

2024 Queensland State Election 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 150 local, community-led Neighbourhood Centres across Queensland.

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.

But with **2.4 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.

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

In the lead up to the Queensland State Election on 26 October, NCQ and Neighbourhood Centres are calling on Queensland 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 150 Neighbourhood Centres, and delivering access to Neighbourhood Centres for every Queensland.

Our six key priorities for the 2024 Queensland election include:

1

Build more vibrant, inclusive and supported communities

by continuing implementation of the *Shared Vision for Neighbourhood Centres* and current funding agreements

2

Deliver a Neighbourhood Centre for every Queensland

by funding a minimum of 20 additional Neighbourhood Centres across the state

3

Support community members with complex cost of living issues, housing pressures, domestic violence and mental health issues

by expanding the Community Connect Worker program from 32 Neighbourhood Centres to 129 Centres

4

Ensure relief is available to people in crisis facing cost-of-living emergencies

by making State Flexible Emergency Relief funding permanently available for funded Neighbourhood Centres to distribute

5

Support adaptation and growth of existing Neighbourhood Centres

by providing a once-off grant to Neighbourhood Centres to adopt the recent changes arising from the *Shared Vision for Neighbourhood Centres*

6

Develop the workforce and sector to respond to increasing community and government demand

by investing in the peak body, Neighbourhood Centres Queensland (NCQ), to support sector development

Together, Neighbourhood Centres in Queensland supported over

2.4 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

1,547



Staff Members

Working a total of 1.64million hours over the year

2,454



Volunteers each week

Working a total of 727,850 hours over the year. Worth over \$37.6m

\$258,680



Median Funding Per Centre*

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

805



Funding Applications

to maintain operations

1,598



Community Projects Run

Over the year, and supported 917 Community Projects run by others

Making an Impact

For every **\$1** invested by the Queensland Government, the sector produced **\$4.09** in Community Value.

Food Relief



1,285tne

Equating to \$25.8 million in Community Value

Frozen Meals



162,042

Equating to \$1.6 million in Community Value

Non-Food Emergency Relief



\$3.85m

Equating to \$3.85 million in Community Value

Programmed Activity Participants



1,193,350

Equating to \$39.6 million in Community Value

Referrals to Other Services



299,800

In one year alone

Social Enterprises



\$2.78m

Worth of income, as well as \$10.28 million income from fee-for-service activities

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

1 Build more vibrant, inclusive and supported communities

by continuing implementation of the Shared Vision for Neighbourhood Centres and current funding agreements

Context

Neighbourhood Centres form a network of diverse community-led and place-based organisations that build vibrant, inclusive and supported communities.

A recent repositioning of the sector has positioned Neighbourhood Centres as central to delivering on social policy.

The Shared Vision for Neighbourhood Centres, published in December 2023, is a strategic document defining a shared vision, purpose, understanding and commitment between Queensland Government and the Neighbourhood Centre sector to work together. It outlines the role of Neighbourhood Centres and their activities.

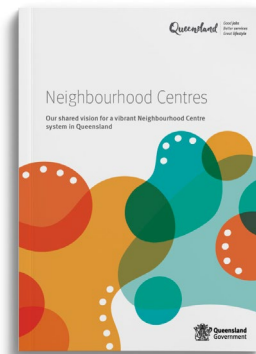
The repositioning and strategy has been warmly welcomed by the Neighbourhood Centre sector. The repositioning has strengthened the sector, which had experienced significant long-term underfunding.

Recommendations

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

- Continue the implementation of the Shared Vision for Neighbourhood Centres
- Maintain or increase the current Neighbourhood Centre Program funding agreements

Download the Shared Vision for Neighbourhood Centres



Tanya Stevenson
CEO of Hervey Bay Neighbourhood Centre

“Investing in Neighbourhood Centres is vital for weaving stronger social fabric, as these hubs foster resilience, connection, and a sense of belonging across Queensland communities.”



2 Deliver a Neighbourhood Centre for every Queensland

by funding a minimum of 20 additional Neighbourhood Centres across the state

Context

Queensland has 128 funded Neighbourhood Centres and at least 27 Centres operate with no Neighbourhood Centre Program funding from Queensland government. Queensland has less funded Neighbourhood Centres than any other state in mainland Australia.

Because Neighbourhood Centres are such vital social infrastructure, we believe that all Queenslanders should have the opportunity to have access to a place where they can participate, contribute, belong and be supported. This vision requires a range of responses by Government, including mapping and funding Centres that are operating without Department funding, working with communities to establish new Centres and building new Neighbourhood Centres. The vision also means putting the focus on supporting and funding small community-based organisations that encourage local ownership and participation.

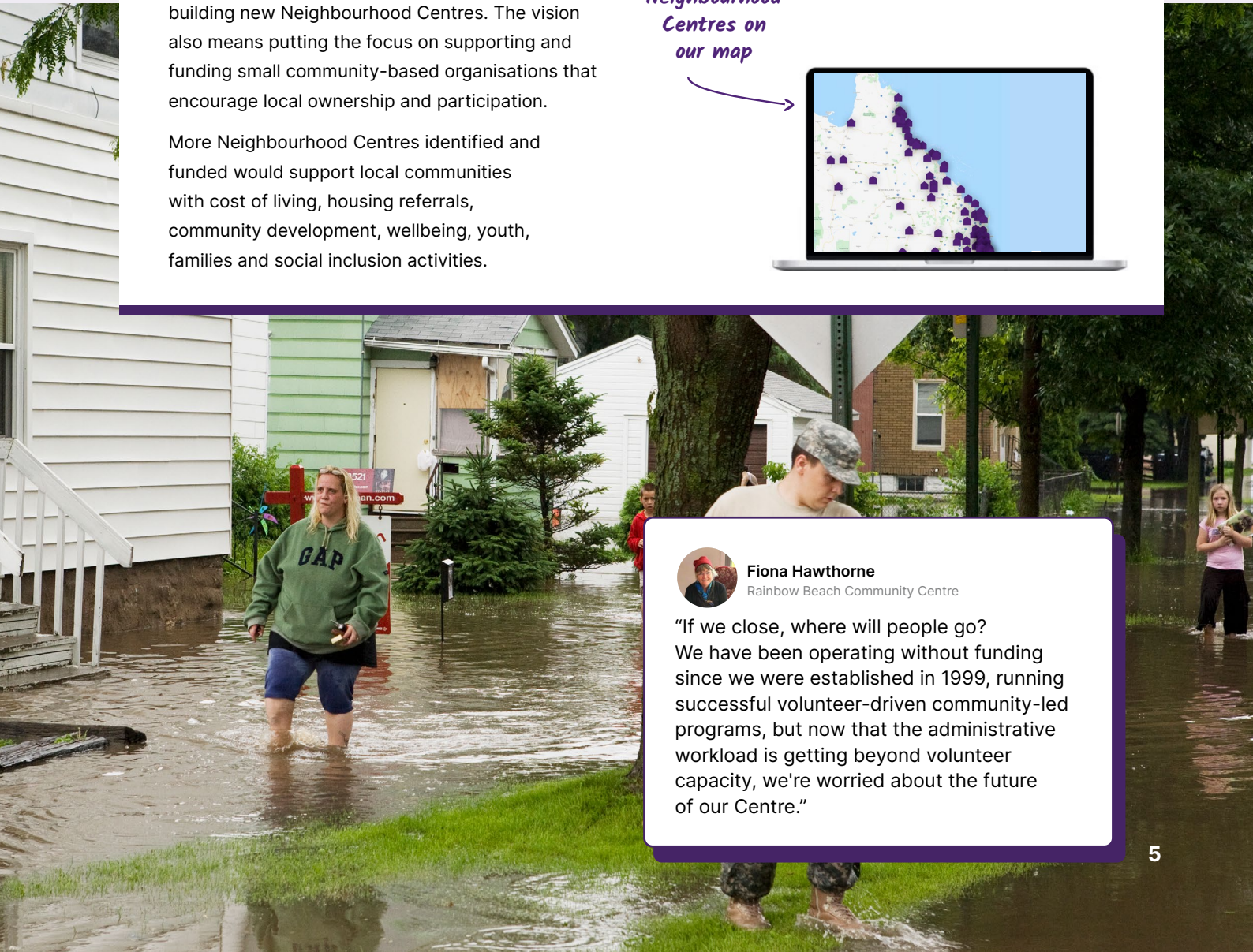
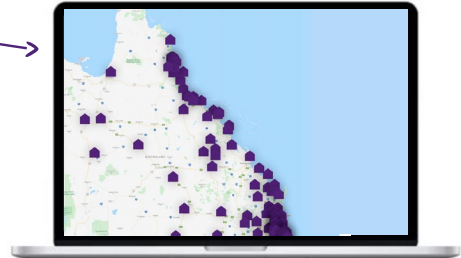
More Neighbourhood Centres identified and funded would support local communities with cost of living, housing referrals, community development, wellbeing, youth, families and social inclusion activities.

Recommendation

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

- Map every funded and unfunded Neighbourhood and community centre across the state
- Operational Funds for 20 new locations in the next 4 years (Total estimated investment: \$13.095million)
- Prioritise place-based community-governed organisations

Find your local Neighbourhood Centres on our map



Fiona Hawthorne
Rainbow Beach Community Centre

"If we close, where will people go? We have been operating without funding since we were established in 1999, running successful volunteer-driven community-led programs, but now that the administrative workload is getting beyond volunteer capacity, we're worried about the future of our Centre."

3 Support at-risk community members with complex cost of living, housing pressures, domestic violence and mental health issues

by expanding the Community Connect Worker program from 32 Neighbourhood Centres to 129 Centres

Context

Community Connect Workers operate within 32 selected Neighbourhood Centres to provide support to individuals and families who present with complex needs, including financial hardship, homelessness, domestic and family violence, trauma, chronic health issues 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 wellbeing groups and community connections, improving their physical and mental wellbeing.

The program is particularly successful, and with significantly increasing numbers and complexity,

we need more Community Connect Workers in more locations able to support the community.

Recommendation

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

- Expand the Community Connect Worker Program from 32 locations to 129 funded Neighbourhood Centres in Queensland. Additional estimated investment: \$14.55m per year



Alana Wahl
Manager of Laidley Neighbourhood Centre

"The employment of a full time Community Connect Worker has meant that, when someone attends in crisis, we have a person on hand to sit with them, listen, and take the time to respond to their underlying issues whether someone is escaping domestic violence, or is living in their car while they wait for housing, or is experiencing complex mental health concerns, or all of these things together."



4 Ensure relief is available to people in crisis facing cost-of-living emergencies

by making State Flexible Emergency Relief funding permanently available for funded Neighbourhood Centres

Context

In 2023, all funded Neighbourhood Centres received a once off \$10,000 amount of emergency relief to distribute to community members experiencing cost of living challenges. This was extended for one extra year in the 24/25 state budget. Many Centres have indicated this emergency relief funding has been extremely valuable to distribute in communities and desire it to continue permanently. They state that this relief creates opportunities for further financial conversations and other supports the centre has to offer. The funding is flexible in nature and can be used for a wide variety of community needs, including bill relief, transport, food initiatives, practical items and assisting First Nations people

to return to country. Centres will also have the option of opting out if Emergency Relief funding isn't appropriate for their community.

Recommendation

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

- Make the \$10,000 once off Emergency Relief funding permanently available for 129 Neighbourhood Centres (Estimated investment: Up to \$1.29m per year)



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.”



PICTURED: Michael Henning at Maroochy Neighbourhood Centre

5 Support adaptation and growth of existing Neighbourhood Centres

by providing a once-off grant to Neighbourhood Centres to adopt the recent changes arising from the *Shared Vision for Neighbourhood Centres*

Context

The new shared vision and initiative guideline was implemented sector wide in October 2023, instigating the commencement of widespread sector reforms including new frameworks, reporting, data collection and practice methods for many Neighbourhood Centres.

No funding was provided to individual Centres to support the implementation of these changes and many are needing to upgrade internal infrastructure, such as IT, policy and procedures, strategic plans, human resources, communications, governance mechanisms and a variety of other internal requirements to operate under the new requirements and respond to increased community demand.

Recommendation

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

- Provide a once off grant of \$20,000 per funded Neighbourhood Centre to implement the new guidelines
(Estimated investment: \$2.58m)



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.”



PICTURED: Brilla Brilla Community Centre

6 Develop the workforce and sector to respond to increasing community and government demand by investing in the peak body, NCQ, to support sector development

Context

Neighbourhood Centres are undergoing significant sector reform and government is positioning Neighbourhood Centres more centrally in social policy, calling on Centres to respond to increasingly complex social issues including cost of living, financial resilience, social isolation and loneliness, disaster resilience, volunteering, digital inclusion, 0-5 place-based children's initiatives and community development.

The peak body, NCQ, is being called upon by the government and Centres to provide local and statewide intelligence (data, trends and forecasting), respond to workforce challenges, upskill the sector, support networks and travel to locations across the state.

The peak body is in a strong position to provide workforce training and intelligence, but is limited by minimal funding to support workforce development.

Recommendation

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

- Upskill the workforce by investing in the peak body to provide training to staff, boards and volunteers of Neighbourhood Centres
- Invest in the peak body to design and deliver workforce recruitment and retainment strategies and implementation
- Ensure the Invest in the peak body to communicate up-to-date information and policy changes to Neighbourhood Centres
- Fund travel expenditure to rural, remote and regional locations to support network meetings and a biennial conference
- Fund in-person visits and member support from peak body
- Estimated additional investment: \$220,000 per year



Chris Mundy
Interim CEO of Neighbourhood Centres Queensland

“In a cost of living crisis, people need Neighbourhood Centres now more than ever. NCQ has a positive relationship with Government, and we work together effectively... but our current peaks funding isn't enough to properly respond to Government requests and support statewide sector development across 150 Centres.”

PICTURED: Kylie, and Stephen lead a learning circle with Neighbourhood Centres at the Conference

How Neighbourhood Centres respond to 4 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 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:

- 75% offer food relief
- 73% offer other emergency relief
- 52% offer financial resilience programs.
- 34% offer Centrelink Access
- 25% offer Financial Counselling
- 28% offer Employment Services
- 14% receive funding from Dept Employment, Small Business and Training
- \$2.77 million delivered in community value in Social Enterprise Activities

Housing.

Neighbourhood Centres are responding to the housing crisis across the state. 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
- 11% receive Dept of housing funding

Download the Sector Impact Report



Family Wellbeing and Community Safety

Current levels of crime in Queensland 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 identified local problems. Their community development approach means they can co-design local responses to build safer communities.

Health

Neighbourhood Centres improve the health and wellbeing of Queenslanders. One recent survey of a Neighbourhood revealed that 84% of respondents experienced improvements in physical health and 92% experienced improvement in overall quality of life². The Parliamentary Inquiry into Loneliness and Social isolation highlighted the important role that Neighbourhood Centres play in providing connection and belonging. This includes piloting 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:

In 2023, Centres delivered 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

48% offer Playgroups

43% offer Counselling and Psychology

41% offer Self-help Groups

31% offer Family Violence services

27% run Family Support Programs (CYJMA funded)

25% design programs with young people aged 13-25

13% offer vocational education and training

While each Neighbourhood Centre is different, impact reporting demonstrates:

In 2023, Centres delivered 442 community development projects that respond to social isolation and loneliness.

80% offer social connection programs

60% offer health and wellbeing programs

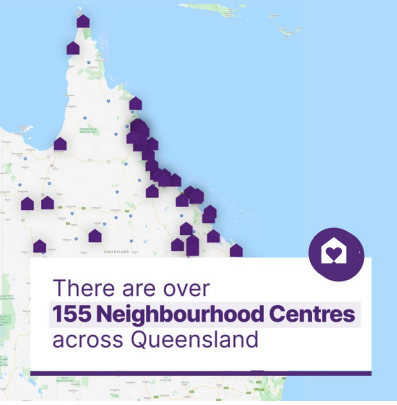
13% are funded by Primary Health Networks

9% run Social Prescribing Programs

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¹ Sector Impact Report

² Donald Simpson Centre, KPMG.



There are over **155 Neighbourhood Centres** across Queensland



For every **\$1 invested** by the Queensland Gov., **Neighbourhood Centres produced \$4.09** in community value



Together, Neighbourhood Centres in Queensland supported over **2.4million visitors** last year alone



Neighbourhood Centres in Queensland were **staffed** by over **1,547 dedicated people** last year alone



38% of Neighbourhood Centres in Queensland provided **services to homeless people**



64% of Neighbourhood Centres provided **Disaster preparedness, resilience and response**



Emergency Food Relief has increased sevenfold from 100kg (per Centre per month) in 2019 to 720kg



Neighbourhood Centres in Queensland distributed over **\$3.85million in non-food Emergency Relief** last year alone



69% of Neighbourhood Centres in Queensland have **Relationships with local Elders or local Traditional Owners**



28% of Neighbourhood Centres in Queensland have **have yarning circles** or special spaces



3 Neighbourhood Centres in Queensland are managed by **Aboriginal-controlled organisations** and **2 Centres** have **First Nations majority Boards**



49% of Neighbourhood Centres in Queensland have **First Nations staff and/or volunteers**



Neighbourhood Centres in Queensland ran over **1,598 Community Projects** last year alone



Neighbourhood Centres in Queensland supported over **1.19 million Participants in Programmed Activities** last year alone



74% of Neighbourhood Centres in Queensland provided **Community Advocacy** last year



128 Neighbourhood Centres in Queensland receive NC Program funding, **27 do not**



Neighbourhood Centres in Queensland provided over **162,042 Frozen Meals** last year alone



Neighbourhood Centres in Queensland raised over **\$2.78 million of income from Social Enterprises** last year alone





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