

Service Priority Review Panel
Dumas House
2 Havelock St
WEST PERTH WA 6005

15 September 2017

Dear Iain, Margaret and Michael

Western Australian
Council of Social Service Inc.
ABN 32 201 266 289

City West Lotteries House
2 Delhi Street
West Perth
Western Australia 6005

Phone (08) 9420 7222
Fax (08) 9486 7966
Email info@wacoss.org.au
www.wacoss.org.au

Service Priority Review – final submission

The WA Council of Social Service (the Council) welcomes the opportunity to provide the Panel with additional feedback on the Service Priority Review interim report in preparation for the final report.

The panel rightly identifies fragmentation, risk aversion, duplication and the formation of siloes as key barriers to a better performing public sector in Western Australia.

The Council shares the view that breaking down these barriers is essential to enable the kind of collaboration that delivers the best community outcomes with the most efficient use of funding.

We recognise that the panel has taken the position that community-based organisations are beyond the scope of the review, with the understanding that they are likely to be affected by changes in the way the public sector operates.

The Council, however, maintains that it is crucial that the focus is on achieving community outcomes through public *services* (be they delivered by government alone or in partnership with community organisations) and not just outcomes from the public *sector*.

Partnership is fundamental to delivering the best possible outcomes for the community. Genuine and meaningful change to deliver better outcomes requires reforms are designed and implemented *with* service users and providers, rather than from the top-down.

While a high-level cross-sector partnership forum can play a key role in leadership and oversight of such reforms, coordinated engagement at the local level is critical to practical implementation, and change needs to be much more than just reform of service contracting arrangements.

Attached below is an updated version of the structure diagram for the relationship between the *Supporting Communities Forum* and other existing consultation and coordination mechanisms, including *Regional Managers Forums* as well as locally integrated initiatives such as *Child and Parent Centres* and *Family Support Networks*.

The Council is also concerned that the focus on how to improve public sector collaboration is dominated by the current machinery of government changes. While there are great opportunities emerging within the new Department for Communities (for instance) to have once disparate agencies such as housing, disability services and child protection more able to work together, there is a risk that other opportunities for whole of government reform may be sidelined.

On the one hand, there is a risk public servants are too caught up in structural and administrative changes to be open to or engaging with ongoing community service reforms. On the other hand, there is a risk that while collaboration within new departments will become easier, the siloes between other agencies (such as health, education or justice) may become more entrenched.

The Council has been particularly concerned by the a number of five-year contracts being rushed out to tender before there has been an opportunity to consider the cross-agency, cross-program reform opportunities offered by the machinery of government changes. We would prefer to see contracts being rolled-over to enable more time to explore these emerging opportunities to deliver more integrated service systems across existing programs and portfolios.

Co-Design and Co-Production

Co-design and co-production are integral to this concept of partnership. The Council was pleased to see reference and support for co-design processes in the Interim Report. A genuine commitment to co-design can enable the building of a public sector focused on community needs, if linked to capacity building and cultural change within the public service.

An understanding of co-design has to become embedded within the public service rather than given lip service or treated as an optional extra. Effective co-design takes time and resources. It is not necessary or desirable to co-design every service commissioning process, rather efforts should be focused in areas where existing service models appear inadequate because needs appear complex, disadvantage is entrenched, or participation is required across multiple disciplines and portfolios.

Co-design processes can and should involve both service users and service providers as well as funding agencies (in appropriate ways as part of a staged design process). Services that better meet the needs and aspirations of service users should be more engaging and hence more effective in delivering meaningful and sustainable outcomes.

We recognise there are significant challenges balancing the needs and interests of different stakeholders in service design processes in a manner that is appropriate, transparent and accountable. To this end, the Council recently developed a [Co-Design Toolkit](#) (in consultation with the Partnership Forum and WA Peaks Forum) and provides training and advice on co-design.

Co-design is not just limited to the design of community services but is equally valuable to the development of community strategies and initiatives, outcomes frameworks and evaluation.

Place-Based Services and the Regions

The Council is heartened to see a recognition in the Interim Report that metro-centric and 'one size fits all' models are failing our regions and not delivering outcomes for Aboriginal people.

There is significant need for more flexible service design and delivery, with investment made to enable greater participation of regional citizens and Aboriginal people in service co-design and the coordination of services. This in turn will create greater employment and economic opportunities.

The Council believes there must be a commitment to an *Aboriginal human services workforce development strategy*, as well as strategy to develop the capacity of *Aboriginal-controlled community services* including support for meaningful partnerships with mainstream services.

As stated in the Interim Report, regional workforces need devolved decision-making authority to design, develop and implement local solutions. *Regional Managers Forums* need to include local community sector leaders and be resourced to undertake planning and coordination effectively. This should include resources for coordinating and engaging regional community sector networks.

It is essential that the planning and design of place-based services is evidence based and data driven. Data needs to be shared and quality analysis undertaken to ensure needs are understood, gaps identified, and existing service models and outcomes are taken into account in setting targets, designing service systems and measuring outcomes. This will require both some investment in building local and regional capacity and coordination in addition to that in central agencies.

Increased cultural awareness training and Aboriginal employment in the public sector (as discussed in the report) is necessary but is not sufficient to improve community outcomes. Effort is also needed to address structural and historical barriers to community engagement in public service decision-making processes and develop community capacity and trust.

The Council has made 'Place' the focus of its 2018 biennial conference, and invites the WA Government to join with us to use this opportunity to bring together local, national and international experts on making place and building community to build a common vision and understanding of our shared reform journey.

Digital Service Delivery and Whole of Government Shop-fronts

For many of the reasons stated in our first submission, the Council is has some reservations about the application of the digital service delivery concept. While there may be cost savings through moving services online, there is increased risk of digital exclusion for those who do not have access or lack the knowledge and skills to navigate an online environment. Consistently, we have heard from local community centres that the time of their staff and volunteers is increasingly taken up helping elderly and educationally disadvantaged people to access online service systems (particularly Centrelink).

New technologies and integrated service systems can provide opportunities for improving access to quality services that enable existing staff and services to become a point of access and support for whole of government solutions, while still providing a human point of contact and not excluding service users who are not online or digitally literate. Such an approach could be central to achieving the cultural change envisaged in a public service focused on putting the citizen at the centre.

Whole of Government Targets and the *Our Communities* Report

The Council believes it is essential the outcomes framework and whole of government targets that are developed measure outcomes across both the government and community services sector, so that they accurately reflect the impact that public services are having on the ground.

The Council recommends that the Service Priority Review links the development of whole of government targets to the *Our Communities* biennial report. This report should be a three-way collaboration synthesizing reporting and analysis from government departments, community sector peaks and independent research institutions.

Areas that the Council believes would be appropriate starting point include:

- Better life outcomes for at risk youth (education, employment, justice, child protection)
- Closing the gaps for Aboriginal people
- Reducing family violence and improving child safety
- Tackling the links between homelessness, mental health & AOD
- Improving financial resilience
- Diversifying the WA economy (employment and workforce development)

It is important that the *Our Communities* report outcomes are co-designed with communities and services to ensure that the support provided genuinely target community aspirations.

The proposed *Supporting Communities Forum* can play a key oversight and coordination role in developing and implementing a social policy and community service reform agenda to achieve these outcomes, and in evaluating progress against these targets.

It is critical the Forum is grounded in a relationship of partnership and mutual respect between the public and community services sectors that is focused on achieving better outcomes for the WA community (particularly our most vulnerable and excluded citizens).

In order to achieve this, the Forum needs to be actively involved in driving cross-government and community outcomes, as well as developing new opportunities for grassroots community participation. Our detailed first submission provides a series of recommendations about the structure of interaction between the Forum and other community engagement and consultation mechanisms, such as Regional Managers Forums (as attached).

Thank you for again for your engagement with the Council and the community services sector. Please do not hesitate to contact me directly if you have any questions or concerns.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "L. Giolitto". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Louise Giolitto
Chief Executive Officer
WACOSS