Rekindling the Spirit, Kyogle Together, Mid-Richmond Neighbourhood Centre and Nimbin Neighbourhood and Information Centre.
- Monaro Family Support Service in Snowy Monaro.
- Katungul Aboriginal Corporation Regional Health and Community Services in Eurobodalla and Bega.

The Project focused on building skills to improve local disaster management, particularly among vulnerable groups.

We collaborated with NGOs to help them plan how they can use their knowledge and connections to prepare for emergencies. We held several workshops to provide additional tools, resources and training and helped implement a range of strategies to build disaster readiness.

The Project also collected data and insights from the community sector to find out where local disaster risks and strengths are. We helped create the report, [Community Sector Involvement in Disaster Management](#), which was published by Southern Cross University.

The Community Sector Disaster Capability Project was completed in June 2024.

**“As an organisation we now have capacity to follow up with community members and keep up conversations about disaster awareness.”**

*Workshop participant in Snowy Monaro.*



*The Disaster Ready Together Summit conference held in Lismore brought the community sector together to improve disaster planning.*



### Forum of Non-Government Agencies (FONGA)

Our bi-monthly FONGA meetings are always well-attended and engaging, providing a great chance for participants to share insights, tackle problems together, and collaborate on common challenges across sectors.

In our first meeting in August, we shared our cost-of-living research and members spoke of how the crisis continued to impact them and how crisis work in the sector has been growing.

In February, we heard from Dr Angela Jackson and Brad Ruting from Impact Economics and Policy. They presented their findings about what critical infrastructure is needed in South West Sydney.

We also shared how we're partnering with Work Ventures to look at cyber security threats across the sector.

We heard from Anthony Shannon from the Department of Communities and Justice in our April meeting. He talked about the merging of the Targeted Earlier Intervention (TEI) and Family Connect and Support (FCS) programs. We discussed sector updates, including giving feedback on the NSW Government's proposed portable long service scheme.

Our final FONGA meeting was held in June 2024. Project Director Megan Nicholson gave an update from the Community Sector Disaster Capability Project.

ACOSS Deputy CEO Jacqui Phillips gave an analysis of the federal budget and we also heard updates from LCSA, FAMS, Inclusive and Diverse Communities, LEAD and Western Sydney Community Forum.

### Health Equity Alliance

The Health Equity Alliance met four times in 2023-24.

In these meetings, members from non-government organisations, peak bodies, academics, and others come together to discuss and advise on policy responses. Our aim is to improve health outcomes for people facing poverty and disadvantage in NSW.

In August 2023, Miriam Bevis, from the University of Sydney, presented the preliminary findings from the NCOSS/USYD research project exploring lived experiences of virtual care in NSW.

In November 2023, we had two presentations. One was from Dr Neil Hime, Senior Policy Analyst from the Surveillance and Risk Unit, Environmental Health Branch, Health Protection NSW, on NSW Health's 'Beat the Heat' campaign.

The second presentation was from Professor Ollie Jay, Director of the Heat and Health Research Incubator, on their HeatWatch App.

In February 2024, we discussed NCOSS's forward policy and research agenda.

In May 2024, we had a presentation from Rob Stirling, CEO of NADA and Alexandra Hogan, Social Justice Lead from Uniting. They spoke about their advocacy around the 2024 Drug Summit.

We also heard from Jen Wilson, Principal Policy and Projects Officer, Virtual Care Unit Agency for Clinical Innovation at NSW Health, on NSW Health's virtual care projects.

### Regional Members Meetings

We hold Regional Members Meetings three to four times a year. It's important for us to create a space for connection and conversation and help to shine a light on the unique challenges faced by people outside metropolitan Sydney.

Our first meeting this year was held on Friday 18 August 2023, with 26 services across NSW taking part. The key agenda item was the Voice to Parliament, and PIAC's Kate Sinclair (Dharug) and NCOSS board member and AbSec CEO, John Leha led the discussion.

**The following two Regional Members Forums were held in Taree (November 2023) and Dubbo (May 2024).**

The meeting in Taree was documented in the report [People Places Partnerships – Mid North Coast](#).

People at the meeting spoke about how poverty hits regional communities especially hard and the struggles of getting timely healthcare.

They also brought up the need for better disaster preparedness and how important it is to have advocacy and policies that really fit the unique needs of rural areas.

**“ Our services are swamped with people suffering the mental health impacts of stress and trauma caused by poverty.”**

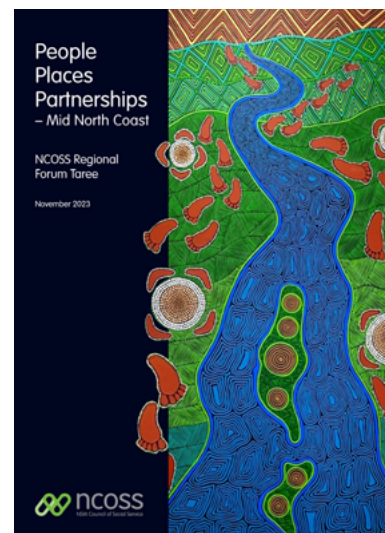
Participant

Continued next page

**“ The Nulla community reached out to Kinchela Boys Home Aboriginal Corporation on (KBHAC) in the recent fires – KBHAC responded by supplying food and gas burners as the community had no electricity and had lost all their refrigerated food. We had no funding to do this.**

**We are not a member of the local emergency management meeting but we are the ones that pull it all together in a disaster and make it work, without any funding.”**

ACCO, Kempsey





The second meeting in Dubbo was documented in the report [Keeping Communities Safe](#). There were several important points discussed, including:

- How to keep kids and communities safe and out of jail
- Housing and homelessness in rural and regional areas
- Workforce issues in the area.

**“ We know of one young Aboriginal boy who was remanded in custody for two years. When the case finally got to trial he was found not guilty – two years too late. And no compensation is available for the two years of his life taken from him by the ‘justice’ system.”**

First Nations participant

These reports will help with recommendations and advocacy. They were also included in the submission to the NSW Parliamentary Inquiry into Community Safety in Regional and Rural Communities.

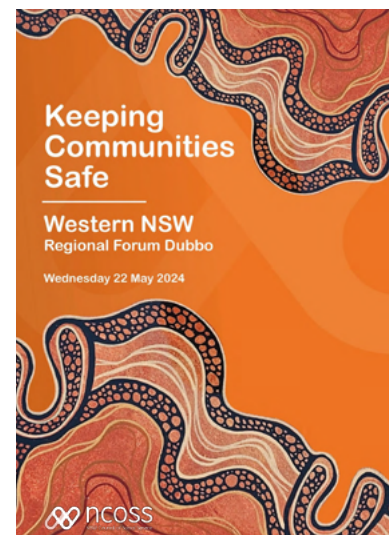
**“ Higher levels of stress amongst essential face to face workers, higher levels of anxiety... We have had a 90% turnover and have lost almost all corporate memory of how things were done prior to COVID.”**

Staff Wellbeing Study participant

### The Secure Jobs and Funding Certainty Taskforce

We joined the NSW Government’s Secure Jobs and Funding Certainty Taskforce with our first formal leadership group meeting on 1 March 2024. The Taskforce released their draft Roadmap, which explained the vital role of the sector.

Actions needed include longer-term funding contracts and improved approaches to funding the sector. We welcomed Justine Lee to the NCOSS team to support our work with the taskforce.



# GOAL 3

Focus NCOSS on core priorities for impact and sustainability.

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Several projects this year have helped foster long-term positive change through community centred programs and inclusive strategies.

Central to this was our ongoing commitment to Mirrung School Gateway Project where we continued to support students and their families in this community.

We set up the Lived Experience Advisory Panel, and we strengthened relationships with First Nations communities through our Reconciliation Action Plan.



# NCOSS School Gateway Project – *Mirrung*, Ashcroft Public School

“*Belonging to the land is a part of the Aboriginal culture. My people belong to the land. I belong to the land. Mirrung means belonging in Dharug. Our hub is called Mirrung.*”

Ashcroft Public School student

The NCOSS School Gateway Project supports children and families in communities across NSW with high levels of disadvantage. It focuses on improving education, health, and development by using schools as central hubs, using their spaces and resources to benefit the community.

We are showing this by developing a wellbeing and learning hub in Ashcroft Public School, in the Liverpool LGA of South West Sydney. The hub is a partnership between NCOSS and the Ashcroft Public School, with the support of the Ashcroft community and the NSW Department

of Education. The Mirrung Hub supports the education and wellbeing of children through a place-based integrated whole-of-family approach.

The hub was launched in 2022 and has continued to evolve and strengthen this year. We have focused on sustainability, cultural safety and evaluation. We continue to make sure the Hub model and approach are fully embedded throughout the school and the community.

With rising cost-of-living pressures, communities like Ashcroft are feeling the strain. We’re seeing more families dealing with food and housing insecurity and having trouble meeting their health needs. This has direct impacts on the child’s ability to learn and so as trust in the Hub has grown, so too has our ability to support the school community at this time

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## GOAL 3

We have experienced many significant achievements this year, including:

After an initial 3-year commitment, Allan & Gill Gray Philanthropy Australasia has agreed to fund the project for a further 2 years. They have also shown interest in the future of a project that scales to additional schools in the Liverpool network or across NSW over a 5-year period.

We launched the report [\*Mirrung – Creating a Thriving Learning Community\*](#) in December 2023. This document goes through the development of Mirrung and its progress so far. It was developed in consultation with school executive, teaching and administration staff, parents and students of Ashcroft Public School.

As part of the integration into the school, the Mirrung team expanded to include the School as Community Centre (SaCC) and Preschool educators, the Aboriginal Education Officer, and an Assistant Principal Wellbeing – Mirrung Hub Leader (all positions funded through the school).

Enrichment and extracurricular classes have become very popular, with over 500 students taking part.

Parents are also being supported with a program of Adult Learning opportunities, presentations from service providers in the district and in less-formal engagements through painting classes, involvement in the garden and cooking for families and school events.

We've hosted regular community events, inviting families into the school to take part and celebrate their children's learning journeys.

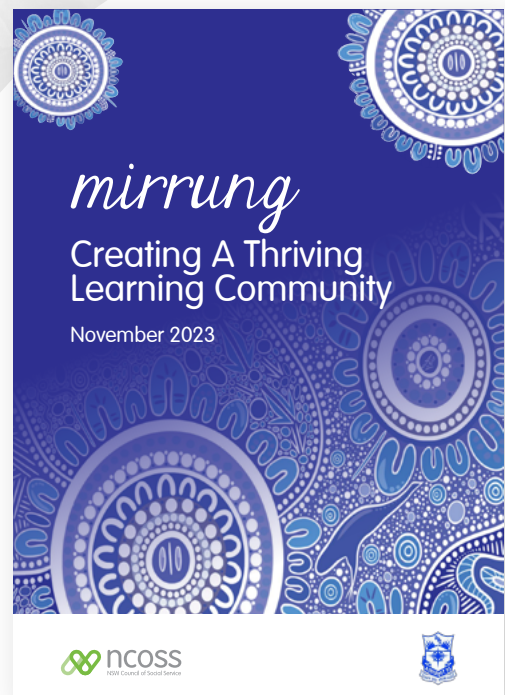
We launched a project in collaboration with researchers from UNSW that screens the health and early development of all 4-5-year olds in the community.

Families accessed the screening tools through a virtual gateway which was translated to Arabic, Chinese, and Vietnamese. 80% of the cohort were screened and assessed, which delivered some powerful data to the researchers. This will help the school develop a program of interventions to support students to meet developmental milestones and build school readiness.

We've found a paediatrician interested in running clinics at the school. We're teaming up with other School-Based Integrated Healthcare Clinics to set up the model of care, aiming to launch this important service by late 2024.

The program at Ashcroft is growing, and we're connecting with more and more stakeholders who are embracing the idea of bringing family and community support into school settings.

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## GOAL 3

The NSW Education department is increasingly calling out the Mirrung approach as one successful way of supporting students and their families to achieve education equity.

Because of our work in this project, we are at the table in significant network discussions about the role of schools in alleviating poverty in communities.

Although it will take time to show long-term outcomes, early indications are that the students and families of Ashcroft are benefiting from the Mirrung program. Thanks to the extension of our funding arrangement, we look forward to continuing to grow the program in 2024 and beyond.

*“When I started coming to these programs, I was able to interact again with other people socially. After a few years of taking care of children at home I was in my own cocoon. I felt I was losing my social skills. Once these programs started, I felt I could be part of society again.”*

Ashcroft Public School parent

*“[The kids who do the activities] enjoy school so much more, they look forward to it. ... All the boys in my class love soccer. It gives them a sense of pride that they can do the outside school sports, that other kids can do, but their families can't afford. They can now say 'I do it too', which is fantastic.”*

Ashcroft Public School teacher



# Reconciliation Action Plan

One of our key Reconciliation Action Plan commitments this year was to promote the Voice to Parliament referendum.

We did this in several ways:

- We *commissioned a series of videos* featuring sector leaders supporting the Yes campaign.
- We worked with the NCOSS First Nations Partners and Advisors Group (PAG) to develop a joint statement to support the Yes vote which included diverse First Nations views.
- We delivered workshops and information sessions for the sector.

After the unsuccessful referendum, we observed a Week of Silence in solidarity with First Nations people, communities and organisations.

We reaffirm our commitment to walk beside them, as a committed ally, in the ongoing fight to recognise their sovereignty and the right to self-determination in their lands. Always was. Always will be.

We continued to make significant progress in other areas of our Reconciliation Action Plan key priorities.



Some of these included:

- **Embedding PAG priorities at the heart of our organisation:** We're focusing on advocating for transformational change in government. This includes our work on the Job Security and Funding Certainty Taskforce and our active role in the Raise the Age campaign.
- **Staff training:** NCOSS staff completed cultural awareness training with proud Barkindji and Ngyiampa woman, educator and facilitator, Julie Wilson. The training included two sessions, a Reflective Yarning Circle, which examined the impacts past policies and practices had and continue to have on First Nations people. The second session was a workshop called *Journey Through Aboriginal Eyes*. It helped us connect our previous understanding of the history of colonisation and with the experience of First Nations people at an emotional, rather than intellectual, level.
- **Guiding Principles for Working Alongside First Nations People:** This document outlines a set of principles for NCOSS staff members to use in understanding the right cultural protocols to use across diverse First Nations communities.
- **First Nations involvement on the NCOSS Board:** Our directors include Jenni Beetson-Mortimer CEO Northern Rivers Community Gateway and John Leha, CEO AbSec, ensuring First Nations perspectives, voices, and leadership are embedded at the heart of the organisation.

*Our beautiful RAP artwork, One Step of Many More, was created by artist, youth worker and lecturer, Karlie Stewart, a Wandj Wandian woman from Yuin Country on the South Coast of New South Wales, who is now a member of our RAP Partners and Advisors Group.*



# Lived Experience Advisory Panel (LEAP)

We recruited our first Lived Experience Advisory Panel (LEAP) members this year and they've already had several opportunities to share their stories.

At the first Post Budget Breakfast for 2023-24, we heard from advocate Emma Warren about living on income support while managing serious health issues. She was also interviewed by the ABC on transport costs.

Makeeta Stubbings shared the challenges of dealing with the cost-of-living crisis as single parent of five children, as well as the importance of the right supports to break the cycle of trauma.

The LEAP has had several meetings to provide their views on the pre-budget submission, the cost-of-living research groups and NCOSS' Health Research Projects

We conducted a LEAP staff induction which received positive feedback. Our goal is to embed the lived experience framework in everything we do.

Sadly, Amir Bodenstein, one of our founding LEAP members, passed away this year. We pay tribute to his strong sense of social justice and the work he did to improve the lives of others.



*NCOSS Lived Experience Advocates, Makeeta Stubbings and Amir Bodenstein with NCOSS Policy Lead, Andrea Angeles, at the 2024 NCOSS Post Budget Breakfast at NSW Parliament House.*

# Member Events

NCOSS was proud to support a number of member events in 2023-24. Here are a couple of highlights.

## Allowah Day

In June, we made a contribution to Allowah Day, a fantastic initiative to help connect Aboriginal high school kids with each other. Merana Aboriginal Community Association for the Hawkesbury works with the Da Murraytoola AECG, local schools, NSW National Parks and Wildlife (the main funding body) and a range of other organisations to coordinate the event.

Find out more about Allowah Day at [merana.org.au](http://merana.org.au)



Students participating in Allowah Day. Photos by Peter Haynes.

## ZEST Awards

We were, once again, pleased to be able to support the annual ZEST Awards, held by Western Sydney Community Forum on May 30, 2024. It was a fabulous evening, recognising excellence and achievement in the community sector in Western Sydney.



NCOSS Policy Leads, Andrea Angeles and Neha Shah, with NCOSS Lived Experience Advocates Amir Bodenstien and Makeeta Stubbings.

## Youth Action's Youth Work Awards

NCOSS sponsored two categories in the annual NSW Youth Work awards. This is an annual event celebrating the achievements of youth services and youth workers across NSW.



Congratulations to all the nominees and winners.



# NCOSS Board Members 2023-24



**John Robertson**  
CEO, Foodbank,  
NSW & ACT Limited  
NCOSS President



**Brad Webb**  
CEO, Castle  
NCOSS Treasurer



**Beverly Baker**  
(Retired 2023 AGM)  
Chair, NSW Older Women's  
Network and Executive  
Officer, Aboriginal  
Education Council



**Elfa Moraitakis**  
CEO, SydWest  
Multicultural Services



**Jack Whitney**  
(Retired 2023 AGM)  
Associate Director, Health  
and Human Services, Policy,  
Economics and Public  
Engagement, KPMG



**Jenna Roberts**  
Deputy Commissioner of  
the NSW Mental Health  
Commission. Services,  
Policy, Economics and  
Public Engagement, KPMG



**Jenni Beetson-Mortimer**  
CEO, Northern Rivers  
Community Gateway  
Director, Homelessness  
Australia



**John Leha**  
CEO, AbSec  
Chairperson, BlaQ Aboriginal  
Corporation Director,  
Gadigal Information Service  
(Koori Radio)



**Katherine McKernan**  
Executive Director,  
National Legal Aid



**Karlie Stewart**  
Lecturer, School of Social Work,  
University of Wollongong  
Program Manager, Aboriginal  
Healing Program, Weave Youth  
and Community Services



**Mark Degotardi**  
CEO, Community Housing  
Industry Association



**Wendy Foote**  
Associate Professor,  
School of Humanities,  
Creative Industries, and  
Social Sciences, University  
of Newcastle

# Statement of Comprehensive Income

For the year ended 30 June 2024

	Note	2024 \$	2023 \$
<b>Revenue</b>			
Revenue	2	4,601,600	2,863,114
Interest revenue calculated using the effective interest rate method		26,437	20,114
Net realised and unrealised gains on financial assets held at fair value through profit or loss		135,302	125,976
<b>Expenses:</b>			
Administration expenses		(42,587)	(41,072)
Brokerage and sponsorships expense		(19,000)	(17,500)
Conference expenses		(49,905)	(204,840)
Consultants expenses	3	(1,669,161)	(360,548)
Depreciation and amortisation expense		(8,777)	(8,129)
Employee benefits expense		(2,258,481)	(1,888,123)
Insurance expense		(27,603)	(20,075)
Premises expenses		(115,759)	(100,766)
Travel expenses		(43,320)	(38,325)
Other expenses		(150,976)	(140,475)
<b>Surplus / (loss) for the year</b>		<b>377,770</b>	<b>189,351</b>
<b>Other comprehensive income</b>			<b>-</b>
<b>Total comprehensive income for the year</b>		<b>377,770</b>	<b>189,351</b>



# Statement of Financial Position

As at 30 June 2024

	Note	2024 \$	2023 \$
<b>Assets</b>			
<b>Current assets</b>			
Cash and cash equivalents	4	715,012	791,460
Trade and other receivables	5	198,305	43,142
Financial assets	7	2,676,179	3,044,715
Other current assets	6	23,954	20,392
<b>Total current assets</b>		<b>3,613,450</b>	<b>3,899,709</b>
<b>Non-current assets</b>			
Plant and equipment	8	9,654	9,379
Other assets	6	57,914	57,086
<b>Total non-current assets</b>		<b>67,568</b>	<b>66,465</b>
<b>Total assets</b>		<b>3,681,018</b>	<b>3,966,174</b>
<b>Liabilities</b>			
<b>Current liabilities</b>			
Trade and other payables	9	730,163	1,395,384
Provisions	10	30,724	22,120
<b>Total current liabilities</b>		<b>760,887</b>	<b>1,417,504</b>
<b>Non-current liabilities</b>			
Provisions	10	27,036	33,345
<b>Total non-current liabilities</b>		<b>27,036</b>	<b>33,345</b>
<b>Total liabilities</b>		<b>787,923</b>	<b>1,450,849</b>
<b>Net assets</b>		<b>2,893,095</b>	<b>2,515,325</b>
<b>Equity</b>			
Accumulated surplus		<b>2,893,095</b>	<b>2,515,325</b>
<b>Total equity</b>		<b>2,893,095</b>	<b>2,515,325</b>



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