

Research: 80% of Australia's community services unable to meet demand.

The largest survey of Australia's community services sector reveals that 80% of frontline agencies are unable to meet current levels of demand with the resources they have. The biggest gaps in meeting demand are in the areas of greatest community need.

The survey of almost 1,000 community service workers from around the country shows that 43% of services are simply unable to meet the needs of people coming to them for help. A further 37% can 'almost' meet demand. Only 20% reported being able to meet demand fully.

The Australian Community Sector Survey was conducted by the Australian Council of Social Services (ACOSS), on behalf of the national Network of Councils of Social Service of which WACOSS is part. It includes the insights and lived experience of 154 Western Australia organisations delivering frontline community services to disadvantaged and vulnerable Western Australians.

"The Council is particularly concerned that the evidence clearly indicates that biggest gaps in service delivery are in some of the areas of greatest community need, with community legal centres and crisis accommodation services reporting the greatest difficulty meeting demand," said Irina Cattalini, CEO of WACOSS today.

"More than half of the front-line community workers interviewed reported that the quality of life of our young unemployed has got "a lot worse" and 56% indicated that life for sole parents was now more stressful."

"These findings from those who work daily with some of the most vulnerable and disadvantaged in our community show clearly where Western Australia needs to focus its efforts," said Ms Cattalini.

"The report shows the priorities for service growth are housing and homeless, mental health services and family support. The biggest priorities for policy reform for people living on low incomes are State concessions and other measures to reduce the cost of living, particularly affordable housing, transport and utilities."

"The Council is calling on the Western Australian Government to deliver on its promise to review the adequacy, appropriateness and targeting of State concessions to ensure that they are efficient and effective in providing support to those most in at risk of poverty and exclusion within our community," she concluded.

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Key Findings - 2014 Australian Community Sector Survey

How people are faring

Our survey finds that the lives of people living on low incomes have become increasingly difficult and stressful over the past year.

- **49%** of sector staff reported quality of life to be 'a lot worse' for **people on low incomes**.
- **50%** of sector staff reported quality of life to be 'a lot worse' for **young unemployed people**.
- **56%** of sector staff reported that life for **sole parents** is more stressful.
- **54%** of sector staff reported that life is more stressful for **young unemployed people**.
- **52%** of sector staff reported that life is more stressful for **older unemployed people**.

Demand for services

Across the community sector, services are struggling to meet demand.

- Overall, **80%** of sector services reported being **unable to fully meet demand**.
- **43%** of sector services reported being **unable to meet demand**.
- **37%** of sector services reported being able to **almost fully meet demand**.
- Only **20%** of sector services reported being **fully able to meet demand**.

Services that prioritise people on low incomes or with specific needs are least able to meet demand.

- **49%** reported being **unable to meet demand**.
- Only **12%** reported being **fully able to meet demand**.

The largest service gaps are in areas of greatest need

The data on capacity to meet demand suggests the largest service gaps exist in areas of the greatest need: among services working most closely with those on the lowest incomes and with the highest levels of need in their communities.

Community legal and accommodation services reported great difficulty meeting demand.

- **72%** of **legal services** are unable to meet demand.
- **51%** of **accommodation services** are unable to meet demand.

Services not able to meet demand need to increase capacity substantially to meet demand.

- **33%** of services would need to increase capacity **by 11-25%** to meet demand.
- **30%** of services would need to increase capacity **by 26-50%** to meet demand.
- **25%** of services would need to increase capacity **by 51-200%** or more in order to meet demand.

Community priorities

Sector staff identified **investment in affordable housing** as the highest priority **for benefitting the community as a whole**, followed by employment, education and skills development, health and income support.

- **Employment** was the top priority identified for **young unemployed people**, followed by education and skills development, affordable housing and income support.
- **Affordable housing** was the top priority identified for **sole parents**, followed by income support, education and skill development and employment.
- **Affordable housing** was also the top priority identified for **older unemployed people**, followed by income support, health and social connections and social capital.

Policy priorities identified include:

- Reducing **cost of living** pressures for people on low incomes;
- Maintaining and reforming **state and local government concessions**;
- Increasing **income support**; and
- Expanding **training programs** for people experiencing long-term unemployment.

Service priorities

Sector staff identified increased **investment in housing and homelessness services** as delivering the greatest benefit to people on low incomes, followed by **mental health services and services for vulnerable families and children**.

Australia's Community Sector

Australia's community welfare sector makes an enormous contribution to Australian society, contributing **5% to GDP** and **8% to employment** annually. It employs 919,000 people and a further two million volunteers.