

MEDIA RELEASE

Reports highlights need to get serious on social issues

Northern Rivers Social Development Council will today launch a new report on social priorities for the region.

The report, *Social Priorities 2010*, will be presented to Senator Ursula Stephens, Parliamentary Secretary for Social Inclusion, when she visits NRSDC at 2.30pm today.

According to NRSDC President, Tony Dreise, the report shows the need for all sides to get serious about social inclusion issues in the current election campaign.

'Since 2001, we have been surveying community services in the region to identify the key social priorities for the region. Over that time we have consistently seen the need for action in key areas, such as transport and housing affordability that impact on quality of life in the region,' Mr Dreise said.

'We live in one of the most disadvantaged parts of Australia,' Mr Dreise said. 'We need to get multi-party commitment to develop a social inclusion agenda for the region to bring real solutions to disadvantage.'

"On top of recognising the issues, we need to be far more creative and innovative than we've been in the past in addressing these issues," Mr Dreise said. "We're calling on all candidates to work with the community sector in developing a 'place based' approach to social inclusion. This simply means that we adopt a place approach to disadvantage rather than a confetti of disjointed programs from disconnected departments and tiers of government."

"We are pleased that Senator Stephens has taken the time to meet with us to discuss the region's priorities and we will be using the opportunity to shine a light on the issues for our region, as well as highlighting some creative solutions," Mr Dreise said.

Social Priorities 2010 is based on survey feedback from 77 community organisations in the Northern Rivers. The report reflects the concerns of people working at the front-line in community services across the region.

Key social priorities identified in the report were:

- Young people – including promotion of wellbeing, access to education and employment
- People with complex need – including improved cross agency case management
- Transport – including better integration and planning of services
- Housing – including supply of affordable housing and homelessness services
- Ageing – including development of flexible, person centred models of care and better coordination of services
- Community based management – providing better support to assist non-for-profit organisations with management and governance.

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Backgrounder

Social Priorities 2010: A Report on the results of the Northern Rivers Social Priorities Survey

Background

Social Priorities 2010 sought feedback from community services to review the six social priorities of the Northern Rivers region. Those social priorities having been identified as: housing, community based management, transport, youth, people with complex needs and the aged. The report provides a summary of survey results, a brief discussion on the issues and mentions some current and recent work conducted by the sector and NRSDC to address them.

The survey was completed by 77 respondents (roughly 11% of the 696 NRSDC e-newsletter subscribers). These respondents had an average of 8 years experience in Northern Rivers social and community services and they had experience working with communities in each of the region's seven local government areas.

Key findings

The issue of *youth*, in particular the wellbeing of young people, was recognised as the most significant concern by service providers. Comments included concern about young people being victims and perpetrators of crime and acts of aggression, the role of disintegration of the family unit, the need to support families who support young people and the lack of appropriate social venues and transport.

People with complex needs has progressed from being an emerging issue in previous consultations to having become quite critical. People with complex needs include those who have combined issues of mental health, alcohol and other drugs and domestic violence. Service providers are concerned that people with multiple vulnerabilities are becoming lost in the system.

Housing affordability and homelessness continue to be a cause of stress for many members of the Northern Rivers community. Housing has become a matter around which workers spend considerable resources attempting to support their clients.

Transport remains important to service providers. The population of the Northern Rivers is dispersed across towns and villages with travel in rural areas and between towns thwarted by minimal services and high fares. There is an urgent need to develop an integrated transport plan for the region. Similarly a rail corridor into South East Queensland should be secured immediately to provide a sustainable basis for the re-establishment of rail within the region.

There will continue to be a growth in the *ageing* population with increased pressure on services needed to support them. Service providers would like to see more work done on restorative service models that provide flexible support tailored to the needs of individual service users.

Community organisations seem to be faring better with *community based management* than they have in the past, reducing the importance of this issue to services. There remains considerable interest however, in supporting not-for-profit organisations with governance and legal issues.