



Catholic Social  
Services **Australia**

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Treasury

2021-22 Pre-budget

The national network of Catholic social services

# About Us



Catholic Social Services Australia (CSSA) is the national body representing more than 15,000 workers and volunteers in more than 650 locations throughout Australia. We are a national body of over 50 member organisations providing social and community services across our Catholic network, reaching more than one million vulnerable Australians through more than 300 different service offerings each year. CSSA represents the social services mission of the Catholic Church and undertakes advocacy on matters of social justice, inclusion, human rights, inequality and policies that are informed by research and the practical experience of our network.

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# Table of Contents

<b>OVERVIEW</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS</b>	<b>2</b>
Introduction	3
<b>1. REVIEW OF THE SOCIAL WELFARE SYSTEM</b>	<b>4</b>
Compulsory Income Management	6
Bushfire Response and Recovery	6
National Food Waste Tax Initiative	7
<b>2. A FULL EMPLOYMENT ECONOMY</b>	<b>8</b>
Delivering jobs through the care sector	8
Improving Australia's Employment Programs:	9
<b>3. RECONCILIATION</b>	<b>11</b>
Closing the Gap	11
National Voice	11
<b>4. AFFORDABLE AND SOCIAL HOUSING</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>5. CLIMATE ACTION</b>	<b>14</b>



## Overview

Our members work to support a cohesive, inclusive and just society where everyone has the opportunity to thrive, flourish and develop their full potential. CSSA's work is underpinned by Catholic Social Teachings principles: solidarity, the preferential option for the poor and vulnerable, the rights of workers, the dignity of work and protection and care for the environment.

Australia's effective management of the COVID-19 pandemic has provided a level of freedom and security compared to other parts of the world and allowed economic activity to resume. However, the country will continue to be affected by the events of 2020 for some years and some sectors are facing the challenge of longer-term reform. As Australia looks to rebuild its economy following the COVID-19 crisis, CSSA argues that government attention should be on developing a people-focused economy that is built around the principle of full employment and participation.

The care sector is one such area that has responded with innovation and nimbleness to the Covid-19 restrictions, ensuring that those most vulnerable in the community continue to be well cared for. However, the Royal Commissions into both Aged Care<sup>1</sup> and Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of people with Disability have identified the staffing and resource inadequacies, systemic issues, neglect and failed policy within these sectors. As a matter of urgency, strategic investment is needed to sustain and create jobs in the care sector.

The COVID-19 crisis has highlighted the importance of considering the care sector as integral to a more resilient and diverse economy for Australia. Not only are there immediate economic benefits to be gained, but sector research has documented the health and care burdens of Australia's ageing population and the anticipated care workforce required in aged care, homecare and disability services. The COVID-19 recovery period provides the opportunity to invest in social infrastructure needs: social housing, community services, and the care workforce – all of which will provide stimulus to the economy and help to prepare the workforce of the future.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://agedcare.royalcommission.gov.au/publications/interim-report>

## SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Establish an independent expert panel to **review Australia's welfare system**; examining the adequacy of all current welfare payment rates, including pensions and reform measures
2. **Retain JobSeeker** at a level that enables people living on income support to live with dignity
3. **Reject** the concept of **compulsory income management** for welfare recipients
4. Invest in a **5-year plan** for wellbeing and community **recovery in disaster-affected areas**
5. **Increase funding for support services** for family violence, housing, alcohol and other drugs support services across Australia, especially in disaster affected areas
6. Support a **National Food Waste Tax Initiative**
7. Develop a **national strategy** for developing and supporting our **Care Sector Workforce**
8. **Expand the JobMaker Hiring Credit criteria** to include eligibility based on length of unemployment
9. **Initiate a Jobs Guarantee** program creating work in areas of community benefit
10. Commit to **greater engagement and participation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people** in decision making to improve their life chances and **Closing the Gap**
11. Support the **Indigenous National Voice to Parliament** proposals and an implementation timeframe within this Parliamentary term
12. Invest in a **National Social Housing Infrastructure Strategy** for responsive and productive social housing to tackle levels of housing stress and homelessness
13. **Adopt a National Strategy on Climate Change, Health and Well-being**
14. Set a **net-zero emissions target by 2050**

## Introduction

Federal and State governments' economic stimulus measures have helped to soften some of the financial impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. While these measures are essential, they will not be enough. The COVID-19 pandemic has exposed weaknesses in the Australian economy which will necessitate structural reform. This will require governments, business, unions and civil society to work together to create a new and inclusive economy that has a broader economic base, improved economic growth and is able to deliver full employment.

To achieve this we call on government to:

- work with business and civil society to drive economic development and growth in order to create an inclusive full-employment economy, where everyone who wants work can be employed;
- to invest in the care sector, where the demand for jobs will continue to grow;
- to implement a job guarantee program, targeted to communities or groups where private sector employment opportunities are limited;
- to reform our social security system to ensure that payments are adequate to enable those without work to live with dignity;
- to modernise our industrial relations system in support of a full-employment economy, and incentivise and reward employers who provide secure employment, while ensuring that the potential of the gig and digital economies enhance the living standards of all Australians; and
- to leverage our tax system to encourage strategic investments that will broaden our economic base, provide sufficient revenue to fund the services Australians require and improve equity within the system.

These critical reforms will take time to develop and implement but serve as a blueprint for the recovery and future sustainability of the Australian economy.

## 1. Review of the Social Welfare System

The McClure Review<sup>2</sup> in 2015 recommendations included a simpler and sustainable income support system. The complexity of our social security payments system and its management has resulted in many confusing and poorly defined arrangements, as well as poor policy initiatives such as the “Robodebt” fiasco, which caused immense stress for thousands of Australians and embarrassment for government.

In 2020 the Government responded to a national advocacy campaign to “Raise the Rate” by renaming Newstart to JobSeeker and temporarily increasing the payment.

During COVID-19 a single person without dependents on JobSeeker received a payment of \$1,115.70 per fortnight, comprising \$565.70 JobSeeker Payment and a \$550 Coronavirus Supplement. The Coronavirus Supplement for JobSeeker was reduced on 28 September 2020 from \$550 to \$250 per fortnight. The JobSeeker payment rate is still under review by government.

In April 2020 the Senate Community Affairs References Committee released its report on the adequacy of the Newstart payment (now JobSeeker).<sup>3</sup> The report made 27 recommendations around JobSeeker and related payments. Key amongst these was that the Australian government immediately undertake a review of the income support system to ensure that all eligible income support recipients do not live in poverty.

The Committee’s report found that the inadequacy of JobSeeker is a barrier to employment, noting that:

*the evidence indicates that the income support system itself is acting as a key barrier to employment because of the inadequate payment rates that force people into poverty, the flaws in the design of mutual obligation requirements and the inefficiency of employment programs. Further, some income support recipients experience additional challenges that further compromise their ability to secure work, which often results in long-term unemployment.*<sup>4</sup>

The Social Policy Research Centre (SPRC) has calculated the amount of money that is required to provide a minimally adequate standard of living: the Minimum Income for Healthy Living (MIHL). For a single adult with no children, the level of the MIHL is \$460 and for a couple with two children, it is \$814 each week.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.dss.gov.au/review-of-australias-welfare-system>

<sup>3</sup> Senate Community Affairs References Committee, 2020, “Inquiry Into Adequacy of Newstart and Related Payments and Alternative Mechanisms to Determine the Level of Income Support Payments in Australia”, April 2020.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid, xviii.

<sup>5</sup> [http://povertyandinequality.acoss.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/Inequality-in-Australia-2020-Part-1\\_FINAL.pdf](http://povertyandinequality.acoss.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/Inequality-in-Australia-2020-Part-1_FINAL.pdf)

The following table shows the level of the JobSeeker payment compared to other payments and wages.

	<b>Per week</b>	<b>Per fortnight</b>	<b>Annual</b>
Average Wage FT	\$1,713.90	\$3,427.80	\$89,122.80
Average Wage (all)	\$1,304.70	\$2,609.40	\$67,844.40
Minimum Wage	\$753.80	\$1,507.60	\$39,197.60
Pension (Age)	\$472.15	\$944.30	\$24,551.80
JobSeeker + Corona Supp	\$407.85	\$815.70	\$21,208.20
JobSeeker	\$282.85	\$565.70	\$14,708.20

The combined income from allowances, when family payments and rent assistance are added, is significantly lower than the amount required for an adequate minimum standard of living. This shortfall has serious consequences for every aspect of the lives of people forced to rely on government income support.

Data from the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) confirms that low income households cannot currently afford necessities such as rent, food, energy, transport and health. There is a broad consensus that lifting the level of Newstart would have flow on benefits for the economy and for the well-being of the community. Therefore, CSSA urges the government to retain the JobSeeker payment at a level that enables those people living on income support to do so with dignity. JobSeeker cannot be reduced to the previous Newstart level without causing significant harm.

By providing broadened and accessible financial assistance packages to those in need at the height of the pandemic, the stigma around helping the less fortunate was subsequently eroded. The possibility of needing assistance was very real to all and layers of emotional insulation were pared back by the realisation that job losses were happening across the economy and no one was immune to the impact. Everyone was in the same boat, floating along the same river and lacking control over the destination.

The ANU Centre for Social Research and Methods<sup>6</sup> estimated that the JobKeeper/JobSeeker Schemes lowered the number of people in poverty by 32%. Importantly it found that the additional support also flattened out poverty across the wealth spectrum with only modestly lower poverty in higher wealth households compared to lower wealth households. This resultant redistribution of wealth is something to which we should aspire.

<sup>6</sup> <https://csmr.cass.anu.edu.au/research/publications/covid-19-jobkeeper-and-jobseeker-impacts-poverty-and-housing-stress>  
 CSSA 2021-22 Prebudget Submission\_210128

The McClure Review made numerous recommendations for reform that were not adopted by the Australian government. That review in 2015, predates the significant changes that have occurred within the Australian economy because of COVID-19. The welfare payment system and the manner in which payments are set is in need of an urgent review. Without properly addressing the adequacy of the JobSeeker payment, unemployed Australians, especially those who are long-term unemployed, will struggle to re-enter the labour market.

CSSA continues to call for the establishment of an independent expert panel to examine the adequacy of all current welfare payment rates, including pensions. This panel should be established with the view to advise the Australian Government on the level of payment necessary to enable those dependent on welfare payments to receive an adequate level of income to enable them to live with dignity.

### **Compulsory Income Management**

The *Social Security (Administration) Amendment (Income Management to Cashless Debit Card Transition) Bill 2020* was referred to a Senate Inquiry. The bill contained measures to expand the trial sites for the use of the Cashless Debit Card despite evidence from its own evaluation studies that compulsory income management is ineffective in reducing social harm.<sup>7</sup>

The Australian National Audit Office (ANAO) has also concluded that the evaluation commissioned by the Department of Social Security was inadequate. Submissions to the Senate Inquiry overwhelmingly rejected the government's claims that the Cashless Debit Card reduces family violence and many deemed the measure to be both paternalistic and racist, given that the targeted welfare recipients of the legislation were overwhelmingly in indigenous communities.

CSSA has always argued that income management is not a substitute for measures that promote self-reliance. The overall aim of any form of income management should be to enable individuals and families to take control of their own lives including with assistance from trusted, local services that can provide "wrap around" support.

In communities where alcohol and drug addiction are prevalent CSSA members advise that families and children are impacted greatly through family and community violence. In locations where there are high levels of violence, there is a philosophical tension between individual rights and the best interests of the community. There are no simple answers to addressing this issue. Responses need to be locally tailored; taking into account a diverse range of factors. The Cashless Debit Card is not a "silver bullet".

### **Bushfire Response and Recovery**

The devastating bushfires of the 2019-20 summer deeply affected all Australians and their impact on communities and affected individuals is still raw. Bushfire ravaged communities had commenced the long path towards recovery only to be locked down by the pandemic. One year on there continues to be the need for serious action and investment in affected

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<sup>7</sup>[https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary\\_Business/Committees/Senate/Community\\_Affairs/CashlessWelfareContinua/Report](https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/Senate/Community_Affairs/CashlessWelfareContinua/Report)

communities, where housing and shelter, sanitation, and water supplies have still not been restored.

CSSA acknowledges the work of the National Bushfire Recovery Agency and state governments in disaster recovery, repair of physical and essential infrastructure and funding support provided for Emergency Relief, food security and mental health funding. More investment is needed in long term, community- based support that recognises how natural disasters can impact family violence, trauma, homelessness, mental health and drug and alcohol use. The long-term effects of trauma, grief and loss are considerable in these situations and will have impact individuals, families and their communities. The COVID-19 lockdown has exacerbated some of those issues and increased the social isolation and disengagement from community of many individuals simply coping to survive.

CSSA calls for a 5-year recovery plan for wellbeing and community recovery in disaster-affected areas. Such a plan should include additional funding for support services for trauma counselling, family violence, housing, alcohol and other drugs support services especially in fire affected areas.

The work of the National Coordination Group on Emergency Relief, in which CSSA has participated, has demonstrated our collaboration across sectors provides best value in distribution funds during national disasters. The Bushfire response then moved quickly to considerations posed by COVID-19 and has demonstrated how governments and agencies can collaborate to respond to emerging issues with nimbleness and innovation.

### ***National Food Waste Tax Initiative***

A proposal that has emerged through considerations about food security and food waste during COVID-19 is a National Food Waste Tax Incentive<sup>8</sup> which would:

- help Australia achieve its food waste reduction target of 50% by 2030;
- encourage companies to actively reduce food waste and provide food relief through the donation of food and related services to Australian charities for people in need in the community; and
- stimulate the economy by creating flow-on economic activity including job creation by boosting relevant supporting activities and services.

CSSA strongly supports such an initiative as part of its broader commitment to food security and environmental stewardship.

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<sup>8</sup> <https://home.kpmg/au/en/home/insights/2020/09/food-relief-australia-tax-system.html>

## 2. A Full Employment Economy

In our paper *Stronger Economy, Stronger Australia: Building our Prosperity to Serve the Common Good*, CSSA argues that central to Australia's successful economic recovery will be a commitment to Australia becoming a full employment economy—providing all Australians who are willing and able to participate in economic activity the opportunity to do so. This is fundamental to improving national productivity and social cohesion.

### *Delivering jobs through the care sector*

Both COVID-19 and the 2019–20 bushfires have drawn extensively on our care sector to support Australians in times of crisis. The care sector includes workers in our health, community services aged care, disability, psychosocial counselling and emergency relief services who continue to be at the frontline of Australia's response to COVID-19.

When restrictions were imposed to contain the pandemic all parts of the care sector responded by reshape their service offerings. The agility of the sector was critical to maintaining vital support services for an ever-growing group of vulnerable people. COVID-19 has exposed weaknesses in the care sector systems, particularly in the aged care system, which at the time of writing has seen more than 900 people die as a result of COVID-19.

The disability and aged care sectors support many of Australia's most vulnerable citizens. The financial investment by the Australian Government in these two sectors alone is \$45.3 billion for 2020-21 increasing to \$51.3 billion in 2023-24.<sup>71</sup> However, significant concerns have been raised about the capacity of the sector to deliver the level of services necessary to support some of our most vulnerable people.

In its Interim Report titled *Neglect*,<sup>9</sup> the Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety examined workforce issues in the aged care sector. The interim report identified a range of workforce challenges from difficulties in attracting and retaining workers, to poor pay and conditions as barriers to providing person-centred care.

The commonality of workforce issues between community health, aged care and NDIS provides an opportunity for more strategic investment by the Australian Government to deliver better care and create employment for Australians who have lost their jobs during the pandemic. The scale of demand for workers in the care sector is large, with the exact number likely to be clearer once the Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety makes its final recommendations.

This will require investment in access to training and skills development, as well as employment conditions in the care sector. Enhancing the value of the contribution of the care workforce to Australian society will be critical. Promoting career paths within the sector as a lifelong vocation is an important aspect of repositioning the role of carers in our community. The Australian Government can enhance and support employment programs to ensure they better support the job opportunities in the care sector.

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<sup>9</sup> <https://agedcare.royalcommission.gov.au/sites/default/files/2020-02/interim-report-volume-1.pdf>

### *Improving Australia's Employment Programs*

Achieving a full employment economy requires significant government effort in creating jobs both within government, the private sector and the community. The centrepiece of the Government's measures intended to increase employment growth in the post-COVID-19 environment is the JobMaker Hiring Credit—a wage subsidy program for people up to 35 years of age, expected to cost \$4.0 billion over three years from 2020–21.<sup>10</sup> CSSA believes that the criteria based on age should be extended to include eligibility based on the length of time that an individual has been unemployed.

The employment programs of the current government continue to be both ineffective and unjust. The slow take-up of the Youth Jobs PaTH internship program where host businesses are given up-front payments and a wage subsidy, indicate that the JobMaker Hiring Credit could struggle to meet its anticipated target of 450,000 positions. The qualifying criteria for job seekers is restrictive and excludes highly disadvantaged young people who have been in insecure work and not accumulated the requisite minimum 20 hours per week, averaged over a quarter, or who have not been in receipt of income support.

In the lead-up to the expiry of the Jobactive contracts in 2020, the Australian Government appointed an independent Expert Advisory Panel to “help shape the future design of employment services in Australia”. The panel's report found that Australia's employment services system was not meeting the needs of many job seekers and employers.<sup>11</sup>

A substantial number of job seekers are able to find work themselves, with limited or no employment service provider assistance. These job seekers are subject to compliance requirements that in many cases do not help and may actively hinder them in gaining employment. Other more disadvantaged job seekers are not receiving the intensive individualised support they need from providers who have high caseloads.

At the same time, the report found that very few employers are using the Jobactive system, and many of those who do reported being inundated with inappropriate job applications as a result of the job search requirements placed on job seekers. The report recommended that the employment services system be re-structured to focus on helping those job seekers who most need assistance.

Australia's employment services system is based on a “work first” approach; that is, it has a strong focus on rapid placement in work at the expense of longer-term investments in employability. Such an approach has a large short-term impact. However, programs that are focused on improving the human capital of disadvantaged job seekers through education and training tend to have longer run effects. CSSA suggests that such programs are especially relevant in Australia's current economic environment with COVID-19 job losses, high levels of long-term unemployment, underemployment and a labour market in which the share of low-skilled jobs is gradually shrinking.

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.ato.gov.au/General/New-legislation/The-Australian-Government-s-economic-response-to-coronavirus/JobMaker-Hiring-Credit/>

<sup>11</sup> [https://www.aph.gov.au/About\\_Parliament/Parliamentary\\_Departments/Parliamentary\\_Library/pubs/BriefingBook46p/EmploymentServices](https://www.aph.gov.au/About_Parliament/Parliamentary_Departments/Parliamentary_Library/pubs/BriefingBook46p/EmploymentServices)  
CSSA 2021-22 Prebudget Submission\_210128

In response to the Jobactive review, the Australian government has announced and extension of Jobactive contracts to 2022, with some reforms via a New Employment Services program which is being trialled in Adelaide and the NSW North Coast. These changes overturn some of the worst elements of the Jobactive regime. However, its reliance on digital platforms risks excluding people who do not have access and the new services continue automated penalties for non-compliance which are often applied erroneously and without any human intervention. This continues to result in penalties for people who are already surviving on extremely low incomes and resources.

CSSA is advocating for a Jobs Guarantee program as part of the economic recovery strategy. With predictions that unemployment in Australia will remain stubbornly high over the coming years, the role of employment services will be critical. In addition to supporting the placement of unemployed people into jobs, the Australian Government should also use these programs to work with the not-for-profit sector in creating new employment opportunities under a Job Guarantee program.

A Job Guarantee program works by creating full-time and part-time jobs that are of “community benefit” through local government, community organisations, not-for-profit social enterprises and charities. These jobs are paid for by the government via the program and can include a range of activities including sub-trade jobs, local volunteer co-ordination and environmental remediation jobs.

A Job Guarantee program would have a net cost to government of around \$650 million for a cohort of up to 100,000 participants. A Job Guarantee program enables participants to be employed in a variety of community-based jobs, designed to match the skills and capabilities of the participants. The program incorporates vocational training, offers participants the opportunity to gain transferable skills and experience, offering increased economic mobility for them and their families.

Local communities 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.

### 3. Reconciliation

#### *Closing the Gap*

While the Productivity Commission's 2020 Report<sup>12</sup> on overcoming indigenous disadvantage provided some good news in relation to infant mortality rates and educational participation, these improvements were overshadowed by the findings that rates of children in out of home care have almost tripled in the past 15 years, and the adult imprisonment rate increased 72 per cent between 2000 and 2019.

The Centre for Independent Studies 2021 paper<sup>13</sup> *Worlds Apart: Remote Indigenous disadvantage in the context of wide Australia* maps the state of these Indigenous communities against the rest of the country. It has found that the living conditions, education, employment and life expectancy of regional and remote Indigenous communities in Australia are more comparable with those of developing nations.

These findings are not new but they are disappointing. The Closing the Gap strategy has done little to improve the circumstances of Indigenous Australians living in rural and remote communities. CSSA supports the advocacy of the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Catholic Council, whose members are located in Aboriginal communities across Australia.

NATSICC<sup>14</sup> argues that Closing the Gap has resulted in unnecessary layering of bureaucracy which has served to move Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people further away from decision making processes. Catholic Social Teaching emphasises the principle of Subsidiarity - Subsidiarity empowers and acknowledges the genius and dignity of the individual by recognising that those closest to the problem or issue are best placed to provide a solution. We must encourage and use these intrinsic attributes to forge a path forward for our people and not bury them under protectionism or paternalistic measures.

#### *National Voice*

Addressing Indigenous disadvantage is a national responsibility that requires the belief, commitment and energy of all Australians. Central to this work must be a commitment to partnership with Indigenous Australians, based on mutual respect, mutual resolve and mutual responsibility.

The Government's rejection of the Uluru Statement from the Heart<sup>15</sup> and the Referendum Council's recommendation for an indigenous voice to Parliament undermines that commitment to respect, resolve and responsibility. An interim report proposing models for a National Voice<sup>16</sup> and framework to enhance local and regional governance for First Nations people was publicly released in January 2021 and provides an example of how co-designing the process has led to considerable concessions by Indigenous peoples in the interest of the common good.

<sup>12</sup> <https://www.pc.gov.au/research/ongoing/overcoming-indigenous-disadvantage/2020>

<sup>13</sup> <https://www.cis.org.au/publications/policy-papers/worlds-apart-remote-indigenous-disadvantage-in-the-context-of-wider-australia/>

<sup>14</sup> <https://mailchi.mp/bb6de3f89177/why-isnt-the-gap-closing>

<sup>15</sup> <https://theconversation.com/turnbull-government-says-no-to-indigenous-voice-to-parliament-86421>

<sup>16</sup> <https://www.indigenous.gov.au/topics/indigenous-voice>

CSSA therefore calls on the government to accept the National Voice proposals and commit to an implementation timeframe within this term of Parliament.

## 4. Affordable and Social Housing

Since the 1990s, social housing construction levels have languished at residual levels; while Australia's total number of households expanded by 30 per cent over the two decades to 2016, social housing provision grew by just 4 per cent.

Australia is now in the midst of a housing crisis and urgently requires more affordable housing to ensure that people on middle to low incomes have access to affordable and suitable housing. This is especially pertinent for low-income earners who are disproportionately affected by a lack of affordable housing across Australia and are increasingly being driven into homelessness. AHURI has identified that over the next 20 years 727,300 additional social housing dwellings will be required to tackle levels of homelessness and housing stress among lowest income households renting privately.

AHURI's Report Social housing as infrastructure: rationale, prioritisation and investment pathway<sup>17</sup> outlines how productive social housing systems use a combination of policy instruments to reduce the cost of land, invest strategic equity and lever efficient long-term financing. Productive social housing systems do not rely solely on demand-side subsidies that have proved ineffective when rents are deregulated and vacancies low. The use of grants and efficient financing not only reduces long-term costs to government, but also reduces pressure on service charges and related assistance in other policy areas.

While the Government established the National Housing Finance Investment Corporation (NHFIC)<sup>18</sup> to offer lower cost finance to social housing providers this will not generate enough new social housing supply to meet the predicted need. Without direct public investment in the form of a needs-based capital investment program, the government is unlikely to fill the social housing gap. Needs-based capital investment is where decisions on what to invest is not only based on financial return, but also on other factors like the effects on society.

CSSA supports the call for a National Housing Authority and the development of new National Housing Partnership agreements with state and territory governments to invest in responsive and productive social housing systems to address our critical housing shortage.

<sup>17</sup> <https://www.ahuri.edu.au/research/final-reports/306>

<sup>18</sup> <https://www.nhfic.gov.au/>

## 5. Climate Action

In 2009, Lord Stern<sup>19</sup> described the two great challenges for modern society as “overcoming poverty and managing climate change. If we fail on one, we will fail on the other”. The changes we have experienced during the disasters of 2019 and 2020, indicate that climate policy must be an urgent responsibility of the government and the wider community.

The consequences of climate change affect the entire population, but the economic and social burden is falling most heavily on already vulnerable people. Low income households spend a larger proportion of their budget on energy costs, and most energy efficiency measures target homeowners, and exclude renters.

The special MJA-Lancet Countdown report<sup>20</sup> released in late 2020 details the deaths and health impacts caused by the 2019-20 Australian bushfire season, as well as those from rising temperatures, heatwaves and air pollution overall.

The report notes an encouraging “growing awareness of and engagement with the links between health and climate change”, demonstrated by increased media coverage and scientific publications in this area and calls on the federal government to adopt a National Strategy on Climate Change, Health and Well-being.

CSSA joins members of the Catholic Climate Covenant and Climate and Health Alliance in urging the Australia government to set a net-zero emissions target by 2050 at the latest.

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<sup>19</sup> <https://www.lse.ac.uk/granthaminstitute/publication/the-economics-of-climate-change-the-stern-review/>

<sup>20</sup> <https://www.mja.com.au/journal/2020/213/11/2020-special-report-mja-lancet-countdown-health-and-climate-change-lessons>