

## State Budget Recommendation

Establish a \$40 million Community Resilience Fund (\$40 million over 5 years)

The community services sector has made an important, frontline contribution to ensuring Queensland weathered the first 12 months of the COVID-19 pandemic. However, increased and more complex demands on the sector have emphasised an existing vulnerability. The sector requires strengthening through the provision of dynamic project funding.

The Community Resilience Fund would fund place-based projects targeted at the emerging needs of Queensland communities. These projects would enhance local innovation, resilience and job creation, particularly for women, one of the cohorts most impacted by unemployment related to the COVID-19 pandemic. The Community Resilience Fund will also contribute to sector preparedness, as the community impact of the pandemic continues to be felt.

## The COVID crisis in Queensland

The COVID-19 crisis has caused unprecedented health and economic outcomes in Australia. In Queensland, unemployment was at 5.9 per cent as of March 2021, 0.3 per cent higher than the national average.<sup>i</sup> The youth unemployment rate in Queensland is close to double that, at 11.9 per cent.<sup>ii</sup>

In March 2021, 297,661 individuals were receiving the JobSeeker and Youth Allowance income support payments<sup>iii</sup> – a 38 per cent increase from the number of individuals accessing the same payments in December 2019 (215,908).<sup>iv</sup>

Data analysis released by QCOSS in March 2021 found that nearly one in four Queenslanders lost employment or working hours as a result of COVID-19, and that women, young people, renters and the already precariously employed (casual or part-time) were more likely to have had their employment impacted.

### *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.<sup>v</sup>

A follow-up survey in July 2020 found that 77 per cent of community services reported their service had experienced changes in clientele, issues or needs due to the COVID crisis; 61 per cent of workers believed that demand for community services had increased since March 2020; and 70 per cent of organisations said complexity of need in clients had increased.<sup>vi</sup>

## A Community Resilience Fund

A community resilience fund 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. Ideally, the fund would provide place-based funding. The fund should also be designed to ensure resources are dispersed promptly. This will enable a service to be responsive to emerging local issues.

## ***Resilience Funds in Australia***

Resilience funds have successfully been used by Australian Governments to respond to economic crises in Australia and internationally. An example is the Hawke government's *Community Employment Program (CEP)*, an initiative designed to 'soak up unemployment' during the 1980s recession.<sup>vii</sup> 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.<sup>viii</sup> 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.<sup>ix</sup> 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.

QCROSS 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](mailto:research@qcross.org.au).

## **QCROSS proposal**

The multifaceted impact of COVID-19 demands diverse and targeted responses from community support systems. QCROSS recommends the Queensland Government implement a \$40 million Community Resilience Fund ('the Fund') to support community organisations responding to these impacts. The Fund would address proposals submitted by community and not-for-profit organisations 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.

Importantly, the Fund would play an important role in local job creation, in particular 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. 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 as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. 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

- <sup>i</sup> Labour Force, Australia December 2020. Australian Government; 2020. <https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/labour/employment-and-unemployment/labour-force-australia/latest-release#states-and-territories>.
- <sup>ii</sup> Labour Force, Australia December 2020. Australian Government; 2021. <https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/labour/employment-and-unemployment/labour-force-australia/latest-release#data-downloads>.
- <sup>iii</sup> JobSeeker Payment and Youth Allowance recipients – monthly profile. Australian Government; 2021. <https://data.gov.au/data/dataset/jobseeker-payment-and-youth-allowance-recipients-monthly-profile>.
- <sup>iv</sup> DSS Payment Demographic Data. Australian Government; 2020. <https://data.gov.au/data/dataset/dss-payment-demographic-data>.
- <sup>v</sup> Cortis N, Blaxland M. *The profile and pulse of the sector: Findings from the 2019 Australian Community Sector Survey*. University of New South Wales ACOSS;2019.
- <sup>vi</sup> Cortis N, Blaxland M. Australia's Community Sector and COVID-19 Supporting Communities Through the Crisis - an Australian Community Sector Survey Special Report September 2020. 2020.
- <sup>vii</sup> Howe J. The Job Creation Function of the State: A New Subject for Labour Law. *Australian Journal of Labour Law*. 2001;14(3):242-268. <https://findanexpert.unimelb.edu.au/scholarlywork/247588-the-job-creation-function-of-the-state-a-new-subject-for-labour-law>.
- <sup>viii</sup> Seccombe M. Recession and government stimulus. *The Saturday Paper*. <https://www.thesaturdaypaper.com.au/news/politics/2020/07/04/recession-and-government-stimulus/159378480010057#hrd>. July 4, 2020.
- <sup>ix</sup> State Government of Queensland. About the Jobs and Regional Growth Fund. State Development, Infrastructure, Local Government and Planning website. <https://www.statedevelopment.qld.gov.au/industry/industry-support/jobs-and-regional-growth-fund/about>.