



Jesuit Social Services is a social change organisation. We work with the most disadvantaged members of the community, providing services and advocacy in the areas of justice and crime prevention; mental health and well-being; settlement and community building; education, training and employment; gender and ecological justice.

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Jesuit Social Services' 2020-21 Pre-Budget Submission

Introduction

Jesuit Social Services has over 40 years' experience working with individuals and communities experiencing disadvantage. The people we work with are often living in disadvantaged areas and may have multiple and complex needs, histories of trauma or abuse, mental ill-health, disability or involvement with the justice system.

In supporting people to reach their full potential, we cannot ignore the structural barriers to participation that many people face, including poverty, locational disadvantage, a lack of appropriate housing and a social safety net that has been chronically underfunded. The imperative to address these factors underlines our submission to the 2020-21 Federal Budget.

In our submission, we call for a fairer social security system that enables people to maintain an adequate standard of living while they look for employment; a National Housing Strategy to meet the identified shortfall of 500,000 social and affordable homes over the next ten years; and reform of the employment services system to move away from inflexible obligations and excessive penalties that are simply punishing people who are not in work.

We also outline our case for more funding for settlement services, the crucial need to support people bereaved by suicide, and dedicated investment in better understanding the behaviours and attitudes of men and boys in order to reduce violence against women and children.

Some of these issues have persisted for too long, through government terms on both sides of politics, and require systemic reform. In devising this next Federal Budget, Jesuit Social Services calls on the government to devote resources and implement policies and practices that reduce inequality, prejudice and exclusion and that help ensure people on the margins of society are given every opportunity to lead healthy and fulfilling lives.

1. Ecological justice

It is increasingly clear that the impacts of climate change will disproportionately affect the most disadvantaged people and communities, exacerbating existing inequality and marginalisation. To help ensure that those least able to cope with climate change receive the support they need to successfully adapt, increasing attention is being paid to the idea of a ‘just transition’¹ – that is, how to move from current untenable economic and social systems to an ecologically sustainable, zero greenhouse gas emissions world in an effective and equitable way. Proactive policy responses, genuine community involvement and carefully targeted social protection will be crucial to achieving a just transition.

The community services sector has much to contribute to the realisation of a just transition, including engaging in education and advocacy initiatives and mobilising communities to address already complex cycles of disadvantage and inequality and build resilience. Equally, community organisations will need more support and training in order to effectively understand and address ecological injustice.

Climate
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recognising the serious and imminent risk posed by climate change to the planet and people, legislate an emissions reduction target of net zero by 2050 and set a clear path to a just transition to a low-carbon future.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase funding and resources for organisations and communities seeking to trial, test and implement climate change adaptation, mitigation and transformation activities.

2. Employment services

Weight of evidence clearly shows that the federal employment services system, with its focus on compliance and meeting narrowly prescribed outcomes, is failing disadvantaged people looking to secure work.² With current *jobactive* contracts extended until June 2022 while a government trial of a new model takes place in two regions, Jesuit Social Services believes that any new system must enable the time and resources to be invested in those who are most disadvantaged.³ The most effective support for disadvantaged people occurs through building a relationship with a person and taking the time to understand their capabilities, strengths, hopes and aspirations. Providers of support should focus on building foundational learning skills and participation in prevocational training that offer clear pathways to inclusion for disadvantaged and marginalised people. In addition, post-placement support and mentoring for individuals, as well as support for prospective employers, must be a focus of any new system.

The Community Development Program (CDP), the federal remote-area employment scheme, must also be overhauled. The scheme, which has around 30,000 participants, more than 80 per cent of whom are

¹ See, Jesuit Social Services (September 2019) *Expanding the conversation: Ecological Justice series Just Transitions*, <https://jss.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/PAP-20190912-Just-Transitions-FINAL.pdf>.

² Employment Services Expert Advisory Panel, *I Want to Work: Employment Services 2020*, https://docs.employment.gov.au/system/files/doc/other/final_-_i_want_to_work.pdf; Senate Education and Employment References Committee (February 2019) *Jobactive: failing those it is intended to serve*, https://parlinfo.aph.gov.au/parlinfo/download/committees/reportsen/024217/toc_pdf/Jobactivefailingthoseitisintendedtoserve.pdf;fileType=application%2Fpdf; ACOSS (August 2018) *Submission on Future Employment Services*, https://www.acoss.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/ACOSS_submission-on-future-employment-services_FINAL.pdf.

³ Jesuit Social Services, Submission to the Senate Education and Employment References Committee’s inquiry into *jobactive*, <https://jss.org.au/submission-to-the-senate-education-and-employment-references-committees-inquiry-into-jobactive/>.

Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander people, has failed to deliver meaningful training or employment outcomes while setting onerous requirements and significant penalties for compliance failures. Participants have been expected to undertake compulsory work, at an hourly rate below the minimum wage, within a centralised system that has led to a decline in local decision-making and discretion in its implementation. The current scheme should be replaced with a model in line with that proposed by Aboriginal Peak Organisations Northern Territory (APO NT) that is community-driven and fosters long-term collaboration across governments, employers, Indigenous organisations and communities.⁴ APO NT's proposal envisages a shift in resources away from the administration of compliance obligations and into participation and community development in remote areas, including work on services and projects identified by, and with value for, remote communities.

Social procurement

The capacity for Federal Government procurement spending to contribute social value should be meaningfully pursued. The size of government procurement contracts underlines the significant potential for a proportion of this spending to be targeted to achieving positive social outcomes, such as the targeting of recruitment to people who are unemployed, have low skill levels and who live in areas of high social disadvantage. While current Commonwealth Procurement Rules include reference to considerations such as environmental sustainability, decision-makers should also be required to consider social value and impact as part of procurement processes. In particular, there are opportunities for targeted social procurement to support and resource employment initiatives in communities experiencing high levels of social disadvantage.

Employment services
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Replace the compliance-focused <i>jobactive</i> model with a system that is responsive to the needs of disadvantaged people seeking work, with funding dedicated to intensive, flexible and individualised training and support, including post-placement support, for disadvantaged people.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Replace the Community Development Program with a model in line with that proposed by Aboriginal Peak Organisations Northern Territory that is: community-driven; based on genuine, long-term collaboration across governments, employers, Indigenous organisations and communities; and facilitates participation and community development in remote areas, including work on services and projects identified by, and with value for, remote communities.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implement a federal social procurement policy in order to positively impact social outcomes, with concrete employment targets for people experiencing barriers to inclusion.

⁴ See, Aboriginal Peak Organisations NT (APO NT) (May 2017) *Fair Work and Strong Communities: Proposal for a Remote Development and Employment Scheme*, <http://www.amsant.org.au/apont/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/RDES-Report-Online.pdf>.

3. Social security

People who receive income support are often among the most vulnerable in our community.⁵ This group of people, many of whom experience barriers to social and economic inclusion, will struggle to find work – and indeed may be systematically excluded from it – without effective, tailored support. Part of this support should include a fairer social security system that enables people to maintain an adequate standard of living while they look for employment.⁶ Newstart Allowance is simply not enough to live on.⁷ In fact, the payment is so low that it is now widely recognised as constituting a barrier to employment.⁸ Raising the level of income support will help reduce poverty and inequality in Australia, benefiting not just individuals who are struggling but the broader communities in which they live.

Jesuit Social Services sees the low rate of Newstart as part of a suite of concerning policy measures that undermine the dignity and personal agency of people experiencing multiple forms of disadvantage. Among these policies is the continued expansion of the cashless debit card trials which, in their current form, are imposed on communities on a mandatory basis, without adequate consultation, and without targeted assessments of a person’s suitability or level of need.⁹ The trials continue to be expanded without clear evidence that they are achieving what they purport to and with an apparent disregard for the body of evidence on the harmful impacts of these measures.¹⁰ Jesuit Social Services acknowledges that aspects of income management may be helpful for some individuals and families who choose to take part in it. However, such initiatives should always be voluntary; be informed and developed by communities; and be linked to other appropriate services as part of a holistic approach to supporting people in need.

Social security
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase the single rate of Newstart, Youth Allowance and related payments by a minimum of \$75 per week.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establish an independent social security commission to guide Parliament on future changes to income support rates and monitor indexation settings.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • End compulsory trials of the cashless debit card scheme and only pursue forms of income management that are voluntary, developed by communities and linked to other appropriate services as part of a holistic approach to supporting people in need.

⁵ Australian Council for Social Service (ACOSS) and Jobs Australia (September 2018) *Faces of unemployment*, https://www.acoss.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/ACOSS_JA_Faces-of-Unemployment_14-September-2018_web.pdf.

⁶ Jesuit Social Services (27 September 2019) Submission to the Senate Standing Committees on Community Affairs’ *Inquiry into the Adequacy of Newstart and related payments*, <https://jss.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/SUB-2019-Submission-for-Inquiry-into-Newstart-and-related-payments.pdf>.

⁷ ACOSS (July 2019) *“I regularly don’t eat at all”: Trying to get by on Newstart*, <https://www.acoss.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/190729-Survey-of-people-on-Newstart-and-Youth-Allowance.pdf>.

⁸ The Age (7 August 2013) *Employers agree Newstart a barrier for job seekers*, <https://www.smh.com.au/politics/federal/employers-agree-newstart-a-barrier-for-job-seekers-20130806-2rdhz.html>.

⁹ Jesuit Social Services (17 October 2019) Senate Standing Committee on Community Affairs’ inquiry into the *Social Security (Administration) Amendment (Income Management to Cashless Debit Card Transition) Bill 2019*, <https://jss.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/SUB-2019-Submission-on-cashless-debit-card-bill-Jesuit-Social-Services-FINAL.pdf>.

¹⁰ See, for example, E. Vincent (2019), *Lived Experiences of the Cashless Debit Card Trial, Ceduna, South Australia*, Working Paper 129/2019, Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research, Australian National University, Canberra; WACOSS (7 March 2019) Submission to the Senate Community Affairs Legislation Committee inquiry into the *Social Security (Administration) Amendment (Income Management and Cashless Welfare) Bill 2019*, <https://wacoss.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/Cashless-Debit-Card-Submission-2019.pdf>.

4. Settlement services

Funding SETS

Funding for settlement services must allow for tailored and flexible support that mirrors the non-linear journey toward successful settlement that many newly arrived people experience. Jesuit Social Services believes that services funded under the Settlement Engagement and Transition Support (SETS) Program should be able to respond to the settlement needs of people beyond the current post-arrival five year period of eligibility. A similarly flexible approach should be adopted with regard to English language support provided through the Adult Migrant English Program.

Interpreting services

Interpreting services play a vital role in assisting newly arrived people to navigate the complexities of starting over in a new country and fully engaging with the services and support they need. This assistance is not only a practical necessity but also a key personal support for often vulnerable people who may be experiencing social isolation. From 2019, the SETS programs have incurred the costs of engaging interpreters – an expense that was previously covered by the Commonwealth as part of contracted services. This is an additional cost with no additional funding to cover it and means that service providers are having to carefully consider the engagement of interpreters from a budgeting perspective, with potential impacts on the effectiveness of support.

SRSS cuts

The Federal Government’s recent changes to the Status Resolution Support Services (SRSS) have significantly reduced the number of people eligible for this vital support, placing people seeking asylum at risk of destitution and increasing demands on the community services they turn to for support. As the Asylum Seeker Resource Centre notes, changes to SRSS eligibility have “increased the need for people seeking asylum to find work (any work) without adequate support to develop their capacity to do so, or adequate guards against their exploitation in the local labour market.”¹¹ The tightening of eligibility requirements for the SRSS program should be reversed to ensure that vulnerable people are able to access this vital social support.

Settlement services
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enable services funded under the Settlement Engagement and Transition Support Program to be able to respond to the settlement needs of newly arrived people beyond the current post-arrival five year period of eligibility.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase investment in interpreter services for Settlement Engagement and Transition Support services and reinstate a dedicated funding stream to complement settlement service contracts.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Restore access to the SRSS program for all vulnerable people seeking asylum who are facing financial hardship as they wait for the outcome of their applications for asylum.

¹¹ Asylum Seeker Resource Centre (April 2019) *Towards an optimal employment strategy for people seeking asylum in Victoria*, https://www.asrc.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2013/04/ASRC-Employment-Research-Report_W_FA.pdf.

5. People seeking asylum

Over decades, Australia's contribution to resettling vulnerable people fleeing violence or persecution has been significant. We also have the resources to do more, and we should.

The number of people displaced around the world is staggeringly high and continues to grow. According to the UNHCR's latest statistics, there are 70.8 million people forcibly displaced worldwide – double the level of 20 years ago.¹² Despite the level of need, only 92,400 refugees were resettled in 2018, representing less than 7 per cent of people awaiting resettlement.¹³

Australia's contribution to a humane, coordinated and effective global response has been diminished by domestic policies that punish people seeking asylum, including offshore detention; prolonged and mandatory immigration detention; and temporary protection visas. Jesuit Social Services believes these policies should be reversed.

In addition to the clear moral imperative to offer vulnerable people a chance to rebuild their lives, the case to pursue a more generous humanitarian program makes economic sense. Recent research by Deloitte Access Economics found that increasing Australia's humanitarian program intake to 44,000 people per year by 2023 would boost the size of the economy by \$37.7 billion in the next 50 years; sustain on average an additional 35,000 full time jobs each year; and increase demand for goods and services by \$18.2 billion.¹⁴

Offshore processing has damaged too many lives. It has also cost billions of dollars.¹⁵ Reopening Christmas Island alone reportedly cost almost \$27 million up to 31 August 2019,¹⁶ with only four people – a family – detained there. While the cost of detaining a person in offshore detention has been estimated at more than \$573,000 per year, in contrast, providing for a person to live in the community while their claim for asylum is assessed is estimated at \$10,221.¹⁷

People seeking asylum

- **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 the most vulnerable refugees.**

¹² UNHCR (19 June 2019) 'Worldwide displacement tops 70 million, UN Refugee Chief urges greater solidarity in response', <https://www.unhcr.org/en-au/news/press/2019/6/5d03b22b4/worldwide-displacement-tops-70-million-un-refugee-chief-urges-greater-solidarity.html>.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Deloitte Access Economics and Oxfam Australia (August 2019) *Economic and social impact of increasing Australia's humanitarian intake*, <https://www2.deloitte.com/content/dam/Deloitte/au/Documents/Economics/deloitte-au-economics-social-impact-increasing-australias-humanitarian-intake-280819.pdf>.

¹⁵ <https://uploads.guim.co.uk/2017/07/18/BE17210.pdf>.

¹⁶ SBS (22 October 2019) Christmas Island detention centre cost \$27 million to 'detain four people', <https://www.sbs.com.au/news/christmas-island-detention-centre-cost-27-million-to-detain-four-people>.

¹⁷ See, Andrew & Renata Kaldor Centre for International Refugee Law (12 September 2019) *The Cost of Australia's Asylum And Refugee Policies: A Source Guide*, https://www.kaldorcentre.unsw.edu.au/sites/default/files/Factsheet_Cost%20of%20Australias%20asylum%20and%20refugee%20policy_Sept2019.pdf; ASRC, Save the Children, GetUp! (2019) *At What Cost?* http://cdn.getup.org.au/2710-1912_At_What_Cost_report.pdf.

- **End the punitive approach toward people seeking asylum, including by abolishing Temporary Protection Visas, ending offshore processing, and ensuring against prolonged and indefinite detention by introducing legislative timeframes for immigration detention.**
- **Enhance access to family reunion for refugee and humanitarian entrants, including considering the Refugee Council of Australia’s recommendation¹⁸ 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.**
- **Significantly increase financial support for the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR).**
- **Pursue complementary pathways to resettlement, in addition to the Humanitarian Program, including community sponsorship, as set out in the ‘Investing in Refugees’ inquiry report.¹⁹**

6. Mental health

With an estimated one in five Australians experiencing mental ill-health in any one year,²⁰ improving responses to mental illness must be a national priority. The Federal Government’s 2019-20 Budget contained welcome investment in mental health services, including the \$114.5 million to trial eight community mental health centres. However, it is widely recognised that major structural reform in mental health and suicide prevention is needed in order to help ensure people are able to access the level of care they need, local to where they live. Separate inquiries by the Productivity Commission and the Royal Commission into Victoria’s Mental Health System will offer valuable insight into where pressing reforms are needed.

The Productivity Commission’s draft report on mental health, released in October 2019, is welcome in examining the broader systems and structures that impact on and interact with mental health service delivery and outcomes, including housing, social services, employment and the justice system. Jesuit Social Services believes that governments must take a holistic approach to addressing mental ill-health, with greater attention paid to the role of factors such as poverty and disadvantage as key determinants of health and well-being, and the interaction of co-existing issues such as substance abuse and histories of trauma.

Many of the draft recommendations in the Productivity Commission’s report offer important direction for the Federal Government. These include recommendations for:

- A nationally consistent formal policy of no exits into homelessness for people with mental illness who are discharged from institutions such as hospitals and prisons.
- A National Mental Health and Suicide Prevention Agreement between all levels of government that would include the clarification of responsibilities to fund and deliver particular mental health services and suicide prevention activities to ensure maximum coverage.

¹⁸ Refugee Council of Australia (March 2019) *A New Opportunity for Global Leadership: Options for Australia’s Refugee and Humanitarian Program in 2019-20*, https://www.refugeecouncil.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/intake_submission_2019_2020_RCOA_final.pdf.

¹⁹ Peter Shergold, Kerrin Benson and Margaret Piper (February 2019) *Investing in Refugees, Investing in Australia: the findings of a Review into Integration, Employment and Settlement Outcomes for Refugees and Humanitarian Entrants in Australia*, <https://www.homeaffairs.gov.au/reports-and-pubs/files/review-integration-employment-settlement-outcomes-refugees-humanitarian-entrants.pdf>.

²⁰ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (9 Oct 2019) *Mental health services in Australia*, <https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports-data/health-welfare-services/mental-health-services/overview>.



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- Care coordination services that are available to all who need them, including people with complex needs and/or severe mental illness and people who do not qualify for the NDIS.

We look forward to the Commission’s final report following further input from interested parties and, subsequently, the government’s timely response.

Postvention support

One area of suicide prevention that receives comparatively less policy attention is the crucial need for postvention support. We know from our experience delivering Support After Suicide throughout Melbourne and regional Victoria since 2004 that the experience of bereavement after suicide is complex and prolonged and people who don’t receive the help they need from specialists in the postvention field often have mental health issues in the long-term. It is critical to recognise the risk of suicide amongst those who are bereaved by suicide. The stark reality is that some of our participants present as suicidal. However, postvention support delivered by experienced practitioners reduces this risk.

For Support After Suicide, however, there is a lack of certainty regarding ongoing funding provided by the Commonwealth. Additionally, while Support After Suicide operates in regional areas (the Macedon Ranges and Geelong), its ability to provide robust services, in spite of increased demand, is limited due to restricted funding. In Jesuit Social Services’ view, in Victoria, there are not enough services available for people bereaved by suicide, particularly in rural and regional areas.

Jesuit Social Services is currently finalising research with family members who are bereaved by suicide, investigating service system issues. As part of the research, more than 140 Support After Suicide participants have undertaken an online survey. This study seeks to understand what information and support was provided to family members following a suicide. While the findings of this important research are still being finalised, the comments of many participants point to multiple systemic issues experienced by people who are bereaved by suicide and underline the importance of postvention services. Building on this forthcoming study, further dedicated research will be required to develop a strong evidence base on the impact of suicide on others, and the effectiveness of bereavement support in reducing risk.

Mental health
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide secure, long-term funding for postvention services, including access to postvention services for regional and rural areas.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide funding for a dedicated research stream to develop an evidence base on the impact of suicide and the effectiveness of postvention services in reducing risk.

7. Housing

A lack of safe, secure and stable housing is a major issue for many in our community, and particularly for people with mental illness, multiple and complex needs and young people who may be transitioning from out-of-home care or the justice system. Our experience tells us that the provision of public, social and affordable housing helps build safer and more cohesive communities and that long-term housing is integral to help people experiencing disadvantage to live fulfilling lives.

For people on low incomes or those receiving government income support, affording rent is a significant challenge. Anglicare Australia's tenth Rental Affordability Snapshot, which surveyed over 69,000 private rental listings across Australia on a particular weekend in March 2019, found that only two properties across Australia were affordable for a person on Newstart or Youth Allowance.²¹ While people receiving certain social security payments may be eligible for Commonwealth Rent Assistance, the current level of this crucial support is too low. Government data shows that 57.4 per cent of young people aged 24 years or under receiving Rent Assistance are in housing affordability stress – meaning more than 30 per cent of their gross income goes to rental payments.²²

As documented by the Productivity Commission, Commonwealth Rent Assistance, which is indexed against the consumer price index, has lagged behind average rents over the past 20 years.²³ Jesuit Social Services supports the position of the Australian Council of Social Service (ACOSS) that the rate and indexation of Commonwealth Rent Assistance should be reviewed and that, as a first step, the payment should be increased by 30 per cent (or, approximately \$20 per week) to support low-income households.

The low rate of crucial government support such as Newstart Allowance and Commonwealth Rent Assistance, combined with a serious undersupply of social housing, is placing a growing number of Australians at risk of entrenched disadvantage.²⁴ With around 195,000 households awaiting social housing allocation²⁵ and a growing number of people in need, large-scale investment in social housing stock is urgently needed. It was recently estimated that over 727,000 new social dwellings will be required to address the shortfall in social housing over the next 20 years.²⁶ With this identified need, it is concerning that social housing has declined as a share of the total Australian housing stock from 5.1 per cent in 2001 to 4.2 per cent in 2016.²⁷

²¹ To measure affordability, Anglicare Australia uses the benchmark that rent should be no more than 30 per cent of a household budget for it "not to cause financial stress and hardship". Anglicare Australia, *Rental Affordability Snapshot*, National Report / April 2019, <https://www.anglicare.asn.au/docs/default-source/default-document-library/final---rental-affordability-snapshota302da309d6962baacc1ff0000899bca.pdf?sfvrsn=4>.

²² Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute (7 March 2019) *Why are young people receiving CRA experiencing Housing Affordability Stress?* <https://www.ahuri.edu.au/policy/ahuri-briefs/why-are-young-people-on-commonwealth-rent-assistance-experiencing-housing-affordability-stress>.

²³ Productivity Commission (2019) *Vulnerable Private Renters: Evidence and Options*, Commission Research Paper, <https://www.pc.gov.au/research/completed/renters/private-renters.pdf>.

²⁴ Committee for Economic Development of Australia (2019) *Disrupting disadvantage: setting the scene*, https://www.ceda.com.au/CEDA/media/General/Publication/PDFs/CEDA_DisruptingDisadvantagesS1Nov2019_com.pdf.

²⁵ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (2019) *National Social Housing Survey 2018: Key results*, <https://www.aihw.gov.au/getmedia/46555204-b4ca-4429-9d1a-a1797e6a06cd/aihw-hou-311.pdf.aspx?inline=true>.

²⁶ Lawson, J., Pawson, H., Troy, L., van den Nouwelant, R. and Hamilton, C. (2018) *Social housing as infrastructure: an investment pathway*, Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute, <http://www.ahuri.edu.au/research/final-reports/306>.

²⁷ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (2019) *National Social Housing Survey 2018: Key results*, <https://www.aihw.gov.au/getmedia/46555204-b4ca-4429-9d1a-a1797e6a06cd/aihw-hou-311.pdf.aspx?inline=true>.

Jesuit Social Services supports the *Everybody's Home* campaign,²⁸ led by the Council to Homeless Persons and Homelessness Australia, which calls on the Federal Government to develop a National Housing Strategy to meet the identified shortfall of 500,000 social and affordable homes over the next ten years and determine the respective roles of federal, state and local governments required to achieve this.

Housing
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review the rate and indexation of Commonwealth Rent Assistance and, as an immediate first step, increase the payment by 30 per cent (or, approximately \$20 per week) to support low-income households.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop a National Housing Strategy and increase investment in social housing to meet the identified shortfall of at least 500,000 social and affordable homes in Australia over the next ten years.

8. Gender justice

Research shows that gender inequality and narrow, rigid gender stereotypes are bad for all of us, keeping women and men from living safe and healthy lives and contributing to violence and other harmful behaviours.

The impact of male perpetrated violence on women, children, families and men themselves is profound. The focus has been, as it should be, on supporting the victims of this violence. But we must also address the root causes of the problem by 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 their communities.

We need to promote positive change around gender norms and stereotypes and what it means to be a healthy and respectful man, while also focusing on contributing factors to male violence like mental health problems, substance abuse and social isolation. Jesuit Social Services' The Men's Project is working with boys and men to understand their attitudes and behaviours and support them to establish meaningful relationships, to build hopes and aspirations, and to fully realise their potential.

Supporting role models for change

We believe that role models – both male and female – in the places where boys and men live, work, and meet are crucial. We want to support role models who interact with boys and men on a regular basis so they can challenge limiting and harmful stereotypes and promote respect and equality.

This is why we have developed the [Modelling Respect and Equality](#) (MoRE) program, to support participants to develop greater self-awareness, build a deeper understanding of key issues, learn how to model and promote positive change, and recognise and challenge problematic attitudes and behaviours. Ongoing support is offered for participants to identify and action opportunities and activities in their own communities.

We commend the Federal Government for committing to funding, across the 2019-20 to 2021-22 financial years, primary prevention activities that encourage men to be positive role models.²⁹ We call for this

²⁸ <https://everybodyshome.com.au/>.

²⁹ <https://www.communitygrants.gov.au/grants/men-role-models-preventing-violence>.

funding to continue.

The Man Box research

Evidence from research into men's behaviours and attitudes conducted overseas has found that adherence to social pressures to behave like a 'real man' is related to the use of violence, and in poorer outcomes for men across a range of areas. The Men's Project [undertook a similar study](#), *The Man Box*, released in October 2018 – the first comprehensive study that focuses on the attitudes to manhood and the behaviours of young Australian men aged 18 to 30.

The 'Man Box' is a set of beliefs within and across society that place pressure on men to be a certain way – to be tough; not to show any emotions; to be the breadwinner; to always be in control; use violence to solve problems; and to have many sexual partners. Findings show that the Man Box is alive and well in Australia today. The majority of young men agree there are social pressures on them to behave or act a certain way because of their gender. Living up to the pressures of being a 'real man' causes harm to young men and those around them.

Young men who most strongly agree with these rules report poorer levels of mental health, engage in risky drinking, are more likely to be in car accidents and to report committing acts of violence, online bullying and sexual harassment. Of these young men, 44 per cent had thoughts of suicide in the last two weeks (twice as likely as those outside The Man Box); 56 per cent perpetrated verbal bullying in the past month; 46 per cent made sexual comments to women they didn't know in a public place in the past month; and 83 per cent reported having little interest or pleasure in doing things in the last two weeks.

Further analysis broke survey respondents into five groups (quintiles) depending on their composite scores on the Man Box scale. This analysis found that, although those who more strongly endorsed the Man Box rules had higher levels of life satisfaction than young men in other quintiles, this group also had the highest suicidal ideation rate. This demonstrated the somewhat complex and contradictory nature of life inside the Man Box.

Given these findings, there must be a renewed focus on addressing these attitudes and behaviours in relevant policy areas including mental health and wellbeing, crime prevention, alcohol harm reduction and road safety. Further detailed research should also be undertaken to better understand the behaviours and attitudes of men and boys in relation to The Man Box norms. This is in keeping with the Department of Health's *National Men's Health Strategy 2020–2030* – specifically, objective 3, which identifies a need to build the evidence base for improving the health and wellbeing of men and boys through investment in research.³⁰

Responding to adolescent family violence

Jesuit Social Services is developing and trialling new ways of working with adolescents who commit family violence, including through *Starting Over*, an adolescent family violence pilot program working with adolescents and their families in Western Sydney. This work draws on our experience using restorative justice in responding to youth offending, and offers a Family Group Conference process for young people

³⁰ Department of Health (2019) *National Men's Health Strategy 2020-2030*, [https://www1.health.gov.au/internet/main/publishing.nsf/content/86BBADC780E6058CCA257BF000191627/\\$File/19-0320%20National%20Mens%20Health%20Strategy%20Print%20ready%20accessible1.pdf](https://www1.health.gov.au/internet/main/publishing.nsf/content/86BBADC780E6058CCA257BF000191627/$File/19-0320%20National%20Mens%20Health%20Strategy%20Print%20ready%20accessible1.pdf).

who have committed family violence. Importantly, the process of preparing for a Conference seeks to build trust and empathy and identify supports that the family may benefit from. This work is being undertaken in collaboration with schools and local community organisations, and is being evaluated by experts from the University of Melbourne.

While *Starting Over* has received some Federal funding, the program is due to conclude in December this year, when the funding ends. Jesuit Social Services is calling for a commitment for ongoing and longer term funding for this important program. In addition, the current age of eligibility is 10 to 16 years old. Intervention is needed even earlier, to work with children at the first signs of vulnerability to violence.

A ‘What Works’ Centre for preventing violence

As acknowledged in the Fourth Action Plan of the *National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children 2010-2022*, the evidence of what works to reduce violence and inform responses is “far from complete.” One of the Fourth Action Plan’s priority areas is to build this evidence base through dedicated research and data projects, in addition to the important research led by Australia’s National Research Organisation for Women’s Safety (ANROWS).³¹

In line with the Fourth Action Plan, Jesuit Social Services proposes the establishment of a ‘What Works’ Centre to improve the creation, sharing and use of high-quality evidence on the prevention of male violence, and help drive more effective evidence-informed policy and decision-making in this area. ‘What Works’ Centres have been established in various forms overseas, including in the United Kingdom which has built a network of centres covering a broad range of policy areas to ensure that policy-making and practice across the public service is informed by the best available evidence and advice.

We envisage that a ‘What Works’ Centre could serve the following key functions:

- Independent, unbiased synthesis of high-quality research and evidence to inform decisions and identify gaps in knowledge to guide future research, trials and related projects.
- Support the implementation of primary prevention projects, including through providing appropriate training, developing implementation guidelines and drawing on the best available data to inform practices.
- Conduct rigorous evaluations of violence prevention programs and related initiatives to understand which programs and approaches are genuinely effective and to drive continuous improvement.

A ‘What Works’ Centre would help existing services working in violence prevention to refine their approaches, build the evidence base and influence better informed policy. Establishing this centre would demonstrate a significant, ongoing commitment to ending violence against women and children.

Preventing child sexual abuse

There are currently no national early interventions in Australia for adults, children and young people who are worried about their sexual thoughts or behaviours in relation to children. The gap in preventative

³¹ Commonwealth of Australia (Department of Social Services) 2019, Fourth Action Plan of the *National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children 2010-2022* https://www.dss.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/10_2019/fourth-action-plan-single-page-printer-friendly.pdf.

interventions for potential perpetrators was identified by the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse.

Through the Men’s Project, Jesuit Social Services is working to address this gap. One initiative we are recommending for application in Australia is *Stop It Now!*, a secondary prevention program that operates successfully in North America, the United Kingdom, Ireland, and the Netherlands, and has also previously operated on a small scale in Queensland. This program was highlighted as a potential model to adopt in the National Child Sexual Abuse Prevention Strategy recommended by the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse.³²

A key feature of *Stop It Now!* is a national confidential and anonymous phone helpline that provides information and support for people who are worried about their own sexual thoughts and behaviours, as well as parents, family-members, and professionals who are concerned about actual or potential child sexual abuse. The phone helpline and text contact facility would balance engagement with accountability, provide information, complete safety planning based on a comprehensive risk assessment, and facilitate referrals for additional assistance (in compliance with legal and mandatory reporting obligations). The program would also include a website with advice, self-help materials and guidance to raise awareness around child abuse, as well as links to a network of partner agencies who would refer to and receive referrals from *Stop It Now!* Australia.

As part of The Men’s Project, Jesuit Social Services, in collaboration with the University of Melbourne, has assessed the feasibility of a *Stop It Now!* phone helpline. Discussions with a wide range of stakeholders revealed strong support for a *Stop It Now!* program in Australia. A copy of the full scoping study including the proposed preliminary models and recommendations for its operation in Australia is [available here](#).

We estimate that a national pilot over four years could be delivered at a cost of approximately \$2 million per year. The Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse noted that telephone and online interventions can be as effective as face-to-face services, are cost-effective, and can be accessed from regional and remote areas.³³ The economic evaluation in the UK found estimated benefits of up to £6.15m per annum – over 15 times larger than annual costs.³⁴

Gender justice
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue to fund activities that encourage men to be positive role models, challenge limiting and harmful stereotypes and promote respect and equality.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Invest in research to better understand the behaviours and attitudes of men and boys in relation to The Man Box norms, in line with the Department of Health’s <i>National Men’s Health Strategy 2020–2030</i>, which identifies a need to build the evidence base for improving the health and wellbeing of men and boys.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Commit to funding <i>Starting Over</i> on a long term basis to provide restorative responses to adolescents showing violent behaviour in the home, and lower the age of eligibility for the program.

³² Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse, Final Report, Recommendations, https://www.childabuseroyalcommission.gov.au/sites/default/files/final_report_-_recommendations.pdf.

³³ Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse, Final Report, Making institutions child safe, p. 95, https://www.childabuseroyalcommission.gov.au/sites/default/files/final_report_-_recommendations.pdf.

³⁴ Bowles, R. (2014) *Economic analysis of the Stop it Now! UK and Stop it Now! Netherlands Helplines: Summary*, <http://natcen.ac.uk/media/338803/stop-it-now-economic-analysis.pdf>.

- **Fund the establishment of a ‘What Works’ Centre for preventing violence against women and children to improve the creation, sharing and use of high-quality evidence to inform policy and decision-making.**
- **Invest in national early intervention programs in Australia for adults, children and young people who are worried about their sexual thoughts or behaviours in relation to children, including funding *Stop it Now!* We estimate that a national *Stop it Now!* pilot over four years could be delivered at a cost of approximately \$2 million per year.**