

A Stronger, More Diverse and Independent Community Sector Issues Paper

– yourtown’s advocacy submission

What is it about?

yourtown has submitted a response to the Federal Department of Social Services’ Stronger, More Diverse and Independent Community Sector Issues Paper, focused on how the Department can better support community service organisations (CSOs) through reforming the grants process and facilitating meaningful working relationships across the sector. Our response also highlighted that while the sector continues to face a multitude of challenges, **yourtown** and other CSOs have shown strength, tenacity, and unwavering commitment to the needs of the community.

Why is it important?

In order to continue to respond efficiently and effectively to the shifting needs of children and young people, **yourtown** and other CSOs need adequate funding that covers the true cost of delivering high-quality services. While **yourtown** is relatively independent from government funding, we are advocating for a consistent approach to grants that prioritise the long-term needs of the community over short-term project-based funding arrangements, so that staff and communities can rely on sustainable, positive outcomes. We also advocate for Government to more meaningfully consult with CSOs as trusted partners to find solutions to persistent problems through collaboration, not competition.

Some of **yourtown**’s key messages:

1. Government should share their evidence with CSOs to strengthen the knowledge base.

This will help identify gaps in services and design more effective policies and services. We also advised the Department to be mindful of the power they hold as the major funding body, and regard CSOs as trusted partners in tackling persistent issues in the community.

2. Policy and program development should incorporate co-design and human-centred design principles

We recommended that grant and tender processes allocate enough time and money for service users and those with barriers to access to participate in the design process, so their voices are embedded in the services they use.

3. Grant funding needs to reflect the true cost of delivering high-quality services in 2023

Increases funding should be allocated to staffing, co-design, engagement of lived experience networks, and increased regulatory compliance in order to meet government standards. In addition, funding periods should run for a minimum of 5 years, to ensure we can achieve sustainable outcomes and plan effectively for the future.

4. Government should avoid diversity of funding for its own sake

Instead, we have recommended that government strike a balance between continuous and consistent outcomes for communities and innovative, new approaches.

5. The definition of place-based approaches is too restrictive

Place-based arrangements should look beyond geographic locations. For example, they should include virtual communities given young people will gain support from these groups when face-to-face services are not available or accessible.

READ YOURTOWN'S FULL SUBMISSION

