



Australian Council of Social Service

2 May 2019

Mr. David Thodey AO,
Chair, APS Review Panel
Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet
PO Box 6500
Canberra ACT 2600

Submission: Australian Public Service Review – Supplementary Submission

Dear Mr Thodey,

The Australian Council of Social Service (ACOSS) is a national advocate for action to reduce poverty and inequality and the peak body for the community services sector in Australia. Our vision is for a fair, inclusive and sustainable Australia where all individuals and communities can participate in and benefit from social and economic life. ACOSS welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the work of the APS Review Panel in this important area.

Developing Stronger Internal and External Partnerships

In this submission we have focussed on the APS Review Panel's fourth priority – *Develop stronger internal and external partnerships*. We welcome the review panel's focus on partnerships as a key priority for change. The report's focus on this area reflects feedback that ACOSS and our members have provided directly to the APS Review Panel throughout the review process.

Specifically, we agree with the APS Review Panel's report that "A fundamental rethink of its key relationships will move the APS to solving problems in genuine partnership with ministers and their offices, civil society, business, academia, other jurisdictions, and the Australian public." We also agree that what is needed are "Formal commitments to work in partnership with others (for example, civil society and business) on core policy, delivery and regulatory work – with all parties publicly accountable for adhering to those commitments."

Achieving this priority will require a significant shift in the relationship between civil society and the Federal Government. Strong community voices are vital to a thriving democracy and good policymaking, and civil society must be free to advocate for social change, even when this means criticising government decisions. During the past five years we have seen community representatives locked out of government decision making and community voices have faced intimidation, harassment, funding cuts and unnecessary regulations. At the same time, current policy advisory arrangements are failing to rise to pressing challenges, including deep and persistent poverty, climate change and future health financing.

Central to achieving a reset in the partnership between civil society and the APS will be ensuring that the voices of the most disadvantaged people and communities are resourced to provide advice to the APS and input to their processes. One of the most significant factors that affect a community or organisation's capacity to engage with the APS is the resources available to it. Yet over the past five



years we have seen significant funding cuts and defunding of organisations that represent or are focussed on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, young people, refugees and migrants, people experiencing homelessness or struggling in the housing market and other disadvantaged people and communities. These cuts have directly affected the capacity of the APS to understand the experience of and the issues faced by disadvantaged and marginalised people and communities.

An international example of this type of partnership between civil society, people affected by policy decisions and government is the Scottish Government's recent codesign of a Social Security Charter. This charter regulates how social security services and payments are delivered, and was codesigned with people with lived experience of social security and other stakeholders. A [detailed report](#) that provides an outline of the process of codesign that was used in the creation of the charter was published by the Scottish Government.

The Review Panel may also find useful the Human Rights Law Centre's [Defending Democracy](#) report. This report speaks to how governments deter civil society from participating in public debates, and makes a number of recommendations for change in that area.

Relationships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples

ACOSS also agrees with the panel's report that "the APS cannot meet its purpose of serving all Australians unless it works openly and with integrity with partners across the community. Nowhere is this truer than in supporting the outcomes and aspirations of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples." We welcome your commitment to continue to work on hearing the voices of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as you continue your review. ACOSS strongly urges governments to work with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander national organisations and leadership to develop policy and budget measures across key areas in the Redfern Statement including engagement, health, justice, violence prevention, disability, children and families. ACOSS also supports the '[Uluru Statement from the Heart](#)' and rejects the government's refusal to engage with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in their united plea to have a voice to parliament. The ongoing refusal of this parliament and others before this to engage with a consultative group on issues that affect Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people across this country is blocking effective dialogue with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. We refer the review panel to the Uluru Statement webpage at www.acoss.org.au/supportfirstnations, which carries the support of over 8,500 signatories.

Whole of Government Advisory Arrangements

ACOSS has developed policies on future [whole of government advisory arrangements and civil society](#). Our proposals include a new standing advisory body – a *National Reform Council* – should be legislated to advise government on long-term whole-of-government policy *challenges*, integrating economic, social and environmental goals and perspectives. The Council would draw together expertise from government, business, unions, community and environmental perspectives and respected independent experts, and encourage all sectors of the community to work together with government to find practical solutions to these challenges. It would collaborate with a *First Nations Voice* on challenges facing First Nations communities, the relationship between them and the wider community, and include representation from that body.



The Council would seek input from the community through discussion papers, reports, and an annual public forum. It would be supported by a fixed number of *expert Commissions* tasked with solving whole-of-government policy challenges such as: income inequality and poverty; full employment; digital transformation; a robust, fair and efficient public revenue base; climate change; economic, social and cultural engagement with our Asian neighbours; affordable, efficient and liveable cities and regions; and the provision and financing of care for older people, people with disabilities or chronic illness. The Commissions would draw, in a flexible way, on expertise across sectors, governments, academia, and the experience of people affected by public policies.

There would be a fixed number of standing and fixed-term Commissions, each formulating policy *missions* informed by expert, stakeholder and public input, incorporating goals, strategy and evaluation. These new whole-of-government advisory bodies would *replace* the Productivity Commission (and other whole-of-government advisory bodies, as appropriate) and *supplement* Ministerial advisory bodies such as the proposed Social Security Commission, National Housing Council, and Human Services Partnership Forum.

If the review panel has any questions regarding this submission, the ACOSS contact person is Senior Adviser (Community Services and Health), John Mikelsons, on (02) 9210 6212 or john@acoss.org.au.

Yours sincerely,

Dr. Cassandra Goldie
ACOSS CEO