

Settlement Council of Australia

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Budget Policy Division
Department of the Treasury
Langton Crescent
PARKES ACT 2600

Dear Mr Brummitt,

The Settlement Council of Australia (SCOA) is pleased to provide this submission to the government on the forthcoming Federal Budget. SCOA represents a broad network of nearly 80 settlement agencies around Australia. SCOA's consultation with members and our research into the area have informed the preparation of this submission. SCOA's members represent a significant range of agencies, who provide world class settlement support throughout Australia.

Increase in the Humanitarian Program:

We welcome the government's recent announcement to increase the humanitarian program to 20,000 following the recommendation from the Expert Panel report. While acknowledging the strengths and resilience of the many refugees who find safety in Australia it is important to ensure successful settlement through targeted settlement support where needed. Provision of specific support during the settlement process provides a myriad of benefits, and vastly improves people's capacity to make productive contributions to Australia in the longer term. The settlement sector is well placed to provide increased levels of support across the country. SCOA calls on the government to ensure that the budget allocation for settlement needs to be commensurate to the demands on it as the funds allocated ensure all potential Australian citizens are successfully settled through strengths based programs that have quantitative outcomes such as English language competency, orientation to Australian law, welfare and health systems, employment readiness and overseas qualification recognition, establishment of social and community supports and fully integrated. Therefore the budget needs to be demand driven and not a finite amount allocated that does not meet needs of the community.

We understand there are savings projected by the Department of Immigration and Citizenship through the Private Sponsorship program, ideally these need to be quantified so that it can be supported appropriately by the settlement sector.

Department of Immigration and Citizenship contract and funding arrangements

SCOA feels there is an opportunity to review the Department of Immigration and Citizenship's funding structure within a cost neutral budget, with spending focused less on detention and more on settlement (i.e. focusing on transferring people out of detention into settlement). While acknowledging the need to

maintain a robust refugee status determination system, including returns where people are found to have no claims for protection under the refugee convention, the current system is very expensive and cumbersome. Funding could be reallocated to greater community and client benefit through a review of funding and program structures. SCOA looks forward to the first part of this work in the Integrated Service Delivery Framework, and hopes that this will pave the way for a more streamlined client centric approach to asylum and settlement services. Experience has shown that outcomes across the board improve where client health and wellbeing is the central focus of program delivery.

Tenders and grant funding rounds remain a prime focus of the settlement sector, and SCOA is keen to see increasing levels of access and transparency in this area. Ensuring that tenders and funding opportunities are open, that programs are constructed to be fair and financially viable, and that risk is shared between all parties is crucial to maintaining a robust settlement sector. Resourcing processes need to take into consideration the cost of continuous short term funding options and also time frames for reporting, for example the reporting deadlines of the Settlement Grants Program, a major settlement program were the 30th December last year, right in the middle of the holiday period.

Additionally there is scope to review contracts to ensure consistency in addressing contract cost increases. Currently different contracts can have different triggers for raises in unit prices, and these are not keeping pace with increases in wage or rent costs across the country.

Equal pay through the settlement sector

SCOA has watched with interest the "Equal Pay case" as it has unfolded across the country, given that it affects many agencies and settlement sector workers. It is clear that investing in the settlement sector workforce is an important aspect to ensure that the settlement sector remains a professional, attractive and viable sector to potential employees. SCOA is investing considerable time and effort into examining service delivery standards, and would like to see increasing funding for training available within the sector.

While SCOA commends DIAC and the government on the improved communication and transparency evident through the focus on the national compact and increased dialogue with the non-government sector, there is always scope for improvement in these areas. In particular SCOA would like to see improved communication with the settlement sector. The forthcoming Settlement Framework is an important step in this regard, which needs to be resourced and implemented to ensure successful communication and collaboration is maintained and strengthened.

The settlement sector, and SCOA as the representative body, is well aware of the many pressures on budgets, and is putting forward the ideas in this submission with a view to cost neutral solutions which improve client outcomes and efficiency. Please feel free to contact the Executive Officer should you have any queries in relation to our submission.

Yours sincerely,



Cedric Manen
SCOA Chair