

Four priority areas for attention ahead of the 2023 NSW election

In 2021-2022, Mission Australia worked with over 55,000 people through 250 services in NSW. These services assisted children, young people and families with support around housing and homelessness, parenting and child wellbeing, domestic and family violence, mental health, alcohol and other drugs, and employment, education and training.

Across NSW, cost-of-living pressures are increasing. Rental affordability remains low, and affordability for low-income households has worsened in Greater Sydney and even more so in regional areas, driven by outward migrating city residents as a result of COVID and impacts of devastating floods.

This sustained disruption and vulnerability for people is taking a toll on their lives and the service system intended to support them.

Ahead of the 2023 NSW election, we urge party leaders to commit to urgent and meaningful action to address immediate needs as well as safeguard our communities against future crises.

The priority areas we have identified are:

1. Strong and sustained prevention and early intervention investment for children, youth and families most in need

- Further support the recent and welcomed policy change of extending out-of-home care from 18 to 21 years by ensuring every young person has a safe place to call home when they transition to independence, similar to Victoria's Better Futures program.
- Provide long-term investment to strengthen families building on the Western Sydney Investment Approach trial and expand it to at least 12 locations of greatest need in NSW.
- Address system gaps where young people seeking support to overcome ice and other drug or alcohol dependency cannot receive treatment, by funding new youth-specific AOD residential services in metro and non-metro areas of need, including tailored services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people.
- Guarantee long-term funding contracts and increased investment in family preservation, family support and early intervention programs that divert young people from the justice system. Index funding for these services at a consistent,

evidence-based rate, to realise the full benefits of programs and initiatives and give service providers, staff and clients certainty.

2. Housing and homelessness

A home is essential to everything else we rely on, from health care and education, to safety, family stability, and steady work. Mission Australia supports the Homelessness NSW, Ending Homelessness Together plan which contains the following proposals to ensure that everyone in our state can have a safe and secure home:

- Home Building - Lift social housing from 4.7% of total residential dwellings to 10% by 2050.
- Support - An additional \$152 million per year to deliver services to the growing group of people without homes, including scaling up Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations.
- Housing First - Appointing a 'Homelessness Commissioner', establishing responsibility across government, and adopting a 'housing first' approach, which recognises the right and importance of a home in our lives with the support when we need it.

In addition, Mission Australia seeks your commitment to:

- Strengthen the homelessness service system to have a greater focus on and investment in prevention and early intervention, with particular regard to:
 - Expanding the Sustaining Tenancies in Social Housing program.
 - Reviewing the *No Exits from Government Services into Homelessness: A framework for multi-agency action*, invest in exit priorities and hold government agencies such as Correction, Health and Communities and Justice to account for its implementation.
 - Fund the Home and Healthy initiative which proved to be effective at preventing exits from health facilities into homelessness during its trial.
- Expand the Housing and Support Initiative (HASI) program which enables people with mental illness to live independently in the community with support.
- Invest in [Youth Foyers](#) to support young people experiencing or at risk of homelessness to transition to thriving independent futures.
- Invest in housing responses to address the growing proportion of older people, especially older women who are falling into homelessness.
- In collaboration with the sector and acknowledging feedback on the first two funding tranches, continue to roll out the Core and Cluster initiative to deliver on all women's refuges previously announced.

3. Improved disaster recovery

With more frequent climate disasters expected in the future, Mission Australia along with

the St Vincent de Paul Society (NSW), The Salvation Army Australia, Social Futures, Australian Red Cross and Tenants' Union of NSW collaborated to commission the City Futures Research Centre to produce [The impact of housing vulnerability on climate disaster recovery](#) report.

While the report focuses on the 2022 flooding events in the Northern Rivers, its findings are applicable to other flooding events and climate disasters. We urge parties to consider the recommendations from our report, which are to:

- Identify clear pathways for people to move out of emergency accommodation and into semi-permanent medium-term housing
- Develop more detailed planning around any proposed 'pod home' villages
- Support tenants from the medium-term failings of the private rental market
- Mitigate the impacts of displacement and dislocation from existing community connections
- Build capacity for a more deliberate role for local civil society in response to crisis
- Resource community response accordingly (not rolling one-offs)
- Develop housing system intelligence to inform disaster preparedness and recovery planning
- Develop a more sustainable ongoing social housing sector

4. A fairer NSW

The cost-of-living crisis is affecting everyone, but our most vulnerable are being hit the hardest and more and more people are struggling to make ends meet. Mission Australia supports the NCOSS pre-election campaign aimed at creating a fairer NSW. In particular, we ask party leaders to commit to:

- Responding to rising energy prices
- Improving access to dental care
- Make renting more secure and affordable.
- Investing in local social infrastructure
- Enhancing safety, security and wellbeing for women impacted by domestic and family violence
- Bolstering children's safety, social development and educational outcomes
- Limiting the harm caused by pokies on vulnerable communities
- Strengthening sustainability of the NSW social service sector as a growth industry and key employer of women