

Time for governments to respect charities!

'There have been decades of discussions about the relationship between governments and not-for-profit organisations. The time has come for all governments to respect charities, to free them up from unnecessary red tape and compliance, and to enable them to do what they do best – support the communities they serve. Civil society is at its best when the voice of the not-for-profit sector can be heard loud and clear. The removal of gag clauses is a critical part of the reform process, and one charities and not-for-profits will strongly welcome,' according to Rev Tim Costello, Chair of the Community Council for Australia (CCA) and CEO of World Vision.

Rev Costello was speaking in support of today's announcement that the Federal government will legislate to ensure the removal of gag clauses from all Commonwealth contracts with charities and not-for-profit organisations. He was joined in his support for the measure by leaders across the not-for-profit sector.

According to David Crosbie, CEO of CCA, ***'Feudal lords treated their serfs better than the way some governments treat the not-for-profit organisations they contract to deliver vital services. The recent behavior of the Queensland government in imposing gag clauses on health organisations is reprehensible. The imposition of conditions limiting the capacity of not-for-profits to fulfill their primary mission of trying to achieve positive change in their communities is indefensible. The removal of gag clauses from all Commonwealth contracts is one good measure of the relationship between governments and the not-for-profit sector. It is a measure we would expect all governments and all political parties to endorse.'***

Others to offer their support included Heather Neil from the RSPCA and Dr Stephen Judd from Hammond Care, who both emphasized the importance of an independent not-for-profit sector.

The not-for-profit sector currently employs around one million Australians and turns over almost \$100 billion annually making it one of the most economically significant sectors in Australia.

The new federal government initiative to ban gag clauses reinforces the National Compact agreement signed by the Federal government and leading not-for-profit organisations. It also partly addresses growing concerns about the introduction of gag clauses in Queensland.

According to Mr Crosbie, ***'No-one is sure exactly what the Queensland government 'no advocacy' clauses will mean for a community health center that supports the push for better mental health services, an aboriginal health service backing their community to achieve restrictions around alcohol sales, or any group trying to change things for the better for their clients and their communities. CCA strongly rejects this form of government contractual control over the independent operations of not-for-profit organisations.'***

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