NEIGHBOURHOOD CENTRES QUEENSLAND

Pre-Budget Submission 2026-2027

Priorities for NCQ and Neighbourhood Centres: the local, community-led infrastructure delivering for Queenslanders every day



It’s time to strengthen the innovative, community-led infrastructure that’s delivering for Queenslanders

There are over 155 local, community-led Neighbourhood Centres across Queensland.

Neighbourhood Centres are on the ground, opening their doors and working with their community members to deliver innovative responses to cost-of-living pressures, housing challenges, community safety, family support and disaster resilience.

Evidence shows Neighbourhood Centres offer exceptional return on investment for the Queensland Government. For every $1 invested in Neighbourhood Centre Program funding, Centres deliver $5.46 in community value.

With visitors to Neighbourhood Centres increasing from 1.6 million in 2021 to 2.6 million visitors in 2025, it's time to invest in the sector to respond to increasing community and government demand.

About Neighbourhood Centres Approach

Community problems require community-led solutions. Queensland’s Neighbourhood Centres do more than respond to local issues—they proactively address root causes, shift trajectories, and build the conditions for long-term flourishing. As place-based community anchors, they work to strengthen families, prevent harm, support community members doing it tough and create opportunities for participation and belonging.

More than 155 Centres operate across the state, with 130 funded by the Queensland Government and many others unfunded. Centres support Queenslanders facing cost-of-living pressures, housing stress, natural disasters, family and youth issues, violence and health system strain, while also generating local solutions that strengthen community resilience. But Neighbourhood Centres aren’t just reactive to challenges; they’re proactive in generating opportunities and preventing issues before they arise. An estimated 2.6 million visitors engaged with Centres in 2025, producing $201.8 million in community value.

About Neighbourhood Centres Queensland (NCQ)

> See pages 21 for more information

Neighbourhood Centres are already delivering on Government Commitments

The Queensland Government has committed to supporting families and children, increasing economic participation, lowering living costs, responding to the housing crisis, revitalising health services and making communities safer. Neighbourhood Centres are already delivering against these priorities every day, across metropolitan, regional, rural and remote Queensland. As place-based, community-led infrastructure, Centres provide early intervention, prevention and connection at scale — often before people reach crisis points that place pressure on health, housing and justice systems.

> See pages 18 to 20 for evidence and detail.

We're seeking a commitment

To meet growing demand and support the Queensland Government’s’ agenda, NCQ and the Neighbourhood Centre sector are seeking a commitment from Queensland Government for an increased investment. This commitment would position Neighbourhood Centres as essential partners in building safer, stronger, and more connected communities. With increased investment, Queensland communities can flourish.

IN SUMMARY

Budget Recommendations from NCQ and Neighbourhood Centres

1. **Provide early intervention support to community members facing complex cost of living, housing, domestic violence and mental health issues**
   by expanding the Community Connect Worker Program from 33 Neighbourhood Centres to all 130-state funded Centres

2. **Develop the workforce and sector to respond to increasing community and government demand**
   by investing in a statewide workforce development worker to provide professional development and training through the peak body, NCQ

3. **Help Queensland communities get ready for, respond to, and bounce back from compounding disasters**
   by investing in a statewide strategic disaster resilience worker through the peak body, NCQ, and seek permanent disaster funding for Neighbourhood Centres

4. **Deliver more Neighbourhood Centres for the growing number of Queenslanders**
   by mapping place-based community-led infrastructure

5. **Revitalise volunteering, civic participation and community connection opportunities in regional, remote and metropolitan Queensland**
   by investing in volunteer coordination workers in Neighbourhood Centres

6. **Address loneliness and social isolation while improving physical and mental health outcomes**
   by advancing social prescribing initiatives through Neighbourhood Centres

SUMMARY OF THE 2025 FINANCIAL YEAR

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

2,126
Staff Members
Working a total of 2,598,544 hours over the year

2,541
Volunteers each week
Working a total of 655,300 hours over the year. Worth over $33.8 million

$284,098
Median Funding Per Centre*
Calculation based only on the *128 Centres who receive NC Program funding

922
Funding Applications
to maintain operations. Worth over $16.27 million

1,637
Community Projects Run
Over the year, and supported 919 Community Projects run by others

Making an Impact

For every **$1** invested by the Queensland Government, the sector produced **$5.46** in Community Value.

Food Relief
1,721tne
Equating to $74.37 million in Community Value

Community Meals
232,956
Equating to $2.33 million in Community Value

Non-Food Emergency Relief
$5.72m
Equating to $5.72 million in Community Value

Programmed Activity Participants
1,471,900
Equating to $53.95 million in Community Value

Referrals to Other Services
250,550
In one year alone

Social Enterprises
$3.84m
Worth of income, as well as $10.17 million income from fee-for-service activities

Reference: Neighbourhood Centres Queensland 2025 Sector Impact Report. Neighbourhood Centres Queensland. To download the full report, visit ncq.org.au.

NEIGHBOURHOOD CENTRES QUEENSLAND

ncq.org.au

Recommendation 1

Overview

Provide early intervention support to community members facing complex cost of living, housing, domestic violence and mental health issues by expanding the Community Connect Worker Program from 33 Neighbourhood Centres to all 130-state funded Centres

Investment	$15.52 million per year for an extra 97 Community Connect Workers (CCW) in Neighbourhood Centres $200,000 per year for 5 years to Neighbourhood Centres Queensland (NCQ) supporting orientation and a community of practice $1,270,000 per year in permanent Emergency Relief
Impact	Individuals and families in 130 Queensland communities, including those in regional and rural areas, have access to face to face support for cost of living, housing, domestic violence and health issues
Delivers on Government Priority Focus Areas	✓ Delivering for Regional and Rural communities ✓ Strengthening families and communities ✓ Increasing economic participation and lowering cost of living ✓ Responding to the housing crisis ✓ Revitalising health outcomes ✓ Making communities safer

Detail

Background

At present, funding for Community Connect Workers is limited to 33 Neighbourhood Centre locations in Queensland. They provide support to individuals and families who present with complex needs, including financial hardship, homelessness, domestic and family violence, trauma, chronic health issues, crime or substance abuse. They help link people to community and specialist support services through referrals and tailored support. Support may also include linking people who experience loneliness and social isolation with well-being groups and community connections, improving their physical and mental wellbeing, including older Queenslanders.

The Community Connect Worker program has been operating since 2017. It was successfully trialled in 12 locations, and expanded to 20 further sites in 2022. One Centre was added as an election commitment in 2025. In FY 2024-25,

6672 service users were supported by Community Connect Workers. Of these users, 56% were individuals and 44% consisted of family units. A total of 19,243 referrals were made from the program to a range of specialised services.

All three of the Preventative Peaks Alliance workshops facilitated in 2025 (Townsville, Logan and Toowoomba) identified Community Connect Workers as being key for early intervention support.

Problem

- Neighbourhood Centres face significant increasing demand, with visitor numbers increasing significantly from 1.6million to 2.6 million per year between 2019 and 2025.
- Community Connect Workers are only allocated in 33 locations for 130 funded Neighbourhood Centres, meaning many communities miss out on vital support.
- There is significant demand in all Centre locations for early intervention and support for increasing numbers of community members presenting with complex needs.
- Neighbourhood Centres are not currently funded to triage emergency relief distribution or provide intensive support to community members with complex issues.
- Focused support for community members in crisis reduces the Centre's capacity to run programs, social groups and community development activities.
- Community Connect Workers have requested a community of practice from NCQ, particularly via small regional groups.
- $10,000 State Emergency Relief through all funded Neighbourhood Centres is only funded until June 2026.

Solution

Provide Community Connect Workers to all funded Neighbourhood Centre locations. The Community Connect Initiative guidelines were revised in 2023[1] and this very successful program is ready to be rolled out further. A dedicated Workforce Capability position with NCQ to facilitate an ongoing community of practice for Community Connect Workers would support the expansion of the program and provide opportunities to strengthen practice and enhance service systems.

Outcomes

- An estimated 24,768 service users who are experiencing crisis will be supported by 130 Community Connect Workers.
- More than a link and refer program, Community Connect Workers will support individuals and families to form meaningful connections.
- Individual Neighbourhood Centres able to utilise the Community Connect Worker position to best meet the needs of local communities, e.g. incorporating Emergency Relief funding.
- Greater capacity for Neighbourhood Centres to respond to financial hardship, homelessness, domestic and family violence, trauma, youth crime, chronic health issues, elder abuse or substance abuse.
- Designated Community Connect Workers enable other Neighbourhood Centre staff to concentrate on community building and programs to create positive neighbourhoods.
- Community Connect Workers are supported via a community of practice facilitated by NCQ.
- Early intervention for individuals and families provided through an increased understanding of complex needs.
- Emergency Relief delivered as part of wrap around services - first point of contact for early intervention and prevention initiatives to community members.

[1] https://www.business.qld.gov.au/industries/service-industries-professionals/service-industries/community-services/neighbourhood-centres-providers

Recommendation 2

Overview

Develop the workforce and sector to respond to increasing community and government demand by investing in a statewide workforce development worker to provide professional development and training through the peak body, NCQ.

Investment	$200,000 per year for five years to Neighbourhood Centres Queensland for a Workforce Capability position including on-costs and training brokerage
Impact	A strong Neighbourhood Centre workforce, with 2129 staff, 2521 volunteers and 879 board members supported and upskilled with professional development and training to respond to and prevent escalating social challenges
Delivers on Government Priority Focus Areas	✓ Delivering for Regional and Rural communities ✓ Strengthening families and communities ✓ Increasing economic participation and lowering cost of living ✓ Responding to the housing crisis ✓ Revitalising health outcomes ✓ Making communities safer ✓ Building social capital

Detail

Background

Neighbourhood Centres are experiencing increasing complexity in the needs they respond to, including cost-of-living pressures, housing stress, community safety concerns, family wellbeing issues, and growing mental and physical health challenges. Centres increasingly manage **critical incidents, safety risks, complex presentations, and heightened community distress**, requiring stronger and more consistent workforce capability across the state.

The sector comprises **2129 staff, 2,521 volunteers, and 879 board members**, many of whom rely on ad-hoc or locally sourced training. A dedicated learning and development function is required to build a **cohesive, skilled and prevention-oriented workforce** capable of delivering high-quality, place-based responses, and strengthen community governance models.

In 2025, the peak body Neighbourhood Centres Queensland delivered two micro-credentials on *Introduction to Neighbourhood Centres*, and an *Overview of Community Development Neighbourhood Centres* that received over 820 enrolment requests from the sector, demonstrating the effectiveness of online approaches alongside in-person training.

Problem

- Neighbourhood Centres are responding to increasingly complex social issues and safety incidents.
- Rural and regional Neighbourhood Centres are disadvantaged by the lack of locally available training options and the high cost of travel to participate in metropolitan training.
- There has been an increase of 300 staff members in the sector over the past year.
- 83% of the sector are made up of women. The gender pay gap for women in Qld is 12.6%[2].
- Neighbourhood Centres Queensland is not funded to offer professional development, despite being trusted by the sector and well-positioned to.
- NCQ's first Micro-Credential Project was highly successful and with continuing demand. However, with project funding ending in October 2025, continued support for the project is financially impossible.
- The two micro-credentials are currently hosted on Central Queensland University's learning platform, and this will cease in June 2026.

Solution

Increase Neighbourhood Centres Queensland funding to offer professional development and workforce capacity building opportunities to the sector. Funding workforce development provides a sustainable solution: it builds the skills, confidence and resilience of practitioners; improves service quality and safety; supports staff retention in a sector experiencing high burnout and turnover; and ensures Centres can continue delivering place-based, community-led responses aligned with contemporary best practice. Investment in sector training will strengthen community-based responses by lifting the capacity of Neighbourhood Centres to deliver safe, effective, preventative and community-led services, ultimately increasing social impact and reducing downstream pressure on housing, health, justice and family support systems.

Outcome

- Place-based targeted training provided, in consultation with regional Neighbourhood Centre networks, tailored to local community contexts.
- Preventative and early intervention community development practice strengthened, enabling Centres to address issues before they escalate.
- Capability to manage critical incidents, de-escalation, trauma-informed support and safe service environments built.
- Enhanced community-led governance, improving board capability, compliance and accountability, specifically tailored to the Neighbourhood Centre sector.
- Consistent, sector-wide approaches to peer support, volunteer coordination, and community-led responses.
- Centres are supported to shift from a defensive crisis response to a more proactive approach—building solutions, local resilience and long-term community capacity.

[2] https://www.publications.qld.gov.au/dataset/womens-economic-security-wellbeing-report-2025

Recommendation 3

Overview

Help Queensland communities get ready for, respond to, and bounce back from compounding disasters by investing in a statewide strategic disaster resilience worker through the peak body, NCQ, and seek permanent disaster funding for Neighbourhood Centres

Investment	$200,000 NCQ Disaster Worker per year for 5 years including travel costs Explore models for disaster workers in Neighbourhood Centres affected by compounding events
Impact	150+ Neighbourhood Centres supported to help 150+ Queensland Communities get ready for, respond to and bounce back from disasters
Delivers on Government Priority Focus Areas	✓ Delivering for Regional and Rural communities ✓ Strengthening families and communities ✓ Building social capital

Detail

Background

Queensland is the most disaster affected state in Australia and local Neighbourhood Centres have long been central to supporting communities and families through these events. Neighbourhood Centres are embedded in communities before, during and after disasters, providing long-term assistance to families and community members with practical support around housing damage, emergency grants, insurance challenges, emergency relief, as well as psychosocial support. This is particularly the case in rural and remote regions where Neighbourhood Centres are often the primary and most trusted point of contact for community members. This prompted the development of NCQ's *Queensland Neighbourhood Centres Strategy for Disaster Resilience 2023-2026*[1] - recognised internationally for its place-based community-led approach to disaster preparation, response and recovery.

During the 2024-2025 disaster season, 73 of Queensland's 77 Local Government Areas were activated in response to disaster events. Across this broad geographical area of impact, Centres responded quickly and flexibly, offering both formal and informal support to their communities. For the first time, 50% of the 30 agencies Community Recovery partnered with were Neighbourhood Centres. This demonstrates that Neighbourhood Centres are becoming an essential element of disaster management and justifies the urgent need to invest in place-based social infrastructure.

As more Centres are experiencing compounding effects of disasters and the expectations from community to respond, they require increased capacity to implement Strategy led by NCQ. However, **NCQ does not receive any ongoing funding to support the sector in this work** and is currently relying on short term event-specific project funding.

Problem

- NCQ has no ongoing funding to support disaster-related sector development.
- The Queensland Neighbourhood Centres Strategy for Disaster Resilience 2023–2026 is due for review and renewal in 2026.
- Short-term, event-specific funding limits NCQ's and the sector's ability to provide the flexible support needed to build sector capacity to respond to disasters, strengthen community resilience, and support long-term community recovery.
- A large proportion of Neighbourhood Centres are responding to floods, storms, cyclones and bushfires, often experiencing compounding events over multiple years.
- Disasters continue to have the greatest impact on people with pre-existing vulnerabilities, and Centres are seeing a growing number of community members needing support.
- Disaster preparedness is unfunded within the Neighbourhood Centre sector.
- The Resilience Readiness Scorecard for community groups, organisations and services has received short term funding that will end in July 2026.
- Worker burnout during events with no locum workforce arrangements.

Solution

Fund a Disaster Resilience Lead role with NCQ, which will drive the implementation of the *Queensland Neighbourhood Centres Strategy for Disaster Resilience 2023–2026* (the Strategy). This role will focus on delivering the Strategy's four strategic pillars:

1. Raise awareness and recognition of the role, value and capacity of Neighbourhood Centres in the disaster management system supporting disaster-affected communities.

2. Strengthen relationships towards greater collaboration of Neighbourhood Centres within the disaster management sector, and relationships towards greater inclusion of community members in all stages of disasters.

3. Influence policy and shape funding models to enhance funding arrangements to Neighbourhood Centres for place-based and community-led disaster recovery and resilience.

4. Foster and strengthen place-based learning and development to support disaster-affected communities through the complexities and compounding nature of disasters.

Outcomes

- 150+ Neighbourhood Centres supported to strengthen disaster preparedness, response and recovery.
- *Queensland Neighbourhood Centres Strategy for Disaster Resilience 2023-26* will be reviewed and renewed post 2026.
- Provide coordinated sector support, capacity-building, and advocacy to strengthen the sector's role in state-level disaster resilience planning and policy influence.
- Support local integration of Neighbourhood Centres within disaster management arrangements at the community level.
- Facilitate the establishment of regional and local networks to enhance coordination between Neighbourhood Centres and partner organisations - a need strongly voiced by Centres due to limited current resourcing. Co-develop systems for shared learnings and resources between regions. co-developing systems.
- Faster, more effective community recovery, reducing long-term psychosocial and economic impacts.
- Investigation of a locum workforce pool to maintain service continuity and prevent staff burnout during disaster events.
- Ongoing Disaster Resilience Ready Scorecard program to build organisational readiness across the sector.
- Stronger, more cohesive sector capability, with planning extended to drought, heatwaves and slow-onset events and better data to inform government decision-making.
- Advance the sector's need for Disaster Resilience workers in Neighbourhood Centre locations affected by compounding disasters.

Recommendation 4

Overview

Deliver more Neighbourhood Centres for the growing number of Queenslanders by mapping place-based community-led infrastructure

Investment	$150,000 One-Year Project to NCQ
Impact	More Neighbourhood Centres to proactively address and prevent escalating social issues in their communities
Delivers on Government Priority Focus Areas	✓ Delivering for Regional and Rural communities ✓ Strengthening families and communities ✓ Increasing economic participation and lowering cost of living ✓ Responding to the housing crisis ✓ Making communities safer ✓ Building social capital

Detail

Background

The number, distribution and capacity of unfunded Neighbourhood Centres in Queensland is currently unknown, with the last statewide mapping undertaken in 1999. NCQ is aware of at least 27 Centres operating without Queensland Government support—many for more than 25 years—often as small, community-governed organisations in rural and regional areas using State or Local Government facilities without operational funding. Additionally, First Nations–controlled Centres are operating in various locations but are not formally recorded.

Without contemporary mapping, the sector cannot fully utilise existing social infrastructure for prevention, early intervention and disaster resilience. The size, scope and capability of unfunded Centres remain unclear, limiting efforts to avoid duplication, target high-need locations, support upskilling, strengthen local networks and align funding to community demand. Neighbourhood Centres provide essential social infrastructure that supports participation, connection and early support, and mapping unfunded Centres would enhance Queensland's ability to respond to cost-of-living pressures, housing stress, youth needs,and domestic and family violence.

The Parliamentary Inquiry into Loneliness and Social Isolation (2021) recommended a consistent statewide approach to mapping Neighbourhood and Community Centre services to support place-based responses (Recommendation 13).

In 2025, Queensland had significantly less funded Centres per capita than South Australia, Western Australia, Victoria, and Tasmania.

(NSW has different funding arrangements).



Problem

- Lower number of funded NC's per capita than VIC, SA, WA and Tas. NSW has different funding arrangements.
- The total number of Neighbourhood Centres in Qld is unknown, resulting in a social infrastructure knowledge deficit for prevention, early intervention and disaster resilience.
- Known unfunded Centres cannot fully meet increasing community needs, including disaster recovery, cost of living, housing, youth crime, domestic and family violence.
- Rural, regional, and First Nations areas are most impacted.
- There is no mechanism for Neighbourhood Centre initiative funding outside of existing Department procurement processes.
- Neighbourhood and community centre service mapping is supported by Recommendation 13 of Parliamentary Inquiry into Loneliness and Social Isolation but has not been progressed.
- Lack of funding creates a wage gap, affecting the ability to retain staff, ensure safety, and sustain quality services (Productivity Commission, 2010: XXIV)[3].

Solution

An NCQ project worker will undertake a 12-month mapping process to identify unfunded Neighbourhood Centres and assess assets, gaps and capacity across the state. Each Centre will be evaluated for alignment with the Queensland Government's Neighbourhood Centres Initiative, including its level of community embedding, governance structure and ability to operate from a central and accessible neighbourhood building.

The project will produce a detailed report for the Department of Families, Seniors, Disability Services and Child Safety. This report will inform decisions about potential new funding locations, scaled funding models, and philanthropic investment opportunities for early intervention and prevention, and priority sites for disaster preparedness and recovery. This work will also complement current Neighbourhood Centre evaluation work being conducted by the Queensland Government Statisticians Office.

Outcomes

- Statewide identification of unfunded Neighbourhood Centres, including their location, scope, governance and capacity for activation.
- Delivery of a detailed report to the Queensland Government to inform decisions on future funding allocations and priority locations for new Neighbourhood Centres.
- Improved understanding of unfunded and First Nations–controlled Centres, supporting disaster preparedness, recovery planning, and consideration of future investment or alternative funding models.
- Enhanced local responses to cost-of-living pressures, housing stress, early intervention, youth needs, family support, and domestic and family violence through better utilisation of existing social infrastructure.
- Increased community-led solutions and strengthened volunteer participation, improving local capability and resilience.
- Evidence to support trial funding models—for example, small-scale operational funding (e.g. $100,000 per year) for Centres in smaller or high-need communities.
- Publishing of a "How to Start a Neighbourhood Centre Toolkit" for community-led start-ups..
- Mapping physical infrastructure and the feasibility of solar and batteries retrofits for disaster responses during power outages.
- Greater knowledge of cohort focused Neighbourhood Centres that support older people, cultural groups, youth, etc.

[3] Productivity Commission (2010) Contribution of the Not-for-Profit Sector. Research Report, Canberra: Productivity Commission, p. xxiv.

Recommendation 5

Overview

Revitalise volunteering, civic participation and community connection opportunities in regional, remote and metropolitan Queensland by investing in Volunteer Coordination Workers in Neighbourhood Centres

Investment	$1.5million - trial part time Volunteer Coordinators in 15 Neighbourhood Centre locations (2 days per week over 2 years)
Impact	Increased recruitment, management and retention of volunteers across 15 communities, improving social connection, workforce pathways and social impact.
Delivers on Government Priority Focus Areas	✓ Delivering for Regional and Rural communities ✓ Strengthening families and communities ✓ Increasing economic participation and lowering cost of living ✓ Revitalising health outcomes ✓ Building social capital

Detail

Background

Neighbourhood Centres are uniquely placed to mobilise and sustain Queensland's volunteer workforce because they operate as trusted, accessible hubs embedded within local communities. With more than 2,521 volunteers contributing over 650,500 hours each year, Neighbourhood Centres rely on volunteers to deliver core services—from food relief and community programs to administration, events, transport, and governance. As highlighted in NCQ's Parliamentary Inquiry submission, volunteers are drawn to Neighbourhood Centres because they offer a welcoming, community-led environment where contributions are valued and connected to meaningful local outcomes. This strong relational foundation enables high volunteer retention and provides pathways to increased wellbeing, skills development and social participation. Investing in Neighbourhood Centres therefore strengthens a critical piece of Queensland's social infrastructure, ensuring that volunteers can continue to underpin essential services and enhance resilience across metropolitan, regional, rural and remote communities.

However, the sector has experienced a decrease of 200 volunteers across the sector over the past year as volunteering hours have increased. Some locations, particularly in rural and remote areas struggle to recruit any volunteers to support Neighbourhood Centre operations. 68% of Neighbourhood Centres do not have a designated Volunteer Coordinator, meaning volunteer management is often absorbed into general staff duties. Among Centres that *do* have a Coordinator, the role is frequently part-time or combined with other responsibilities—such as events, administration, HR, or broader community development work. Some Centres operate dedicated **volunteer hubs**, with specific personnel assigned to coordinate volunteer involvement.

Problem

- Decrease in volunteers, increase in volunteer hours mean that less volunteers are doing more work risking volunteer burnout.
- Declining volunteer availability, especially in small and rural communities where the pool of potential volunteers is limited.
- Cost-of-living pressures, including fuel costs, make volunteering financially difficult for many people.
- Ageing volunteer base, with few younger volunteers stepping into long-term roles.
- Lack of a dedicated Volunteer Coordinator in 68% Centres, reducing capacity for structured recruitment and support.
- A Neighbourhood and Care Army Connect Workers Initiative was launched at 15 Neighbourhood Centres in 2022, however this funding was directed to a third party. NCQ recommends that the sector is directly funded for this initiative.

Solution

Fund Volunteer Coordination through Neighbourhood Centres in 15 communities that are experiencing volunteer challenges. These Coordinators will support volunteer recruitment and retention strategies across their local communities. Centres with a dedicated volunteer coordinator consistently report higher volunteer retention supported through regular contact, relationship-building and structured oversight; improved recruitment processes driven by clearer communication and more proactive engagement; and stronger supervision and support, including better training, development pathways and recognition for volunteers. The support of place-based volunteer coordination and recruitment models are supported by the Parliamentary Inquiry into Volunteering recommendations and Queensland Government's feasibility study into Social Prescribing.

Outcomes

- Stronger volunteer recruitment and retention in low volunteer communities, supported by consistent supervision and relationship-building.
- Increased service capacity, enabling more programs, activities and community supports to operate reliably.
- Improved training, induction and compliance, ensuring volunteers are well-prepared and roles are delivered safely.
- Reduced workload for Centre staff, allowing managers and practitioners to focus on core service delivery.
- Enhanced community participation and pathways to employment, through structured, supported volunteer roles.
- Greater community resilience, with a well-coordinated volunteer base ready to respond to local needs and emergencies.
- Volunteer Coordinators reduce workload on managers and boards by taking responsibility for volunteer systems, compliance, induction and supervision.
- 100 hours total of volunteering in just one Neighbourhood Centre equates to $271,908 in annual value. If achieved across 15 locations, this results in over $4million in economic value per year
- Explore regional volunteer coordination models to be rolled out further across the sector.

Recommendation 6

Overview

Address loneliness and social isolation while improving physical and mental health outcomes by advancing Social Prescribing initiatives through Neighbourhood Centres

Investment	$5.4million - extend youth social prescribing trial in 10 locations for 2 years $540,000 per year - extend other social prescribing programs in 3 locations
Impact	Increased health and wellbeing for Queenslanders through non-clinical interventions
Delivers on Government Priority Focus Areas	✓ Delivering for Regional and Rural communities ✓ Strengthening families and communities ✓ Increasing economic participation and lowering cost of living ✓ Revitalising health outcomes ✓ Making communities safer ✓ Building social capital

Detail

Background

Social Prescribing is a new approach to health intervention that involves medical staff prescribing social, physical, arts and nature-based activities to someone experiencing health issues. Neighbourhood Centres are the most effective platform for delivering social prescribing in Queensland because they are trusted, place-based community hubs with deep local relationships and a proven track record of connecting people to non-clinical supports. The Social Prescribing Feasibility Study identifies that Queensland's network of 129 Neighbourhood Centres already performs many core social prescribing functions—community connection, volunteer mobilisation, accessible activities, and low-barrier early support—yet this work remains under-recognised and inconsistently resourced. Strengthening Neighbourhood Centres with dedicated link workers, volunteer coordination and brokerage funds directly addresses system gaps and leverages existing infrastructure, providing a scalable, preventative response to social isolation and loneliness. By investing in Neighbourhood Centres as the backbone of a statewide social prescribing system, government can achieve measurable improvements in wellbeing, reduce long-term demand on health and social services, and ensure place-based responses that reflect local needs and strengths.

Formal Social Prescribing programs are being trialled in 13 Neighbourhood Centre locations, including 10 locations that have a specific focus on children and young people. Over 325 people were engaged in the youth trial in July-September 2025, with a third having persistent health issues or disabilities. This work is part of advancing Recommendation 14f of the Parliamentary Inquiry into Loneliness and Social Isolation to "*Investigate and analyse the research related to the effectiveness of a social prescribing model of addressing social isolation"* in Queensland through link workers.

Problem

- Formal Social Prescribing programs are currently operating in only 13 Neighbourhood Centres on a short-term basis.
- The health system remains skewed towards costly acute health responses, undermining the significant benefits that prevention, early intervention and community-based models can deliver.
- There is an apparent disconnection between the health and community services sector.
- Queenslanders are not receiving low-cost interventions that can improve their quality of life.
- Decreased social connections for older community members leading to poor health outcomes and possibility of elder abuse.

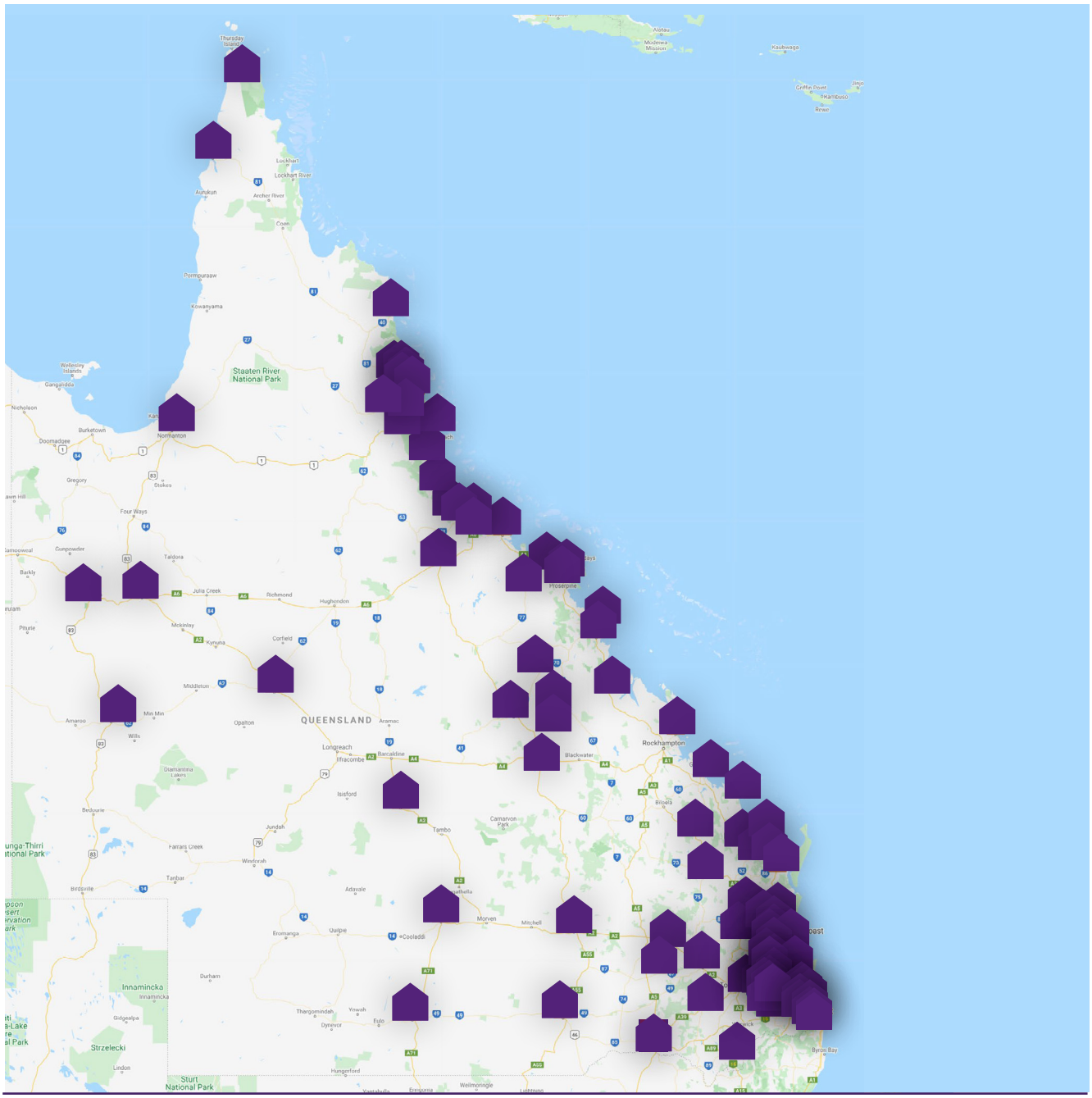
Solution

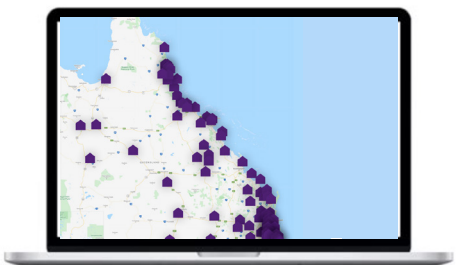
Advance Social Prescribing programs through Neighbourhood Centres to address social isolation and loneliness, mental health and physical health issues. Essential to link worker programs are brokerage and resource support for the groups that individuals are being referred into, to cover program costs, tuition fees and facilitation to start new groups.

Outcomes

- Improved mental health, emotional wellbeing and healthier lifestyles through increased physical and social activity.
- Earlier access to supports and prevention of escalation, reducing avoidable GP and hospital presentations and associated costs.
- Reduced loneliness and stronger community connection, with measurable gains in confidence, wellbeing and quality of life.
- Increased participation in community activities, volunteering, civic engagement and the development of new community-led groups.
- More efficient service navigation and smoother referral pathways, with Link Workers helping people access the right supports at the right time.
- Reduction of isolated older community members vulnerable to elder abuse.
- Enhanced integration between health, community and social services, delivering coordinated care and generating strong economic value, with Social Return on Investment ranging from $2 to $18.20 depending on the model.

Map of Queensland with location of 155 Neighbourhood Centres identified in 2025





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

Neighbourhood Centres are delivering for Queenslanders

The Queensland Government has committed to supporting families and children, increasing economic participation, lowering living costs, responding to the housing crisis, revitalising health services and making communities safer.

Neighbourhood Centres are already delivering against these priorities every day, across metropolitan, regional, rural and remote Queensland. As place-based, community-led infrastructure, Centres provide early intervention, prevention and connection at scale — often before people reach crisis points that place pressure on health, housing and justice systems.

Delivering across regional, rural and remote Queensland

Neighbourhood Centres are particularly critical in non-metropolitan areas where service access is limited:

93 Centres located in rural, regional and remote Queensland

63 Centres serving communities with populations under 10,000

42 Centres located in regional communities with populations above 10,000

In many locations, Neighbourhood Centres are the only place-based, community-led social infrastructure available.

Strengthening families and communities .

Neighbourhood Centres play a central role in supporting families, children and young people through prevention, early intervention and community connection:

78 Centres offer playgroups supporting early childhood development

87 Centres deliver parenting courses and family support groups

79 Centres provide counselling or psychology services

47 Centres deliver Child Safety–funded family support services

16 Centres provide maternal health checks and immunisations

48 Centres offer youth services

20 Centres provide individual tutoring support

140 Centres provide referral services, supporting navigation of complex service systems

76 Centres offer libraries or book-swap services

141 Centres host community events, celebrations and festivals, attracting 230,736 participants and supported by 6,631 volunteers

These services strengthen families, reduce isolation, support children's development and build community connection—key protective factors

Increasing economic participation and lowering cost of living

Neighbourhood Centres provide practical, accessible supports that help Queenslanders manage financial stress, access services and build pathways to employment:

51 Centres operate social enterprises

40 Centres provide employment services

42 Centres support training and employment pathways

57 Centres offer résumé and job-readiness support

107 Centres provide digital assistance

50 Centres operate as Centrelink agency or access points

46,452 hours per year spent supporting access to online government services

45 Centres provide financial counselling

91 Centres deliver financial resilience programs

135 Centres provide food relief

129 Centres offer material relief

These supports reduce immediate financial hardship while improving longer-term economic participation and digital inclusion.

Responding to the housing crisis

Neighbourhood Centres are frontline responders to housing stress and homelessness, particularly in regional and rural communities:

36 Centres provide housing, rental or homestay support

47 Centres deliver homelessness services

$201,672 per year provided in tents, swags and sleeping bags to people experiencing homelessness

Centres support early intervention, crisis response and system navigation, reducing pressure on emergency accommodation and homelessness services.

Revitalising health outcomes

Neighbourhood Centres improve physical and mental health through prevention, connection and non-clinical interventions:

122 Centres provide health and exercise groups

13 Centres deliver formal social prescribing programs

47 Centres offer self-help and peer support groups

26 Centres provide home services and in-home support

$53.9 million in improved quality-of-life outcomes generated through social connection initiatives

These community-based approaches improve wellbeing, reduce loneliness and help prevent avoidable demand on acute health services.

Making communities safer

Neighbourhood Centres contribute to safer communities through prevention, early intervention and trusted local presence:

73 Centres deliver community safety programs

43 Centres provide domestic and family violence support

Centres act as accessible, non-stigmatising entry points for people experiencing risk, helping to de-escalate issues before they reach crisis.

Building social capital and community resilience

Neighbourhood Centres are hubs of participation, collaboration and local leadership:

76 Centres auspice other community organisations

17 Centres operate community transport schemes

102 Centres deliver emergency preparedness and disaster resilience activities

48 Centres provide grant-writing support

1,856 community partnerships supported per month

1,639 projects led by the sector and

919 projects supported

922 funding applications generating an additional $16.2 million for communities

104 Centres provide public computer and internet access

This social infrastructure underpins volunteering, civic participation and disaster resilience across Queensland.

About the peak body, Neighbourhood Centres Queensland (NCQ)

With over 150 Neighbourhood Centres across the state, our sector represents the largest communityled infrastructure in Queensland. NCQ is here to grow our collective impact by increasing the resourcing, recognition, and relationships of Neighbourhood and Community Centres at the local, state, and national level. We collaborate with our members, partners and government to measure impact and build sector capacity for long-term community and social resilience.

NCQ has supported Neighbourhood Centres since the 1990s, strengthening community development, family support, and place-based practice across metropolitan, regional, rural and remote communities, including First Nations communities. NCQ coordinates 12 regional networks that meet regularly for peer learning, problem-solving and collaborative local strategies, providing NCQ with real-time grassroots intelligence on emerging needs and system pressures. The sector is growing rapidly as governments and service organisations increasingly recognise that place-based, community-led approaches are among the most effective ways to address complex social issues and build local resilience.

Neighbourhood Centres Queensland's Year in Numbers for FY 2025

As the the peak body for Neighbourhood Centres in Queensland, delivered for our sector.

5.8



Staff Members Median (FTE)

5.8 Median FTE (Full Time Equivalent) staff in FY 2025, with 9 people in the team as of June 2025

7

Board Members

As of June 2025

Funding

$2,039,146



Total Income

Including $591,199 in peak body funding, $1,303,925 in project funding, and $12,304 in membership fees.

$1,032,858



Funds directed to Neighbourhood Centres

Through projects lead by NCQ

Projects and initiatives delivered

7



Funded statewide projects delivered by NCQ

On top of projects delivered as part of peak body funding

17



Statewide projects & initiatives lead by NCQ

These were unfunded

27



Statewide projects & initiatives supported

These were unfunded

Membership connection

155



Neighbourhood Centres

Of which 128 receive Neighbourhood Centre Program funding and 27 do not

63



Centres visited by staff

Including 30 Federal MPs and 12 Senators based in Queensland

11



Regional networks operating

With NCQ staff attending 39 network meetings

Political connection

93



State MPs contacted

With 8 State MPs met with

42



30 Qld-based Federal MPs & 12 Senators Contacted

135



Politicians viewed Sector Impact Summaries

Government connection

7



Submissions to Government

39



Meetings with Department of Families, Seniors, Disability Services and Child Safety

5



Government agencies collaborated with

As well as 8 agencies connected with.


BARINGA
COMMUNITY
CENTRE


BOWEN
COMMUNITY
CENTRE


NEW FARM NEIGHBOUR


CHILDERS
NEIGHBOURHOOD
CENTRE




MAKE
RENTING
FAIR
Qstars


Gin Gin
Community Hub








WEST END
COMMUNITY
Free Community
BBQ breakfast


North Townsville Community Hub
52 Palm Drive Deeragun
Information
Playgroup
Top Notch Op Shop
Emergency & Disaster Support
Meeting Place
Charity Donations
A place for everybody


BRILLA BRILLA
COMMUNITY
CENTRE


RYBOROUGH
HBOURHOOD CENTRE


Maleny Neighbourhood


I ♥ Surfetin Neighbourhood Centre
because... it connects locals and services and the staff are super friendly and helpful ♡




liveBetter
community services
Monto Neighbourhood Centre
07 4994 2508
qld.livebetter.org.au


SHERWOOD NEIGHBO OD CENT
Community Support Services
3379 6963
• Support, Education and A
• Hall Hire • Room & Offic
• Pottery Studio • Volunt


OLEY COMMUNITY CENTRE


Rollingstone


Cooktown



Cate Akaveka
CEO of Neighbourhood Centres Queensland (NCQ)

"People need Neighbourhood and Community Centres now more than ever. I welcome meetings with Queensland Government decision makers from all parties to discuss our pre-budget submission and recommendations."

For further information contact:

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NEIGHBOURHOOD CENTRES QUEENSLAND