MEDIA RELEASE

Catholic Social Services Australia

CSSA Saddened and Appalled by Violent Attack on Federal MP, Dr Helen Haines

19 October 2026

Catholic Social Services Australia (CSSA) is deeply saddened and appalled by the violent attack on Dr Helen Haines, Federal Independent Member for Indi. Such acts of violence against any individual – especially those who serve the public with dedication and integrity – are profoundly disturbing. They strike at the heart of our community and the values that bind us together.

"Violence has no place in political discourse or public life. We repudiate any act that seeks to intimidate, harm, or silence those who serve democracy. Such behaviour is a betrayal of the respect and dignity every person deserves and an affront to our way of life," said Dr Jerry Nockles, CEO of Catholic Social Services Australia.

"Every human being is created in the image and likeness of God, endowed with an inherent and inviolable dignity that demands our respect and protection," said Dr Nockles. "The attack on Dr Haines wounds not only one person but the very fabric of our community."

Respect for the dignity of every person is foundational to social cohesion. If we are serious about building a cohesive society, we must learn to 'look through' difference and division to recognise the human dignity beneath. This requires moving beyond fear, contempt, and division, and embracing the inestimable value and worth in every individual.

The recent social justice statement from the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference on social cohesion echoes this call, urging all Australians to foster respect, dialogue, and solidarity.

"The Gospel calls us to love one another, to treat each other with compassion, and to uphold the sacredness of every human life," said Dr Nockles.

"Love is the cornerstone of our shared humanity. It is incumbent upon each of us – not only leaders or institutions – to live out this love daily, in our words and actions, fostering a culture of respect and peace. We cannot stand back and blame others when respect breaks down; the responsibility lies with all of us."

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The violent act against Dr Haines is a stark reminder of the urgent need to renew our commitment to civility, dialogue, and mutual respect in public life and beyond. Our democracy depends on recognising the dignity of all, including those with whom we disagree. Contempt corrodes the trust and solidarity essential for a just society.

In this difficult time, CSSA keeps Dr Haines, her family, and all those impacted by this senseless act in our prayers. We pray for healing, peace, and the strength to continue building a society where every person is valued and safe.

"We must remember that the dignity of each person is not negotiable. It is a gift and a responsibility. We all need to strive to embody love and respect in every encounter, so that peace and justice can flourish in our communities," Dr Nockles said.

CSSA recalls the recent teaching of Pope Leo XIV, who urges us to "get our hands dirty on the construction site of our time." This powerful metaphor challenges us to move beyond words and take practical, hands-on action to build a society that truly serves the common good.

"In this special Year of St Francis, we are also inspired by the beautiful words of his Prayer, which calls us to be instruments of peace – to sow love where there is hatred, light where there is darkness, joy where there is sadness, and to foster hope where there is despair. May these words guide us all as we seek to heal divisions and build a society rooted in love, dignity, and respect."

As a nation and as a people, we are called not only to condemn violence but to embody the values of respect, compassion, and solidarity in every aspect of our lives. Only then can we truly stand together against violence and build a future where every person is honoured and safe.

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About CSSA

CSSA is the national peak body for Catholic social service providers. CSSA's network of forty-two member agencies runs across all Australian States and Territories with a combined total of over seven hundred sites, delivering essential services to vulnerable and disadvantaged Australians.

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