SOCIAL JUSTICE STOCKTAKE

2025

TAKING STOCK OF OUR COMMUNITIES

THE SALVATION ARMY

AUSTRALIA

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

The Salvation Army Australia acknowledges the Traditional Owners of the lands and waters throughout Australia.

We pay our respect to Elders and acknowledge their continuing relationship to this land and the ongoing living cultures of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples across Australia. We also acknowledge future aspirations of all First Nations peoples.

Through respectful relationships we will work for the mutual flourishing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians and non-Indigenous Australians.

We commit ourselves in prayer and practice to this land of Australia and its people, seeking reconciliation, unity and equity.

INCLUSION STATEMENT

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.

OUR VALUES ARE:

**Integrity
Compassion
Respect
Diversity
Collaboration**

The Salvation Army is a worldwide movement known for its acceptance and unconditional love for all people. We love unconditionally, because God first loved us.

The Bible says, "God so loves the world" (John 3:16, RGT). As both a church and charity, we believe all people are loved by God and are worthy of having their needs met. Everyone is welcome to find love, hope and acceptance at The Salvation Army.

The Salvation Army Australia Territory wishes to acknowledge that members of the LGBTIQA+ community have experienced hurt and exclusion because of mixed comments and responses made in the past.

The Salvation Army is committed to inclusive practice that recognises and values diversity. We are ensuring our services affirm the right to equality, fairness, and decency for all LGBTIQA+ people, rectifying all

forms of discriminatory practice throughout the organisation.

We seek to partner with LGBTIQA+ people and allies to work with us to build an inclusive, accessible and culturally safe environment in every aspect of Salvation Army organisation and services. Everyone has a right to feel safe and respected.

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.

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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.

In our inaugural 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 found surprising agreement about the issues affecting communities right across Australia, regardless of where they are and how they vote. We heard that many people feel overwhelmed, even hopeless, when asked how Australia can address the issues they see in their local communities.

In 2024 we again checked in across the nation — with almost 16,000 Australians across every state and territory and in every electorate. This time there was even more consensus about the top issues affecting individuals and communities. An extraordinary 71 per cent of survey respondents reported that housing affordability and homelessness was a key issue in their community. The majority of respondents also agreed that mental health, financial hardship, and access to health care were in the top five issues facing their communities.

The sentiment of respondents was different this time. In 2021 we heard a sense of helplessness about addressing social injustice. This year there was also an overwhelming sense of urgency in response to perceived governmental inaction — many respondents left messages calling on decision-makers to put politics aside and prioritise action.

So instead of just providing our findings, we've tried to arm readers with practical solutions and pathways towards the changes they want to see in their communities. 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.

In order to reflect respondents' views accurately, quotes have not been edited for spelling or punctuation; only shortened or explicit language removed.

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**

Every person can make a difference. Together, we can make an even greater difference. Our hope is that the following report will show how.

RESULTS AT A GLANCE

ISSUES FOR COMMUNITY	TOTAL
Housing affordability and homelessness	**71.0%**
Mental health	**57.6%**
Financial hardship and inclusion	**53.2%**
Access to health care	**50.4%**
Alcohol and drug misuse	**43.4%**
Family violence	**32.7%**
Climate change	**30.1%**
Unemployment and underemployment	**27.9%**
Social isolation and loneliness	**23.5%**
Opportunities for children and young people	**20.4%**
Older Australians discrimination and disadvantage	**17.5%**
Racism and discrimination	**14.3%**
Gambling harm	**13.9%**
Disability discrimination and disadvantage	**12.5%**
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander discrimination and disadvantage	**11.6%**
Gender inequality and inequity	9.6%
LGBTIQA+ community discrimination and disadvantage	4.6%
Treatment of refugees and asylum seekers	3.1%
Modern slavery	2.9%

ISSUES FOR SELF	TOTAL
Mental health	**40.3%**
Housing affordability and homelessness	**36.5%**
Financial hardship and inclusion	**32.31%**
Climate change	**30.3%**
Access to health care	**30.1%**
Social isolation and loneliness	**19.0%**
Unemployment and underemployment	**16.2%**
Older Australians discrimination and disadvantage	**14.3%**
Opportunities for children and young people	**13.5%**
Family violence	**12.5%**
Gender inequality and inequity	**11.5%**
Racism and discrimination	**11.3%**
Alcohol and drug misuse	9.7%
Disability discrimination and disadvantage	9.7%
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander discrimination and disadvantage	6.7%
Gambling harm	6.2%
LGBTIQA+ community discrimination and disadvantage	4.7%
Modern slavery	4.7%
Treatment of refugees and asylum seekers	4.6%
None of these	**11.5%**

SOCIAL JUSTICE IN AUSTRALIA

The most striking result from the Stocktake is the extraordinary consensus across Australia about what issues we are seeing.

71%

IDENTIFIED HOUSING AFFORDABILITY AND HOMELESSNESS AS AN ISSUE IN THEIR COMMUNITY

HOUSING AFFORDABILITY AND HOMELESSNESS

Housing affordability and homelessness were overwhelmingly the top social justice concerns people saw in their community, irrespective of geography and socioeconomic status. An enormous 71 per cent of respondents identified these issues in their community and they were the most common concerns across seven out of eight Australian jurisdictions. Housing and homelessness were in the top four issues in every single electorate in Australia. Only around half the number of people who identified this issue in their community identified it in their own lives (35.52 per cent), although this still places it as the second most common issue respondents had personally experienced.

Australia is experiencing a housing crisis. The 2021 census recorded that 122,494 people were homeless on any given night[1] and the consensus is that this estimate will have increased. Australia has a shortfall of 640,000 social housing properties, an increase in shortfall of more than 200,000 since reported in the last Social Justice Stocktake.[2] The struggle to find affordable rentals is particularly pervasive amongst those on minimum wage with 82 per cent of properties unaffordable for families earning minimum wage, 98 per cent of properties unaffordable for single parents on minimum wage, and 100 per cent of properties unaffordable for persons on JobSeeker, retirees on the Age Pension and persons on Disability Support Pension.[3]

1   Australian Bureau of Statistics. (2021). *Estimating Homelessness: Census.* ABS. https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/people/housing/estimating-homelessness-census/latest-release#cite-window1
2   Van Den Nouwelant, R., Troy, L. & Soundararaj, B. (2022). *Quantifying Australia's Unmet Housing Need: A National Snapshot.* Community Housing Industry Association, University of New South Wales City Futures Research Centre, University of Sydney https://apo.org.au/sites/default/files/resource-files/2022-11/apo-nid320820.pdf
3   Anglicare. (2024). *Rental Affordability Snapshot National Report 2024.* https://www.anglicare.asn.au/wp-content/uploads/2024/04/Rental-Affordability-Snapshot-National-Report.pdf

MENTAL HEALTH

Mental health is the second most common social justice concern identified by respondents for their community but the most commonly experienced by respondents themselves. The number of people identifying mental health as an issue in their community is even higher than the number identifying it in the last survey where it was the most common issue identified. Mental health is connected to every other social justice concern raised in this report and particularly linked with housing stress and homelessness.[4] The Salvation Army's own experience has shown that mental ill health can drive and result from other forms of disadvantage as well as exacerbate and be exacerbated by other experiences of hardship. When we consider mental health, we need to consider that a purely medical response must be complemented by actions that address underlying disadvantage. The best possible clinical care will be less effective if a person is living in their car or unsafe in their home.

FINANCIAL HARDSHIP AND INCLUSION

Financial hardship and inclusion was identified by more than double the number of people in this survey as identified it in the last Stocktake. It was the third most common issue identified in both the community and in respondents' own lives. The cost of living crisis is affecting everyone in Australia but there are cohorts who are more likely to experience extreme disadvantage. The Salvation Army's own research has shown that affording cost of living was the most cited challenge for respondents in the past year.[5] Nearly every respondent saw an increase in household expenses in the past year, making it difficult to make ends meet, and more than nine in 10 reported to have experienced financial stress.[6] Work undertaken by Foodbank Australia identified that half of the Australian population has experienced some level of difficulty in meeting their basic food needs with cost of living being the most frequent reason.[7] UnitingCare Australia has undertaken research showing that one in six Australian children are living in poverty.[8]

4   Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. (2024). *Specialist Homelessness Services Annual Report 2022-23*. https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/homelessness-services/specialist-homelessness-services-annual-report/contents/clients-with-a-current-mental-health-issue
5   Verrelli, S., Russell, C., & Taylor, E. (2024). *Findings from the 2024 Red Shield Appeal Research Project*. The Salvation Army, Australia
6   Verrelli, S., Russell, C., & Taylor, E. (2024). *Findings from the 2024 Red Shield Appeal Research Project*. The Salvation Army, Australia
7   Foodbank Australia. (2023). *Foodbank Hunger Report 2023*. https://reports.foodbank.org.au/foodbank-hunger-report-2023/
8   Miranti, R., Freyens. B., Vidyattama, Y., Tanton, R. & Shakir, G. (2024). *Child Social Exclusion Index Nurturing Inclusion: Paving the Way to Improved Child Wellbeing*. The Canberra School of Politics, Economics and Society (SchoPES), Faculty of Business, Government and Law (BGL), University of Canberra. Report commissioned by UnitingCare Australia. https://unitingcare.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/2024-Child-Social-Exclusion-Report-FINAL.pdf

ACCESS TO HEALTH CARE

Access to health care was introduced as an option for the first time in the 2025 Stocktake as a learning from the previous Stocktake. Over half of all respondents identified access to health care as a social justice issue, demonstrating that the inequities exposed during the COVID-19 pandemic continue to be prevalent in our community. Alcohol and drug misuse was also identified as a key social justice issue in Australia (at around the same level as the last Stocktake) but was an issue of huge concern in specific areas — for example, over 80 per cent of respondents in the NT selected it.

REFLECTING ON OUR OWN LIVES

There was much less consensus when we asked people about issues in their own lives, but the top issues remained broadly consistent. It is important to note that, given the nature of the questions, respondents could identify any number of issues up to five including none.

FAMILY VIOLENCE

Family violence was selected by slightly fewer respondents than in the previous Stocktake (although still selected by around a third of respondents), which does not correlate with what we know has not been a diminishing of the prevalence of the issue. Tragically, almost one in eight respondents identified that family violence was an issue in their own lives.

CLIMATE CHANGE

Climate change was increasingly a key issue. The numbers of people selecting climate change as an issue for each category increased to around 30 per cent, with only the ranking affected. An extraordinary 84 per cent of people in Australia have identified that they personally have been affected by a climate event or extreme weather,[9] so it is an indication of how serious the other social justice issues are that climate change, while ranking highly, still does not range higher.

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9   Climate Council. (2024). Survey Results: *Climate-Fueled Disasters Cause Australians to Fear Permanent Loss of Homes.* https://www.climatecouncil.org.au/resources/
survey-results-climate-fuelled-disasters-cause-australians-to-fear-permanent-loss-of-homes/#:~:text=The%20overwhelming%20majority%20(84%25),%25)%20and%20landslides%20(8%25)

AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

"[These issues] are real. They impact real people. These things cause deaths. These things cause suicides. These things cause family violence. These things cause family breakdowns. We need action that improves outcomes, that increases inclusion and community."

NEW SOUTH WALES

"These are growing issues. Right now we still have a chance to fix it but the longer we leave it, the worse it'll be for the people and economy."

NORTHERN TERRITORY

"For the government to actually listen to the people in the community instead of what they think needs to happen."

QUEENSLAND

"That things are about to get worse and quickly if they don't act and house people. People need the basic right of shelter and to feel safe."

SOUTH AUSTRALIA

"I would like to see initiatives that encourage young and old to be more involved in their communities and lead healthy lifestyles that help everyone rise together. A local community that has a roof over their heads, healthy relationships and are financially thriving is what I would love to see."

TASMANIA

"[I would like decision makers to know] what it is actually like to have to decide whether you want to have somewhere to live or whether to put food on the table this week/fortnight/month."

VICTORIA

"We need to find ways to unite rather than focus on what makes people different."

WESTERN AUSTRALIA

"I'd like the government to make the hard calls instead of just trying to win votes and save their jobs."

HOUSING AFFORDABILITY AND HOMELESSNESS

Homelessness is a widespread and serious issue in Australia — on any given night, 122,494 people in Australia are homeless;[10] however the number is likely much higher given the numbers of people not recorded as "no fixed address" and the increasing impact of a tight rental market.

Homelessness is when a person does not have suitable accommodation — that might mean that a person's dwelling is inadequate, they do not have any security that they can stay where they are or they do not have control over their space.[11] Homelessness is a result of systemic and structural issues such as poverty, low income, and a lack of safe, affordable housing. The cost of homelessness to individuals, our community and economy is enormous, and increases the longer the individual remains homeless.

People 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 45 or older are among some of the people most likely to experience homelessness.[12]

Housing affordability relates to the relationship between expenditure on housing (prices, mortgage payments or rents) and household incomes. Any type of housing (including rental housing or home ownership, permanent or temporary, for-profit, or not-for-profit) is considered affordable if it costs less than 30 per cent of household income.

Access to appropriate, affordable, and secure housing is the basis of any individual and family's engagement in work, education and social participation. In real terms, having a safe and secure home means having the breathing space to focus on thriving.

23%
EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS
12-24 YRS OLD

In 2021, 23 per cent of all people experiencing homelessness were aged between 12 and 24.[13]

640K
HOUSEHOLDS

Around 640,000 households in Australia are not having their housing needs met.[14]

174.6K
WAITING

As at June 2022, there were 174,600 households waiting to be allocated public housing, with 68,000 of these households being considered of "greatest need".[15]

In a 2024 snapshot, it was found that only three rentals across the entire country were affordable for a single person receiving the JobSeeker Payment and there were no affordable rentals for someone receiving Youth Allowance.[16]

1M
LOW-INCOME HOUSEHOLDS

In 2019-20, approximately one million low-income households were in financial housing stress, meaning they were spending more than 30 per cent of their income on housing.[17]

WE HAVE THE POWER TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE

WE CAN URGE ACTION FROM OUR GOVERNMENTS

All governments can commit to ending homelessness. This will involve all governments working together to address the structural drivers of homelessness such as poverty, low income, and the lack of social and affordable housing. Critically, while the Housing Australia Future Fund is a start, it is critical that funding for affordable housing is not at the expense of social housing — both need to be fully funded.

Governments need to work together to rapidly increase access to social housing, committing to building up social housing stock to be at least 10 per cent of total housing stock. This will relieve pressure across the entire housing continuum.

WE CAN IMPLEMENT CHANGE IN OUR COMMUNITY AND OUR WORKPLACES

Homelessness is extremely isolating and there are many places in our community where people experiencing homelessness do not feel welcome. Our community groups can ensure they remain open to people who are homeless by keeping the cost of activities and membership as low as possible or considering arrangements for lower fees for people experiencing financial hardship.

Places of business can also make sure that people experiencing homelessness are welcome and do not experience stigma or discrimination when they are in public spaces.

Community groups and businesses that have facilities might investigate whether they can create events or opportunities to share those facilities, such as having community dinners. We might also be able to make facilities such as showers and toilets available for use by members of the public who may not have access to a safe and secure place themselves.

WE CAN HAVE INFLUENCE IN OUR PERSONAL LIVES

There is a lot of stigma and shame associated with experiencing homelessness. We can treat people experiencing homelessness or housing stress with dignity and respect. If we see someone in the street experiencing homelessness, we can stop and engage.

10   Australian Bureau of Statistics. (2023). *Estimating Homelessness*. https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/people/housing/estimating-homelessness-census/latest-release
11   This is a loose paraphrasing of the more robust statistical definition used by the Australian Bureau of Statistics – https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/people/housing/estimating-homelessness-census/latest-release
12   House of Representatives Standing Committee on Social Policy and Legal Affairs. (2021). *Final report: Inquiry into homelessness in Australia*. https://parlinfo.aph.gov.au/parlInfo/download/committees/reportrep/024522/toc_pdf/Finalreport.pdf;fileType=application%2Fpdf
13   Australian Bureau of Statistics. (2023). *Estimating Homelessness*. https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/people/housing/estimating-homelessness-census/latest-release
14   Van Den Nouwelant, R., Troy, L., & Soundararaj, B. (2022). *Quantifying Australia's Unmet Housing Need: A National Snapshot*. Community Housing Industry Association, University of New South Wales City Futures Research Centre, University of Sydney. https://apo.org.au/sites/default/files/resource-files/2022-11/apo-nid320820.pdf
15   Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. (2023). *Housing Assistance in Australia*. https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/housing-assistance/housing-assistance-in-australia/contents/households-and-waiting-lists
16   Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. (2023). *Housing Assistance in Australia*. https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/housing-assistance/housing-assistance-in-australia/contents/households-and-waiting-lists
17   Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. (2023). *Housing Affordability*. https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/australias-welfare/housing-affordability

MENTAL HEALTH

Mental health and wellbeing, just like physical health, exist on a spectrum. Mental illnesses, such as anxiety, depression, and substance abuse disorders are common, affecting millions of Australians of all ages and backgrounds. It is also important to recognise that less severe mental health concerns still undermine the mental wellbeing of too many Australians.

Any number of factors can contribute to a person's experience of mental ill health, particularly economic stresses such as unemployment and homelessness, and social factors including family and domestic violence, discrimination and exclusion, loneliness and social isolation. Minor mental health problems can develop into more significant illness and this can have monumental negative impacts upon every component of a person's work, social and family life. People experiencing significant mental illness can find it difficult to maintain employment, stable housing, connection to loved ones, and even physical health.

While significant progress has been made in recent years to raise awareness and improve access to mental health services, challenges persist in addressing the diverse needs of the population. Access to mental health services remains a critical issue, particularly in regional and remote areas where services are often limited or inaccessible. Long wait times, high costs, and a lack of culturally appropriate services can create barriers to seeking help for those in need. Additionally, stigma surrounding mental illness continues to

deter individuals from seeking support and can exacerbate feelings of shame and isolation.

Mental illness does not discriminate. It is 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.

People living with mental ill health are likelier to develop a physical illness and are more likely to be hospitalised for preventable reasons.[18]

People living with mental illnesses have a life expectancy 10 to 15 years shorter than the general population, and this trend is growing.[19]

44%
EXPERIENCED
MENTAL
ILL HEALTH

44 per cent of the population, approximately 8.6 million Australians, have experienced mental ill health at some point in their life.[20]

4.2M
IN THE PAST
12 MONTHS

21 per cent of Australians (4.2 million people) have experienced mental ill health in the past 12 months.[21]

WE HAVE THE POWER TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE

WE CAN URGE ACTION FROM OUR GOVERNMENTS

Economic and social factors can negatively impact a person's mental health. Systemic issues such as poverty, housing insecurity, family and domestic violence and other social and economic factors need to be addressed for any mental health strategy to be effective.

Governments can work together to implement diverse, ambitious, evidence-based trial programs to explore new approaches and deliver active outreach. One key priority is fixing the issue of the "missing middle" of mental health care provision, to address mental ill health before a person reaches a crisis.

WE CAN IMPLEMENT CHANGE IN OUR COMMUNITY AND OUR WORKPLACES

It is critical that workplaces treat employees' and volunteers' mental health and wellbeing as an element of Workplace Health and Safety (WHS). One action workplaces can take is to offer relevant staff and volunteers, including managers, leaders and senior staff members, training in mental health first aid just as we do physical first aid.

Our community groups can be powerful in providing social connection that can build resilience against mental ill health. It is important that we make sure that our events, activities, and spaces are welcoming for all people and do not create stigma around mental ill health.

WE CAN HAVE INFLUENCE IN OUR PERSONAL LIVES

In our own lives we can find strategies to build positive mental health and wellbeing. This includes asking for help when it is needed and finding out about local supports and services to foster positive mental health and address mental health concerns.

We can talk to the people in our lives if we are worried about their mental health, ask if they are okay, listen and help them to access support. If you are not sure what to say, there are helpful resources online.

18   Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. (2023). *Physical health of people with mental illness.* https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/mental-health/physical-health-of-people-with-mental-illness
19   Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. (2023). *Physical health of people with mental illness.* https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/mental-health/physical-health-of-people-with-mental-illness
20   Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. (2024). *Prevalence and impact of mental illness.* https://www.aihw.gov.au/mental-health/overview/prevalence-and-impact-of-mental-illness
21   Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. (2024). *Prevalence and impact of mental illness.* https://www.aihw.gov.au/mental-health/overview/prevalence-and-impact-of-mental-illness

FINANCIAL HARDSHIP AND INCLUSION

Although poverty is often hidden in Australia, it can be a crushing reality for those experiencing it. Financial hardship often involves making impossible choices between essentials — food or rent — and being in a near constant state of worry and stress about having your basic needs met. Stress around financial pressures can have negative impacts on people's health and wellbeing. Fear, shame, and the feeling of being trapped cause significant harm, and individuals may withdraw from community and friendships, becoming isolated.

Experience of poverty can easily change a person's life trajectory, impacting employment, housing, education and health outcomes for much of their life.[22]

Many Australians are only a few financial shocks away from severe financial hardship, that could look like losing a job, sudden or chronic illness or a relationship ending. It's important that we build our system so that a financial shock does not mean long-term experiences of poverty. Unfortunately, our current social welfare system is not fit for purpose. People who are relying on income support payments are unable to afford necessities,

often having to go without meals, falling behind in payments, or having to access debt to stay afloat. This is the case no matter how savvily or carefully they budget. Such a low income makes it hard to find secure and stable employment and can lead to long-term unemployment, social isolation, entrenched poverty, and intergenerational disadvantage.

Cost of living pressures are affecting almost all Australians but they are not affecting us equally. It is critical that we make sure those who are doing it toughest can still have their needs met.

3.3M
LIVING BELOW THE POVERTY LINE

In 2022, there were 3.3 million people (13.4 per cent) living below the poverty line, including 761,000 children (16.6 per cent).[23]

$8
PER WEEK LEFT AFTER ESSENTIALS

The 2024 Red Shield Appeal report found that people accessing emergency relief had $8 a week left after essential spending such as housing and groceries. Respondents who were reliant on government payments went backwards and had -$2 after essentials.[24]
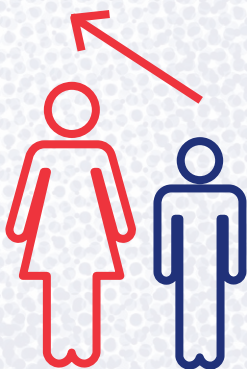
Poverty is more pronounced for women than men, with larger gender differences in rates of poverty for young women and women aged 55 and over.[25]
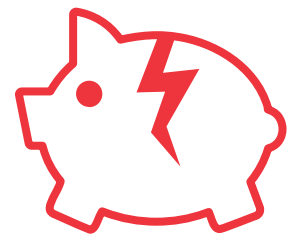
People who experience childhood poverty are up to 3.3 times more likely to remain in poverty in adult life.[26]

WE HAVE THE POWER TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE

WE CAN URGE ACTION FROM OUR GOVERNMENTS

Our social safety net is failing people. The Commonwealth Government needs to review and radically increase the rates of income support, such as JobSeeker and Youth Allowance, so that unemployment does not mean long-term poverty.

Governments need to work together to prioritise ending homelessness and housing stress. A commitment and concrete plan to increase social housing to at least 10 per cent of housing stock in Australia is a key intervention that will ease housing stress across our community.

WE CAN IMPLEMENT CHANGE IN OUR COMMUNITY AND OUR WORKPLACES

Workplaces and community groups often support causes through fundraising and learning opportunities. Poverty is a foundational social justice issue that leads to, results from, or exacerbates every other disadvantage in this report. When we are choosing a cause to highlight, we can choose ones that address the underlying issue of financial hardship.

When organising events, activities and memberships we can keep in mind that cost may be a barrier to some people participating. We can actively keep the individual cost of participation as low as possible and consider providing bursaries or scholarships to assist with costs that can be accessed without shame or stigma.

WE CAN HAVE INFLUENCE IN OUR PERSONAL LIVES

We can give to or volunteer with groups that are working to support people experiencing poverty. While structural issues need to be addressed, in the meantime there are already so many people doing what they can and so many opportunities to get involved. Acting in our own communities, we can make a difference for people one at a time.
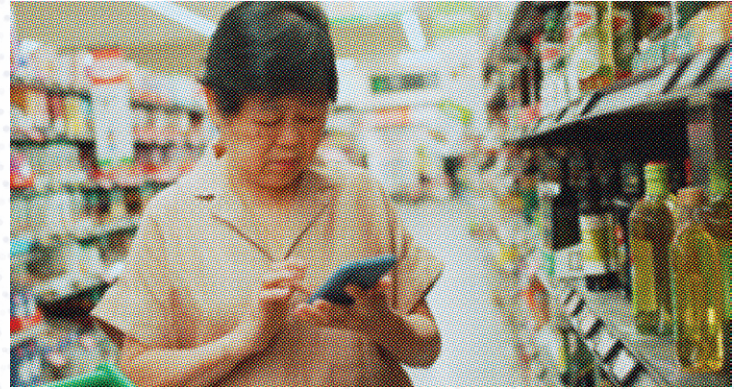
22   Royal Children's Hospital Melbourne. (2019). *Strong Foundations: Getting it Right in the First 1000 Days: A Case for Investment.* 28 https://www.rch.org.au/uploadedFiles/Main/Content/ccchdev/The-First-Thousand-Days-A-Case-for-Investment.pdf
23   Davidson, P., Bradbury, B., & Wong, M. (2023). *Poverty in Australia 2023: Who is affected.* Poverty and Inequality Partnership Report no. 20. Australian Council of Social Service and UNSW Sydney.
24   Verrelli, S., Russell, C., & Taylor, E. (2024). *Findings from the 2024 Red Shield Appeal Research Project.* The Salvation Army, Australia.
25   Duncan, A. (2022, March). *Behind the Line: Poverty and disadvantage in Australia 2022.* Bankwest Curtin Economics Centre. https://bcec.edu.au/assets/2022/03/BCEC-Poverty-and-Disadvantage-Report-March-2022-FINAL-WEB.pdf
26   Vera-Toscano, E., & Wilkins, R. (2020). *Does poverty in childhood beget poverty in adulthood in Australia?* Melbourne Institute: Applied Economic & Social Research, University of Melbourne.

ACCESS TO HEALTH CARE

Good health is fundamental to the quality of life all people deserve. Accessing quality health care early is critical to prevent a minor health problem becoming a serious chronic condition, which can have significant economic and lifestyle implications.

Unfortunately, many Australians cannot access suitable health care for a variety of reasons, including cost, availability of professionals, and capacity to take time away from other responsibilities.

Certain groups of people in Australia are more likely to experience barriers to accessing quality health care. These include rural and remote communities, lower income areas, people experiencing financial hardship, people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted the importance of quality health care for all people. The pandemic also exposed, and even made worse, many gaps and shortfalls in Australia's health care system, including staffing shortages and insufficient hospital beds. The impacts of this were disproportionately felt by people who were already experiencing disadvantage.

Some people are more likely to receive poor-quality care or have negative experiences with health services. For example, two-thirds of women report experiencing gender bias or discrimination when accessing health care.[27] Many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds receive care that is not culturally safe, from language barriers to discrimination and racism.[28,29] Some Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people report deciding not to access a health service due to fear or embarrassment.[30]

Issues with availability, affordability, accessibility, and quality of health care often lead to health conditions going unmonitored, unmanaged and becoming more difficult to treat. The impact of an untreated health condition can impact other areas of life, including relationships with others, and housing or employment security.

Inequitable access to health care has negative consequences for individuals, the community, and our economy.

WAITED

24

HOURS OR MORE

45.6 per cent of people who saw a General Practitioner (GP) for urgent medical care waited for 24 hours or more.[31]

7%

Seven per cent of people say cost was a reason for delaying a visit to or not using a GP. This is up from 3.5 per cent in 2021–22.[32]

1 IN 3

OFFER BULK BILLING

Only around one in three Australian GP clinics offer bulk billing to adults. In some electorates there are no bulk billing GPs.[33]

WE HAVE THE POWER TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE

WE CAN URGE ACTION FROM OUR GOVERNMENTS

Governments can work together to increase funding and flexibility in primary health care to encourage more bulk billed GP visits and to provide more clinicians in primary care such as nurses and allied health professionals.[34]

We can explore funding models that allow rural and remote communities to design innovative and sustainable models of primary care that address the needs of local communities.[35]

We can increase investment in Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisations (ACCHOs) to provide culturally informed and holistic health services that address local community needs and work to close the gap on health and wellbeing inequality for First Nations peoples.[36]

We should expect health services in Australia to be safe and equitable for all. We can push for governments to increase investment in healthcare research with an intersectional gendered lens to improve women's treatment in the health system.[37] Governments must identify and address barriers that exist across the nation to ensure equitable access to culturally safe and gender-responsive health care.

WE CAN IMPLEMENT CHANGE IN OUR COMMUNITY AND OUR WORKPLACES

When we organise events for our community groups and workplaces we can prioritise events and activities that are compatible with, or even promote, positive health and wellbeing.

Where we can influence our workplaces, wherever possible, we should provide options for flexible work arrangements that allow people to effectively manage their health around work.

WE CAN HAVE INFLUENCE IN OUR PERSONAL LIVES

We can invest in our health by getting regular physical activity and eating fresh and nutritious foods, where possible.

We can take action early when unwell, and encourage family and friends to do the same.

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30   Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. (2024). *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Performance Framework: summary report March 2024*. https://www.indigenoushpf.gov.au/Report-overview/Overview/Summary-Report
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32   Australian Bureau of Statistics. (2022-23). *Patient Experiences*. ABS. https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/health/health-services/patient-experiences/latest-release
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36   Australian Government. (2022). *Strengthening Medicare Taskforce Report*. https://www.health.gov.au/sites/default/files/2023-02/strengthening-medicare-taskforce-report_0.pdf
37   Australian Women's Health Alliance. (2023). *Policy brief: A gendered framework for action on prevention and healthcare*. https://australianwomenshealth.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/07/Australian-Womens-Health-Alliance-Policy-brief-Gendered-framework_FINAL.pdf

ALCOHOL AND DRUG MISUSE

Harmful alcohol and other drug use in Australia represents a significant public health concern, with wide-ranging social, economic, and health implications. Despite extensive efforts to address this issue, it remains a persistent challenge affecting individuals, families, and communities across the country.

Not all alcohol and drug use results in dependence or causes serious issues. In this context, we use the terminology "alcohol and drug misuse" to refer to substance use which incurs harm.

Some of the harm that can be associated with alcohol and drug misuse for individuals includes impacts on health and wellbeing, relationships, employment, and education. For the community, some of the harm from alcohol and drug misuse can include increased contact with the justice system, disease and injury, road accidents, and the exacerbation of mental ill-health and family and domestic violence.

Alcohol and other drug-related harm is both a driver and result of other forms of disadvantage. Often a person experiencing alcohol or other drug-related harm is also experiencing multiple disadvantages at once. Substance use itself can be disruptive to the brain, making it harder to change behaviour — even if a person wants to.

According to the National Drug Strategy Household Survey, in 2022-23 around 47 per cent of Australians aged 14 and over had used a non-prescribed 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.[38]

It is also estimated that around one in 20 Australians have lived experience of alcohol or drug misuse.

1742
ALCOHOL-INDUCED DEATHS
RECORDED IN 2022

There were 1742 alcohol-induced deaths recorded in 2022. This was a 9.1 per cent increase on 2021.[39]

Almost one in two Australians have engaged in non-prescribed substance use in their lifetime.[40]

1 IN 5

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.[41]

COST OF ADDICTION:
$80.3B

In 2021 the cost of addiction in Australia was estimated at $80.3 billion.[42]

WE HAVE THE POWER TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE

WE CAN URGE ACTION FROM OUR GOVERNMENTS

Governments can work together by investing in harm reduction and treatment services so that the health problems primarily associated with substance misuse can be mitigated.

When planning policy to address alcohol and drug use, governments need to understand the needs of local populations, particularly the voices of lived experience, to provide accessible alcohol and other drug treatment systems embedded within the wider welfare system to create pathways and services to better engage, maintain and transition people from treatment.

Alcohol and other drug misuse often occurs alongside other forms of disadvantage. Policy responses need to be holistic, tailored, and culturally appropriate, and focus on harm reduction and early intervention.

WE CAN IMPLEMENT CHANGE IN OUR COMMUNITY AND OUR WORKPLACES

Social connection is a supportive factor in minimising harm from alcohol and drug use. Community groups in particular have the power to ensure their events and activities are supportive and non-judgmental to create pathways for all people to build hopeful, purposeful, and meaningful lives.

Workplaces can incorporate understanding of alcohol and drug use, and the impact on health and wellbeing, in our wellbeing policies and supports (such as Employee Assistance Program which provides counselling to employees for a range of concerns).

WE CAN HAVE INFLUENCE IN OUR PERSONAL LIVES

Alcohol and drug misuse is a health issue and it can take great effort and courage to seek help. Instead of judging, we can listen and connect with people and reduce the stigma associated with substance use.

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41 Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. (2024). *National Drug Strategy Household Survey 2022–2023*. https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/illicit-use-of-drugs/national-drug-strategy-household-survey
42 Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. (2023). *Alcohol, tobacco and other drugs in Australia*. https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/alcohol/alcohol-tobacco-other-drugs-australia/contents/impacts/economic-impacts

FAMILY VIOLENCE

Family and domestic violence is a major health and welfare issue across Australia. It can impact all people, of all ages, from all backgrounds, but mainly impacts women and children.

Family and domestic violence is not always physical. Financial abuse, verbal abuse, emotional abuse, and coercive control can be less obvious, but just as harmful as physical violence. All forms of family violence can cause immediate and long-term harm to victim-survivors as well as others, especially children, who witness it.

Gender inequality and inequity in Australia provide the underlying conditions for violence against women. Many of the drivers of family violence are "societal", and how we, as a community and as individuals, respond to gender inequity and gender stereotypes can be a powerful force for change.

Family and domestic violence interacts with every other social justice issue in this report. It is the most prevalent reason women access homelessness services at The Salvation Army and is a major driver in youth homelessness. Experience and study also demonstrate that family and domestic violence is a significant cause of poverty for those who experience it.[43] Addressing the causes of family and domestic violence will have a flow-on effect in preventing other harm and injustices experienced by victim-survivors across Australia.

2 IN 5 EXPERIENCED VIOLENCE

Two in five women (39 per cent) have experienced violence since the age of 15.[44]

1 WOMAN MURDERED EVERY WEEK

On average in Australia one woman every week is murdered by her current or former partner.[45]

33 TIMES MORE LIKELY TO BE HOSPITALISED

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women are disproportionately impacted by family violence, and are 33 times more likely to be hospitalised than non-Indigenous women.[46]

Family and domestic violence is the leading driver of homelessness for women. In 2020-21, 116,200 of people who attended Specialist Homelessness Services reported they were escaping family violence.[47]

WE HAVE THE POWER TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE

WE CAN URGE ACTION FROM OUR GOVERNMENTS

When victim-survivors seek help, we need to be able to help them. Governments can work together to ensure there is sufficient funding for crisis supports, and that those supports allow victim-survivors to be physically safe while continuing to be employed, pursue education and be connected.

Family violence is widespread but often misunderstood — we need to implement specialist training for key first responders to ensure they can correctly identify person/s in need of protection and respond with meaningful support options.

The most important support for a victim-survivor experiencing family violence is access to safe and secure housing — we need to increase the availability of suitable housing so that all victim-survivors can access support.

WE CAN IMPLEMENT CHANGE IN OUR COMMUNITY AND OUR WORKPLACES

Education is key. In our community groups and workplaces we can have safe but challenging conversations to ensure that people are equipped with the tools and resources to understand the nature of family and domestic violence as a pattern of behaviours over time.

We can also create environments where it is safe for employees and members to disclose family violence. This involves not just cultivating a safe culture but ensuring that leaders and managers have access to information, training and supervision so they are equipped to safely and compassionately connect people experiencing family violence to support.

WE CAN HAVE INFLUENCE IN OUR PERSONAL LIVES

We can challenge our own ideas and language around family violence and question when others use language that minimises or excuses violence within the family or home.

Everyone can call out negative behaviour. It is important to do so in a manner that doesn't shame the victim, but you can always say "that's not okay".

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44   Australian Bureau of Statistics. (2021-22). *Personal Safety, Australia.* ABS. https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/people/crime-and-justice/personal-safety-australia/latest-release
45   Bryant, W., & Bricknell, S. (2017). *Homicide in Australia 2012-13 to 2013-14: National Homicide Monitoring Program report.* Australian Institute of Criminology. https://doi.org/10.52922/sr234734
46   Commonwealth of Australia (Department of Social Services). (2023). *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Action Plan 2023–2025: Under the National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children 2022–2032.* https://www.dss.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/10_2023/dedicated-action-plan.pdf
47   AHURI. (2022). *Housing, homelessness and domestic violence.* https://www.ahuri.edu.au/analysis/brief/housing-homelessness-and-domestic-and-family-violence#:~:text=Domestic%20and%20family%20violence%20(DFV,that%20they%20were%20escaping%20DFV

CLIMATE CHANGE

Australia's climate has warmed since records started to be kept in 1910.[48] This is because of the greenhouse effect, where the level of carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases in the Earth's atmosphere act as a blanket, trapping in heat.[49] The United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) found that this has been caused by human activities.[50]

Changes in our climate have led to:

- More frequent and intense extreme weather events like floods, heatwaves and bushfires
- Changes to rainfall patterns
- Rising sea temperature and levels
- More hot days and less cold days
- Coral bleaching[51]

Climate change impacts go beyond the environmental impacts. Climate change will have strong impacts on physical and mental health, including those resulting from lack of access to clean water and sanitation, changes to spread in diseases, increased natural disasters, and poverty.

We are already experiencing this in Australia with disaster trends being complex, compounding and cascading, and it is expected to get worse.[52] Climate change responses must lower emissions and help our community adapt to a changing climate. Unfortunately, people already experiencing disadvantage are more likely to be impacted negatively both by climate change and by measures to adapt. They typically have fewer resources to reduce the personal impact of climate change (such as installing solar panels or moving to a safer region) and to recover from it (such as rebuilding after a flood or fire). This means that addressing climate change is not just an environmental or economic imperative — it is a social justice priority.

1.47°C WARMER

Australia's climate has warmed by an average of 1.47°C since national records began in 1910.[53] Global surface temperature was 1.09°C higher in the decade between 2011–2020 than in the period between 1850–1900.[54]

There has been an increase in extreme fire weather, and a longer fire season, across large parts of Australia since the 1950s.[55]

84% DIRECTLY AFFECTED

A Climate Council survey found that 84 per cent of respondents had been directly affected by at least one climate-fuelled disaster since 2019. The same percentage report being worried that their home insurance may become unaffordable due to worsening disasters.[56]

$1532 AVERAGE COST PER AUSSIE HOUSEHOLD

It is estimated that the extreme weather events that happened between September 2021 and September 2022 cost every Australian household an average of $1532.[57]

WE HAVE THE POWER TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE

WE CAN URGE ACTION FROM OUR GOVERNMENTS

As a nation we can commit to deep, rapid and sustained reductions in Australia's greenhouse gas emissions before 2030, and net zero carbon dioxide emissions by the early 2050s.

At all levels of government, we can invest in, and create, policies that encourage widespread investment in renewable energy, energy conservation and efficiency, and reducing transport emissions.

In relevant policy, regulatory and planning settings, the risks and impacts of climate change, especially on those already experiencing disadvantage, can be at the forefront of decision-making processes. Given the increasing likelihood and severity of climate-related disasters, it is imperative that governments commit effort and resources to developing resilience and preparedness.

WE CAN IMPLEMENT CHANGE IN OUR COMMUNITY AND OUR WORKPLACES

When we are making a business decision about what we sell or purchase and how we manage waste, we can consider the climate change impact of our actions.

Our community groups can support local food growers and producers, reclaim green spaces, or grow the local circular economy.

When we've found actions that work, we can share knowledge and resources to help and encourage others in the community reduce our individual and collective footprint.

WE CAN HAVE INFLUENCE IN OUR PERSONAL LIVES

We can commit to one change to reduce our individual greenhouse gas footprint. This could look like eating more sustainable and healthy meals once a week, reducing our food waste, catching public transport, cycling or walking instead of driving, or changing the energy sources we rely on.

48   CSIRO and the Bureau of Meteorology. (2022). *State of the Climate 2022.* https://www.csiro.au/-/media/OnA/Files/SOTC22/22-00220_OA_REPORT_StateoftheClimate2022_WEB_221115.pdf
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50   IPCC. (2023). Summary for Policymakers. In: *Climate Change 2023: Synthesis Report. Contribution of Working Groups I, II and III to the Sixth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change* [Core Writing Team, H. Lee and J. Romero (eds.)]. IPCC, Geneva, Switzerland, pp. 1-34. https://doi.org/10.59327/IPCC/AR6-9789291691647.001
51   Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water. (n.d.). *Understanding climate change.* DCCEEW. https://www.dcceew.gov.au/climate-change/policy/climate-science/understanding-climate-change
     CSIRO and the Bureau of Meteorology. (2022). *State of the Climate 2022.* https://www.csiro.au/-/media/OnA/Files/SOTC22/22-00220_OA_REPORT_StateoftheClimate2022_WEB_221115.pdf
52   IPCC. (2023). Summary for Policymakers. In: *Climate Change 2023: Synthesis Report. Contribution of Working Groups I, II and III to the Sixth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change* [Core Writing Team, H. Lee and J. Romero (eds.)]. IPCC, Geneva, Switzerland, pp. 1-34. https://doi.org/10.59327/IPCC/AR6-9789291691647.001
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54   IPCC. (2023). Summary for Policymakers. In: *Climate Change 2023: Synthesis Report. Contribution of Working Groups I, II and III to the Sixth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change* [Core Writing Team, H. Lee and J. Romero (eds.)]. IPCC, Geneva, Switzerland, pp. 1-34. https://doi.org/10.59327/IPCC/AR6-9789291691647.001
55   CSIRO and the Bureau of Meteorology. (2022). *State of the Climate 2022.* https://www.csiro.au/-/media/OnA/Files/SOTC22/22-00220_OA_REPORT_StateoftheClimate2022_WEB_221115.pdf
56   Climate Council. (2024). *Survey results: Climate-fuelled disasters cause Australians to fear permanent loss of homes.* https://www.climatecouncil.org.au/resources/survey-results-climate-fuelled-disasters-cause-australians-to-fear-permanent-loss-of-homes/#:~:text=More%20than%201%20in%203,or%20knowing%20someone%20who%20has
57   Lefebvre, M., & Reinhard, J. (2022). *The Cost of Extreme Weather: Building Resilience in the face of disaster.* The McKell Institute. https://insurancecouncil.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/McKell_Cost-of-Natural-Disasters_SINGLES_WEB.pdf

UNEMPLOYMENT AND UNDEREMPLOYMENT

Unemployment and underemployment pose significant challenges to Australians and the economy. When we talk about unemployment in government reporting we generally mean people who have no paid employment and are actively seeking employment. People who work just one hour a week do not count as unemployed in official figures even when they are actively seeking more work (they are underemployed). People who cannot actively seek employment, or become discouraged and have stopped looking for work, are also not included in the headline unemployment numbers.

Many Australians face uncertain job situations, not because they lack skills or experience, but because there are not jobs available. Economic conditions, structural changes in demand for skills, and difficulties around labour mobility (a mismatch of where the job is located and where the person looking can live) all impact employment opportunities. The nature of the job market has also changed, with casual work and the "gig economy" growing in prevalence. Unfortunately, an uncertain job market increases the risk of worker exploitation and people feel they have fewer options and less ability to stand up for themselves.

Unemployment, underemployment and casualised employment can be a major source of stress that has the potential to compromise the health and wellbeing of individuals. In Australia we have an income support safety net for people seeking work but it is currently set at such low levels that it does not provide enough to allow a person to live and seek work and can trap a person in poverty and unemployment. Currently in Australia, about 750,000 people are "long-term unemployed", meaning they have been receiving income support payments for 12 months or longer.[58]

Secure employment provides more than just financial stability. It provides an opportunity to grow skills and make a contribution. This is why addressing the barriers to employment is so critical to the wellbeing of individuals and our community.[59]

Since November 2022 the underemployment rate has risen steadily and is nearly twice the headline unemployment rate.[60]

Underemployment rates are consistently higher for women than men. As much as 7.5 per cent of women in the labour force experienced underemployment (July 2023) and only 5.3 per cent of men.[61]

As many as 19.9 per cent of suicides in Australia between 2004 and 2016 related directly to unemployment or underemployment.[62]

48% WITH DISABILITY VS 80% WITHOUT DISABILITY

Only 48 per cent of people with disability are employed, compared to 80 per cent of people without disability.[63]

WE HAVE THE POWER TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE

WE CAN URGE ACTION FROM OUR GOVERNMENTS

Governments can address some negative impacts of unemployment by ensuring that our income support safety net is fit for purpose. This involves an immediate increase to income support payments such as JobSeeker and Youth Allowance.

Governments can also re-examine the measures of economic success to recognise the negative impacts of unemployment. At the Commonwealth level, work has already begun on considering budget decisions through a wellbeing framework. This thinking could be extended to committing to full employment and making sure our ideas of unemployment shift to account for underemployment.

Other concrete actions governments can take involve positive promotion and working with industries that currently struggle to attract workers to make them attractive to jobseekers. Governments can also ensure that employment services are fit for the purpose of helping jobseekers, including by implementing measures like mandatory minimum professional standards.

WE CAN IMPLEMENT CHANGE IN OUR COMMUNITY AND OUR WORKPLACES

Businesses have a huge role to play in both creating employment opportunities and ensuring that workers are treated fairly. In our workplaces we can make sure that employees are aware of their rights and feel safe and comfortable raising any concerns they have.

Businesses can also consciously implement strategies to increase employment opportunities for a diverse range of people, recognising the significant contribution that any person can make. For example, we can significantly broaden our thinking about the wide range of contributions people with disability can bring to the workplace.

Community groups can also be a wonderful place of belonging for people experiencing unemployment. In our community groups we can provide opportunities for people to volunteer and remain connected to their community, as well as build and maintain valuable skills.

WE CAN HAVE INFLUENCE IN OUR PERSONAL LIVES

When people in our circles are unemployed we can be sympathetic and respectful. We can work to dismantle preconceived ideas about those experiencing unemployment, acknowledging that many barriers to employment exist outside of an individual's control.

Unfortunately, some companies have taken advantage of the precarious nature of the jobs market. As consumers we can avoid using services and industries that are known to have exploitative employment practices.

58   Australian Bureau of Statistics. (2024, May). *Labour Force, Australia.* ABS. https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/labour/employment-and-unemployment/labour-force-australia/may-2024
59   Australian Council of Social Services (ACOSS). *Faces of Unemployment 2021.* ACOSS: Strawberry Hills. https://www.acoss.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/Faces-of-Unemployment-2021_v2.pdf
60   Australian Bureau of Statistics. (2024, May). *Labour Force, Australia.* ABS. https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/labour/employment-and-unemployment/labour-force-australia/may-2024
61   Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. (2023). *Employment and unemployment.* https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/australias-welfare/employment-unemployment
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63   Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. (2022). *People with disability in Australia.* https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/disability/people-with-disability-in-australia

SOCIAL ISOLATION AND LONELINESS

People often associate social isolation and loneliness with the COVID-19 pandemic but this has been an issue in our community for a long time. Social isolation and loneliness are different but related. Social isolation is a measure of meaningful social connection and interaction while loneliness is the unpleasant feeling that may come about because of social isolation.

There are many causes of social isolation and loneliness. Social isolation can result from several factors, including geographical remoteness, life transitions, and societal changes.

Many older people experience loneliness and social disconnectedness due to factors such as retirement, loss of loved ones, and physical health limitations. Young people in Australia also face challenges related to social isolation. Despite being more connected than ever through online platforms, many young people report feelings of loneliness and disconnection, which can impact their self-esteem, mental health, and sense of belonging.

There is a clear relationship between financial hardship and social isolation and loneliness. People experiencing poverty or financial hardship are often forced into social isolation and develop feelings of loneliness.

People experiencing loneliness have a higher risk of mental ill health, particularly depression and anxiety. This can start a feedback loop, as people who are anxious or feeling depressed may isolate themselves further as a coping mechanism. Loneliness can have other implications too, including poorer physical health, pain and sleep disorders, and even gastrointestinal disease.

Once a person experiences the negative implications of social isolation and loneliness, it can lead to other forms of disadvantage, including difficulty maintaining employment, housing, and other relationships. This is why it is so important to foster meaningful and purposeful social connections, and a sense of belonging and community inclusion (while providing accessible resources and support services), so all individuals feel valued, connected, and supported in their communities.

1 IN 20

In August 2022, about one in 20 (4.8 per cent) Australians reported never meeting socially with friends, colleagues or relatives. This is more than double pre-pandemic levels of isolation.[64]

Young people (aged 18–24) were most likely to report high levels of loneliness throughout the pandemic.[65]

TWICE
AS LIKELY TO HAVE
CHRONIC DISEASE

People who are moderately lonely are twice as likely to have chronic disease as people who are not lonely.[66]

46%
TOO EMBARRASSED TO ADMIT FEELING LONELY

46 per cent of people say they are too embarrassed to admit it to others when they feel lonely.[67]

WE HAVE THE POWER TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE

WE CAN URGE ACTION FROM OUR GOVERNMENTS

Governments can lead the conversation on social isolation and loneliness by creating frameworks of accountability such as developing ways of measuring social isolation and loneliness and appointing a minister with responsibility for minimising social isolation.

Governments of all levels can work to address service gaps that can cause people experiencing hardship (such as family and domestic violence, homelessness, substance misuse, and mental ill health) to be pushed into isolation and loneliness.

WE CAN IMPLEMENT CHANGE IN OUR COMMUNITY AND OUR WORKPLACES

Community groups have huge power to address loneliness and social isolation. This might involve dedicated outreach to attract more participants to events or activities, or checking in and building deeper connections with currently active members.

Workplaces are an important element of many people's social lives. We can provide constructive social interaction for employees but we can also see our businesses as opportunities for social connection with customers and community members.

To foster connection, social programs need to be welcoming to a broad cohort, and flexible and adaptable to a specific community's needs. Community groups can be collaborative and interconnected to support those with more intensive needs.

WE CAN HAVE INFLUENCE IN OUR PERSONAL LIVES

We can address social isolation and loneliness in ourselves and in our community by being open to building social connections across all aspects of our lives, from our neighbourhoods, workplaces, community groups, and family.

We can learn how to identify and support someone experiencing social isolation and loneliness. This can have a profound impact on the people around us.

64   Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. (2023). *Social Isolation and loneliness.* https://www.aihw.gov.au/getmedia/c47cb232-4f6f-4eb0-853e-d601bf6ee01c/aihw-aus-246_chapter_2.pdf
65   Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. (2023). *Social Isolation and loneliness.* https://www.aihw.gov.au/getmedia/c47cb232-4f6f-4eb0-853e-d601bf6ee01c/aihw-aus-246_chapter_2.pdf
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OPPORTUNITIES FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

Children and young people have the right to a full life, where they can thrive, be supported, and be empowered. The early years of a child's life are foundational for future health, development, and wellbeing outcomes. Unfortunately, many children and young people in our country do not have a great start in life and face various challenges that are outside their control. This can be stressful, traumatic, and disruptive to their development, and have lifelong impacts.

On average, one in six Australian children aged 0-14 years live in poverty.[68] Children living in regional Australia are more at risk of child social exclusion, a measure of childhood disadvantage which extends the concept of child poverty, with almost 48 per cent of children in regional areas falling into the two most excluded quintiles.[69] There is a strong correlation between experiencing poverty in the first thousand days of life and experiencing adverse health and wellbeing outcomes in later life.[70] The effects of poverty also adversely impact educational attainment, with children experiencing disadvantage being on average two to three years behind in reading and maths by the time they reach 15 years. This can prevent children from reaching their full potential later in life and perpetuates intergenerational disadvantage for those 1.2 million Australian children living in poverty.[71]

Children and young people living in out-of-home care are even more acutely affected. Children and young people living in out-of-home care experience poorer wellbeing outcomes in general, as well as having often experienced a range of significant adverse life experiences and traumas. These experiences are linked with reduced social skills, developmental disruption, poorer educational attainment, increased likelihood of encountering the youth justice system, poorer physical and mental health outcomes, impacts to their attachment behaviours and connection to community.[72]

For young people, limited employment prospects in Australia can substantially impact their wellbeing. Being unemployed restricts access to a wide range of services, opportunities, and necessities, including housing, transportation, and basic living needs.

These adverse experiences in childhood and at a young age can result in ongoing and chronic experiences of poverty across a person's whole life. We need to ensure opportunities for children and young people so they can achieve their potential at any age.
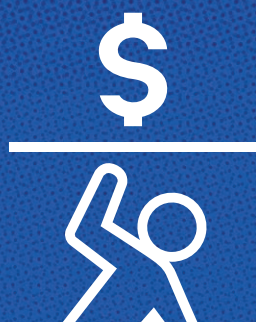
One in every six Australian children live below the national poverty line.[73]

In 2021 nearly a quarter (23 per cent) of all people experiencing homelessness were aged from 12 to 24 years.[74]

30%
OF YOUNG PEOPLE EXPERIENCE HOMELESSNESS

30 per cent of young people experience homelessness within the first year of leaving out-of-home care.[75]

YOUTH UNEMPLOYMENT RATE IN 2024:
9.7%

In 2024, the youth unemployment rate was at 9.7 per cent compared to four per cent for the adult population.[76]

WE HAVE THE POWER TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE

WE CAN URGE ACTION FROM OUR GOVERNMENTS

At all levels of government, we can implement legislative and administrative processes that respect and uphold the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.

We can commit to ensuring the programs and resources available for young people will provide equitable access to opportunities and support. We can provide funding for integrated, culturally safe, and non-discriminatory services and programs (such as through schools, health, and community centres), with a focus on communities experiencing the greatest disadvantage.

We can actively involve and privilege the voices and expertise of children and young people to make sure that resources, support services, and interventions are tailored, flexible, and responsive to the unique experience of each child or young person.

WE CAN IMPLEMENT CHANGE IN OUR COMMUNITY AND OUR WORKPLACES

When we are organising social and community groups and events we can seek out the insights, experiences, and skills of children and young people to make sure that our spaces are safe and welcoming.

We can actively create opportunities for young people to build skills and experience that will be useful for their futures and align with their interests and desires.

We can work to raise awareness and support causes that promote the fair treatment of, and wellbeing of, children and young people. This can include ensuring that staff, volunteers, and members are educated in, and accountable to, the national child safe principles, to protect children from harm.

WE CAN HAVE INFLUENCE IN OUR PERSONAL LIVES

In our day-to-day interactions we can acknowledge that young people are active agents of change and key players in society, and treat them as such. We can also listen to and treat children and young people with the dignity and respect they deserve.

We can open our eyes to the children around us and seek genuine connections with children in spaces that are safe, appealing, and welcoming to them.

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OLDER AUSTRALIANS DISCRIMINATION AND DISADVANTAGE

Older Australians make an enormous contribution to Australian society. In addition to their social contributions, older people contribute almost $39 billion each year to the Australian economy in unpaid caring and volunteer work.[77] We are living for longer, which means that Australia's population is ageing.[78]

Older Australians live longer and healthier lives than those in earlier generations, but many older people still experience considerable hardship. Older people (65 years plus) are especially at risk of falling into poverty, homelessness, and housing insecurity. This is primarily because the Age Pension has not kept step with the rising cost of living (and particularly, the rising cost of housing for those renting or with a mortgage).

One in three older Australians report experiencing some form of age-related discrimination, including employment-related discrimination.[79] The Australian Human Rights Commission found that older people are shut out of paid work because of age discrimination during recruitment, in the workplace, and in decisions about training and promotion.[80]

Over one in three people over the age of 65 (37 per cent or 1.2 million people) were born overseas,[81] with older Australians speaking over 260 different languages.[82] Other issues experienced by all older Australians can be more pronounced for people from a culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) background, including social isolation, poor access to health care, and loneliness.[83]

Transitional life changes can increase the risk of, or act as, a trigger for loneliness. Over 15 per cent of Australians aged 65 and over report feeling lonely,[84] with rates of loneliness higher among older people living in residential aged care.[85] Research shows that older people experiencing loneliness and social isolation are also more likely to experience social exclusion and significant health problems.[86] There is so much that we can do as a nation to value and support older people in our communities.

Older people made up about 16 per cent of the total Australian population in 2020.[87]

AUSTRALIANS AGED
85 YRS+ ↗

PROJECTED TO DOUBLE BY 2042

The number of Australians aged 85 years and over is projected to double by 2042, increasing to over one million.[88]

63 per cent of people aged 65 and over (2.8 million people) receive income support payments, primarily the Age Pension.[89]

1 IN 7

EXPERIENCE ELDER ABUSE

Approximately one in seven older Australians experience elder abuse each year.[90]

WE HAVE THE POWER TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE

WE CAN URGE ACTION FROM OUR GOVERNMENTS

Governments need to work together to develop a national policy to promote healthy ageing with consideration of the differing and diverse needs of older Australians. This policy needs to consider the rapid growth of the population of older Australians and the desire of most older Australians to remain in their communities as they age.

Governments also need to develop strategies and programs for older Australians, including education around digital literacy and safety, accessible transport, financial literacy, elder abuse, social connection and loneliness, training to (re)enter the workforce, and increased volunteerism. These programs must be informed by lived experience and evidence-informed research about the needs of older Australians.

WE CAN IMPLEMENT CHANGE IN OUR COMMUNITY AND OUR WORKPLACES

In our workplaces we need to recognise the huge contribution older Australians continue to make, and ensure equal opportunities in recruitment, training, and career progression. There should be no place for ageism and age-related discrimination in the workplace.

Community groups are crucial in addressing the social isolation and loneliness that some older Australians experience. When recruiting members, and planning events and activities, we can make sure that we are being welcoming and accessible for older Australians so we can all benefit from what they bring.

WE CAN HAVE INFLUENCE IN OUR PERSONAL LIVES

We almost certainly already have older people who are valuable parts of our lives. We can make sure we are reaching out so we can enjoy their company. We can also recognise that a difference in age is no barrier to making new friends.

We can be agents of change if we witness discrimination against older people in the community and in the workplace.

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RACISM AND DISCRIMINATION

Racism can take many forms and includes "prejudice, discrimination or hatred directed at someone because of their colour, ethnicity or national origin". Racism can be overt (where disadvantage against a particular group is openly acted on or spoken about), covert (where it is subtle such as a "joke" or when seemingly universal rules only actually affect one group) or structural (where processes or systems either purposely or inadvertently disadvantage a particular group).

Unfortunately, racism is a common occurrence in Australia. Over the past 10 years, racist incidents have been reported in all aspects of Australian society, from everyday settings such as public transport, to essential institutions such as education and healthcare. While legislation protects against discrimination based on race, many people experience racism daily.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds experience racism

at a higher rate than the general population. Racist attitudes and behaviours often become more pronounced, and less veiled, according to topical and current affairs in Australian society. This can sometimes lead to an increase in racial discrimination against specific groups in society at a given time. Sadly, we have seen examples of this even as a result of events far from Australia's shores. At the heart of racism is the failure to recognise that we are all inherently equal and valuable, so that is where we need to start in addressing racism.

Research shows a correlation between racial discrimination and poorer physical and mental health.[91]

62%

INDICATED RACISM
A "VERY BIG" OR "FAIRLY BIG" PROBLEM

62 per cent of respondents to a social cohesion survey indicated racism was a "very big" or "fairly big problem".[92]

60 per cent of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples reported experiencing at least one form of racial prejudice in the past six months.[93]

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples also experience the highest rates of workplace discrimination (50 per cent compared with 24 per cent of non-Indigenous workers).[94]

WE HAVE THE POWER TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE

WE CAN URGE ACTION FROM OUR GOVERNMENTS

Governments of all levels can strengthen and enforce anti-discrimination laws to ensure equal treatment for all citizens, including regularly updating legislation to address emerging forms of discrimination. One part of this is ensuring that it is easy and accessible to report instances of discrimination.

Young people are critical to eliminating racism and discrimination. Governments can work together to implement culturally appropriate educational programs that promote understanding, tolerance, and diversity in schools.

WE CAN IMPLEMENT CHANGE IN OUR COMMUNITY AND OUR WORKPLACES

In our workplaces we can push for mandatory workplace diversity training to foster an inclusive and safe work environment.

When organising events, we can make sure they are welcoming and culturally appropriate. We can theme social events around celebrations of the value of diversity such as Harmony Day, NAIDOC Week or culturally specific holidays like the Lunar New Year.

We can also make sure that services, supports and business offerings we organise are accessible and empowering to diverse communities.

WE CAN HAVE INFLUENCE IN OUR PERSONAL LIVES

Unconscious bias is a driver of racism and sometimes we can unthinkingly act on beliefs that consciously we know not to be true. That gives us the opportunity to really examine some of the assumptions we may have made and then choose to act in a more deliberate and considerate way.

Racism is often subtle, so we can be hugely influential as individuals simply by seeing and calling out casual racism. This might look like not laughing at jokes that rely on racial stereotypes, critically examining arguments that make assumptions about people from other cultures, or even calling out statements that are discriminatory.

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GAMBLING HARM

Gambling, like any other addiction, is a chronic disease, not a personal weakness or a moral failing. Australians spend more on gambling per capita each year than any other country, around $1300 per adult.[95]

Gambling harm is any adverse consequence related to gambling activity. Gambling harm is about more than losing money and extends beyond the individual, impacting loved ones and communities. For every person experiencing harm because they gamble, another six experience harm because of that gambling.[96]

Gambling harm ranges from minor consequences to major crises, and the harm experienced is not always proportionate to the gambling participation.[97] Gambling harm can include relationship difficulties, health concerns, psychological or emotional distress, financial problems, issues with work or study, cultural issues, and criminal activity.

Because gambling harm is so widespread in Australia, and affects so many people, it is critical that we look at ways to support people who want to stop or lessen their gambling activity, and prevent harm from occurring wherever possible.

In June 2023, the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Social Policy and Legal Affairs inquiry report, "You Win Some, You Lose More: Online Gambling and its Impacts on those Experiencing Gambling Harm", was released, outlining 31 recommendations to reform the gambling industry, with one key recommendation being a comprehensive ban on online gambling advertising within three years.[98]
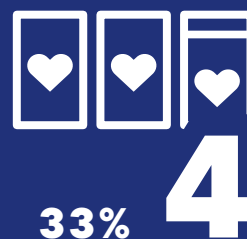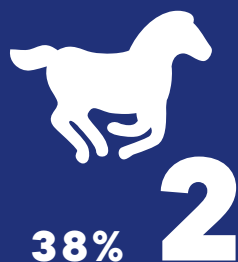
$25B

APPROX.

LOST ON GAMBLING EACH YEAR

Australians lose approximately $25 billion on legal forms of gambling each year.[99]
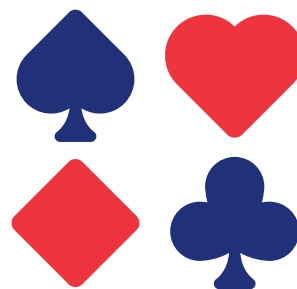
In 2022, three in four (73 per cent) of Australians aged over 18 reported gambling in the past 12 months.[100]

MOST COMMON GAMBLING PRODUCTS

64% **1** 38% **2** 34% **3** 33% **4**
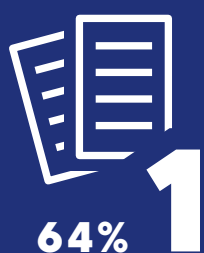
The most common gambling products Australians spend money on are lotteries and scratchies (64 per cent), horse racing (38 per cent), sports betting (34 per cent) and poker machines (33 per cent).[101]

WE HAVE THE POWER TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE

WE CAN URGE ACTION FROM OUR GOVERNMENTS

Gambling harm minimisation, prevention, and consumer protections need to be at the centre of any gambling-related legislation and policy across the country. To support that, governments need to reduce their reliance on gambling tax revenue.

Regulatory and policy interventions need to focus on consumer protections and preventing harm. Measures such as banning online gambling advertising, reducing availability of poker machines in the most stressed communities, and increasing the obligations on gaming venues to identify gambling behaviour that could lead to harm, could have a real impact in reducing harm.

Funding for early intervention and prevention programs to prevent harms associated with gambling from occurring is more effective than only providing support after harm has occurred.

WE CAN IMPLEMENT CHANGE IN OUR COMMUNITY AND OUR WORKPLACES

One major thing we can do in our workplaces and community groups is to ensure that social events and activities are not centred around gambling. Being sensitive to the possibility that some of our colleagues and friends may be experiencing gambling harm might lead us to avoid gaming venues for social events or forgo "office sweeps" on sporting matches.

We can also make sure that our workplaces and social groups do not perpetuate stigma around seeking help to reduce gambling (such as self-exclusion programs or counselling) and that our Employee Assistance Programs are available to help employees who may want to access help and support.

WE CAN HAVE INFLUENCE IN OUR PERSONAL LIVES

In our own lives, we can recognise that a person exhibiting concerning addictive behaviour around gambling is dealing with a health issue and not a personal weakness. It might be that we have friends and family who are experiencing gambling harm and, by the way we talk about gambling, we can reduce the stigma around seeking help.

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DISABILITY DISCRIMINATION AND DISADVANTAGE

Disability is an innate part of human diversity. Approximately one in five Australians live with disability. People with disability contribute diverse skills and perspectives to our relationships, workplaces, and communities.

It is unlawful to discriminate against a person because of their disability in many areas of public life, including employment, education, accessing services, renting or buying a property, and accessing public places. Every year there are more complaints about disability discrimination to the Australian Human Rights Commission (AHRC) than any other form of discrimination.[102]

The discrimination and exclusion of people with disability is not a result of a person's impairment, but a result of attitudinal, communication, physical, and social barriers they face. We must reshape society to meaningfully include people with disability.

The Disability Royal Commission shone a light on the widespread violence, abuse, neglect, and exploitation of people with disability in Australia. It made 222 recommendations to improve the independence, inclusion and rights of people with disability. The goal is for communities to be safe and diverse, where people with disability have the power of choice and independence.

When people with disability fully participate and are empowered to achieve their full potential — socially, politically, and economically — our whole society benefits.

55%
HAVE EXPERIENCED VIOLENCE SINCE 15YRS OLD

People with disability experience higher rates of violence, abuse and neglect than people without disability. More than half of people with disability (55 per cent) have experienced physical or sexual violence since the age of 15, compared with 38 per cent of those without disability.[103]

People with disability are more likely to leave school at younger ages and to have a lower level of educational attainment. 45.3 per cent of people with disability have completed Year 12, an increase from 33.4 per cent in 2018,[104] but still lower than the general population who have completed a Year 12 qualification or higher (66.7 per cent).[105]

60.5%
AGED 15-64 YEARS WITH DISABILITY ARE EMPLOYED

VS

84.9%
WITHOUT DISABILITY

60.5 per cent of people aged 15–64 years with disability are employed, up from 53.4 per cent in 2018. This is still significantly lower than those without disability (84.9 per cent).[106]

WE HAVE THE POWER TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE

WE CAN URGE ACTION FROM OUR GOVERNMENTS

All governments will need to work together to eliminate violence, abuse, neglect, and exploitation of people with disability by implementing meaningful change through disability-led, co-designed solutions in response to the Disability Royal Commission's final report.

Fundamental to empowering people with disability to achieve their potential is ensuring they have the support they need. This involves both ensuring that the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) is adequately funded and fit for purpose (including by implementing the recommendations of the NDIS Review) but also that mainstream services such as housing, health, education, and transport are inclusive and accessible for people with disability.

WE CAN IMPLEMENT CHANGE IN OUR COMMUNITY AND OUR WORKPLACES

Community spaces and activities should be inclusive and accessible. When we are planning an event or activity we can make sure to address any physical, communication, or social barriers that may prevent a person with disability being able to participate. In our communities and workplaces, it is critical we ensure that all communications and messaging are disability-inclusive.

In our workplaces, there is an access and inclusion health check that businesses can undertake to understand how inclusive and accessible a workplace is, and identify areas for improvement.[107] We can do a health check and implement changes.

We can ensure that recruitment practices (for employees, members and leaders) are inclusive and accessible so they attract, encourage, and support applications from people with disability. People with disability bring diverse ways of thinking, skills, and talents, and improve workplace culture and productivity.[108]

WE CAN HAVE INFLUENCE IN OUR PERSONAL LIVES

In our own lives and social groups, we can make sure we are not inadvertently excluding people with disability. With one in five Australians identifying as having a disability, we need to not be shy about making connections.

Given the prevalence of discrimination, we can also model behaviour that is respectful and considerate, and challenge people around us if they express negative and harmful beliefs and attitudes about people with disability.

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ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER DISCRIMINATION AND DISADVANTAGE

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are part of the oldest living culture in the world, but they are also amongst the Australians who experience the most disadvantage. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities experience lower life expectancy and poorer health outcomes, while encountering higher rates of infant and maternal mortality,[109] family and domestic violence, suicide, and incarceration.

There are both historical and current contributors to this disadvantage, and the experience of colonialism[110] and suppression of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures have an ongoing negative effect on people from these cultures. Many of the drivers of disadvantage are systemic and structural. This means that as well as addressing disadvantage as it is experienced, we also need to address the underlying structures which cause, or lead to, discrimination and hardship.

In Australia, successive governments have committed to "Closing the Gap" between outcomes experienced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and those enjoyed by non-Indigenous Australians, but we are not making the progress that was intended.

The Productivity Commission Review report in February 2024 emphasised the need for a departure from a tokenistic approach and encourages governments to involve Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people,[111] organisations, and communities in assessing and addressing institutional racism and unconscious bias. The report also highlights the importance of empowering Indigenous communities to drive their own solutions and participate actively in decision-making processes.

5 OUT OF 19

Only five out of 19 "Closing the Gap" targets are on track. Children thriving in early childhood, imprisonment rates, the proportion of children in out-of-home care, and social and emotional wellbeing, have all worsened in recent years.[112]

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children represent 44 per cent of children in out-of-home care but make up only six per cent of Australia's children.[113]

58% EMPLOYED

In 2021, 58 per cent of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples aged 15-24 were fully engaged in employment, education, or training, compared to 88 per cent of Australians in the same age bracket.[114]

LIFE EXPECTANCY GAP STILL SUBSTANTIAL

The most recent "Closing the Gap" review identified that the life expectancy gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians was still substantial (8.6 years for males and 7.8 years for females).[115]

WE HAVE THE POWER TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE

WE CAN URGE ACTION FROM OUR GOVERNMENTS

Governments have committed to "Closing the Gap" but there are still issues with how the policies and programs created to close the gap are designed and implemented. It is critical that governments co-design and work with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in good faith to design programs that are truly fit for purpose and culturally appropriate.

The Commonwealth Government has committed to implementing the Uluru Statement from the Heart in full. In the wake of the "No" referendum result in 2023, it is critical that action to address historic and contemporary injustices, and centre Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander voices in every conversation that concerns them, is maintained.

WE CAN IMPLEMENT CHANGE IN OUR COMMUNITY AND OUR WORKPLACES

Any organisation can make a commitment to reconciliation. We can encourage the businesses and organisations we are involved with to develop a Reconciliation Action Plan.

In our workplaces we can ensure a safe and inclusive environment for Indigenous employees by implementing cultural awareness and competency training programs to foster understanding and respect for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures, histories, and perspectives.

When we are organising events, we can work with our local Traditional Owners as well as Indigenous organisations and groups to ensure the event respects Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture. We can foster partnerships with Indigenous-owned businesses and suppliers to create economic opportunities within Indigenous communities and contribute to sustainable economic development.

WE CAN HAVE INFLUENCE IN OUR PERSONAL LIVES

We can commit to learning more about the shared history of this land — even when that history is challenging or painful. We can then use that knowledge to show support and respect, such as using Indigenous place names or supporting Indigenous organisations, businesses, and events.

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GENDER INEQUALITY AND INEQUITY

Gender inequality refers to the unequal treatment or perceptions of individuals based on their gender. It encompasses social, economic, political, and cultural dimensions, and often results in discrimination and disadvantage for individuals based on their gender identity or expression. Ignorance and discrimination against people who are non-binary, or transgender, are also examples of gender inequality and inequity.

Discrimination can happen against people of any gender. The most common form of gender-based discrimination is against women, but any discrimination on the basis of gender is harmful.

Although women make up over half the population in Australia, they are underrepresented in almost all places of influence. Across every industry in Australia, women are paid less than men[116] and they are also disproportionately more likely to be doing unpaid work at home.[117]

Gender-based violence, including domestic violence, sexual harassment, and harmful traditional practices such as child marriage and female genital mutilation, are significant manifestations of gender inequality. Discriminatory laws and social norms can perpetuate violence and limit survivors' access to justice and support services. Gender equality promotes and protects the safety and wellbeing of people of all genders.[118]

Gender inequality is also harming our economic and social interests. Discrimination and unsupportive workplace practices deprive our society of the full contributions of women, especially in leadership roles.[119] Gender equality and women's economic security has the potential to benefit boys and men too, through increased personal wellbeing, happier relationships, greater economic growth, and more peaceful societies.[120]

Australian women approaching retirement have 23.1 per cent less superannuation than men of the same age.[121]

12%
AUSTRALIA'S
FULL-TIME GENDER PAY GAP

Australia's full-time gender pay gap is 12 per cent, with women earning an average $238 per week less than men.[122]

AUSTRALIA'S OVERALL PAY GAP
43RD
IN THE WORLD

The World Economic Forum annual global gender gap index indicates that Australia's overall pay gap was 43rd in the world in 2022.[123]

The "typical" Australian man spends five hours less per week doing housework than the "typical" Australian woman.[124]

WE HAVE THE POWER TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE

WE CAN URGE ACTION FROM OUR GOVERNMENTS

Governments can actively implement policies that promote women's independence and decision-making, both in public and private. For example, policy changes that allow for a more even distribution of childcare responsibilities have the potential to enhance women's workforce engagement and reduce gender inequities.

Governments can also set the example for gender equality by ensuring equitable paid leave and superannuation arrangements for public sector workers so that informal care and pregnancy do not lead to long-term disadvantage.

WE CAN IMPLEMENT CHANGE IN OUR COMMUNITY AND OUR WORKPLACES

Our workplaces can promote gender equity by reviewing policies and procedures — for example, developing policies and procedures that ensure pay equity, flexible work opportunities, and family violence leave.

Businesses and community groups can actively work to create a safe and respectful culture that values, supports, and celebrates leadership opportunities and career progression for women.

Community groups and businesses can have respectful and safe conversations to educate people on how attitudes within our community may be contributing to gender inequality. We can look to our own leadership and decision-making structures to ensure women have equal voices.

WE CAN HAVE INFLUENCE IN OUR PERSONAL LIVES

All individuals, irrespective of gender, need to call out sexism – both overt and covert. We can challenge language and images that suggest that women are less than men.

We can challenge our own unconscious bias that allows for gender inequality to exist in our own lives. We can question constructions of masculinity that suggest men are aggressive or dominant, constructions of femininity that suggest women are passive or subordinate, and constructions of gender that allow only for a strict binary.
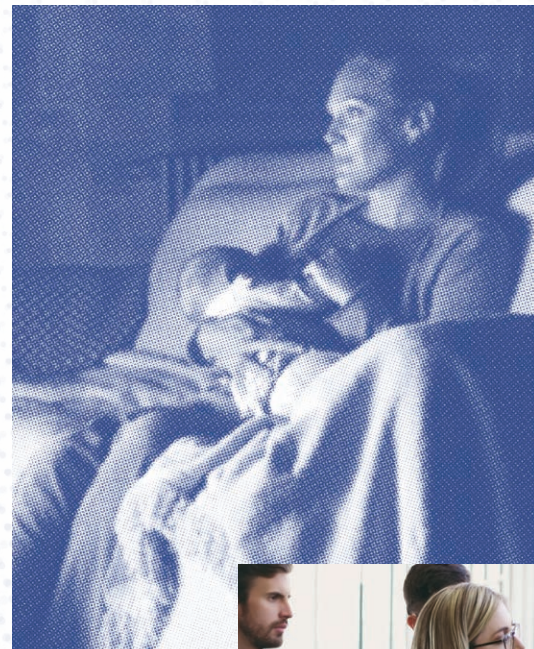
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LGBTIQA+ COMMUNITY DISCRIMINATION AND DISADVANTAGE

While Australia has made significant strides in advancing LGBTIQA+ rights through legislative reforms such as marriage equality and anti-discrimination laws, there is still much work to be done to address systemic discrimination and create a more inclusive society.

Members of the LGBTIQA+ community continue to face various forms of discrimination and prejudice in different aspects of their lives, including employment, education, healthcare, housing, sports, and religious settings.

Many LGBTIQA+ people live healthy and happy lives, but research demonstrates that a disproportionate number experience homelessness, exclusion, discrimination, and poorer mental health outcomes than non-LGBTIQA+ individuals.[125]

LGBTIQA+ people are more likely to be diagnosed with a mental health condition, and to report high levels of psychological distress.[126] This is related to experiences of exclusion, violence, stigma, discrimination, and abuse.[127]

Community connectedness and positive relationships can protect against the effect of these experiences and create a sense of belonging, value, and identity.[128]

Younger people from the LGBTIQA+ community were more likely to report precarious or casual employment, regular financial difficulties and seeking mental health support.[129] They also report experiences of family rejection, conflict, and violence, which may lead to homelessness at a young age.[130]

EXPERIENCE HOMELESSNESS AT TWICE THE RATE

People from the LGBTIQA+ community experience homelessness at more than twice the rate of those not from the LGBTIQA+ community.[131]

LGBTIQA+ people are nearly six times more likely to experience and be diagnosed with depression.[132]

28.1% EXPERIENCED VERBAL HARASSMENT IN THE PAST 12 MONTHS

More than one quarter (28.1 per cent) of LGBTIQA+ secondary school students surveyed experienced verbal harassment relating to their sexuality or gender identity in this setting in the past 12 months.

Over one-third of secondary school students (38.4 per cent) reported missing day/s of school in the past 12 months because they felt unsafe or uncomfortable.[133]

WE HAVE THE POWER TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE

WE CAN URGE ACTION FROM OUR GOVERNMENTS

There are already laws that prohibit discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation, gender identity and intersex status. We know members of the LGBTIQA+ community still experience discrimination and hardship because of that discrimination, but there are gaps in our knowledge. One thing governments can do is commit to appropriate research and data collection (such as through the Census) to inform better policy-making.

Sexual orientation and gender identity change efforts (SOGICE), also known as conversion practices, are particularly harmful forms of discrimination. Although some governments have made efforts to outlaw these harmful practices, governments at all levels can do more to introduce legislative, regulatory, and educational measures to prevent SOGICE.

It is critical that services are inclusive, non-judgmental and accessible for LGBTIQA+ people. Governments need to include members of the LGBTIQA+ community in service design and policy development across the full range of service systems to ensure they are welcoming and fit for purpose.
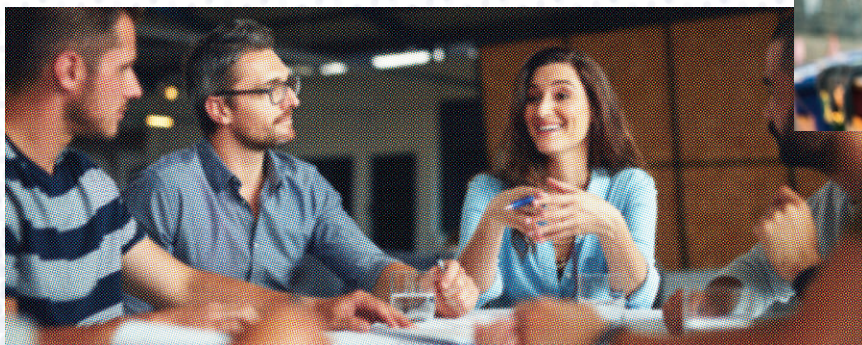
WE CAN IMPLEMENT CHANGE IN OUR COMMUNITY AND OUR WORKPLACES

We need to make sure that the spaces we occupy are welcoming and inclusive for all people. To make sure that members of the LGBTIQA+ community feel welcome, we might physically display support (such as rainbow motifs) to remove doubt and fear.

It is also critical that we make sure our places of business or community activities are free from all forms of homophobia and transphobia. As well as fostering an inclusive culture, this means making it easy and accessible to make complaints, and acting promptly on any report of harassment or discrimination.

WE CAN HAVE INFLUENCE IN OUR PERSONAL LIVES

We can treat all people with love, respect and dignity. That means examining and being conscious of our own language and behaviour, and might mean calling out discrimination, exclusion, and abuse.

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        LGBTIQ+ Health Australia. (2021, October). *Snapshot of mental health and suicide prevention statistics for LGBTIQ+ people*. https://assets.nationbuilder.com/lgbtihealth/pages/549/attachments/original/1648014801/24.10.21_Snapshot_of_MHSP_Statistics_for_LGBTIQ_People_–_Revised.pdf?1648014801
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TREATMENT OF REFUGEES AND ASYLUM SEEKERS

The United Nations defines a refugee as "any person who, owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his/her nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, unwilling to avail himself/herself of the protection of that country."[134]

Australia is party to the UN Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees (Refugee Convention) and its Protocol, which creates minimum standards and broad obligations surrounding the fair and humane treatment of refugees. We have obligations to protect the human rights of all asylum seekers and refugees, regardless of how or where they arrive in Australia, and their visa status. We have also committed to preventing refoulement — the return or expulsion of persons from a country they seek protection from, if their life or freedom is threatened or there is risk of irreparable harm or human rights violations upon return.

Communities which promote solidarity, diversity, and which welcome multicultural communities, are essential in sharing the global responsibility for all people who are displaced by violence, persecution, or who face grave dangers and cannot be protected by their own government. In the past decade, the number of people displaced from their home worldwide has doubled, with approximately 110 million people displaced in mid-2023.[135] Of these, 62.5 million people remain displaced within their country of nationality and 47.8 million are seeking international protections.[136]

47M
REFUGEES ARE CHILDREN

47 million refugees are children, and 1.9 million children were born as refugees.[137]

75 per cent of the world's refugees and people seeking international protection are hosted by low- and middle-income countries.[138]

AUSTRALIA RECOGNISED OR RESETTLED

180,073
REFUGEES
OVER 10 YEARS TO DEC 2022

Over the 10 years to December 2022, Australia recognised or resettled 180,073 refugees, 0.75 per cent of the global total of 23.99 million refugees recognised or resettled in that period.[139]

WE HAVE THE POWER TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE

WE CAN URGE ACTION FROM OUR GOVERNMENTS

The Commonwealth Government can enact and reform legislation that promotes the fair, just and humane treatment of refugees and asylum seekers. Policies should prioritise compassion, be non-criminalising and rights-focused, and uphold international human rights obligations, including the UN Refugee Convention.

Australia can collaborate with international bodies to address global displacement issues, and provide targeted assistance for those experiencing humanitarian need. This could include increasing refugee resettlement quotas and expanding complementary pathways programs, to provide more opportunities for those in need of protection to access safety and security within Australia.

Governments can provide support to initiatives driven by the community that are working towards helping refugees become valued members of our communities.

WE CAN IMPLEMENT CHANGE IN OUR COMMUNITY AND OUR WORKPLACES

All organisations can foster a culture of inclusion, diversity, and understanding. This could include supporting initiatives that educate the public about the experiences of refugees and asylum seekers to counter misinformation.

In workplaces we can create and expand opportunities for refugees and asylum seekers and implement inclusive hiring practices that recognise diverse skills and experiences. Refugees and asylum seekers have so much to offer.

Local communities can also explore sponsoring and welcoming refugee families through community refugee sponsorship programs.

WE CAN HAVE INFLUENCE IN OUR PERSONAL LIVES

As individuals, we can stay informed about the challenges faced by refugees and asylum seekers. We can minimise stigma by dispelling myths and misconceptions by educating friends, family, and colleagues.

We can contribute financially, donate goods, or volunteer our time to organisations providing essential services to refugees.

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MODERN SLAVERY

Modern slavery is a global challenge that persists in various forms, affecting millions of individuals around the world, including in Australia. It is an umbrella term which refers to relationships which are based on exploitation and coercion, including forced labour or marriage, human trafficking, debt bondage, child labour, and deceptive recruiting for labour or services.[140]

In Australia, modern slavery-like practices are more common in industries such as agriculture, construction, hospitality, domestic work, and the sex industry, and among certain groups of people, including migrant workers, refugees, and other marginalised groups.[141] They include, but are not limited to, underpayment, unsafe working conditions, violence, and the confiscation of passports as a means of control.

Economic pressures, globalisation, and a demand for cheap labour,

all contribute to the prevalence of modern slavery in Australia. As businesses and consumers, we play a part in these cycles of exploitations when we engage with exploitative suppliers or organisations and contribute to a demand for low-cost goods.

Australia has taken steps to address modern slavery through legislation, though it is still challenging to detect, prevent, and respond, because of complex supply chains and weaknesses in regulation and enforcement.

50M
PEOPLE GLOBALLY
ARE LIVING IN MODERN SLAVERY

The 2023 Global Slavery Index estimates that 50 million people globally are living in modern slavery. On any given day, there are an estimated 41,000 individuals living in modern slavery in Australia.[142]

340
REPORTS OF MODERN SLAVERY
IN AUSTRALIA IN 2022-23

In 2022–23, there were about 340 reports of modern slavery in Australia. The five most reported crime types were forced marriage (90 reports), sexual servitude and exploitation (73 reports), forced labour (43 reports), trafficking in persons (38 reports), and exit trafficking (a person coercing, forcing, or threatening another to leave Australia against their will) (30 reports).[143]

TOP 5
AT-RISK IMPORTED PRODUCTS

In Australia, the top five at-risk imported products are electronics, fish, garments, solar panels, and textiles, worth approximately US$17.4 billion a year.[144]

WE HAVE THE POWER TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE

WE CAN URGE ACTION FROM OUR GOVERNMENTS

Governments can work together to continuously review and strengthen anti-slavery legislation to address emerging challenges, and ensure effective and accessible enforcement mechanisms. This will need to include better provision of specialised, trauma-informed training for law enforcement, public officials, and community leaders to identify and respond to cases of modern slavery.

Enforcement is only one part of the process and it is crucial that there are victim-centred pathways to timely, needs-based, and unconditional support. This needs to be driven by the expertise of people with lived experience and centred on the victim-survivor's needs.

WE CAN IMPLEMENT CHANGE IN OUR COMMUNITY AND OUR WORKPLACES

There are already laws to ensure fair wages, safe working conditions, and workers' rights, but each workplace needs to take responsibility to ensure they are implemented and upheld.

Businesses and community groups can use their consumer power to encourage suppliers to adopt ethical labour practices. This is sometimes called having "transparent supply chain practices" and means conducting due diligence to identify and address potential risks of modern slavery.

Support and participate in local initiatives that aim to prevent and address exploitation. We can learn more about the indicators of modern slavery and keep a lookout by establishing community networks to share information about potential cases of exploitation.

WE CAN HAVE INFLUENCE IN OUR PERSONAL LIVES

The main way most of us can help is by making informed purchasing decisions to support companies that prioritise ethical, sustainable practices and supply chains, or that are dedicated to combating modern slavery.

We can also stay informed about signs of modern slavery and human trafficking, recognising that it is far more common in Australia than we would expect.

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ABOUT THE SOCIAL JUSTICE STOCKTAKE

The Salvation Army believes that the social justice issues we face in Australia can be addressed. This is something we all can play a part in, through the influence we have in our personal spheres, in our workplaces, and communities, and by advocating for change with governments and other decision-makers.

SURVEY DESIGN

The Social Justice Stocktake survey was designed to capture the perspectives of a diversity of everyday people living in Australia. The survey focused on social justice issues present in local communities, and people across every state and territory were invited to take part. The survey included both multiple-choice and open-ended questions. We asked people to identify the top five social justice issues they were seeing in their local community and experiencing in their own lives. We then invited them to tell us what could be done about these issues and what they wanted decision-makers to know.

SURVEY DISTRIBUTION AND SAMPLING

The survey was distributed using an online platform to ensure easy access for a broad cohort. We heard from 15,918 people across Australia — including 100 or more responses in almost every federal electorate. We collected basic demographic information (age, gender, suburb, and postcode, and whether respondents identified with certain demographic groups). All respondents were over the age of 18. The survey was open for responses from February to April 2024. Participation was voluntary, and all responses were kept confidential.

REPORTING

We used the results from the survey to guide our focus on a range of relevant data. We also conducted a thematic analysis of the main themes from the open-ended responses. From this we produced 158 reports — one for Australia, one for each state and territory, and then one for each federal electorate, with the exception of the newly-created electorate of Bullwinkel (WA), where no data was available at the time of reporting. This year we collected enough responses in the Northern Territory to create electorate reports for both Solomon and Lingiari. In order to reflect respondents' views accurately, quotes included in this report were only edited for length and not for spelling or punctuation.

More information about the Stocktake, including access to all 158 reports and references, can be found at www.salvationarmy.org.au/socialjusticestocktake or by e-mailing policy.advocacy@salvationarmy.org.au

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS AND THANKS

The Salvation Army's Policy and Advocacy team would like to thank the team at PureProfile, who administered the survey, and our colleagues in the Research and Outcomes Measurement team who provided the quantitative data analysis, as well as invaluable advice on qualitative data analysis. The Social Justice Stocktake would not have been possible without the 15,918 people who took the time to generously share their experiences and thoughts with us. For this we are grateful.
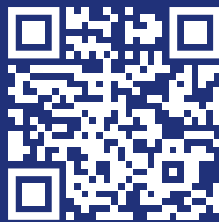
ABOUT THE SALVATION ARMY

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.

OUR VISION

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.

SCAN TO LEARN MORE

THE SALVATION ARMY

BELIEVE IN GOOD