

Overcoming Cost-of-Living Challenges and Unlocking Social Mobility

Introduction:

As Communities 1st and our member organisations, we are dedicated to fostering vibrant, inclusive communities. This briefing paper aims to address four challenges that impact our collective mission: increasing cost-of-living, evolving social welfare systems, fluctuating prosperity, and barriers to social mobility. These issues not only create barriers to equality but also undermine the social and economic wellbeing of our communities.

This briefing paper marks the second in our ongoing series of local discussions. Following our first discussion topic on Bridging the Digital Divide and Eradicating the Poverty Premium, we want continue to continue these discussions, with the aim to explore diverse topics, share collective insights, and collaboratively develop strategies and policy positions that will contribute to the resilience, inclusivity, and prosperity of the communities we serve.

Discussion Point: Cost-of-Living Increases and the 'Just About Managing'

Our communities are currently facing a significant challenge with the rising cost of living, which is impacting every essential aspect of life, including housing, utilities, and food. This issue is far-reaching, affecting not only those in traditional poverty but also those who are 'just about managing' (JAMs). JAMs are individuals and families who, while not classified as living in poverty, struggle to meet their basic expenses due to the escalating costs of essentials. This precarious situation places them just one unexpected expense away from financial distress. The consequences of this extend to mental health issues, family stability challenges, and a decline in overall quality of life.

The broader impact of this cost-of-living crisis is profound, rippling out to affect children's education, health outcomes, and the very social fabric of our communities. It's crucial to not only recognise the breadth of this issue but also to delve into its root causes. Understanding how the rising cost of living disproportionately affects various groups, including the JAMs, is key to addressing the widening social gaps and building a more equitable society.

Key Questions:

1. What are the primary challenges your organisation faces in helping those affected by cost-of-living increases, including the 'just about managing' group?
2. From your perspective, what policy changes are crucial to better support individuals and families who are struggling with the rising cost of living?

Discussion Point: Navigating Social Welfare, Economic Disparities, and Social Mobility Challenges

Our communities face a trio of interconnected challenges: evolving social welfare systems, unequal economic growth, and obstacles to social mobility.

The transformation in social welfare systems, marked by policy shifts and funding changes, is reshaping the support framework for those in need. It's crucial to understand how these alterations impact the fabric of our social safety nets and what they mean for the vulnerable segments of our communities.

At the same time, economic growth is experienced unevenly across different segments of society. This disparity results in notable economic inequalities, affecting the overall quality of life and opportunities available within our communities. Understanding the root causes and effects of these economic disparities is essential to grasp the challenges faced by our communities.

Additionally, social mobility is hindered by a range of barriers, including educational, economic, and systemic obstacles. These barriers prevent many individuals from improving their circumstances and achieving their potential, contributing to ongoing social and economic inequality.

Key Questions:

1. What do you see as the primary obstacles in enhancing the socioeconomic well-being of the communities you serve?
2. What are the most critical policy changes needed to enable the VCFSE sector to more effectively address issues related to social welfare, economic disparities, and social mobility?
3. How can the VCFSE sector play a more active role in fostering greater social mobility within communities?

Conclusion:

The challenges of rising cost-of-living, shifting social welfare, economic disparities, and social mobility barriers are deeply interconnected, shaping our communities and the work of our member organisations. As Communities 1st and its members, we are poised to significantly impact these issues. By pooling resources, sharing knowledge, and working together, we can develop strategies that not only address these challenges but also enhance community resilience and prosperity.

This document marks another step in our series of our ongoing conversations, emphasizing our commitment to addressing key issues affecting community well-being. Our ongoing discussions and collaborative actions are pivotal in shaping effective strategies and policies for the betterment of our communities.