

SOUTHERN NSW TEMPERATURE CHECK

MARCH 2023

This is our first temperature check survey report for 2023 and our third in the temperature check series for this financial year.

In March 2023 we surveyed community services and organisations operating across Southern NSW to gain information on the issues facing their communities and organisations.

This was our largest temperature check survey to date.

We received 72 responses from 70 organisations that provide essential services to people in our communities. The sectors represented included children, youth and family, housing and homelessness, domestic and family violence, aged care, disability, mental health, culturally and linguistically diverse and Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations.

Respondents were invited to rank the biggest issue currently facing their community and the biggest challenges facing their organisations. Unsurprisingly the issue that ranked highest for communities was housing access and homelessness (40%), followed by cost of living (21%) and access to care and services (13%).

What is the biggest issue currently facing your community?

Respondents shared their concerns about the impacts of the ongoing housing crisis and cost of living pressures on their communities:

1. Housing

2. Cost of Living

3. Access to Care & Services

4. Workforce & Employment

5. Mental Health

"Access to workforce and not always being able to provide services people need as we do not have workforce to meet gaps"

"There are not enough services available to support our older clients to optimise their independence allowing them to remain in their homes"

"The cost of living is one of the biggest challenges facing our community with some of our customers cutting back on groceries and food to be able to afford utility bills"

"Housing and cost of living are huge challenges for the community everywhere, especially for clients that are on the verge of becoming homeless or are experiencing homelessness"

"Many of the people we see are on very low incomes or reliant on Centerlink payments and are struggling financially, are food poor and go without meals, heating and cooling"

"Homelessness and housing pressure and having long wait times to access health and other support services undermine our community's ability to recover and maintain wellbeing"

"The cost of living which is on the rise is a concern, petrol, food, rental and mortgage rate increases affect everyone as well as the lack of affordable housing"


"Clients cannot afford to see GP's - no bulk billing - means no referrals - no healthcare maintenance, areas are understaffed and low skilled."

"Long wait times to access health and other support services undermines our community's ability to recover and maintain wellbeing"

"Lack of mental health and counselling services without a significant waitlist"

"Some women are staying in violent relationships because of the accommodation shortage"





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What is the biggest challenge currently facing your organisation?

Organisations ranked inadequate funding levels as the biggest challenge for their organisation (54%), followed by staffing (22%) and changes to funded programs and service delivery (11%).

1. Funding Levels

2. Staffing

3. Changes to funded programs

4. Contracts and funding agreements

5. Increasing operational expenses

Funding Levels

Respondents identified challenges related to funding including not being able to meet community demand, struggling to offer competitive salaries for recruiting and retaining staff, and the fact that core funding had not kept up with increased costs in delivering services. Connected to funding is the issue of increasing operational costs. Survey respondents identified increased costs in rent, petrol, electricity, food, essential items and services as adding pressure to their already stretched funding.

Staffing

In relation to staffing, availability of suitably qualified staff, funding to offer attractive salaries, and ability to offer sufficient length contracts and job stability were mentioned as hurdles providers face on a daily basis. This job stability issue is exacerbated by the application of short term contracts and one off grants to community service providers.




Changes to Funding Agreements

Also falling under the umbrella of funding challenges is the issue of changes to funded programs. Members impacted by changes to funded programs report that implementing changes creates additional administrative burden for their organisation, makes forward planning and consistency challenging, and adds to feelings of uncertainty amongst staff and the broader community.

Contracts/Funding Agreements

The volatile and short-term nature of contracts and funding arrangements available was highlighted as a key issue. Short-term, non-recurrent funding was considered unreliable, making forward planning challenging and making it difficult to offer staff stable permanent employment. The process of applying for grants was identified as resource intensive, posing a barrier for many organisations.





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We asked Organisations to share with us their insights on the biggest challenges facing their organisation.

"Funding has not increased but organisational costs have risen significantly so we are not able to keep up the same service levels, let alone keep improving or expanding services as demand for our services is growing"

"We are unable to effectively compete with the salaries that our mental health clinicians are able to earn in the private sector- so staffing is a primary concern"

"The changes relating to the aged care reforms underway provide many challenges due to uncertainty and unclear vision of the government of how will some currently funded programs fit within the new aged care system"

"Funding sources are not adequate to be competitive in the market when recruiting to clinical roles...has been the primary reason for not being able to retain staff"

"Not enough funding ongoing. We might have another 5 years left...but after that we cannot sustain our service"

"Funding is insufficient to meet needs of the community. Time has to be spent applying for grants, which takes us away from direct client work and also places us in competition with other agencies who we should be collaborating with"

"Applying for ongoing grants that last no more than 1 year is a challenge. This takes up a lot of time and often something that is working well in the community is then not funded the year after. This means connections made are lost and we have to start again to build trust within our space"

"Funding is limited this in turn has an effect on operational and service delivery, we are reliant on referring people to mainstream services"



What my organisation needs right now is:

When we asked 'what is the one thing your organisation needs right now?' Here's what was most often mentioned:

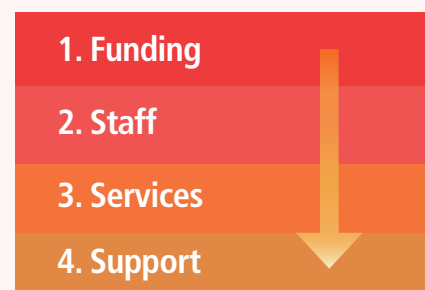
"Funding growth to meet employment costs eg super and casual staffing etc and increase cyber safety"


"More funding! to keep our staff and continue to deliver high quality services"

"Increased funding to allow service to operate 5 days per week"

"More funding so we can at least provide the same level of service and be able to support the groups we have"

"Greater certainty in funding agreements with appropriate indexation to reflect increasing costs"





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Funding, staff, services and support are all key needs our organisations need right now:

"Long term staff solutions and accommodation for those staff"

"Resources and capacity to support continuity of service provision with a focus on mental health wellbeing and recovery"

"Community awareness and visibility"

"More funding and more staff to support the community"

"Certainty for our clinicians and our consumers"

"Outside of additional funds and another pair of hands we need additional food to provide the community and a new home"

"Greater clarity regarding the sector reform including pricing structure and organisational support for financial viability"

"Energy and stability"

"More funding for my program to be able to work more hours/days"

"A break - but to do that I need to have funding to employ a relief worker. I have not had a break in 4yrs"

"Certainty regarding long term funding"

"More support to implement regulatory and reporting changes"

"Another person to learn my work as I am retiring this year"

"Transparency from funding bodies"

"Equitable funding to Government Agencies"

"Ways to support a team in a cycle of burnout due to lack of mental health funding, staffing and partner services"

One thing I need right now:



Just over 60% of respondents were in leadership roles in their organisations. It is clear from the responses that leaders and workers need additional support - for their organisations and for themselves.

"Time"

"A holiday!"

"More funding"

"Less paperwork"

"Funding to visit groups"

"Ongoing funding for organisation development costs"

"Affordable housing options for clients"

"Break, peace, and quiet time (for a day at least)"

- Adequate resources (funding and staffing)
- More time
- A break
- Less administrative burden
- More support

"Less bureaucracy"

"To take time for myself and not work too many extra hours"

"An assistant or someone else in the same role to assist"

"Time to be able to achieve everything that is required for the reporting requirements"