



Tasmanian Council of Social Service Inc.

Review of the Tasmanian State Service – Phase Two Consultation

March 2021



INTEGRITY
COMPASSION
INFLUENCE

About TasCOSS

TasCOSS' vision is one Tasmania, free of poverty and inequality, where everyone has the same opportunity. Our mission is two-fold: to act as the peak body for the community services industry; and to change the systems, attitudes and behaviours that create poverty, inequality and exclusion. Our membership includes individuals and organisations active in the provision of community services to low-income Tasmanians living in vulnerable and disadvantaged circumstances. TasCOSS represents the interests of our members and their service users to government, regulators, the media and the public. Through our advocacy and policy development, we draw attention to the causes of poverty and disadvantage, and promote the adoption of effective solutions to address these issues.

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Introduction

Thank you for the opportunity to participate in the Phase Two Consultation of the Tasmanian State Service (TSS) review.

TasCOSS acknowledges the effort to produce the Interim Report and notes its many findings. Our response is designed to support the Review's aim of ensuring the TSS is fit-for-purpose now and into the future to deliver a more efficient and effective public service. An effective TSS will deliver the best outcomes for the Tasmanian community, in particular, those Tasmanians in vulnerable circumstances who may draw more heavily on the services the TSS delivers.

We have structured this submission in accordance with the key themes identified and related discussion papers developed by the project team.

The Big Picture

TasCOSS endorses the seven key elements identified in the Interim Report that Tasmania needs and deserves in its state service. We add the following features that are pivotal to a state service delivering better outcomes for all Tasmanians:

- People and their human rights placed at the centre of policy development and decision-making.
- Commitment to place-based and community-led solutions.
- Lived experience valued and integrated into policies and processes.

People and their human rights placed at the centre of policy development and decision-making.

As the Review process considers the structure and purpose of the TSS, it must also reflect on the leadership role the TSS has in helping to achieve the kind of community Tasmanians want into the future.

In that regard, a significant omission from the Interim Report is any reference to human rights or human rights principles.

Despite decades of discussion, Tasmania remains without a Human Rights Act. This means that human rights protections in Tasmania are inconsistent and where they do exist, current protections focus largely on non-discrimination. Rather than a framework that delivers protections only *after* someone has been discriminated against, we advocate for a framework and related actions that enshrine equality for all.

COVID-19 has shown how vulnerable we can all become and the extent to which government decision-making impacts on the basic needs and rights of us all. In Tasmania, the decision to close businesses and restrict people's movements highlighted the importance of access to fundamental rights such as

food and housing, as well as access to health and education. The fact that many groups missed out on various economic supports also highlighted the need for protections that cover all people regardless of their age, sex, gender, disability, race, residency or citizenship. This highlights the lack of a robust human rights framework which would have committed the government and other bodies to ensure everyone had their basic needs met.

A TSS that embeds human rights at the centre of policy development and decision-making will:

- develop a human rights framework with a consistent, whole-of-government approach to its implementation;
- shift from a focus on non-discrimination to a more ambitious approach to rights as implicit and universal; and
- ensure the protection of Tasmanians' human rights are elevated in policy design and service delivery.

A TSS that places human rights at the core of its structure and purpose will deliver better policy and social outcomes for Tasmanians and promote a strong culture of respect for human rights in our state.

Recommendation 1a: The TSS develops a human rights framework that is applied to policy development, decision-making and service delivery.

Commitment to place-based and community-led solutions.

TasCOSS has been consulting with Tasmanians on low incomes about the principles of human rights and what makes for a good life. We believe every Tasmanian should have the opportunity for a good life – that is, the opportunity to do more than spend each day just getting by.

Our consultations have led to the identification of nine key domains of a good life in Tasmania as well as numerous people-centred, place-based and community led actions that should guide our priorities, policy development and advocacy work, to help Tasmanians achieve a good life.

The nine domains for the TSS to consider and prioritise in its policy development and service delivery are:

- A healthy mind and body;
- A place to call home;
- Being able to afford the basics;
- Feeling safe;
- Learning for life;
- Getting where you need to go;
- Feeling valued, included and heard;
- Knowing you're not alone; and
- Hope for the future.

The TSS will deliver better outcomes for the Tasmanian community if it shares the same goals as the Tasmanian community. The best policy and social outcomes for Tasmanians will be delivered by placing people, their human rights and their communities at the centre of decision-making.

Recommendation 1b: The TSS considers the nine key domains of a *good life* in its policy development and service delivery, and commits to place-based, community-led solutions.

Lived experience valued and integrated into policies and processes.

Lived experience is expertise gained from having a specific life experience. Community organisations and advocacy groups often partner with lived experience advocates and/or build their experiences and voices into their advocacy. TasCOSS recognises the valuable insights from lived experience experts in designing, implementing and evaluating policies, programs and services that impact the Tasmanian community.

It is probable that many, if not most, staff delivering services or providing assistance to the community do not have a “lived experience” of those services or industries. As an example, few TSS employees would have a recent experience of engaging with Housing Connect as a client, waiting 64 weeks as a priority applicant for housing, or trying to rent a property on an insecure income. This type of expertise, or lived experience, would greatly inform the design and implementation of policies, processes and services delivered by agencies.

The benefits of lived experience are not limited to community services, but extend to industry development, environmental protection and many other areas of government activity. Integrating greater lived experience across the TSS can be achieved by recruitment having a focus on lived experience, as well as other necessary attributes such as skills, education, professional experience and values. It can also be achieved through secondments, placements, training and the sharing of good and promising practice.

As the TSS works to nurture its brightest people to become future leaders, ideally they will also have a practical, real life experience of the area in which they are working.

Recommendation 1c: The TSS integrates lived-experience into policies and processes and encourages lived-experience in recruitment.

Building One State Service

One TSS

TasCOSS is confident working as ‘One TSS’ would make the TSS as a whole more agile, efficient and able to address important whole-of-government priorities. We endorse a whole-of-government approach to complex policy issues and creating One TSS will enable the state service to better focus on addressing

priorities or initiatives that require a multi-agency approach, while also removing silos and reducing duplication.

While acknowledging the challenges the TSS experiences compared to other jurisdictions due to a lack of economies of scale, this is also our greatest advantage due to fewer layers of bureaucracy, better access to decision-makers and a state service much closer and more connected to the community.

The government's COVID-19 response demonstrated a One TSS approach is not only possible, but beneficial. During the emergency period, the TSS worked together as an integrated organisation sharing resources, providing timely and informative communication and operating effectively for the benefit of the Tasmanian community.

As noted in the Interim Report, the concept of One TSS will need to be prioritised by Government and require a genuine commitment from TSS leadership and management. Efforts to engage, share information and communicate across the TSS will require ongoing endeavour, support and evaluation to measure progress and success in achieving this goal.

TasCOSS can provide multiple examples of progress on important initiatives that have been stalled by bureaucracies buck-passing, lacking leadership to drive change or being constrained by agency boundaries rather than working collaboratively, or under a One TSS approach to problem solving. This includes (to name but a few) – recent efforts to enable regular and periodic payments of car registration; engaging with government to support and implement PESRAC recommendations relating to digital inclusion; and community organisations that deliver services addressing complex needs facing barriers to funding and engagement with government because their activities span multiple government agencies.

The TSS should be empowered to work together, across government and with the community. The silos and demarcation that exist in the bureaucracy need to be dismantled, otherwise any efforts by the community or industry to identify and develop positive outcomes are at risk of stonewalling.

Stewardship and Managing Talent

TasCOSS views stronger stewardship in practical terms as improving cultural and behavioural expectations through greater diversity and lived experience.

The diversity indicators in the Interim Report are not reflective of the Tasmanian community. The Budget announcement to deliver Aboriginal Cultural Respect training to SES and senior management is a positive shift, but only a first step. This training should be compulsory for all SES and senior management to attend and cultural diversity training should also be rolled out across the TSS.

TasCOSS supports initiatives to increase diversity and embed lived experience such as secondments, targeted recruitment and relationships with peak bodies and key stakeholders. We also support training

and development initiatives, such as cultural awareness training, to better understand and support the diversity of our community.

A Wellbeing Budget

Central agencies have a core role to play in facilitating cross-stewardship throughout the TSS. Shared goals are critical to the promotion of outcomes across the TSS. Central agencies can help the Government set priorities by not only focusing on portfolio objectives, but also working towards implementing the shared goals of the TSS.

A key action that has emerged from the Good Life process described above, is the opportunity for the Tasmanian Government to adopt a Wellbeing Budget, similar to other jurisdictions including as close as New Zealand or the other side of the world in Scotland.

While the management of the budget process is beyond the Terms of Reference of this Review, the budget process facilitates cross-agency stewardship through the strategic direction of government and a financial investment in outcomes for the Tasmanian community.

Recommendation II: The TSS pursues the development of a Wellbeing Budget to better align human rights principles with the achievement of policy and social outcomes for Tasmanians.

Working With Others

TasCOSS agrees with the Interim Report that partnerships are critical for the TSS to meet Tasmania's challenges. Partnerships will produce closer ties with the public, private and not-for-profit sectors that will not only complement the resources and expertise within the TSS, but benefit all parties through a better understanding of their challenges and opportunities, and drawing upon the capabilities and expertise outside of the TSS.

The TSS has the opportunity to access the best of Tasmania's talent and resources, partner more efficiently and work more collaboratively through secondments, training and sharing of best practice approaches.

While acknowledging the explanation in the Interim Report for singling out the relationship with UTAS, the TSS must ensure it does not default to UTAS as the primary destination for professional expertise. There is significant capability, expertise and ingenuity across all industries and all corners of our state to draw upon.

The TSS must look to identify partnership opportunities and collaborations with other organisations and industries with equal priority to UTAS. The expiration of the Community Services Industry Partnership Agreement, for example, also provides an opportunity for the TSS to partner with the Community

Services Industry to collaborate and leverage off each other's expertise in research, policy development, building community capacity and addressing social challenges.

Community services is one of the largest industries in Tasmania. Partnering with government, industry and decision-makers is essential to ensuring our industry can support its growth and achieve its vision for all Tasmanians to be able to live a good life in connected and resilient communities, supported by high quality and agile community services. This includes ensuring our industry is providing enough workers, with appropriate skills, to fill the thousands of job opportunities in Tasmania's fastest growing industry and help ensure the industry is prepared for its future.

TasCOSS would welcome the opportunity for a Partnership Agreement to implement the Community Services industry plan and respond to the challenges for our industry that have been exacerbated by COVID-19.

TasCOSS is committed to innovative partnerships and collaborations that strengthen relationships, support future planning and enhance the way government agencies and the industry works together to identify and respond to community needs.

We believe Recommendation 6 should be broadened to encapsulate a number of partnership and collaboration opportunities to initiate, rather than solely prioritising UTAS

Recommendation III: The final report broadens Recommendation 6 to include developing multiple Partnership Agreements with key stakeholders, including the Community Services Industry.

The Government also partners with many consultants to undertake research and provide advice, providing access to a wealth of data and research that would benefit many organisation or industries in the community. Greater disclosure of these partnerships and sharing of this data would add to the resource and information wealth available for community benefit.

Continuous Review and Improvement

An alarming admission in the Interim Report is that a high priority has not been placed on systemic review and evaluation, despite acknowledging that an evidence-based, outcomes-focussed approach to program, policy and project activities is crucial for continuous improvement, accountability and determining the efficiency and effectiveness of public policy¹. The Interim Report further acknowledges that the absence of systemic review and evaluation makes it difficult for the TSS to provide consolidated advice to Government to inform decision-making and ensure optimal efficiency in projects and programs.

¹ Dr Ian Watt AC (2020), *Review of the Tasmanian State Service – Interim Report*, Department of Premier and Cabinet, p42.

Recommendation IV: Interim Report Recommendation 8 be a priority recommendation for implementation and that a [Theory of Change](#) process of review and evaluation be undertaken to ensure policies and programs are having the right impact, meeting the needs of target groups, delivering their intended purpose, identifying adverse outcomes and ensuring resources are used most efficiently.

Supporting the Current and Future Workforce

TasCOSS welcomes the finding in the Interim Report that more needs to be done to achieve a diverse workforce. While there are a suite of frameworks and policies in place supporting diversity and inclusion, the results of TSS data and survey results² suggest that pursuing diversity and inclusion will not only need to continue, but needs to be reviewed and evaluated to ensure it is done better.

The Interim Report also considers youth and women's employment should be high priorities of the TSS following the inequitable impacts of COVID-19 on these cohorts. However, while acknowledging these are two cohorts whose employment has been disproportionately impacted by COVID-19, in seeking to address diversity the response must be more nuanced than just creating more opportunities for young people and women.

With 72% of the TSS being female, post-COVID-19 employment strategies should be well-targeted and address areas of specific need, such as more women in management or men in female-dominated workplaces, or programs to increase the TSS' disability workforce, or workforce representation from non-English speaking backgrounds, for example.

The TSS should also look to contracting and engaging the services of organisations that have diverse workforces or clear policies and strategies in place with a genuine commitment to achieving diversity. As an example, this could include allocating a portion of supplies/consumables spending to support social enterprises such as businesses that employ and support people with disability, or preferencing construction firms with a high proportion of female apprentices/builders.

Ways of Working in the Future

TasCOSS considers the issues identified in the Interim Report are better considered internally by the TSS in relation to how it structures, manages and motivates its workforce.

One issue that requires comment, in terms of how the TSS keeps up with the increasingly digitalised world, is the sudden removal of employees' contact details from the Government Directory Service

² Dr Ian Watt AC (2020), *Review of the Tasmanian State Service – Interim Report*, Department of Premier and Cabinet, p49.

(GDS). This was a retrograde step that provides a literal barrier between the state service and the community it serves.

TasCOSS has heard from our members the value they found in the GDS to identify key personal in government, the structure of departments, interrelationships and reporting lines. This has particularly been the case where departmental staff have moved on and another contact is needed. There are multiple instances of calls to the general contact numbers provided on department websites that have gone unanswered.

Interestingly, we have also heard from state service employees of similar experiences and the negative impact it has had on their ability to reach out to other agencies to directly contact relevant staff, for collaboration or to identify like-roles. This is an important consideration in the context of the TSS examining the location and dispersment of workforces.

Recommendation V: Reinstate employees' contact details in the Government Directory Service.

Delivering Contemporary Services for Tasmanians

TasCOSS agrees with the Interim Report that the provision of services to the community is the primary role of the TSS.

While it is acknowledged that expectations have changed in the way people want to engage with and access services, it must also be acknowledged that the design of service delivery must account for the needs of all service users, not just those with the ability or resources to choose their preferred methods of access.

The operations of Service Tasmania should not be exempt from review or avoid exploration of how it can be more efficient or effective in its service delivery or business operations. However, the Interim Report notes that Service Tasmania conducts 1.5 million face-to-face transactions each year, more than five-times the number of phone contacts and 50 per cent more than the number of web-page views per year. The desire to move to a greater application of digital solutions must be balanced with the need for human interaction and Tasmania's low levels of digital inclusion.

The Interim Report notes other jurisdictions have moved to more streamlined accessible digital services such as apps, digital wallets and online service delivery. However, the report also notes Tasmania's poor performance on all three measures of digital inclusion – accessibility, affordability and overall ability to use digital technology for work, study and day-to-day access to essential services. TasCOSS therefore agrees with the Interim report that Service Tasmania *“shopfronts remain critical in Tasmania, particularly where levels of digital access and ability are among the lowest in the country”*³.

³ Dr Ian Watt AC (2020), *Review of the Tasmanian State Service – Interim Report*, Department of Premier and Cabinet, p68.

This does not mean that Service Tasmania offerings should not be digitalised. Service Tasmania has an obligation to be efficient and should be supported with the necessary technology and digitalisation to operate and deliver services in a contemporary environment.

Moving Service Tasmania service delivery online should be done in an inclusive, accessible and user-friendly way. Where there is benefit to digitalising services to meet the needs of those who do wish to engage online, this should be undertaken, but the digital inclusion of all Tasmanians must remain a focus when considering digitalisation of services.

The value of the Service Tasmania network and shopfronts was highlighted in the PESRAC report. PESRAC recommendation 55 suggested that Service Tasmania can play a leading role in the roll out of digital literacy initiatives in communities around Tasmania utilising existing networks. TasCOSS also acknowledges the inherent benefit of the Service Tasmania network as an asset.

There are opportunities for Service Tasmania to view efficiency not just in terms of how many services or how much traffic can be directed online or to a digital platform. A more efficient and effective service delivery model should consider how it can support those customers who prefer and value face-to-face contact through shopfronts. Reviewing the design and operation of Service Tasmania shopfronts could include:

- person-centred, place-based approaches to designing and delivering services;
- co-location with other federal, state and local government services and community service organisations;
- investigating partnerships with other government and non-government services to offer expanded service delivery.

Recommendations

- Ia. The TSS develops a human rights framework that is applied to policy development, decision-making and service delivery.
- Ib. The TSS considers the nine key domains of a *good life* in its policy development and service delivery, and commits to place-based, community-led solutions.
- Ic. The TSS integrates lived-experience into policies and processes and encourages lived-experience in recruitment.
- II. The TSS pursues the development of a Wellbeing Budget to better align human rights principles with the achievement of policy and social outcomes for Tasmanians.
- III. The final report broadens Recommendation 6 to include developing multiple Partnership Agreements with key stakeholders, including the Community Services Industry.

- IV. Interim Report Recommendation 8 be a priority recommendation for implementation and that a [Theory of Change](#) process of review and evaluation be undertaken to ensure policies and programs are having the right impact, meeting the needs of target groups, delivering their intended purpose, identifying adverse outcomes and ensuring resources are used most efficiently.
- V. Reinstate employees' contact details in the Government Directory Service.