

Inquiry: the Impact on service quality, efficiency and sustainability of recent Commonwealth community service tendering processes by the Department of Social Services.

Dear Senators

I am writing to express my deepest concern at the decision of the Federal Government not to continue funding to numerous community organisations undertaking the important function of representing the housing and homelessness sectors in Australia.

While not involved in the tendering process I understand that the methodology used by the Department was far from satisfactory in terms of the time allowed for submissions to be made and the way in which information about the process was communicated. There are also serious concerns about the performance measures used for assessing the tenders and evaluating the worth of the various activities undertaken by these bodies.

Over the past 20 years I have worked within community sector peak bodies, in government departments and as a social policy consultant with a specific interest and expertise in homelessness policy. Over this time the work of the peak bodies in housing and homelessness has been critical in developing resources and advising government of all types (local, State and Federal) about the issues facing people experiencing homelessness, and the service provides that assist them on a daily basis.

Peak bodies also play an important role in keeping agencies and other stakeholders informed about events and activities in the policy field, and synthesising research reports and national/international best practice. Workers in the field very seldom have the time to undertake their own reading or research into such matters and therefore rely on peak bodies to keep them in touch with such materials.

If governments want to shift the way in which they take advice from community sectors, or influence the way in which these organisations undertake their work, there are multiple ways in which this can be achieved. Simply cutting funding from large numbers of agencies is a blunt instrument and unlikely to achieve anything other than shutting down an important avenue of information and specialist advice.

Importantly, from the perspective of someone completely outside the community sector, any process by which government funding is determined and allocated should be as transparent as possible with maximum visibility and accountability for the way in which the decision-making process is undertaken. This would limit any accusations or suggestion of bias or favoritism within the tendering process.

I look forward to reading the outcomes of this Senate Inquiry process, and in particular seeing the details of the way in which the former tender process was run in order to better understand the outcomes. I would also strongly encourage a review of the decision to defund organisations like Homelessness Australia and the Community Housing Federation of Australia, which are both organisations that occupy a critical role in addressing the housing and homelessness crises in Australia.

Yours sincerely

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