

**INQUIRY INTO SERVICE COORDINATION IN  
COMMUNITIES WITH HIGH SOCIAL NEEDS**

**Organisation:** United Services Union

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Legislative Council Standing  
Committee on Social Issues

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Service Coordination in  
Communities with high social  
needs

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Submission from the United  
Services Union

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New South Wales Local Government, Clerical, Administrative,  
Energy, Airlines & Utilities Union  
(United Services Union)  
Level 7, 321 Pitt Street Sydney NSW  
2000  
Ph:  
Fax:  
Contact person:

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Authorised by Graeme Kelly, General Secretary

1. The United Services Union ('the Union') represents the industrial interests of approximately 35,000 employees across a range of industries including local government, clerical, administrative, energy, airlines and utilities. Membership coverage extends to employees in wages, salaries and professional classifications, with members working for a large variety of employers throughout New South Wales. Members are derived from local government, electricity, and clerical and administrative employees in the airline, retail, food manufacturing, road transport, and totalisator industries.
2. This submission is based on the premise that the term 'community services' is best encapsulated as including activities, other than health and education, concerning human services.<sup>1</sup> The Australian Bureau of Statistics defines community service activities as including: personal and social support (provision of information, advice, referral, and support to remain living at home); childcare (day care centres, family day care providers, occasional child care providers, before/after school care providers); training and employment providers for those with disabilities; financial assistance; residential care (transitional and crisis accommodation, intensive residential care, hostel care, residential respite care, residential rehabilitation), foster care placement, accommodation placement, juvenile and disability corrective services, statutory protection and placement, policy development, social planning, and advocacy.
3. It is the Union's firm view that it is essential that adequate community services are provided, quite simply because such provision ensures social cohesion, and a society that is fair and equitable.<sup>2</sup>
4. This submission is general in nature and endeavours to provide some information specifically relating to local government community services, as well as to provide some comments on issues relating to community services delivery by the NSW government.
5. It is noted that government, non-profit, and not-for-profit organisations<sup>3</sup> each act as service providers for a very wide variety services<sup>4</sup> including but not limited to housing, child care, aged care and support, indigenous community services, disability services, drug and alcohol counselling services, community development services, employment assistance, 'Meals on Wheels' services, counselling, and financial support.<sup>5</sup> Other services include family support services, crisis and medium term accommodation, out of home care services, community transport, youth services, women's health centres, Community Legal Centres, support services for migrants, domestic violence support services, drug and alcohol counselling services, mental health services, tenancy advice services, and regional advocacy

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<sup>1</sup> ASU Submission, 'Community Services Australia survey 2008-2009'.

<sup>2</sup> K Lee, 'Building Social Inclusion in Australia: Priorities for the social and community services sector workforce' A discussion paper commissioned by the Australian Services Union (2007) 5.

<sup>3</sup> K Lee, 'Building Social Inclusion in Australia: Priorities for the social and community services sector workforce' A discussion paper commissioned by the Australian Services Union (2007) 10.

<sup>4</sup> ASU Submission, 'Community Services Australia survey 2008-2009'.

<sup>5</sup> K Lee, 'Building Social Inclusion in Australia: Priorities for the social and community services sector workforce' (2007).

organisations.<sup>6</sup> Almost all community services receive funding (either wholly or in part) by the government, and the relevant state/territory and federal government have responsibility for providing services.<sup>7</sup>

6. In addition to the long standing tradition of local government providing services including childcare and aged care, specialised areas of support have evolved, largely in response to community needs. This has included, but not been limited to, areas such as the provision of support for victims of domestic violence, suicide prevention, cultural events, youth crime prevention and community safety.
7. The Union has a keen interest in remaining abreast of the topical issues affecting local communities and our members. As such, the Union is closely watching developments in this area, and welcomes the opportunity to make a submission to the Inquiry.

#### **Community services in Local Government**

8. Local government makes a significant contribution to community services in New South Wales. The Division of Local Government Comparative Information publication states as follows:

*"Councils provide facilities such as community centres and halls, senior citizens centres, aged care centres, childcare centres and youth centres. They employ community development staff and provide services for groups in the community with specific needs eg the aged, people with disabilities, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders, and people from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds."*<sup>8</sup>

The nature of the community services provided by each Council within New South Wales varies significantly, in part due to differences in the demographic composition of each local community.

9. It is the Union's view that community services is best described as being 'the third pillar of society's social infrastructure...all three are crucial to maximising opportunity and reducing systematic disadvantage'.<sup>9</sup>
10. In essence, the value of community services cannot be underestimated, particularly to clients who reside in communities with high social needs.

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<sup>6</sup> K Lee, 'Building Social Inclusion in Australia: Priorities for the social and community services sector workforce' (2007).

<sup>7</sup> K Lee, 'Building Social Inclusion in Australia: Priorities for the social and community services sector workforce' A discussion paper commissioned by the Australian Services Union (2007) 10.

<sup>8</sup> Division of Local Government (DLG) Snapshot of NSW Local Government: Comparative Information on NSW Local Government Councils 2009/10, DLG 2011, p 132 DLG website <http://www.dlg.nsw.gov.au/dlg> viewed 17 August 2015.

<sup>9</sup> Australian Services Union, submission to Senate Community Affairs References Committee inquiry into impact on service quality, efficiency and sustainability of recent Commonwealth community services tendering processes by the Department of Social Services', March 2015 8.

**Delivery of community services**

11. In order to provide services to the community, Councils must undertake planning and reporting to ensure that there is accountability, as well as appropriate responses to the specific, diverse needs of their communities. It is noted that in the Council's Charter in section 8 of the *Local Government Act (1993) NSW*, it states that NSW Councils are required to provide, directly or on behalf of other levels of government, after due consideration, adequate, equitable and appropriate service and facilities for the community, and to ensure that those services are managed effectively and efficiently.<sup>10</sup> Also, Councils are required to exercise their functions in a manner that is consistent with, and actively promotes the principles of multiculturalism.
12. Importantly, local government community service workers often play a critical role in assisting and resourcing local networks of not-for-profit community organisations. The networks can help with identifying critical gaps in service provision within communities. This is extremely important for rural and regional communities, who may have a strong need for services to address issues such as high levels of unemployment, youth suicide, or economic down turn due drought.

**General comments on service co-ordination in communities with high social needs**

13. It is noted that the terms of reference of the Inquiry sought to consider the extent to which government and non-government service providers are identifying the needs of the clients and providing a coordinated response which ensures access to services both within and outside of their particular area of responsibility. To this end, the Union does not have any specific experiences to submit to the Inquiry. Rather, the Union submits that although many not-for-profit organisations have provided positive contributions in areas including housing, disability and home care services, such contributions have tended to be supplementary to the role of government. On occasion, it has enabled more focussed services targeting particular sections of the community, as needed.
14. Many not-for-profit organisations do not have the capacity or expertise to completely replace government provided service delivery. These groups are comprised of very diverse organisations who provide a wide range of services such as support for families, residential care, financial assistance, and community development activities.<sup>11</sup> It has tended to be the case that approaches to service delivery are not consistent, and many of the organisations which are better resourced are religion based. Also, community board members are often untrained in their responsibilities and, on occasions, seek advice and/or training and resources from professional social and community workers from state and local government. These factors can certainly impact upon service delivery, and in turn the ability of clients to have their needs met.
15. In response to the Inquiry's query as to adequacy of the provision of a coordinated response by government and non-government service providers that allows for access to services, the

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<sup>10</sup> *Local Government Act 1993* (NSW) section 8 (1).

<sup>11</sup> University of New South Wales Social Policy Research Centre, 'Profiling non-government community service organisations in NSW: Summary Report', July 2010, 3.

Union notes that previous research undertaken by the New South Wales Department of Community Services supported service coordination and integration as a way of meeting the needs of clients with complex needs.<sup>12</sup> However, information obtained by the Union during the preparation of this response could not conclusively confirm that service providers are adequately achieving this goal by way of a coordinated approach.

16. Other issues sought to be reviewed by the Inquiry include the identification of any barriers to the effective coordination of services, including lack of client awareness of services and any legislative provisions such as privacy law. To this end, the Union submits the following general concerns to the Inquiry; although the relationship between not-for-profit community organisations and local Councils can be mutually beneficial, some difficulties do arise because, as already indicated, not-for-profit organisations are often reliant upon funding support from local government for a diverse range of services, infrastructure and resources. In some cases this can lead to an increase in the need for local government assistance. It follows then that it may result in cost shifting to local government. Cost shifting from the state government to local government lends itself to concern, because it affects the viability of some Councils.
17. An issue of extreme and ongoing concern to the Union is the effect that outsourcing of community services has had generally upon service delivery. To this end, the Union presses the point that the increase in the use of competitive tendering in community services has had a devastating impact upon the provision of social services. As recently as March 2015, the Union's National Office, the Australian Services Union ('the ASU'), made a submission to the Senate Community Affairs Reference Committee inquiry into the Impact on service quality, efficiency and sustainability of recent Commonwealth community service tendering processes by the Department of Social services. During the course of preparations for this submission, it was apparent from reading the ASU's submission that outsourcing of community services brought little benefit. Rather, the ASU found that the process of competitive tendering resulted in organisations needing to compete with each other for funding, causing smaller organisations to be unable to equitably pit themselves against larger organisations, who could rely upon economies of scale as well as better access to employ tender writers, in order to secure the tender. Crucially, the ASU noted in its submission that:  
*'demands to demonstrate 'collaboration' have forced many smaller organisations to merge or form consortia, while ignoring the fact that most smaller, specialised local services have worked long and hard to build meaningful collaborative interagency relationships with each other. Instead, services are forced to see each other as predators not partners and this may affect their service provision too'.*

As such, the Union sees this as another example of the extent to which government and non-government service providers are not yet able to provide a genuinely coordinated response, nor one which can, at present, result in an overall better service for clients.

18. Relatedly, an ongoing concern of the Union in terms of service delivery is the impact of outsourcing upon the overall quality of the service provided. Whilst it is acknowledged that

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<sup>12</sup> NSW Department of Community Services Research Report, 'Models of Service Delivery and interventions for children and young people with high needs', September 2006, iii.



there has been considerable privatisation and outsourcing within service delivery across the globe within the past thirty years, with the aim of reducing costs associated with service delivery, the end result has tended to be a negligible amount of cost savings, coupled with decreased quality of service.<sup>13</sup> To this end, it is the Union's submission that community services have been negatively affected by outsourcing, and as such, clients' needs are unlikely to be being met to the fullest extent possible.

19. In respect of the impact of privacy laws upon service coordination, the Union does not provide any specific examples within this submission. Rather, the Union notes anecdotal evidence obtained which indicates that there have been difficulties faced by organisations when seeking funding, due to confidentiality requirements.<sup>14</sup> It has been reported that restrictions surrounding confidentiality requirements for matters such as the funding process for organisations, can negatively impact the organisation's ability to identify community needs, and meet those needs. Accordingly the Union considers that such difficulties demonstrate that service delivery is not without hindrance, in terms of compliance with privacy regulations.
20. Relatedly, the Union notes that since the Department of Family Services now includes the Aboriginal Housing Office, Ageing Disability and Home Care, Community Services, Housing NSW, the Land and Housing Corporation, Home Care Service, Strategy and Policy, and Corporate Services, it has produced a 'Privacy Notice' which assures clients that any information provided to one of those entities, will be managed in accordance with the requirements of the relevant legislation. Such legislation includes the *Privacy and Personal Information Protection Act 1998* (NSW), the *Health Records and Information Privacy Act 2002* (NSW), the *Children and Young Persons (Care and Protection) Act 1998* (NSW) and the *Housing Act 2001* (NSW). For the purposes of this submission, the Union does not make any comment upon these legislative provisions, and any possible barriers to effective service coordination.
21. Local government has in place many measures to ensure accountability to the community and appropriate regulation of service provision. Whilst it is acknowledged that the co-ordination of service provision by government and non-government agencies may assist in ensuring the needs of clients are met, there are some difficulties with the day to day reality of its implementation, to consider. Although some sectors of the not-for-profit industry have many years of experience in service provision, in some regions within New South Wales such organisations do not have the capacity or expertise to augment state provided community services. Also, there are continued increasing administrative and accountability requirements to be met<sup>15</sup>, which inevitably affects the ability of organisations to deliver services to groups most in need. Accordingly, this may prove to be a barrier to effective service coordination.

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<sup>13</sup> Professor Brian Dollery, 'Outsourcing and Insourcing in Australian Local Government: Productivity Commission's 2014 public infrastructure report and municipal road maintenance and renewal' (2014) 1.

<sup>14</sup> Australian Council of Social Services, 'Submission to Australian Senate Community Affairs Committee Inquiry: Impact on service quality, efficiency and sustainability of recent Commonwealth community service tendering process by the Department of Social Services' March 2015.

<sup>15</sup> K Lee, 'Building Social Inclusion in Australia: Priorities for the social and community services sector workforce' (2007).

22. The Inquiry also sought to consider the initiatives such as the Dubbo Minister's Action Group and best practice models for the co-ordination of services. In this regard, the Union supports the intent of the Discussion Paper report released in July 2013 by the East Dubbo Ministers Action Group ('MAG'). The Union also supports the intent of MAG in adopting a collaborative approach to addressing community concerns relating to the social housing estate known as East Dubbo Apollo, in Dubbo.<sup>16</sup>
23. It is the Union's view that there is some merit in the initiative advanced by MAG, namely to adopt an 'integrated and holistic approach'<sup>17</sup> to service delivery in order to meet clients' needs. However, any such initiatives must be implemented with caution, along with substantive input as to potential advantages and disadvantages, from the relevant service providers.

### Conclusion

24. Local government has a vital role to play in providing infrastructure and support to sustain the networks of community based organisations. As well as critical roles in reporting, planning and assisting accountability, many community services workers in local government provide direct services such as child care, youth work, service for people with disabilities and a wide variety of other services.
25. The Union supports any initiative that will provide assistance to communities with high social needs. However, such initiatives should be thoroughly researched, and implemented in a way that ensures adequate resourcing, and the appropriate balance between meeting community needs and addressing any gaps in service provision.
26. The Union encourages further discussions between the government and industry parties in order to address the compelling issue of adequate and appropriate service coordination in communities with high social needs.

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<sup>16</sup> East Dubbo Ministers Action Group, Discussion Paper Report, July 2013.

<sup>17</sup> East Dubbo Ministers Action Group, Discussion Paper Report, July 2013.