

2025 Federal Election Policy Platform

Priorities for Neighbourhood Centres:
the local, community-led infrastructure
supporting Queenslanders every day



It's time to strengthen local, community-led solutions

There are over 155 local, community-led Neighbourhood Centres across Queensland, and over 1000 Neighbourhood Houses and Centres across Australia.

Neighbourhood Centres are on the ground, opening their doors and supporting their communities through cost-of-living issues, housing, natural disasters, community safety, family support and personal wellbeing.

With **2.6 million visitors to Centres last year alone**, it's time to strengthen the sector to respond to increasing community and government demand.

No two communities are the same, and Neighbourhood Centres understand that effectively responding to issues requires programs and services to be designed for the local context through community-led solutions.

As government decision makers are increasingly understanding the importance of local and community-led approaches, Neighbourhood Centres in Queensland have recently undergone widespread sector reforms to centrally position them in state and federal social policy across a range of portfolios.

In the lead up to the Australian Federal Election on the 3rd of May 2025, NCQ and Neighbourhood Centres are calling on Australian Government decision makers from all parties to commit to our six key priorities.

It's time to commit to local, community-led solutions to the cost of living crisis, by strengthening the existing 155 Queensland Neighbourhood Centres and deliver access to Neighbourhood Centres for every Australian.

Our six key priorities for the 2025 Federal Election include:

1

Improve national social policy outcomes with community data and insights from over 1,000 Neighbourhood Centres

by resourcing ANHCA to lead coordinated research and impact reporting nationwide.

2

Deliver a Neighbourhood Centre for every Queensland

by investing in community infrastructure and building on state Government investment

3

Ensure Queensland communities can recover faster from disasters

by reforming Commonwealth and State Disaster arrangements to support place-based and community-led disaster preparedness, response and recovery through Neighbourhood Centres

4

Ensure face-to-face Emergency Relief is available to people in crisis facing cost-of-living emergencies

by increasing targeted federal Emergency Relief and funding wages for delivery through Neighbourhood Centres

5

Revitalise volunteering in local communities

by funding Neighbourhood Centres for volunteer coordination

6

Support rural and remote access to critical Commonwealth services

by providing adequate support to Neighbourhood Centres

Together, Neighbourhood Centres
in Queensland supported over

2.6 Million Visitors

in one year alone.

This was achieved through:

155



Neighbourhood Centres

Of which 128 receive NC Program funding from Qld Gov, and 27 do not receive this funding

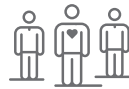
1,803



Staff Members

Working a total of 2.14million hours over the year

2,811



Volunteers each week

Working a total of 558,950 hours over the year. Worth over \$28.9m

\$273,245



Median Funding Per Centre*

Calculation based only on the *128 Centres who receive NC Program funding

957



Funding Applications

to maintain operations. Worth over \$18m

1,387



Community Projects Run

Over the year, and supported 852 Community Projects run by others

Making an Impact

For every **\$1** invested by the Queensland Government,
the sector produced **\$3.98** in Community Value.

Food Relief



1,512tne

Equating to \$30.3 million in Community Value

Frozen Meals



140,448

Equating to \$1.4 million in Community Value

**Non-Food
Emergency Relief**



\$4.87m

Equating to \$4.87 million in Community Value

**Programmed
Activity Participants**



1,358,850

Equating to \$48.7 million in Community Value

**Referrals to
Other Services**



298,200

In one year alone

**Social
Enterprises**



\$3.31m

Worth of income, as well as \$11.9 million income from fee-for-service activities

Reference: Mundy, C. (2024) Neighbourhood Centres Queensland 2023 Sector Impact Report. Neighbourhood Centres Queensland. To download the full report, visit ncq.org.au.

1 Improve national social policy outcomes with community data and insights from over 1,000 Neighbourhood Centres

by resourcing ANHCA to lead coordinated research and impact reporting nationwide

Recommendations

NCQ and the Neighbourhood Centre sector is seeking a commitment from the Australian Government decision makers from all parties to:

- ☐ Fund the ANHCA as the national peak body
- ☐ Invest in a National Data Collection and Research Initiative through ANHCA and the over 1000 Centres they support
- ☐ Strengthen Policy Engagement and On-the-Ground Support for the over 1000 Centres.
- ☐ Fund ANHCA to forward social cohesion and connection initiatives across the national sector.

Context

In Queensland, we as the state peak body, Neighbourhood Centres Queensland (NCQ), hold an annual census of the 150+ Neighbourhood Centre across the state and develop this into an annual Sector Impact Report. Our census, report and data provide important data and insights to the Queensland government that informs social policy and equips them with insights of what's happening in communities on the ground right across the state. Our most recent report is here: www.ncq.org.au/resources/2023-sector-impact-report.

Currently, there is no national census or report on Neighbourhood and Community Centres, and the Federal government is missing out on important data and insights to inform federal social policy.

We recommend the Australian Government resource the national peak body, Australian Neighbourhood Houses and Centres Association (ANHCA) to conduct such research on a national scale and provide community data and insights from over 1000 Neighbourhood

Centres, Community Centres and Neighbourhood Houses that operate across the country.

The national sector plays a critical role in addressing complex, place-based community challenges, particularly in rural and remote areas where services are limited and Neighbourhood Centres act as a "one stop shop" for community support. Currently, data collection is fragmented across states, limiting the ability to identify national trends and develop cohesive responses to issues such as cost-of-living pressures, housing insecurity, social isolation, and domestic violence. But addressing social issues at the grassroots level, Neighbourhood Centres alleviate pressure on federal government systems and services.

ANHCA currently does not receive any peak body funding.

With more locations nationwide than McDonald's outlets, ANHCA supports the largest community-led social infrastructure in the country, fostering connection, resilience, and support in local communities. ANHCA is made up of six state peak bodies: Neighbourhood Houses Victoria, Community Centres South Australia, LinkWest (WA), Local Community Services Association (NSW), Neighbourhood Houses Tasmania and Neighbourhood Houses Queensland. ANHCA is also a member of the International Federation of Settlement Houses, the global peak body, which has consultative status with the United Nations. ANHCA operates a number of small grants initiatives such as Supporting Stronger Communities, Strong and Resilient Communities and the Community Refugee Integration and Settlement Pilot.

It currently employs 1.2FE staff members.

2 Deliver a Neighbourhood Centre for every Queensland

by investing in community infrastructure and building on state Government investment

Recommendations

NCQ and the Neighbourhood Centre sector is seeking a commitment from the Australian Government decision makers from all parties to:

- ☐ Provide community infrastructure funding, either directly or under shared local or state government arrangements, for Neighbourhood Centre buildings.
- ☐ Work with the Queensland Government to map unfunded Neighbourhood Centres across the state and build on State Government investment with community input
- ☐ Retrofit all Neighbourhood Centres in Queensland to operate off-grid during disaster events and provide disaster recovery facilities
- ☐ Upgrade IT infrastructure in Neighbourhood Centre locations, with an emphasis on rural and remote areas.

Context

Queensland has 129 funded Neighbourhood Centres and at least 27 Centres operate with no Neighbourhood Centre Program funding from the Queensland Government. Queensland has less funded Neighbourhood Centres than any other state in mainland Australia.

Neighbourhood Centres are embedded in their local communities, opening their doors to welcome everyone, regardless of their background. Neighbourhood Centres have been vital in supporting their communities through everything from cost-of-living challenges to social isolation. Centres take a place-based and developmental approach that is adapted to suit the needs of their

local communities. They offer Queenslanders vital supports such as emergency relief, financial literacy and counselling, adult education, employment and training, housing referrals and wellbeing programs.

Neighbourhood Centres' physical infrastructure varies. 41% of funded Centres are owned by the Queensland Government, 38% by local council and the remainder either owned or rented privately. Many Centres located in council owned or private facilities are disused houses or dated commercial infrastructure that is inadequate for widespread community use.

Without program or infrastructure funding, many unfunded Centres are run by a volunteer workforce or sustained through small grants programs and rely on limited local resources to sustain their premises.

As many Queensland Neighbourhood Centres are situated in disaster affected locations, these facilities can be affected during an event as they support their communities. Power outages, water access, mobile phone coverage and internet connections can all be disrupted during an event. Neighbourhood Centres in rural and remote areas are most affected, where limited mobile and data coverage exists due to the shutting down of the 3G network and the vast geographic landscape. Investment is required to strengthen the resilience of infrastructure and enable Centres to support their communities on the ground before, during and after disasters.



Tracey Dickinson

CEO of Community Support Centre Innisfail Inc.

"Neighbourhood Centres are in urgent need of upgrading to respond to the increased emphasis on local based solutions in key community wellbeing programmes such as Disaster Management, Social and Service Connection."

3 Ensure Queensland communities can recover faster from disasters

by reforming Commonwealth and State Disaster arrangements to support place-based and community-led disaster preparedness, response and recovery through Neighbourhood Centres

Recommendations

NCQ and the Neighbourhood Centre sector is seeking a commitment from the Australian Government decision makers from all parties to:

- ☐ Provide long term funding to Neighbourhood Centres for Disaster Preparation and Resilience workers in locations experiencing compounding disaster events
- ☐ Reduce red-tape and provide funding for overheads for Commonwealth/ State Disaster funding
- ☐ Recognise drought as a disaster event under Commonwealth/State disaster arrangements

Context

Queensland is the most disaster affected state in Australia and local Neighbourhood Centres have been responding to compounding events including cyclones, monsoonal flooding, bushfires, severe storms and drought. NCQ's Queensland Neighbourhood Strategy for Disaster Resilience 2023-2026 has been recognised internationally for its place-based community-led approach to disaster preparation, response and recovery. Neighbourhood Centres are embedded in communities before, during and after disaster events and assist community members long term with issues around housing damage, emergency grants, insurance challenges, emergency relief and furniture replacement.

When Queensland Neighbourhood Centres receive funding for disaster activities, it is received under Commonwealth/State disaster recovery arrangements that are tied to specific events. This means that Centres receiving recovery worker funding for one event cannot use this funding for a compounding event unless separate funding is released. Funding is distributed according to narrow parameters meaning that overheads associated with recovery work, such as rental space, IT systems, utilities, workplace insurance, compliance and administration costs cannot be included. Additionally, immediate recovery funding may only be released in three-monthly periods, negatively affecting staffing retention. This greatly affects these small community-based organisations who experience forensic reporting requirements associated with short term, episodic Commonwealth/State funding arrangements.

Additionally, no funding is provided to the sector for ongoing community-led disaster preparedness in a state that is repeatedly impacted by multiple disasters, including drought and frequent flooding. Under the current disaster arrangements, drought is not included as a disaster event despite having significant environmental and economic impacts to local communities and national food security.



Melinda McInturff

Community Resilience Coordinator, Yeronga C. Centre

"The thing about Neighbourhood Centres is that we're always the first ones that are expected to be on the ground when a disaster hits. And we're expected to be with our community long after, like we are now, but we're always the last ones funded."

4 Ensure face-to-face Emergency Relief is available to people in crisis facing cost-of-living emergencies

by increasing targeted federal Emergency Relief and funding wages for delivery through Neighbourhood Centres

Recommendations

NCQ and the Neighbourhood Centre sector is seeking a commitment from the Australian Government decision makers from all parties to:

- ☐ Recognise the importance of smaller catchment areas and prioritise local place-based community-governed Neighbourhood Centres in Federal procurement processes
- ☐ Increase Federal Emergency Relief amounts in the context of rising cost of living issues and disaster affected communities
- ☐ Provide funding to employ staff to triage and respond to Emergency Relief requests.

Context

Neighbourhood Centres that distribute federal Emergency Relief are seeing unprecedented demand. Emergency food relief alone has skyrocketed from 100kg distributed to community members per Centre per month in 2019, to 720kg per Centre per month in 2023FY. Federal relief funding does not include funding for wages to employ a staff member to triage Emergency Relief requests and make referrals to formal and informal support. Due to community members presenting with increasingly complex issues, it is not always appropriate for volunteers to undertake this work. This means that staff members are pulled away from their other funded activities to conduct intake and response.

36% of Queensland's Neighbourhood Centres provide Federal Emergency Relief to community

members experiencing cost-of-living and housing issues. This Emergency Relief is provided in the context of many other initiatives Neighbourhood Centres offer. It is often an entry point for community members to access other opportunities such as budgeting education, NILS loans, bill relief, energy efficiency resources, financial resilience or financial counselling. Additionally, community members seeking Emergency Relief can access community activities at the Centre that build social capital. This may range from playgroups, volunteering and social groups through to activities that create employment opportunities such as work skills programs or social enterprises.

In 2019, many Neighbourhood Centres were overlooked in new procurement arrangements for federal Emergency Relief programs due to changes to larger SA4 catchment areas and movement of contracts to larger non-profit organisations. As a result, community members in many smaller rural and regional localities have struggled to access emergency relief and in circumstances where vouchers are distributed via general phone lines, do not have the opportunity to receive wrap-around support from a local Neighbourhood Centre. Procurement for the latest round of federal Emergency Relief funding has been delayed.



Sandra Elton
CEO of North Townsville Community Hub (NOTCH)

"Many families are desperate. People in regional areas are living off our travelling food tables each week. The amount of emergency food relief we distribute to people in need has more than quadrupled since 2020."

5 Revitalise volunteering in local communities by funding Neighbourhood Centres for volunteer coordination

Recommendations

NCQ and the Neighbourhood Centre sector is seeking a commitment from the Australian Government decision makers from all parties to:

- ☐ Provide funding to Neighbourhood Centres for volunteer coordination staffing
- ☐ Where no Volunteer Resource Centre exists, fund Neighbourhood Centres for place-based regional volunteer promotion and referral.
- ☐ Leverage existing Neighbourhood Centre infrastructure to enhance volunteering in rural, regional and remote communities.

Context

Last year alone, over 2,800 volunteers worked in Neighbourhood Centres across Queensland, contributing significant community value and often being relied upon to sustain vital programs such as community transport in rural areas, education programs, and disaster recovery. Outcomes across many government portfolios could be significantly improved by revitalising volunteer recruitment, management and retention in Neighbourhood Centres.

Managing volunteers in Neighbourhood Centres presents unique challenges, particularly given the diverse range of roles they fill and the limited resources available to support them.

High turnover increases management workload, such as frequent training and recruitment.

A majority (68%) of Neighbourhood Centres do not have a designated Volunteer Coordinator, and this results in a reliance on existing staff to manage volunteers. This lack of structured oversight can lead to disparities in recruitment, training gaps, and difficulties in volunteer retention. Additionally, some volunteers require extra supports, such as those facing barriers related to age, disability, or mental health challenges. This can place extra demands on staff and existing volunteers.

While Volunteer grants are made available through the Australian Government, Department of Social Services, these funds cannot be used for wages to undertake volunteer coordination.

Neighbourhood Centres with a dedicated Volunteer Coordinator report greater success in volunteer engagement and retention. They benefit from structured and well-managed volunteer programs, leading to improved efficiency, volunteer satisfaction, and long-term engagement. Centres with Volunteer coordinators also indicate they are able to implement place-based volunteer promotion and referral strategies across their regions.



Chris Mundy
Research and Policy Lead, NCQ

"Together, Neighbourhood Centres in Queensland support over 2.4million visitors a year, with about 2,500 people volunteering through Neighbourhood Centres each week."



Louise Judge
Manager, Chinchilla Community Centre

"If volunteers can't be recruited, retained or managed effectively, the impact is often the loss or reduction of a valuable community service, program or project. We rely heavily on volunteers to deliver vital support."

6 Support rural and remote access to critical Commonwealth services

by providing adequate support to Neighbourhood Centres delivering Department of Social Service products

Recommendations

NCQ and the Neighbourhood Centre sector is seeking a commitment from the Australian Government decision makers from all parties to:

- ☐ Adequately support Neighbourhood Centres providing Centrelink and other Department of Social Service products in their facilities, including adequate financial compensation and priority responses for Neighbourhood Centre agency workers.
- ☐ Funding for Digital Assistance workers in Neighbourhood Centres to support community members to engage with Mygov and associated Department of Social Service applications.

Context

31% of Neighbourhood Centres in Queensland provide Centrelink services to local communities. These services are offered in locations where no physical Centrelink agencies exist, or host specialised outreach workers to service vulnerable populations, such as those experiencing homelessness or affected by disaster events.

Remote Centrelink agencies in Neighbourhood Centres are funded by the Department of Social Services, providing a separate pod in each Centre and a small amount of funding to employ a worker to respond to Centrelink inquiries from community members. Neighbourhood Centre

staff employed to manage Centrelink services can sometimes be subject to abusive and aggressive behaviour by escalated community members. No funding is provided for rental costs for Centrelink services operating from Neighbourhood centres, including Centrelink Outreach workers whose appointments are managed by Neighbourhood Centre reception staff or volunteers.

Additionally, 72% of Neighbourhood Centres in Queensland provide digital assistance to community members who struggle to navigate online portals used for Department of Social Service purposes, in particular MyGov. This work can be intensive, and support for community members can take significant amounts of staff time to fill in applications for pensions, rent assistance, parenting payment, youth allowance or jobseeker payments. These community members often have limited technical or literacy skills, and may include older Australians, people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, and those experiencing mental health issues.



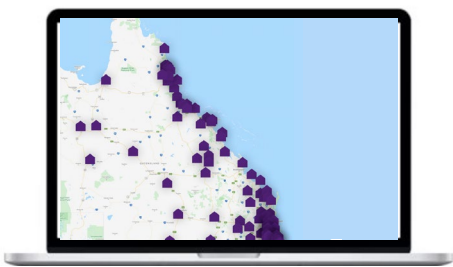
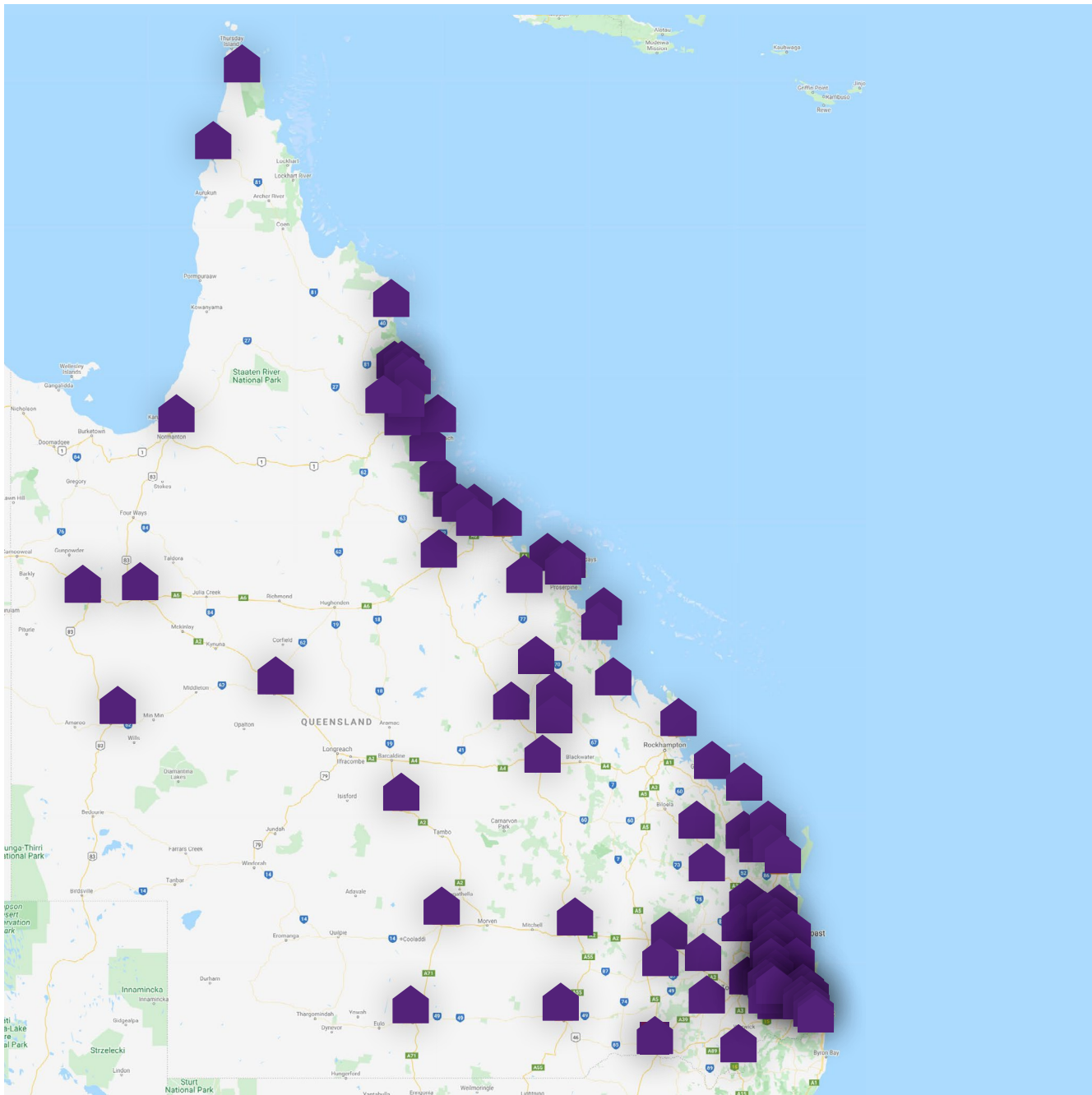
Alana Wahl

Manager of Laidley Neighbourhood Centre

“There’s not a lot of other services that are on the ground that are operating in-person in our region. Our community is slipping through the gaps there because of transport issues and being a regional hub.”



Map of Queensland with location of 155 Neighbourhood Centres identified in 2024.



Find your local Neighbourhood Centre
on our interactive map:
www.ncq.org.au/find-a-centre

How Neighbourhood Centres respond to four important community and election issues

Cost of Living Issues

Neighbourhood Centres are responding to the cost-of-living crisis through the delivery of food relief, material relief, emergency payments, financial resilience, employment programs and work skills training. They are also active in establishing social enterprises which provide opportunities for those with employment barriers. Neighbourhood Centres work with networks of local businesses, schools, government, community organisations and services to build local economies and social capital in ways that depend on Government less and leverage communities more. No Interest Loan Schemes (NILS), budgeting advice, financial counselling, bill relief, insurance matters and energy efficiency education is also offered through many Neighbourhood Centres to assist with cost-of-living issues.

While each Neighbourhood Centre is different, impact reporting demonstrates:

- 82%** offer food relief
- 78%** offer other emergency relief
- 44%** offer financial resilience programs.
- 31%** offer Centrelink Access
- 25%** offer Financial Counselling
- 33%** offer Employment Services
- 32%** are funded by Dept of Social Services
- \$3.31 million** in Social Enterprise Activities

Housing.

Neighbourhood Centres are responding to the housing crisis. With many community members having no housing options, they often go to Neighbourhood Centres for help. This includes homeless families seeking stable accommodation and those that are struggling to maintain tenancies because of increasing rental costs. Centres provide referral pathways to specialised housing services. Through listening to the lived experience of people experiencing housing challenges, they advocate to create change in the housing system and work with other services and businesses to address local expressions of housing crisis. They also provide spaces of social connection, food relief and other support for those experiencing housing issues.

While each Neighbourhood Centre is different, impact reporting demonstrates:

- 38%** offer services to People experiencing Homelessness
- 20%** offer Homestay/Rental Support Services

Family Wellbeing and Community Safety

Current levels of crime are symptoms of deeper issues in families and communities. Neighbourhood Centres offer family support programs for parents and their children experiencing acute stress. They also provide programs such as parenting courses and playgroups to foster healthy child development and create stable family units. Youth programs, including workplace skills development for at-risk young people, are also a feature of many Neighbourhood Centres. Support is also offered to victims of crime in communities. Centres also provide activities in communities that build social connection and cohesion which mitigate crime and identify local problems. Their community development approach means they can co-design local responses to build safer communities.

While each Neighbourhood Centre is different, impact reporting demonstrates:

115 community development projects that improve safety for the community or a cohort within the community.

48% offer social connection activities to young people aged 13-25years

49% offer Playgroups

43% offer Counselling and Psychology

35% offer Self-help Groups

25% offer Family Violence services

24% run Family Support Programs

25% design programs with young people aged 13-25

13% offer vocational education and training to young people aged 13-25years

Health

Neighbourhood Centres improve the health and wellbeing of Australians. One recent survey of a Neighbourhood revealed that 84% of respondents experienced improvements in physical health and 92% experienced improvement in overall quality of life^[2]. The Parliamentary Inquiry into Loneliness and Social isolation in Queensland highlighted the important role that Neighbourhood Centres play in providing connection and belonging. This includes providing social prescribing programs to increase health and wellbeing outcomes. Research suggests that increased social connection and physical activity results in less hospital and psychological presentations and reduces the burden on the health system.

While each Neighbourhood Centre is different, impact reporting demonstrates:

442 community development projects that respond to social isolation and loneliness.

80% offer social connection programs

60% offer health and wellbeing programs

13% are funded by Primary Health Networks

8% run Social Prescribing Programs

¹ Sector Impact Report

² Donald Simpson Centre, KPMG.



Cate Akaveka

CEO of Neighbourhood Centres Queensland (NCQ)

"In a cost-of-living crisis, people need Neighbourhood and Community Centres now more than ever. I welcome meetings with Australian Government decision makers from all parties to discuss our federal policy recommendations."

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