



youth affairs network qld

Queensland State Budget 2009/10

***Response to the Budget, and Discussion on
Funding for Wage Increases***

June 2009

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2009/10 State Budget Response

Introduction

The 2009/2010 State Budget was released last week, in what seem to be the worst economic conditions we have faced in many years. The State Government was clear from the outset that they had particular priorities in mind when preparing the Budget (Premier Bligh made a bold promise to create new jobs, and focus on our health), and in tough economic times, a tough stance is required. That said, what does this Budget mean for those of us who fell outside of the Government's priority areas this year?

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Services

The main focus for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities has been the 'Close the Gap' program, which is delivered nationally, and the State is quick to point out that they are working in line with that program. Beyond that, there is little to note in the new Budget, except that \$55.4 million has been allocated for Indigenous Wages and Savings Reparations Scheme, to ensure that all eligible claims have been paid. The main concern in this area is the Government's ability to effect change across the board, and without a clear agenda or strong commitment, this seems uncertain.

It is known that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are extremely disproportionately represented in the justice system, but the response from the Government continues to be more investment in detention, rather than prevention and intervention.

The State Government has also pledged to maintain momentum and continue to implement the Cape York Welfare Reform and Alcohol Reform Initiatives. This is in line with the Australian Crime Commission's recent announcement that it will expand its operations of intervention in the Northern Territory into Queensland and New South Wales. YANQ strongly objects to any policy which is not in line with the concept of Self Determination for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

Youth Issues

There are a number of priority areas in youth affairs, but once again the Budget has focussed on youth detention. The Government has allocated capital funding of \$70.2 million in 2009-10 (equating to \$170.7 million over four years) to expand the Cleveland Youth Detention Centre in North Queensland by an additional 48 beds, which should be available by 2011. Further, there will be an additional \$36.1 million available over the next three years for operating costs associated with the expansion of the Cleveland Youth Detention Centre. This is a total of \$206.8 million over the next few years to increase the capacity of youth detention in one centre (or roughly \$4.3 million per bed).

Comparatively, only \$1.8 million is being allocated over three years to implement a new initiative to improve economic and social outcomes for young people who have recently entered the youth justice system and are at risk of further offending; and/or are experiencing homelessness or are at risk of homelessness.

The very significant gap in funding between these two programs is of particular concern, especially considering a recent report by Mission Australia which outlined the need for a review of the juvenile justice system in favour of prevention and a focussed effort on Indigenous and Pacific Islander youth, who are disproportionately represented in youth detention centres.

Over the last several years, YANQ and other peak bodies have repeatedly and consistently called for more investment in prevention and early intervention, rather than detention and imprisonment. Once again, the Government has ignored our cries, and continues to pour money into building prisons, despite a large body of strong academic research showing that young people who come into contact with the justice system are more likely to end up back in the justice system as adults.

Further, the State Government has failed to budget for the transfer of seventeen year olds from adult correctional facilities to youth detention centres. Queensland remains the only State to send seventeen year olds to adult correctional facilities. Queensland's youth detention centres are practically overcrowded with young people on Remand. Most young people on Remand are in detention centres because they do not have access to accommodation and other support services, NOT because they are a danger to the community. The State Government has failed these young people by not allocating resources for support services which, with a fraction of the cost of the Cleveland Youth Detention Centre upgrade, could assist and divert these young people away from the justice system, and re-engage them with the community in a constructive way.

Multicultural Affairs

YANQ is pleased to see the continuation of the Community Action for a Multicultural Society (CAMS) and Local Area Multicultural Partnerships (LAMP) programs with just under \$2 million in 2009–10, a total of \$5.9 million over three years. Ideally, these programs would have been increased, in line with the increase in population and diversity of our CALD communities. As previously reported, YANQ did not receive renewed funding under the CAMS program, and there was an increased focus on front-line service, with advocacy taking a back seat. Obviously, our service providers are very important for multicultural community development, but without the work that YANQ as a peak body has been doing in terms of research, sector development, policy development and capacity building, the resources of the service providers will be limited, and the workers themselves will be stretched beyond their capacity.

Education

The Department of Education and Training has allocated \$7.8 billion in recurrent funding, and an additional \$1.7 billion in infrastructure in the 2009/10 State Budget. Of this very significant amount, \$1.2 million (part of \$3 million over three years) will be allocated, in conjunction with the Department of Communities, to provide an innovative model of support for young people aged between 12 and 15 years who are returning from the juvenile justice system and are at risk of disengaging from education.

As part of a \$30 million, four year commitment, \$8.3 million is being contributed in 2009/10 to continue the implementation of of Australian Sign Language (Auslan) as the language of instruction for deaf/hearing-impaired students using signed communication.

\$3 million has been allocated as part of a \$10 million, four year plan for Indigenous Education Support Structures being piloted across five clusters of state schools, and a number of non-state schools.

This appears to be the extent of initiatives to help disadvantaged young people, with no mention of interpreting services and ESL intensive modules, or support for young people with a disability beyond the Auslan program.

Disability Services

Disability Services have allocated a small sum of \$0.52 million in 2009/10 (\$1.1 million over two years) to a pilot project to provide a system of self-managed funding, auspiced through a non-government organisation, geared towards families with children and young people with a disability.

Youngcare will also receive \$1 million in 2009/10 for accommodation and support for young people with a disability at a new residential complex on the Gold Coast.

Early intervention for young people showing early signs of mental illness will receive a boost with an additional \$2.2 million allocated in 2009/10 (\$6.5 million over three years) to trial two community residential programs.

YANQ is pleased to see young people with a disability included in the budget as a specific target group with particular needs.

New Funding for Increased Wages

As many readers will be aware, the Queensland Government has allocated \$414 million over four years to cover wages increases for some workers in non-government social and community services. This funding is in response to the Australian Services Union's successful application earlier this year to the Queensland Industrial Relations Commission for a wage increase.

So, does this mean that youth workers in non-government organisations will now get a pay increase? Does it mean that your wages will now be on par with your colleagues in the government sector? Well, maybe and no are the answers YANQ can put forward. Here is our explanation of the situation now and please be aware that this is NOT legal advice, merely YANQ's best understanding of the situation based on the research we've undertaken.

Does the new Award & the Pay Increase mean Government & Non-Government workers will be paid equally from now?

No. The new Queensland Community Services and Crisis Assistance (QCSCA) Award only sets out the minimum rates of pay and conditions for workers who rely on it. If staff in non-government community services rely just on this Award to secure their pay and conditions there will be a short-term increase in wages for some, followed by another long, slow decline in parity.

Awards only increase (year-by-year) by flat-dollar amounts based on minimum wage decisions. Employees in other sectors and industries have negotiated different agreements with their employers that guarantee percentage based wage increases. Social and community workers in non-government services (largely) have not done this, which is why there was a disparity in wages to begin with.

Who does the New Award & the Pay Increase apply to?

If you or your employer does nothing, then this table below describes the current and future status of non-government community services¹.

Listed as Respondent to existing SACS or CASH Awards?	Constitutional trading corporation?	Award status Now	Next pay increase?	In future?*
Yes	Yes	Federal pre-reform SACS or CASH (Qld)	October 2009	Federal modern award will apply from January 2010
Yes	No	Federal transitional SACS or CASH (Qld)	October 2009	Transition on to state award in March 2011
No	Yes	Award free	n/a	Federal modern award will apply from January 2010
No	No	State Community Services and Crisis Assistance Award 2008	July 2009	State award continues to apply

The above table only applies if you do nothing. As employees you have a right to collectively negotiate a workplace agreement with your employer that sets out wages and conditions above those specified in an Award.

What about the new funding from the QLD Government - Won't we get the wage increase even if the new Award doesn't apply?

We don't know yet – the best answer right now is 'maybe'. Here's what the budget papers say:

Recently the Queensland Industrial Relations Commission increased award rates for community services

¹ Table courtesy of Jobs Australia.

* The summary of future changes is based on current legislative timetables. The situation for federal transitional awards, and for state awards, could change if Queensland agrees to refer some or all of its Industrial Relations powers to the federal parliament.

workers. In recognition of this increased cost, the Government will provide **\$65 million in 2009-10** increasing to \$125 million recurrently in 2012-13 for allocation **on a prioritised basis** to State supported services to dependent and vulnerable Queenslanders. This provision of \$414 million over four years will significantly contribute to the sustainability of the sector (funding will be allocated across a number of Government agencies).

If the average wage increase for workers in NGOs is going to be around \$5,000 (SACS 5.1 increase should be \$5,270), then the \$65 million for next financial year will cover about 13,000 workers. Estimates about the number of workers in the non-government social and community services vary, and truth be told no-one really knows – but 20,000 is a figure that is often used.

Furthermore, many services rely on funding from other sources (Commonwealth Government, donations, local governments etc) to pay staff. Without funding from these sources there can be no guarantee of an across-the-board increase in wages.

How will the 'prioritised basis' work?

While no official statement has been received, YANQ has been given verbal information from the State Government that the allocation of the wage increase will work on a four year, three level priority system. The first level of priority, or P1, are those organisations which deal with crisis all the time, such as 24 hour shelters. P2 will include domestic violence services, counselling and referral services, and P3, the lowest priority, consists of advocates, policy workers and those in community development.

In the first year, \$65 million is allocated, which will go to all P1 and most P2 services. Over the following three years, \$120 million will be paid. This amount will be allocated to cover all P1 services, and some P2 services. P3 services do not receive ANY wage increases at all under this system, regardless of their award or enterprise bargaining agreement.

This is great news for emergency and crisis centres, but terrible news for all policy workers, advocates and community development workers. This sends the message that early intervention, development and prevention measures are less important than dealing with crises as they arise, much like the budget allocations in detention centres discussed above.

As mentioned, this system has not yet been officially implemented. YANQ will update our website as soon as we receive official word.

For workers whose programs are funded by the State Government and who provide 'P1' and 'P2' level services, you still may not be guaranteed a wage increase. If there is no Industrial Instrument (award, enterprise bargaining agreement, policy) in place in your organisation that specifies that employees will be paid the new QCSCA Award rates, then your organisation is not obliged to pass any extra funding it receives through to wages. Previous State Government Budgets have provided extra funding for wage increases, but in some cases these have not been passed on. For example, the 2008/2009 Budget provided for a 3.6% wage increase – however because there was no industrial instrument forcing organisations to pass this onto wages, some services used this to cover organisational costs or develop new or expand existing programs.