ACOSS Briefing: DSS discretional grants funding round, February 2015

Background

In 2014 the Federal Government cut funding to the Department of Social Services (DSS) portfolio.

- Federal Budget 2014-15 (May) introduced a $241m cut to DSS over four years (incorporating a $51m cut to DSS in 2014-15).
- Mid-year Economic and Fiscal Outlook (MYEFO) 2014 (Nov) introduced a further $30m cut to DSS in 2014-15.
- A freeze on indexation of community sector funding.

At the same time, significant cuts and uncertainty to community services and social infrastructure emerged in a range of other areas,\(^1\) including:

- $15 million cut from federally funded legal assistance, including community legal centres, Aboriginal legal services, family violence and prevention services, and legal aid;
- $493.7 million cut from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander programs over 4 years and the restructuring of funding under the Indigenous Advancement Strategy;
- Foreshadowing of $197.1 million cut from the ‘Health Flexible Funds’ over 3 years from 2015-16, resulting in uncertainty about the future funding of health services; and
- The current review of Federalism with implications for government responsibilities across core areas of community service and support.

ACOSS has consistently advocated strongly against these cuts, which are likely to hit people and communities most in need. ACOSS has also been advocating for clear Government commitments to support the transitional arrangements for clients and staff affected by these cuts; and in the face of funding offers that require organisations to change how they operate.

In the subsequent tender and contracting process, large numbers of community organisations were offered funding, including those with already-established government funding relationships. DSS reported that 692 organisations were successful in their applications. Of those,

- 586 orgs had been previously funded by DSS
- 106 were newly-funded organisations
- In addition, other organisations are being funded through sub-contracting or consortia arrangements with a lead organisation.

Some organisations have been offered more funds than they had received previously, or for longer time frames, enabling more effective operational planning to meet the needs of their communities. Some organisations were also able to complete their contracting negotiation in a short period of time. But for many others, this process has resulted in a cut to part or all of their DSS funding; and significant challenges in their ability to contract appropriately with Government to ensure they can meet the needs of their communities.

This briefing sets out the problems that sector organisations have reported through the ACOSS network; and key messages to Government to address them. It is intended to support sector organisations understand the implications and assist in ongoing advocacy efforts; and will be updated with further information and as circumstances change.

**Key messages**

1. Funding uncertainty and the impact of the Government’s cuts to community services and social infrastructure have left many organisations without critical government support to provide services, policy advice and connection with community over major social and economic priorities. In the short-term, Government needs to restore the cuts and provide clear and appropriate support to organisations through funding extensions and transitional arrangements. In the long-term, Government needs to work with community service organisations to determine adequate funding levels to meet community needs and ensure social and economic participation; and implement investment to meet those funding levels over a five year timeframe.

2. The implementation of funding decisions, including the lack of information about where funding has been cut or changed, has been a significant barrier to smooth transition by organisations supporting people and communities in need, and in meeting their obligations to staff and organisations. Government should publish immediately details on what funding has been lost for social services, on a geographic or population basis as relevant; and which organisations have been offered funding, including for which services, target population and geographic coverage.

3. Contract terms and conditions are undermining an outcomes-based approach. Government funding needs to enable the flexibility for organisations to identify the needs of their communities and how best to meet them. Contracting terms and conditions that impinge upon this should be removed from DSS funding. The Government should work with the sector to implement the recommendations of the Productivity Commission to improve contracting with community organisations (attachment 3).

4. Confidentiality requirements are undermining collaborative partnerships and relationships. The confidentiality provisions currently attached to Government funding offers for community services must be lifted.

5. The welcome reforms towards data exchange on outcomes need to accommodate the broader operating environments for community organisations, including the importance of trust, confidence and confidentiality between sector organisations and their clients and communities.
1. Funding uncertainty

Following the Budget cuts to DSS announced in May 2014, the Department of Social Services provided evidence on the consequent changes in funding allocations by program area; and the grants process it would follow for new funding in these areas. The subsequent open tender process for funding in the discretionary grants program saw more than 5,500 applications seeking over $3.9 billion in funding, where only $800 million was available.

Successive extensions to existing funding contracts were provided: first to the end of December 2014; then, as the expiry of the first extension neared, by a further two months to end Feb 2015. On 22 Dec funding applicants were advised whether they had been successful in the tender process or not. No further information was received about detailed offers for those who were advised they had been ‘successful’, leaving organisations waiting for over one month without detailed information about what funding they were being offered and for what activities. On 30 Jan 2015 Social Services Minister Scott Morrison announced a transitional package for many of the organisations that lost funding; and opened the way for DSS to make offers to those who had been successful in the tender process.

The level of uncertainty about the future of contracts put organisations into an untenable position where they could not guarantee the continuation of their activities or could not ensure they were solvent beyond one month. There are both social and economic impacts of this uncertainty, in a sector that contributes 5% of GDP and 8% of employment nationally.

Family Support Newcastle was not successful in our submission for Community Mental Health Funding. 5 staff members will be redundant as a result of this change. This is despite having provided the service very successfully over the past 8 years. Because we did not know the outcome early enough, we have been gradually making staff redundant and will be operating a minimal service over the next two months until the new service in Newcastle is established. We can only hope that the new service is even better than the service that we have provided to date, to account for the disruption that this has created both for clients and for competent staff.

2. Impact of funding cuts

As a result of the additional cut in MYEFO, and despite organisations having invested time and resources in tendering for these programs, the Government announced no funding would be awarded for the:

- Housing and Homelessness Service Improvement and Sector Support round;
- Financial Crisis and Material Aid Sector Support round; and
- Financial Counselling and Capability Sector Support round (a direct source funding round).
St George Youth Services (NSW) were one of the applicants for the Housing and Homelessness Service Improvement and Sector Support recent DSS grants. After spending all of that time and energy in writing a funding application, including money on staffing hours and an external consultant, we were told afterwards that this program will no longer be continued. This is very annoying and a waste of human resource time and resources in a very difficult climate. We had recently lost our State government funding and we hoped that the DSS grant would be an alternate source of funding for the high level of homelessness needs in our region. We feel disrespected and devalued when the Federal government decides a funding round will be ceased after all of our work has been done; at the very least there should be some reimbursement for this time and resources. The broader question is where is the commitment to homelessness and housing needs by the Federal government?

The impact of the Government’s funding cuts has been an erosion of peak representative, policy and advocacy capacity in a range of areas including:

- Housing and homelessness including Community Federation of Australia, Homelessness Australia and National Shelter, which lost all DSS funding halfway through a funded contract;
- Disability, including funding cuts to Australia Federation of Disability Organisations, Autism Aspergers Advocacy Australia, Blind Citizens Australia, Brain Injury Australia, Deaf Australia, Deafness Forum of Australia, Down Syndrome Australia, National Council on Intellectual Disability, Physical Disability Australia, Short Statured People of Australia and Disability Advocacy Network of Australia.

The cuts have also seen services defunded for programs across a broad range of areas, including:

- Carer respite
- Children’s, youth & family services
- Community mental health services
- Emergency relief
- Financial Counselling

Community organisations are deeply concerned about the impact of these cuts on the people and communities they serve. While DSS set its own priorities for population and community need as part of this funding process, this did not entail evaluation between government and the community sector of existing programs, a marked gap particularly where funding has not been reallocated. The impact of these cuts includes loss of funding to local organisations in many communities that do not have other organisations already active there and able to meet additional needs. When one of the sector’s greatest contributions is its relationships and capacity within communities, this loss cannot be contracted easily from other providers.

Our immediate concern is in towns where the only and/or major/primary Emergency Relief service provider has had their DSS funding cut. We are aware of this being the case in Carnarvon, Margaret River and Esperance (two services cut) (WA).
FamilyCare in Shepparton (Vic) had been operating a Parent Child Program for 20 years when it was advised just before Christmas that DSS would not provide funding after the end of February. An announcement by new DSS Minister Scott Morrison in January indicated the funding would be extended until 30 June 2015 only. FamilyCare’s Parent Child Program provides vital support to parents with young children, in particular through its mother/baby day-stay facility available in Shepparton, Cobram and Seymour. Since 2000 the service has assisted 4,500 families across the region. As well as practical assistance for direct participants, it plays an important preventative role in a network of parental and maternity services. The central question ‘is Government funding a comparable service after 1 July’ has not been answered.

Key messages 1) and 2): ACOSS calls on the Government to work with community service organisations to determine adequate funding levels to meet community needs and ensure social and economic participation; and to implement investment to meet those levels over a five year timeframe. Until appropriate funding levels are determined, the Government should restore the funding cut from social services and community infrastructure, including through portfolio savings measures within Department of Social Services and other areas. Community sector funding should include adequate indexation of funding (to wage price index). Government should provide clear and appropriate support to organisations through funding extensions and transitional arrangements (see attachment 2).

3. Capacity to meet obligations to vulnerable clients and communities or to staff following the DSS funding cut

The Government’s commitment to support the transition of some organisations that lost funding was a welcome step to ensure support for clients and communities affected; and reflected core positions advocated by ACOSS. Emergency Relief and Food Relief providers were offered funding extensions to 31 March 2015; providers of some other community services were offered extensions to 30 June 2015.

However the lack of information about what other services are available continues to be a major stumbling block to smooth transition by organisations receiving this transitional support; while other organisations go without clarity of such support, including those who have lost funding and those who have been offered funding on a different basis to what they sought.

Crossroads has been providing ER in the Sutherland Shire since 1986 but has now lost that funding. Over the last 2 years we provided 188 and 181 instances of emergency relief respectively, excluding case management of clients and referral phone enquiries. Over past 2 years have had approx. 180 clients annually. Had one staff 0.2FTE delivering ER; lost that capacity. We tendered on our own and also in a consortium with Sutherland Shire Family Services and Jannali Neighbourhood Aid – none of these applications were successful. We don’t yet know who else received the funding, if any. We won’t be able to offer payments for rental arrears, bonds and removals, payments for medical bills and chemist costs, cash for travel/fores, food vouchers, payments for telephone bills, funeral assistance and other one off financial payments for other essential living costs.
Key messages: Government should publish immediately details on what funding has been lost for social services, on a geographic or population basis as relevant; and which organisations have been offered funding, including for which services, target population and geographic coverage.

4. Adequacy and transparency of contracting process

Community organisations must be given the time and resources to contract appropriately, to ensure effective community services for the people and communities that rely upon them; and to enable due diligence on what organisations are being offered funding for, their obligations on that funding, and their capacity to meet those obligations. ACOSS has consistently advocated a minimum of six-months notice before the end or change of funding arrangements: on any revision or reform to funding programs; and as a minimum timeframe for any contract negotiation. The lack of such timeframes in the current contracting round, with organisations being offered less than one month to agree current funding offers, has caused significant problems for organisations across the sector.

For organisations offered funding under the current DSS round, a key challenge is the difficulty to properly negotiate contracts within the one month before their current Government funding runs out, particularly where organisations have been offered funding on a different basis from that for which they tendered. There may have been attempts to maintain services and organisational capacity as part of DSS funding decisions, in the context of reduced funding. But the result is that many organisations need to review their allocation of resources and their service design in the face of funding offers for different amounts and for different activities to those they applied for; while also undertaking due diligence on the contract obligations themselves.

Under the previous contract Good Beginnings was contracted to provide services in a particular location. The new contract has more of a restricted area, which is only one part of the previous location. Suddenly we are in a position where we need to go back to more than a dozen families and tell them we are not funded to run this program, and we are not sure who is funded for the area so can’t provide referrals at this point. We also have a strong collaboration with the school that used to host the program (they contributed funds to fitting out the space) and if we are unable to operate there we would like to also manage their expectations respectfully. If we are able to have advice about the timeline this would be most helpful. It would also be very helpful for us to know who has been successful in adjacent areas, so we can seek to work with them in the transition. In some locations we have been able to find this information out through networks and in others it is still unknown. Although the contract closure for preferred providers is 28/2/15 an additional 4 months (30/6/15) would mean transition could be managed more effectively with families and make sure that they are supported through the change. The risk of families falling through the cracks and ending up with greater needs is quite high.

One of the difficulties in advising about an effective, systemic response to these issues has been the unwillingness of organisations to be identified on these concerns, either because they remain uncertain over their future funding; there is a lack of clarity about options available to
them on contracts whose terms have been advised as ‘not negotiable’; or they are cautious about damaging their relationships with government through their advocacy. Those that have consented to providing information publicly are included throughout this briefing and at Attachment 3.

The lack of transparency throughout the funding process has also been raised by organisations as a significant barrier to working effectively with Government and to organisations being able to respond effectively to community needs. The lack of transparency over who has been offered funding and who has lost it was outlined at iii) above. In addition, organisations who lost funding in this process have reported receiving anonymous responses to their requests for information from the Department of Social Services; and others who were successful in their tenders being explicitly advised their offers are confidential. This is making it impossible for organisations to negotiate with other providers on the ground about how to pick up gaps in services or how to deliver services into new or different areas.

For some in the sector, the continuing extensions to funding have compounded rather than resolved the problems they are facing, and there are no perfect solutions to address the impact of these issues on communities and organisations. Nevertheless there is currently significant risk of organisations contracting for outcomes that they may find very difficult to meet.

**Key messages:** Community organisations need to be well-informed about the services being funded in their areas; and to be able to work together collaboratively, free from expectations of confidentiality and practices of secrecy. Current funding offers for new contracts by DSS need to be extended to enable attention to activity requirements and contracting obligations and to develop relationships in communities to support good outcomes. Transitional funding needs to be available for organisations who have been offered funding but need to reorganise their operations, alongside those who have lost funding.

### 5. Contract terms and conditions undermining outcomes-based approach

2014 reforms to DSS funding processes included contracting on the basis of outcomes, something ACOSS had long called for and welcomed at the time. However some of the current contractual terms and conditions require permission or detailed reporting for activities that ought to be at the discretion of organisations working flexibly to meet their responsibilities. This reflects a consolidation of government funding in terms of a purchaser-provider relationship rather than a shift towards outcomes based relationships and activities. Such requirements include:

- seeking permission for purchases over $5000;
- reporting in-kind and donated contributions to funded activities; and
- returning surpluses from the project to Government.

Even where not new, such conditions point to a continuing inability by Government to recognise the value it contracts from community organisations in relationships and connections with the communities being served. These are intangible but irreplaceable values: organisations need to
be able to invest in social infrastructure like collaboration and networking well beyond the life of any funded activity. The Productivity Commission found such limitations in Government contracting undermine the outcomes governments themselves seek:

The efficiency and effectiveness of delivery of services by NFPs on behalf of governments is adversely affected by inadequate contracting processes. These include overly prescriptive requirements, increased micro management, requirements to return surplus funds, and inappropriately short-term contracts (PC 2010:XXIV).

**Key messages:** Government funding for community outcomes needs to allow for the flexibility for organisations to identify the needs of their communities and how best to meet them. Contracting terms and conditions that impinge upon this should be removed from DSS funding. The Government should work with the sector to implement the recommendations of the Productivity Commission to improve contracting with community organisations (attachment 3).

6. **Funding process and confidentiality requirements undermining collaborative partnerships and relationships**

Many community organisations have been working hard to establish partnerships with each other within the communities they support, as they seek to reduce duplication, maximise the value of resources and improve social impact. The delays and lack of information about who has been offered and lost funding has put pressure on local partnerships at both formal and informal levels. This has undermined the social infrastructure within communities, much of which has been hard fought and developed over long periods of investment and effort by community organisations; and which is both unfunded and the very value that governments received from the community sector.

Even once funding offers have been made, the sector’s capacity to identify service gaps, and opportunities for partnership and collaboration to address those gaps is being hampered by the requirement to maintain confidentiality over funding offers for those who have been offered funding and for those who have been told there may be a chance of funding, though do not yet have an offer. Such confidentiality requirements undermine transparency of the funding process and severely restrict the sector’s capacity to identify community needs and the best ways to meet them, including collaboratively.

We’re trying to find out which agencies were successful in the DSS tenders, specifically the Communities for Children Parenting and Playgroups. We weren’t successful and want to try to introduce our staff to those successful in the hope of future employment.

These issues are also impacting organisations and programs beyond DSS. Relationships and subcontracts that were already in place are now in doubt as organisations review their operations and funding following the DSS tender outcomes. The secrecy of offers to ‘parent’ organisations in subcontracting and collaborative relationships is further compounding the uncertainty for organisations and communities.
Key message: The confidentiality provisions currently attached to Government funding offers for community services must be lifted.

7. Data outcomes framework

ACOSS has been part of the community sector’s call to move community service funding to focus on the outcomes we are trying to achieve for people and communities. As such, we welcomed the Department’s intent to reform funding process through 2014 to reflect an outcomes-based approach including through the use of data and measurement. However we signalled concerns about the potential conflict between community organisations maintaining client confidentiality and being required to provide details to DSS to participate in its newly established Data Outcomes Framework. Organisations being offered funding are now raising this concern regarding the DSS Data Exchange and their capacity to develop relationships of trust with clients while also meeting the Department’s requirements for data exchange.

Our primary concern is that if we comply with these requirements, we’re effectively no longer providing a confidential service (even if the personal information is only able to be seen by ‘technical’ DSS staff, rather than other staff). If callers are requested to consent to their personal details being passed on to the government, I suspect trust and confidence in our service and financial counselling in general would be reduced. We come at this from a lawyer-client relationship perspective (and I think the FC-client relationship is similar) where there is an obligation of confidence. Indeed lawyers have professional obligations not to breach client confidence, and many callers to the financial counselling hotline also access legal services (and our data base is shared).

Key message: The move towards data exchange on outcomes needs to accommodate the broader operating environments for community organisations, including the importance of trust, confidence and confidentiality between sector organisations and their clients and communities.

How can you help? The ACOSS network will continue to advocate against these cuts and their impacts in communities. To provide further information about how the funding cut to community organisations have impacted your organisation and to lend your support to advocacy on this issue, contact Tessa.Boyd-Caine@acoss.org.au.
Attachment 1: Key links and resources

ACOSS

- Advocacy against the cuts: http://acoss.org.au/media/acoss_newsletter/


DSS

- Senate estimates submission about implementation of DSS Funding Cuts: http://www.aph.gov.au/~/media/Committees/clac_ctte/estimates/bud_1415/DSS/tabled_docs/19June_2.pdf

Attachment 2: ACOSS recommendations to Government for supporting appropriate transition in Government-funded community organisations

- Ensure that new contracts are finalised at least 6 months prior to the end of existing contracts, in accordance with good governance and risk management principles;
- Ensure that there is advance notice of at least 6 months of service procurement processes;
- Where there are significant changes to the size, scope or nature of services tendered, ensure that there is clear and open consultation and collaboration with services concerning program design and service outcomes;
- Support and encourage services to engage service users in service design and evaluation;
- Ensure any funding or tendering process preferences the options of direct negotiation or select tender, with open tender processes only being used in circumstances where clear benefits for competitive processes can be demonstrated;
- Ensure contracts operate with a presumption of a minimum of 5 years funding;
- Ensure no contracts prohibit organisations from participating in independent research, policy development and public debate, including advocacy;
- Provide for industry assistance, including transition funding, and job transfers to reduce the risks of increasing unemployment, and the loss of the expertise and skills of the existing workforces;
- Ensure there is adequate provision for redundancies for staff affected by changes in service procurement.
Attachment 3: Productivity Commission recommendations for improving the effectiveness of direct government funding

Providing clarity over funding obligations

Recommendation 11.1: Australian governments should, in the contracting of services or other funding of external organisations, determine and transparently articulate whether they are fully funding particular services or activities undertaken by not-for-profit organisations, or only making a contribution towards the associated costs and the extent of that contribution. Australian governments should fully fund those services that they would otherwise provide directly (allowing for co-contributions from clients and any agreed contributions by service providers). In applying this criterion, governments should have regard to whether the funded activity is considered essential, as part of the social safety net or an entitlement for eligible Australians.

Australian governments should ensure that service agreements and contracts include provision for reasonable compensation for providers for the costs imposed by changes in government policy that affect the delivery of the contracted service, for example, changes to eligibility rules, the scope of the service being provided, or reporting requirements.

Recommendation 11.2: Australian governments should ensure that service agreements and contracts include provision for reasonable compensation for providers for the costs imposed by changes in government policy that affect the delivery of the contracted service, for example, changes to eligibility rules, the scope of the service being provided, or reporting requirements.

Recommendation 8.2: The Departments of the Treasury and Finance and Deregulation should jointly conduct a review into the feasibility, the costs and the benefits of requiring value for money assessments for government procurement to consider significant input tax concessions. Such a review should be wide-ranging, including the not-for-profit and for-profit sectors.

Ensuring appropriate independence

Recommendation 11.3: Australian governments funding service provision or making grants should respect the independence of funded organisations and not impose conditions associated with the general operations of the funded organisation, beyond those essential to ensure the delivery of agreed funding outcomes.
Attachment 4: How organisations have described to ACOSS the impacts on their organisation of the DSS funding cuts and current contracting environment

i. **Family and children’s services**

- Richmond Community Services has been running a ‘Tools for Parents’ program funded by DSS for the past 9 years. We were not successful in our tender. This is huge for the Hawkesbury; there is a huge gap and need in the area. The project provides parenting and relationship skills through a series of therapeutic workshops and ongoing courses to disadvantaged families in the Hawkesbury LGA (and often beyond) and removes all barriers to access by providing them free, in an accessible location, at times suited to both parents and with free childcare, eg ‘Helping the Anxious Child’, ‘Couples Communication’, ‘Flying Solo Parenting Skills’, ‘Beating Bullying’, ‘Be A Great Dad’, ‘Talking and Listening with Your Kids’......the list is long and content decided via direct feedback from families. Other limited help of this nature available in Penrith would necessitate a family travelling to Blacktown and then changing trains and travelling to Penrith – a journey of some 2 ½ hours – and with a cost that they would likely be unable to meet – and finding childcare for their children. The program has enjoyed enormous success and far exceeded expected outcomes and attendance levels; over 9 years 99.8% anonymously reported that attending helped their family. (Hence refunded 4 times without us having to tender). It was born of an identified gap in services in the area – and our worry is that in a few years’ time this will again be recognised as a huge gap and refunded elsewhere – when we already have systems in place etc – the constant and costly re-invention of the wheel.

- Eurobodalla Family Support has not been successful in our application for DSS funding. We have run supported playgroups to disadvantaged families on the South Coast of NSW. The majority of our clients are Aboriginal families. We have been funded to run this program since 2006. Another non-profit organisation in Eden and Bega has not been refunded. This service works with children with special needs and has also been running for several years. This is not our sole funding but it means the loss of 2 full time staff members. The playgroups were an essential factor in early intervention as they allowed us to identify issues such as domestic and family violence, delayed learning in children, child abuse/neglect, medical issues effecting babies and children, preparation for preschool and school and a myriad of other factors that isolated families face. The number of clients effected is around 500 per year. The department’s web site states that successful agencies will be negotiated with this month and the results will then be posted. In fact I presume that “new” services will commence in July and that the “big” agencies will get the nod as is happening with the refuges. As far as we know the service will cease entirely as no other agency applied in our region. We have funding until the end of February.

- Young people and families: REALskills program (Tweed Shire, NSW/Qld) axed after 12 years achieving positive independently evaluated outcomes for young people and their families and school communities for many years. On average we run/ran 10 x one-off workshops and 4 x 3 week courses per year – attendance to these varies from 8 per session to 23!!! (we averaged that 7 would attend each but this is far exceeded). The impact on clients will be that the disadvantaged families will not have access to these programs any longer and it was developed
in direct response to gaps identified and provided an ongoing avenue of support........which goes a long way to making safer communities, esp for children.....

ii. Emergency relief

- Christian Community Aid, Eastwood (NSW): funding cut of $236,000. A team of 12 qualified staff and volunteers with vast experience and knowledge provide these professional services and assistance without charge to community members. CCA’s Financial Counselling program sees approximately 350 individual clients a year. Of these, more than half: live in rental accommodation and face increasing rental costs; receive Government benefits as their sole source of income; have annual incomes of less than $20,000; and are aged between 26-45.

- In Western Sydney: Blue Mountains Family Support Services; Hills Community Aid; Holroyd Community Aid; Blacktown Community Aid (already closed) Gateway Family Services and the Blue Mountains Family Referral Service Managers

- Holroyd Community Aid (HCA): lost its Emergency Relief funding, having been helping the local community in past 48 years for via this funding relief.

- Stafford Cottage and Highlands Youth Hub, operating for over 20 years with 1200 visits per year and over 450 families on our books. We have 730 ER clients and saw 450 clients a year during 1200 visits. Last year our ER volunteers made 312 referrals to other services. We saw 163 first time clients during 2013-14. We are extremely concerned about the effect of ER funding cuts – especially to regional areas. We are a small community centre and previously we received $75,000 per year as ER funding. Every cent of this money was given to clients. We chose not to take the $6000 admin amount and use mostly volunteers to deliver the program. Our concern is that a large organisation will have received funding for this area but our experience is that they do not usually adequately service an area they are not based in. They will definitely not be doing ER 5 days a week and probably won’t be available for those clients from Centrelink, the hospital and the Police that need urgent assistance immediately and who were previously referred to us. I would imagine that they will also be paying admin costs (room rental, staff costs, travel etc). Of course, the biggest issue is not the $75,000 of food, meals and prescriptions that we supplied but the huge number of referrals that came through the ER program – for NILS, Financial Counselling, counselling, community development programs etc.

- Traveller’s Aid Victoria: no transitional arrangements; staff redundancies. Only service of its kind in Australia.

- Yarrawonga Health- Community Services has been notified that our funding application to continue our Emergency Relief/Vulnerable Groups Counselling programs was UNSUCCESSFUL. We have been advised that the current funding round ceases from Friday 6 February, 2015. Yarrawonga Health has provided these services since 2005 so the impact, especially to the most vulnerable and disadvantaged clients of those programs, will be immense. Yarrawonga is a small rural community with extremely limited services. The small financial aid that our ER/VG counselling programs was able to provide as well as the ongoing financial hardship counselling, which, for some, encompasses many impacting individual life issues, endeavoured to instil some hope for these clients, maintain a level of connection to their community and assist the link to other beneficial services. Two staff members are affected by this change, a total of 0.4 EFT.