

SACOSS Media Release

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Disability and Social Housing the Big Budget Winners - Those in Financial Trouble Get a Much Needed Hand Up.

Today's State Budget announcement by the Weatherill Government has provided some hope within the community and social services sector, with increased funding for a number of services, and the implementation of new financial and legal services in South Australia.

SACOSS has been campaigning for increased funds for financial counselling for more than two and half years since 40 counselling positions were cut from Families SA by the then-Treasurer Foley.

Given the modest reinvestment last year with the announcement of a Utilities Literacy Program, today's funding commitment for 10-12 new community based financial counsellors is vital.

Cost of living pressures are acute for people on low incomes, and access to free independent financial guidance and advocacy is vital, SACOSS welcomes this investment which will help protect people from financial disaster.

Investment in this area is further strengthened by funding for a new consumer credit legal service which will provide much needed legal support to consumers with credit and financial difficulties. Research commissioned recently by the government showed 10,000 South Australians each year do not have access to the legal support they require in relation to consumer credit issues.

SACOSS Executive Director Ross Womersley said,
"SACOSS has long been lobbying for funded consumer credit legal services to ensure people have access to financial counselling and legal support, the ability to negotiate with creditors, and knowledge of their rights early in the debt process"

"Following on from the release of the SACOSS CCLS scoping study earlier this year, it is extremely pleasing that the need for these services has been recognised with funding for

their development and implementation. This is a good start which we hope will be built on in years to come”

The investment in the Affordable Housing Stimulus Package is also extremely welcome, and should help to ensure desperately needed social and community housing becomes available.

SACOSS notes that the housing sector remains a key employer and this direct investment ensures much needed jobs will continue to be available locally.

The decision by the government in this budget to bring forward funds to ensure full funding for the NDIS is also very positive.

Mr Womersley said,

“This is an extremely welcome investment by the Weatherill Government, which will assist a group of people, many of whom have very limited support to access a good life. SACOSS welcomes an early release of money, particularly if it means shorter waiting lists and the ability to make services more accessible to people in need”.

Training is a crucial pathway linked to employment and a \$27million investment in skills and training will ensure that more people have the opportunity to develop the skills they need to fit the work that is available.

Further funding to promote community development in the APY Lands is also welcomed by SACOSS. The rehabilitation and restructuring of major roads will lessen dangers to drivers, increase access to remote services, and promote greater employment opportunities.

Mr Womersley said,

“Extra funding to provide APY communities with more health workers, as well as the continuation of the therapeutic services for a further 2 years, will be an extremely important means of support and development for these communities. “

The decision to increase the current water concession by \$30 a year will be very helpful for a wide range of South Australian householders who have struggled with recent price increases.

While welcoming this increase, SACOSS believes all energy and water concessions should be properly indexed so that struggling people are not left behind as real prices increase. SACOSS calls on both the government and opposition to commit in future to properly indexing these concessions.

SACOSS is really pleased that the government has used this Budget to fulfil its promise to

pay “its fair share” in response to the ASU’s recent equal pay case for social and community service workers.

These wage increases are deserved and long overdue. Service providers have been anxious about their capacity to meet increased wage costs, and this funding commitment ensures services won’t be cut and workers will be properly rewarded.

It is important to note that while SACOSS welcomes all of the new and extended funding for some of South Australia’s most vulnerable citizens, we are concerned that a considerable amount of the additional expenditure in this budget is funded by one-off income flows.

“SACOSS believes that no matter which political party holds government in South Australia, there is an outstanding issue – South Australia needs a stable and sustainable revenue base which can ensure South Australians receive the critical support they continue to expect from the government” Mr Womersley said.

The SACOSS State Budget Snapshot 2013 will be released on Friday 7 June.

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