

A Community Resilience Fund for Queensland community organisations



Budget Priority

Establish a \$40 million Community Resilience Fund

The impacts of the COVID crisis in Queensland have been profound. They have confirmed the importance of the community sector in Queensland as an essential player in supporting community resilience against economic, health and social impacts. This is evident in the increase in demand for community services in response to the developing issues experienced by Queensland communities in the past year.

The establishment of a Community Resilience Fund would strengthen the community sector in Queensland. The aim of the Fund is to promptly target the emerging needs of local communities as Queensland recovers from the pandemic, while also enhancing job creation, innovation and resilience in Queensland communities.

The COVID crisis in Queensland

The COVID-19 crisis has caused unprecedented health and economic outcomes in Australia and across the world.

Unemployment as of December 2020 sat at 7.5 per cent in Queensland, the highest rate in any state or territory and 0.9 per cent higher than the national average.ⁱ The youth unemployment rate in Queensland is close to double that, at 14.4 per cent.ⁱⁱ

According to reports, more than 170,000 businesses in Queensland are still claiming the JobKeeper subsidy.ⁱⁱⁱ In December 2020, 322,136 individuals were receiving the JobSeeker and Youth Allowance income support payments^{iv} – a 50 per cent increase on the number of individuals accessing the same payments in December 2019 (215,908).^v

Impact on Queensland's community service sector

The community service sector has played a central role in Queensland's response to the COVID-19 pandemic and will continue to do so as the state recovers. Community organisations are the frontline for people experiencing vulnerability, providing services such as emergency food relief, domestic and family violence prevention, family support services, community health, housing, and disability and aged care support.

Even before the COVID crisis, Queensland's community service sector was under pressure. A December 2019 survey by ACOSS, QCOSS and the University of New South Wales found that 82 per cent reported demand for services in the community either 'increased' (50 per cent) or 'increased significantly' (a further 32 per cent) in 2019.^{vi}

A follow-up survey in July 2020 found that 77 per cent of community services reported that their service had experienced changes in clientele, issues or needs due to the COVID crisis, and 61 per cent of workers believed that demand for community services had increased since March 2020. Seventy per cent of organisations said complexity of need in clients had increased.^{vii}

A Community Resilience Fund

A community resilience fund is a fund that can be accessed by community service providers to fund projects that create jobs and address emerging issues in local communities.

A community resilience fund will allow Queensland-based community organisations to remain responsive and have access to funding for projects according to the emerging needs of local communities.

A desirable fund would be one that provides 'place-based' funding. This will enable a service to be responsive to emerging local issues. The fund should be designed to ensure resources are dispersed promptly in response to emerging issues.

Resilience Funds in Australia

Resilience funds have successfully been used by Australian Governments to respond to economic crises in Australia and internationally. A relevant example is the Hawke government's Community Employment Program (CEP), an initiative designed to 'soak up unemployment' during the 1980s recession.^{viii} As a result of the CEP, community organisations collaborated on programs that created direct employment and benefited the community. When determining a project's eligibility, consultative committees considered factors such as benefit to the community, the project's labour-intensity, how much money would go to administration as opposed to direct employment, and whether the project would support diversity in employment for disadvantaged groups.^{ix} The Program built and staffed many of today's childcare centres.

In Queensland, recent examples include the 2017 Jobs and Regional Growth Fund (JRGF), which was created to generate growth and job creation in the private sector in regional Queensland.^x While organisations outside of not-for-profits could apply for funding – including local government – the eligibility criteria included proven regional benefits, ongoing employment benefits and sustainable economic development.

To respond to the COVID crisis, the former Department of Child Safety, Youth and Woman created the Responding to COVID-19 in the sexual, domestic and family violence sectors grants program (RCSDFV) to support domestic and family violence services respond to the complex challenges. This fund has three main functions: to assist services to adapt the delivery of existing services, to expand service delivery (for example, by increasing service capacity) and to introduce new services, in accordance with increased demand resulting from the COVID crisis.

QCOSS has considered and compared 12 resilience fund examples from Australian and international jurisdictions. For more information and to access the research paper, contact research@qcross.org.au.

QCOSS proposal

The multifaceted effect of COVID-19 demands diverse and targeted responses from community support systems. QCOSS is calling on the Queensland Government to implement a \$40 million Community Resilience Fund ('the Fund') to support community organisations affected by COVID-19. This will support community and not-for-profit organisations to submit funding proposals for projects that address emerging issues in local communities. The Fund would also go some way to alleviating increasing demand pressures for under-resourced services and create jobs across Queensland.

In particular, the Fund will create much needed jobs for women. Women's jobs accounted for 65 per cent of the job losses in Queensland during the COVID crisis in 2020 and up to 80 per cent of the community services sector workforce is women. More jobs in the sector means more jobs for women.

Eligibility and application process

A Community Resilience Fund should require projects to demonstrate or provide evidence of their ability to address the challenges faced by the community in light of COVID-19. This would help ensure the effectiveness of the fund to target the specific needs of the community and assure stakeholders that such demands are met. For example, the first criteria of the RCSDFV program asks applicants how the project will address or respond to the impact of COVID-19. International funds have also required recipients to monitor spending and provide evidence of the impact successful projects have had on local communities.

An application process that prioritises speed will prove beneficial. Local review boards that comprise of people who know the issues in the area and are leaders in their fields would help to improve the calibre of successful projects. Local boards will lead to fast and informal reviews of applications as opposed to more formal proceedings. In turn, this will deliver funding to initiatives more rapidly and thus enhance the ability of the fund to address emerging community needs.



References

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