MEDIA RELEASE
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Funding Cuts to Community Resource Centre Program Strongly Opposed

Linkwest opposes a 40 per cent funding cut to the State Government’s Community Resource Centre program and is calling for a comprehensive review.

Linkwest, the Peak Body for Community Resource Centres (CRCs) and Neighbourhood Centres (NCs) in WA, said such a cut will not only be a blow to the regional jobs market and local economies but will go against the government’s drive for better social outcomes and job creation in the WA economy.

Located in more than 100 regional and remote communities throughout the State, CRCs are friendly, locally owned and operated service and information centres.

The centres are not-for-profit organisations, which are independently managed and governed by their local community.

They are a central point for businesses, local residents and visitors and provide access to government and community services and information.

Linkwest CEO Jane Chilcott said a 40 per cent funding cut to a CRC equates to a reduction in funding from approximately $100,000 per annum to $60,000 per annum.

“This will have a profound impact on the ability for CRCs to cover their staff and operational costs, resulting in job losses and significantly reduced hours and wages for the many staff who work part-time in these centres, and probably closure for some.” she said.

“Already, we are seeing experienced and dedicated staff reluctantly leave their CRC roles in the need for a guaranteed income.”

In many of these towns, the local CRC is the only service available within a population where many either have no computer, limited Internet access or limited digital literacy.

“With more and more State and Federal Government, and business and banking services being made available exclusively online, these local place based points of access, and the support of CRC staff for those with low digital literacy, is becoming increasingly vital,” Ms Chilcott said.

Linkwest notes Minister Alannah MacTiernan stated earlier this month that the long awaited review of the Community Resource Centre program will take place and be completed by mid-year.

This review was announced by the Minister in July 2017 after cutting short CRC contracts.

“The review is being conducted prior to a forecast budget cut of 40 per cent to the CRC network in 2019/20, dropping funding to this program from $13 Million to $8 Million,” Ms Chilcott said.

“To date, the review’s terms of reference have not been finalised.”
“While we welcome the review, Linkwest is very concerned about the short amount of time left to conduct a comprehensive assessment of a program that provides – along with a range of programs and services tailored to the needs of the local community – vital access to State and Federal Government agencies.”

Linkwest has written to Minister MacTiernan with recommendations for the terms of reference. Most notably, Linkwest believed the review should:

- be undertaken by an independent party,
- build on Curtin University’s extensive research into the network
- be based on community need
- be made public
- consult with the community, and
- where CRCs are defunded or have funding cut, identify how access to government services will be provided in the local community.

Linkwest believes a comprehensive review will reveal the large network of regional and remote CRCs provides the McGowan Government the opportunity to help their reform agenda.

Most notably priority one of the Service Priority Review, ‘Building a public sector focused on community needs’, particularly in regional and remote WA.

The CRC network is also ideally positioned to support the Sustainable Health Review in delivering better primary and allied health services into regional WA, through the use of video conferencing technology and the coordination of primary health professionals hiring rooms in the CRC.

Also of vital importance is the skilling and reskilling of people living in the regions.

Funding cuts will mean traineeships will suffer.

Currently, CRCs offer local traineeships in the regions, and to date 497 trainees have benefitted from the scheme.

There are currently 40 trainees across the network. As CRCs close or reduce their hours, the ability to provide traineeships – in small towns with few alternative traineeship opportunities – will be largely diminished.

Ms Chilcott said Linkwest acknowledged the government’s difficult position of balancing the State budget.

“However, a comprehensive review provides the opportunity to look at how the Community Resource Centre network can provide the government with a real opportunity to co-design the delivery of multiple government services in regional WA in a cost effective and efficient way.”

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BACKGROUND: Community Resource Centres

Located in 105 regional and remote communities throughout Western Australia, Community Resource Centres (CRCs) are friendly, locally owned and operated service and information centres. The centres are not-for-profit organisations that are independently managed and governed by their local community.

CRCs undertake community, business and economic development activities, and are a central point for locals, visitors and businesses, providing access to government and community services and information. As more and more government services go online, this access point is an increasingly critical function of the CRCs, particularly for those without access to computers and/or reliable Internet services, or poor digital literacy.

Sample of services which are accessed online:

- School Bus services
- Department of Transport services
- Crimestoppers
- Accessing a Firearm
- Applying for driving tests
- Medicare
- MyGov
- MyAgedCare
- MyHealthRecords

The CRCs also provide high quality video-conferencing services, enabling communities to directly access services that are otherwise unavailable in the regions. These include parenting programs, women’s health services, interviews and support for job seekers, and even court appearances.

BACKGROUND: Linkwest

Nedlands-based Linkwest is a small not-for-profit organisation that is largely funded by the State Government’s Department of Communities and the Department for Primary Industry and Regional Development. Linkwest is the peak body for community resource centres and neighbourhood centres in Western Australia. It offers targeted and relevant training, resources, advocacy and support to those working in small community-managed not-for-profit organisations.

Linkwest, with a staff of seven, offers crucial support to more than 150 member organisations, including over 100 regional and remote Centres. More than 27,000 Western Australians currently use these centres each week. The centres provide a friendly, welcoming place where local people can meet to learn, gain new skills, make friends and feel part of their community. They also provide a safe, affordable space for playgroups, community and support groups to gather.
Former Premier of Western Australia, Professor Carmen Lawrence, is Linkwest’s official patron. She has been a patron for the past eight years.

The history behind the organisation goes back to 1978 – for many years it was known as Learning Centre Link, until it was renamed Linkwest in 2011.

BACKGROUND:

Sector Priority Review


CRCs are grass roots and place based organisations with connections into local communities that can ensure community engagement is genuine and not just a tick box.

Service Priority Review - Priority One Recommendations that CRCs can assist the governments reform agenda

- **#1.2 Improve the quality of engagement with the community** to enable sharper focus on their needs.
  CRCs are ideally placed to assist in this at a regional, grass roots level.
- **#1.4 Increase online service delivery** to provide multiple channels for delivering transactional services. CRCs can do this through their existing video conferencing platform. The VC system is currently very underused by the State government. Other NFP service providers and Federal government agencies are increasingly using this technology through the CRCs to deliver cost-effective services into the community.
- **#1.5 Improve the coordination of service delivery** in the regions. CRCs currently deliver on multiple government agency outcomes, including but not limited to, regional development, agriculture, volunteering, seniors, youth, communities, disabilities, health, mental health, jobs, environment, innovation and technology, and corrective services. One of the Labor government’s commitments under their Supporting Communities Policy was to break down barriers to maximise every opportunity to deliver quality services to the community. Through CRCs the government is already doing this but the review offers the opportunity to do it better and for more departments.

Sustainable Health Review


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