

## Dear Prime Minister, Premiers and Chief Ministers

This is a very challenging time for all governments in Australia and around the world dealing with the Covid-19 pandemic. The health and economic costs are quite staggering. We all understand governments are trying not to create panic and keep the Australian economy turning over, while at the same time seeking to manage this major pandemic.

There has never been a more important time for Australians to work together with governments, business, and community groups, including charities. We want to work with you and ensure we leverage your efforts to protect Australians now and going forward.

This letter offers seven constructive suggestions about how the charities sector could work better with governments over the coming months.

Charities employ more than 1.3 million people, draw on the contributions of over 3.5 million volunteers, and contribute over 8% of Australia's GDP. These economic indicators are just the tip of the iceberg in terms of the charitable contribution to our communities. Unlike for-profit business, the work of charities is all about public benefit. Charities keep our communities strong in good times and bad. Charities will be critical in the way we respond to the tasks set us all by Covid-19.

Here are seven suggestions as to how government can work more effectively with charities:

- 1. Engage with us:** Charities are close to communities and enjoy high levels of trust compared to most institutions. At present it feels as though our voice and our experience is not at the table in any of the major national policy discussions. Forums have been set up deep within governments to support business and receive their advice. The same does not apply for charities who can often offer solutions grounded in the experiences of many different communities, if given the chance to provide their knowledge and expertise. Peak bodies in the charities sector are often a good way of bringing collective voices to the discussion.
- 2. Treat charity workers as part of the economy too:** Government actions to date, particularly at a national level, imply that a job in the charities sector is not worth saving to the same degree that a job in a for-profit business is. The income of most charities will be significantly impacted by Covid-19 including fundraising and fees for services. The exclusion of charities from stimulus packages provided to small business and others feels like an insult to 1.3 million charity workers who contribute 8% of GDP and often undertake demanding work for limited benefit.
- 3. Offer more security to maintain programs and employment:** Governments around Australia could increase security and help maintain employment levels in charities if they guaranteed not to cut funding to charities over the next 12 months. This measure would provide greater certainty for charities and the 1.3 million staff currently employed across the sector. Without this assurance, given the loss of income for many charities from fees and charges, and from fundraising, many charities will have to let staff go.
- 4. Provide additional funding to meet additional demand:** In some cases charities are facing more work as a consequence of Covid-19. This includes critical areas such as support for food, shelter and other health conditions outside of Covid-19. Some special packages have been announced, but very few, and the growing need is going to overwhelm some charities without additional support.

5. **Enable flexibility for charities to respond:** Charities are at the front line, embedded in community and are exceptionally well-placed to know what works to achieve a good outcome for their communities. In difficult times, government funded charities could be released from their narrow contractual obligations and enabled to respond as needed. Charities should always be accountable for what is delivered and report their activities to government, but should not have to comply with outdated centralised controls about what they can and cannot do to support their communities. Effective, productive responses require adaptability and a 'can do' approach. Charities are well positioned to help out in any number of ways if given the opportunity.
6. **Maintain support for the other work of charities including bushfire recovery:** Most of the work of charities is not directly Covid-19 related, but it needs to continue, especially the complex tasks associated with bushfire recovery. Cutting back in areas critical to community resilience in order to fund new Covid-19 measures will cost more in the future. Dealing with a pandemic does not mean the other needs of our communities can be ignored. In some areas the indirect impact of Covid-19 will put a lot more pressure on existing work.
7. **Help us build trust:** Right now, many charities are making a real difference in our communities. This work could be more actively acknowledged by political leaders and policy makers. If Australia is to respond well to this pandemic, working together, acknowledging our collaborative achievements will help build community resilience. Charities are a good news story that can help build a sense of belonging, of trust, of being prepared to give to others and support each other.

The reality is that charities will face very real challenges in continuing their invaluable work. There is no doubt the impact of the pandemic will cost jobs and reduce services to our communities.

These suggestions are not about addressing all the needs of the charities sector. Many charities across Australia will have their own views about how they can work better with governments. What is more important is that charities can be part of the solution and can be more effective if they are actively engaged in planning and delivering the services our communities need now and as the pandemic progresses.

This is not about politics, ideology, sectoral interests, profitability or self-interest. It is about overcoming the immediate challenges and building flourishing communities across Australia.

Work with us, support us, and we can make a real difference in all the communities we serve, now and into the future.

Yours sincerely



Rev Tim Costello AO  
Chair, Community Council for Australia  
19<sup>th</sup> of March 2020



Mr David Crosbie  
CEO, Community Council for Australia  
19<sup>th</sup> of March 2020