



New Deductible Gift Recipient (DGR) category for Men's Sheds and Women's Sheds Submission for Treasury

We write to you regarding the above subject matter and in response to your request for submissions on the draft bill and explanatory memorandum for the new deductible gift recipient (DGR) general category for 'Sheds'.

The Australian Neighbourhood Houses and Centres Association (ANHCA) is the national peak body for Neighbourhood Houses and Community Centres (Houses) in Australia. Representing over 1,000 organisations, ANHCA is committed to the development of place based solutions to meet the economic, social and civic opportunities and challenges that are currently facing Australian communities. To achieve this, ANHCA works to support the evolution of strong local communities through the empowerment of engaged local leaders and the creation of community partnerships.

ANHCA's purpose is to contribute to national policy and issues of common interest to its members and their constituents to promote and strengthen the national identity of the sector. ANHCA seeks to enhance the quality, skills and knowledge and support the activity and work of Neighbourhood Houses and Centres in Australia.

ANHCA's members are the State Peak bodies for Neighbourhood Houses and Centres including;

- **Community Centres South Australia** - www.communitycentressa.asn.au
- **Linkwest Western Australia** - www.linkwest.asn.au
- **Local Community Services Association (LCSA NSW)** - www.lcsansw.org.au
- **Neighbourhood Houses Tasmania** – www.nht.org.au
- **Neighbourhood Houses Victoria (NHVic)** - www.nhvic.org.au
- **Queensland Families and Communities Association (QFCA)** - www.qfca.org.au

Each of these peak bodies works with the houses and centres across their own state. They provide advocacy, develop and manage relationships and work with key

stakeholders with a focus on social inclusion and good mental health while providing a physical location for members of the community, who may otherwise be held out of participating, to feel safe and accepted.

We note the following:

- ANHCA has DGR status in its own right under Section 35.45 Welfare and rights, in the Income Tax Assessment Act 1997.
- In Victoria alone, more than a third of the Men's Sheds are currently, or have previously been, auspiced by Neighbourhood Houses.
- ANHCA's DGR status has not been extended to its Peak Body members or to the Neighbourhood Houses and Centres that they represent.

While ANHCA wholeheartedly endorses the provision of DGR status to eligible 'Sheds', we can't help but highlight the irony of neglecting to provide the same to the 'Houses' that preceded them, established them, and continue to sponsor them.

The Exposure Draft (2020 Measures No. 2) lists under subsection 3 - 995-1(1) the primary qualifying organisational purposes for DGR under the draft bill as:

- (a) The institution's dominant purposes are advancing mental health and preventing or relieving social isolation; and
- (b) The institution seeks to achieve those purposes primarily by providing a physical location at which it supports individuals to undertake activities and work on projects in the company of others.

There appears to be three primary factors to the proposed purposes. To advance good mental health, to relieve or prevent social isolation and to provide a physical location for activities and projects in the company of others. We put forward that Neighbourhood Houses have been meeting these purposes for more than 40 years as per the following.

Mental Health

The Neighbourhood House movement was founded on and continues to be informed by the key tenets of Community Development, which call for inclusive, fair and responsive approaches to creating solutions within local communities.

To this end, Neighbourhood Houses encourage active participation, consultation and involvement from the broad community in the development, design, delivery and evaluation of projects. Neighbourhood Houses support people with mental ill health on a daily basis, and provide them with an opportunity to participate socially, in accredited

and pre-accredited education, and in some cases transition to employment. This is done almost entirely without dedicated health or mental health funding.

Data gathered by Neighbourhood Houses Tasmania (NHT) found that 97 percent of participants reported that by engaging with a Neighbourhood House, they were provided with information and support relevant to their situation. The survey also found that 187 people per House were engaged in health and wellbeing activities each week.

Similar data was recorded in Victoria, with 75 percent of Houses reporting either daily or weekly use of the physical location provided by the House by people experiencing mental illness.

In another survey conducted by NHVic, it was found that 46 percent of Houses reported running activities determined and/or co-designed by people with mental health issues.

In 2019, Linkwest conducted a census in which members identified poor mental health and wellbeing as a common issue faced by their communities, with 91 percent of centres providing regular information and referrals in relation to mental health. A further 76 percent reported delivering health and wellbeing programs within their communities.

Preventing or relieving social isolation

The Neighbourhood House sector provides more than 1,000 locations across Australia for people to participate in community life. At the core of every Neighbourhood House is a fundamental desire to provide a diverse and constantly evolving range of positive social connections for individuals, families and communities, particularly for those experiencing disadvantage.

In 2017, 377 Victorian Neighbourhood Houses reported over 190,000 visits each week, representing more than 480,000 social connections over a twelve month period. Importantly, Neighbourhood Houses also have a demonstrated track-record in terms of attracting and providing accessible activities for people from diverse and disadvantaged backgrounds.

A survey of over 47,000 Neighbourhood House participants in Victoria found that the most commonly identified benefits of attending a Neighbourhood House were spending time with other people (47%) or meeting new people/make new friends (40%) with 57 percent of all respondents reporting benefits that relate directly to forming social connections and/or maintaining social connections.

In the census completed by Linkwest in 2019, social isolation was identified as one of the major issues affecting whole communities in general, with young families and seniors being especially impacted.

The census conducted by Neighbourhood Houses Tasmania in 2018 reported up to 779,592 contacts made by community members across the Network over the full year. They also reported 3,842 people participated in NHT House programs each week demonstrating the impact that the Neighbourhood house sector has on the lives of people and communities. The same census found that 89 percent of respondents reported increased community participation or connectedness as a result of visiting a Neighbourhood House.

Provide a physical location at which individuals are supported to work on projects and undertake other activities in the company of others;

Neighbourhood Houses provide more than 1,000 physical locations across Australia that support individuals to undertake activities and work on projects in the company of others, with more than 406,000 people visiting a House every single week. This is more than the population of Canberra. Indeed with unparalleled reach into local communities, Neighbourhood Houses and Centres strengthen the foundations of communities to enable people and their families to thrive.

It should further be noted that Neighbourhood Houses and Centres are located in some of the most geographically isolated and disadvantaged communities in Australia including Bruny Island, the Pilbara and Kaniva. In some communities, the Neighbourhood House is quite literally the only location in town that provides a safe and welcoming place where people from *all* walks of life, age, ability, race and gender can come together to connect, learn, create and celebrate.

Conclusion

With over 1,000 physical locations across Australia, Neighbourhood Houses and Centres provide significant positive mental health benefits to participants within a socially inclusive and welcoming environment.

Recommendation

That the Draft Bill be extended to include ANHCA, its Peak Body Members and Neighbourhood Houses and Centres across Australia.