



Jesuit Social Services is a social change organisation. We work with the most disadvantaged members of the community, providing services and advocacy in the areas of justice and crime prevention; mental health and well-being; settlement and community building; education, training and employment; gender and ecological justice.

Senator Tony Sheldon, Chair
Select Committee on Job Security
Department of the Senate
PO Box 6100, Canberra ACT 2600
jobsecurity.sen@aph.gov.au

15 April 2021

Dear Chair,

Jesuit Social Services welcomes the opportunity to contribute to this inquiry on insecure work undertaken by the Senate Select Committee on Job Security.

Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic brought many pre-existing social and economic issues in Australia into sharper focus, from homelessness and the lack of social housing, to poverty and disadvantage, burgeoning imprisonment rates and the dire need for reforms of aged care. As an organisation working with some of the most disadvantaged members of the community, we have witnessed firsthand the disproportionate impact of this crisis on already marginalised individuals and communities.

The extent of casual or insecure employment in Australia has been another issue brought to the fore this past year. During the height of the pandemic, many people in insecure jobs were working to provide the kind of services that we relied on, including crucial healthcare, social support, cleaning, food and transport, in circumstances that often exposed them to greater health risks.¹ In Victoria, a number of local government areas hit hardest by COVID-19 also had a higher percentage of people in insecure jobs.²

We know that casual work is associated with an absence of key protections, including sick pay, annual leave and superannuation, that hours and continuity of employment are uncertain, and that wages are often lower.³ Women, young people and migrant workers are among cohorts more likely to be in casual or insecure employment.⁴ During the pandemic, the lack of protections for casual workers – who are often forced to work multiple jobs to make ends meet, and in situations where not attending work means foregoing pay – was rightly viewed as problematic from a public health perspective. It's also an issue of basic fairness and equity. All workers deserve protections, whether casual or contracted.

¹ Victoria State Government (23 Nov 2020) Victoria to Take First Big Step to Tackle Insecure Work, <https://www.premier.vic.gov.au/victoria-take-first-big-step-tackle-insecure-work>; Associate Professor Kamalini Lokuge et al, ANU Research School of Population Health College of Health and Medicine, Submission to Inquiry into the Fair Work Amendment (Supporting Australia's Jobs and Economic Recovery) Act 2020, Submission 72, <https://www.aph.gov.au/DocumentStore.ashx?id=17b1abf7-d507-42ee-974d-4a4b533c08d6&subId=701028>.

² Parliament of Victoria, Public Accounts and Estimates Committee (Feb 2021) *Inquiry into the Victorian Government's response to the COVID-19 pandemic*, https://www.parliament.vic.gov.au/images/stories/committees/paec/COVID-19_Inquiry/Report/PAEC_59-08_Vic_Gov_response_to_COVID-19_pandemic.pdf.

³ Ibid, p. 130.

⁴ *The Guardian* (7 March 2021) Australian women more likely to lose jobs and do more unpaid work during Covid recession, <https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2021/mar/07/women-more-likely-to-lose-jobs-and-do-more-unpaid-work-during-covid-recession-report-finds>.

The people we support through our programs are more likely to be in insecure work. It may be short-term, cash in hand or otherwise precarious – work environments where people can simply be let go without notice and replaced. These kinds of workplaces are not ideal for anyone, but are especially challenging for people with complex needs. The knock-on effects of insecure work include that people cannot plan for ongoing expenses relating to housing, transport or education, to name a few, hampering civic participation and embedding structural disadvantage.

The string of recent deaths of food delivery drivers, who work as ‘independent contractors’ and lack many of the rights afforded to employees, is a shocking illustration of the conditions and dangers many people face in insecure work.⁵ Governments, in cooperation with unions, employers and others, should be spurred to take immediate action to address exploitation, enhance workplace safety and extend protections to all. The Victorian Government has recently taken a positive step in initiating the Secure Work Pilot Scheme, to provide up to five days of sick and carer’s pay for casual workers in some industries.⁶ More change is needed.

Our submission focuses on some of the key issues impacting disadvantaged people in seeking and retaining employment, including income support, employment services, housing and digital access, and makes several recommendations to the Federal Government in these areas.

In summary, Jesuit Social Services recommends:

- **Legislative reforms that uphold and strengthen workers’ rights, guard against issues of exploitation, and increase opportunities for secure, permanent work.**
- **An increase to the base rate of JobSeeker and related payments by at least \$25 per day.**
- **Replacing the compliance-focused jobactive system, including inflexible mutual obligation requirements, with a new model that prioritises funding for intensive, flexible and individualised training and support for disadvantaged people seeking work.**
- **Replacing the Community Development Program with a model in line with that proposed by Aboriginal Peak Organisations Northern Territory that is community-driven; based on genuine, long-term collaboration across governments, employers, Indigenous organisations and communities; and facilitates participation and community development in remote areas, including work on services and projects identified by, and with value for, remote communities.**
- **A federal social procurement policy that includes clear and ambitious targets for creating meaningful employment opportunities for people experiencing disadvantage.**
- **Providing affordable access to home internet, data and associated technology for low-income households to ensure no Australian is excluded from broader social and economic participation.**
- **Partnering with State and Territory governments to urgently increase investment in social housing, targeting the building of 30,000 new social housing dwellings as an immediate priority.**
- **Funding State and Territory governments to increase the range and availability of supported housing options for different cohorts of people with multiple and complex needs – including specific initiatives, for example, for young people, people with experience of trauma, people exiting prison, and people with mental ill-health.**

⁵ ABC (Feb 2021) *Online food delivery deaths prompt calls for better worker's compensation for gig economy workers*, <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2021-02-09/exclusive-uber-eats-dede-fredy-riders-deaths-families-speak-out/13118130>.

⁶ <https://www.premier.vic.gov.au/victoria-take-first-big-step-tackle-insecure-work>.

1. Legislative reform to protect and enhance workers' rights

Jesuit Social Services advocates that legislative reform on workplace relations should, as a priority, uphold and strengthen workers' rights, guard against issues of exploitation such as underpayment and unsafe work conditions,⁷ address the gender pay gap, extend protections and entitlements to casual workers and increase opportunities for secure permanent work. We note that the majority of measures proposed in the Federal Government's Fair Work Amendment (Supporting Australia's Jobs and Economic Recovery) Bill 2021 have not passed the Senate, and look to now be on hold. A number of experts and academics were concerned that the original bill would have entrenched casual work and allowed for some forms of pay and conditions to be cut.⁸ It is notable that the Government withdrew measures in the Bill that would have introduced tougher penalties on wage theft, and that appeared to have cross-party support. If this or similar legislation is introduced in future, Jesuit Social Services reiterates the reform objectives outlined in ACOSS' submission on the original bill, including that priority be given to improving job security, addressing overreliance on casual work, restoring wage growth and safeguarding workers' entitlements.⁹

Safeguards against workplace exploitation, which often disproportionately impacts marginalised groups such as refugees or migrants, should be instituted and improved as a matter of priority. We note that the Government has accepted in principle each of the 22 recommendations of the Migrant Workers' Taskforce Report, released in March 2019. The inquiry found that "a significant proportion of temporary visa holders in Australia are being exploited," including through underpayment, withholding of entitlements, unpaid training, unfair dismissal and unsafe work conditions.¹⁰ However, many of the recommendations to date do not appear to have been implemented. These recommendations include extending access to the Fair Entitlements Guarantee (FEG) to people on temporary visas, to ensure they are entitled to financial assistance to cover unpaid entitlements in the event of company liquidation or bankruptcy.¹¹ We call on the Government to effectively implement the recommendations of the Migrant Workers' Taskforce Report to protect workers who are among those most at risk of exploitation.

Recommendations to the Federal Government

- **Prioritise workplace relations reforms that uphold and strengthen workers' rights, guard against issues of exploitation such as underpayment and poor conditions, address the gender pay gap, extend protections and entitlements to casual workers and increase opportunities for secure permanent work.**
- **Implement the recommendations of the 2019 Migrant Workers' Taskforce Report to protect workers who are among those most at risk of exploitation.**

⁷ See, for example, Commonwealth of Australia (2019) *Report of the Migrant Workers' Taskforce*, https://www.ag.gov.au/sites/default/files/2020-03/mwt_final_report.pdf.

⁸ Professor Andrew Stewart et al. (5 Feb 2021) Submission to the Senate Education and Employment Committee inquiry into the Economic on the Fair Work Amendment (Supporting Australia's Jobs and Economic Recovery) Bill 2020 (*Submission 56*).

⁹ ACOSS (4 Feb 2021) Submission to the Senate Education and Employment Committee inquiry into the Economic on the Fair Work Amendment (Supporting Australia's Jobs and Economic Recovery) Bill 2020 (*Submission 8*).

¹⁰ Commonwealth of Australia (2019) *Report of the Migrant Workers' Taskforce*, https://www.ag.gov.au/sites/default/files/2020-03/mwt_final_report.pdf.

¹¹ At present, eligible employees must be Australian citizens or holders of a permanent or special category visa.

2. Recognising locational disadvantage

Jesuit Social Services' research into locational disadvantage, over more than 20 years, has consistently shown that a small number of communities across the country are experiencing persistent, entrenched disadvantage, with a higher incidence of factors such as poor health, unemployment and contact with the justice system.¹² Events in 2020 further highlighted the disproportionate risks the most disadvantaged communities face. The five local government areas in Victoria that had the most active COVID-19 cases as of 1 December 2020 were also amongst the 10 most disadvantaged.¹³ These areas also had a higher percentage of insecure workers than most other areas of Victoria.¹⁴

The nature of locational disadvantage and inequality across Australia must be better understood and addressed. This includes the need for governments to resource community-led, place-based responses to address the causes of disadvantage and build community resilience over the long-term. In supporting people to reach their full potential, including to find and retain meaningful, sustainable and secure work, we cannot ignore the structural barriers to participation that many people face, including the complex and overlapping factors of disadvantage that recur where they live.

The next iteration of our *Dropping off the Edge* research, mapping disadvantage in each state and territory, will be published in 2021. The research maps indicators related to social wellbeing and disadvantage, including long-term unemployment, child maltreatment, criminal convictions and family violence. With underemployment rates still stubbornly high across the country, after rising dramatically last year,¹⁵ our next *DOTE* report will also include an underemployment indicator for the first time. Jesuit Social Services' newly established Centre for Just Places, a national research, advocacy and capacity-building centre into place-based approaches, will be the home for our *Dropping off the Edge* research. We would be happy to provide the committee with further updates on this research, and the work of the centre, upon request.

3. Supporting people into work

In the midst of an economic downturn triggered by a public health crisis that has compounded challenges for many, we should be focused on how best we can support people in need. As we look to recover, Jesuit Social Services advocates that we should not return to the pre-COVID reality, where people were punished for not having work, where compliance with arbitrary obligations was prioritised over real support, and where the needs of disadvantaged people were overlooked. We need a fairer system of social and employment support that empowers people to reach their full potential.

a) A living wage

The Federal Government's recent decision to raise the JobSeeker payment by only \$50 per fortnight on pre-COVID levels was extremely disappointing and will see recipients once again consigned to living below the poverty line and struggling to pay for essentials such as food, rent and medicine. People

¹² <https://dote.org.au/>

¹³ Parliament of Victoria, Public Accounts and Estimates Committee (Feb 2021) *Inquiry into the Victorian Government's response to the COVID-19 pandemic*, p. 130.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ In Victoria, for example, underemployment rose 34 per cent by the end of 2020. See, Ibid, p. xvii.

should be supported with a living wage while they look for work, not further marginalised by a rate of payment so low it is widely seen as a barrier to employment.¹⁶

The impact of the temporary increase to JobSeeker through the Coronavirus Supplement last year was profound. As a result of the increase, some of our participants were able to access rental accommodation, to afford medication or purchase items as simple, but essential, as warm clothes. We witnessed positive changes, such as a decrease in substance abuse, and some participants achieved a measure of stability in their lives that they hadn't previously enjoyed. Crucially, our participants had hope. Their outlook changed. These insights are in line with findings that the Coronavirus Supplement lifted significant numbers of people out of poverty.¹⁷ The return to an inadequate pre-COVID rate will have a devastating impact for many.

With ongoing economic uncertainty and a highly competitive job market, the importance of a fair social safety net is only magnified. We also know that people on low incomes are more likely to spend, meaning a higher rate of income support is a boost to the economy.¹⁸ JobSeeker and related payments must be permanently and adequately increased to ensure people are able to cover the basics and live in safety and dignity while they are out of work. Jesuit Social Services supports ACOSS' Raise the Rate campaign to increase the base rate of JobSeeker by *at least* \$25 per day, and to establish a social security commission to advise Parliament on the ongoing adequacy of future income support payments from a social justice perspective.¹⁹

Participant Case Study:

A 24-year-old female participant was working full-time on a minimum wage for two years, after which she commenced studying a diploma course and went onto Youth Allowance. She does not have the financial support of her parents (since she left home at 17 years of age) and must pay for everything herself, including rent in shared accommodation. In a recent session with her Jesuit Social Services worker, the participant disclosed that once her Centrelink payment increased (due to COVID-19), she was able to replace her underwear and obtain a proper winter jacket. This was something she could not previously afford. The increased payment also meant she did not have to decide between buying groceries or the medication she is on for depression and anxiety.

b) Overhaul compliance-focused employment services

With current jobactive contracts extended until June 2022 while a government trial of a new model takes place in two regions, Jesuit Social Services believes that any new system must enable the time

¹⁶ Parliament of Australia, Parliamentary Library (2019) *Briefing Book: Key Issues for the 46th Parliament*, Don Arthur, 'The adequacy of jobseeker payments', pp. 138-141.

¹⁷ Hayward, D., Ralston, L. and Raysmith, H. (2020). Social policy during the coronavirus recession: a fairytale with an unhappy ending? A case study of Victoria, Australia, p. 8, <https://apo.org.au/sites/default/files/resource-files/2020-11/apo-nid309338.pdf>.

¹⁸ Deloitte Access Economics (September 2020) Estimating the economic impacts of lowering current levels of income support payments, <https://www.acoss.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/Final-ACOSS-Coronavirus-Supplement-to-ACOSS-09.09.2020.pdf>.

¹⁹ <https://raisetherate.org.au/about/>

and resources to be invested in those who are most disadvantaged.²⁰ As recommended by the Employment Services Expert Panel, the new model will include primarily digital services for people who are less disadvantaged and ‘enhanced services’ for people with more significant barriers to employment.²¹ While the full efficacy of the new system will not be clear until it is implemented, Jesuit Social Services echoes ACOSS’ call that any financial savings from the digital-first approach must be redirected into directly supporting participants – particularly those who are most disadvantaged – and not chalked up as budget savings or used to monitor compliance.²²

Weight of evidence has clearly shown that the current system, with its focus on compliance and meeting narrowly prescribed outcomes, has consistently failed people who are struggling to secure work.²³ The high caseloads of providers under the current model mean people with complex needs simply don’t get the kind of support they need. The most effective support for disadvantaged people occurs through building a relationship with a person and taking the time to understand their strengths, hopes and aspirations. Providers of support should focus on building foundational learning skills and participation in prevocational training that offer clear pathways to inclusion for disadvantaged and marginalised people.

We also see a need for more supported employment options for people with complex needs who require holistic support, whether to address housing, mental ill-health, trauma or substance issues. Many people are not ready for the demands of full-time employment and would benefit from a gradual, supported approach into work. Effective models may include partnerships between social services organisations and employers; more coordinated and collaborative responses across sectors to support people; and more flexible funding models that enable tailored, ongoing support for people with complex needs.

In Victoria, initiatives such as the Jobs Victoria Employment Network (JVEN) have enabled providers such as Jesuit Social Services to support people into jobs who face significant barriers, including past justice involvement, mental-ill health or other complex needs. For this cohort, the kind of tailored, flexible and long-term support able to be provided both through pre-accredited and foundation skills training, and then through their engagement in JVEN programs, has been crucial. JVEN, with its focus on supporting the most disadvantaged, stands as an example of an employment services scheme that is largely working well.

The Federal Government should take this opportunity to move away from the inflexible and arbitrary mutual obligation requirements, including unreasonable job search activity, that simply punish people for not being in work. While the new model canvasses “more flexible” options for people to meet mutual obligation requirements, it is concerning that in the short-term, the Federal Government has

²⁰ Jesuit Social Services, Submission to the Senate Education and Employment References Committee’s inquiry into jobactive, <https://jss.org.au/submission-to-the-senate-education-and-employment-references-committees-inquiry-into-jobactive/>.

²¹ <https://www.employment.gov.au/new-employment-services-model>

²² ACOSS, Budget Priorities Statement 2021-2022, <https://www.acoss.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/ACOSS-BPS-FINAL.pdf>

²³ Employment Services Expert Advisory Panel, *I Want to Work: Employment Services 2020*, https://docs.employment.gov.au/system/files/doc/other/final_-_i_want_to_work.pdf; Senate Education and Employment References Committee (February 2019) *Jobactive: failing those it is intended to serve*; ACOSS (August 2018) Submission on Future Employment Services, https://www.acoss.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/ACOSS_submission-on-future-employment-services_FINAL.pdf

forecast that jobseekers will once again need to apply for 20 jobs per month from July 2021.²⁴ In the current economic climate, it is evident that the difficulties of finding work are not due to a lack of job search effort, but rather that there are simply not enough jobs. Recent research estimates that there are 48 people accessing JobSeeker for each entry-level job available.²⁵

Jesuit Social Services is also concerned about the government's stated plan to enable employers to report jobseekers for not accepting suitable employment. In our view, this is completely unnecessary, open to abuse and only demonises people seeking work. There may be myriad legitimate reasons for an individual to decline a job offer. The government should reverse this measure.

Community Development Program

The federal remote-area employment scheme has failed to deliver meaningful training or employment outcomes for participants, the majority of whom are Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander people, while setting onerous requirements and significant penalties for compliance failures. Under the Community Development Program (CDP), people have been expected to undertake compulsory work, at an hourly rate below the minimum wage, within a centralised system that has led to a decline in local decision-making and discretion in its implementation. While some reforms were implemented in March 2019, this scheme is overdue for replacement.

Jesuit Social Services supports a model in line with that proposed by Aboriginal Peak Organisations NT (APO NT) that is community-driven and fosters long-term collaboration across governments, employers, Indigenous organisations and communities.²⁶ The new scheme should focus on job creation to increase employment and reduce poverty. APO NT's proposal envisages a shift in resources away from the administration of compliance obligations and into participation and community development in remote areas, including work on meaningful services and projects identified by, and with value for, remote communities.

One example of an Aboriginal-led initiative that has the potential to improve employment opportunities for at-risk young people is the Grassroots Youth Engagement Pilot Program in Palmerston, Northern Territory. Initiated by local elder Serena Dalton and funded by Territory Families, the pilot program has partnered with a local construction business to employ young people in a supported environment, with the aim of increasing their confidence and employability. The program has engaged young people most at risk of falling through the cracks, who may have felt that a job is out of reach for them – including young people who have been involved in the youth justice system. It provides young people with cultural security through wrap-around mentoring support and cultural activities.

An evaluation report prepared by Jesuit Social Services for community advocacy group, Grassroots Action Palmerston, found that the pilot has supported significant positive change in the lives of young people engaged in the program. Key to the success of the program to date has been the fact that it is:

a) Aboriginal-led and culturally secure.

²⁴ <https://www.servicesaustralia.gov.au/individuals/news/how-changes-coronavirus-covid-19-support-may-impact-you>

²⁵ Anna Patty (March 2021) 'I haven't had breakfast for years': Job search to get tougher as JobKeeper ends, *The Age*, <https://www.smh.com.au/business/workplace/i-haven-t-had-breakfast-for-years-job-search-to-get-tougher-as-jobkeeper-ends-20210326-p57eam.html>.

²⁶ Aboriginal Peak Organisations NT (2017) *Fair Work and Strong Communities*, http://www.amsant.org.au/apont/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/RDES-Report_Online.pdf.

b) Community-driven and place-based – initiated by local community members, based on a sound understanding of local community needs and a common desire to see change.

c) Flexible and tailored – the program has been designed to fit the needs of the young people, rather than the young people being expected to fit the program.

d) Based on a way of working that is strengths-based, relational and trauma-informed.

c) Implement a federal social procurement policy

The capacity for Federal Government procurement spending to contribute social value should be meaningfully pursued, including in relation to creating sustainable job opportunities for people experiencing disadvantage. The size of government procurement contracts underlines the significant potential for a proportion of this spending to be targeted to achieving positive social outcomes, such as driving recruitment of people who are long-term unemployed, have low skill levels and who live in areas of high social disadvantage. While current Commonwealth Procurement Rules include reference to considerations such as environmental sustainability, decision-makers should also be required to consider social value and impact as part of procurement processes.

In particular, there are opportunities for targeted social procurement to support and resource employment initiatives for people experiencing disadvantage. This could include either using suppliers whose main objective is generating positive social impact, or using contractual obligations to incentivise suppliers to, for example, take on people who are long-term unemployed.²⁷ The Victorian Government's Social Procurement Framework, which embeds considerations of social objectives in the government's procurement processes, is a positive starting point. In our view, a federal social procurement policy should include: setting clear and ambitious targets; not be limited only to large-scale, high-spending projects; foster partnerships with employers and other organisations, including those that focus on generating social value; and aim to place disadvantaged jobseekers into secure and sustainable employment, with ongoing support.²⁸

d) Post-employment support

In our experience delivering the Corporate Diversity Partnerships program (see *Appendix 1*), the provision of post-employment support, for both people and employers, is an important aspect to successful employment outcomes that is less recognised and catered for. For people who may have been out of the workforce for some time or have faced significant barriers to inclusion, post-employment support would not only aid retention but also act as a protective factor against risks of employer exploitation.

In our experience, providing access to support, as needed, for people settling in to a new job can make a significant difference to retention outcomes. Employers we have partnered with as part of our Corporate Diversity Partnerships program have told us that the ongoing mentoring we offer has been an invaluable element of the program's success. This support is open-ended — it includes the ability for people to pick up the phone or email to discuss any issue that might be affecting their general wellbeing or ability to do their job — whether it is childcare arrangements, discussing leave or work hours, or the particulars of a role. For employers, the availability of support during the early stages of

²⁷ M. Mupanemunda (2020) The promise of social procurement: Leveraging purchasing power to create inclusive employment opportunities, Library Fellowship Paper, Parliamentary Library & Information Service, Melbourne, Parliament of Victoria, <https://apo.org.au/sites/default/files/resource-files/2020-11/apo-nid309556.pdf>.

²⁸ Ibid.

the employer-employee relationship reduces the sense of risk for the business and provides an avenue for troubleshooting small issues before they escalate.

Recommendations to the Federal Government

- **Increase the base rate of JobSeeker and related payments by *at least* \$25 per day, and establish a social security commission to advise Parliament on the ongoing adequacy of future income support payments.**
- **Overhaul compliance-focused jobactive, including inflexible mutual obligation requirements, and replace it with a model that is responsive to the needs of disadvantaged people seeking work, with funding dedicated to intensive, flexible and individualised training and support for disadvantaged people.**
- **Replace the Community Development Program with a model in line with that proposed by Aboriginal Peak Organisations Northern Territory that is: community-driven; based on genuine, long-term collaboration across governments, employers, Indigenous organisations and communities; and facilitates participation and community development in remote areas, including work on services and projects identified by, and with value for, remote communities.**
- **Implement a federal social procurement policy that includes clear and ambitious targets for creating meaningful employment opportunities for people experiencing disadvantage.**
- **Fund services that provide post-placement support to newly employed people from marginalised backgrounds, as well as to employers, to aid retention and protect against exploitation.**

4. Address digital exclusion

The impact of digital inequity and digital literacy are issues that demand more policy attention as online tools and platforms become increasingly central to work, health, education and other services. As COVID-19 hit communities last year, Jesuit Social Services witnessed the impact of digital exclusion on many of the people we work with. With public internet access points such as libraries closed for much of last year, many of our participants lacked adequate access to the internet, either at home or through mobile phone data, as well as to devices such as laptops. Still others lack the skills to effectively utilise these technologies – an issue largely due to a lack of access in the first place. High internet costs are prohibitive, and larger families with school-age children may also struggle to share around a single laptop or to use an overburdened internet connection.

The Federal Government recognises some key issues around digital inequality, including that some 3 million Australians are facing digital exclusion, including the elderly, people with disability, those living in remote communities and culturally and linguistically diverse people.²⁹ The government also acknowledges that the benefits of digital technologies “cannot be fully realised when portions of our society face barriers to participation.”³⁰ In Victoria, the state government’s supply of devices to school students in need during the pandemic was positive. More systematic, ongoing measures are needed to ensure the online barriers to full civic participation, whether for school students or jobseekers, are removed. With government services such as employment support shifting further

²⁹ <https://www.pmc.gov.au/digital-technology-taskforce/digitally-capable-and-inclusive-australia>.

³⁰ Ibid.

online, there is a pressing need to take steps to ensure that people are not further marginalised by barriers such as a lack of affordable internet access.

We argue that the internet should be recognised as an essential public good with strong public oversight to ensure equitable and affordable access to data and devices, and increased options for digital skills training for disadvantaged communities, encompassing digital rights and security. The Federal Government should consider subsidising affordable access to home internet, data and technology for people experiencing disadvantage to ensure no Australian is excluded from broader social and economic participation. A flexible response is required that takes account of different needs, such as people experiencing homelessness. For low-income households, the No Australian Left Offline campaign for affordable broadband offers a potential model that would see the NBN Co offer a 50 mbps unlimited broadband service at a wholesale price of \$20 per month to households receiving government financial support.³¹ This proposal should be strongly considered by the Government.

Recommendations to the Federal Government

- **Recognise the internet as an essential public good with strong public oversight to ensure equitable and affordable access to data and devices.**
- **Consider subsidising affordable access to home internet, data and associated technology for low-income households to ensure no Australian is excluded from broader social and economic participation.**

5. Invest in safe, secure, affordable and energy efficient social housing

The inquiry's terms of reference refers to the "aspirations of Australians," including in relation to housing security. There is significant evidence, compiled by bodies such as the Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute (AHURI), economists, community organisations and others, that the private property and rental markets do not work effectively for people on the margins – or indeed anyone on a low income. Jesuit Social Services has long called for more innovative responses to improving Australia's affordable and social housing systems, including subsidised and supported housing models.³² This includes public housing owned and managed by respective State or Territory Governments and community housing managed by not-for-profit agencies.

Every person has the right to an adequate standard of living, which includes the right to adequate housing. Safe and secure housing is foundational for personal health, wellbeing and agency, and helps foster healthier and more cohesive communities. The Department of Social Services acknowledges that housing "is fundamental to all Australians and our housing market has a significant influence on a number of key social and economic aspects of society."³³ Yet, it is evident from recent budgets that the Australian Government does not treat social housing as a significant part of Australia's public and social infrastructure. Jesuit Social Services supports many people who rely on social housing to meet their accommodation needs – many of whom are experiencing or have experienced homelessness, housing instability and other forms of disadvantage. Safe and affordable housing options are crucial

³¹ <http://accan.org.au/no-australian-left-offline>.

³² See for example, https://jss.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/10.-SUB-Federal-Inquiry-Into-Homelessness_FINAL_01Apr2020.pdf.

³³ See the Department of Social Services website: <https://www.dss.gov.au/housing-support/programmesservices/housing>.

in enabling people to get their lives back on track and pursue aspirations such as finding and retaining employment.

Participant Case Study:

Tom* is 25 years old with a history of sleeping rough and substance abuse. Tom also faces challenges with his mental health and has had contact with the justice system in relation to trespass, shoplifting and drug possession.

After bouts of homelessness and time at a youth refuge, Tom was referred to Jesuit Social Services and now lives at Dillon House – a small residential facility for young adults in contact with the justice system. Tom has now been at Dillon House for 19 months and, in that time, has been able to start getting his life in order.

It's not easy – Tom still has times when his mental health deteriorates. But thanks to stable housing and trusting relationships formed with staff at the house, Tom has started to care for himself better and to re-establish contact with family.

Tom has been able to build his independent living skills while at Dillon House and is looking forward to moving into transitional housing. When he does, the team will maintain contact to help him stay on the right track. Tom may always face challenges but he has built the skills to recognise when he needs help and the trust to ask for it.

*Not his real name

The findings of numerous research reports³⁴ indicate that there is a significant and increasing undersupply of social housing dwellings across Australia. In 2020, the Victorian Government announced a \$5.3 billion investment into social and affordable housing, a significant step in ensuring thousands of Victorians have a safe and secure place to call home.³⁵ Similar commitment to social housing is needed at the federal level. This is not only a moral imperative, but also makes economic sense. Housing advocates have estimated that a boost to social housing of 30,000 dwellings over four years would generate 18,000 jobs and increase GDP.³⁶ A recent survey of 87 leading economists and other housing market specialists found that the overwhelming majority thought the Federal Government should invest in social housing as part of post-COVID stimulus efforts.³⁷

Jesuit Social Services continues to strongly support the national [Everybody's Home campaign](#), which was launched by peak organisations in the social housing sector ahead of the 2019 Federal election.

³⁴ For example: Compass Housing Services (2019). Estimating Current and Future Demand for Housing Assistance: A discussion paper. Hamilton, NSW; Daley, J., Coates, B., & Wiltshire, T. (2018). Housing affordability: Reimagining the Australian dream. Grattan Institute; Parkinson, S., Batterham, D., Reynolds, M., & Wood, G. (2019). The changing geography of homelessness: A spatial analysis from 2001 to 2016, AHURI Final Report. Melbourne: Australia Housing & Urban Research Institute; and Powell, A., Meltzer, A., Martin, C., et al. (2019). The construction of social housing pathways across Australia. Melbourne: Australian Housing & Urban Research Institute.

³⁵ <https://jss.org.au/victorian-governments-social-housing-spend-a-step-towards-a-stronger-state/>

³⁶ Homelessness Australia, Federal Budget Submission, August 2020, <https://chp.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/HA-Federal-Budget-Submission.pdf>.

³⁷ City Futures Research Centre, UNSW (January 2021) *Australian Experts' Views of Housing in the Economy: Abstract Dreamings or Real Directions?*, <https://apo.org.au/node/310959>.

In line with this vision, we also support ACOSS' call for Federal Government investment, in partnership with States and Territories, to construct 30,000 social housing dwellings – a measure that would reduce homelessness and generate jobs.³⁸

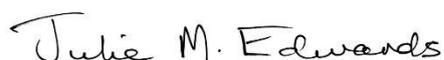
In addition, Jesuit Social Services supports the joint proposal developed by the Healthy and Affordable Homes Coalition for a national low-income energy productivity program that would improve the energy efficiency of low-income homes.³⁹ The initiative aims to create jobs in areas of the program such as auditing, installation and manufacturing, and relieve financial pressure and improve the health and well-being of people on low incomes, including those in social housing. The proposal meets multiple important objectives including reduced energy bills, cuts in carbon emissions and reduced pressure on the electricity grid.

Recommendations to the Federal Government

- **Partner with State and Territory governments to urgently increase investment in social housing, targeting the building of 30,000 new social housing dwellings as an immediate priority.**
- **Commit funding to the State and Territory governments to increase the range (diversity) and availability (quantity) of supported housing options for different cohorts of people with multiple and complex needs – including specific initiatives, for example, for young people, single people, women, people with experience of trauma, people exiting prison, and people with mental ill-health.**
- **Consider implementing the national low-income energy productivity initiative, proposed by the Health and Affordable Homes Coalition, that would improve the energy efficiency of low-income homes and create jobs.**

Thank you for taking our views into consideration.

Yours sincerely



Julie Edwards
CEO, Jesuit Social Services

³⁸ <https://www.acoss.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/200429-Economic-Recovery-Briefing-PDF-1.pdf>.

³⁹ <https://www.acoss.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/ACOSS-BPS-FINAL.pdf>.



Jesuit Social Services is a social change organisation. We work with the most disadvantaged members of the community, providing services and advocacy in the areas of justice and crime prevention; mental health and well-being; settlement and community building; education, training and employment; gender and ecological justice.

Appendix 1.

Corporate Diversity Partnerships

Jesuit Social Services has developed the Corporate Diversity Partnerships program to help companies connect with a diverse talent pool of qualified people who seek an opportunity to obtain the corporate experience and professional networks needed to launch their careers.

We partner with employers to develop a customised paid internship program that creates a life changing career experience for the intern; progress toward business goals for the company; and positive social impact for the community. To date, we have partnered with the Australian Taxation Office as part of their 'Opening Doors' initiative; John Holland, one of Australia's leading engineering contractors; Yarra Valley Water; Melbourne Water; SuperConcepts; and super fund CBUS.

This program is built on the success of our African Australian Inclusion Program (AAIP), formed in partnership with the National Australia Bank (NAB), which offers six-month paid work placements, including mentoring and career coaching, to qualified African-Australians. As of this year, more than 500 participants have graduated from AAIP across Victoria and NSW since its inception in 2009 and 80 per cent of alumni have gone on to secure roles at NAB or in their chosen field.

A program such as the AAIP not only performs a social good, in broadening the employment prospects of people from diverse backgrounds, but also provides significant benefits to the private sector in opening up an untapped labour market of talented workers and shifting perceptions in a positive way.