



## Council of Social Service of New South Wales

66 Albion St, Surry Hills NSW  
phone 02 9211 2599 fax 02 9281 1968  
email [info@ncoss.org.au](mailto:info@ncoss.org.au) web [www.ncoss.org.au](http://www.ncoss.org.au)

abn 85001 797 137

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The Committee Manager  
Standing Committee on Public Works  
Parliament House  
Macquarie Street  
Sydney NSW 2000

Dear Sir/Ms

I refer to the invitation from the Committee Chair, Mr Kevin Greene MP, to the Council of Social Service of NSW (NCOSS) to make a submission to the Inquiry into the Joint Use and Co-Location of Public Buildings.

NCOSS is the peak body for the State's 7000 not for profit human services organisations. We work with our members, on behalf of disadvantaged people and communities, towards achieving greater social justice across NSW.

The provision of appropriate public buildings and other facilities, from which a broad range of human services, cultural development, sport and recreation and environmental services can operate, is a core requirement of Government in assisting local communities to improve their quality of life.

The principal owners of such infrastructure are agencies of the State and Territory Governments and local councils, although in some urban and regional locations, Commonwealth Government agencies are also significant owners of public buildings and related facilities.

### **Community use of public buildings**

Publicly owned and operated health, education, transport, community services, disability, sports and recreation buildings are being provided in both urban development and consolidation areas of NSW, although many commentators would suggest that the community demand outstrips the supply of services provided from them in a range of locations.

Since the mid 1990s, as pressure has been applied to NSW Government agencies and local councils to commercialise their approaches to asset management, NCOSS has noted increasing difficulties that many not for profit organisations (NGOs) are having in obtaining or maintaining their occupancy of public buildings and related facilities to operate services and activities.

These difficulties include:

- movements towards market rents, which have often resulted in one agency of Government having to increase its grant funding levels so that the occupant NGO can pay the increased rent to another agency of Government ;
- removal of publicly owned properties from community use with either an asset sale or more often, the replacement of the occupant NGO with a for profit business tenant ; and
- a reduction in the availability of new public buildings for community use by NGOs.

NCOSS has made proposals to the NSW Government for it to adopt a transparent community services obligations policy pertaining to the community use of publicly owned buildings and facilities.

We have also discussed with the NSW Government and bodies such as the Local Government and Shires Associations, the preference for a consistent and public approach to a comprehensive CSOs policy across local councils in NSW, which would include the use of local council owned buildings and related facilities. Unfortunately, to date, neither initiative has been taken up.

### **Joint uses, including co-locations**

There is little doubt that, progressed with the appropriate level of negotiation between Government and the NSW NGO sector, a range of “back office” efficiencies for not for profit community organisations could be assisted through the more strategic use of public buildings and related facilities.

Co-locations, for certain types of services being provided in specific locations, whether by a network of NGOs or Government agencies and NGOs, would have specific advantages relating to client referrals, shared administrative arrangements and possibly pooled purchasing of inventory. For Government agencies, there may be opportunities to maximise the effective and appropriate use of buildings in a manner that does not currently occur on all occasions.

In the case of Government human services agencies, savings could be applied to providing greater levels of funding assistance to the direct provision of client services by the funded NGOs and the Government agencies themselves.

However, arbitrary co-locations, with a singular view to cost savings may in fact create significant reductions in the quality and adequacy of human services and, community development outcomes through poorly aligned service provision and a lack of genuine collaboration.

It is also important to note that many publicly owned buildings, leased to NGOs do not meet current OHS requirements and, without a strategic investment in appropriate renovation/retrofitting, they may inflict some significant longer term costs on both the NGOs concerned and the Government agency which owns the building or associated facility.

In the past few years, the NSW Government has hinted at rolling out IT broadband access through existing Government facilities such as schools and hospitals into the broader community, especially in regional and rural NSW. An ability for NGOs in these locations to affordably and regularly access the Internet through such “value adding” through public buildings should be examined in detail.

The establishment of publicly owned community facilities through developer levies by local councils remains an important vehicle in contributing to the well being of local communities. However, in public policy terms, it makes little sense to construct or purchase such new publicly owned buildings if neither the local Council nor relevant State or Commonwealth Government agencies can deliver adequate recurrent funding streams to enable viable human services to operate from such buildings.

### **Other issues**

Governments are moving to use public-private partnerships in new areas such as the human services (eg education and health), to bring forward capital works requirements in areas of growing population pressures. It is critical in these PPP arrangements that opportunities for community use of these publicly owned, but privately financed facilities are not lost, but, in fact enhanced.

The large charitable NGOs in the human services sector, are, of course, major owners of building assets in their own right. Government policies aimed at promoting community access and use of publicly owned buildings should also be used to entice collaborative arrangements with not for profit sector owned facilities, so as to maximise the benefit to local communities.

I hope that these brief comments are of assistance to the Inquiry. If further information is required, please contact me on tel 9211 2599 or email at [gary@ncoss.org.au](mailto:gary@ncoss.org.au)

Yours sincerely



Gary Moore  
Director