



Federal Pre-Budget Submission 2024-25

February 2024



**Jesuit
Social Services**
Building a Just Society

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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.

Jesuit Social Services: Who we are and what we do

Jesuit Social Services is a social change organisation working to build a just society where all people can live to their full potential. For 46 years we have been working with some of the most disadvantaged and marginalised members of our communities, who often experience multiple and complex challenges. We work where the need is greatest and where we have the capacity, experience and skills to make the most difference. Our early intervention, policy and advocacy work has a national focus and we also deliver services across Victoria as well as in Western Sydney and the Northern Territory (NT).

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, as well as 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, business and the community sector to build coalitions and alliances around key issues and by building strong relationships with key decision-makers and the community.

Our programs and advocacy

Our services and advocacy focus on these areas:

- **Place-based approaches and ecological justice** – advocacy and research around enabling and supporting systemic change needed to achieve social and ecological justice in place.
- **Justice and crime prevention** – people involved with the justice system.
- **Education, training and employment** – people with barriers to education and sustainable employment.
- **Mental health and wellbeing** – people with multiple and complex needs including mental illness, trauma, homelessness and bereavement.
- **Gender Justice** – leadership on the reduction of violence and other harmful behaviours prevalent among boys and men, developing new approaches to improve their wellbeing and keep families and communities safe.
- **Settlement and community building** – recently arrived immigrants, people seeking asylum and refugees, and communities experiencing disadvantage.

Introduction

Jesuit Social Services' vision is to build a just society. Allocation of adequate and evidence-based funding and resourcing is an essential part of this vision. The recommendations in this pre-budget submission are grounded in the knowledge, expertise and experiences of Jesuit Social Services' staff as well as research and evidence. This submission's recommendations provide a framework for reform and are also informed by consistent advocacy led by organisations in the community sector.

Jesuit Social Services welcomes some changes made by the Federal government over the past year, including incremental increases to income support payments and Commonwealth Rent Assistance (though more needs to be done in this space), the establishment of the National Justice Reinvestment Program, commencement of consultation for a National Housing and Homelessness Plan and the completion of notable inquiries including the NDIS Review and the Workforce Australia Inquiry, which have outlined frameworks for necessary reform of essential services.

However, given the current state of inflation, weak wages growth and how rapidly cost of living pressures have increased over the past year, particularly the prices of housing, rent, groceries and energy bills, the 2024-25 Federal budget needs to provide much needed relief.¹ In particular, the budget needs to provide relief for people who are feeling the effects of these pressures most acutely, including people on very low incomes, including those on income support, people with multiple and complex needs and people experiencing vulnerability.

Last year, an average of 95,862 people per month were accessing homelessness services due to financial stress, or housing crisis and accommodation issues, and the Australian Community Sector Survey found that only 3% of community service providers can always meet service demand.² Such statistics paint a picture of ballooning demand for help and community services struggling to cope with demand. Additionally, much like the cost of living crisis and the COVID-19 pandemic, climate change is continuing to disproportionately impact 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, age, health conditions, disabilities, or where they work.

Drawing on 46 years of advocacy and action, this pre-budget submission provides recommendations across a range of interconnected social policy areas. Jesuit Social Services calls on the Federal government to devote resources towards reducing inequity and exclusion, and ensuring people on the margins are given every opportunity to lead healthy and fulfilling lives. The upcoming budget must provide meaningful cost of living relief, especially for people on the lowest incomes, and must provide adequate and secure funding for the community service organisations that are dealing with unprecedented levels of demand in the face of events such as the worsening housing crisis.

Jesuit Social Services would welcome the opportunity to expand further on any of the matters raised in this submission.

¹ Australian Council of Social Service (ACOSS) (2024). Scrap stage three tax cuts to fund low-income cost of living relief. [Weblink](#).

² Homelessness Australia (2023). Mid year economic update must confront growing housing and homelessness crisis. [Weblink](#); ACOSS (2023). Helping people in need during a cost-of-living crisis: Findings from the Australian Community Sector Survey. [Weblink](#).

Recommendations

1. Place-based approaches to social and ecological justice

- Invest in further research to build the knowledge base regarding locational disadvantage, such as the research undertaken in Jesuit Social Service's [Dropping off the Edge](#)³ report, to capture a deep understanding of community strengths, needs and priorities that can inform decision making and program delivery by all areas of government.
- Resource long-term, place-based and systemic approaches to disadvantage that centre community decision making and address factors that lead to inequity and disadvantage.
- Build broader community resilience to climate change by resourcing the establishment and coordination of place-based, cross-sector, resilience coalitions to work in partnership with local governments and the health and community sectors to strengthen adaptation planning and policies.
- Increase funding and resources for organisations and communities seeking to trial, test and implement climate change adaptation, mitigation and transformation activities.

2. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander self-determination

- Continue investment in implementing the National Agreement on Closing the Gap, and resource Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations (ACCOs) to design, lead and deliver services and programs as they are best placed to meet the needs of their communities.

3. Adult and youth justice systems

- Invest in a coordinated approach to raise the age of criminal responsibility to 14 across all states and territories.
- Ensure an ongoing commitment to long-term funding for community-led Justice Reinvestment sites, as part of the National Justice Reinvestment Program.
- Work with state and territory corrections systems to extend access to the Medicare Benefits Scheme (MBS) and the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) for people who are incarcerated.
- In accordance with the Optional Protocol Against Torture (OPCAT), fund the establishment of National Protective Mechanisms in each state and territory to provide independent oversight of places of detention.
- Resource the establishment of a National Youth Justice Strategy, ideally led by the National Children's Commission, to set policy objectives for all jurisdictions in relation to children and young people at risk of entering or engaging with the youth justice system.

4. A fair social safety net

- Raise the rate for JobSeeker and related payments to at least \$78 a day, as per calls by the Raise the Rate Campaign, in order to lift people on income support above the poverty line and increase their ability to afford access to essentials such as appropriate housing and prevent homelessness.
- Extend eligibility for JobSeeker, Youth Allowance and related payments to people on bridging visas and other temporary visa holders.
- Benchmark Commonwealth Rent Assistance for private tenants with low income to actual rents/rents paid, requiring a 100% increase in the maximum rates for this payment.

³ 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. [Weblink](#).

- As recommended by the Australian Council of Social Service, establish a \$65 a week Disability and Illness Supplement and a Single Parent Supplement benchmarked to the additional costs of single parenthood (to replace Family Tax Benefit Part B), to adequately cover the additional costs faced by these groups.

5. Pathways to education, training and employment

- Invest in a Social Inclusion Fund and an accompanying Social Inclusion Strategy to create new opportunities for employment, particularly in areas of persistent disadvantage.
- Invest in pre-accredited training programs to support people to enter or re-enter education and training as a pathway to employment.
- Develop a Youth Job Guarantee that would ensure all young people are supported into secure employment, education or training that is aligned with their interests and goals, within four months of leaving formal education or becoming unemployed.
- Invest in strategies to reduce systemic barriers to employment pathways for refugees and newly arrived migrants, including:
 - investment in culturally sensitive employment support programs; and
 - allocation of funding to accelerate processing timeframes for Australian recognition of professional qualifications undertaken internationally, to ensure that people affected can enter the workforce sooner.
- Invest in and call on public service agencies and corporate organisations to consider shared social impact initiatives to support under and unemployed skilled professionals from migrant and refugee backgrounds into employment, such as the Corporate Diversity Partnerships program.
- Prioritise investment in programs of ecological literacy, skills training and employment in regenerative and sustainable industries in marginalised communities and those living within degraded and at-risk ecosystems.
- Consider subsidising affordable access to home internet, data and associated technology for low-income households to ensure no Australian is excluded from broader social and economic participation.

6. Gender justice - The Men's Project

We reiterate the following relevant recommendations to the Federal government made in our Man Box 2024 report:

- Informed by the lessons learnt during the forthcoming Healthy Masculinities project trial, the Federal government should develop a National Healthier Masculinities Action Plan that is aligned with The National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children 2022-2032, and sets out its approach to embedding healthier masculinities into violence prevention and early intervention work with men and boys. This should include establishing a set of standards based on available evidence of what is expected from programs seeking to deliver this work.
- The Federal government, working closely with state and territory governments, should commission an independent national review of relevant policy frameworks to determine where and how a greater focus on promoting healthier masculinities could be incorporated (e.g., violence prevention, mental health, gambling, alcohol and other drugs, healthy eating, criminal justice, social procurement, child and family services, occupational health and safety, road safety).

- The Federal government, working closely with state and territory governments, should commission an independent national review of progress in implementing respectful relationships education in primary and secondary schools nationwide. The objectives of this review should include assessing how teachers and school staff are being supported, through curricula and professional development, to challenge harmful gender norms and support students to apply critical thinking towards areas of related concern (e.g., pornography).
- Higher education curricula for workforces like teachers, social workers and psychologists should be changed to include healthier masculinities content and capability-building, to support them to effectively model healthier alternatives to stereotypical masculine norms and support the populations they work with to adopt healthier and more flexible masculinities.
- Federal, state and territory governments should provide funding to agencies which specialise in the primary prevention of violence and/or in health promotion to run population-level, evidence-based campaigns to promote healthier masculinities.
- The Federal government should adopt a place-based approach in which community consortiums lead healthy masculinities work with multiple and reinforcing approaches across schools, sports clubs, community service organisations and local councils.

We also recommend that the Federal government:

- 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 coordinated, centralised and long-term investment for primary prevention education in schools across states and territories. This could include:
 - Expanding the Rights Resilience and Respectful Relationships (RRRR) Curriculum so it is delivered nation-wide.
 - Engaging Jesuit Social Services to facilitate knowledge-sharing across states and territories based on our experience supporting the implementation of Resilience, Rights and Respectful Relationships in Victoria.
- Implement a Federal Social Procurement Policy that includes clear and ambitious targets for creating meaningful employment opportunities for people experiencing disadvantage and addresses cultural issues related to the safety of women and other minority groups in male-dominated industries.

7. Safe, affordable and sustainable housing

- Increase investment in safe, sustainable and supported social housing, by committing to build at least 25,000 public and community homes per year over the next ten years, with a particular focus on increasing the supply of public housing as a percentage of social housing overall, as per calls by the Everybody's Home campaign.
- Prioritise investment in new social housing as part of the National Housing Accord, with a particular focus on increasing the stock of safe, sustainable and energy-efficient public housing, and partner with state and territory governments to retrofit all existing social housing with energy efficiency upgrades.
- Provide incentives to community housing providers to provide housing to people with histories of homelessness and people who have complex needs and/ or are on lower incomes such as JobSeeker or Youth Allowance.

- Increase funding to state and territory governments to invest in housing and homelessness services to close the gap in the rates of homelessness and overcrowding experienced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.
- Commit to funding effective implementation of climate safe and energy efficient design in planning and construction of new public and community housing, as well as retrofitting of pre-2003 social housing.
- Provide equitable access to energy-efficient housing, and invest in energy efficiency improvements for low-income homes to cut emissions and energy bills.
- Invest in transitional, ongoing wraparound support programs for children and young people exiting out-of-home care.
- Increase funding to state and territory governments for investment in targeted, specialised and holistic programs of housing and support for people whose multiple and complex needs are not met through the private rental markets or community housing systems. These programs should include targeted initiatives offering outreach and wrap around supports for people with a range of needs including:
 - young people exiting out-of-home care and custodial settings;
 - young people at risk of homelessness;
 - victim-survivors of family violence;
 - people with mental ill-health, experiences of substance misuse and trauma;
 - people with disabilities; and
 - people seeking asylum and refugees.

8. Mental health, disability and wellbeing

- Fully fund implementation of the recommendations from the NDIS Review, and support implementation of an increase in wraparound supports for people with multiple and complex needs accessing the NDIS.
- Extend drug and alcohol treatment Primary Health Network funding periods for dual-diagnosis programs such as [Connexions](#) and increase allocated funding to enable people to address complex and co-occurring issues.
- Enable the provision of direct, long-term funding for a comprehensive and evidence-based model of suicide postvention support by ensuring that:
 - funding for suicide postvention support is increased;
 - there is greater integration of funding for suicide postvention support between Federal and state departments; and
 - the Federal government does not stipulate a service provider in the next Bilateral Schedule on Mental Health and Suicide Prevention so that states and territories have the ability to choose the providers of postvention support services.

9. A humane immigration system

- End the use of prolonged immigration detention in Australia, and instead invest funding in supporting people seeking asylum to live and permanently resettle with adequate support within the community.
- Prioritise funding and resources to process the protection of the thousands of people waiting for years on temporary visas, and allocate funding to support those in crisis, including frontline services.

- Allocate funding to 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 those most in need.
- 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.

10. Settlement services for newly arrived people

- Allocate additional resources to services funded under the Settlement Engagement and Transition Support Program (SETS), in acknowledgement of the extension of the eligibility period to beyond 5 years to respond to the settlement needs of newly arrived people.
- Expand funding of SETS providers so that a greater number of newly arrived refugees and migrants can access dedicated, holistic and ongoing support.
- Increase investment in interpreter services for SETS services and reinstate a dedicated funding stream to complement settlement service contracts.
- 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.
- Invest in strategies to reduce systemic barriers to employment pathways for refugees and newly arrived migrants, including:
 - investment in culturally sensitive employment support programs; and
 - allocation of funding to accelerate processing timeframes for Australian recognition of professional qualifications undertaken internationally, to ensure that people affected can enter the workforce sooner.

11. Quality community services

- As recommended by the Australian Council of Social Service, the Federal government must fund any relevant pay rises and improved workplace conditions for the community sector workforce arising from decisions made by the Fair Work Commission.
- Fund the full cost of quality service delivery, including infrastructure, management and administration costs (overheads), and adopt adequate indexation that is consistent across funded organisations, published annually and reflects the actual increase in costs incurred by funded organisations, as called for by the Australian Council of Social Service.

1. Place-based approaches to build thriving and resilient communities

Jesuit Social Services' [Dropping off the Edge 2021](#) is the fifth instalment in our research series, clearly showing that complex and entrenched disadvantage is experienced by a small but persistent number of locations in each state and territory across Australia. The challenge of persistent and entrenched locational disadvantage must be addressed, and for this we must look towards place-based solutions.

We believe that change can be achieved when the interrelated root causes of disadvantage are understood and place-based solutions are properly resourced. Jesuit Social Services understands place-based approaches as innovative ways to address disadvantage and inequity, strengthen resilience to crises in place, and build thriving and resilient communities. Jesuit Social Services calls on the Federal government to identify locations of complex disadvantage, through Dropping off the Edge research, and adequately resource long-term, place-based approaches in these locations that centre community decision-making and address the factors that lead to inequity and disadvantage.

1.1 Enabling ecological and social justice

In 2021, for the first time, our *Dropping off the Edge* research included 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,⁴ exposure to heat stress,⁵ and poorer access to green open spaces.⁶

In recognising the urgent need to support CSOs to build resilience to climate change and environmental injustice, Jesuit Social Services' [Centre for Just Places](#) has been delivering a range of climate adaptation and resilience initiatives and workshops across metropolitan Melbourne (see for example our [Collaborative Action Plan for climate justice in Melbourne's west](#)).⁷ 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.

We call on the Federal government to further resource place-based, cross-sector coalitions to enable a shared understanding of how social and climate justice issues intersect and help drive adaptation planning and policy development to build broader community resilience.

Recommendations

- Invest in further research to build the knowledge base regarding locational disadvantage, such as the research undertaken in Jesuit Social Service's [Dropping off the Edge](#)⁸ report, to capture a deep understanding of community strengths, needs and priorities that can inform decision making and program delivery by all areas of government.
- Resource long-term, place-based and systemic approaches to disadvantage that centre community decision making and address factors that lead to inequity and disadvantage.

⁴ 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.

⁵ Ibid. Indicator 34. Pg 236.

⁶ Ibid. Indicators 33 and 35. Pg 236.

⁷ Jesuit Social Services (2022). Mobilising Climate Just and Resilient Communities in Melbourne's West: Collaborative Action Plan. [Weblink](#).

⁸ 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. [Weblink](#).

- Build broader community resilience to climate change by resourcing the establishment and coordination of place-based, cross-sector, resilience coalitions to work in partnership with local governments and the health and community sectors to strengthen adaptation planning and policies.
- Increase funding and resources for organisations and communities seeking to trial, test and implement climate change adaptation, mitigation and transformation activities.

2. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander self-determination

Consideration of adequate resourcing and capacity-building and a commitment to place-based services needs to guide allocation of funding to Aboriginal communities and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled organisations (ACCOs) in the 2024-25 Federal budget. Allocation of funding and resourcing for services that are needed in Aboriginal communities must be driven by the principle of self-determination and a focus on establishing and supporting community-led initiatives.

2.1 The National Agreement on Closing the Gap

Data released in 2023 by the Productivity Commission monitoring progress under the National Agreement on Closing the Gap shows that significant work is still needed to improve outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.⁹ Just four out of the 20 Closing the Gap socio-economic targets are on track to be met, and the gap is widening in a number of significant areas including adult incarceration rates, deaths by suicide and rates of children in out-of-home care. It is clear that more work needs to be done to improve life outcomes and opportunities for current and future generations of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

To achieve this, we know that the self-determination of First Nations people is the best path. One way we have seen this 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 2020.¹⁰ It is crucial for the Federal government to continue its investment in implementing the National Agreement, and for funding to be directed to communities and ACCOs to design self-determined systems.

Recommendations

- Continue investment in implementing the National Agreement on Closing the Gap, and resource Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations (ACCOs) to design, lead and deliver services and programs as they are best placed to meet the needs of their communities.

3. Safe and respectful adult and youth 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 (CALD) 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 Federal government to ensure the following issues in relation to our adult and youth justice systems are addressed in the budget as a priority.

⁹ Australian Government Productivity Commission (2023). Closing the Gap: Annual Data Compilation Report July 2023. [Weblink](#).

¹⁰ Coalition of Peaks (2022). New National Agreement on Closing the Gap. [Weblink](#)

3.1 Raise the age of criminal responsibility

A small number of children experiencing vulnerability 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.¹¹ 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.

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, we call on the Federal government to work with states and territories to raise the age of criminal responsibility from 10 to 14 years.¹² Jesuit Social Services welcomes and acknowledges the raising of the age to 12 in the Northern Territory, but stresses this needs to be raised further to 14, and that the rest of Australia's states and territories need to follow and make this necessary change.¹³

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.¹⁴ 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.

3.2 Establish a National First-Nations led Justice Reinvestment Body

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. In 2023, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander adults were almost 12 times more likely to be imprisoned than adults in the general population.¹⁵ Additionally in 2022, Aboriginal children were also nine times more likely to be in custody than their non-Aboriginal counterparts.¹⁶

The updated National Agreement on Closing the Gap features justice targets, which seek to reduce incarceration rates for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander adults and young people. This is a welcome step, that has been supported by the 2023 establishment of the National Justice Reinvestment Program.¹⁷ In order to achieve justice targets and progress in this area, the National Justice Reinvestment Program needs to be adequately resourced and driven by community, and further

¹¹ 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](#).

¹² Child Rights International Network (2016). Minimum ages of criminal responsibility around the world. [Weblink](#).

¹³ ABC News (2023). New age of criminal responsibility in the NT to come into effect on August 1, eight months after legislation passes. [Weblink](#).

¹⁴ Jesuit Social Services (2019). Raising the Age of Criminal Responsibility: There is a better way. [Weblink](#).

¹⁵ Australian Bureau of Statistics (2023). Corrective Services September 2023. [Weblink](#).

¹⁶ 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](#).

¹⁷ Australian Government Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet (2023). Now Open: National Justice Reinvestment Program. [Weblink](#).

resourcing needs to be committed in order to support community readiness, as outlined in our [Justice Reinvestment Design Submission](#).¹⁸

3.3 Fair and equal access to health care

People in prison experience higher rates of mental health conditions, chronic physical disease, communicable disease, tobacco smoking, high-risk alcohol consumption and problematic substance use than the general population.¹⁹ Aboriginal people who come into contact with the justice system are more likely to have worse physical and mental health than non-Aboriginal people, including cognitive disability and learning difficulties, hearing loss, and specific health problems including hepatitis B.²⁰ Prison health services are required to meet the widely recognised 1982 UN resolution that the standard and amount of healthcare provided in prisons should be equivalent to that provided to the wider community.²¹ However, the Medicare Benefit Scheme does not cover people in prisons across Australia, and National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) access in prisons is convoluted and inconsistent.

Many NDIS services are suspended while a person is in prison, despite the significant proportion of people in prison who have an acquired brain injury, intellectual disability or other disability.²² Overall, people with a disability in prison currently do not receive the support they require; may be incarcerated for longer as a result of lack of clarity about responsibility for support provision; may have the reinstatement of their support delayed once they exit prison; and may as a result be more likely to reoffend.²³

We advocate that the Federal government should partner with state and territory corrections services to ensure all people in prison can receive the health care they need. Ensuring access to these health schemes would supplement current services available in prison and would be a critical enabler of continuity of care for people entering and exiting custody.

3.4 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 (OPCAT) in Australia would 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 Federal 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.²⁴

¹⁸ Jesuit Social Services (2023). Justice Reinvestment Design Submission. [Weblink](#).

¹⁹ AIHW (2022). Health of prisoners. [Weblink](#).

²⁰ AIHW (2022). Health of prisoners. [Weblink](#).

²¹ United Nations General Assembly (1982). Resolution 37/194. Principle of medical ethics.

²² Doyle, C., Dodd, S., Dickinson, H., Yates, S. & Buick, F. (2022). 'There's not just a gap, there's a chasm' The boundaries between Australian disability services and prisons. [Weblink](#); Victorian Department of Justice (2011). Acquired Brain Injury in the Victorian Prison System. Corrections Research Paper Series Paper No. 04 April 2011. pp. 8-22. [Weblink](#).

²³ Yates, S., Dodd, S., Doyle, C., Buick, & Dickinson H. (2022); Centre for Innovative Justice, Jesuit Social Services (2018). [Weblink](#).

²⁴ As outlined in Jesuit Social Services' [submission to the Australian Human Rights Commission's OPCAT in Australia consultation](#), the National Preventive Mechanisms (NPMs) must protect the rights of, and ensure supports are in place for, vulnerable cohorts in places of detention, including Aboriginal people, individuals with acquired brain injury 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.

The Federal and state and territory governments were required to nominate an NPM by 20 January 2023 to provide independent oversight of places of detention. The Federal government and states and territories are yet to meet their obligations. The 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.

3.5 Establish a National Youth Justice Strategy

A small number of young people experiencing vulnerability become caught up in the criminal justice system from a young age. Young people most likely to offend are often the ones who have faced the toughest circumstances growing up, and the most effective approach to prevent their entry into the justice system is to address the issues driving their vulnerability such as family dysfunction, trauma, abuse and neglect.²⁵ Intervening early and diverting children from detention to prevent trajectories into the youth and adult justice systems is critical, and legislation for children and young people in all jurisdictions needs reviewing to better reflect a commitment to early intervention and non-custodial strategies.

As outlined in Jesuit Social Services' submission about [the National Children's Commissioner Youth Justice and Child Wellbeing Reform across Australia](#), a national framework is needed to provide a common legislative approach to youth justice and child wellbeing reform in Australia.²⁶ For this we suggest the establishment of a National Youth Justice Strategy, to provide a national policy framework to guide early intervention, prevention and targeted prevention for children and young people at risk of offending.

Recommendations

- Invest in a coordinated approach to raise the age of criminal responsibility to 14 across all states and territories.
- Ensure an ongoing commitment to long-term funding for community-led Justice Reinvestment sites, as part of the National Justice Reinvestment Program.
- Work with state and territory corrections systems to extend access to the Medicare Benefits Scheme (MBS) and the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) for people who are incarcerated.
- In accordance with the Optional Protocol Against Torture (OPCAT), fund the establishment of National Protective Mechanisms in each state and territory to provide independent oversight of places of detention.
- Resource the establishment of a National Youth Justice Strategy, ideally led by the National Children's Commission, to set policy objectives for all jurisdictions in relation to children and young people at risk of entering or engaging with the youth justice system.

4. A fair social security system

In the midst of a cost of living crisis that has multiplied and compounded challenges for many, the Federal government must focus on how to support people on low incomes and people experiencing vulnerability. We need a fair system of social and employment support that empowers people to reach their full potential and recognises the extraordinary conditions people are up against at the moment in

²⁵ Youth Parole Board (2018). Victorian Youth Parole Board Annual Report 2017-18. [Weblink](#).

²⁶ Jesuit Social Service (2023). Submission to the National Children's Commissioner Youth Justice and Child Wellbeing Reform across Australia. [Weblink](#).

the face of inflation and the housing crisis. While Jesuit Social Services welcomes the recent changes to the proposed Stage 3 tax cuts, which will now result in a fairer deal for people on low and moderate incomes, we stress that people on the lowest incomes, specifically income support payments, still need help in the current economic climate.

4.1 Income support

Despite last year's small increase, the base rates of JobSeeker (\$54 a day), Youth Allowance (\$44 a day) and related payments continue to sit well below the poverty line.²⁷ These base rate payments are not enough to live on, and it is not reasonable to expect people to find a job or secure housing when they are forced to skip meals or forgo healthcare and heating in the winter because their income is so low.²⁸ The cost of living continues to rise dramatically, and in this context having inadequate income support payment rates greatly increases people's risk of becoming homeless. For example, in 2021-22, 79% of all clients aged 15 and over who presented to Specialist Homelessness Services for assistance named income support payments as their main form of income.²⁹

The success of the 2020 Coronavirus Supplement and JobKeeper payments, demonstrate that an adequate income support rate can drastically improve people's circumstances and reduce homelessness. With these increased payments, people were able to access rental accommodation, to afford medication or purchase items such as warm clothes. Among people in households on the JobSeeker Payment, poverty fell from 76 per cent in 2019 to 15 per cent in June 2020.³⁰ Concerningly, research from ACOSS and UNSW shows that once the increased payment rates were withdrawn during early 2021, income inequality and poverty increased above pre-pandemic levels.³¹

Jesuit Social Services strongly supports ACOSS' [Raise the Rate for Good campaign](#) to increase the base rate of JobSeeker and related payments from \$54 per day to at least \$78, and to increase Commonwealth Rent Assistance rates in recognition of the massive rise in rents nationwide.³² We also support ACOSS' recommendation to establish a \$65 a week Disability and Illness Supplement and a Single Parent Supplement (to replace Family Tax Benefit Part B), to adequately cover the additional costs faced by these groups.

Recommendations

- Raise the rate for JobSeeker and related payments to at least \$78 a day, as per calls by the Raise the Rate Campaign, in order to lift people on income support above the poverty line and increase their ability to afford access to essentials such as appropriate housing and prevent homelessness.
- Extend eligibility for JobSeeker, Youth Allowance and related payments to people on bridging visas and other temporary visa holders.
- Benchmark Commonwealth Rent Assistance for private tenants with low income to actual rents/rents paid, requiring a 100% increase in the maximum rates for this payment.
- As recommended by the Australian Council of Social Service, establish a \$65 a week Disability and Illness Supplement and a Single Parent Supplement benchmarked to the additional costs of single

²⁷ Davidson, P., Bradbury, B. & Wong, M. (2023). Poverty in Australia 2023: Who is affected. Poverty and Inequality Partnership Report no. 20. Australian Council of Social Service and UNSW Sydney. [Weblink](#); Services Australia (2023). How much you can get. [Weblink](#).

²⁸ ACOSS (2019). "I regularly don't eat at all": Trying to get by on Newstart.

²⁹ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (2022). Specialist homelessness services annual report 2021-22. [Weblink](#).

³⁰ 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.

³¹ Ibid.

³² ACOSS (2024). Raise the Rate for Good. [Weblink](#).

parenthood (to replace Family Tax Benefit Part B), to adequately cover the additional costs faced by these groups.

5. Pathways to education, training and employment

Jesuit Social Services commends the Federal Government's development of the [White Paper on Jobs and Opportunities](#), to provide a roadmap to boost incomes and living standards and create more employment opportunities for more Australians.³³ We welcomed the opportunity to contribute a submission to inform the White Paper (available [here](#)). We know that when people are able to fully access education, training and employment, this has significant benefits for their own wellbeing, their family's wellbeing and the wellbeing of communities.³⁴

5.1 Social inclusion fund and strategy

There can be no one-size-fits-all approach to working towards full employment in locations with multiple disadvantages. Each community has its own specific strengths and challenges, and what may improve education, training and employment outcomes for an urban community in Victoria will be different to what helps a regional community in Queensland.

Jesuit Social Services therefore calls on the Federal Government to introduce a Social Inclusion Fund resourced at the same level as the \$15 billion National Reconstruction Fund³⁵ to create local opportunities for people who have had limited opportunities to learn, study or work, particularly in locations of complex disadvantage as identified in the [Dropping off the Edge \(DOTE\) research](#).³⁶ Social inclusion Boards should be established to centre community decision-making and to identify local priorities and opportunities for increased jobs in the care, community service and environment sectors. The fund would be used to create local jobs to meet these local needs.

To achieve intergenerational change, we call on the Federal Government to commit to a 10 to 20-year comprehensive Social Inclusion Strategy to address the persistent disadvantage experienced by the most disadvantaged communities in Australia as identified through DOTE.

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.

We call on the Federal Government to invest in pre-accredited training programs to support people to enter or re-enter education and training to obtain employment. Further, we support [Per Capita's](#)

³³ Australian Government (2023). Working Future: The Australian Government's White Paper on Jobs and Opportunities. [Weblink](#).

³⁴ Cole, K., Daly, A., & Mak, A. (2009). Good for the soul: The relationship between work, wellbeing and psychological capital. *The Journal of Socio-Economics*, 38(3), 464-474.

³⁵ Australian Government Department of Industry, Science and Resources (2022). National Reconstruction Fund: diversifying and transforming Australia's industry and economy. [Weblink](#).

³⁶ 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. [Weblink](#).

recommendation for the Department of Employment and Workplace Relations to undertake a broad evaluation of pre-employment programs in Australia which with input from community sector representative groups and employers.³⁷

5.3 Youth transitions to education, training and employment

Engaging in education or commencing work after finishing secondary school allows young people to grow their skills and abilities, and builds a socially cohesive and inclusive society.³⁸ Conversely, an absence of education or employment after completion of high school can lead to future unemployment, lower incomes and employment insecurity.³⁹

Where a young person lives impacts their vulnerability to becoming disengaged from education, training and/or employment after secondary schooling. In May 2020, the proportion of young people who were not in employment, education or training was more than twice as high for those living in the lowest socioeconomic areas as for those in the highest.⁴⁰

Jesuit Social Services calls for a Youth Job Guarantee that would ensure all young people are supported into secure employment, education or training that is aligned with their interests and goals, within four months of leaving formal education or becoming unemployed. Further, we recommend that local jobs and skills opportunities are created through the introduction of the Social Inclusion Fund to meet local care, community and environmental service needs, for young people who might otherwise be left behind.

5.4 Supporting people from migrant and refugee backgrounds into employment

The importance of meaningful work for newly arrived people is significant. Employment fosters broader participation in society, provides a sense of purpose, and creates opportunities for migrants to become contributing members of the community. Unfortunately, many people from migrant and refugee backgrounds face unemployment and underemployment – with their skills underutilised.

Evidence increasingly suggests that a significant number of migrants and refugees with overseas-obtained post-school qualifications are working in lower skilled jobs, due to a lack of recognition of overseas obtained qualifications and skills.⁴¹ This has significant economic and social costs.⁴² We have observed through our employment support program that finding employment which is consistent with qualifications and experience often takes time, with the process being quite demoralising impacting on self-esteem and mental health. This is particularly challenging for migrants and refugees, who often have already had to face a loss of agency and self-determination over their own lives in leaving their country of origin.⁴³

Jesuit Social Services believes that the role of business as an enabler of social inclusion should be more actively explored and promoted. This requires moving away from a transactional relationship between business and marginalised people to one grounded in an understanding of the capacity of business to

³⁷ Per Capita (2022). Submission to the Workforce Australia Inquiry: Pre-Employment Programs and ParentsNext. [Weblink](#).

³⁸ AIHW. (2021). Australia's youth: Engagement in education or employment. [Weblink](#).

³⁹ de Fontenay C, Lampe B, Nugent J & Jomini P (2020). Climbing the jobs ladder slower: young people in a weak labour market: Working paper. Canberra: Productivity Commission; Pech J, McNevin A & Nelms L (2009). Young people with poor labour force attachment: a survey of concepts, data and previous research. Canberra: Australian Fair Pay Commission.

⁴⁰ AIHW (2021). Australia's youth: Engagement in education or employment. [Weblink](#).

⁴¹ Productivity Commission (2016). Migrant Intake into Australia Inquiry report. [Weblink](#).

⁴² Deloitte (2018). Seizing the opportunity: Making the most of the skills and experience of migrants and refugees. [Weblink](#).

⁴³ Jesuit Social Services (2023). Submission to the Multicultural Framework Review. [Weblink](#).

work with organisations and the community. Jesuit Social Services has a long history of working in partnership with companies to support people from diverse backgrounds to move into work aligned to their skills and qualifications. Effective models already exist and can be built upon, including the African Australian Inclusion Program (AAIP), and Jesuit Social Services' Corporate Diversity Programs.

5.5 Making a 'just transition' to green jobs

As mentioned above, Jesuit Social Services brings an ecological perspective to our practice, policy and organisational identity in recognition of the particular risks that climate change poses to the communities we work with. To minimise the unfairness inherent in climate change and environmental degradation, increasing attention has been given to the idea of a 'just transition' to a zero carbon future. A just transition has transformative potential for Australians experiencing disadvantage. Jesuit Social Services' paper, '[Just transitions – Expanding the conversation](#)', highlights that a just transition must ensure disadvantaged communities receive the help they need to adapt and build resilience, and should also achieve transformational change by addressing the underlying and interrelated drivers of social and ecological vulnerability.⁴⁴

A just transition calls on the Federal Government to increase training and education pathways into employment in clean energy, land care and management, and other regenerative and sustainable industries: activities that reduce our climate risk and build the economy of the future. 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 the transition.

5.6 Digital equity

The impact of digital inequity and digital literacy are issues that demand more policy attention as online tools and platforms become increasingly central to work, education and other services. Throughout the pandemic, Jesuit Social Services has witnessed the impact of digital exclusion on many of the people we work with.

Jesuit Social Services plays a leadership role in [Wester'ly](#); a place-based campaign in Western Sydney that has formed around the issue of digital inclusion, especially in relation to education. Wester'ly first formed in 2020 in response to digital exclusion challenges faced by Western Sydney community members during lockdown measures to prevent the spread of COVID-19.⁴⁵

The Federal Government should consider subsidising affordable access to home internet, data and technology for people experiencing disadvantage to ensure no Australian is excluded from broader social and economic participation. A flexible response is required that takes account of different needs, such as people experiencing homelessness. For low-income households, the No Australian Left Offline campaign for affordable broadband offers a potential model that would see the NBN Co offer a 50 mbps

⁴⁴ Jesuit Social Services (2018). Ecological justice: Expanding the Conversation. [Weblink](#).

⁴⁵ According to the 2016 Census, 30 to 40 per cent of people in Mt Druitt do not have access to the internet. (Note: the 2021 Census did not collect data in relation to digital inclusion).

unlimited broadband service at a wholesale price of \$20 per month to households receiving government financial support.⁴⁶ This proposal should be strongly considered by the Government.

Recommendations

- Invest in a Social Inclusion Fund and an accompanying Social Inclusion Strategy to create new opportunities for employment, particularly in areas of persistent disadvantage.
- Invest in pre-accredited training programs to support people to enter or re-enter education and training as a pathway to employment.
- Develop a Youth Job Guarantee that would ensure all young people are supported into secure employment, education or training that is aligned with their interests and goals, within four months of leaving formal education or becoming unemployed.
- Invest in strategies to reduce systemic barriers to employment pathways for refugees and newly arrived migrants, including:
 - investment in culturally sensitive employment support programs; and
 - allocation of funding to accelerate processing timeframes for Australian recognition of professional qualifications undertaken internationally, to ensure that people affected can enter the workforce sooner.
- Invest in and call on public service agencies and corporate organisations to consider shared social impact initiatives to support under and unemployed skilled professionals from migrant and refugee backgrounds into employment, such as the Corporate Diversity Partnerships program.
- Prioritise investment in programs of ecological literacy, skills training and employment in regenerative and sustainable industries in marginalised communities and those living within degraded and at-risk ecosystems.
- Consider subsidising affordable access to home internet, data and associated technology for low-income households to ensure no Australian is excluded from broader social and economic participation.

6. Engaging men and boys to prevent family violence

In 2017, Jesuit Social Services established [The Men's Project](#). The Men's Project focuses on supporting boys and men to live respectful, accountable and fulfilling lives, where they are able to develop loving relationships free from violence and contribute to safe and equal communities.

Our work in the Men's Project exposed a need to address the root causes of harmful behaviours in the workplace, such as violence, gendered violence, sexism and sexual harassment. The best available evidence suggests that a key way to achieve this is through primary prevention efforts that promote cultural and attitudinal change related to masculinities and gender.

6.1 The Man Box

Through the Men's Project, Jesuit Social Services has taken steps to better understand and respond to male violence and other harmful behaviours. In 2018, we published the first Australian study exploring the association between attitudes to manhood and the behaviours of men aged 18 to 30 years old. A second study was published in 2020, and a third in February 2024. This latest study also included men aged 31 to 45 years and expanded the scope of the attitudes and behaviours measured. It found that men who most strongly agreed with Man Box norms were significantly more likely to have a range of

⁴⁶ ACCAN (2019). No Australian Left Offline. [Weblink](#).

poor health outcomes, and to have perpetrated violence. This group constitutes approximately one in four men aged 18–30. The Man Box norms are a set of 19 “rules,” such as “guys should act strong even if they feel scared or nervous inside”, representing people’s perception of societal beliefs that place pressure on men to act in certain ways.

6.2 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 national curriculum as a step towards supporting young people to understand gendered stereotypes, coercion and power imbalances. In addition to consent education, we advocate for respectful relationships education to be prioritised in the national curriculum and provided in all Australian schools. This must be complemented by equipping teachers, sports coaches, youth workers and other community leaders and people working with young people with the language and skills they need to create positive change on issues of respect.

The Men’s Project is currently supporting the implementation of the Resilience Rights and Respectful Relationships (RRRR) curriculum in Victoria through a partnership with the Victorian Department of Education. This involves 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. The evaluation of this work will have implications for the Federal government, as well as states and territories.

6.3 Workforce capacity building

We call on the Federal government to make significant efforts to invest in and prioritise workforce capacity building to support people who work with boys and men to challenge harmful stereotypes and promote respect and equality.

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, which is known to be a key driver of violence. 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. Our Unpacking the Man Box workshops provide 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 effect change. These programs are examples of programs that can be funded and scaled up to build greater workforce capacity.

6.4 A Federal social procurement policy

Social procurement frameworks should set and deliver on gender equality targets. Commonwealth Procurement Rules currently include reference to considerations such as environmental sustainability, but decision-makers should also be required to consider social value and impact as part of procurement

processes, including gender equity and recruitment of people who are long-term unemployed, have low skill levels and currently live in areas of high social disadvantage.

Recommendations

We reiterate the following relevant recommendations to the Federal government made in our Man Box 2024 report:

- Informed by the lessons learnt during the forthcoming Healthy Masculinities project trial, the Federal government should develop a National Healthier Masculinities Action Plan that is aligned with the National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children 2022-2032, and sets out its approach to embedding healthier masculinities into violence prevention and early intervention work with men and boys. This should include establishing a set of standards based on available evidence of what is expected from programs seeking to deliver this work.
- The Federal government, working closely with state and territory governments, should commission an independent national review of relevant policy frameworks to determine where and how a greater focus on promoting healthier masculinities could be incorporated (e.g., violence prevention, mental health, gambling, alcohol and other drugs, healthy eating, criminal justice, social procurement, child and family services, occupational health and safety, road safety).
- The Federal government, working closely with state and territory governments, should commission an independent national review of progress in implementing respectful relationships education in primary and secondary schools nationwide. The objectives of this review should include assessing how teachers and school staff are being supported, through curricula and professional development, to challenge harmful gender norms and support students to apply critical thinking towards areas of related concern (e.g., pornography).
- Higher education curricula for workforces like teachers, social workers and psychologists should be changed to include healthier masculinities content and capability-building, to support them to effectively model healthier alternatives to stereotypical masculine norms and support the populations they work with to adopt healthier and more flexible masculinities.
- Federal, state and territory governments should provide funding to agencies which specialise in the primary prevention of violence and/or in health promotion to run population-level, evidence-based campaigns to promote healthier masculinities.
- The Federal government should adopt a place-based approach in which community consortiums lead healthy masculinities work with multiple and reinforcing approaches across schools, sports clubs, community service organisations and local councils.

We also recommend that the Federal government:

- 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 coordinated, centralised and long-term investment for primary prevention education in schools across states and territories. This could include:
 - Expanding the Rights Resilience and Respectful Relationships (RRRR) Curriculum so it is delivered nation-wide.

- Engaging Jesuit Social Services to facilitate knowledge-sharing across states and territories based on our experience supporting the implementation of Resilience, Rights and Respectful Relationships in Victoria.
- Implement a Federal Social Procurement Policy that includes clear and ambitious targets for creating meaningful employment opportunities for people experiencing disadvantage and addresses cultural issues related to the safety of women and other minority groups in male-dominated industries.

7. Safe, affordable and sustainable housing

Access to safe, affordable and sustainable housing is becoming increasingly out of reach for people in Australia, particularly those on low-incomes and with complex needs. An increasing number of people are becoming unable to access the private rental market, and it is the least affordable in the country, when compared with other housing options such as home ownership or social housing. People with low incomes are being priced out of the private market and in order to increase access to housing, an increase in the supply of social housing, and public housing specifically, needs to be prioritised in the Budget.

7.1 Increase the stock of public and community housing

Social housing represents only 4% of all dwellings in Australia, down from 7% in the mid-1990s.⁴⁷ While there has been some growth in social housing stock nationally, it has not kept up with population growth, which grew by 15% during 2011-2021, while social housing stock only grew by 4.5%. Data from the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) shows that Australia's supply of public housing specifically has been steadily declining. In 2011, there were 337,177 public housing dwellings (81% of all social housing).⁴⁸ In 2023, this has declined further, with a total of 297,600 public housing dwellings (67% of all social housing).⁴⁹

In 2023 there were several major announcements by governments regarding housing policy, including the passage of the Housing Australia Future Fund Bill 2023 and the outcomes of the National Cabinet meeting in August.⁵⁰ In each of these, governments used the terminology 'social and affordable housing' to describe future housing policy and funding commitments. While public housing does fit under the umbrella term of social housing, without making a specific mention of public housing in these recent announcements, there is no guarantee that any of these changes will result in an increase in public housing stock.

Community housing is necessary and more affordable than private rental properties, but it is our observation that community housing does not meet the needs of most Jesuit Social Services participants, or people with complex needs, people on income support payments or very low incomes or people at risk of homelessness. Community housing is also not very accessible for young people, due to the income-related barriers they face. If young people rely on Youth Allowance for their income, their income is automatically lower than other potential social housing tenants, making them unattractive tenants from the perspective of social housing providers. The Council for Homeless Persons reported

⁴⁷ Martin, C., Lawson, J., Milligan, V., Hartley, C., Pawson, H. and Dodson, J. (2023). Towards an Australian Housing and Homelessness Strategy: understanding national approaches in contemporary policy. AHURI Final Report No. 401, Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute Limited, Melbourne. [Weblink](#).

⁴⁸ AIHW (2011). Housing assistance in Australia. [Weblink](#).

⁴⁹ AIHW (2023). Housing assistance in Australia. [Weblink](#).

⁵⁰ Parliament of Australia (2023). Housing Australia Future Fund Bill 2023. [Weblink](#); Prime Minister of Australia (2023). Meeting of National Cabinet – Working Together to Deliver Better Housing Outcomes. [Weblink](#).

that across 5000 tenancies, social housing providers would receive \$7.2 million less housing single young people than if they housed single Jobseeker recipients.⁵¹

Current supply of social housing is inadequate and without a significant increase, more people will be forced onto long waitlists for social housing, particularly for public housing, or into crisis accommodation, rough sleeping or couch surfing.⁵²

7.2 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Housing

The impacts of colonisation, racism and 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-Aboriginal Australians. For example, in 2021-22, 28% (72,900) of all clients for specialist homelessness services in Australia were Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander.⁵³ This disparity is significant given that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people make up 3.2% of the total population. The 2024-25 budget needs to invest in Aboriginal Community Controlled housing and homelessness services to close the gap in housing outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

7.3 Ensure housing is ecologically sustainable

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.”⁵⁴ These added stressors increase incidents of family violence, substance misuse and significantly impact on the mental health of tenants. We therefore advocate for the Federal 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.

7.4 Tenancy support and wraparound services

Eviction is one of the main causes of homelessness. The most effective change we can make towards ending homelessness, along with increasing income support, is to prevent people becoming homeless in the first place through early intervention and tenancy support programs. Early intervention and tenancy support programs are an evidence-based way to help people maintain their tenancies and avoid eviction, and the budget should commit to expanding investment in these services as a way to prevent homelessness.

Wraparound supports, such as supported accommodation, tenancy support and transitional support for those exiting prison or out of home care are essential services for supporting people with complex needs, to maintain housing and live well in our community. Many successful initiatives, such as Jesuit

⁵¹ Council to Homeless Persons (2023). Parity: Towards a New Child and Youth Housing and Homelessness Plan. Vol. 36 Issue 2.

⁵² Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) (2023). Housing assistance in Australia. [Weblink](#).

⁵³ AIHW (2022). Specialist homelessness services annual report 2021-22. [Weblink](#).

⁵⁴ 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](#))

Social Services' [Next Steps](#) and [Perry House](#) programs have been developed to support people with multiple and complex needs to sustain private and public tenancies.⁵⁵ Jesuit Social Services advocates for the budget to include expansion of and significantly increased investment in specific initiatives targeted at people with complex, multiple and intensive long-term support needs. These specialised housing support programs help meet the needs of people at risk of homelessness who often are not served by existing housing services, and along with a proper increase in income support, growth in these programs would make a real impact in helping to end homelessness.

Recommendations

- Increase investment in safe, sustainable and supported social housing, by committing to build at least 25,000 public and community homes per year over the next ten years, with a particular focus on increasing the supply of public housing as a percentage of social housing overall, as per calls by the Everybody's Home campaign.
- Prioritise investment in new social housing as part of the National Housing Accord, with a particular focus on increasing the stock of safe, sustainable and energy-efficient public housing, and partner with state and territory governments to retrofit all existing social housing with energy efficiency upgrades.
- Provide incentives to community housing providers to provide housing to people with histories of homelessness and people who have complex needs and/ or are on lower incomes such as JobSeeker or Youth Allowance.
- Increase funding to state and territory governments to invest in housing and homelessness services to close the gap in the rates of homelessness and overcrowding experienced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.
- Commit to funding effective implementation of climate safe and energy efficient design in planning and construction of new public and community housing, as well as retrofitting of pre-2003 social housing.
- Provide equitable access to energy-efficient housing, and invest in energy efficiency improvements for low-income homes to cut emissions and energy bills.
- Invest in transitional, ongoing wraparound support programs for children and young people exiting out-of-home care.
- Increase funding to state and territory governments for investment in targeted, specialised and holistic programs of housing and support for people whose multiple and complex needs are not met through the private rental markets or community housing systems. These programs should include targeted initiatives offering outreach and wrap around supports for people with a range of needs including:
 - young people exiting out-of-home care and custodial settings;
 - young people at risk of homelessness;
 - victim-survivors of family violence;
 - people with mental ill-health, experiences of substance misuse and trauma;
 - people with disabilities; and
 - people seeking asylum and refugees.

8. Supporting people with disability, mental ill health and complex needs

⁵⁵ Jesuit Social Services (2024). [Next Steps](#). [Weblink](#).; Jesuit Social Services (2024). [Perry House](#). [Weblink](#).

Jesuit Social Services works with and advocates for people with multiple and complex needs. Many of the people we work with face a range of co-occurring and interrelated issues, such as homelessness, disability, substance misuse, mental ill health, and involvement in the child protection and criminal justice systems. These overlapping issues often mean that recovery is harder to achieve and sustain, with people often experiencing inter-generational cycles of entrenched disadvantage.

Our welfare, health and justice systems are often not designed to cater for people experiencing vulnerability or for people with multiple and complex needs. A coordinated whole-of-person approach is critical in addressing the unique mix of intersecting and overlapping issues that individuals with multiple and complex needs face.

8.1 An NDIS that supports people with multiple and complex needs

Jesuit Social Services welcomes the findings and recommendations from the [NDIS Independent Review's Final Report](#).⁵⁶ We support the focus of the review on moving towards an NDIS that is sustainable in the long-term, more accessible and supported by staff and services that are adequately qualified and regulated. However, the NDIS Review's recommendations must include an adequate focus on making the changes necessary to make the NDIS more accessible and effective for people with multiple and complex needs, such as people who are incarcerated.

In Victoria, we offer Specialist Support Coordination where 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 are also working with other service providers, including justice and youth services. We also provide supported housing ([Perry House](#)) for justice system-involved young people with an intellectual disability who are at risk of, or are experiencing, homelessness.⁵⁷ As a result of this experience in delivering programs and support, Jesuit Social Services has observed increasing shortages of disability support staff as well as limited understanding of the multiple and complex needs of our participants.

We urge the Federal government to fully fund implementation of the recommendations from the NDIS Review, and to support implementation of an increase in wraparound supports for people accessing the NDIS with multiple and complex needs, such as people who are in prison or involved with the justice system. We also welcome the recent announcement of a review of the fixed pricing structure for NDIS service coordination and provision. This review is a necessary step to ensure that NDIS pricing aligns with sector standards and supports fair wages and good working conditions.

8.2 Long-term funding for dual diagnosis services

It is crucial that the co-occurring issues that some people experience are not treated in isolation. In particular, specialist expertise and integrated care (often through multi-disciplinary teams) are needed to concurrently address both mental health and alcohol and drug misuse, in recognition of how the co-occurrence of these issues can impact upon a person's health.

⁵⁶ NDIS Review 2023. Working together to deliver the NDIS: Independent Review into the National Disability Insurance Scheme Final Report. [Weblink](#).

⁵⁷ Jesuit Social Services (2024). Perry House. [Weblink](#).

Jesuit Social Services' [Connexions](#) program started in 1996 as Victoria's first dual diagnosis service working exclusively with young people dealing with concurrent issues of mental illness and substance abuse.⁵⁸ Connexions offers a relationship-based approach to intake and assessment, and uses assertive outreach, where workers follow up with disadvantaged and hard to engage young people who have been identified as needing support. Specialist assertive outreach focuses initially on developing a relationship of trust to create a foundation that enables discussion of mental health issues.

We strongly support further development of integrated support and care for people with co-occurring issues, such as Connexions, as recommended by the Productivity Commission into Mental Health in Australia's Final Report.⁵⁹ Further, we note that providing integrated treatment and care is included as a recommendation in Australia's Fifth National Mental Health and Suicide Prevention Plan. However, delivery of services such as Connexions is currently limited by short-term contracts. The current funding model of short-term contracts has implications for workforce retention and continuity of service delivery to participants. As such, we call on the federal government to provide long-term, sustainable funding to dual diagnosis services. This will allow for a consistent approach and enable us to continue delivering vital support to our participants.

8.3 Specialist suicide postvention services

Evidence shows that people bereaved by suicide are themselves at a higher risk of suicide.⁶⁰ However, we know from our experience that postvention support delivered by experienced practitioners reduces this risk. Jesuit Social Services has delivered Support After Suicide throughout Melbourne and regional Victoria for almost 20 years. The program provides critical support to people after a death of a loved one to suicide through specialist counselling, group programs and online support to people bereaved by suicide (including children and young people), and secondary consultation to professional education and other professional organisations working with people bereaved by suicide.

Support After Suicide currently receives federal funding from three areas: the Bilateral Schedule on Mental Health and Suicide Prevention, Targeted Regional Initiatives for Suicide Prevention (Primary Health Networks) and the National Suicide Prevention Leadership and Support Program. This funding setup is administratively burdensome and time-consuming in terms of contract management and reporting, and results in a lack of funding certainty. This has implications for service delivery and staff recruitment and retention.

Under the Bilateral Schedule on Mental Health and Suicide Prevention, state and territory governments that included postvention are not able to choose the service provider of postvention services. In addition, the existence of three separate funding models has resulted in a duplication of services between the federal government and the states and territories, as well as inequity between metropolitan and regional areas in Australia. We believe greater integration of funding decisions is needed between the federal and state and territory departments, and that states and territories should be given the ability to choose their preferred provider for postvention services in their jurisdiction.

Jesuit Social Services calls on the federal government to partner with state and territory governments to provide direct, long-term funding for a comprehensive and evidence-based model of suicide postvention support that encompasses specialist suicide bereavement counselling, support groups and

⁵⁸ Jesuit Social Services (2024). Connexions. [Weblink](#).

⁵⁹ Australian Government Productivity Commission (2020). Mental Health: Productivity Commission Inquiry Report. [Weblink](#).

⁶⁰ Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System (2021). Final Report. [Weblink](#).

tailored assistance designed to meet the needs of people navigating a complex and distressing experience. It is critical that this support extends to people in rural, regional and remote areas across Australia.

Recommendations

- Fully fund implementation of the recommendations from the NDIS Review, and support implementation of an increase in wraparound supports for people with multiple and complex needs accessing the NDIS.
- Extend drug and alcohol treatment Primary Health Network funding periods for dual-diagnosis programs like Connexions and increase allocated funding to enable people to address complex and co-occurring issues.
- Enable the provision of direct, long-term funding for a comprehensive and evidence-based model of suicide postvention support by ensuring that:
 - funding for suicide postvention support is increased;
 - there is greater integration of funding for suicide postvention support between federal and state departments; and
 - the federal government does not stipulate a service provider in the next Bilateral Schedule on Mental Health and Suicide Prevention so that states and territories have the ability to choose their providers for postvention support services.

9. 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 for 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. The following recommendations are based on insights gained through this initiative.

9.1 End the use of prolonged detention

Jesuit Social Services is deeply concerned at the ongoing government spending on prolonged detention of people seeking asylum both in Australia and overseas at the hands of Australia's immigration system. The Federal government is currently committed to spending \$350 million per year for the basic running costs of one offshore detention centre in Nauru, after having spent \$485 million in 2023.⁶¹

Notwithstanding the recent decision in *NZYQ v Minister for Immigration, Citizenship and Multicultural Affairs & Anor [2023] HCA 37*, which reduces the average length of time a person spends in detention, the average length of time a person spends in immigration detention is currently 620 days.⁶² Many people have been detained for much longer; over 120 people have been detained for over five years and many of those have been detained for more than ten years.⁶³ Detention has been widely demonstrated to have a significant impact on the health and wellbeing of anybody that is detained.

⁶¹ Karp, P., & Shepherd, T. (2023). Nauru offshore processing to cost Australian taxpayers \$485m despite only 22 asylum seekers remaining. The Guardian. [Weblink](#).

⁶² Department of Home Affairs (2024). Immigration Detention and Community Statistics Summary for 30 November 2023. [Weblink](#).

⁶³ Refugee Council of Australia (2024). Statistics on people in detention in Australia. [Weblink](#).

Experts in law, health, psychology, social work and human rights have expressed ongoing concerns for the wellbeing of refugees and people seeking asylum held in long-term detention.⁶⁴

Jesuit Social Services is particularly concerned that one of the people seeking asylum recently placed in offshore detention in Nauru was a child.⁶⁵ The impact on childhood development and the mental and physical wellbeing of children detained in immigration detention is detrimental, significant and long-lasting.⁶⁶ Further, we are concerned about the limited information released publicly about those placed in offshore detention. Government transparency is a vital pillar to any liberal democracy. As a proudly democratic nation, we therefore call on the Federal government for greater transparency regarding individuals and processes involved in offshore detention in Nauru.

In addition to the significant human cost, this is a serious drain on Australia's financial resources. Funding and resources should instead be invested in a more humane and financially effective immigration system, and not on harmful detention.

It has been ten years since the start of Australia's offshore processing of asylum and refugee claims. Jesuit Social Services urges the Federal government to end the punitive approach toward people seeking asylum by ending offshore detention, and for any form of onshore detention to only be used as an absolute last resort, spanning the shortest possible length of time. The Federal government should invest in supporting people to live in the community while their protection applications are processed.

9.2 Abolish temporary protection and provide pathways to permanency

Jesuit Social Services welcomed the Federal government's move to give permanent protection to the more than 19,000 people seeking asylum on Temporary Protection Visas (TPVs) and five-year Safe Haven Enterprise Visas (SHEVs). We ask the Federal government to process as quickly as possible the applications of those still waiting for permanency.

However, thousands of people seeking asylum living in the community continue to face uncertainty and remain on bridging visas and other temporary visas, including those who were Medevaced from offshore detention and those under the 'fast-track' system. Further, some people seeking asylum living in the community currently are 'in between' visas and waiting for the government to provide them with a new visa, rendering them stateless. Without a clear pathway for permanency, this cohort of people continue to live in limbo, some waiting longer than 10 years. It currently takes "866 days for a primary decision from the Department of Home Affairs, 1,330 days for a merit-based review from the Administrative Appeals Tribunal (AAT), and 1,872 days for appeals at the court level."⁶⁷ Comparatively, Canada only takes 14 days to process a claim, and the United States takes 55 days.⁶⁸

People seeking asylum and refugees living in the community face major challenges, often living below the poverty line, without access to government support like Medicare, a financial safety net or housing. They are often also contending with ongoing family separation. Many do not have the right to work or

⁶⁴ 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.

⁶⁵ Connaughton, M., & Farrell, P. (2023). A teenager is among the first boat arrivals sent to Nauru in nine years. ABC News. [Weblink](#).

⁶⁶ Tosif, S., Graham, H., Kiang, K., Laemmle-Ruff, I., Heenan, R., Smith, A., Volkmann, T., Connell, T., & Paxton, G. (2023). Health of children who experienced Australian immigration detention. PLoS ONE 18(3): e0282798. [Weblink](#); Australian Human Rights Commission (2014). *The Forgotten Children: National Inquiry into Children in Immigration Detention*. [Weblink](#).

⁶⁷ Parliament of Australia, House of Representatives (2023). Migration Amendment (Limits on Immigration Detention) Bill 2023: First Reading - Bill and explanatory memorandum presented by Ms Tink 27/11/2023. [Weblink](#).

⁶⁸ Ibid

study, including now-adult children who were Medevaced. This may be the case even for those who attended primary and secondary school in Australia, and are now unable to progress to tertiary education or employment. Jesuit Social Services is alarmed by the high rates of people seeking asylum and refugees living in crisis and destitution at present, magnified by the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic and the current cost of living crisis. Immediate relief is possible by giving people seeking asylum work and vocational rights and access to Medicare while they wait for their protection applications to be processed. Further, frontline services desperately require allocation of further funding to ensure that they keep up with the demands of providing essential services and support.

We call on the Federal government to prioritise funding and resources to process the protection of the thousands of people waiting for years on temporary visas, and to provide pathways for people seeking asylum and refugees to permanently resettle in the community. Further, we call for the Federal government to allocate funding to support those in crisis, including frontline services.

9.3 Expand Australia's annual humanitarian intake

Jesuit Social Services welcomed the Federal government's announcement of an increase in Australia's humanitarian intake.⁶⁹ However, we note that globally, conflict and persecution continues to uproot the lives of millions worldwide and will continue to worsen. Recent examples include the conflicts and wars in Palestine and Israel, Ukraine and Afghanistan. Up to 1.9 million people have been displaced in Gaza, or 85 per cent of the population.⁷⁰ However, Australia has only approved 860 temporary visas to Palestinians and 1,739 Israeli citizens since the war began in October.⁷¹ These visas are specific to those with direct family connections in Australia only.⁷² These are just a few 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 Federal government should invest in increasing its Humanitarian Program to 30,000. Besides the clear moral imperative to offer people experiencing vulnerability a chance to rebuild their lives, the case to pursue a more generous humanitarian program makes economic sense.⁷³ 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.⁷⁴ Further, we call on the Federal government to allocate more resources to expanding its complementary pathways in addition to these 30,000 places, including expanding existing programs such as the Community Refugee Integration and Settlement Pilot (CRISP) and skilled refugee visa programs supported through Talent Beyond Boundaries.⁷⁵

⁶⁹ Refugee Council of Australia (2021). 'The Federal Budget: What it means for refugees and people seeking humanitarian protection', Refugee and Humanitarian Program [Weblink](#).

⁷⁰ UNRWA (2024). UNRWA Situation Report #62 on the Situation in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank, Including East Jerusalem. [Weblink](#).

⁷¹ Haydar, N., Al-Khoury, C., & Chamas, Z. (2023). Government grants hundreds of temporary visas to Palestinians. ABC News. [Weblink](#).

⁷² Rachwani, M. (2023). 'They break my heart': the Palestinian Australians supporting refugees from the Israel-Gaza war. The Guardian. ([Weblink](#)); Australian Government Department of Home Affairs (2024). Hamas-Israel Conflict: Visa Support. [Weblink](#).

⁷³ Deloitte Access Economics and Oxfam Australia (2019). Economic and social impact of increasing Australia's humanitarian intake. [Weblink](#).

⁷⁴ Deloitte Access Economics and Oxfam Australia (August 2019) Economic and social impact of increasing Australia's humanitarian intake. [Weblink](#).

⁷⁵ For more information on the CRISP program run by Community Refugee Sponsorship Australia, see [here](#). For more information on Talent Beyond Boundaries, see [here](#).

9.4 Prioritise family reunification for those already in Australia

When people seek asylum, they very often leave family and loved ones behind. This means that for many, their loved ones remain in danger, and contact with them can be impossible, intermittent or unsafe.⁷⁶ 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.⁷⁷ We continue to strongly support the Refugee Council of Australia's calls for the Federal government to enhance access to family reunions for refugees and humanitarian entrants.⁷⁸

9.5 Expand SRSS funding and provide adequate support

The Federal government's previous changes to the Status Resolution Support Services (SRSS) have reduced the number of people eligible for this vital support, meaning very few people are actually eligible for support. It is placing people seeking asylum at risk of destitution and increasing demands on the community services they turn to for support. The current cost of living crisis has exacerbated existing disparities, and many people seeking asylum and refugees living in the community are struggling and unable to pay for food, housing and medication. The tightening of eligibility requirements for the SRSS program should be reversed to ensure that people experiencing vulnerability can access this vital social support. Eligibility should be expanded to ensure that those who are most vulnerable receive the support they need.

Recommendations

- End the use of prolonged immigration detention in Australia, and instead invest funding in supporting people seeking asylum to live and permanently resettle with adequate support within the community.
- Prioritise funding and resources to process the protection of the thousands of people waiting for years on temporary visas, and allocate funding to support those in crisis, including frontline services.
- Allocate funding to 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 those most in need.
- 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.

10. Settlement services for newly arrived people

In the western suburbs of Melbourne, Jesuit Social Services' Settlement Engagement and Transition Support Program (SETS) aims to develop people's ability and confidence to access support services, facilitate independence, enhance living skills and promote meaningful community engagement. With

⁷⁶ 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.

⁷⁷ Wilmsen, B. (2011). Family separation: The policies, procedures, and consequences for refugee background families. *Refugee Survey Quarterly*, 30(1), 44-64.

⁷⁸ Refugee Council of Australia. (2021) Family separation and family reunion for refugees: The issues. March 2021. [Weblink](#).

more than a quarter of Australians born overseas, diversity is a central pillar of our national identity that should be recognised, welcomed and celebrated.

10.1 Expand resources and eligibility of settlement support

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. Jesuit Social Services supports the Federal government in fulfilling its commitments to extend the eligibility period of the SETS program beyond the previous five-year period.

However, we believe that greater funding and resources need to be allocated towards supports and services for those who are newly resettled, including expansion of the SETS program. Humanitarian program allocations for settlement services have been cut by 13.7 per cent in recent times, and these cuts have been felt directly by both participants receiving much-needed support, and staff delivering this support. Many families continue to have greater vulnerabilities and complexities and need more support to address these than is currently provided. In addition to removing this time limitation, we call on the Federal government to expand the eligibility to accessing SETS in recognition of this complexity.

Further, we believe that the funding of specialised services designated to particularly vulnerable cohorts of migrants and newly arrived refugees is needed in supporting their resettlement, including young refugees and migrants. Jesuit Social Services acknowledges that the Youth Transition Support services has been extended to 30 June 2024. However, programs such as this one require further stable and continual funding. As previously discussed, we have observed through our own programs that young newly arrived refugees and migrants face systemic barriers to employment and training, and extending a service such as this is therefore very beneficial.

10.2 Allocate funding towards translating and interpreting services

Access to Translating and Interpreting Services (TIS National) is no longer free for Jesuit Social Services and other SETS providers. This becomes an additional cost in the context of reduced funding overall. This additional financial burden means agencies may not be able to use an interpreting service when it may be necessary, or have to 'save up' important conversations. This creates further language barriers, as well as barriers to accessing information and services. It is crucial to ensure that people who may be experiencing disadvantage, social isolation or other longer-term issues are able to continue accessing support.

10.3 Provide secure and sustainable housing

Safe and secure housing is 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 previously mentioned, it is well established that there is a severe housing shortage, for both social housing and private rentals, 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 to housing stress, housing insecurity and ultimately homelessness upon

resettlement in Australia.⁷⁹ 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 Federal government to extend settlement housing support beyond the initial 28-day period and to scale up the funding and development of sustainable, supportive housing for newly arrived migrants and refugees.

Recommendations

- Allocate additional resources to services funded under the Settlement Engagement and Transition Support Program (SETS), in acknowledgement of the extension of the eligibility period to beyond 5 years to respond to the settlement needs of newly arrived people.
- Expand funding of SETS providers so that a greater number of newly arrived refugees and migrants can access dedicated, holistic and ongoing support.
- Increase investment in interpreter services for SETS services and reinstate a dedicated funding stream to complement settlement service contracts.
- 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.
- Invest in strategies to reduce systemic barriers to employment pathways for refugees and newly arrived migrants, including:
 - investment in culturally sensitive employment support programs; and
 - allocation of funding to accelerate processing timeframes for Australian recognition of professional qualifications undertaken internationally, to ensure that people affected can enter the workforce sooner.

11. Quality community services

11.1 Fund changes to pay and workplace conditions arising from Fair Work Commission decisions

Due to the current practise of using short fixed-term Federal government contracts to fund the not-for-profit (NFP) sector, workforce retention and development is an ongoing challenge for NFP organisations. Along with staff shortages, the current funding structure also creates conditions for lower work quality and worker vulnerability.¹⁵ This has implications for job security, employment standards and professional development. NFP organisations are also often competing with better resourced sectors to attract and retain staff.¹⁶ ACOSS has stated that due to wage stagnation and inflation, staff are also increasingly reporting being worried about their financial security and their ability to afford basic essentials, which is driving many employees to leave the NFP sector.¹⁸

Government should commit to fully funding pay rises and improved workplace conditions for the community sector workforce arising from decisions made by the Fair Work Commission so that NFP organisations can compete with other sectors.

11.2 The full cost of funding community service organisation service delivery

The 2023 Australian Community Sector Survey found that only 9 per cent of Community Service Organisation (CSO) leaders agreed that funding covers the full cost of service delivery, a sharp decrease from the 20 per cent who agreed with this statement in 2022.¹⁶ Inadequate funding decreases the ability of CSOs to meet community demand for services, maintain and develop the workforce and plan for the

⁷⁹ 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](#))

future.¹⁷ ACOSS has observed that there has been a continual lack of commitment from the Federal government to fund the full cost of service delivery, and in the current context, with the rising cost of living and inflation, this needs to change.¹⁸

Treatment of Shared Costs (Overheads)

An important aspect of funding adequacy is the treatment of shared costs (indirect costs or overheads) including IT, finance, human resources, learning and development, measurement, and evaluation. The Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission (ACNC) recognises that overhead costs are an essential expense for CSOs that vary across organisations.¹⁹ Despite this, CSOs frequently face what has been described as the ‘overhead myth’ – the idea that spending on anything other than a CSO’s programs or stated objectives is wasteful, and that overheads must be kept to an absolute minimum.²¹

Research by Social Ventures Australia and the Centre for Social Impact has found that CSOs in Australia are typically not funded for the full cost of what they do, resulting in less effective outcomes. Nine Australian CSOs ranging in size and areas of operation were found to have indirect costs averaging 33 per cent of total expenses (ranging from 26 per cent to 47 per cent). Yet the amount included in funding agreements for indirect costs typically ranges from zero to 20 per cent of total funding.²⁴ The 2022 Australian Community Sector Survey also found that only 14 per cent of CSO leaders said their organisation’s main funding properly recognised the cost of overheads.²⁵ Adequate spending on overheads is essential for maintaining the workforce of CSOs, and a high-quality workforce is essential to provide high quality services.

Indexation

Indexation of funding to maintain its real value also remains a critical issue. The additional \$560 million of funding for the sector included in last year’s federal budget was a welcome addition, and there have been worthwhile increases in indexation rates at both the state and federal levels in recent years.²⁷ However, the current high level of inflation means that indexation remains inadequate to fully cover the increased cost of service provision. ACOSS recently found that only 6 per cent of surveyed community organisations agreed that the indexation arrangements for their main funding source were adequate.²⁸ Full guaranteed indexation is needed to cover increases in wages and the cost of goods and services CSOs depend on to do their work.

Recommendations

- As recommended by the Australian Council of Social Service, the Federal government must fund any relevant pay rises and improved workplace conditions for the community sector workforce arising from decisions made by the Fair Work Commission.
- Fund the full cost of quality service delivery, including infrastructure, management and administration costs (overheads), and adopt adequate indexation that is consistent across funded organisations, published annually and reflects the actual increase in costs incurred by funded organisations, as called for by the Australian Council of Social Service.