

# Queensland Budget Submission 2024-2025

## Neighbourhood Centres Queensland

Queensland's Neighbourhood Centres are the largest place-based social infrastructure in the state and were featured strongly in the Parliamentary Inquiry into Loneliness and Social Isolation in 2021. Since such time, the work of these high impact community-based, non-profit organisations have been highlighted as providing tangible support and assistance to hundreds of thousands of Queenslanders and contributing to improvements in community responses, public health, social connection, disaster preparedness and social resilience. Neighbourhood Centres leverage local resources, strengths and knowledge to create stronger communities and foster opportunities for participation, contribution, inclusion and belonging to an estimated 2.4million visitors a year. Neighbourhood Centres Queensland (NCQ), the peak body for the sector, estimate the community value generated by the sector is \$133,778,315<sup>1</sup>.

NCQ and the Neighbourhood Centre sector call upon the Queensland Government to invest in the expansion, training, and support of the sector across the state. The sector is undergoing considerable growth and change due to funding uplift and the Queensland Government's new Neighbourhood Centre initiatives. Implemented in October 2023, the initiative features a new agreed purpose, program logic, investment and reporting framework for 128 funded Centres across the state. An increased investment of \$7.371 million will support the growth of the sector due to these changes as more demands are being placed on them due to the Queensland Government's place-based community-led social policy in the Communities 2032 Strategic Plan and the new Neighbourhood Centres Initiative. This support for Neighbourhood Centres comes at a time of increased community demand due to cost of living, the housing crisis, natural disasters and the effects of loneliness and social isolation.

---

<sup>1</sup> NCQ Sector Impact Census 2023

# Recommendations Summary

## Recommendation 1

**Mapping of unfunded Neighbourhood Centre sites across the state and the provision of operational funding for 10 new locations.**

Pages 4-5

## Recommendation 2

**Provide an online Neighbourhood Centre induction and training package through NCQ to support the implementation of the new Neighbourhood Centre initiative guidelines and shared vision.**

Pages 6-7

## Recommendation 3

**Provide a once off grant to funded Neighbourhood Centres and NCQ to implement the Queensland Government’s Neighbourhood Centre Shared Vision and Initiative.**

Pages 8-9

## Recommendation 4

**Support Neighbourhood Centre Networks and State Conferences for Rural and Regional Locations.**

Pages 10-11

# Recommendation 1

## Recommendation 1 Overview

### Mapping of unfunded Neighbourhood Centre sites across the state and the provision of operational funding for 10 new locations.

**Investment** \$3.99million (Year 1: \$1,390,000<sup>2</sup>. Year 2: \$2,600,000)

**Impact** Unfunded Centres across the state mapped over a 6-month period to identify sites for potential funding. A list and map of sites will be provided to the Department and Queensland Government will determine 10 new sites (5 sites per year over 2 years). This investment will result in an additional \$15,932,963 in community value for localities, with an emphasis on rural, regional and First Nations locations.<sup>3</sup> Unfunded Neighbourhood Centres receiving funding will provide increased responses to cost of living pressures, housing stress, loneliness and social isolation.

## Recommendation 1 Detail

### Background

There are at least 27 Neighbourhood Centres in Queensland operating without Neighbourhood Centre funding from the Queensland Government<sup>4</sup>. The exact number of unfunded Centres operating in the state is unclear as the last mapping project occurred in 1999, 25 years ago. Some of these Centres have been operating in an unfunded capacity for over 25 years<sup>5</sup> and have a volunteer workforce supported by a small part time role or no staffing whatsoever. Many of these community governed incorporated associations are embedded in their rural and regional communities, operating from State or Local Government facilities or other community infrastructure without any operational funding. This includes First Nations controlled centres.

### Problem

- Apart from Tasmania, Queensland has fewer funded Neighbourhood Centres than every other state in Australia.
- The number of unfunded Centres in the state is currently unknown.
- No or little funding has created a substantial wage gap which impacts unfunded Neighbourhood Centres ability to support, retain and ensure safety of staff and volunteers, threatening the sustainability and quality of services. (Productivity Commission, 2010: XXIV)
- Loneliness and Social Isolation for many community members is not being addressed
- Unfunded Centres don't have funds to address increased needs in local communities, including disaster affected localities.

<sup>2</sup> SCHADS Level 5 worker for 6 months plus travel budget and project costs (\$94,350). Operational funding at 5 Centres per year over 3 years at \$259,118 per centre including \$20,000 non-state government building subsidy.

<sup>3</sup> The Return on Investment for Neighbourhood Centre funding in the NCQ Sector Impact Census 2023 is \$4.09

<sup>4</sup> NCQ Sector Impact Census 2023

<sup>5</sup> Unfunded Neighbourhood Centres, 2000.

- Poor workforce conditions – gender pay inequity, safety issues and staff burnout
- Rural, Regional and First Nations locations most affected

### Solution

An NCQ project worker will map unfunded Neighbourhood Centres across the state for a 6-month period, identifying gaps, needs and community readiness in local communities where unfunded Centres currently operate. Neighbourhood Centres Queensland has expert sector knowledge to conduct this project. Centres identified through this process will be vetted for consistency with the Queensland Government Neighbourhood Centres Initiative, be operating or have the capacity to operate from a central community building, and are already embedded in the community by a community governed incorporated association. A focus of this project are Centres located in rural, regional and First Nations locations where there is not a funded Neighbourhood Centre in close proximity. Example locations of regional and rural locations include Babinda, Warwick, Dalby, Dimbulah, Rainbow Beach and Mudjimba. A list and map of unfunded Neighbourhood Centres will be provided to the Department of Communities. The Queensland Government will determine which sites to prioritise funding for 10 locations over 2 years.

### Outcomes

- Mapping unfunded Neighbourhood Centres throughout the state to identify 10 sites for funding
- Increased understanding of unfunded Neighbourhood Centre sector, include First Nations Neighbourhood Centres for future funding opportunities and community recovery during natural disasters.
- Neighbourhood Centres funded in rural and regional locations
- Increased ability to respond to Loneliness and Social Isolation, and Natural Disasters in communities
- Ability to run additional programs targeting unique issues in localities
- Community led solutions to local problems and interests
- Increased capacity to recruit volunteers and students
- Increased local networking between, and resourcing of, local agencies and community groups
- Healthy and safe work environment
- Increased support for communities affected by cost of living issues
- Gender equity for women who make up 83% of the Neighbourhood Centre workforce

# Recommendation 2

## Recommendation 2 Overview

**Provide an online Neighbourhood Centre induction and training package through NCQ to support the implementation of the new Neighbourhood Centre initiative guidelines and shared vision.**

**Investment** \$141,127 1 year<sup>6</sup>

**Impact** Online Neighbourhood Centre orientation package will be offered to all neighbourhood centres, representing a workforce of an estimated 1550 staff members, 968 board members and 2729 volunteers<sup>7</sup> across the sector. Department of Communities contract officers and other government members will also access the package, ensuring shared understanding. The course will be provided in an ongoing manner to all new Neighbourhood Centre personnel and Department staff members.

## Recommendation 2 Detail

### Background

From October 2023, all funded Neighbourhood Centres began operating under the new Neighbourhood Centre Initiative Guidelines as articulated in the Queensland Government’s shared vision for the Neighbourhood Centres. These extensive sector reforms create a new shared purpose, program logic, investment and reporting framework for all funded Centres under the Queensland Government. In addition to these sector reforms, Neighbourhood Centres received a funding uplift in late 2022 enabling them to employ an additional staff member for their organization. The combination of sector reforms and new workforce has resulted in a widespread training and induction gap in the sector. Employees, volunteers and board members do not have access to a training package that gives an overview of the uniqueness of the Neighbourhood Centre sector, including the initiative guidelines, culture, historical overview and practice frameworks that emphasise place based community-led methods. In addition to the sector, Department of Communities staff members that work with Neighbourhood Centres in the area of contract management also require induction into the unique work of Neighbourhood Centres.

### Problem

- No induction training package for Queensland’s Neighbourhood Centre sector and stakeholders
- New initiative guidelines for Centres without accompanying professional development for the workforce
- Rural and regional locations have limited access to training opportunities and have workforce recruitment challenges.
- Staff unfamiliar with Neighbourhood Centre work focus on narrow service delivery methods which is outside of the scope of community development expertise.

<sup>6</sup> SCHADS 5 Worker x 12 months plus online course development and hosting costs

<sup>7</sup> NCQ Sector Impact Census 2023

- Community Development courses and training have disappeared from tertiary institutions throughout the state, leading to an education and training gap for the existing and future Neighbourhood Centre workforce
- Department of Communities contract staff unfamiliar with the Neighbourhood Centre movement

## Solution

NCQ will develop an online induction training package for Neighbourhood Centre staff, volunteers and board members. This course will also be available to government staff working with neighbourhood centres, including contract officers. This course will be co-designed with the sector, utilizing a project worker to bring together the most essential aspects of Neighbourhood Centre culture, methods and practice. It will feature video of Neighbourhood Centre workers explaining their place-based community-led practice and the most important aspects of the movement. A video to promote a “Community Career” in Neighbourhood Centres will also be produced to encourage a new workforce pipeline for the sector, including those Centres located in rural and remote locations. The Queensland Government shared vision and initiative guidelines will be explained in the context of induction.

## Outcomes

- Initial rollout to promote this product amongst the state’s 155 neighbourhood centres. This includes a workforce of 1550 staff members, 968 board members and 2729 volunteers<sup>8</sup>.
- The course will also be accessible to Department of Communities staff and other government workers involved with the neighbourhood centre sector.
- Induction training for all new Neighbourhood Centre employees and volunteers across the state as well as contract staff.
- Centres supported and confident in fulfilling new contracts with the Queensland Government Neighbourhood Centre Initiative Guidelines
- Neighbourhood Centre place-based community-led expertise captured and promoted
- Video promoting a career in Neighbourhood Centres highlighting place-based community-led expertise
- Enhanced Neighbourhood Centre workforce recruitment including rural and regional locations
- The sector and Queensland Government staff on the “same page” about the Neighbourhood Centre sector

---

<sup>8</sup> NCQ Sector Impact Census 2023

# Recommendation 3

## Recommendation 3 Overview

**Provide a once off grant to funded Neighbourhood Centres and NCQ to implement the Queensland Government’s Neighbourhood Centre Shared Vision and Initiative.**

**Investment** \$2,610,000

**Impact** Funded Neighbourhood Centres will receive a once off grant of \$20,000 to increase their infrastructure and capacity to meet the Queensland Government’s new Neighbourhood Centre Shared Vision and Initiative. This may include upgrades to IT, policy and procedures, HR, governance, strategic planning and other internal infrastructure necessary to respond to the new focus on Neighbourhood Centres. In addition to the sector, a once off grant of \$50,000 to NCQ to support initiative implementation.

## Recommendation 3 Detail

### Background

The new Shared Vision for Neighbourhood Centres by the Queensland Government<sup>9</sup> and associated initiative guidelines<sup>10</sup> details a renewed focus on Centres by not only DTATSIPCA, but other Government agencies, business, and philanthropic organisations. It also details enhancements in evaluation and programs being offered by Neighbourhood Centres, including new guidelines, reporting and data collection frameworks. This increased focus on Neighbourhood Centres comes after decades of funding shortfalls meaning that many of these community-based organisations do not have the internal infrastructure needed to respond to increasing demands being placed on them. Upgrades to communications channels, such as websites and social media, as well as secure IT infrastructure is needed to implement the new shared vision for Neighbourhood Centres. New policy and procedures, strategic planning, governance enhancement and other internal organizational capacity building is also required. In addition to Neighbourhood Centres, NCQ is supporting the sector through the largest structural change in its history. Funding is required for the extra demand on NCQ resources.

### Problem

- Chronic underfunding of the Neighbourhood Centre sector has restricted organizational capacity and internal infrastructure
- New Queensland Government Shared Vision for Neighbourhood Centre envisages cross department participation, new programs and increased evaluation.
- Many Neighbourhood Centres have limited IT and communications infrastructure, data collection and project management tools.

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.housing.qld.gov.au/initiatives/strategic-repositioning-committee#:~:text=Neighbourhood%20Centres%20are%20the%20cornerstones.priorities%20of%20their%20local%20communities>.  
<sup>10</sup> <https://www.business.qld.gov.au/industries/service-industries-professionals/service-industries/community-services/neighbourhood-centres-providers>

- Due to a funding uplift, Centres are needing to enhance human resources capability, governance and strategic planning for the future.
- New focus on Neighbourhood Centres has generated increased interest in program delivery from numerous stakeholders without the organisational capacity to respond.
- NCQ is experiencing increased demand on our resources during implementation, such as increased meetings, stakeholder interest, online briefing sessions, data collection advisory, network attendance, resource development, communications, travel costs and enquiries for the sector.

## Solution

Neighbourhood Centres funded by the Queensland Government will receive a once off amount of \$20,000 to boost their internal capacity to implement the new Shared Vision and Initiative Guidelines for Neighbourhood Centres. Similar to the \$20,000 funding boost to respond to COVID in February 2022, this once off funding boost will be used to assist Centres to upgrade necessary IT infrastructure, communications platforms, policy and procedures, strategic planning, governance and other internal organisational infrastructure to implement and respond to their renewed focus in Queensland Government policy. Neighbourhood Centres will have the flexibility to use the grant to upgrade whichever aspects of their organization that are needed to implement the shared vision and guidelines for their Centre as they plan to implement Communities 2032 over the next 8 years. In addition to this grant for the sector, NCQ requests a \$50,000 grant to fund the extra demand for its services as the new guidelines are implemented.

## Outcomes

- Neighbourhood Centres will have increased capacity to fulfill the Queensland Government's Shared Vision for the sector.
- Enhanced internal infrastructure to be able to respond to community need and expectations
- Robust governance and evaluation processes implemented
- Flexible funding model means that Centres can choose what aspects of their organization needs upgrading to implement the new vision and guidelines
- Increased capacity to respond to new programs, stakeholder interest and partnerships.
- Increased capacity of NCQ to support implementation including departmental meetings, information sessions, data collection development, resource development, enquiries, communications, travel costs and other emerging responses.



# Recommendation 4

## Recommendation 4 Overview

### Supporting Neighbourhood Centre Networks and State Conferences for Rural and Regional Locations.

<b>Investment</b>	\$120,000 per year <sup>11</sup> ongoing for at least 3 years + \$90,040 per year for a dedicated, part-time NCQ network coordinator to grow the capability and impact of the Neighbourhood Centre network, and provide place-based intelligence to the QLD government
<b>Impact</b>	Staff members from Neighbourhood Centres in Rural and Regional locations will be supported to attend in-person regional and state network meetings to foster best practice, access professional development, and increase sector capacity and capability. This will be provided from a brokerage fund of \$100,000 per year.

## Recommendation 4 Detail

### Background

There are 10 Neighbourhood Centre networks that meet throughout Queensland. NCQ previously received Community Liaison Funds from the Queensland Government to provide support for each region’s network meeting, administration expenses and reasonable costs of travel and accommodation. Funding also supported a state meeting for the entire sector. This network funding was cut by the Newman Government in 2012 and the networks have operated in an unfunded capacity for the past 12 years. 5 regional networks operate outside of South East Queensland, which include Far North Qld, North Qld, South West Qld, Far West Remote Qld and Wide Bay Burnett consisting of 71 Centres.

### Problem

- Centre coordinators in rural locations travel up to 757km each way to attend network meetings or are excluded from network meetings because of geographical distance.
- Centre staff travel long distances (Up to 1639kms) to attend the biannual Queensland Community Development Conference and associated Neighbourhood Centres state-wide gathering.
- Travel funds come from Centre operational funding affecting frontline staffing and service delivery.
- Online network meetings affect the quality of the support being offered – in person meetings produce higher amounts of sector cohesion and learning
- Inequity between Neighbourhood Centres located in South East Queensland and those in the rest of the state that have less access to regional meetings, professional development, community infrastructure and other resources.
- NCQ challenges in attending network meeting located across state, including remote and rural locations.

---

## Solution

A pool of brokerage funds will be provided to NCQ to support rural and regional Neighbourhood Centres to gather in regional networks for professional development, planning, resource sharing and sector development. This funding will be provided to support with travel and accommodation costs for regional network meetings in rural and regional locations, where there are significant costs involved in attending. This brokerage will also be made available for rural and regional staff to attend the biannual Queensland Community Development Conference and the attached Neighbourhood Centres state-wide gathering in 2025 and beyond. Travel costs will also be made available to a dedicated NCQ staff member to focus on building the 10 networks of NC's across the state, enabling the staff member to coordinate meetings, attend regional networks and coordinate the biannual conference to ensure all Centres throughout the state have face to face access to their peak body for support, representation, and access. NCQ staff member will also broker departmental attendance at regional networks when necessary for sector consultation and intelligence gathering.

## Outcomes

- Staff from Queensland Neighbourhood Centres supported to attend regional network meetings
- Centres in rural and regional locations overcoming disadvantage due to distance
- Increased support for Neighbourhood Centres outside of South East Queensland
- Centres have greater access to their peak body leading to increased capacity and representation at a state level, and support during the implementation of the shared vision
- Increased capacity, innovation, and professional development
- Support for Neighbourhood Centre staff to attend the Queensland Community Development Conference and Neighbourhood Centre State-Wide gathering in 2025.
- NCQ staff member dedicated to mobilising and growing the capacity of NC impact networks statewide.
- Local level intelligence gathered on what NC's are experiencing in their communities and expanding consultation to identify strategic and emerging issues for multiple departmental portfolios.