



# A blueprint for a just recovery

Jesuit Social Services' Federal Election Platform

April 2022



## Jesuit Social Services: Who we are and what we do

Jesuit Social Services has been working for 45 years delivering support services and advocating for improved policies, legislation and resources to achieve strong, cohesive and vibrant communities where every individual can play their role and flourish.

We are a social change organisation working with some of the most marginalised individuals, families and communities, often experiencing multiple and complex challenges. Jesuit Social Services works where the need is greatest and where we have the capacity, experience and skills to make the most difference. Our services span Victoria, New South Wales and the Northern Territory.

Our service delivery and advocacy focuses on these areas:

- **Justice and crime prevention** – people involved with the justice system.
- **Mental health and wellbeing** – people with multiple and complex needs including mental illness, trauma, homelessness and bereavement.
- **Settlement and community building** – recently arrived immigrants and refugees, and disadvantaged communities.
- **Education, training and employment** – people with barriers to education and sustainable employment.
- **Gender Justice** – leadership on the reduction of violence and other harmful behaviours prevalent among boys and men, and new approaches to improve their wellbeing and keep families and communities safe.
- **Ecological justice** – advocacy and research around the systemic change needed to achieve a 'just transition' towards a sustainable future, and supporting community members to lead more sustainable lives.

Research, advocacy and policy are coordinated across all program and major interest areas of Jesuit Social Services. Our advocacy is grounded in the knowledge, expertise and experiences of program staff and participants, and academic research and evidence. We seek to influence policies, practices, legislation and budget investment to positively influence people's lives and improve approaches to address long-term social challenges.

We do this by working collaboratively with governments, businesses, the community sector, and communities themselves to build coalitions and alliances around key issues, and building strong relationships with key decision-makers and the community.

We acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of all the lands on which Jesuit Social Services operates and pay respect to their Elders past and present. We express our gratitude for First Nations people's love and care of people, community, land and all life.

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## Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic has brought many pre-existing social and economic issues in Australia to the fore, from housing stress, to poverty, family violence, and insecure employment. 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 people and communities.

However, responses to the pandemic have also proven that while these issues are complex, they are not beyond resolution. For example, the increase to JobSeeker meant that some of our participants for the first time were able to afford necessities such as medication and warm clothes. We have witnessed the collaboration of private and public sectors to implement evidence-informed measures that increased the level of mental health support, boosted income, and provided housing for people experiencing vulnerabilities. While these measures show that a more just and humane society is possible, many of these them have been temporary and only provided short-term relief.

The climate crisis continues to unfold alongside the pandemic. The 'Black Summer' of 2019-20 saw a megafire spread across Victoria and New South Wales claiming human lives, natural habitat and property. Concerningly, 2021 was recorded as one of the planet's seven hottest years on record.<sup>1</sup> This is despite back-to-back La Niña events, demonstrating just how strong the trend of long-term warming is. The United Nations' Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) report released in February 2022 identified Australia as suffering greater impacts from climate change than any other advanced economy.<sup>2</sup> We have seen more frequent and severe natural disasters, even as recently as March 2022 with catastrophic floods causing devastation across Southern Queensland and the entire east coast of New South Wales.

Much like COVID-19, climate change is disproportionately impacting marginalised people and communities including the people we work with. Our participants are more at risk of bearing the brunt of the current and long-term impacts of climate change because of where they live, their income, their age, health conditions, disabilities, or

where they work. As we look to recover from the pandemic, it is therefore critical that we do not lose sight of the co-occurring climate crisis by ensuring our response is grounded in principles of ecological justice and equity.

At election times, familiar themes often dominate the political spectrum: tax cuts, the economy, national security, infrastructure, among others. These are important issues, but all too often the needs of those on the margins of society are overlooked during election time. We need to ensure that our political leaders commit to policies, practices and investment that allows everybody the opportunity to reach their full potential.

There is a mood for change amongst the Australian public. We have seen this through community solidarity with women standing up for gender equity; calls for genuine action on climate change; and advocacy to raise income and support payments so that those with the least can live a better life.

Elections are times for reflecting on what kind of society we want to live in. Drawing on 45 years of advocacy and action, this document outlines Jesuit Social Services' vision for a just society across a range of interconnected social policy areas, from climate change to Aboriginal self-determination, youth justice, mental health and affordable housing. Jesuit Social Services calls for resources, policies, practices and ideas that reduce inequality, prejudice and exclusion and that, ultimately, reflect a more compassionate and just Australia.

1 King, A. (2022). 2021 was one of the hottest years on record – and it could also be the coldest we'll ever see again. The Conversation. ([Weblink](#))

2 IPCC, 2022: Climate Change 2022: Impacts, Adaptation, and Vulnerability. Contribution of Working Group II to the Sixth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change [H.-O. Pörtner, D.C. Roberts, M. Tignor, E.S. Poloczanska, K. Mintenbeck, A. Alegría, M. Craig, S. Langsdorf, S. Lösschke, V. Möller, A. Okem, B. Rama (eds.)]. Cambridge University Press. In Press.

## Summary of recommendations

### 1. A fair social safety net

- Increase the base rate of JobSeeker and related payments to at least \$69 per day, as outlined by ACOSS in its Raise the Rate For Good campaign.
- Commit to ongoing indexation of payments and fund the establishment of a Social Security Commission to advise the Parliament on the ongoing adequacy of income support payments.
- Extend eligibility for JobSeeker, Youth Allowance and related payments to people on bridging visas and other temporary visa holders.
- End compulsory trials of the cashless debit card scheme and compulsory income management.

### 2. Social and ecological justice

- Invest in place-based approaches that can build on community strengths and enable community-led and system change.
- Invest in a renewables-led recovery and economic stimulus that creates jobs in clean energy, land management, and other regenerative and sustainable industries that can build the economy of the future.
- Prioritise investment in resourcing and capacity building for community organisations and local leaders on just transitions.
- Establish coordinating bodies that facilitate cross-sector collaboration to work towards a just transition.
- Increase funding and resources for organisations and communities seeking to trial, test and implement climate change adaptation, mitigation and transformation activities.
- Resource the establishment and coordination of place-based coalitions at the local government level to incorporate the knowledge and relationships held by the community sector and community leaders into resilience and adaptation planning.

### 3. Gender justice

- Invest in workforce capacity-building across organisations.
- Provide funding for the evaluation of primary prevention interventions.
- Provide coordinated, centralised and long-term investment for primary prevention education for schools with a particular focus on research and sharing best practice across states/territories.

- Expand the *Rights Resilience and Respectful Relationships Curriculum* nationally and prioritise healthy and respectful relationships education.
- Invest in national coordinated data collection, research and evaluations to address the complex causes of family violence and inform evidence-based interventions.
- Fund research and program development to address the root causes of harmful sexual behaviours among young people.

### 4. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander self-determination

- Commit to progressing the aspirations of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people articulated in the Uluru Statement from the Heart, particularly through constitutional recognition of the National Indigenous Voice to Parliament.
- Resource ACCOs to design, lead and deliver services and programs as they are best placed to meet the needs of their communities and implement solutions.
- Establish a national, coordinated focus on the overrepresentation of Aboriginal people in prison and the justice system more broadly, in particular, investment in data systems to understand trends and patterns, as well as information sharing from each jurisdiction about lessons learnt about effective programs and practice.
- Continue investment in implementing the new National Agreement on Closing the Gap, in particular, funding to be directed to communities and ACCOs to design self-determined systems in partnership.

### 5. Pathways to education, training and employment

- Replace 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 people seeking work.
- Invest in pre-accredited training programs to support people to enter or re-enter education and training as a pathway to employment.
- Replace the Community Development Program with a model in line with that proposed by Aboriginal Peak Organisations Northern Territory.
- Implement a federal social procurement policy that includes clear and ambitious targets for creating meaningful employment opportunities for people experiencing disadvantage.

## **6. A humane immigration system**

- End indefinite and arbitrary immigration detention in Australia.
- Expand Australia's Humanitarian Program to at least 30,000 places annually in response to growing global protection needs, as per Oxfam and Deloitte Access Economics' recommendation.
- Enhance access to family reunions for refugee and humanitarian entrants and develop a humanitarian family reunion program of 10,000 places annually, as per Refugee Council of Australia's recommendation.
- Increase Status Resolution Support Services (SRSS) funding and expand eligibility requirements.

## **7. Adequate settlement services for newly arrived people**

- Expand funding of Settlement Engagement and Transition Support Program (SETS) and enable services funded under this program to respond to the settlement needs of newly arrived people beyond the current post-arrival five-year period of eligibility.
- Extend settlement housing support under the Humanitarian Settlement Program (HSP) beyond the initial 28-day period and upscale the funding and development of sustainable, supportive housing for newly arrived migrants and refugees.
- Increase investment in interpreter services for Settlement Engagement and Transition Support services.

## **8. Safe, affordable and sustainable housing**

- Establish a 10-year national strategy on housing and homelessness to complement the National Housing and Homelessness Agreement and improve the coordination of the national response to homelessness.
- Develop a 10-year national Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander housing strategy in partnership with Aboriginal Community Controlled Housing Organisations.
- Increase funding for homelessness services, including by providing Equal Remuneration Order (ERO) supplementation for the homelessness service sector to meet increased wages costs arising from the 2012 Fair Work Commission ERO decision.
- Partner with State and Territory governments to increase investment in safe, sustainable and energy-efficient social housing, targeting the construction of 25,000 new social housing

dwellings, as per calls by the Everybody's Home Campaign.

- Partner with State and Territory governments to retrofit all existing social housing with energy efficiency upgrades.

## **9. Fair justice systems**

- Raise the age of criminal responsibility to the age of 14 across all states and territories.
- Establish a National Justice Reinvestment Body that embeds Aboriginal leadership and expertise at all levels.
- Support the Northern Territory Government to give full effect to the recommendations of the Royal Commission into the Protection and Detention of Children in the Northern Territory.
- Coordinate the establishment of National Protective Mechanisms in each state and territory to provide independent oversight of places of detention.
- Work with States and Territories and independent oversight bodies to ban the use of isolation in youth justice facilities and significantly reduce the use of isolation and solitary confinement in adult prisons across Australian jurisdictions.

## **10. A flexible and responsive National Disability Insurance Scheme**

- Implement an NDIS pricing structure that is flexible to ensure that it can engage highly skilled staff to provide quality, intensive support to people with multiple and complex needs of the diverse range of participants supported by the scheme.
- Review the Disability Support worker cost model and work towards developing a skilled, qualified and remunerated disability workforce.
- Improve the flexibility of the NDIS so that packages can be accessed in a timely manner, in particular for participants with multiple and complex needs.
- Strengthen the interface of the NDIS and mainstream services so that cooccurring issues experienced by people with multiple and complex needs are addressed in congruence.

## **11. Strengthen mental health and suicide bereavement supports**

- Partner with State and Territory governments to implement state and territory wide postvention support services, so that every person bereaved by suicide is automatically referred to a postvention bereavement provider.



- Develop secure, long-term funding for postvention, early intervention services for suicide bereavement, including Support After Suicide, underpinned by a nationally agreed approach.
- Increase the capacity of mainstream mental health services to respond to trauma, particularly for families and children.
- Establish consistent reporting and evaluation requirements across Primary Health Networks.
- Extend drug and alcohol treatment Primary Health Networks funding for programs such as *Connexions*.

### **12. Equal pay funding for community services**

- Reinstatement ERO supplementation funding for the community services sector to ensure people experiencing vulnerability can receive the support they need.



## 1. A fair social safety net

In an economic downturn triggered by a public health crisis that has multiplied challenges for many, we must focus on how best we can support people in need. As we continue to adapt, we must avoid returning to the pre-COVID reality, where compliance with mutual obligations was prioritised over real support, and where the needs of disadvantaged people were overlooked. We have also seen the severe impact of crises – bushfires, pandemic, floods and war – on the cost of living in Australia.<sup>3</sup> In response to this, the Government must seek, to the fullest extent possible, not to compound existing disadvantage or create additional disadvantage. We need a fair system of social and employment support that empowers people to reach their full potential.

The impact of the temporary increase to JobSeeker through the Coronavirus Supplement was profound. With this increase, some of our participants were able to access rental accommodation, to afford medication or purchase items as simple, but essential, as warm clothes. Anecdotal evidence from our programs revealed positive changes, such as a decrease in substance misuse, 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 many people out of poverty.<sup>4</sup> Among people in households on the JobSeeker Payment, poverty fell by four-fifths, from 76 per cent in 2019 to 15 per cent in June 2020.<sup>5</sup>

Concerningly, research from ACOSS and UNSW shows that once the income supports in place were withdrawn during early 2021, income inequality and poverty increased above pre-pandemic levels.<sup>6</sup>

In light of this, the Federal Government's decision to raise the JobSeeker, Parenting Payment, Youth Allowance and Austudy payments by only \$50 per fortnight was disappointing and has seen recipients once again living below the poverty line and struggling to pay for essentials such as food, rent, medicine and internet access. During the lockdowns to contain the spread of COVID-19, many of our

participants struggled to afford internet access<sup>7</sup> which in turn impacted their ability provide home schooling, access essential telehealth, partake in job interviews or to access goods and services online.

With ongoing economic uncertainty and a highly competitive job market, the importance of a fair social safety net is only magnified. Jesuit Social Services supports ACOSS' Raise the Rate For Good campaign to increase the base rate of JobSeeker and related payments from \$44 per day to at least \$69, and to establish a social security commission to advise Parliament on the ongoing adequacy of future income support payments from a social justice perspective.<sup>8</sup>

### CASE STUDY: Emma\*

Emma is 24-years-old and worked full-time on a minimum wage for two years, after which she started studying a diploma course and went onto Youth Allowance. She does not have the financial support of her parents, having 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, Emma disclosed that once her Centrelink payment increased due to the Coronavirus Supplement, 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.

*\*All participant names are changed to protect privacy – Emma isn't her real name.*

Eligibility for social security should be expanded

3 Pueblos, M. & Tamer R. (2022). Australia's cost of living is soaring. Why is everything so expensive? SBS News. ([Weblink](#))

4 Hayward, D., Ralston, L. and Raysmith, H. (2020). Social policy during the coronavirus recession: A fairy tale with an unhappy ending? A case study of Victoria, Australia, p. 8. ([Weblink](#))

5 Davidson, P., (2022) A tale of two pandemics: COVID, inequality and poverty in 2020 and 2021 ACOSS/UNSW Sydney Poverty and Inequality Partnership, Build Back Fairer Series, Report No. 3. Sydney

6 Ibid.

7 Internet access is one of the indicators of Jesuit Social Services' [DOTE 2021](#) research – having no internet access is one of the prevalent forms of disadvantage in some of the most disadvantaged communities..

8 See: [Raise the Rate For Good](#)



and barriers to receiving income support, such as onerous mutual obligation and income management measures, including the cashless debit card scheme, should be removed. Forms of income management should be opt-in or voluntary, developed by communities and linked to other services as part of a holistic approach to supporting people in need.

## 2. Social and ecological justice

### Recommendations

- Increase the base rate of JobSeeker and related payments to at least \$69 per day, as outlined by ACOSS in its Raise the Rate For Good campaign.
- Commit to ongoing indexation of payments and fund the establishment of a Social Security Commission to advise the Parliament on the ongoing adequacy of income support payments.
- Extend eligibility for JobSeeker, Youth Allowance and related payments to people on bridging visas and other temporary visa holders.
- End compulsory trials of the cashless debit card scheme and compulsory income management.

Last year, Jesuit Social Services' latest [Dropping Off the Edge](#) (DOTE) report was released—the fifth edition of research spanning over 20 years, mapping disadvantage by location. The report identifies where entrenched and persistent disadvantage is located and demonstrates the complex web of challenges faced by those communities. For the first time, DOTE 2021 includes environmental indicators alongside social, economic, education and health measures. The findings show that communities that experience persistent disadvantage often also experience disproportionate environmental injustice, represented through such factors as higher levels of air pollution,<sup>9</sup> exposure to heat stress,<sup>10</sup> and poorer access to green open spaces.<sup>11</sup>

Ecological injustice is evident globally, regionally and locally, where the effects of rising temperatures, more severe droughts, bushfires and extreme weather events are disproportionately affecting the lives of those already facing marginalisation. Disasters, smoke exposure, infrastructure stress, service disruption, public health stress, the impacts of species loss and the long-term need for a just recovery to build communities of resilience demand a discerning and long-term vision for Australia.

In order to ensure those least able to cope with climate change receive the support they need to adapt, increasing attention is being paid to the idea of a 'just transition'<sup>12</sup> – that is, moving from current untenable economic and social systems to an ecologically sustainable, zero greenhouse gas emissions world in an effective and equitable way. Jesuit Social Services recently released a discussion paper drawing attention to the overlapping social and ecological harms of the prison system. The paper – [Prisons, Climate and a Just Transition](#) – makes the case for why a just transition must include a focus on decarceration. Action in this area is urgently needed following reports from Western Australian prisons in January this year of prisoners suffering soaring temperatures for a number of weeks, rising above 50 degrees in a number of prisons.<sup>13</sup> Even more concerning are revelations from former prisoners that inside Roebourne, Australia's hottest prison, that there is air-conditioning in the guards' toilets but not in the cells.<sup>14</sup>

Clear parameters are required by government to ensure this transition does not replicate the harmful power structures that drive existing inequality, but rather harnesses the potential for transformational change. For example, in the Northern Territory, there is growing interest in the economic opportunities presented by renewables; without clear parameters set by government, there is a risk that new solar projects could perpetuate the pattern of old industries – extracting value from Aboriginal land without the participation or benefit of traditional owners and local communities. Proactive policy responses, genuine community involvement and carefully targeted social protection will be crucial to achieving a just transition.

The outcomes of any path taken will be unpredictable and require flexible but considered

9 Tanton, R., Dare, L., Miranti, R., Vidyattama, Y., Yule, A. and McCabe, M. (2021), *Dropping Off the Edge 2021: Persistent and multilayered disadvantage in Australia*, Jesuit Social Services: Melbourne. Indicator 32. Pg 236.

10 Ibid. Indicator 34. Pg 236.

11 Ibid. Indicators 33 and 35. Pg 236.

12 See, Jesuit Social Services (2019) *Expanding the conversation: Ecological Justice series Just Transitions*, ([Weblink](#))

13 Brennan, D. (2022). 'Inside Roebourne, Australia's Hottest Prison', *The Saturday Paper*, January 29 - February 4, 2022, No. 384. ([Weblink](#))

14 Ibid.

responses. Our future depends on the mobilisation of all sectors – government, community and private – around a collective, collaborative commitment to reduce emissions and a just and sustainable future.

Community service organisations (CSOs) are highly vulnerable and not well prepared to respond to climate change or extreme weather events, with many small and medium-sized organisations at risk of permanent closure or service disruption as a result of major damage to physical infrastructure and disruptions to critical services. The detailed consequences of major disruptions to social service provision for people experiencing poverty and inequality – for whom CSOs are the shock absorbers for everyday adversity as well as crises – are very serious as they impact the basic needs for human survival: homelessness, deprivation, hunger, isolation and death. At present, CSOs perceive an overwhelming range of barriers to action. Key amongst these is a lack of financial resources and skills and the concern that adaptation is 'beyond the scope' of the sector's core business.

In recognising the urgent need to mitigate and adapt to climate change, Jesuit Social Services' [Centre for Just Places](#) has been delivering a range of climate adaptation and resilience initiatives and workshops across metropolitan Melbourne. In doing so, the Centre aims to build place-based climate resilience coalitions and strengthen collaboration between CSOs and local governments to build resilience to extreme weather and protect the health and wellbeing of those most at-risk. A transformative approach to adaptation goes beyond emergency management, addressing the underlying drivers of vulnerability. CSOs hold local knowledge and, through their relationships with the community, can best understand the vulnerabilities, strengths and appropriate responses best suited to their local community. Building place-based, cross-sector coalitions enables a shared understanding of how social and climate justice issues intersect and helps drive adaptation planning and policy development to build broader community resilience.

## Recommendations

- Invest in place-based approaches that can build on community strengths and enable community-led and system change. This involves working collaboratively with state and local governments and community organisations and leaders to understand local needs and address the drivers of inequity and disadvantage. This must be led by and with communities to incorporate the diverse knowledge and voices of lived experience.
- Invest in a renewables-led recovery and economic stimulus that creates jobs in clean energy, land management, and other regenerative and sustainable industries that can build the economy of the future.
- Prioritise investment in resourcing and capacity building for community organisations and local leaders on just transitions, ecological literacy, skills training and employment in regenerative and sustainable industries particularly in marginalised communities and those living within degraded and at-risk ecosystems.
- Recognising the collective effort required to achieve this goal, we recommend that governments establish coordinating bodies that facilitate cross-sector collaboration to work towards a just transition. This should include engagement across all levels of government, together with industry, researchers and technical experts, environmental organisations, the community services sector and communities themselves.
- Increase funding and resources for organisations and communities seeking to trial, test and implement climate change adaptation, mitigation and transformation activities.
- Resource the establishment and coordination of place-based coalitions at the local government level to incorporate the knowledge and relationships held by the community sector and community leaders into resilience and adaptation planning.

### 3. Gender justice

Through our work, we have seen that too many boys and men are in trouble and causing trouble, and that without the proper role models and support, they tend to endorse harmful masculine norms and destructive behaviours. While it isn't all of them, it's too many. We see it in high levels of substance misuse, mental health issues, extremely high rates of suicide, radicalisation and violence. The impact on women, children, families, men, communities and society as a whole is profound. We have recently acknowledged one significant aspect of the problem – violence against women. The focus has been, as it should be, on supporting victim-survivors of this violence. But we need to do much more.

By looking at the root causes of violence and challenging behaviours, The Men's Project seeks to move from crisis to prevention and early intervention; going up-stream to support boys and men to be their best selves, so they can lead healthier lives free from violence and foster positive relationships. When we engage directly with men and boys, we also contribute to safer communities and better outcomes for the women and children in their lives.

#### 3.1 The Man Box

Jesuit Social Services strongly believes that addressing family violence requires tackling its root causes by supporting men and boys to live respectful, accountable and fulfilling lives. Through The Men's Project, Jesuit Social Services has taken steps to better understand and respond to male violence and other harmful behaviours. Our research, *The Man Box: A study on being a young man in Australia*, focused on the attitudes to manhood and the behaviours of young Australian men aged 18 to 30. It involved an online survey of a representative sample of 1,000 young men from across the country, as well as focus group discussions with two groups of young men. Our findings reflected those of other research, showing that men who rigidly conform to dominant masculine norms (that men should be tough, stoic, dominant and in control) are more likely to self-report the use of violence and sexual harassment, suffer poor mental health, engage in risky behaviours such as binge drinking and less likely to engage in health promotion behaviours.<sup>15</sup>

More recently we have developed and are in the early stages of piloting our Adolescent Man Box survey. The Adolescent Man Box is the first study that focuses on the attitudes to manhood (endorsement of stereotypical masculine norms) and the association between these and a range of harmful behaviours. The survey, subject to funding to support this work, also has the potential to serve as an important longitudinal evaluation tool. This work is directly relevant to the Federal Government's recent \$5 million commitment to develop a survey of secondary school-age students on issues related to consent. We would welcome the opportunity to partner on this work drawing on the lessons and insights from our work to date examining the underlying attitudes which are tightly associated with violence and sexual harassment.

#### 3.2 Workforce capacity building

The Men's Project has developed workforce capacity-building projects for people working with men and boys to engage them on issues related to stereotypical constructions of masculinity (a key driver of violence) including:

- *Modelling Respect and Equality* - supports participants to develop greater self-awareness, learn how to model and promote positive change, and recognise and challenge problematic attitudes and behaviours.
- *Unpacking the Man Box workshops* – provides a range of participants (social workers, well-being staff, teachers, students, early childhood educators, faith leaders and parents) with awareness of the negative consequences associated with outdated forms of masculinity and tools/resources to foster healthier forms of masculinity.

Internal evaluations of both programs found participants report significant improvements in their knowledge and understanding of stereotypical constructions of masculinity, and in their confidence and motivation to affect change.

#### 3.3 Prevention education

Adequately funded prevention education fosters safe and respectful relationships, and ultimately supports the goal of ending violence against women. We welcome the inclusion of consent education in the new national curriculum as a critical

<sup>15</sup> Our Watch., (2019). Men in focus: unpacking masculinities and engaging men in the prevention of violence against women. Our Watch: Melbourne, Australia.; The Men's Project & Flood, M., (2018). The Man Box: A Study on Being a Young Man in Australia. Jesuit Social Services: Melbourne.



## CASE STUDY: Vas

When I arrived at the Brosnan Centre for the two-day Modelling Respect and Equality (MoRE) training run by The Men's Project, I felt nervous and excited. We were about to scrutinise messages about masculinity that affect the lives of boys and young men, and I was deeply aware of being part of that demographic. I quickly relaxed in the company of the other smiling participants, both men and women, who represented a broad swathe of society.

The program was led by Michael from Jesuit Social Services together with Paul and Kesh from Nirodah, kicking off the workshop and unpacking the Man-Box study which revealed the harmful impact of masculine stereotypes on boys and young men. I found the evidence both compelling and validating as it resonated with my own discomfort with toxic messages and my coexistent uncertainty about what exactly healthy masculinity might look like today.

The two-day workshop and subsequent meet-ups in the weeks and months following gave me an arena in which to explore my questions and insecurities with the support of other men and women who were also committed to challenging their personal biases and growing in their own ways.

Opportunities like the MoRE program are few and far between and I feel hard-pressed to think of anyone whom I would not encourage to attend, and indeed I have and will continue to recommend it to friends and professional peers alike.

step in empowering and supporting young people to understand gendered stereotypes, coercion and power imbalances.

Further to this, Jesuit Social Services advocates for respectful relationships education to be prioritised in the national curriculum and provided in all Australian schools. In addition to teaching students about respectful and healthy relationships, teachers, sports coaches, youth workers and other community leaders who work with boys must be

equipped with the language and skills they need to create positive change around issues of respect. Sadly, the onset of COVID-19 resulted in a spike in family violence, demonstrating that the work of The Men's Project is more vital than ever before.<sup>16</sup>

As part of our work we are supporting the Victorian Government to implement the Resilience Rights and Respectful Relationships (RRRR) curriculum. Too often, teachers report a need for greater knowledge, skills and confidence in order to teach topics such as gendered violence, gender norms, power and privilege. In response, in partnership with the Victorian Department of Education, we are engaging school leadership, teachers and other staff in capacity building programs to support more effective delivery of the RRRR curriculum and enable school staff to embed a whole of school approach. We expect the evaluation of the work will have implications for the Federal Government as well as other states / territories.

### 3.4 Intervening earlier to prevent child sexual abuse

In addition to our research and primary intervention work, we are designing, piloting and evaluating program models that intervene earlier. An area of particular focus, with relevance to the Federal Government, is preventing child sexual abuse. We commend the work completed to date, led by the National Office for Child Safety (the National Office), on the development of the *National Strategy to Prevent and Respond to Child Sexual Abuse* (the National Strategy). Our work directly aligns with two of the five key themes within the National Strategy – 'Enhancing national approaches to children with harmful sexual behaviours' and 'Offender prevention and intervention'.<sup>17</sup> We particularly welcome the commitment to 'Launch an offender prevention service for adults who have sexual thoughts about children or young people'.<sup>18</sup>

We have two key initiatives that aim to intervene earlier and prevent child sexual abuse by working with people who are worried about their sexual thoughts and behaviours, including:

- *Stop it Now!* – Jesuit Social Services, in collaboration with the University of Melbourne, is building the foundations of a *Stop It Now!* service in Australia, with the pilot commencing imminently. *Stop It Now!* seeks to prevent child sexual abuse and offending involving child abuse material. *Stop It Now!* currently operates successfully in North America, the United

16 Boxall H., Morgan A. & Brown R. (2020). The prevalence of domestic violence among women during the COVID-19 pandemic. Statistical Bulletin no. 28. Canberra: Australian Institute of Criminology.

17 Commonwealth of Australia. (2021). Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, National Strategy to Prevent and Respond to Child Sexual Abuse 2021–2030. ([Weblink](#))

18 Ibid.

## Recommendations

- Invest in workforce capacity-building across organisations, based on our Man Box research, Modelling Respect and Equality program and Unpacking the Man Box workshops, to support people who work with boys and men to challenge harmful stereotypes and promote respect and equality.
- Provide funding for the evaluation of primary prevention interventions.
- Provide coordinated, centralised and long-term investment for primary prevention education for schools with a particular focus on research and sharing best practice across states/territories. This could include, drawing on the work completed to date through our Adolescent Man Box survey, partner with Jesuit Social Services as part of the \$5 million commitment to develop a survey of secondary school-age students on issues related to consent.
- Expand the Rights Resilience and Respectful Relationships Curriculum nationally and prioritise healthy and respectful relationships education.
- Invest in national coordinated data collection, research and evaluations to address the complex causes of family violence and inform evidence-based interventions, such as providing funding for the national roll-out of Jesuit Social Services' Adolescent Man Box Survey.
- Fund research and program development to address the root causes of harmful sexual behaviours among young people's behaviours such as Jesuit Social Services' Worried About Sex and Porn Project (WASAPP).

Kingdom, Ireland and the Netherlands having been first established by a victim survivor of child sexual abuse in the US. The program's key feature is an anonymous and confidential phone helpline and online chat function for people who

are worried about their sexual thoughts and behaviours in relation to children, as well as parents, family members, and professionals who have concerns about someone in relation to this problem. While the service is anonymous and confidential, it will adhere to mandatory reporting requirements relevant to laws in each Australian jurisdiction.

- *The Worried About Sex and Pornography Project (WASAPP)* – in collaboration with the University of Melbourne, Jesuit Social Services is currently engaged in a research project, WASAPP, for young people worried about their sexual thoughts or behaviours. Funded by a Learning System Grant, through the Centre for Excellence in Child and Family Welfare, the research is seeking to understand the developmental trajectories of children and young people in order to inform the contents of an effective online help tool. The next stage is to secure funding and build and trial a WASAPP online help tool.

## 4. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander self-determination

Jesuit Social Services acknowledges Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people as the Traditional Owners of this land, whose sovereignty has never been ceded.

### 4.1 A First Nations Voice to Parliament

The Uluru Statement from the Heart was issued to the Australian people in 2017. It calls for a constitutionally enshrined First Nations Voice (the Voice) to Parliament, and the establishment of a Makarrata Commission that would take active steps for truth-telling about our history and lay the foundation for agreement-making (treaties) between Federal and State governments and First Nations peoples.<sup>19</sup> In 2019, Minister for Indigenous Australians Ken Wyatt announced a 'co-design' process with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to determine the structure and functions of the Voice to Parliament through community consultations.<sup>20</sup>

The final report on the Indigenous Voice Co-design Process, released in 2021, recommended that the Voice should consist of an integrated system comprising Local and Regional Voices and a National Voice, with connections to existing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander bodies.<sup>21</sup>

19 Uluru Statement from the Heart (2022). History. ([Weblink](#))

20 Ibid.

21 Commonwealth of Australia, National Indigenous Australians Agency (2021). Indigenous Voice Co-design Process Final Report to the Australian Government. ([Weblink](#))

Unfortunately, the Voice will not be constitutionally enshrined, but rather legislatively adopted, which does not reflect the calls from the Uluru Statement for constitutional reforms to empower Aboriginal people. In addition to advocating for a constitutionally enshrined Voice, we echo the calls of the Aboriginal Executive Council for the structure and governance of the Voice to align with the new National Agreement on Closing the Gap (discussed below). It is critical that these mechanisms work in unison and are coordinated according to the priority reforms and new targets.<sup>22</sup>

#### **4.2 Overrepresentation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the justice system**

**“Proportionally, we are the most incarcerated people on the planet. We are not an innately criminal people.” – Uluru Statement from the Heart**

Jesuit Social Services believes that the overrepresentation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the adult and youth justice systems nationally represents a systemic failure. We are particularly concerned about the increasing rates at which Aboriginal children and women are being incarcerated. Aboriginal women are the fastest growing prison population in Victoria while Aboriginal children are nine times more likely to be in custody than their non-Aboriginal counterparts.<sup>23</sup> We seek to highlight the historical and structural root causes of this overrepresentation and advocate for a genuine commitment to Aboriginal self-determination as critical to preventing contact with the justice system.

Structural and systemic racism are key underlying drivers of the rising Aboriginal prison population. PwC’s 2017 report *Indigenous incarceration: Unlock the facts* found systemic racism spans across the justice system from policing, legal assistance and courts.<sup>24</sup> Further to these findings, the inquiry by the Victorian Commission for Children and Young People, *Our Youth, Our Way* highlighted the systemic causes of challenges faced by Aboriginal children, which influence their involvement with the justice system.<sup>25</sup>

Some of these included interrupted engagement with education, mental health and substance misuse concerns, entrenched family disadvantage, involvement with the child protection system and disproportionate youth justice involvement at an earlier age.<sup>26</sup>

Culture plays a central role in the lives of Aboriginal people, particularly for children. It can support healing, protect health and wellbeing, and build identity, resilience and connection to community and Country. A key finding of the *Our Youth, Our Way* inquiry was that services designed, controlled, and delivered by the Aboriginal community resulted in the best outcomes for Aboriginal children involved with youth justice with positive flow on effects for the wider Aboriginal community.<sup>27</sup> Jesuit Social Services supports Aboriginal self-determination, recognising that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled organisations (ACCOs) are uniquely placed to provide culturally appropriate services, developed by and for local communities. They should be adequately resourced and supported to do so given the intersect between education, health, housing and incarceration. We call on the Commonwealth to work with states and territories to end the overrepresentation of Aboriginal people in the justice system. A national coordinated response is necessary to address overrepresentation, consisting of investment in data systems to understand trends and patterns, as well as information sharing from each jurisdiction about lessons learnt about effective programs and practice.

#### **4.3 The new National Agreement on Closing the Gap**

We know that the empowerment and self-determination of First Nations people is the best path to improved outcomes. One way we have seen this play out is through the work of the Coalition of Peaks, the collective voice of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled sector, in co-designing the new National Agreement on Closing the Gap which was launched in 2020.<sup>28</sup>

22 Aboriginal Executive Council (2020). Submission to the Indigenous Voice.

23 Commission for Children and Young People (2021). *Our youth, our way: inquiry into the over-representation of Aboriginal children and young people in the Victorian youth justice system.*; Australian Bureau of Statistics (Australian Government) (2021). *Corrective Services* March 2021.

24 PwC’s *Indigenous Consulting*. (2017). *Indigenous incarceration: Unlock the facts*.

25 Commission for Children and Young People (2021). *Our youth, our way: inquiry into the over-representation of Aboriginal children and young people in the Victorian youth justice system*.

26 Ibid.

27 Ibid.

28 Coalition of Peaks (2022). *New National Agreement on Closing the Gap*. ([Weblink](#))



It is crucial for the Commonwealth to continue its investment in implementing the National Agreement, in particular, for funding to be directed to communities and ACCOs to design self-determined systems in partnership.

## Recommendations

- Commit to progressing the aspirations of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people articulated in the Uluru Statement from the Heart, particularly through constitutional recognition of the National Indigenous Voice to Parliament.
- Resource ACCOs to design, lead and deliver services and programs as they are best placed to meet the needs of their communities and implement solutions.
- Establish a national, coordinated focus on the overrepresentation of Aboriginal people in prison and the justice system more broadly, in particular, investment in data systems to understand trends and patterns, as well as information sharing from each jurisdiction about lessons learnt about effective programs and practice.
- Continue investment in implementing the new National Agreement on Closing the Gap, in particular, funding to be directed to communities and ACCOs to design self-determined systems in partnership.

## 5. Pathways to education, training and employment

### 5.1 Jobactive

Evidence shows that the federal employment services system, with its focus on compliance and meeting narrowly prescribed outcomes, is failing people looking to secure work.<sup>29</sup> With current jobactive contracts extended until June 2022 while a trial of a new model takes place in two regions, Jesuit Social Services believes that any new system must enable the time and resources to be

invested in those who are experiencing entrenched disadvantage. We have observed the power of supporting individuals to harness their strengths and to be provided with the right skills and training to attain meaningful employment. In doing so, we advocate for working relationally with this cohort and taking the time to understand their capabilities, hopes and aspirations. In addition, post-placement support and mentoring for individuals, and support for prospective employers, must be a focus of any new system.

### 5.2 Pre-accredited training opportunities

Pre-accredited training provides an important stepping stone into employment for people with low-level educational attainment or people who have been out of the workplace or education for some time. Access to pre-accredited training provides an opportunity to successfully engage or re-engage in education and enhance skills and work readiness. For some people, this is the first such opportunity in many years. Through pre-accredited training provided by Jesuit Social Services, participants gain the essential vocational and personal skills they need to make a successful transition to formal accredited training and employment. Recognising the importance of pre-accredited training, we call on the incoming Federal Government to invest in pre-accredited training programs to support people to enter or re-enter education and training to obtain employment.

### 5.3 The Community Development Program

The Community Development Program (CDP), 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 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.<sup>30</sup> 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.<sup>31</sup>

29 Employment Services Expert Advisory Panel. (2020). I Want to Work. [\(Weblink\)](#); Senate Education and Employment References Committee. (2019). Jobactive: Failing those it is intended to serve. [\(Weblink\)](#); ACOSS. (2018). Future Employment Services. [\(Weblink\)](#)

30 Aboriginal Peak Organisations NT. (2017). Fair Work and Strong Communities. [\(Weblink\)](#).

31 Ibid.

## Recommendations

- Replace 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 people seeking work.
- Invest in pre-accredited training programs to support people to enter or re-enter education and training as a pathway to employment.
- 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.

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.

### 5.4 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 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. The [Victorian Government's Social Procurement Framework](#) is a promising example that could be drawn upon.

## 6. A humane immigration system

The Catholic Alliance for People Seeking Asylum (CAPSA) is a national initiative that advocates for a just and humane processing system in Australia, in which we welcome people seeking asylum. Formed in 2014, CAPSA is co-convened by Jesuit Social Services and Jesuit Refugee Services Australia and is supported by an advisory group of national representatives from Catholic peak bodies and organisations across the pastoral, education, social and health sectors. Through the work of CAPSA, Jesuit Social Services advocates that significant change is needed so that refugees and people seeking asylum can be treated fairly and humanely. Not only will this uphold the human rights of those seeking safety in Australia, but it would also benefit the Australian economy, workforce and broader society.

### 6.1 End indefinite and arbitrary detention

Jesuit Social Services is deeply concerned at the ongoing indefinite and arbitrary detention of asylum seekers both in Australia and overseas at the hands of Australia's immigration system. The average length of time a person spends in immigration detention is just under 700 days.<sup>32</sup> However, many people have been detained for much longer - 117 people have been detained for over five years and eight people have been detained for more than ten years.<sup>33</sup> Experts in law, health, psychology, social work and human rights have expressed their well-founded and ongoing concerns for the wellbeing of refugees and people seeking asylum held in indefinite detention by the Australian Government.<sup>34</sup> The arbitrary and indefinite nature of immigration detention has been found by the UN Human Rights Committee to contravene Australia's international

32 Department of Home Affairs. Immigration Detention and Community Statistics Summary. 30 September 2021. ([Weblink](#))

33 Ibid.

34 Parliament of Australia, Senate Legal and Constitutional Affairs References Committee's inquiry into The serious allegations of abuse, self-harm and neglect of asylum seekers in relation to the Nauru Regional Processing Centre, and any like allegations in relation to the Manus Regional Processing Centre (2017). Submissions.

treaty obligations.<sup>35</sup> In addition to the significant human cost, indefinite offshore detention does not make economic sense given the cost of holding a single refugee on Nauru has escalated tenfold to more than \$350,000 every month – or \$4.3m a year – since 2016.<sup>36</sup>

It has been almost ten years since the start Australia's offshore processing of asylum and refugee claims. We urge the incoming Federal Government end the punitive approach toward people seeking asylum by ending offshore processing and ensuring against prolonged and arbitrary detention.

### **6.2 Abolish temporary protection and provide pathways to permanency**

People seeking asylum and refugees living in the community also face major challenges, often living below the poverty line, without access to Government support, away from loved ones and with the uncertainty of three-year Temporary Protection Visas (TPVs) and five-year Safe Haven Enterprise Visas (SHEVs). As we highlight below, the COVID-19 pandemic has magnified these challenges. In addition to showing basic respect for human dignity, health and wellbeing, research has found that giving refugees on TPVs and SHEVs permanency is likely to generate approximately \$6.75 billion for the Australian economy over a five-year period.<sup>37</sup> We call on the Government to abolish TPVs and SHEVs, and provide pathways for people seeking asylum and refugees to permanently resettle in the community.

### **6.3 Expand Australia's annual humanitarian intake**

Since 2018-19, Australia's yearly humanitarian intake has decreased annually.<sup>38</sup> This is despite the fact that globally, conflict and persecution continue to uproot the lives of millions worldwide. Recent examples of this upheaval can be seen in the

ongoing conflict in Afghanistan and Ukraine. Over 100,000 people have applied for Humanitarian Visas in Australia since the fall of Kabul in August 2021. At the time of writing, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) estimates that approximately 10 million Ukrainian refugees have been displaced by the escalating conflict brought on by the Russian invasion at the end of February this year.<sup>39</sup>

Ukraine and Afghanistan are only two examples. Conflict continues to forcibly displace civilians across the world, and Australia must do more in supporting those who seek safety. In response to the growing number of people displaced around the world, the Government should increase its Humanitarian Program to 30,000. Besides the clear moral imperative to offer vulnerable people a chance to rebuild their lives, the case to pursue a more generous humanitarian program makes economic sense.<sup>40</sup> As Deloitte Access Economics and Oxfam Australia have shown, an increase to at least 30,000 humanitarian places (over the next five years) could create, on average, 35,000 additional jobs every year for the next 50 years.<sup>41</sup>

### **6.4 Prioritise family reunification for those already in Australia**

When people seek asylum, they very often leave family and loved ones. This means that for many, their loved ones remain in danger, and contact with them can be impossible, intermittent or unsafe.<sup>42</sup> Further, being separated from family makes settling into a new country all the more difficult. The process for applying for visas for family members is difficult and costly, and therefore is beyond the reach of many people.<sup>43</sup> We therefore strongly support the Refugee Council of Australia's calls for the Federal Government to enhance access to family reunions for refugees and humanitarian entrants.<sup>44</sup>

35 UN Human Rights Committee, Communication No. 2233/2013, F.J. et al v Australia, UN doc CCPR/C/116/D/2233/2013.

36 Catholic Social Services Australia. (2022). Nauru offshore detention company making \$500,000 profit a year for each detainee. Media Release. ([Weblink](#))

37 Van Kooy, J. (2021). Supporting economic growth in uncertain times: Permanent pathways for Temporary Protection visa and Safe Haven Enterprise visa holders. Policy options paper. ([Weblink](#))

38 Refugee Council of Australia (11 May 2021), 'The Federal Budget: What it means for refugees and people seeking humanitarian protection', Refugee and Humanitarian Program ([Weblink](#))

39 United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) [2020]. Situation Ukraine Refugees - Operational data portal. ([Weblink](#))

40 Deloitte Access Economics and Oxfam Australia (August 2019) Economic and social impact of increasing Australia's humanitarian intake. ([Weblink](#))

41 Deloitte Access Economics and Oxfam Australia (August 2019) Economic and social impact of increasing Australia's humanitarian intake ([Weblink](#))

42 Suárez-Orozco, C., Bang, H. J., & Kim, H. Y. (2011). I felt like my heart was staying behind: Psychological implications of family separations & reunifications for immigrant youth. *Journal of Adolescent Research*, 26(2), 222-257.

43 Wilmsen, B. (2011). Family separation: The policies, procedures, and consequences for refugee background families. *Refugee Survey Quarterly*, 30(1), 44-64.

44 Refugee Council of Australia. (2021) Family separation and family reunion for refugees: The issues. March 2021. ([Weblink](#))



## Recommendations:

- End indefinite and arbitrary immigration detention in Australia.
- Abolish TPVs and SHEVs, and provide pathways for people seeking asylum and refugees to permanently resettle in the community. Expand Australia's Humanitarian Program to at least 30,000 places annually in response to growing global protection needs and ensure the program remains non-discriminatory and prioritises the resettlement of the most vulnerable refugees.
- Enhance access to family reunions for refugee and humanitarian entrants, including considering the Refugee Council of Australia's recommendation to develop a humanitarian family reunion program of 10,000 places annually, outside of the Humanitarian Program, in consultation with refugee community members and organisations and other relevant bodies.
- Increase Status Resolution Support Services (SRSS) funding and expand eligibility requirements to ensure that more people who seek asylum in Australia have access to adequate financial and service supports.

### **6.5 Expand SRSS funding and provide adequate support**

The Federal Government's changes to the Status Resolution Support Services (SRSS) have reduced the number of people eligible for this vital support, placing people seeking asylum at risk of destitution and increasing demands on the community services they turn to for support. Currently, only 5 per cent of people seeking asylum in the community are estimated to have access to SRSS.<sup>45</sup> As the Asylum Seeker Resource Centre notes, changes to SRSS eligibility have "increased the need for people seeking asylum to find work (any work) without adequate support to develop their capacity to do so, or adequate guards against their exploitation in the local labour market."<sup>46</sup> The tightening of

eligibility requirements for the SRSS program should be reversed to ensure that vulnerable people can access this vital social support.

## **7. Adequate settlement services for newly arrived people**

With more than a quarter of Australians born overseas, diversity is a central pillar of our national identity that should be recognised, welcomed and celebrated. In the western suburbs of Melbourne, Jesuit Social Services' Settlement Program works to develop people's ability and confidence to access support services, facilitate independence, enhance living skills and promote meaningful community engagement.

### **7.1 Expand settlement support beyond five-year eligibility**

Many newly arrived people experience non-linear journeys towards successful resettlement. It is therefore important that the settlement supports are based on each person's unique needs. Further, we believe that services funded under the SETS Program — such as Jesuit Social Services' Settlement Program — should be able to respond to the settlement needs of migrants beyond the current post-arrival five-year period of eligibility. This is crucial to ensure that people who may be experiencing disadvantage, social isolation or other longer-term issues are able to continue accessing support.

### **7.2 Provide secure and sustainable housing**

Safe and secure housing is a foundational for the successful settlement and integration of newly arrived migrants and refugees. However, those who are supported under the Humanitarian Settlement Program (HSP) are only provided rental accommodation and utilities for 28 days post-settlement in the Australian community. Following this time, and in spite of the many compounding issues they may be facing, migrants and refugees under the HSP must themselves pay for the rental property and all associated costs.

As outlined in further detail below, it is well established that there is a severe housing shortage, both social housing and private rentals, in Victoria and across Australia. The combination of this short supply of housing, limited financial means upon arrival and backgrounds of trauma, means that newly arrived refugees and migrants are vulnerable

45 Jesuit Refugee Service Australia and St Vincent de Paul Society. (2021). Access to a safety net for all people seeking asylum in Australia. ([Weblink](#))

46 Asylum Seeker Resource Centre. (2019). Towards an optimal employment strategy for people seeking asylum in Victoria. ([Weblink](#))

## Recommendations:

- Enable services funded under the Settlement Engagement and Transition Support Program (SETS) to respond to the settlement needs of newly arrived people beyond the current post-arrival five-year period of eligibility.
- Expand funding of SETS providers so that a greater number of newly arrived refugees and migrants can access dedicated, holistic and ongoing support.
- Extend settlement housing support under the Humanitarian Settlement Program (HSP) beyond the initial 28-day period and upscale the funding and development of sustainable, supportive housing for newly arrived migrants and refugees.
- Increase investment in interpreter services for Settlement Engagement and Transition Support services and reinstate a dedicated funding stream to complement settlement service contracts.

to housing stress, housing insecurity and ultimately homelessness upon resettlement in Australia.<sup>47</sup> Jesuit Social Services' Settlement staff estimate that they spend 70 to 80 per cent of their time assisting participants in housing-related matters. We urge the incoming Federal Government to extend settlement housing support beyond the initial 28-day period and to upscale the funding and development of sustainable, supportive housing for newly arrived migrants and refugees.

## 8. Safe, affordable and sustainable housing

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. Yet, access to safe, affordable and sustainable housing continues to be a key issue for all

Australians, particularly those on low-incomes and in disadvantaged areas.

The COVID-19 pandemic has only exacerbated Australia's existing housing affordability crisis. In 2020-21, housing stress affected over one in four people (29 per cent) who attended specialist homelessness services.<sup>48</sup> This is consistent with evidence showing that in 2020-21, regional rents increased by over 12 per cent, while private rental supply fell in states such as Victoria and NSW, thereby increasing pressure on people on low incomes or those already in housing stress.<sup>49</sup>

State and territory government initiatives that housed thousands of people experiencing homelessness during the pandemic has highlighted that better ways of operating are possible. Analysis of the number of people seeking specialist homelessness support for the first time in the year to April 2021 shows that there was between 10 to 20 per cent fewer new requests for help than in the previous two years.<sup>50</sup> In other words, approximately 15,000 fewer people may have avoided homelessness over this timeframe.

Jesuit Social Services works with many people who are experiencing or have experienced homelessness, inappropriate or unsafe housing, housing instability and stress, and other forms of disadvantage in their lives. We know that safe and affordable housing options are crucial in enabling people to get their lives back on track and pursue aspirations such as engaging in education, and finding and retaining employment.

### **8.1 Develop a 10-year national strategy on housing and homelessness**

We recognise that a whole-of-government approach, where policies, programs and support services are designed and implemented holistically, is the most effective way of ensuring every person living in Australia has access safe and affordable housing. On this basis, Jesuit Social Services recommends that the Federal Government develop a 10-year national strategy on housing and homelessness.

We also emphasise the need for the Federal Government to develop a national Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander housing strategy in consultation with the Aboriginal community and ACCOs. The impacts of colonisation, racism and

47 Flatau, P., Smith, J., Carson, G., Miller, J., Burvill, A. and Brand, R. (2015) The housing and homelessness journeys of refugees in Australia, AHURI Final Report No.256. Melbourne: Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute Limited. ([Weblink](#))

48 Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW). (2021). Specialist homelessness services annual report 2020-21. ([Weblink](#))

49 Pawson, H., Martin, C., Thompson, S., Aminpour, F. (2021) 'COVID-19: Rental housing and homelessness policy impacts' ACOSS/UNSW Poverty and Inequality Partnership Report No. 12. Sydney

50 AIHW. (2021). Specialist Homelessness Services annual report 2020-21. ([Weblink](#))

dispossession continue to be felt by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and communities in Australia today. As a consequence, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are more likely to experience insecure housing, live in overcrowded houses and experience homelessness, including intergenerational homelessness, than non-Indigenous Australians.<sup>51</sup> A national Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander housing strategy is urgently needed to address these acute housing challenges.

### **8.2 Increase funding for specialist homelessness services**

We also recommend an increase long-term funding for specialist homelessness services to meet the growing number of people experiencing homelessness. In particular, we further call for enduring supported housing options for people with multiple and complex needs. This must include supplemental funding to assist organisations to meet the costs of complying with the Equal Remuneration Order (ERO) because of the 2012 Fair Work Commission decision to increase community sector wages.

### **8.3 Increase the stock of social housing**

The share of social housing households as a percentage of all Australian households has fallen sharply from 4.8% in 2011 to 4.2% in 2020.<sup>52</sup> We call on the next Australian Government to recognise the importance of social housing as social and public infrastructure. Following from this, we support Everybody's Home – the campaign for a better, fairer housing system – in their call for the Federal Government to invest in building 25,000 social housing properties each year.<sup>53</sup> In addition to reducing homelessness and direct support costs, this measure would generate an economic output of \$12.7 billion and create 15,700 jobs.<sup>54</sup>

We call for a particular focus on increasing the stock of good-quality public housing, noting that it is unrealistic and unviable to rely too heavily on the private and community housing markets to rapidly expand and adequately provide for the diverse range of needs of those who require social and affordable housing.<sup>55</sup>

## **Recommendations**

- Establish a 10-year national strategy on housing and homelessness to complement the National Housing and Homelessness Agreement and improve the coordination of the national response to homelessness.
- Develop a 10-year national Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander housing strategy in partnership with Aboriginal Community Controlled Housing Organisations to address the acute housing challenges experienced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.
- Increase funding for homelessness services, including by providing Equal Remuneration Order (ERO) supplementation for the homelessness service sector to meet increased wages costs arising from the 2012 Fair Work Commission ERO decision.
- Partner with State and Territory governments to increase investment in safe, sustainable and energy-efficient social housing, targeting the building of 25,000 new social housing dwellings as an immediate priority, with a particular focus on increasing the stock of public housing, as per calls by the Everybody's Home Campaign.
- Partner with State and Territory governments to retrofit all existing social housing with energy efficiency upgrades.

### **8.4 Ensure housing is ecologically sustainable**

Additionally, Jesuit Social Services is concerned to ensure that pre-existing inequities in housing in Australia are not exacerbated by the impacts of climate change. According to research undertaken by Mallee Family Care and the University of Sydney in the Victorian town of Mildura, public housing is commonly “substandard and unsafe and poorly adapted to high temperatures.”<sup>56</sup> These added stressors increase incidents of family violence, substance misuse and significantly impact on the

51 AIHW. (2019). Specialist Homelessness Services annual report 2018-19. ([Weblink](#))

52 AIHW. (2021). Housing Assistance Australia - (Supplementary Data Table 1). ([Weblink](#))

53 See: <http://everybodyshome.com.au/>

54 SGS Economics. (2020). Economic Impacts of Social Housing Construction, Melbourne. ([Weblink](#))

55 Jesuit Social Services (2021). Submission to Victoria's 10-year housing strategy consultation. ([Weblink](#))

56 Lander, J., Breth-Petersen, M., Moait, R., Forbes, C. and Stephens, L., Dickson, M. (2019). Extreme heat driven by the climate emergency: Impacts on the health and wellbeing of public housing tenants in Mildura, Victoria ([Weblink](#))



mental health of tenants. We therefore advocate for the Government to partner with State and Territory governments to retrofit all existing social housing with energy efficient upgrades. Further, we emphasise the need for effective implementation of climate safe and energy efficient design in the planning and construction of all new public and community housing, and for this to be enshrined in legislation.

## 9. Fair justice systems

Jesuit Social Services is deeply concerned about the growing rates of imprisonment across Australia, disproportionately impacting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and people from culturally and linguistically diverse communities. Urgent measures are needed to significantly reduce the number of people in prison and reserve prison as a last resort. On this basis, we call on the next elected Government to ensure the following issues in relation to our adult and youth justice systems are addressed as a national priority.

### 9.1 Raise the age of criminal responsibility

A small number of vulnerable children enter the criminal justice system at a very young age. We know this group is among the most vulnerable in our community and that children detained between the ages of 10 and 14 are more likely, compared to those at older ages, to have sustained and frequent contact with the criminal justice system throughout their life.<sup>57</sup> Child offending experts, psychologists and other health experts agree that younger children have rarely developed the social, emotional and intellectual maturity necessary for legal responsibility before the age of 14 years, and lack the capacity to properly engage with the justice system. Consequently, procedural fairness cannot be assured and criminal justice proceedings fail to guarantee a just response to children's behaviour.

The current age of criminal responsibility disproportionately impacts children from vulnerable backgrounds, particularly Aboriginal children who are overrepresented in the number of children involved with the justice system under 14 years. In line with international standards embodied in the *United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child* and enacted in many overseas jurisdictions<sup>58</sup>, we

call on the next Federal Government to work with states and territories to raise the age of criminal responsibility from 10 to 14 years. Raising the age of criminal responsibility also serves as a critical prevention measure by diverting children from contact with the criminal justice system.

AUS	USA	FRA	SWE	NED	JPN
10	6-12	13	15	12	14

Table: Age of criminal responsibility: international comparison<sup>59</sup>

Our paper, [Raising the Age of Criminal Responsibility: There is a Better Way](#), shows that this is clearly better for the children in question and for society as a whole. The paper also sets out the most effective approach to prevent these children's trajectories into the justice system, which is to intervene early and support families at the first signs of struggle. Funding for restorative justice, family-centred and therapeutic approaches to respond to children under 14 who come into contact with police is also required. We need responses that take account of their broader family and social circumstances, work with the child to help them to understand the impact of their behaviour and equip them with the tools to take a different path and prevent contact with the justice system. We call for a nationally coordinated approach to raising the age of legal responsibility to at least 14 years old.

### 9.2 Establish a National First-Nations led Justice Reinvestment Body

Jesuit Social Services is deeply concerned about the significantly higher rates at which Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are incarcerated. The impacts of colonisation, racism and dispossession continue to be felt by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and communities across Australia today, and over-representation in the justice system must be understood as a result of this. At March 2021, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander adults were almost 14 times more likely to be imprisoned than adults in the general population.<sup>60</sup> Aboriginal children were also nine times more likely to be in custody than their non-Aboriginal counterparts.<sup>61</sup>

Thirty years ago, the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody (RCIADIC) was established by the Federal Government in response to a growing public concern that deaths in custody

57 Jesuit Social Services (2013). Thinking Outside: Alternatives to remand for children ([Weblink](#)); Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (2013). Young people aged 10–14 in the youth justice system 2011– 2012 ([Weblink](#))

58 Child Rights International Network (2016) Minimum ages of criminal responsibility around the world. ([Weblink](#))

59 Hazel, N. (2008). Cross-national comparison of youth justice. London: Youth Justice Board for England and Wales.

60 Australian Bureau of Statistics (Australian Government) (2021). Corrective Services March 2021. ([Weblink](#))

61 Commission for Children and Young People (2021). Our youth, our way: inquiry into the over-representation of Aboriginal children and young people in the Victorian youth justice system. ([Weblink](#))

of Aboriginal people were too common and poorly explained.<sup>62</sup> Thirty years on, many outcomes central to the concern of the RCIADIC have continued to worsen, in particular the commitments to reduce the number of Aboriginal people in custody.<sup>63</sup>

Jesuit Social Services welcomes the inclusion of justice targets as part of the new National Agreement on Closing the Gap which seek to reduce incarceration rates for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander adults and young people. However, it is critical that the adoption of justice targets is accompanied by community-driven solutions to address disadvantage, with justice reinvestment adopted as an approach to redirect funding toward such solutions. Jesuit Social Services therefore supports Change the Record's call for a National Justice Reinvestment Body as recommended by the Australian Law Reform Commission's landmark Pathways to Justice Report.<sup>64</sup> The establishment of a national Justice Reinvestment Body that embodies Aboriginal leadership and expertise at all levels would make a real impact on the lives of First Nations peoples and communities.

### **9.3 Implement the findings of the Royal Commission in the Northern Territory**

In May 2021, the Northern Territory Government introduced a number of legislative changes to the youth justice system that will see more children separated from family and community, and funnelled into detention. These deeply concerning measures include increasing grounds to refuse or revoke bail; reducing access to diversion; and more powers to place electronic monitoring devices on young people in contact with the justice system. Recently it was also revealed that spithoods and restraint chairs continue to be used on children despite the Northern Territory Government's commitment to phase out these inhumane devices.<sup>65</sup>

Jesuit Social Services has made clear its opposition to these measures, which spurn the recommendations of the 2017 *Royal Commission into the Protection and Detention of Children in the*

*Northern Territory* and will not lead to improved community safety. The measures will also disproportionately impact Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people, who make up most of the young people in custody in the Northern Territory. Thirty years since the landmark report of the *Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody*, which called for legislation to ensure imprisonment be used only as a last resort, these punitive, costly and ineffective policies will only cause more harm.

In July 2021, Jesuit Social Services partnered with the North Australian Aboriginal Justice Agency (NAAJA) to host the 5th National Justice Symposium in Mparntwe/Alice Springs and online. Our biennial National Justice Symposium brings together key stakeholders and experts to explore issues and themes relating to criminal justice systems.

Centring the voices and stories of First Nations young people and communities, the Symposium explored the ingredients for change from the grassroots to the system level, with keynotes and panel discussions, conversations with young people and with Elders, case studies of good practice, and a focus on the power of storytelling and community action. Highlights from the Symposium are available [here](#). We heard from Elders what they know works in caring for their kids – namely maintaining their connections with culture, community, family, Elders, language and Country.

Consistent with the recommendations of the Royal Commission, the NT Government should be supported by the incoming Federal Government to take immediate action in partnership with local communities, adopting a place-based approach, and built on the principles of mutual respect, shared commitment, shared responsibility and good faith.

### **9.4 Implement the Optional Protocol on the Convention Against Torture**

In discussing conditions of imprisonment, there is widespread recognition that effective implementation of the Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment

62 Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody (1991). Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody: National Report ([Weblink](#))

63 Recommendation 148. See Anthony, T. et al. (2021) 30 Years On: Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody Recommendations Remain Unimplemented, CAEPR Working Paper 1402021. Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research ([Weblink](#)). The Productivity Commission's 2021 Report on Government services showed that the number of Indigenous Australian prisoners has continued to grow despite an overall reduction in the number of adult prisoners nationally (for statistics, see ([Weblink](#)))

64 Change the Record. (2021). Election Platform. ([Weblink](#))

65 Kurmelovs, R. (2022, February 24). Northern Territory police still using 'inhumane' spithoods and restraint chairs on children. The Guardian. ([Weblink](#))

(OPCAT) in Australia can help prevent mistreatment in detention, improve oversight and accountability, and enable better detention practices.

Ratified by the Australian Government in December 2017, implementation of OPCAT requires the Commonwealth and each state and territory government to designate and establish National Preventative Mechanisms (NPM) to undertake monitoring and allowing for inspections by a UN committee. As outlined in Jesuit Social Services' [submission to the Australian Human Rights Commission's OPCAT in Australia consultation](#), the NPMs must protect the rights of, and ensure supports are in place for, vulnerable cohorts in places of detention, including Aboriginal people, individuals with ABI and cognitive impairment, young adults, transgender and gender diverse people, and children. NPMs must also prioritise the prevention of the use of isolation and other methods of physical and chemical restraints in prisons.

To date, Australia's progress on implementing OPCAT has been slow. As of February 2022, the following have been announced as NPMs:<sup>66</sup>

- Commonwealth - Office of the Commonwealth Ombudsman
- Western Australia - Ombudsman Western Australia (for mental health and other secure facilities), Office of the Inspector of Custodial Services (WA) (for justice-related facilities including police lock ups)
- Northern Territory - Office of the Ombudsman NT (as interim Coordinating NPM)
- Australian Capital Territory - ACT Inspector of Correctional Services, ACT Human Rights Commission, ACT Ombudsman (multi-body NPM)
- Tasmania - Mr Richard Connock (concurrently the Tasmanian Ombudsman and Custodial Inspector)

The Commonwealth and each state and territory government was required to nominate an NPM by 20 January 2022 to provide independent oversight of places of detention. As it stands, the Commonwealth and states and territories have not met their obligations and Australia have requested a 12-month extension to the implementation deadline. The incoming Federal Government must urgently act to support states and territories and ensure OPCAT is fully implemented in order to help protect the dignity and safety of people in places of detention and to meet its international obligations.

## 9.5 Address the use of isolation

Internationally, the *UN Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners*, also known as the Nelson Mandela Rules, cover a range of matters pertinent to ensuring safe and healthy living conditions for people in prison, including in regard to temperature, lighting and ventilation. Importantly, the rules make clear that incarceration alone is the person's punishment, and not the circumstances of their confinement.<sup>67</sup> The Nelson Mandela Rules define solitary confinement as more than 15 days spent alone in a cell, without access to meaningful human contact. Terms such as isolation, segregation, separation, seclusion or involvement in a management regime can all be used to describe this practice, but the result is the same: the denial of human contact and a severe and oppressive environment, often with limited ventilation and light.

### Recommendations

- Raise the age of criminal responsibility to the age of 14 across all states and territories.
- Establish a National Justice Reinvestment Body that embeds Aboriginal leadership and expertise at all levels.
- Support the Northern Territory Government to give full effect to the recommendations of the Royal Commission into the Protection and Detention of Children in the Northern Territory.
- Coordinate the establishment of National Protective Mechanisms in each state and territory to provide independent oversight of places of detention.
- Work with States and Territories and independent oversight bodies to ban the use of isolation in youth justice facilities and significantly reduce the use of isolation and solitary confinement in adult prisons across Australian jurisdictions as part of OPCAT implementation.

66 Commonwealth Ombudsman. (2022). Monitoring places of detention – The Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (OPCAT) ([Weblink](#))

67 United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS) (2016) Technical Guidance for Prison Planning. ([Weblink](#))

## Participant case study: James\*

James is an Aboriginal man who was transferred to an adult prison in Victoria from a youth justice centre at the age of 16. James was released from an intermediate regime placement (22 hours in cell, two hours out of cell with a small group of people) at the age of 19. Following this transfer, he struggled to manage his transition back into the community. While James secured a transitional property, he found this too challenging to live in, and made his bathroom into a cell. He slept in the bath and prepared his food in the bathroom. James brought a number of items, including a radio, a kettle and a toaster, into his bathroom to replicate the cell he had in prison. James returned to custody shortly following his release and his struggles in the community were the source of much concern to his family, who were not immediately aware of his transfer to an adult prison at the age of 16.

*\*All participant names are changed to protect privacy – James isn't his real name.*

Isolation happens often enough in prisons across Australia to cause concern. This has significant impacts on physical and mental health and future outcomes for people in prison and the community. The *Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody* found the use of isolation has a particularly devastating impact on Aboriginal people, stating that 'it is undesirable in the highest degree that an Aboriginal prisoner should be placed in segregation or isolated detention'.<sup>68</sup>

Our report – [All alone: Young adults in the Victorian justice system](#) – raised a number of concerns regarding the welfare and treatment of young adults in Victorian prisons, including the use of isolation and restraint. Young adults, who we know to be a vulnerable cohort, appear to be disproportionately subject to these practices in Victoria.

Jesuit Social Services commends the Victorian Ombudsman's 2019 investigation into the isolation of young people in closed environments in Victoria. While this is a positive initial step, there is now an urgent need for national attention and a consistent approach across jurisdictions. Ideally, the Commonwealth Ombudsman, as the Coordinator of the NPMs, should encourage investigations through

NPMs into the harmful practice of isolation in places of detention. However, given the complexity of the establishment of NPMs and the potential for delay, immediate action is required to ban the use of isolation in youth justice facilities and significantly reduce the use of isolation and solitary confinement in adult prisons across Australian jurisdictions. Further supporting the need for change around this issue, the recent *Inquiry into Victoria's Justice System* final report recommended a review into the use of solitary confinement, physical restraints and strip searching in Victorian prisons.<sup>69</sup> Jesuit Social Services strongly supports this for Victoria and argues it is necessary to have a nationally coordinated approach to review and reduce the use of isolation and restraint across other jurisdictions.

## 10. A flexible and responsive National Disability Insurance Scheme

Jesuit Social Services works with a highly complex, cohort of people with mild-to-moderate intellectual or cognitive disabilities. This cohort often also experiences a range of co-occurring and interrelated issues including homelessness, substance misuse, involvement with child protection and the justice system, and experiences of trauma, including family violence. For example, an annual survey conducted of 145 young people in custody in Victoria in June 2021 found that 20 per cent of young people had an active cognitive difficulty diagnosed or documented by a professional.<sup>70</sup> The participants we work with often require long-term support to navigate relevant service systems and are eligible to receive a combination of federal and state government financial support packages.

Our NDIS programs include:

- **Specialist Support Coordination** – we work actively with NDIS participants, their care teams, service providers, and support networks to achieve their personal goals, support them to understand and navigate the NDIS, increase their independence, and reduce barriers to accessing supports. Many of the people we support have complex needs and are working with other service providers, including justice and youth services.
- **Perry House** – a Specialist Forensic Disability Accommodation service providing 24-hour support. Referrals can only be accepted from the Victorian Department of Families, Fairness and Housing state-wide referral program.

68 Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody (1991) ([Weblink](#))

69 Parliament of Victoria. (2022). Inquiry into Victoria's criminal justice system. Legal and Social Issues Committee. ([Weblink](#))

70 State of Victoria (2021). YOUTH PAROLE BOARD Annual Report 2020–21. Department of Justice and Community Safety, September 2021. ([Weblink](#))



## Participant case study: Charlie\*

Charlie has a range of needs requiring specialist service support, including cognitive impairment, mental health issues, drug and alcohol misuse, and involvement with the justice system. After spending six weeks in prison, Charlie came to a Jesuit Social Services' residential-based living skills program. When they were released from custody, Charlie was expected to navigate a complex system that they had no prior knowledge of in order to secure an appropriate NDIS package. The complexity of this process and the significant wait times involved has left them without the necessary supports to adequately address the challenges they face, including their offending behaviour.

*\*All participant names are changed to protect privacy – Charlie isn't their real name.*

### 10.1 Implement a flexible pricing structure

While the service delivery, structure and pricing of the NDIS may meet the needs of many Australians, greater flexibility is required to provide access to highly skilled staff that can adequately support people with complex needs. From our experience, the NDIS does not adequately meet the needs of participants who often do not fit its eligibility criteria and have intersecting, complex needs such as mental health concerns, intellectual disabilities, acquired brain injuries, experiences of trauma, out-of-home-care, justice involvement or grief and loss.

Current prices set by the National Disability Insurance Agency (NDIA) are insufficient and do not reflect service delivery realities. More tailored support, particularly for people with multiple and complex needs, requires more flexible pricing that considers the realistic cost of providing quality intensive support by skilled staff, including after-hours services. Therefore, the NDIS pricing structure must be suitably flexible to meet the complex and often compounded needs of the diverse range of participants supported by the scheme.

### 10.2 Building relationships and enhancing the skills of staff

Through our experience, we know that building trusting relationships is integral to understanding the whole person and their support needs. Therefore, our practice approach based on the *Jesuit Social Services Our Way of Working Framework*<sup>71</sup> is relationships-based and premised on the understanding that building trust takes time and is achieved through a consistent response, respect and the provision of a safe environment.

Our participants require a collaborative team approach that is flexible and responsive to their multiple and complex needs. To meet this requirement, Jesuit Social Services employs a highly experienced, skilled and qualified workforce. Our staff provide individual support with a range of activities, including building up participants' independent living skills, supporting them to engage with appropriate and meaningful employment, training and education activities, as well as assisting them to engage with their allied health practitioners. This type of targeted support aims to help our participants to connect more closely with the community and with the supports they need to help them address their needs and protect them from repeated involvement in the justice system. Ultimately, what we are trying to do is to help people to thrive and live their life to their fullest potential.

Jesuit Social Services has observed increasing shortages of disability support staff as well as limited training and understanding of the multiple and complex needs of our participants. The *NDIS National Workforce Plan: 2021-2025* has also reflected this, identifying a large and growing shortage of disability support workers as well as high staff turnover rates.<sup>72</sup> Further to this, the Disability Royal Commission's Interim Report raised that the mass casualisation of support work, where the workforce is engaged on a casual basis and for a short term, can result in inconsistencies of support for people with a disability.<sup>73</sup> An emergent theme in the evidence provided to the Disability Royal Commission was the need for better training and monitoring of disability support staff to help address risks of neglect, abuse and exploitation.<sup>74</sup>

71 Jesuit Social Services (2018). Foundation Document. ([Weblink](#))

72 Department of Social Services. (2021). NDIS National Workforce Plan: 2021-2025. June 2021. Australian Government. ([Weblink](#))

73 Commonwealth of Australia (2020). Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability: Interim Report. Canberra. ([Weblink](#))

74 Ibid.

Disability support workers need to be given basic health training and education, so that they are supported to deliver quality services. We urge the incoming Federal Government to review the Disability Support worker cost model and work towards developing a skilled, qualified and remunerated disability workforce.

### **10.3 Improve flexibility and responsiveness**

The Interim Report of the *Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with a Disability* found that many participants shared a strong view that they had been let down by the NDIS. This was primarily due to the system being intimidating, difficult to navigate and involving long waiting times.<sup>75</sup> This view is also shared by the people we support who often need urgent support due to significant changes of circumstances. Our participants often find themselves in positions where funding for transitional supports is required to establish new housing and living arrangements. This can be a lengthy process and challenging to secure due to the high volume of evidence that is required to support NDIS package applications and difficulties with sourcing suitable allied health therapists to conduct assessments. The lengthy waiting times to have assessments undertaken means that participants are missing out on the transitional supports they need, often for a number of months.

Greater flexibility measures are crucial for our participants to allocate packages in a timely manner. This can allow participants to access transitional housing and living supports while suitable long-term living arrangements are explored. Flexibility is central to positive participant experiences for the cohort we work with due to the complexity of their needs and the multiple service systems that they engage with.

### **10.4 Strengthen the interface of the NDIS and mainstream systems**

It is crucial that the co-occurring issues experienced by people with multiple needs are not compartmentalised and dealt with in isolation by the various systems that are funding and supporting them. It is our experience that the people who have intersecting, complex needs feel caught in the middle of several systems and grow increasingly frustrated and disengaged from these systems over time. The Disability Royal Commission also heard accounts of the detrimental effect of the NDIS on

existing partnerships between health and disability services, and the need for more coordination between them.<sup>76</sup> Often disagreements between services over responsibilities and costs come at a residual cost of participants' wellbeing, as they are asked to retell past difficulties and traumas to satisfy various stakeholders. This in turn leads to additional costs to the services themselves as they may be required to respond to a participant's increasing unmet needs across justice, health, education and other mainstream domains.

## **Recommendations**

- Implement a pricing structure that is flexible to ensure that it can engage highly skilled staff to provide quality, intensive support to people with multiple and complex needs of the diverse range of participants supported by the scheme.
- Review the Disability Support worker cost model and work towards developing a skilled, qualified and remunerated disability workforce.
- Improve the flexibility of the NDIS so that packages can be accessed in a timely manner, in particular for participants with multiple and complex needs.
- Strengthen the interface of the NDIS and mainstream services so that cooccurring issues experienced by people with multiple and complex needs are addressed in congruence.

## **11. Strengthen mental health and suicide bereavement supports**

Jesuit Social Services supports a holistic approach to mental health that takes account of key drivers of poor mental health, including poverty and disadvantage, discrimination, family dysfunction and histories of trauma.

As previously mentioned, in 2021, Jesuit Social Services released the fifth iteration of our [Dropping Off the Edge](#) research, which spans over 20 years and maps disadvantage by location. For the first time, DOTE 2021 includes eight case studies of communities across six states and territories to

75 Commonwealth of Australia (2020). Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability: Interim Report. Canberra. ([Weblink](#))

76 Commonwealth of Australia (2020). Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability: Interim Report. Canberra. ([Weblink](#))

understand the lived experience of disadvantage. DOTE 2021 found that accessible and affordable health services were missing across all the case study communities. These services, particularly clinical mental health services, are critical for these communities, with three case study communities being in the top 10 per cent most disadvantaged for psychiatric admissions, and two in the top 10 per cent most disadvantaged for suicide.

Strategies are required to address drivers of poor mental health and to provide more effective service responses, including specific responses for children and young people, people in contact with the justice system, those exiting out-of-home care, people with multiple and complex needs, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. People should be able to get the right services at the right time, local to where they live – be it a metropolitan, regional or rural area. We support the recommendations made by the *Productivity Commission Inquiry into Mental Health in Australia* and the *Royal Commission into Mental Health in Victoria* and look forward to seeing these implemented.

### **11.1 Specialist suicide postvention services**

Jesuit Social Services strongly supports the *Royal Commission into Mental Health in Victoria's* recommendation for the development of initiatives to support people at risk of experiencing suicidal behaviour. This includes by implementing, in partnership with the Commonwealth Government, state-wide postvention bereavement support, so that every person bereaved by suicide is automatically referred to a postvention bereavement provider. We believe this recommendation should apply to all Australian jurisdictions, not only Victoria.

Jesuit Social Services established its [Support After Suicide](#) service because we recognise that people experience grief, trauma, stigma and other challenges that are unique to those bereaved by suicide. This need is similar to that for victim-survivors of sexual assault or family violence in that it requires specialist counsellors who have built up experience in the field. This is because the behaviour of people bereaved by suicide can be complex, and because they are at increased risk themselves of suicide and mental illness.

We also recommend ongoing sustainable funding and governance of postvention services, as recommended in our submission to the *Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System* (pp. 5 and 38). Specifically, this should be implemented along the lines of the model for the postvention service we have established in New South Wales (NSW) in partnership with the NSW Ministry of

### **CASE STUDY: Peter**

After Peter's partner Des took his own life in 2015, Peter "suffered in silence" for months. "I saw one or two doctors but they just wanted to give me anti-depressants. I took them but nothing made me feel better. In a way they made me feel worse – it's not a chemical imbalance in my brain, it's grief."

Peter and Des had been together for 19 years and Des' loved ones, including Peter, were unaware he was suffering before his death. "He never sought any help for mental health, he never said he was depressed. People often say to me 'he must have been sick' and I can honestly say I don't know." About three months after Des died, Peter found himself "at the end of my tether" and struggling to manage his deteriorating mental health. "I really thought I was going to self-harm and do something stupid to myself. I just couldn't cope with the grief, the stress and everything associated to it," he says.

Through a family friend, Peter found out about Jesuit Social Services' Support After Suicide program. Since 2004, the program has provided support including counselling, group support and online resources for people bereaved by the loss of a loved one, as well as delivering training to health, welfare and education professionals.

In 2018-19, Support After Suicide directly assisted 913 people bereaved by suicide. "I remember ringing the program and just crying – I couldn't get anything else out. They told me to come in later that day and it was the first time I saw someone. All the pressure up until that point was unbearable."

Peter attended Support After Suicide's bereaved partners group, which convenes monthly, for about 18 months. Meeting other people who had experienced a similar tragedy was an important step in Peter navigating the complex grief and trauma associated with suicide. "I didn't realise how many people took their own lives, I didn't realise how many people are affected and the fact it cuts across every socio-economic group, age, race and sexuality.

Support After Suicide remains significantly underfunded. The program receives no state Government funding and there is a lack of certainty regarding ongoing funding provided by the Federal Government.

*\*All participant names are changed to protect privacy – Peter and Des aren't their real names*

## Recommendations

- Partner with State and Territory governments to implement state and territory wide postvention support services, so that every person bereaved by suicide is automatically referred to a postvention bereavement provider.
- Develop secure, long-term funding for postvention, early intervention services for suicide bereavement, including Support After Suicide, underpinned by a nationally agreed approach.
- Increase the capacity of mainstream mental health services to respond to trauma, particularly for families and children.
- Establish consistent reporting and evaluation requirements across Primary Health Networks.
- Extend drug and alcohol treatment PHN funding for programs like *Connexions*.

Health. This model involves a consortium of experienced postvention providers delivering a comprehensive model, with the service guided by a Steering Committee that includes the partner organisations and people with lived experience.

Funding for our NSW postvention service is provided directly by the Ministry of Health and reporting is also directly to the Ministry, not through the Primary Health Networks (PHNs). The major advantage of direct funding and reporting to the Ministry is that it ensures comprehensive and cohesive service provision, through a planned and coordinated approach led by the respective Health Department. In addition, program responses can still be tailored for local communities, and the considerable administrative burden and complexity associated with reporting to a range of funding bodies is minimised. Currently, for example, our Victorian Support After Suicide has contractual arrangements with four PHNs. This is administratively burdensome and time consuming in terms of contract management and reporting.

### 11.2 Trauma-informed workforce

Jesuit Social Services believes there is a need to enhance the capacity of mainstream mental health services to respond to trauma. Trauma, loss, abuse and neglect are common underlying issues of mental health and substance misuse.

We have significant experience working with young people in contact with the justice and out-of-home care systems who have complex needs, including histories of trauma. Many of these young people have been excluded from mainstream mental health or community services because they fail to meet service expectations around attending appointments, or have displayed challenging behaviours.

While mainstream services can and should adjust service delivery to be more inclusive and responsive to people with histories of trauma, the gap between where they are now and where they need to be is substantial. In this context, Jesuit Social Services supports Recommendations 23 and 24 of the Final Report from the *Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System*.<sup>77</sup> Recommendation 23 advocates for the establishment of a State-wide Trauma Service, the purpose of which would include development and delivery of education and training that supports Victoria's mental health and wellbeing workforce to deliver trauma-informed care. Recommendation 24 advocates for each of the proposed new Mental Health and Wellbeing Services to employ up to three specialist trauma practitioners to work with peer support workers in Local Mental Health and Wellbeing Services.

We believe these recommendations should apply to all Australian jurisdictions, not only Victoria, and that their implementation and effectiveness would be enhanced through partnership with the Commonwealth Government.

### 11.3 Funding through Primary Health Networks

Jesuit Social Services has built strong relationships with the various PHNs that fund our programs, *Connexions* and *Support After Suicide*. The PHN model, first established in 2015, has been working well in terms of enabling local organisations to deliver key services to meet local needs. However, each PHN has different reporting and evaluation requirements, which places a sizable administrative burden on specialist programs such as Support After Suicide. Establishing consistent reporting requirements across different PHNs would help ensure greater efficiency, particularly for service providers with limited resources.

77 State of Victoria. (2021). Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System, February 2021. ([Weblink](#))



Our program *Connexions* receives PHN funding for drug and alcohol treatment services which is set to expire mid-2022. This program is a dual diagnosis service to address both mental health and substance misuse. *Connexions* offers holistic and integrated support for young people experiencing concurrent mental health and substance misuse issues. We engage our participants in relationships of trust and understanding, providing a professional service of counselling, casework and advocacy. It is paramount that integrated programs such as *Connexions* are able to continue supporting young people's substance needs while offering holistic mental health support. That is why we are calling for an extension of the drug and alcohol treatment services funding for programs like *Connexions*, funded under PHNs so we are able to continue delivering this vital support to our participants.

## 12. Equal pay funding for community services

Jesuit Social Services calls on the incoming Federal Government to reinstate its equal pay funding commitment and ensure it is applied to the whole of the community sector. In 2012, the Fair Work Commission made an Equal Remuneration Order (ERO) for the social and community services industry to increase community sector wages. Since the ERO was made, supplementary payments have been made by the Federal Government to assist funded organisations to cover the increased costs associated with the award wage increase.<sup>78</sup>

The Federal Government's funding to assist the community services sector to meet increased costs due to the ERO ceased in June 2021. At this stage, the Federal Government has not committed to renew this funding. Without supplementary funding, vital services including homelessness services, alcohol and other drugs services, services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, settlement services, and several other service types may need to decrease their staffing, which will have with significant flow on effects on service delivery and will impact the people who need these services most.

Jesuit Social Services calls on the incoming Federal Government to resinate the ERO supplementation to provide crucial supports to people experiencing vulnerability.

### Recommendation

- Reinstating ERO supplementation funding for the community services sector to ensure people experiencing vulnerability can receive the support they need.

78 ACOSS. (2019). Challenges for Australia's community sector: ERO supplementation. ([Weblink](#))