

ComVoices speaks for non-profit services working to support people and build strong, healthy communities.

Our recent survey, *State of the Sector* (see comvoices.org.nz), shows that demand for these services continues to grow and needs are more complex, yet government funding remains largely static.

Many families are struggling to meet basic needs while the services designed to support them are also in a precarious financial situation. Communities are no longer places where everybody can participate and thrive.

There are three things that would make a difference.

1. Fair funding

Non-profit organisations that provide government services have gone for years without any increase in funding. Almost half are using their reserves to keep afloat. This is unsustainable.

Investment in skilled staff, service development and evaluation is fundamental to achieving the best results. Community-based services would benefit from a funding model that:

- Reflects cost of living increases and wage movements
- Reduces compliance and transaction costs.

2. Making it easier to work with government

Community providers often contract with several government agencies, each with its own contracting, accountability and reporting requirements. It is taking up time, money and energy that would be better spent on providing services. Let's make the processes more efficient and effective:

- Streamline contracts using a common set of procurement tools and guidelines.
- Harness community expertise in the design and delivery of local services.
- Formal recognition of the NGOs' advocacy role.

3. Properly managed data

Community-based service providers were shaken at the news that clients' personal data must be collected and shared in return for funding. This is a deterrent to help-seeking, and a threat to established ethical and confidentiality considerations.

The importance of reliable information for good service delivery is well understood. Data is an important tool, but without careful well-researched and well-understood controls over its purpose, storage and use, it has the potential to seriously undermine the value and reach of community services. For these reasons:

- Service providers need to be fully involved in decisions around data collection, sharing, storage and use, with sector-wide consultation around planned initiatives.
- The recommendations in the report of the Privacy Commissioner on ICLD are fundamental to the collection, sharing, storage and use of data.

What you can do this election

Election day is on 23 September. There are opportunities to have your say, and be listened to. Here are some ideas.

Talk to your local MP and candidates about the issues raised in this paper. Ask them what they think and what their party would do if it became government.

Raise the issues at public candidate meetings so other people in the community know about these concerns.

Join with other non-profit organisations in the community and invite candidates to a meeting to discuss the issues.

Importantly, make sure you and the people you know are enrolled to vote. Check how on elections.org.nz

And remember to vote!