

NSW State Election Fact Sheet 2007

Workforce Issues

Western Sydney Community Forum is a peak regional community-based organisation committed to social justice principles, meeting the needs of community groups and other relevant local and regional organisations for resourcing and representation to enable them to improve and maintain the quality of life for the residents of Western Sydney

The NSW state election will be held on 24th March 2007. These policy proposals were developed by Western Sydney Community Forum in association with the New South Wales Council of Social Services and our member organisations to improve outcomes for residents of Western Sydney.

Background

Community-based non-government organisations deliver services to a range of marginalised groups at a local and regional level. Their on-going survival is vital to the continued and expanded delivery of these services.

There are a number of pressures on community-based, NGO's in Western Sydney that may threaten their viability, including:

- the challenge of balancing grants from a number of funding bodies
- labour market trends
- the introduction of technology and changing accountability requirements
- legislative compliance costs including Occupational Health and Safety
- the introduction of the Federal *WorkChoices* legislation

The Western Sydney ageing population is the most rapidly increasing in the Sydney Metropolitan Area with a projected:

- 34.6% increase in the number of people aged over 70 years from 2001 to 2016
- 56.4% increase the number of people aged 85 years plus from 2001 to 2016

NSW needs to plan for this growth in the ageing population:

- there are already extremely long waiting lists for HACC services
- there are shortages and high turnover of workers in all sectors of Human Services

- there is an urgent need to recruit younger skilled workers to address the projected increased need
- there is an urgent need to provide accessible, affordable, appropriate training opportunities and support mechanisms to meet increased accountability and client information management

The introduction of the federal *WorkChoices* legislation in March 2006 needs to be seen in the context of the already complex, challenging task of running a community service.

- NCOSS considers that the majority of community organisations in NSW continue to be bound by the SACS Award but acknowledges that the definitional issue of a “constitutional corporation” and in particular what constitutes “significant trading” is creating uncertainty and anxiety.
- Due to the diversity of services in Western Sydney there is no easy answer on the question of WorkChoices eligibility. This uncertainty creates significant risk for community services.
- Those who are eligible will need to allocate significant time, resources and expertise to ensure compliance with the Act. Those who are not eligible will need a commitment to continued support from the State Government.

Policy proposal

WSCF supports the call by NCOSS for a common human services agency funding policy in NSW that includes a negotiated approach to full indexation and fully funds Award wages at the appropriate professional levels. This policy must also provide longer term funding security to enable realistic strategic and business planning for non-government organisations (see www.fairernsw.net).

WSCF believes that the NSW funding policy must align with the principles contained in the *Working Together for NSW agreement* between the NSW Government and the non-government sector.

WSCF recommends the development of a comprehensive workforce development strategy which includes both current and projected skills shortages in the sector. This strategy must address methods of recruitment and retention of staff and provide better opportunities for professional development and career advancement.

WSCF recommends that the NSW response to the *WorkChoices* legislation includes:

- methods of assisting small community organisations to define their constitutional status
- methods of retaining the efficacy of organisations not eligible for WorkChoices

What you can do

There are many ways you can help promote these issues. Use this fact sheet to:

- Write about the issue in your group's newsletter.
- Write a letter about the issue to your local paper.
- Set up a letter writing stall and ask local people to write their own letters to local candidates supporting the issue.
- Organise a public meeting and invite local political candidates to speak.
- Contact Jennifer Leslie at Western Sydney Community Forum to discuss how your group can work with us to promote your issue.
Phone: 9687 9742 or email: jenniferl@wscf.org.au