

CSSA CALLS FOR RENEWED FOCUS ON ENDING CHILD POVERTY

14 October 2024

Catholic Social Services Australia (CSSA) Agency Heads from around Australia convened at Parliament House on 9-10 October 2024 for a critical two-day advocacy event, engaging directly with Ministers, Shadow Ministers, and Members of Parliament from each of the main political parties. The event highlighted the growing challenges for social service providers across the nation: funding and indexation shortfalls, unprecedented community needs and the absolute importance of prioritising an end to child poverty.

Ron Johnson, Acting Executive Director of CSSA, spoke to the pressing concerns raised during the summit: "The unaffordability of residential land and housing are key factors in the declining standard of living for most Australians. Tragically, more families and children are being forced into poverty and extreme hardship. CSSA discussions have centred on both immediate aid measures and longer-term structural solutions. This is not just a job for our politicians - the whole Australian community can help to make better policy. We owe it to our children to put their needs first and to listen to their voices in this enormous battle against poverty."

Alicia Payne MP, the keynote speaker at the CSSA dinner, and a longstanding advocate for ending poverty, said "The impacts of growing up in poverty are deep and extend throughout life. For Government to address child poverty is to create a better future for those children and is an investment in our nation as a whole."

Alicia Payne added, "Social security policy is one of the most powerful tools governments have to address and prevent poverty. Throughout Australia's history, we have seen the ability of a strong social security system to address poverty and the benefits this brings, yet as a nation, we don't take the same pride in this system as we do in other pillars of our egalitarian society such as universal healthcare, public education, or award wages."

Peter Monaghan, Chair of CSSA and CEO of Marist180, reflected on the importance of these meetings: "We have an opportunity to bring attention to the most vulnerable in our communities. These discussions with government officials allow us to drive meaningful change on issues like poverty, youth justice and homelessness that have a profound impact on Australian families."

Ron Johnson concluded, "We need to remind ourselves of the vision and leadership shown by Pope Francis. For example, in *Evangelii Gaudium* he wrote: 'Each individual Christian and every community is called to be an instrument of God for the liberation and promotion of the poor, and for enabling them to be fully a part of society. This demands that we be docile and attentive to the cry of the poor and to come to their aid.'"

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Catholic Social Services Australia (CSSA) advocates for the Church's social service ministry. It is the national peak body for Catholic social service providers. The CSSA's network operates across all Australian States and Territories and has a combined total of over 700 sites.

The national network of Catholic social services