# Queensland Neighbourhood Centres

## 2017 Investment Management Standards (IMS) Consultation

### Introduction

In Mid 2017 the Queensland Council of Social Service (QCOSS) and the Queensland Families and Communities Association (QFCA) consulted NHCs across Queensland. The findings of the consultation were used to inform the Queensland Government IMS workshops in late 2017. This constituted a review of the Queensland government Neighbourhood Centre Program. Participation in the consultation was high and well distributed across regions and locality types, with 82 per cent of the 122 funded neighbourhood centres (NHC) in Queensland engaging in the process. The data and narratives collated describe the current operating environment and practices of NHCs in Queensland and a collective vision for the future of the sector. A business case is being developed by the Queensland Department of Communities, Disability Services and Seniors for submission to Cabinet in early 2018.

### Key Messages

The following is a summary of the key themes of the NHC consultation and IMS workshops of 2017. It provides useful points and information for stakeholders to use when discussing the future of Queensland NHCs with their local representatives.

**Resourcing**- NHCs are underfunded and need increased resourcing to support:

* + safe staffing levels
	+ collaboration and community capacity building
	+ service delivery that meets the needs of their community
	+ governance, training, volunteer support and administration
	+ equitable infrastructure

The IMS process has recommended a preferred option of **Increased annual statewide funding to NHCs from $15million to $30million** (over three years). The second preferred option is to expand the Community Connect Worker trial to add capacity to NHCs.

Infrastructure inequities across premises, building maintenance arrangements and information technology also need to be addressed. These options are not exclusive and could be combined.

**Recognition** -  NHCs need recognition as:

* + essential social infrastructure
	+ place-based services
	+ front-line services

By recognising the work and key role of NHCs, Government could strengthen their place based strategies across the state and lever community participation. Recognition is also required for the role of the Queensland Families and Communities Association and the Coalition of Community Boards as representatives of Queensland NHCs.

**Engagement** – NHCs need to be considered in:

* Queensland Government place based planning
* Program development that has impacts across Queensland Government Departments.

The IMS process has recommended the establishment of a quarterly forum between Queensland Government Department representatives and NHCs to identify opportunities for place-based program synergies.

### Current Context

In Queensland, the 122 funded NHCs offer diverse services that are tailored to their local communities. Some are part of large not for profit organisations or local councils but most are small independent services governed by local volunteer management committees. All NHCs rely on volunteers to support their program delivery. Base annual funding for Queensland Neighbourhood Centres is currently $110,000 pa and this is inadequate.

NHCs are defined as universal services and are primarily funded to provide information and referral and low or no cost activities without eligibility criteria. NHCs also provide use of their premises to other groups and faciltate the work of specialist programs through brokering relationships, providing a safe space to meet and client support. Without the confines of specialist program eligibility and program guidelines, NHCs can provide flexible responses to community need and are uniquely placed to offer holistic services in early intervention, crisis and post crisis contexts across life stages and abilities. This broad scope of service provision means that centres play a vital role play in working with vulnerable people and those experiencing socio-economic disadvantage.

The value of NHCs to governments is currently under-recognised resulting in NHCs being excluded from an integrated whole of government ‘place-based’ delivery model. This is a missed opportunity to partner and leverage effective, affordable and achievable ‘place-based’ strategies.

### Consultation outcomes

NHCs are essential local infrastructure and hubs for social service provision and community capacity building. Centres described themselves as *“brain banks”* of community knowledge and voiced the importance of community development principles and connection to people and place in enabling local responses that foster stability and meaning in communities. In regional areas, the value and role of neighbourhood centres has even greater significance as access to specialist services and community activities can be limited. Participants reported that people came to NHCs for everything including crisis situations and stated “*we never say no*” and *“we do what it takes to help*”. Crisis presentations are on the rise due to communities experiencing increased financial pressures and NHCs are stretched to the limit.

The consultation demonstrated that NHCs either directly provide or support other services to provide:

* financial support services
* programs to families, children, young people, older people and people with a disability
* food security
* legal services
* health services
* counselling and mental health support
* crisis services including domestic and family violence
* housing and homelessness services
* community development
* activities and events
* governance (auspicing, network secretariat, community leadership).

NHCs described significant safety concerns for workers and other clients due to highly complex presentations, low funding and inadequate staffing models. They felt that the front line nature of their work was not recognised. Current funding levels are inadequate to manage the complexity of running a universal service and community development activities. Managers said resource constraints added to the complexity of the work with staff often required to wear ‘multiple hats’. For example, Managers engaging in service delivery and administration work to enable the functioning of the service.

NHCs need resourcing, recognition and government engagement to continue supporting Queensland communities. We ask that you support Queensland NHCs by speaking to your local member.