

TasCOSS Opinion Piece by Mat Rowell, CEO

Tasmanians are a compassionate people. We are a community that still knows how to look after one another and is always willing to extend a helping hand to those in need.

Tasmanians believe in “the fair go” and that every one of us should have the opportunity to live a reasonable quality of life and that our children can look forward to a more prosperous future.

We value the right of every Tasmanian to the basic things in life – an adequate income, affordable housing, access to quality health and dental services and lifelong opportunities to contribute to our community through education, employment and voluntary work. After all, these are the building blocks to a dynamic and prosperous community, with every one of us able to contribute to a Tasmania that is the envy of the world.

However, for Tasmania to achieve its full potential, we must overcome the significant social challenges in our community.

While we have made progress over the past few years, too many Tasmanians continue to be held back by poor housing affordability, unemployment and a lack of access to even the most basic services. And these issues impact on the whole Tasmanian community.

This is why TasCOSS is calling for 2007 to be the year for prioritising investment in services aimed at preventing poverty and disadvantage in our community.

TasCOSS' submission to the Tasmanian Government's 2007/08 State Budget, 'Human Services, Human Rights' recommends that the Tasmanian Government prioritise its social spending on fighting the causes of disadvantage in the Tasmanian community. We believe that this must include further investment in a range of affordable housing solutions, as well as innovative services aimed at assisting unemployed and underemployed Tasmanians to develop the skills they need to realise their full potential.

TasCOSS has also called on the Tasmanian Government to lead the nation in embracing an early intervention focus in protecting vulnerable Tasmanian children and families. A strong focus on early childhood development is the most effective strategy to enhance the opportunities and life chances for Tasmania's most vulnerable children and their families. It is also an essential part of a long-term strategy to increase the State's productivity and economic competitiveness.

When the State Budget is announced in June, many Tasmanians will look to see where the issues of affordable housing, employment and services to our most vulnerable Tasmanians families are listed in the Government's spending priorities.

TasCOSS' other interest is to improve the quality and effectiveness of its own industry's services to the Tasmanian community. We recognise the critical role community services have in meeting the needs of low-income and disadvantaged Tasmanians.

TasCOSS' new Industry Development Unit is committed to assisting organisations reach their full potential, and to facilitate the development of an industry plan that enables organisations to meet the challenges of an ageing workforce, ever increasing demand for services and the need to continue to improve the quality and accountability of services.

An Island of Opportunity for every Tasmanian is what TasCOSS is working towards. This is what we believe all Tasmanians want for their future, and their children's future. A Tasmania that is inclusive, compassionate, innovative and fair.