



Social Justice

# STOCKTAKE

*Taking stock of our communities*

WHITLAM











## Acknowledgement of Country

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The Salvation Army Australia acknowledges the Traditional Owners of the land on which we meet and work and pay our respect to Elders past, present and future.

We value and include people of all cultures, languages, abilities, sexual orientations, gender identities, gender expressions and intersex status. We are committed to providing programs that are fully inclusive. We are committed to the safety and wellbeing of people of all ages, particularly children.

## Traditional Owners

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Dharawal/Tharawal • Wadi Wadi • Gundungurra

## A practical approach to social justice

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The Salvation Army is committed to seeking reconciliation, unity and equity throughout Australia. We value all people – regardless of age, culture, capacity, language spoken, sexual orientation, gender identity and/or expression.

We aim to provide safe, welcoming and fully inclusive programs to people of all ages, abilities and backgrounds. Our Salvation Army mission worldwide, is to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ and to meet human needs in His name with love and without discrimination.

We recognise and are sensitive to the needs of people who often find it difficult to access and use services in times of crisis. This includes Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, people who identify as LGBTIQ+, people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, and people with disabilities.

The Salvation Army believes all people deserve compassion, dignity, hope and respect. We are committed to the safety and wellbeing of people of all ages, particularly children.

Indigenous artwork created in collaboration with The Salvation Army's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander ministries team. Stock images are used in this brochure for illustrative purposes only – the models are not associated with The Salvation Army Australia.





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*The hand-heart-shield motif speaks of the need to raise our hands and be counted, and that we need to do so with love and hope.*



# The Social Justice Stocktake



Working for justice is at the heart of what The Salvation Army does in Australia. It is integral to our ethos, our mission and our vision.

The experience of the pandemic has given us all greater insight into just how deeply social injustice is embedded in Australia. In this Stocktake, The Salvation Army wanted to get to the heart of what people were seeing in their local communities, and from there build a map of social justice priorities across Australia. We checked in with over fifteen thousand Australians across every State and Territory and in every electorate.

*We found that Australians care deeply about social injustice – but don't always know what to do about it.*

We heard that many people feel overwhelmed, even hopeless, when asked how Australia can address the issues they see in their local communities. Some felt they needed government to act before they could do anything individually. Some despaired that governments (of any level and any political persuasion) don't seem to care enough about the issues and injustices going on around them every day.

So instead of just providing our findings, we've tried to help alleviate that sense of hopelessness by also outlining practical solutions. We firmly believe that every social justice issue can be addressed.

*Every person can make a difference.*

*Together, we can make an even greater difference.*

**Our hope is that the following report will show how.**

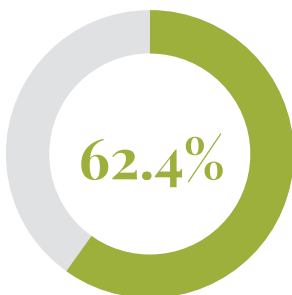
The Salvation Army Australia is a Christian movement dedicated to sharing the love of Jesus. **We do this by:**

- *Caring for people* • *Creating faith pathways*
- *Building healthy communities* • *Working for justice*



# Social Justice in Whitlam

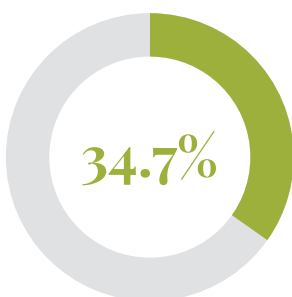
## Breakdown of responses



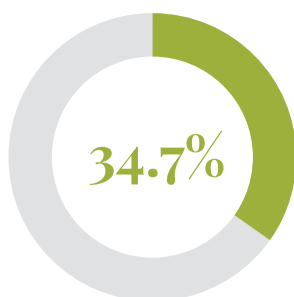
Housing affordability



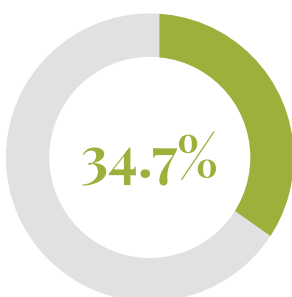
Mental health



Alcohol and drug misuse



Unemployment and under employment



Poverty and financial hardship

## Compared to Australia

Respondents from the electorate of Whitlam listed housing affordability as the area of most concern, with **62.4%** of local respondents reporting this issue as one of their major concerns in line with national and state trends.

Mental health concerns, although the second most common concern among respondents in Whitlam, were significantly lower than the national average response for this issue at **53.9%**.

Poverty and financial hardship, unemployment and underemployment, and alcohol and drug misuse were equal third most important issues of concern for the people of Whitlam, among **34.7%** of respondents.

## What stands out

It is unsurprising that housing affordability is a major concern within the electorate. Recent rental affordability data shows that much of the region has a low rental affordability score (**85 in some areas**). This means it is increasingly difficult for people to find housing which would not cost more than **30.0 per cent** of their income, including in the more rural areas of the electorate. This **30.0 per cent ratio** is considered the benchmark for affordable housing rental for those on low incomes.<sup>1</sup>

The electorate of Whitlam has a shortfall of approximately **2500 social housing properties** and approximately **400 people** experiencing homelessness.<sup>2</sup>

Mental health (**40.6 per cent**) was identified as a major social justice issue in Whitlam. Respondents in Wollongong, Shellharbour, and eventually all of the electorate were in lockdown for part of the period this survey was conducted, however it is striking that mental health appeared consistently as a high social justice concern across the country, irrespective of lockdowns, geography or other forms of disadvantage.





Poverty and financial hardship was also a significant concern in Whitlam. In some areas of the electorate, **22.2 per cent** of residents are experiencing economic disadvantage.<sup>3</sup>

One of the themes that came through the comments from respondents in Whitlam and across Australia was a sense of disempowerment. There was a strong sense that these issues need to be addressed, but a certain hopelessness about how that could happen. In the following pages, we have prepared some further information about the issues identified by the people of Whitlam and some concrete actions we can take together to make a difference.

*“I would like affordable housing increased, with a focus on families already established in the area, e.g. children able to remain in their current schools.”*











Addressing  
*Social Injustice*





# Homeless & housing affordability

Homelessness is a widespread and serious issue in Australia – well over 100,000 people are homeless in Australia.<sup>1</sup> The risk of homelessness is highest for those who have experienced family and domestic violence, young people, children on care and protection orders, Indigenous Australians, people leaving health or social care arrangements and Australians aged 55 or older – particularly women.<sup>2</sup>

People experiencing homelessness are amongst the most socially and economically disadvantaged in our society. Homelessness leads to increased impact and complexity of existing trauma, substance use and mental ill health.<sup>3</sup> The cost of homelessness to individuals, our community and economy is enormous and increases the longer the individual remains homeless. Homelessness is a result of systemic and structural issues, such as poverty, low income and a lack of safe, affordable housing.

Housing affordability relates to how much money a person has to spend on housing (mortgage payments or rent) relative to their household income.<sup>4</sup> Any type of housing (including rental/home ownership, permanent/temporary, for-profit/non-profit) is considered affordable if it costs less than 30 per cent of household income.<sup>5</sup>

Access to appropriate, affordable and secure housing is the foundation of any family or individual's engagement in work, education and social relations. It's also the single most critical exit point from homelessness services. The lack of affordable housing is one of the main factors for increasing homelessness across the nation.

Housing prices in Australia have been steadily increasing since the mid-1980s, while wages and support payments have not increased at nearly the same rate.<sup>6</sup> This is a significant factor driving the crisis of housing affordability.

The superficial solution to addressing homelessness and housing affordability is to just build more houses (or appropriate accommodation of any kind). Of course, it's a bit more complicated than that, but addressing housing supply, especially ensuring there are enough suitable accommodation options available, is a solid start.

Eradicating homelessness and addressing housing affordability issues are possible in Australia, but it is going to take concerted efforts.



**One in 200 people are homeless** on any given night.



One third of people experiencing **homeless** in Australia are **under 18 years of age**.



**Social housing**, as a proportion of housing, has **dropped from 4.6 per cent to 4.2 per cent** between 2014 and 2020.



**Rents have increased** nationally by **8.2 per cent over the 12 months** ending August 2021, the largest rise in rents since 2008.



In 2020, approximately one in three **women and children escaping family violence** seeking homelessness services were **turned away** due to a lack of accommodation.



A survey considering **74,266 rental listings** showed that:

- **zero per cent of rentals** were affordable for a single person on either JobSeeker or Youth Allowance anywhere in the country
- only **two per cent of rentals** were affordable for a couple living on the age pension (the most generous of government payments)





## *What we can do?*

### AS A NATION

- » **We can make a commitment to eradicate homelessness.** Making the end of homelessness a key measure of the success of governments will drive action to address the structural causes of homelessness – poverty, low income and the lack of social and affordable housing. Accountability will also encourage governments at all levels to work together.

### AS A STATE OR TERRITORY

- » **We can focus on transparent population health and infrastructure planning.** One of the barriers to effective action is that there hasn't been enough focus on building evidence around the housing needs of Australians. There is more than enough evidence to get started on increasing social and affordable housing right now, but we also need to be looking at how to ensure that accommodation options meet the needs of the people who will actually live in them.

### AS A COMMUNITY

- » **We can give people who are experiencing (or have experienced) homelessness a voice.** Being homeless causes such extraordinary personal stress and disengagement that survival is the individual focus, rather than advocacy for structural reform. As a community we can support groups that assist people experiencing homelessness – we can fundraise, volunteer and advocate.

### AS INDIVIDUALS

- » **We can treat people experiencing homelessness or housing stress with dignity and respect.** If we see someone in the street, experiencing homelessness, we can smile and say hello. If we are in the position of owning an investment property, we can be ethical landlords.

*Housing prices in Australia have been steadily increasing since the mid-1980s, while wages and support payments have not increased at nearly the same rate. This is a significant factor driving the crisis of housing affordability.*





# Mental health



A person's mental health is a central component of wellbeing. Mental ill-health, whether a condition is considered severe or not, undermines the quality of life of millions of Australians. There are many factors that can cause a person to experience mental ill-health. Some of the societal contributors include economic stresses, such as unemployment and homelessness, and social factors including family and domestic violence, substance use disorders and loneliness and social isolation.

Once a person is experiencing mental ill-health, it's easy for minor conditions and setbacks to snowball, and for this to have monumentally negative impacts upon every part of a person's life.

Mental illness does not discriminate. It's important that anyone experiencing mental ill-health can access timely, non-judgmental and effective support so everyone can achieve and maintain mental health and wellbeing.

We probably can't eradicate all underlying causes of mental ill-health, but we certainly can address much of the hardship that comes with it.



Every year, **3.2 million Australians (13.1 per cent)** experience an anxiety-related condition and **2.4 million (10 per cent)** experience depression or feelings of depression. These numbers are growing.<sup>1</sup>



**Nearly half of Australians (46 per cent)** experience a mental disorder throughout their lifetime.



**One in seven (13.9 per cent) of children between 4 and 17** experience mental ill-health in any given year and more than three quarters of mental health problems occur before the age of 25.<sup>2</sup>

## What we can do?

### AS A NATION

- » **We can design our support systems to recognise the societal, as well as medical contributors to mental ill-health.** This means our national approach to mental health needs to acknowledge systemic issues such as poverty, housing insecurity and family and domestic violence. One 'big thing' the Australian Government can do is reform our social security system, so there is adequate income support for people who become unemployed due to mental illness.

### AS A STATE OR TERRITORY

- » **We can focus on early intervention – providing support before a person finds themselves in crisis.** This will require a change in how services are delivered and will need diverse, ambitious, evidence-based trial programs based on the lived experience of people experiencing mental ill-health, as well as experts.

### AS A COMMUNITY

- » **We can break down the stigma around mental ill-health and asking for help.** If we treat mental illness in the same way we treat physical illness – recognising that the person with the condition is not to blame and needs appropriate support – we can change the conversation and provide an avenue for people to reach out for support.

### AS INDIVIDUALS

- » **We can educate ourselves about mental illness and also about how to support someone experiencing mental ill-health.** There are many resources online, as well as specific courses (such as mental health first aid) that can help us on this journey.



# Alcohol & drug misuse



The consumption of alcohol and illicit drugs can place a heavy burden on individuals, families and society. For individuals, it can affect health, relationships, jobs and education. For the community, the cost to the community from alcohol-related harm is estimated to exceed \$14 billion annually. For illegal drugs it exceeds \$8.2 billion.<sup>1</sup>

Alcohol and other drug related harm is both a driver for and result of other forms of disadvantage. Often a person experiencing alcohol or other drug harm is also experiencing multiple disadvantages at once. Alcohol and drug misuse itself can change an individual's brain, making it harder for them to change behaviour – even when they want to.<sup>2</sup>

Alcohol and drug misuse is widespread in Australia. Around 43 per cent of Australians aged 14 and over had illicitly used a drug at some point in their life (including pharmaceuticals used for non-medical purposes) and 16.4 per cent had used one in the last 12 months.

There is a lot we can do to address the harm that comes from alcohol and drug misuse.



It's estimated that every year in Australia:<sup>3</sup>

- **4,816 people die** from alcohol-related injuries, illness and accidents
- **75,772 people are hospitalised** due to alcohol consumption
- **2,070 people die** from drug-related deaths
- **More people die** from drug overdoses than die on the roads



**More than one in five** Australians (21 per cent) aged 14 and over have been **verbally or physically abused** or put in fear by another person who was under the influence of alcohol.<sup>4</sup>



The proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people living in Australia who consume alcohol at levels that exceed lifetime risk guidelines was **18.4 per cent in 2018–19**. Over the same period, **23 per cent** of Indigenous Australians had **used an illicit drug** in the last 12 months.<sup>5</sup>

## What we can do?

### AS A NATION

- » **We can invest in harm reduction.** This means that we focus on solutions to mitigate the problems that come with misuse. In doing this, we need to acknowledge that alcohol and drug misuse often occur alongside other forms of disadvantage, so we need to ensure that policy responses are tailored and culturally appropriate.

### AS A STATE OR TERRITORY

- » **We can take a local approach that protects vulnerable people and communities.** We need to understand local populations to provide accessible and effective alcohol and other drug treatment systems. Such systems need to be situated within the wider welfare support response to create pathways and services that better engage, maintain and successfully exit people from treatment.

### AS A COMMUNITY

- » **We can provide social connection that is not reliant on alcohol or drug use.** Community groups can ensure their events and activities are supportive and accepting as a way to create pathways for people to build hopeful, purposeful and meaningful lives.

### AS INDIVIDUALS

- » **We can recognise that alcohol and drug misuse are health issues that take great effort and courage to seek help with.** We can listen carefully and connect with people experiencing alcohol and drug misuse, and reduce the stigma associated with alcohol and other drug misuse.



# Unemployment & underemployment



Employment underpins the economic output of a nation and enables people to support themselves, their families and their communities. In September 2021, Australia's unemployment stood at 4.5 per cent,<sup>1</sup> however this figure doesn't tell the whole story. People who are underemployed but work 'one hour of paid work per week' aren't counted as unemployed. People who are not employed but have given up actively looking for work also don't count in this figure.

Unemployment, underemployment and casualised employment can be a major source of stress that has the potential to compromise the health and wellbeing of individuals. The current JobSeeker payment is set at an unsustainably low level and forces many people to forego necessities or enter into debt.

Currently in Australia about 750,000 people are 'long-term unemployed', meaning they have been on unemployment payments of 12 months or longer. The longer a person is unemployed, the more their employment prospects diminish,<sup>2</sup> and the more likely they are to experience heightened levels of anxiety, depression and hopelessness.

Underemployment and long-term unemployment are the biggest challenges Australia faces in building an inclusive COVID-19 recovery in which no one is left behind, yet the economic consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic have not fallen with equal severity on all shoulders.<sup>3</sup> Low paid workers, many of whom are women, have been exposed to the full health and employment effects of the crisis, resulting in lower workforce participation rates than men and the additional stresses of at home child-care and schooling.<sup>4</sup>



The two main unemployment benefits: **JobSeeker Payment** (\$391pw including Rent Assistance for a single adult) and **Youth Allowance, unemployed** (\$331pw) are the lowest in the OECD for individuals who have recently become unemployed.<sup>5</sup>



Only **48 per cent** of people with disability are employed, compared to **79 per cent** without disability.<sup>6</sup>



Recent research reveals there are **27 jobseekers** competing for each entry-level job.<sup>7</sup>



In March 2021, an estimated **376,287 people** receiving JobSeeker Payment were defined as having partial capacity to work. **Over 60 per cent** of these people were **aged over 45 years**. Most were on JobSeeker Payment long term.

## What we can do?

### AS A NATION

» **We can action the commitment to full employment as an urgent policy priority.**

This would mean that those who are available, able and actively seeking work can obtain it, including addressing structural and systemic barriers that prevent people from participating fully in the workforce, including gender pay gap and the casualisation of the workforce.

### AS A STATE OR TERRITORY

» **We can implement state-based programs and engage with local expertise to find pathways for people who are unemployed or underemployed into new employment opportunities.**

Working alongside the Australian government, state and territory governments can promote features of innovative funding and grant arrangements, such as 'social procurement' options.

### AS A COMMUNITY

» **We can encourage and facilitate opportunities for people who are unemployed to learn new skills.**

Community-based organisations can seek out and welcome unemployed and underemployed people into their activities as volunteers, as well as provide work-related skills, experience and mentoring.

### AS INDIVIDUALS

» **We can listen to people's experiences of unemployment and underemployment.**

We can make sure we aren't judging people for being unemployed



# Poverty & financial hardship



Australia is a wealthy country, but there are still millions of Australians who experience financial hardship and poverty. For a person in poverty, every decision is filtered through the lens of survival. Some of the choices can be as extreme as choosing between affording rent and paying electricity bills or choosing between medications and having food for dinner that night. In this context, it is extremely difficult to prioritise social connection – even though we know that social connection is critical for wellbeing.

Some Australians are in what we call ‘intergenerational poverty’ – they’re in financial hardship because their parents were in financial hardship and, without intervention, it’s highly likely their children will have the same experience.

Even short-term, circumstantial poverty can become a trap. Financial stress can draw people into unsustainable debt, it can impact on a person’s ability to gain or maintain employment and it can make it significantly harder to escape harmful situations such as domestic or family violence.

There are many contributors to poverty in Australia, including insecure and casualised work, housing stress and rising costs of living. Probably the biggest contributor though is the fact that welfare payments in Australia are set well below any recognised poverty line. The level of income support is so low that a person who is reliant on it doesn’t have scope to meet both basic needs and plan for the future. A person dependent on welfare risks long-term

unemployment, social isolation, entrenched poverty and intergenerational disadvantage simply because the rate of JobSeeker and Youth Allowance is too low.

The upside of that is there are concrete actions we can take to eradicate poverty in Australia.



In Australia, more than **3.24 million people** or **13.6 per cent** of the population live below the poverty line.<sup>1</sup> Of this, **774,000 children**, or **one in six children**, are in poverty.<sup>2</sup>



The poverty rate for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people is **31 per cent**, while poverty is twice as high in very remote communities (**54 per cent**) as in major cities (**24 per cent**).



Estimates suggest that between **22 per cent to 32 per cent** of the Indigenous population are food insecure.<sup>3</sup>



In 2019, nearly one in five households (**19.5 per cent**) were unable to raise **\$2,000** within a week for something important. There were also more households in 2019 that experienced a cash flow problem in the previous 12 months compared to 2014 (**21.8 per cent compared to 19.3 per cent**).<sup>4</sup>



**968,000 people** or **38 per cent** of the 2.6 million people living in poverty (excluding self-employed people) came from households where wages were the main source of income. This is an increase from the **32 per cent** of people in poverty in the 2013–14 statistics.<sup>5</sup>

## What we can do?

### AS A NATION

- » **We can increase social security payments to allow people reliant on them to live with dignity.** More generally we can make eradicating poverty a stated goal and critical success measure for governments in Australia.

### AS A STATE OR TERRITORY

- » **We can focus on expanding the supply of social, community and affordable housing.** Secure housing is the foundation for other supports to help people out of poverty.

### AS A COMMUNITY

- » **We can be sensitive to the prevalence and stress of financial hardship for the people around us.** With over 3.2 million Australians

living in poverty, it’s highly likely that members of our community groups are experiencing financial stress. Ensuring that our social activities are financially accessible (such as by offering free tickets, bursaries or non-financial options for contributing) could be the difference between someone in financial stress being able to participate or not.

### AS INDIVIDUALS

- » **we can give to or volunteer for groups that are working to support people in poverty.** This is such a big problem that it can feel overwhelming but, there is already so much great work being done that we can get involved with. There are local and national groups working in this space who would welcome any support we can give.



# About the Social Justice Stocktake



The Salvation Army believes that the social justice issues we face in Australia can be addressed. The best way to do that is to examine and act on social justice within our own communities.

In 2021, The Salvation Army set out to find what social injustices people see in their own communities in Australia, and then explore how these prevalent issues could be addressed. We partnered with PureProfile to collect 15,514 responses – securing 100 or more responses in almost every federal electorate. We asked people to identify the five social justice issues they were seeing in their local community and invited them to tell us what could be done about them.

We used the results from the survey to focus our analysis of a range of relevant data and then produced 157 reports – one for Australia, one for each state and territory and then one for each federal electorate (with the exception

of Lingiari (NT) and Solomon (NT) which due to sampling difficulties were treated as one electorate, and the newly created electorate of Hawke (VIC), where no data was available).

Our hope in producing and distributing these reports is that we can help equip and empower people to talk about social justice. The results of this survey confirmed what we already suspected – Australians want to address social injustice – but also reinforced how hard it is to know what to do to make a change.

Every Australian can make a difference – by taking direct action, supporting those on the front line of addressing disadvantage and by making it clear to governments that social justice matters to the people they represent.

More information about the Stocktake, including access to all 157 reports and references, can be found at [www.salvationarmy.org.au/socialjusticestocktake](http://www.salvationarmy.org.au/socialjusticestocktake) or by e-mailing [policy.advocacy@salvationarmy.org.au](mailto:policy.advocacy@salvationarmy.org.au)

## About The Salvation Army

The Salvation Army is an international Christian movement with a presence in over 130 countries. Operating in Australia since 1880, The Salvation Army is one of the largest providers of social services and programs for people experiencing hardship, injustice and social exclusion.

As part of fulfilling our vision and mission, The Salvation Army in Australia has a small Policy and Advocacy team who work alongside our services, corps (churches) and the community to identify social justice issues, explore social policy solutions and advocate for change.

*Wherever there is hardship or injustice Salvos will live, love and fight, alongside others, to transform Australia one life at a time, with the love of Jesus.*





**HOPE**  
THE SALVATION ARMY  
WHERE IT'S NEEDED MOST



