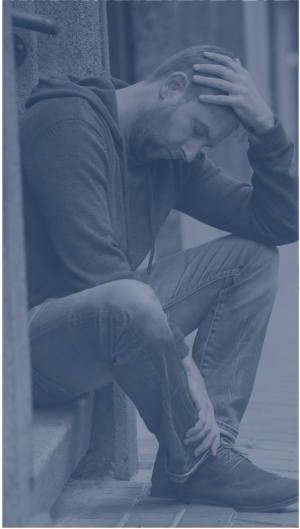
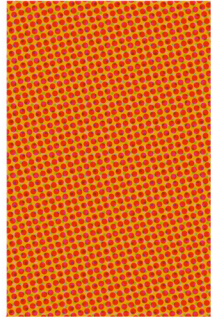
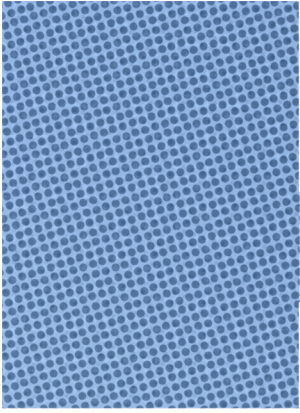
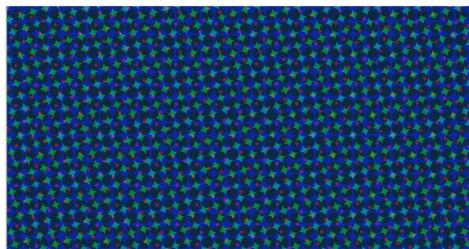
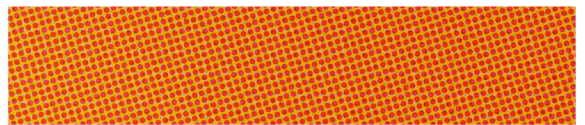
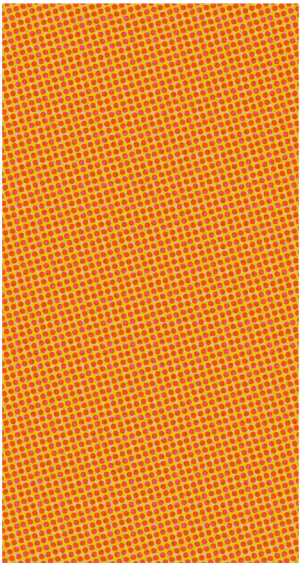




Catholic Social  
Services **Australia**



# Federal Election Statement





A nation's success is not measured by the wealth of a few, but by the prosperity of all. At times, the leaders of all Australian political parties have echoed values of "mateship" and "a fair go". These values speak to a culture of inclusion, support and equality. For too many Australians, these values are hope rather than reality. Despite our many national successes, protecting the dignity of every Australian is not among them.

The 2019 Federal Election will provide an opportunity for an incoming government to implement policies that deliver prosperity to all Australians, especially those who continue to be left behind by an economy of exclusion. It is also an opportunity to deliver a Parliament that will use the dignity of all as a measure to hold that government to account.

In the coming weeks, the challenge for every political party is to offer the Australian nation a vision of social and economic inclusion where the inherent dignity and potential of each person can be realised.

Maintaining the inherent dignity of individuals and families must be the bedrock of our social and economic policies and of the highest policy priority for the government.

Catholic Social Services Australia (CSSA) urges citizens to use their vote to create a mandate for politicians who are committed to equitable and just social and economic policies that will improve the lives of the vulnerable and protect the dignity of all Australians.

CSSA is calling on the Parliament and the incoming government to commit to:

- **Providing low-income and vulnerable families access to adequate income and social services when and where they need them;**
- **A full employment economy through the establishment of a Job Guarantee Program;**
- **Supporting the empowerment and self-determination of our First Nation peoples by working collaboratively and in genuine, formal partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in progressing constitutional recognition;**
- **Resettling all remaining refugees on Manus Island and Nauru in Australia; and**
- **Establishing a Charter for the Common Good to enhance cooperation between government, business and civil society in delivering a more inclusive economy and society.**



## Providing low-income and vulnerable families with access to adequate income and social services

For almost all of the last 12 months, cost-of-living pressures have been top of the list of issues concerning Australians<sup>1</sup>. While all Australian families are feeling the heat, low-income households live in the crucible of low wages growth and an outdated welfare payment system.

The minimum wage is not sufficient to meet the needs of many single-income households<sup>2</sup>. The Newstart Allowance is inadequate and a barrier to employment<sup>3</sup>. Successive governments have cut, frozen or repurposed Family Tax Benefits, leaving many families under financial pressure. People accessing Newstart, pensions and Family Tax Benefits need to be able to live with dignity and fully participate in society.

*There needs to be a new, fairer and more evidenced-based approach to determining the appropriate rates of welfare payments.*

Meanwhile, too many vulnerable families have difficulties in accessing welfare services when and where they need it. This exacerbates already difficult familial issues. There is a need for services to vulnerable families to be better coordinated and resourced<sup>4</sup>. For some communities, entrenched disadvantage spans generations, which requires long-term solutions and an investment framework that supports it<sup>5</sup>.

For others facing the challenges of finding services for their loved ones in areas of disability support, counselling, addiction services, family violence and housing, access is limited, complicated and often under-resourced. This is

particularly the case for families living in rural and remote communities who face additional complexities, such as natural disasters and limited access to health and social services.

*Families in disadvantaged, rural and remote communities deserve access to the same levels and quality of services that are readily available to those in metropolitan Australia.*

CSSA seeks a commitment from the next government to:

- **Review and reform how welfare payments are set to ensure low-income family households have access to adequate income to live with dignity;**
- **Implement the key recommendations of the Productivity Commission's inquiry into human services, including increasing contract terms and better coordination of service provision, supported by appropriate funding for and pricing of social services;**
- **Address access and operational gaps within the National Disability Insurance Scheme;**
- **Support a policy of "Housing First" through increasing investment in affordable and social housing, as well as crisis accommodation and services; and**
- **Support community-led capability building to meet the unique challenges facing families and in rural and remote communities.**

1 IPSOS Issues Monitor, December 2018

2 Fair Work Commission, Annual Wage Review 2017-18

3 Business Council of Australia, Submission to the Senate Inquiry into the Adequacy of the Allowance Payment System for Jobseekers and Others, 2012

4 Productivity Commission, 2017, Introducing Competition and Informed User Choice into Human Services: Reforms to Human Services, Report No. 85, Canberra

5 Productivity Commission 2018, Rising inequality? A stocktake of the evidence, Commission Research Paper, Canberra



# A full employment economy through the establishment of a Job Guarantee Program

With some 700,000 Australians without work and a further 1.1 million seeking additional hours of work, Australia needs a new approach to employment. Australia's government is passive in the job creation agenda, leaving the heavy lifting to businesses, not-for-profits and charities, who are vulnerable to the vagaries of the economic cycle. In times of economic downturn, it is the low-paid and low-skilled employees who are most vulnerable to long-term unemployment. It is time to invest in a Jobs Guarantee Program.

## What is a job guarantee?

A job guarantee is, in effect, a commitment by government to full employment in Australia.

## How does it work?

A Job Guarantee Program works by creating full-time and part-time jobs that are of "community benefit" through community organisations, not-for-profit social enterprises and charities. These jobs are paid for by the government via the program and can include sub-trade jobs, local volunteer co-ordination and environmental remediation, to name just a few. It is not a wage subsidy and it is not available to private sector employers.

## The cost

Based on modelling by The Australia Institute, a Job Guarantee Program would have a net cost to government of around \$3.7 billion. A smaller trial program of up to 100,000 participants would have a net cost of around \$650 million.

## The benefits

There are a range of social and economic benefits of a Job Guarantee Program through the

provision of paid employment. For individuals and their families, the single most common event to trigger an exit from poverty is an increase in the household head's earnings, including movement from unemployment to employment<sup>6</sup>. Work also helps family functioning and supports children's educational and social development. Employment also corresponds with reduced likelihood of incarceration and need for public housing among First Nations peoples<sup>7</sup>.

A Job Guarantee Program enables participants to be employed in a variety of community-based jobs that can be designed to match the skills and capability of the participant. It offers participants the opportunity to gain transferable skills and experience, offering increased economic mobility for them and their families.

Local communities also benefit from the program through improved economic activity by way of increased spending on consumables and services. This is particularly important for regional, rural and remote communities and communities of entrenched disadvantage.

A Job Guarantee Program offers significant economic benefits to Australia and can act as a macroeconomic stabiliser, mitigating the full consequences of economic downturns on individuals and the economy.

CSSA seeks a commitment from the next government to:

- **Adopt a job guarantee agenda and trial this initiative in areas of high unemployment.**

<sup>6</sup> McLachlan, R., Gilfillan, G. and Gordon, J. (2013), Deep and Persistent Disadvantage in Australia, rev., Productivity Commission Staff Working Paper, Canberra.

<sup>7</sup> Gray, M., Edwards, B., Hayes, A., & Baxter, J. (2009). The impacts of recessions on families. Family Matters, (83), 7.



# Supporting the empowerment and self-determination of our First Nations peoples

In 2013, on the fifth anniversary of the Apology to the Stolen Generations, the then leaders of both major political parties led the passage of an Act of Recognition through Parliament to give momentum for constitutional recognition of Indigenous Australians.

Four years later, the First Nations National Constitutional Convention was convened by the bipartisan-appointed Referendum Council to meet over four days. This Convention was to discuss and agree on an approach to constitutional reform that recognised Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. From this, the 2017 *Uluru Statement from the Heart* was born. This statement seeks constitutional reforms to empower First Nations peoples and to take a rightful place in their own country.

*Today, our First Nations peoples still walk in two worlds. While their traditional culture is recognised as a gift to our country, their contemporary contribution is too often overlooked.*

Our nation's success is measured by the prosperity of all. For our First Nations peoples to share in prosperity, they need empowerment and self-determination so that they can design and deliver community-led, strengths-based strategies for self-determination. This can only be achieved by working collaboratively and in genuine, formal partnership between governments and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

Our First Peoples need commitments from the incoming government to support moves to progress constitutional recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

There can be no more a compelling statement to drive our collective support of our First Nations brothers and sisters than this from the *Uluru Statement*<sup>8</sup>:

*When we have power over our destiny, our children will flourish.*

CSSA seeks a commitment from the next government to:

- **Work collaboratively and in genuine, formal partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in progressing constitutional recognition; and**
- **Reform the social services system for Indigenous Australians so that it is developed and delivered within a community-led and strengths-based framework (which includes longer contract terms and better coordination of service provision).**

<sup>8</sup> *Uluru Statement from the Heart*, May 2017



## Resettling all remaining refugees on Manus Island and Nauru in Australia

Australia is a wealthy country whose prosperity was built on the benefits of repeated waves of immigration. We are a mature nation with a robust rule of law and multicultural appreciation. In a world that is too often mired in conflict and tyranny, Australia is a beacon of relative peace and security. It is no surprise that courageous people fleeing persecution would be happy to make a new home here.

It is vital that we protect these valuable qualities of our nation, both for those who are here and those who are still to come. Our politicians are rightly committed to maintaining secure borders and an orderly migration program.

However, after five years, we have to ask:

*If our government is unable to find a home for refugees and asylum-seekers who have had their lives on hold on Nauru and Manus Island, then is it not time to provide them with a home in Australia?*

*Should we not do more to co-operate with our regional neighbours to care for those seeking processing and security in our region, and to provide a permanent home for more of these persons who are fleeing inhumane conditions in their home countries?*

Our hearts should always be open to assisting those in need and for refugees and asylum-seekers this requires a particular form of support that will assist them to settle successfully into Australian society. Services, including access to basic financial assistance, case work, torture and trauma counselling, and other supports to help resolve immigration status will assist refugees and asylum-seekers to live in our communities with dignity while their claims are being processed.

CSSA seeks a commitment from the next government to:

- **Close offshore detention centres on Nauru and Manus Island and resettle remaining refugees in Australia; and**
- **Restore pre-2014 eligibility criteria for Status Resolution Support Services to asylum-seekers living in the community and improved resettlement services to allow refugees to integrate into community more quickly.**



## A Charter for the Common Good

Australia has achieved more than 25 years of continuous economic growth, yet millions of Australians live in poverty. For many, this inequality and disadvantage is deep and entrenched<sup>9</sup>.

Past attempts to introduce social, environmental and economic policy reforms have been regularly thwarted by partisan politics. Too often we have seen sectoral entities placing self-interest ahead of national interest and the common good.

We are a society first and an economy second. The economy can be a vehicle for good, providing much-needed goods and services and prosperity that form the foundations for a just and equitable society. However, when that prosperity is uneven in its distribution, as it all too often has been, our society risks missing out those most in need.

Our trust in institutions is declining and so, too, is our commitment to them. Our relationship with the political system and its parties, our economic institutions and even churches has become detached.

*It's time to reclaim the preconditions for "the common good".*

This is the sum of those conditions of social life that allow social groups and their individual members the ready access to their own fulfilment. It relies on the social contract where all citizens forgo the extremes of individual desires in return for the benefits from the whole. It is based in the recognition of diversity, which produces the creative tension between the spectrum of individual interests and the interests of the whole.

The common good is fundamental to the functioning of our society. Being attentive to the common good, we need to renew our commitment to sound institutions and to judgements based on more than individual self-interest.

CSSA seeks a commitment from the next government to:

- **Forge a new national Charter for the Common Good – a commitment to the Australian people from government, civil society and business to work together to overcome the current impasse on much-needed social, environmental and economic reforms.**

<sup>9</sup> Productivity Commission; ACOSS/UNSW