

# Annual Report

2020–21



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a fairer, more  
inclusive Australian  
society that reflects  
and supports the  
dignity, equality  
and participation  
of all people.



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# About CSSA

**Catholic Social Services Australia (CSSA) is the Catholic Church's national peak body for its social services ministry.**

It draws on the experience of decades of Catholic social service and social policy development in Australia. We work with the Bishops of Australia, leaders of Religious Institutes, Catholic social service organisations, and the broader Church community in advancing the social service ministry of the Church. We collaborate with our fellow agencies; Caritas, Catholic Health Australia, the National Catholic Education Commission, and the St Vincent de Paul Society.

As an organisation we work to five key values; compassion, collaboration, excellence, accountability and innovation.

Our members are Catholic social service organisations and Dioceses, and for over 60 years we have worked with Catholic organisations, governments, other churches and all people of goodwill to develop social welfare policies and programs that will improve the lives of the poor and vulnerable in Australia.

Our service to the community is non-discriminatory and inclusive regardless of sexuality, race, religion or marital status.

## Our Vision

We envisage a fairer, more inclusive Australian society that reflects and supports the dignity, equality and participation of all people.

## Our Mission

CSSA advances the social services ministry which is integral to the mission of the Catholic Church in Australia to promote a fairer, more equitable society that preferentially assists those most in need.

# Catholic Social Teachings

**In pursuing our mission, we seek to embody and promote the core principles of Catholic Social Teaching.**

- **Dignity of the person**

Our vision for society springs from an understanding of the fundamental dignity, sanctity and worth of every human life.

- **Common good and community**

People are fundamentally social beings, and how we organise socially, politically and economically has implications for our capacity to grow in community.

- **Preferential option for the poor**

The most important measure of the success of our community is the manner in which we direct our resources to assist those people most in need.

- **Rights and responsibilities**

Our participation in community brings with it both a range of rights and protections and a range of duties and obligations.

## Acknowledgement of Country

Catholic Social Services Australia acknowledges that our community ministries are built on the traditional lands of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. We pay our respects to their elders past and present. We commit to working with our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander partners in a spirit of reconciliation, especially by providing community services. We re-new our pledge to walk the journey of learning and healing together.

As an organisation we work to five key values; compassion, collaboration, excellence, accountability and innovation.



# Message from the Chair

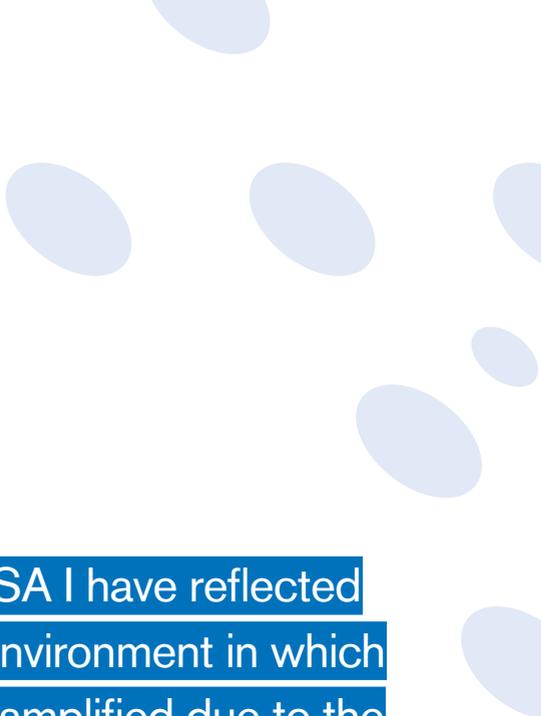


**It has been a year of demand and change for CSSA. We have seen the governance consolidation of the organisation along with a significant re-structure, the development of a new constitution, and the election of a new board.**

CSSA was extremely well served by the previous board and in particular through the leadership of its chair Dr Maria Harries. This year we have also seen the departure of Dr Ursula Stephens as CEO to take up a very critical role with Catholic Safeguarding Ltd.

Dr Stephen's has left CSSA in a very strong position to advocate for those marginalised and disadvantaged, and very pleasingly, after a significant recruitment process, Monique Earsman has been appointed as the CSSA's Executive Director. I know that with her extensive experience in policy, legislation and communication that CSSA will continue to be a strong and united voice to represent those experiencing vulnerability in their lives.

This year saw COVID-19 disrupt our lives and livelihoods on a national scale, testing the resilience of our country's social and economic structures as never before. So much in society has been affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. We see for so many, the loss of financial security, the deterioration of health and wellbeing, and the effects of unemployment – particularly amongst women and young people. We see the impacts on those who are frail aged, homeless, or living with a disability, and understand that amongst many of the social determinants loneliness is significant. First Nations peoples and communities, who are more highly susceptible to severe health impacts from COVID-19 because of co-morbidities, and grave historical injustices, are experiencing very low vaccination rates that threaten those communities. During the health crisis we see parents and children alike, struggling with home schooling and having access to appropriate educational resources; and in many communities we see the strain on families shockingly manifest in domestic and family violence.



In my new role as Chair of CSSA I have reflected on the exceptionally complex environment in which we operate. This complexity is amplified due to the current health crisis and its impacts on our economy.

Now more than ever the services provided by our Network are in high demand. We have seen our Network rise to this challenge and reach out to provide support under the most difficult of circumstances. I believe they are able to do this because the Network is comprised of highly successful organisations that are well led and are founded on a durable and innovative sense of mission. This organisational success allows the Network to retain and sustain a healthy, productive and spiritually strong social services workforce who gives of their best to help those poor and vulnerable in our communities. Our Network and staff work with struggling communities, broken families, and troubled relationships. They provide support for people contending with mental illness, trauma and substance abuse. COVID-19 has only magnified these issues for many and intensified the work of Catholic social service agencies.

In my new role as Chair of CSSA I have reflected on the exceptionally complex environment in which we operate. This complexity is amplified due to the current health crisis and its impacts on our economy. Importantly it is our sense of mission, nurtured by our spirituality that provides the daily inspiration to provide the compassion and endurance for which the Catholic Network is known. Pope Francis exhorts the Church to be on the streets and with people at the margins. He calls us to be a poor Church for the poor. He extols the gift mercy brings to vulnerable people. In Catholic social services he has champions of that message.

**Francis Sullivan AO**

# Message from the CEO



## **This year we have been focusing on adapting to changing circumstances on many levels.**

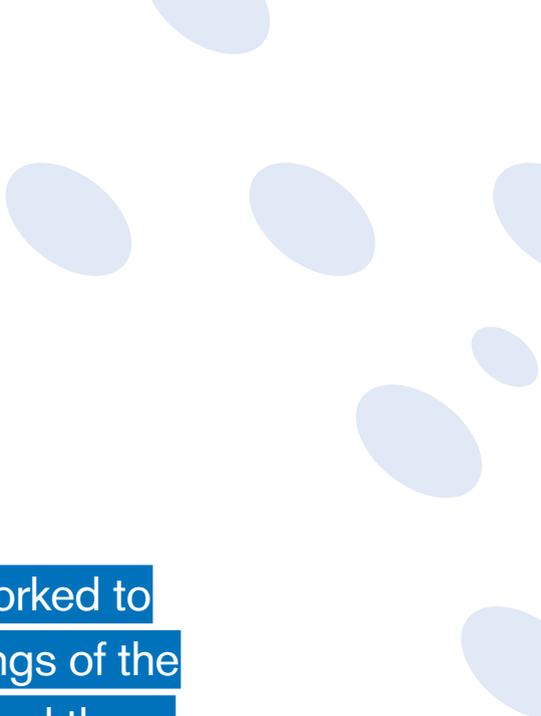
For CSSA it has been about consolidation and streamlining, for the Network it has been about dealing with a surge in demand for services, and for all of us at the personal level, it has been about how we live our lives in the midst of a world-wide health crisis that is COVID-19.

At a time like this, as always, I do believe it is critically important, to reflect on our deeper inspiration and common compassion as we, as an organisation, as a network and as individuals adapt to the challenges that the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic has generated.

Over the course of the year CSSA has downsized and restructured with the objective of achieving a balanced budget. While losing much valued staff and funds to deliver projects has been extremely difficult, the restructure has pushed us to prioritise and consider what is vital to the Network and the work they do. Clearly the priority for the Network and for CSSA is the leveraging for better outcomes for services for those for whom we care.

Throughout this year CSSA worked to communicate the understandings of the complexities of disadvantage and those in need to politicians, government and decision makers. We engaged with the Prime Minister, Members of Parliament and Senators and have made submissions to a number of Inquiries. We continued to represent the sector on advisory groups offering insights and advice to the Emergency Relief Program, the National Bushfires Charities Advisory Group and the Australian Catholic Social Justice Council. We are also active members of the Communities Crisis Cabinet and from this active participation we have been invited to be members of Community Councils Australia.

Our work on the ground, such as that led by Leanne Atkinson, in collaboration with Vinnie's and other agencies, see us continuing to assist communities on the NSW South Coast to re-establish themselves after the devastating impact of bushfires in 2019–20.



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This reporting year has been busy and challenging but we have remained focused on our mission. As CSSA embarks on the year ahead, and I make my departure as CEO, I would like to extend my sincere thanks to the incoming Chair Francis Sullivan. I also sincerely thank the staff at CSSA, who have risen to some difficult demands and choices over the last year doing so with resilience and generosity.

To the Network CEO's and all their staff, I thank you for your dedication and commitment and your guidance and advice during my tenure. I wish you all well in the coming year ahead, working with the new Executive Director Monique Earsman, who brings a new vision and energy to the organisation.

I hope you continue to bring a deep Catholicity to your work and that you are guided and supported by your faith.

**Dr Ursula Stephens**

# Message from the in-coming Executive Director



**On 20 July this year, I was privileged to be appointed Executive Director of CSSA. I am very grateful for the faith the CSSA board has bestowed me and the opportunity the role brings.**

I am especially grateful to Dr Ursula Stephens and her trademark expertise, patience and humour. During our six months together, she provided invaluable mentorship and assisted me in getting across the workings of CSSA.

Ursula has left a strong legacy; a streamlined governance structure and solid relationships with our members, the Catholic ministries, government decision-makers and other major church bodies. I hope to build upon Ursula's legacy.

As we embark upon the coming year, I have two main priorities. First, I have big plans to better connect with members and facilitate links across our Membership. When we are able, I look forward to meeting with members face-to-face, and as soon as it is possible, hosting a members' conference. Unfortunately, in our current lockdown climate, this is not possible, but we will use technological solutions to facilitate our engagement and our connectedness as a network. We will create a section on our website for members to share program information and adaptable media content. We will also reintroduce a client relationship manager that will help us help our members make meaningful connections with others working in their space.

As we embark on the new-year our key priorities will be the needs of our members and to strengthen our capacity to advocate for people who are disadvantage and their communities across Australia.

Our other key priority is maintaining and strengthening our advocacy with the Federal Government, particularly given it's an election year. We will continue to develop submissions, provide input into government forums, and partner with like-minded organisations. We no longer have the stand-alone capacity to conduct research, but in collaboration with other Catholic peak bodies and universities, we will find ways to develop the required evidence to demonstrate community need and the effectiveness of our services.

We are all now facing a transformed reality. COVID-19 has meant each member agency has had to adapt, innovate and, in many cases, increase its capacity to provide emergency relief. CSSA has undergone significant operational and strategic change and we are now leaner, which has its challenges but has also provided an opportunity to discern our priorities and re-imagine our future. I look forward to working with all those in the sector and leading CSSA into its next phase, continuing to strengthening our relationships and our capacity to strive for reform.

As we embark on the new-year our key priorities will be the needs of our members and to strengthen our capacity to advocate for people who are disadvantaged and their communities across Australia.

**Monique Earsman**

# Our Work for the Year

## Governance

The merger of CSSA and CSSA Ltd entities was undertaken during this reporting period. It was a large and complex piece of work that included transferring staff, assets, liabilities and insurances from CSSA to CSSA Ltd.

Once the CSSA Ltd structure was in place and the new Board constituted, we engaged in a strategic planning process to ensure the CSSA operations were fit for purpose, met strategic priorities and were within budget to the 2021–2022 financial year.

During the course of the year new policy documents were developed and ratified by the CSSA Board for adoption. This included the CSSA Code of Conduct, Code of Ethics and Safeguarding Code of Conduct.

## Research

The Mapping the Potential (MTP) research project was a partnership between CSSA, 21 of its members and the Australian National University's Centre for Social Research Methods. The research investigated economic realities alongside education, health and social advantage or disadvantage, and found that persistent disadvantage is present in almost all electorates.

Since the release of the data, CSSA has conducted Member seminars to build the capacity of the CSSA Network to use the data to deliver supports and services to their communities better. Many Members have commented that the research will be transformative in informing responses to people in need.

MTP data has been key to advocating to politicians and government for reform in the social services space. During the year, CSSA was commissioned by several federal members of parliament and senators to create detailed electorate profiles using the data. The reports provided detailed analysis and included a COVID-19 update to the end of 2021.



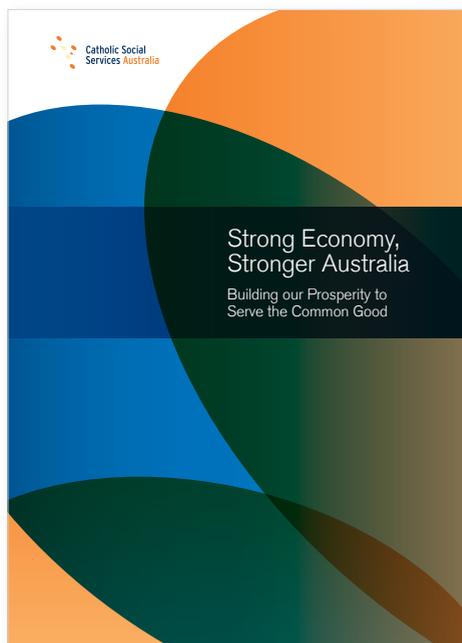
## CSSA Data Project

Conveying the meaning of data has never been more critical, particularly as we rise to the challenges of delivering social services and lobbying government for better social service outcomes in a heightened demand environment.

With this in mind, during the year, we undertook a project with the Australian Catholic University (ACU) to consider how we might share de-identified data as a network. A data working group was formed, with representation from across the CSSA Network.

An initial survey of members was undertaken by the ACU, to understand the Networks' needs and to frame a possible way forward for collaborative data collection. The survey confirmed earlier discussions that a large variety of data collection software was in use and that data entry quality was highly variable. Further, concerns were raised about data privacy and "competitive advantage". After consideration of feedback, the ACU based their framework on the Federal Government's data exchange system (DEX) requirements and envisioned creating a template to standardise input from agencies. ACU proposed that any data collected in the first stages of the project would be de-identified and aggregated.

These challenges have meant we need to re-consider how we might move forward with a data warehousing project. An options paper will be presented to the CSSA Board for consideration in the new financial year.



## Advocacy

During the year, CSSA continued to meet with members of parliament and senators to emphasise our concerns for those vulnerable in the community. Particularly, we engaged on issues highlighted within our *Stronger Economy, Stronger Australia* paper and using our MTP research. Of particular focus and concern was the future of the Jobseeker payment.

CSSA's *Stronger Economy, Stronger Australia* paper, released in January, outlines the detrimental effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on Australian communities and offers a series of strategies to support a person-centred economy. The paper has eight recommendations and argues that in rebuilding, in the wake of COVID-19, government attention should be on developing an economy that is built around the principle of full employment and participation.

## Partnerships

CSSA has been a member of the Community Crisis Cabinet, which advocates across the not-for-profit sector on high-level charity and tax policy reform and legislation. As a result of our year-long association with the Cabinet we have been invited to be a member of the Community Council Australia.

During the year, we engaged with the new Australian Catholic Social Justice Council to advise them on social justice issues. Through our engagement with the Council, we were invited to submit a proposal in a competitive process for funding from the ACU's Stakeholder Engaged Scholarship Unit. We were successful in our proposal and will partner with Caritas Australia and Catholic Health Australia to map the unique work of Catholic agencies in responding to and preventing violence against women and their children.

During 20–21, CSSA continued its engagement on a working group with other Church providers, including Uniting Care, Anglicare and the Salvation Army. The Group considers and leverages for faith-based advocacy issues. We represented the Catholic sector at the Christian Communities Restoration Roundtable at Parliament House on 22 February. The Roundtable was an excellent opportunity to meet with the Prime Minister, Minister Ruston, Roberts, Seselja, Senator Amanda Stoker, Anthony Albanese MP, Tanya Plibersek MP, Senator Deborah O'Neill and Shane Neumann MP.

CSSA continues to provide strong sector representation on the National Advisory Group for Emergency Relief Program and the National Bushfire Charities Advisory Group. And in March, CSSA appeared at the Senate Inquiry into the Lessons from the Bushfires 12 months on, following our submission to that inquiry.

In 2020–21 CSSA received significant donations from Global Giving followed by \$260,000 from Resilience NSW to support our bushfire disaster relief work. Partnering with Bega Council, Vinnie's and Mindaroo, and led by Leanne Atkinson and Michael Coffey, we have significantly assisted people on the NSW Coast to re-establish their lives after the devastating impact of the 2019-20 bushfires.



**CSSA continues to provide strong sector representation on the National Advisory Group for Emergency Relief Program and the National Bushfire Charities Advisory Group.**



## Submissions

During the year, CSSA provided feedback to government on a range of issues. From March 2020, much of our focus was on the consequences of COVID-19.

CSSA worked to both communicate to government what was needed to support the most vulnerable in our communities and seek better outcomes for Members so they could meet the heightened and particular demand for their services as a result of the health crisis and its economic impacts.

## CSSA Submissions

- **Inquiry into the Purpose, Intent and Adequacy of the Disability Support Pension**
- **Inquiry into the Strengthening Income Support Bill**
- **Inquiry into the Fair Work Amendment Bill**
- **Inquiry into the Consumer Credit Protection Bill**
- **2021–22 Pre-Budget Submission**
- **Inquiry into the Lessons to be Learned in Relation to the Australian Bushfires Season 2019-20**
- **Inquiry into the Continuation of the Cashless Welfare Bill**
- **2020–21 Pre-budget submission**
- **Inquiry into the NDIS Workforce**
- **Inquiry into the Adequacy of Newstart**

# Financial Summary

For period ended 30 June 2021

**The audited financial statements for CSSA Limited (Ltd) for the year ended 30 June 2021 are available for download here on the [CSSA Website](#).**

The 2020 Annual General Meeting (AGM) endorsed the appointment of Hardwickes, registered auditors in the Australian Capital Territory, as the Auditors for CSSA Ltd for the 2020–2021 Financial Year.

The Auditor's unqualified independent report states the financial statements give a true and fair view of the Company's financial position as at 30 June 2021 and of its financial performance for the year ended; and complies with Australian Accounting Standards to the extent described in Note 1 of the Financial Statements, and Division 60 of the Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission (ACNC) Regulation 2013. Further, the Auditors have stated they are independent of the Company in accordance with the auditor independence requirements of the ACNC Act 2012 and the ethical requirements of the Accounting Professional and Ethical Standards Board's APES 110 Code of Ethics for Professional Accountants (the Code) that are relevant to the audit of the financial report in Australia.

As advised at the 2020 AGM, the consolidation of CSSA and CSSA Ltd was to take effect from 30 September 2020; pleasingly this was achieved. The process was undertaken in full compliance with the Deed of Consolidation between the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference and CSSA Ltd. This included a financial audit of the accounts for CSSA Org at 30 September 2020, which was undertaken by Hardwickes as appointed by members at the 2020 AGM. The report is published here on the [CSSA Website](#).

Due to the consolidation of the two entities, a total of \$2,567,680 in assets was transferred from CSSA Org to CSSA Ltd at 30 September 2020. As at 30 June 2021, CSSA Ltd had total net assets of \$3,780,416.

The surplus for the 2021 financial year amounted to \$2,477,301. However, this surplus has been distorted as a result of the transfer of \$2,567,680 in assets from CSSA Org to CSSA Ltd. Excluding the transfer of assets, the operating outcome for the Company was a deficit of \$90,379.

Following the consolidation of the entities, it was determined that a significant restructure was required to bring operating expenses into balance with anticipated income. The cost associated with the restructure was partially offset by:

- (1) Significantly reduced occupancy expenses: CatholicCare Canberra and Goulburn (now Marymead CatholicCare) have allowed CSSA to occupy several offices under their tenancy of Favier House. This arrangement will end in November 2021, but CSSA would like to acknowledge their very generous support. CSSA has also disposed of most of its furniture assets to Marymead CatholicCare at a fair value amount of \$18,318.59, anticipating a move in the office location.
- (2) An unrealised gain in CSSA Ltd's CCI Investment: Following the sale of the convent building in Curtin, the proceeds were invested with CCI. This investment produced a gain of \$154,645 in the financial year.

CSSA is in the fortunate position to have substantial equity in reserve. However, the intention is to bring operating expenses into line with operating income within the coming years so that the equity can be retained for the security of the organisation and the benefit of members as required.

CSSA has also been able to continue its work in the fire-ravaged regions of southern coastal NSW. The grant from Global Giving and the donations to CERA were fully expended, but further funding was obtained from Resilience NSW to continue our Bushfire Recovery Project. This project will conclude in the 2021–22 financial year.

The most recent financial year has been another of dramatic changes. Between the staff restructure and the CEO who presided for the financial year, Dr Ursula Stephens, having departed to take over the role of CEO of Australian Catholic Safeguarding Ltd, the Board and remaining staff are repositioning themselves as a streamlined, member-focused organisation.

The Board thanks members for their patience during this significant shift, and as always, remains grateful for your ongoing support. We look forward to reuniting as a group post-pandemic.

This will be my final report as a Director of CSSA Ltd and as Chair of the Finance Committee. I want to thank former Chair Maria Harries and current Chair Francis Sullivan for their friendship and support, and I wish CSSA all the best in the future. I will continue my association with the organisation through my Chairpersonship of Catholic Social Services NSW and ACT.

On behalf of the Board of Catholic Social Services Australia Ltd, I recommend the financial statements to Catholic Social Services Australia Ltd members.

Michael Austin Chair Finance, Audit and Risk Management Committee

**Please Note:** *In past years, CSSA provided a set of pie charts depicting Income and Expenditure components in its Annual Report. Due to the two entities operating separately for the first quarter of the financial year, and the transfer of assets from one entity to the other, we determined this year's financials were too complex to be demonstrated accurately in simple pie charts. Next year we will return to the pie chart format.*

# Board and Staff

## CSSA Board

- Mr Francis Sullivan AO, Chair
- Sister Kathleen Tierney RSM AO, Deputy Chair
- Mr Michael Austin
- Bishop Paul Bird CSsR
- Ms Clare McNamara
- Dr Robyn Miller
- Ms Anita Veivers

## CSSA Staff

The Board would like to acknowledge the commitment and dedication of the staff during a year of significant change.

- Dr Ursula Stephens, CEO (until June 2021)
- Jo Zabar, Deputy CEO, Senior Director Strategic Operations & Economic Policy (until November 2020)
- Mary Jamieson, Director Corporate Services (until December 2020)
- Monique Earsman, Executive Officer (started November 2020)
- Gabrielle Hellenen-Simpson, contract research officer (until January 2021)
- Rosemary Spry, contract communication project manager (contractor until December 2020)
- Aurthur Treloar contract policy officer (until December 2020)

[cssa.org.au](http://cssa.org.au)



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