



COMMUNITY  
GARDENS  
AUSTRALIA

**Productivity Commission Inquiry into Philanthropy**

**Submission by Community Gardens Australia Inc**

**May 2023**

Community Gardens Australia (CGA) is a not-for-profit, volunteer-run organisation that exists to support, provide resources to, network and advocate for community gardening activities. Established in 1996, we currently have over 700 gardens listed in our national online directory. The figure is growing each year.

A recent survey of community gardens conducted by CGA in 2020 shows that an average of 20,425 Australians a week visit and participate in their local community garden, contributing an average of 15,718 hours of volunteer time per week. These numbers are not small and show that community gardening is very important to many people with 89% of survey respondents stating that they had experienced an increase in their health and wellbeing since they became involved in their garden.

Gardens provide other benefits to participants and their communities, including:

- A source of fresh, nutritious food that can reduce weekly cost of living expenses;
- Physical activity and a sense of purpose;
- Social engagement and community connectedness
- Educational and cultural programs
- Relaxing green spaces, especially valuable in urban areas
- Improvements to the environment through sustainable management

Community gardens are commonly a site of philanthropic and economic activity for their neighbourhoods and towns, including for market days, social and cultural events, and for recreation.

Typically, community gardens are not-for-profit incorporated associations with annual turnover in the ACNC “Extra small” category (revenue less than \$50 000 pa). They raise money through membership fees, sale of produce, educational workshops, grants and donations.

The main sources of government assistance are from local and state authorities. Local government plays the biggest role for many gardens, providing land grants (eg peppercorn rent), reduced service fees (eg water, power), in-kind contributions (mulch etc) and some community small grant schemes. State governments have provided community grant schemes and cost relief (eg insurance in Adelaide and Queensland). Only WA has a dedicated grant scheme (\$100,000 pa) for community gardens. The Commonwealth Government provides the least support, though some community gardens have been successful in gaining grants for garden-based programs related to refugee support, disability activities, the arts and community development.

Seeking or expecting support from commercial and other non-government organisations is a low priority for most community gardens. The 2022 National Community Garden Survey, run by CGA, showed that community gardens, when asked “how does the garden prioritise its funding requirements?”, ranked non-government as third or fourth priority compared with their own efforts in gaining in-kind (volunteer) support and self-funding activities.

However, many gardens do seek support from the commercial sector and are most successful in gaining in-kind and some financial support from businesses allied to gardening activities. For instance, many gardens have good relations with local hardware suppliers, like Bunnings, where they might be beneficiaries of in-kind support like donated equipment and consumables. CGA itself has negotiated for its members a number of discount agreements with national suppliers of gardening equipment.

Broader financial philanthropy (private and corporate) for the sector has been difficult to generate. This is largely due to a preference donors have for making donations that attract tax deductions. Community gardens are not listed for Deductible Gift Recipient (DGR) status and their constitutional objects and activities do not easily meet the criteria for DGR status under other categories (eg health or environmental organisations). We note that since 2020 “Community Sheds” have been separately listed for DGR recognition. We believe that activities at community gardens provide the same sort of mental and physical health benefits that men’s sheds do, but also produce healthy food and create beneficial outdoor environments. We would like to see the category of community shed expanded to “community sheds and community gardens”.

We believe a tax reform of this sort would help broaden the sources and increase the overall philanthropic contribution to our community through its community gardens.

Naomi Lacey  
President, Community Gardens Australia