

Foreword

It is an honour to introduce this collection of articles about collaboration across sector boundaries.

This is a subject of great relevance to our work at the ACT Government Community Services Directorate (CSD). Our collaboration with the community sector is currently in the spotlight as we work to develop and implement reforms to respond to unsustainable levels of demand for services, to change service delivery and regulation models and to examine funding mechanisms. Throughout this work, we have also identified the need to support the sector through the changes it is experiencing.

One of seven directorates in the Australian Capital Territory, CSD is responsible for a wide range of human services functions, the largest of which include children, youth and family support services and public and community housing. We also have responsibility for services and policies relating to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander affairs, multicultural affairs, older people, women, community services and community disaster recovery.

We work closely with the community sector to achieve our vision of *better lives for everyone with better services*.

The community sector is a critical part of the ACT human services system. There are nearly 4,000 employees working in the community sector in the Australian Capital Territory, employed by about 160 community sector organisations, and many more in care services for children and older people.

The non-governmental sector in the Australian Capital Territory is particularly active and is marked by a large number of organisations, with about 50 per cent more organisations per head of population than in New South Wales.

In 2015–16, the ACT Government provided \$389 million to support vulnerable Canberrans across areas including young people, families, seniors, domestic violence, public housing, and disability and therapy.

Philanthropic giving also contributes to the sector, with research in 2007 finding there was great interest in philanthropy within the Australian Capital Territory and that the majority of the territory's community organisations either have received or are receiving philanthropic giving. The relationship between the ACT Government and the community sector is strong and is guided by the *Social Compact* that outlines principles of good communication and partnership for the benefit of all people and communities in the Australian Capital Territory.

Canberra is known as one of the world's most liveable cities, with the highest national proportions of people of working age, average income, level of post-school qualifications, work participation rates, self-assessed health status and levels of participation in sport, recreation and culture.

Yet ACT Government calculations have estimated that more than 40,000 Canberrans experience high levels of disadvantage. Because so many of the city's residents are relatively advantaged, disadvantage and marginalisation can be hidden. Disadvantage in Canberra is generally 'salt and peppered' across the territory. Some Canberra suburbs—for example, Red Hill and Reid—have high numbers of both the most and the least disadvantaged individuals.

Despite the increased investment in services highlighted above, disadvantage and associated demand for services are continuing to grow. We are seeing sustained growth in demand across areas including disability services, out-of-home care, homelessness and housing services, and family violence crisis services.

There is a clear need in this environment to ensure public investment is achieving the desired social impacts and that human services are both effective and sustainable.

In late 2013, the community sector joined the ACT Government to co-design major reforms aimed at achieving this. The result was the 2014 *Human Services Blueprint*, a multiyear framework for health, education, justice and community services to work together as one human services system, driving person-centred, outcomes-focused responses. The blueprint aims to make services sustainable by providing quality and value-for-money services, and by responding early to reduce future demand for higher-cost services.

The blueprint's innovative and genuine co-design process has attracted interest from other jurisdictions, including Singapore and Victoria.

The Human Services Taskforce was established, comprising community sector and government leaders with a co-chair arrangement, and advice was prepared for the taskforce by a core design team of community sector and government membership. Maintaining a healthy relationship with the sector in this way was conducive to fostering innovation. Strong sector partnerships are crucial to government's delivery of appropriate services to the community.

Three 'proof of concept' initiatives are currently running to test the blueprint's aim of a cohesive human services system: the West Belconnen Local Services Network, the Strengthening Families program for families with multiple and complex needs and the One Human Services Gateway.

In recent years, government has been relying increasingly on the service delivery expertise of the sector, shifting to place choice and control in the hands of the consumer. This has meant exiting from direct service delivery.

Perhaps the most compelling example of this in our portfolio is the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS), which is seeing CSD gradually withdraw from the provision of specialist disability and therapy services over a three-year period. The aim is to increase the range of non-governmental organisations working in this area. Service providers are being given tailored assistance to ensure that people with a disability in the Australian Capital Territory have a sufficient pool of providers from which to purchase their support and services. The Australian Capital Territory remains the only jurisdiction where the whole disability sector is moving into the NDIS, and I expect other states and territories will be watching our progression closely.

The ACT Government has also recently released A Step Up for Our Kids, the five-year strategy to reform out-of-home care services for children and young people who cannot safely live with their parents.

This represents another significant shift of delivery from government to non-governmental service providers. Currently, Child and Youth Protection Services within CSD is the largest provider of out-of-home care services, with 53 per cent of children and young people in care residing with kinship carers supervised by Child and Youth Protection Services.

When A Step Up for Our Kids is fully implemented, all parental responsibility and case management of children on long-term orders, support for kinship carers of children on long-term orders and support for care leavers where agencies have exercised case management and parental responsibility for the young person will be transferred to the non-governmental sector.

Transferring service delivery to the non-governmental sector has required us to consider our duty of care and ongoing regulation responsibilities. For example, when the territory removes a child from their parents' care, it must actively exercise its duty of care to ensure that the child or young person is cared for in a safe environment and receives a better standard of care than she or he would have received at home.

The Human Services Registrar within CSD has been established to provide risk-responsive regulation of these care and protection non-governmental organisations along with other service providers in community housing, disability, mental health, home and community care, and disability educational and early intervention services.

Person-centred funding, as seen through the NDIS, is another transformational change that is likely to begin to have an impact on other areas of service delivery. Different funding models are also now being considered, such as commissioning for outcomes, rather than simply purchasing outputs.

In the Australian Capital Territory, the Community Sector Reform Program is supporting the sector to respond to the changes it is experiencing, as well as mobilising its capability to do things differently. It includes a capacity-building program that has delivered support

for chief executive officers (CEOs) and board members in governance, financial management, tendering and procurement, working with government, collaboration and strategic risk management. It also includes red tape reduction, such as rethinking the purchasing of community services—something that requires considerable cultural change and maturation of capabilities in government and the community sector.

It is an exciting time to be working in government, requiring us to think differently, work together and trial new approaches to ensure our investment is achieving the desired social impacts for the benefit of our community, particularly those who need it most. I thank all the contributors to this book: your work will help inform how public policy professionals can better support some of the most vulnerable members of our community.

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