

Dear Consultative Committee of the Future Drought Fund,

I am writing as a representative of a grass roots not for profit organisation currently operating throughout country NSW. Four of our volunteers attended your public consultations in Dubbo on November the 26th, we were also represented at your Wagga Wagga discussions on the 20th of November.

We congratulate the government for recognizing the value of strong communities and social cohesion when dealing with the effects of the drought. Our model is somewhat unique and we believe that the method in which we operate has created a system that;

1. Ensures generational change , longevity and grassroots growth
2. Builds communities from within, growing social networks and resilience
3. Provides efficient and timely financial assistance when needed
4. Adapts the model to take into account unique geographic areas
5. Operates in the absence of vested interests and other agendas
6. Operates with appropriate governance and accounting measures to accurately record impact

Please consider our approach and how the plan might align with us to create further economies across Australia.

Who are we?

Our charity is called Can Assist. Our purpose is to assist people from country Australia who find themselves in financial distress as a consequence of a cancer diagnosis. We know the statistics; country people are 17 times more likely to experience “geographical or financial barriers “* compared to their city counterparts when faced with a cancer diagnosis. A cancer diagnosis in the country is not only more expensive, but it is also more deadly ** Indeed, for some cancers , patients are up to three times more likely to die within 5 years of diagnosis*** With one in every two being diagnosed with cancer by their 85th birthday this effects almost every country family at some point.

Add to that the effects of the drought; being lower country income (across the farming and town communities) people are not only more likely to experience financial difficulty but our ability to assist them declines since our fund raising efforts are almost exclusively country sourced. Specifically, from 2018FY to 2019FY, our fundraising revenues declined by more than 7%, yet our client assistance increased by 5.4%. It is in these times of drought that our model needs to grow faster, not slower.

We do not address a single issue - drought adds to a pre-existing economic disadvantage for country people in the health system and our charity aims to level the playing field.

Our current 55 strong branch network runs throughout country NSW. We have thousands of volunteers; some 2700 of which are registered members, the remainder helping out as volunteers when required.

Our Model

1. Ensures generational change , longevity and grassroots growth

Our charity has grown steadily since its inception in 1955, through all the associated technological and societal changes - from our first branch in Forbes to a current network of 55 branches across NSW. Head office are currently considering expressions to expand to Tweed Heads, Coolanong , Ganmain & Victoria. This growth has occurred steadily and from within over the last 65 years.

There are two key features of our model that ensures its longevity and its continued growth across time

- (i) All money raised in the local communities stays in the local communities.

To be clear, no costs are allocated from Head office in Sydney. This unique characteristic keeps our grass roots local communities active and motivated. They typically raise between \$3.0 and \$3.5 million annually trending to the lower end in times of drought.

- (ii) Our branches are run exclusively by local volunteers who know their community and understand their needs

This is contagious. Previously assisted clients or their family members frequently join Can Assist , taking branch executive positions and contributing to fund raising

Just last week we spoke to a 43 women (married and mother of two children) who has not even completed her treatment yet she has already begun organising a Can Assist fund raiser ball for March next year.

Our charity resonates, we are trusted members of the community. We will continue to grow and operate through the drought, but believe that the govt could generate substantial economies by aligning themselves with an operation like ours to expand its impact.

2. Builds communities from within, growing social networks and resilience

Raising some 3 million plus a year from the country means consistent, regular and varied fund raising activities. We hold up to 700 events a year across NSW. Each event can take anywhere from 3 or 4 volunteers up to 50 to arrange, they require multiple meetings and multiple interactions. Many of our volunteers have met, maintained and grown friendship through their association with Can Assist.

Human connectivity and relationship forms the basis of all resilience. Widely dispersed communities that are characteristic of the country have arguably much greater benefits to be sourced from community volunteering and associations. Connected communities remain hopeful and solution

orientated; they are strong in times of adversity. Community models that facilitate this approach need to be fostered and grown in times of drought – coming together makes for real and lasting change.

3. Provides efficient and timely financial assistance when needed

Assistance type and amounts are determined by the relevant local branch executive; local people who have raised the funds, who understand their community and know the problems. The local hospitals know who we are, the social workers spread our message and make our assistance capacities known. Others in need approach us directly as our branding is strong. Indeed after confirmation from a health professional, help is distributed within a matter of days. There is no bureaucracy.

Many of our clients would be “overlooked” by government – indeed , many have never previously accessed government assistance and would not have needed ours had it not been for the dual impact of drought and a cancer diagnosis. We recently assisted a dairy farmer from Finley who had just sold the last of his dairy stock and could no longer afford the weekly parking bills he incurred taking his wife to and from her daily cancer treatment. Margie Crane, another recipient of our charity, a mother of three in her 50’s says “If I had not received help from Can Assist my only alternative would have been to borrow money or not have the treatment”.

4. Adapts the model to take into account unique geographic areas

Our assistance is bespoke and takes into considerations the particular financial needs of the client which is often a result of the remoteness of their postcode. The biggest share of our recipient expenditure is in travel and accommodation. At 45% of our total expenditure in FY 2019, it would have been considerably higher if it was not for our accommodation facility at Wagga Wagga **** where we housed 1,390 people last financial year. For others, a simple payment of a greenslip made the difference they needed. As Bob Griffiths wife says “we are back and forth for weekly treatment, it gets very expensive”. Succinctly summed up by Orange health service based psych-oncology social worker Anna Cobb – “when you’re in a low emotional state, one small act of kindness can be disproportionately powerful”.

We also assist with direct medical out of pockets (at 42%), with utility bills (12%), and various other items.

5. Operates in the absence of vested interests and other agendas

Apart from head office in Sydney and a small staff at our accommodation facility, all other people working in our charity (including our board) operate as volunteers. In addition, the decisions with regards to how money is raised and how money is spent are well dispersed across our branch network. Power is not concentrated. Head office operates at arm’s length, predominantly in a governance capacity and our model relies on branch autonomy. This keeps us honest and trusted within the community – without this integrity our model collapses.

We do not receive any government funding.

6. Operates with appropriate governance and accounting measures to accurately record impact

CPAS is a registered charity (incorporated on 19th December 1962, as a company limited by guarantee). The company’s board oversees the strong governance metrics that are underpinned with a small administrative team based in Sydney. The company is audited each year, and lodges accounts with the ACNC.

Because of our accounting infrastructure we have the data to explain our impact. We know the number of people we have helped and how. Whilst client confidentiality is paramount ,we frequently receive permission from our recipients to tell their stories to promote our cause.

We strongly support the government’s commitment to improve drought resilience across Australia and we would welcome any opportunity to engage further with you on this.



Yours Sincerely,

Majella Gallagher,

Relationship Manager, Can Assist

Emma Phillips

Executive Director, Can Assist

*<https://www.smh.com.au/healthcare/how-much-does-it-cost-to-have-cancer-20190412-p51dlf.html>

**Garvan Research Foundation, Report on Medical Research and Rural Health, July 2015

***National Rural Health Alliance INC, Fact sheet 8, Cancer in Rural Australia, January 2012 (prostrate and cervical cancer)

**** 50% equity JV with cancer council, 100% operated and managed by Can Assist.