



Tasmanian Council of Social Service

TasCOSS Budget Priorities Statement 2015-16: Summary of Recommendations

29 January 2015

Full document available at:

<http://tascoss.org.au/Portals/0/Documents/Publications/Submissions/TasCOSS%20BPS%202015-16%20FINAL.pdf>

phone 03 6231 0755

fax 03 6223 6136

postal PO Box 1126

Sandy Bay

Tas 7006

Authorised by

Tony Reidy, Chief Executive

For inquiries

Meg Webb

Deputy CEO

meg@tascoss.org.au

www.tascoss.org.au

Introduction

The Tasmanian Council of Social Service (TasCOSS) submits its annual Budget Priorities Statement for consideration in the development of the 2015-16 State Budget.

TasCOSS is the peak body for the Tasmanian non-government community services sector and represents the interests of its members, the broader community services sector and of the low-income, disadvantaged and vulnerable Tasmanians that the sector serves and supports.

The submission represents the priority issues and areas of need that have been identified through consultation with our members and the sector in Tasmania's three regions, and through policy research and analysis.

TasCOSS responded to the Treasurer's request for submissions which identify off-setting savings and which are linked to the Government's policies and election commitments. This has been done in response to the Treasurer's assurance that the Government will give a higher weighting to submissions that are 'consistent with the Government's long-term plan for Tasmania's future'.

In addition, the submission proposes some alternative approaches to the current fiscal strategy which, if adopted, would accomplish three things:

1. Help address the current budget problems;
2. Promote sustainable recovery from the current financial situation; and
3. Promote a sustainable State budget over the long term.

Summary of recommendations

Future planning

Recommendation 1: TasCOSS recommends that the research and policy resources of the Department of Premier and Cabinet be utilised to collect information on the impact of budget cuts on vulnerable populations, and that the findings of this be made available to the public for appropriate discussion and planning.

Estimated cost: Uncosted.

Increase community participation in the development of the State Budget

Recommendation 2: TasCOSS recommends that the Government re-engage with the community about the State Budget and improve transparency about decision-making around public resources. This should be done by reinstating the community consultation process with meaningful consultation periods, by making an effort to provide transparent and clear information to the community about the State's budget situation and by engaging the community in discussion around budget decisions.

Investment in communities as part of the joined-up human services system

Recommendation 3: TasCOSS recommends that funding for the development of community capacity be provided as part of the joined-up human service system pilots. It is suggested that this take the form of grants to support cross-sectoral, place-based approaches to supporting communities and families.

Estimated cost: Uncosted.

Transport

Recommendation 4: TasCOSS recommends that the Tasmanian Government raise its funding for Department of State Growth-funded passenger transport services and infrastructure by a minimum of 10% per annum over three years. Some of this funding should be explicitly directed towards implementation of the Transport Access Strategy.

Estimated cost: \$10.2m in 2015-16, \$11.2m in 2016-17, \$12.3m in 2017-18.

Affordable private housing

Recommendation 5: TasCOSS recommends that the Tasmanian Government fund the development and implementation of a state-level planning mechanism on affordable housing under the Resource Management and Planning System. It could be a State Policy, or a similar mechanism.

Estimated cost: \$250,000.

Affordable public housing

Recommendation 6: TasCOSS recommends that Housing Tasmania be relieved of its debt. This could take a variety of forms:

1. Finance General could take over the payments of principal and interest.
2. Housing Tasmania's funding could be increased by the amount of its annual debt repayment.

Estimated cost: \$16 million per annum.

Health equity strategy

Recommendation 7: TasCOSS recommends that the Tasmanian Government funds the development of a Tasmanian Health Equity Strategy as part of the current health reforms.

Estimated cost: \$250,000

Community-based healthcare

Recommendation 8: TasCOSS recommends that adequate funding for non-Government community sector healthcare organisations is provided as part of any shift in the balance of health care provision from hospital to the community through the *One State, One Health System, and Better Outcomes* reform process.

Estimated cost: Uncosted.

Energy efficiency

Recommendation 9: TasCOSS recommends that the Tasmanian Government provide adequate funding to re-establish and expand successful energy efficiency programs for low-income households across all housing tenures.

Estimated cost: \$2.4 million per annum, for a total of \$9.6 million over four years.

Invest in children's early years

Recommendation 10: TasCOSS recommends that the Tasmanian Government continue to resource the early years sector with an independent body that can provide training, sector development opportunities and professional development.

Estimated cost: Uncosted.

Recommendation 11: TasCOSS recommends that the \$500,000 grant fund previously distributed by the Early Years Foundation be maintained and ear-marked for projects that facilitate cross-sectoral, place-based approaches to supporting communities, families and children in the early years.

Estimated cost: \$500,000

Improving student retention and attainment

Recommendation 12: TasCOSS recommends that school staffing allocations for Tasmanian public schools be increased to enable a return to 2014 staffing levels, with no further cuts to staffing. TasCOSS further recommends that the extra teachers being provided to regional high schools for the delivery of Year 11 and 12 be an additional staffing allocation to this baseline.

Estimated cost: The AEU estimates a cost of \$100,000 per annum per teacher, or \$26.6 million per annum.

Support for emotional health in schools

Recommendation 13: TasCOSS recommends that funding is provided for more support in schools for vulnerable students, including additional positions for psychologists, social workers, guidance officers, and teachers' aides.

Estimated cost: \$10 million

Supporting students into employment

Recommendation 14: TasCOSS recommends that funding is provided to ensure that the personal student support functions of the Guaranteeing Futures program that are not adequately covered by the My Education system be restored.

Estimated cost: Uncosted.

Indexation

Recommendation 15: TasCOSS recommends that negotiations between representatives of the Government and the community sector for the creation of a new formula for grant indexation be commenced, with a view to its introduction in 2016-17.

Estimated cost: Uncosted.

Recommendation 16: TasCOSS recommends that appropriate indexation is immediately applied to all Government grants to community service organisations and is adjusted to the new formula in 2016-17.

Estimated cost: Uncosted.

Suspended sentences

Recommendation 17: TasCOSS recommends that suspended sentences be retained as a sentencing option.

Savings: \$13.2 million over period of forward estimates (3 years)

Land tax

Recommendation 18: TasCOSS recommends that land tax be payable on the owner's principal residence land, unless the land is owned by a Commonwealth Concession Card Holder.

Conclusion

TasCOSS urges the Tasmanian Government to adopt a fiscal strategy which aims for socio-economic sustainability. Not all economists see increased social hardship as an inevitable consequence of budget reductions. Many argue for socio-economic sustainability as a policy imperative, pointing out that increasing hardship in vulnerable parts of the community curtails domestic consumption and shrinks economic activity.

It is critical that Tasmania learns from other jurisdictions to avoid replicating the social and economic vulnerability being caused by deep budget cuts to health, welfare and education systems there. TasCOSS looks forward to engaging with the Tasmanian Government in discussions about this