TasCOSS

Strategic Plan

2026–31

Stronger community services, better community outcomes

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About TasCOSS

The Tasmanian Council of Social Service (TasCOSS) is the peak body for the community services industry in Tasmania.

Established in 1961, 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.

As the peak body for the community services industry in the state, our diverse and valued member organisations are central to our work. Our membership includes individuals and organisations active in the provision of community services to Tasmanians on low incomes or living in vulnerable circumstances.

This strategy builds on these foundational roles, seeking to elevate impact by clarifying our focus and remit for the coming five years.

Acknowledgements

TasCOSS acknowledges that we live and work on Aboriginal land, land of the *Palawa* people of *Lutruwita* (Tasmania). We pay our respects to the Tasmanian Aboriginal community, to elders past and present and to all those who continue caring for country, sharing stories and upholding rights.

Strengthening TasCOSS's impact

For 65 years, TasCOSS has been a key advocate for social justice in Tasmania. A lot has changed over that time; however, our island continues to lag behind the rest of the country across key social and economic outcomes. But it doesn't have to be this way...

We believe it is possible to strengthen our society and our economy, and this is our strategy to contribute.

This is a strategy with bold ambition, as we work to address immediate and long-term challenges, for our community services industry and for the Tasmanian community.

Yet, one we are confident we can achieve, as we more intentionally work with, and through, our members. In developing this strategic plan, we engaged widely, with members, funders and partners, and we heard feedback that we need to clarify our purpose, role and remit. We have reflected on this challenge and this strategy provides our answer; one of targeted focus, to support the community services industry to be the strongest it can be, so that people can receive the best support possible.

We recognise that our greatest lever for change is through the community services industry, which is an industry under great pressure. Our strategy places focus on the role we can play to enable the community services industry to be sustainable, innovative, valued and resilient.

It is a strategy that is solutions-focussed. While shining a light on problems is valuable, we want to more impactfully be part of the solutions that create social equity, a stronger economy and more connected communities. We have a unique role to play in this new narrative, as a key conduit between stakeholders, helping to pave the way to a better tomorrow, and supporting those who will make it a reality.

It will not be business as usual at TasCOSS. We recognise that as the context within which we, and the broader community services industry, operates becomes tougher, the status quo will not suffice. While we will always hold the line on social justice, we are certainly not standing still in how we pursue this agenda. This strategy is our significant step forward.

Tasmanian Council of Social Service

Strategic Plan

2026–2031

TasCOSS

Why

Our vision is for a thriving Tasmania, supported by a strong community services industry

Our purpose

1. To enable the community services industry to strengthen outcomes for those who need their services.
2. To influence immediate and long-term solutions that reduce inequity of systems.

Values

- Respect
- Equity
- Dignity
- Inclusion
- Aboriginal self-determination
- Intergenerational wellbeing

What

Our impact over the next five years will be realised with and through our members, with a solutions-driven approach to our strategic pillars:

1 Our community services industry

Enable an effective and valued community services industry.

2 Emergent crises

Provide timely, trusted advocacy and advice during emergent events.

3 Future generations

Co-design and advocate for long-term solutions to eliminate poverty and improve economic and social outcomes for all Tasmanians.

How

Enablers

- Trusted relationships
- Meaningful engagement
- Vibrant and agile team
- Evidence and insight
- Sustainable revenue diversification

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Strategic context

In strategy development, context is critical. To build a comprehensive understanding of TasCOSS's context now and ahead to the coming years, the strategic planning process embraced both internal reflection and external feedback. True to our DNA, this was a highly consultative process, including interviews, surveys and workshops with our staff, board, members and key stakeholders.

The major strategic themes underpinning this strategic plan included:

The community services industry is under great pressure and needs support.

Community services exist to help people meet their needs, overcome challenges, stay safe and connected, and build better futures. The demand for the industry's essential services has never been higher, as Tasmanians struggle with increasing pressures, such as cost of living and housing affordability.

This rising demand is occurring within a tightening fiscal environment. As government's fiscal position tightens, the request to the community services industry is to find efficiencies.

To ensure sustainability, the industry must better demonstrate its impact and value. New narratives must be sown, showing that social and economic priorities are not at odds with one another. The community services industry, in its ability to foster participation, is in fact a key solution to economic problems and wellbeing. New models must be adopted, which leverage technology, partnerships and innovation.

In response to this theme, we are reinforcing our members and the broader community services industry at the heart of our strategy. We are further stepping into our role as the backbone of the industry. In doing so, we will advocate for issues affecting industry strengthening and sustainability. We will promote the value of the industry through evolved framing that incorporates community outcomes, return on investment and value for money, increasing our influence with government and the commercial sector. We will convene and coordinate our members for collective strategy, high value capability-building and exposure to new models. Through these efforts we aim to support the sustainability and impact of the community services industry that Tasmania cannot do without.

Responding to emergent crises

Unexpected crises will continue to emerge, and communities at risk of subsequent hardship need to be represented in those moments.

If the COVID-19 pandemic taught us anything, it's to expect the unexpected. From natural disasters to global conflict, unprecedented events can shock communities with little warning. These times have the potential to create or exacerbate hardship for people, particularly if the response does not consider all needs of the community.

We know these emergent crises will continue to surface, and we recognise that if we do not represent those communities that do not traditionally hold power in high level decision-making processes, a gap that leads to greater poverty and inequality may be created.

TasCOSS has historically assumed the role of 'voice for the voiceless,' with a focus on poverty alleviation. We will continue to represent those at risk of financial and emotional hardship caused by unexpected events, ensuring their interests are represented and considered in decisions in that moment.

Thinking beyond the immediate

Nothing is going to change if we don't invest in long-term thinking.

The importance of immediate advocacy in times of unexpected challenge needs to be balanced with strategic, long-term thinking. Without solutions for step change, the pressures facing Tasmanian communities will continue to compound.

We recognise the privilege of our ability as a peak body, rather than a service delivery organisation, to take a helicopter view, join the dots and identify levers for change.

Our freedom to think beyond political cycles presents us with the opportunity to increase our value to government, as a policy informer who focusses on the systems requiring fundamental paradigm shifts.

Tasmania is an island with a relatively small population, which makes us the perfect place to pilot new policies, models and initiatives.

In this strategy, we are dialling up our leadership in developing the solutions that will benefit future Tasmanians. We will leverage our role as a conduit across our sub-sectors, to bring unlikely partners together to co-create solutions for long-term impact. Rather than simply advocate for more of the same, we will build the evidence that demonstrates which structural levers will make a significant difference, such as investment in prevention, to enhance both human rights and economic prosperity.

Clarifying our purpose and remit

Our own purpose, roles and remit need to be more clearly defined and communicated.

The top layer of strategy, from which everything cascades, centres on an understanding of why the organisation exists, what problems it solves, why, for whom and how. Through the engagement for the development of this strategic plan, it became evident that greater clarity is being sought on TasCOSS's purpose, roles and remit. This challenge is common to peaks with diverse stakeholders and ambitions for system change, and we are not shying away from it. We also reflected that we have been spread too thin for our resourcing and need to consolidate scope, working in a deeper manner, for greater impact.

To avoid any ambiguity, we have reflected deeply on these existential questions, and developed a new vision, purpose and role statements. We have drawn boundaries around our remit, ensuring that we are not duplicating the work of our members or others in the industry. We are focussing on our peak body commitment to members, our representation of the broader community services industry, and our commitment to community in the immediate and long-term horizons to alleviate poverty and inequality. We will move away from leading issues-based advocacy efforts or undertaking projects for specific issues outside of the framing above, and we will not develop capability-building material or programs that are duplicated or adequately addressed elsewhere. We will focus on the areas of highest impact, through relationships that deliver mutual value.

The strategy in detail

This strategic plan provides the direction and boundaries for what we will focus on and invest in over the coming five years. Cascading from 'why,' to 'what' to 'how,' the various components of the plan are explained as follows:

Our vision paints the picture of the world we want to see. This has been updated in our strategy to a thriving Tasmania, supported by a strong community services industry.

Our purpose articulates our reason for being and the part we play in achieving this vision. To create clarity on the multiple layers of our purpose, we have separated the statement into two parts, aligned to the industry for whom we are a peak, and the community for whom they serve. We exist:

- To enable the community services industry to strengthen outcomes for those who need their services; and
- To influence immediate and long-term solutions that reduce inequity of systems.

This purpose is brought to life through our roles as a backbone of the community services industry and an advocate and advisor. We harness collective efforts to build evidence, drive innovation, strengthen leadership and create partnerships that amplify impact. We represent Tasmanians at risk of hardship during times of crisis and lead collective action towards a future free from poverty.

Our strategic intent explains our agenda for the coming five years. We want to be explicit that we are doubling down on achieving our impact with and through our members, by enabling them to amplify their impact. We also want to communicate the shift in our approach, to one that proactively engages in new conversations and relationships, facilitating cross-sector solutions, rather than just shining a light on the problems. Weaving these concepts together, our impact over these five years will be realised with and through our members, with a solutions-driven approach to our strategic pillars.

Our strategic pillars detail the substantive work on our strategic agenda. Each pillar is guided by an overarching goal, which has then been broken down into key objectives, aligned to key results.

PILLAR 1

Our community services industry

Pillar one demonstrates our commitment as a peak body to our members and the broader community services industry. Our members will reap the benefits of our information insights, convening, capability-building and offerings aimed at sustainability and impact. The industry, even beyond our membership will benefit from our advocacy efforts, which will now be targeted towards those issues that the industry indicates to us are widespread and of most importance (e.g. length of government contracts).

Rather than duplicate the roles of industry members, our impact will intentionally be realised through lifting the industry.

Objective (we will...)

Enable an effective and valued community services industry

Priorities (our focus...)

- Facilitate solutions to support greater industry sustainability.
- Advocate to address industry challenges.
- Strengthen capability, coordination and innovation.

Key results (with success measured by)

- High value, evidence-driven advocacy that has enabled government and the community services industry to partner to address issues (e.g. workforce and funding challenges).
- TasCOSS and the community services industry can clearly demonstrate impact and value for money.
- The industry is more coordinated and cohesive and new collaborations with non-traditional cross-sector partners have formed.

PILLAR 2

Emergent crises

Pillar two demonstrates that, even with this shift away from advocating for specific social issues that others in the industry can lead, we remain here for community. We are drawing tighter boundaries around our role as a representative for Tasmanians at risk of or experiencing financial hardship. We have identified that the time that we are most needed, is when there is an unexpected shock to community. This is when we will step-in and step-up, ensuring the response from government and other actors supports those at risk and does not increase poverty or inequality.

Objective (we will...)

Provide timely, trusted advocacy and advice during emergent events

Priorities (our focus...)

- Represent community to government and in the media when crises that can cause hardship first emerge, ensuring responses do not exacerbate inequality.
- Leverage our role as a conduit across sectors to facilitate solutions for those affected.

Key results (with success measured by)

- TasCOSS remains the 'go-to' representative for the Tasmanian communities' interest in times of emergent crises.
- Policies and initiatives developed in times of unexpected crisis mitigate the risk of short or long-term hardship for Tasmanians.

PILLAR 3

Future generations

Pillar three demonstrates how we are significantly dialling up our impact. Transitioning from lots of short-term band aid approaches, we are now intentionally directing our efforts towards doing the work required to find solutions for real change. This will require developing new partnerships across sectors, bolstering our research, data and evidence capability and reframing our relationship with government, to one of elevated influence and advice. Our intentions are aligned with our long history of working to eliminate poverty, but our approach is new. We are embracing the big picture thinking that is required to truly make a difference to the next generation of Tasmanians.

Objective (we will...)

Co-design and advocate for long-term solutions to eliminate poverty and improve economic and social outcomes for all Tasmanians

Priorities (our focus...)

- Create cross-sector partnerships to aid the development of long-term solutions to entrenched challenges.
- Develop evidence-based, big picture thinking on the structural levers that support human rights.
- Support government to develop policy to improve long-term social and economic outcomes for all Tasmanians.

Key results (with success measured by)

- TasCOSS has bolstered its research, data and evidence capability and strengthened intra and inter-industry partnerships.
- TasCOSS's relationship with government has been reframed to one of strategic advisor and policy informer, focussed on those areas requiring paradigm shifts.
- Significant policy reform and service innovation has been achieved.

Our enablers

Our enablers identify the key components of 'how' we will achieve our strategy.

Trusted relationships

Our impact agenda cannot be achieved alone. We trust our members to advise us of industry and community needs. Our members must trust that we are enabling them and not duplicating their efforts. The industry must trust that we are well informed to represent their interests. Government must trust that we can advise independently and productively in healthy partnership. Business must trust that we are not pitting social outcomes against the economy and instead working together for broader community outcomes.

Meaningful engagement

As a contemporary, effective peak body, it is imperative that the flow of communication is not one way between us and our stakeholders. We need member feedback and insights to drive the reform and innovation to which we aspire. We need to bridge sectors and act as a conduit, which can only happen with two-way exchange of ideas and views. For us to genuinely support Aboriginal self-determination, we need to be listening to what Aboriginal organisations and individuals need from us to support them, rather than act on assumption.

Our enablers (cont.)

Vibrant and agile team

To make this strategy a reality, TasCOSS needs the right people, in the right roles, acting in accordance with our values. As part of this strategy requires responsiveness (pillar two) and another requires proactiveness, the team will need to be agile, with the ability to shift priorities as necessary.

Evidence and insight

Compelling advocacy requires solid evidence. There are significant gaps in industry and community data, that could provide great insight if resolved. For the design of future solutions, research to learn from others and the ability to measure impact will be critical to know if the efforts are making a difference.

Sustainable revenue diversification

In many ways, TasCOSS is emblematic of the industry itself and is not immune to the increasing financial pressures. By increasing value to members and developing cross-sector partnerships, the ambition is that TasCOSS can not only maintain core government funding but also embed further financial resilience through new sources of revenue.

Our values

Our values underpin the beliefs and behaviours, which signal how we will bring the strategy to life. They are the foundation of our culture and centre to our decision-making:

Respect

We listen to communities and work constructively across sectors in good faith, even when our views differ.

Equity

We are working towards a Tasmania that supports everyone with the opportunity to live the life they choose.

Dignity

We believe no one should live in poverty and that everyone accessing community services should be treated with dignity and respect.

Inclusion

We appreciate and laud the value of diversity and collaboration.

Aboriginal self-determination

We uphold the rights of Aboriginal people to self-determination and commit to working in genuine partnership with Aboriginal communities and organisations, so that decision-making power rests with those most affected.

Intergenerational wellbeing

We uphold the rights of individuals, families and communities now, as well as future generations, in our planning for a thriving Tasmania.

Bringing the strategic plan to life

To make the concepts in this document a reality, it is essential we have productive relationships with our members, government, other industries and community. We cannot achieve the ambitions of this strategy on our own — we need the community services industry to walk with us and advocate with us. We need to develop shared visions and solutions.

The TasCOSS team has a vital role in bringing this strategy to life. The capability, judgement and commitment of the whole team are fundamental to our success. As is the strength and integrity of the TasCOSS workplace culture: a culture defined by trust, accountability, professionalism and a genuine commitment to working together in service of our purpose. The agility, expertise and judgement that the team brings to complex work is a core part of TasCOSS's identity and impact.

From an accountability perspective, TasCOSS is committed to implementing and monitoring this strategic plan. To do this, we will develop social impact frameworks and annual targets which relate directly to the outcomes above. This will enable us to evaluate progress and performance, ensuring we celebrate our success along the way and learn from everything we do.

Join us in bringing the strategy to life

We are proud of the ambition of this strategy. We recognise we cannot achieve this alone, but we are clear on the role we will play.

This is an open invitation to join us in the co-creation of Tasmania's future. Whether you're a TasCOSS Member, from the broader community services industry, government, business or community, let's walk together into a better tomorrow.