

ComVoices

Advancing the community sector

ELECTION 2017—BRIEFING FOR POLITICAL PARTIES

COMMUNITIES COUNT

ComVoices is a network of national organisations representing community and voluntary services that are working to turn lives around and build strong, healthy communities.

Our most recent *State of the Sector Survey* [find at comvoices.org.nz] shows that demand for these services continues to grow and the problems are becoming more complex. Yet government funding has remained largely static for a number of years. Demand is far outstripping our resources.

Things need to change.

New Zealanders want our communities to be places where everybody can participate and thrive. But many families are struggling to meet basic needs while the services designed to support them are also in a precarious financial situation.

This election year we are asking political parties to focus on three issues and the practical ways government and community services could work together more effectively to make a difference.

We would like to see your support shown in your policy documents and in the speeches and communications of your candidates. We will be pleased to talk with you further about the issues we raise here.

1. MAKE IT EASIER FOR COMMUNITY ORGANISATIONS TO WORK WITH GOVERNMENT

Community providers often contract with several government agencies, each with their own contracting, accountability and reporting requirements. It's taking up time, money and energy that would be better spent on providing services. This is not an efficient use of government funds.

Community-based services are knowledgeable about the needs of their communities and how best to respond. It

should be seen as good practice for government agencies to make use of this expertise in a meaningful co-design process and in planning how best to deliver services. This would be to everyone's benefit, instead of the separate and repetitive consultations that occur now, each incurring high compliance costs for both government and the sector.

It is essential that the relationship between government and community service providers is built on mutual respect for the expertise, knowledge and values each brings. Community service providers have an important role as independent advocates, able to speak up on behalf of their constituents without fear of their contract being put at risk. This needs to be a well understood and formally recognised protocol.

How you can help

Let's make it easier to work together in ways that will result in better outcomes in communities. It really shouldn't be this hard to do business with government.

Here are three suggestions:

- a. Require government agencies to collaborate and streamline contracts using a common set of procurement tools, guidelines, templates and integrated contracts, as outlined in *Buying and Managing Social Services* [find at procurement.govt.nz].
- b. Support co-design methodology that harnesses community expertise to develop systems and processes.
- c. Formally recognise the independent advocacy role of community service providers.

2. WE ALL AGREE ON THE NEED FOR GOOD DATA – BUT IT NEEDS TO BE CORRECTLY MANAGED

There has been a strong drive to embed social investment in community services, but there is no consensus on what this means, how it will work, and how it will improve lives. Good data underpins good service delivery – but not when

data-driven methods are imposed without consultation or a shared understanding of the benefits.

We understand that governments need data to support decisions and avoid waste. But measuring the returns on the investment in social services is highly complex. Costs are tightly controlled on an annual basis but benefits are measured over a life or across generations.

There are challenges around attribution when many factors and services may contribute to an outcome. Government appropriations are not set up to easily accommodate multi-year or cross-agency funding.

We are only beginning to understand what an investment model looks like and yet it's being written into contracts and law.

There was deep concern that MSD's demand for personal client data as a condition of funding would deter help-seeking and ignore ethical and confidentiality issues. To the relief of the sector, this has now been put on hold until the concerns have been worked through.

Importantly, NGOs will be represented in the working group to find a way of increasing the availability of data that builds trust and confidence.

How you can help

Data is a powerful tool. But without careful, well-researched and well-understood controls over its purpose and how it's used, it has the potential to undermine the value and reach of community services. We recommend:

- a. The approach to collecting, storing and using data is based on the principles of clarity of purpose, anonymisation, risk mitigation, and agreement about sharing and reuse protocols.
- b. NGO service providers to be involved in the decisions and oversight of approaches to data collection, storage and use.
- c. Government meets the costs of providers managing, analysing and sharing data.

3. SERVICES WILL CLOSE IF GOVERNMENT DOESN'T IMPROVE FUNDING

Almost half of community service providers are using their reserves to keep afloat and will soon become unsustainable [ComVoices. *State of the Sector Survey 2016*].

Many providers have not had funding increases for some years. Investing in the skills and training of staff, or developing new services, is out of reach for many.

We now have far fewer volunteers, with numbers dropping by 42 percent between 2004 and 2013 (*Statistics New Zealand*).

These are alarming statistics. ComVoices understands there is a finite pool of money and many competing demands but if these trends continue, local needs will not be met, placing growing demands on the directly-funded health and welfare agencies.

How you can help

Community services strive to be skilled, modern, well-resourced hubs of innovation. Invest in our capability so we have the resources to achieve outcomes for the benefit of all New Zealanders.

- a. Increase funding for community-based services to, at a minimum, recognise cost of living increases and wage movements. This will enable community services to invest in their staff and in service development and evaluation.
- b. Replace competitive tendering with a collaborative funding model to reduce compliance and transaction costs for government and community.
3. Establish a community organisation development fund to support community agencies and to ensure effective service delivery linked to community needs.

APPENDIX

STATE OF THE SECTOR SURVEY FINDINGS

In 2016, ComVoices surveyed our members and found that:

68 percent of organisations are doing more work than specified in their contracts.

42 percent of organisations were unable to offer staff any wage increases in the last two years.

40 percent of organisations felt that the time to administer and/or report back on their contracts had increased.

CONTRIBUTION TO THE ECONOMY

For the year ended March 2013, non-profit organisations contributed:

\$6 billion or 2.7 percent of New Zealand's GDP.

As a sector we are the country's second largest employer.

WHAT WE DO

Members of ComVoices support people and communities in a wide range of ways, such as:

- Counselling
- Tenancy support
- Housing
- Budgeting advice
- English language classes
- Food banks
- Employment support
- Care and support for older people
- Culturally diverse events and services
- Social work
- Research & advocacy
- Family violence services
- Sexual violence prevention and education
- Refugee support
- Mental health and addiction services
- Public education
- Regional networks
- Family support
- Public health
- Youth development
- Disability support
- International development

COMVOICES NETWORK

- 2020 Trust
- Age Concern
- Ara Taiohi
- Arthritis New Zealand
- Birthingright New Zealand
- Community Housing Aotearoa
- Community Networks Aotearoa
- Community Research
- Council for International Development
- English Language Partners
- Family Works NZ
- The Duke of Edinburgh's Hillary Award
- Hui E!
- Inclusive NZ
- Jigsaw Whanganui
- National Council of Women of NZ
- NZ Council of Christian Social Services
- NZ Federation of Family Budgeting Services
- NZ Federation of Multicultural Councils
- Philanthropy NZ
- Platform Charitable Trust
- Presbyterian Support New Zealand
- Prison Fellowship of NZ
- Public Health Association
- Public Libraries of NZ
- Social Service Providers Aotearoa
- Te Wana Trust
- Volunteering NZ
- YMCA New Zealand