



2022-23 Pre-Budget Submission to the Federal Government

27 January 2022

Introducing ANHCA

Australian Neighbourhood Houses and Centres Association (ANHCA) is the national peak body for neighbourhood and community houses and centres in Australia.

With a vision for strong local communities, ANCHA represents over 1,000 Neighbourhood Houses/Centres across all of Australia. This is the generic name used for centres nationally known by a variety of names including Community Houses, Learning Centres, and Community Centres. Each of these are member organisations of their state peak representative bodies.

ANHCA is committed to the development of place-based solutions to meet the economic, social, and civic opportunities and challenges that are currently facing Australian communities. To achieve this, ANHCA works to support the evolution of strong local communities through the empowerment of engaged local leaders and the creation of community partnerships.

Each week, over 406,000 people visit a Neighbourhood or Community house or centre in Australia. With unparalleled reach into local communities, we strengthen the foundations of communities to enable people and their families to thrive. Houses and centres are located in some of the most geographically isolated and disadvantaged communities in Australia and work with their communities to identify needs and facilitate local opportunities. This approach underpins the very core of what our sector offers as places where people from all walks of life, age, ability, race, and gender come together to connect, learn, create, celebrate, and contribute.

What are Neighbourhood Houses

Neighbourhood houses bring people within the local area together to meet, socialise, and mobilise to achieve positive community outcomes. They strengthen community spirit, pride, and connection.

Neighbourhood houses combat social isolation and loneliness by being accessible, non-threatening and inclusive spaces that welcome people from all walks of life, regardless of age, gender, ability, or economic status. They provide the opportunity for people to mix, learn from each other, and support each other through a range of health and wellbeing activities including soft exercise and yoga classes, walking groups, tai chi, and healthy cooking classes to promote healthy living. Many houses also provide arts and crafts activities, or

musical groups, for people to engage creatively in a relaxed, social setting. For seniors, they promote an active and positive ageing experience.

Moreover, Neighbourhood Houses and Centres play an important role in providing education and employment pathways by offering a range of pre-accredited and accredited learning opportunities, specifically designed to meet the needs of marginalised learners. Courses range from developing skills in speaking and writing English, computers, hospitality, construction, community services, to reception work, and how to run a small business. Some even provide job ready courses to assist people with the job seeking process including how to search for a job, resume and cover letter writing, and interview techniques.

In addition, neighbourhood houses offer a diverse range of volunteering opportunities, which have been found to increase a participant's skills and experience within a professional work setting. Put simply, neighbourhood houses expand people's interpersonal networks, and break down social isolation through community participation and inclusion. People make new friends, share time with others, and feel a deeper sense of purpose by contributing to their community in a meaningful and impactful way.

Recommendation 1:

Federal government to provide funding to ANHCA to broker a dedicated grants program to address loneliness

According to research, one in two Australians report feeling lonely for at least one day each week.¹ And almost one in ten Australians aged 15 years and over, report lacking adequate social support.² Whilst psychologically distressing, this kind of loneliness and social isolation is also associated with a range of negative health outcomes and behaviours, including ill mental health, suicidal ideation, poor diet, smoking, decreased physical activity and obesity. It also creates a significant impost on local health systems, with an estimated one

¹ Australian Psychological Society. (2018). Australian loneliness report.

² Relationships Australia. (2018). Is Australia experiencing an epidemic of loneliness? Findings from 16 waves of the Household Income and Labour Dynamics of Australia Survey. Relationships Australia National.

in five patients accessing GPs or presenting to hospital emergency rooms for social issues related to loneliness and/or social isolation, rather than for medical reasons.³

Moreover, other recent studies have revealed that loneliness has significant economic costs for the government. Indeed, Bankwest Curtin Economics Centre's 2021 study found that increased loneliness among Australians is costing \$2.7 billion per year! **This equates to an extra \$1,565 per lonely person each and every year!**⁴

In order to address this growing pandemic of loneliness and social isolation, ANHCA would develop a dedicated grants program for local and community-based organisations to run events and/or specialised programs to reduce social isolation and loneliness. Furthermore, in recognising the holistic nature of Neighbourhood Houses, people experiencing social isolation and loneliness would be further supported through a variety of other holistic interventions as required.

Given the ongoing nature of COVID-19, it should be noted that all of these initiatives could easily adapt to being pandemic friendly, through the hosting of virtual activities and events as needed.

³ Cruwys, T., Wakefield, J., Sani, F., Dingle, G., & Jetten, J. (2018). Social Isolation Predicts Frequent Attendance in Primary Care. *Annals of Behavioural Medicine*, 52(10), 817-829.

⁴ Twomey C and Vu L (2021), 'Stronger Together: Loneliness and social connectedness in Australia', *Bankwest Curtin Economics Centre Focus on the States Series, #8, November 2021*.

For our network to support over 1,000 community-run local organisations, we request that the Federal Government provide \$5 million in funding over the next 4 years.

This funding would enable brokerage of **100 grants** of up to **\$10,000 per annum**, as well as administration and collaboration with a recognised university to oversee data collection and evaluation in order to demonstrate the evidence-based outcomes of the program.

Recommendation 2:

Funding to assist Neighbourhood Houses and Centres supporting people through the COVID Pandemic

When communities are impacted by emergencies such as bushfires or floods, neighbourhood houses are often on the frontline supporting responders in any way they can, and also play a significant role in disaster recovery. For the past two years, our houses and centres have been working around the clock to ensure that their communities have the assistance and support required in order to address the ongoing impacts of COVID-19, including the provision of face masks and other PPE, access to rapid antigen tests, sharing public health messages from the Federal Government, pop-up clinics (both testing and vaccination) and helping people to access their digital certificates. Many houses, particularly in low socio-economic areas, have also been supporting people who have lost employment as a result of the pandemic, to access food and other financial support as required.

Whilst vital for ensuring the health and wellbeing of local communities, the provision of such support does carry a heavy cost for Neighbourhood and Community Houses and Centres, most of whom have received no additional

funding to undertake this demanding work. ANHCA is therefore seeking urgent funding so that its network of Neighbourhood Houses and Centres can continue to provide vital support to address the ongoing impacts of COVID-19 in local communities all across Australia.

For our network to support people to remain safe from COVID in 1,000+ local communities across Australia, we request that the Federal Government provide **\$5 million in funding over the next 12 months.**

This funding would enable brokerage of **1,000 grants** of up to **\$5,000** for houses to continue to provide local solutions to address the ongoing impacts of COVID within their respective communities.

Examples of some of the amazing work that Neighbourhood Houses and Centres are undertaking to help their residents through the pandemic

Brookton Community Resource Centre Western Australia

Covid Vaccination Proof Assistance - We are doing this by appointment when we have two staff on, so one can deal with general enquires and one can manage the Vaccination Proof assistance. Many of the people who we see don't even have an email address or access to MYGOV, so it can take up to 2.5 hours to get them set-up and to download their vaccination certificate.

Yesterday we had appointments booked in back-to-back 9.30am – 3.30pm and today have been taking more bookings for next Tuesday. This is our community, and we will never ever say no to helping we just have had to manage it the best we can. We know already that there are more coming for assistance so any further support would be amazing."

- Hazel Martin, Manager, Brookton Community Resource Centre

Community Plus+ - West End Community House Queensland

Over the course of the pandemic, West End Community House has produced and distributed over 5,000 meals to vulnerable community members and assisted people in the community with 1787 referrals to further support services.

Additionally, they supported their community by conducting check-in phone calls and visits and provided art supplies to people in isolation to combat social isolation.

They also partnered with local organisations to coordinate support for people impacted by COVID-19; including international students.

Cumberland Park Community Centre

South Australia

To support community members in showing proof of their COVID-19 Vaccination, Cumberland Park Community Centre hosted a workshop to help people download the certificate on their smart phones. However, a common barrier that many faced in downloading their certificate was not being connected to My Gov, as such this workshop also facilitated community members in setting up their My Gov account and linking to Medicare/ My Health Record.



Springwood Neighbourhood Centre

New South Wales

Springwood Neighbourhood Centre collaborated with Faulconbridge Public School to combat social isolation in young people and the elderly as a result of the COVID-19 lockdowns. The centre's home visitor's co-ordinator Tonje Akerholt was looking for a way to provide her elderly clients with social support while face-to-face visiting was restricted during COVID-19. They were encouraged to write a letter describing their own experiences during COVID-19 lockdown as well as ask questions about the recipient's life. The responses from the project have been enthusiastic on both sides, with one recipient saying, "It made my day".



Willum Warrain Aboriginal Association Victoria

Willum Warrain Aboriginal Association partnered with Peninsula Health to deliver covid-19 vaccinations to mob throughout 2021. As part of the campaign, they engaged with local elders to encourage others to roll up their sleeves to get vaccinated. Additionally, in 2020 and 2021, they provided mob with flu shots through a partnership with First People's Health and Wellbeing and operated as a testing point for covid-19 to further protect their community.



Wydkatchem Community Resource Centre Western Australia

"We will most likely have an official training day where we teach how to download all other relevant apps first [...] because we have a lot of elderly who are not that up to date when it comes to apps – we will also show how to download their official vaxx docs and laminate them."

- Craig Cooper, Manager, Wyalkatchem Community Resource Centre

Wyndham Park Community Centre Victoria

Wyndham Park Community Centre has been distributing food relief to community members in need throughout the pandemic. At the beginning of the pandemic they partnered with UNITED SIKHS and Lets Feed to start a weekly meal and grocery program 'Guru Nanak Free Community Kitchen & Food Pantry'. Each week over 150 meals and 30 grocery packs were provided to vulnerable community members.

Over the last 12 months we have provided food hampers to over 10,000 families which is approximately 40,000 people.



The synergy of these recommendations

In these unprecedented times, the Federal government should consider both these recommendations as an effective dual strategy to combat both the ongoing health impacts COVID-19, as well as the increase in loneliness and social isolation that have been caused by the pandemic. Indeed, unless this shadow pandemic of loneliness and social isolation is not immediately addressed by the Federal Government, it is likely to result in an even greater burden on Australia's healthcare system – especially GPs on the frontline, who have already been stretched beyond capacity.

For more information about this submission, please contact Nicole Battle (ANHCA President) on 0414 146 075 or email nicole@nhvic.org.au.