



Finding Ground: Building a better way *back* together

23-24 February 2021

Conference Theme

It's time to break new ground. As old systems buckle and collapse under the strain of the entirely novel challenges we have faced, spaces of opportunity open to remake and rebuild better together.

The social divides, wealth inequities, uncertain climate futures, and continued colonial impacts that our communities faced prior to the pandemic have been amplified and accelerated. We find ourselves in unimagined and tumultuous terrain that we have had little time to map as we continue to respond to immediate needs.

We are at a juncture. It is critical now, more than ever, that we mobilise our collective efforts to establish the foundations for more cohesive communities, more effective social service systems, more collaborative and joined-up service design and delivery.

The WACOSS *Finding Ground: Building a better way back together* conference will be one of the first major opportunities for the community service sector to take stock – exchange and support, review and reflect, and envision – since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. We need to meet and early 2021 is both timely and imperative to affirm pathways out of response and into recovery.

Like the Nyoongar concept of *djenna bidi*, journeying together, we need to build and walk forward in unity, here on Nyoongar Boodja where we are gathering, and elsewhere, to realise a future that is genuinely inclusive, sustainable, and grounded in equity.

The WACOSS conference will be the place and space to plot and plan with our peers about how we might do things differently together to make a real difference. A chance to explore not what we want, because we are clear about this, but how we are going to collectively and effectively take action to get there. Our shared conviction that lasting change is possible is the place for us to begin, our dreams and determination and commitment for thriving communities, using the experiences and understandings we have.

The focus will be forward, recognising what we have learnt from this crisis, those COVID adaptations that have revealed better ways. These innovative changes and agile responses will be our footing while we consider how these lessons can inform future service design and social policy. Approaches that begin with our strengths and meet our hopes and needs as a community are essential. These dialogues will happen with other enablers, including representatives from diverse sectors and government, as well as the community sector, since we are, indeed, all in this together.

This conference will provide us with the opportunity to seize these emerging and urgent openings, and find ground from which we build back more resilient and connected communities.