
Australian Council of Social Service

ACOSS Media Release



Electorate stands up for equality, climate, and a brighter future

Australia has handed the incoming Labor Government a golden opportunity to work in collaboration to address the significant challenges of inequality and climate change we face, as we continue to emerge from this pandemic, the Australian Council of Social Service (ACOSS) said today.

ACOSS CEO, Dr Cassandra Goldie said, "ACOSS congratulates Mr Albanese as Australia's new Prime Minister and welcomes his strong commitment on behalf of the incoming Labor Federal Government to work in partnership with the community sector. By working together, a brighter, more resilient Australia is within grasp," Dr Goldie said.

"This election result represents a powerful message from the community that we reject fear, abuse of government power, misogyny, racism and neglect.

The electorate has stood up for implementing the Uluru statement from the heart, addressing poverty and inequality including gender equality, acting on climate change and taking a more humane approach to refugees and people seeking asylum.

"The strong influence of so many women in this election marks a new era, with the public signalling a clear desire for a collaborative, focussed Federal Government that works to bring us together to tackle the big economic, social and environmental challenges we so clearly face.

"Australia is far from finished with this pandemic and our future challenges are significant.

"The stress people are under could not have been clearer throughout this election campaign, with surging housing costs, increasing poverty, persistent inequality, including gender inequality, and unprecedented extreme weather events being made worse by climate change.

"There are 2.5 million people receiving income support payments that are less than \$70 a day. This includes 900,000 children, 880,000 people unemployed long-term, 490,000 aged 45 or older, 390,000 with a disability, 320,000 caring for a child alone, and 180,000 from First Nations communities.

"Last night's result is a clear call to action for the Albanese Government to create a more equal community and forge a resilient and brighter future for this and the next generation. With his strong commitment to leave no-one behind, we look forward to working with all those elected to deliver on lifting income supports and wages so people can live with dignity, afford a decent place to call home, get decent employment and work together to tackle climate change, across sectors and regions, towards a brighter future.

"I want to particularly thank all the thousands of people on low incomes who have stood up and shared their stories, and all those who have stood in solidarity. Australia is a very wealthy country. Far too many people are facing hunger and homelessness each and every day. We know we can end poverty, together, and now is the time."

ACOSS will be looking to the incoming Federal Government to be bold in facing the challenges ahead by taking the following seven steps:

- 1. Lift Income Supports so that everyone has enough to cover the basics:** The current, punishingly low rate of income support is forcing people to make heartbreaking decisions between paying their rent or buying food and medicine. An ACOSS-commissioned poll found a clear majority of people believe jobseeker should be increased, with close to 70% agreeing it should be above the poverty line of \$70 a day. This Government must prioritise lifting income supports payments, so everyone can cover the basics, within this term of government.
- 2. Ensure everyone has a safe, stable home:** Housing is the biggest cost of living pressure for people in Australia right now. Regional rents have risen by 18 per cent over the last two years while Commonwealth Rent Assistance hasn't had a real increase in 20 years and interest rate rises threaten to push many with mortgages into financial distress. Major housing reforms, including investment in 25,000 social and affordable dwellings per year and an increase to Commonwealth Rent Assistance are urgently needed by this Government to address the growing housing crisis.
- 3. Secure fair, fast and inclusive climate action:** People on low incomes must be at the center of a fast, fair and inclusive plan to address climate change and reduce poverty and inequality at the same time. An April survey conducted by ACOSS, 43% of whom receive income supports showed overwhelming concern about the impacts of climate change and that this was important to their vote. Australia urgently needs a plan to ensure that people on lower incomes can access clean technologies like rooftop solar, batteries, and electric vehicles and are not disadvantaged by poorly targeted subsidies, levies, and inequitable cost recovery measures.
- 4. Support people to secure paid employment:** Hard-won reductions in unemployment are something for Australia to be proud of. But there are still fewer entry-level jobs than before the pandemic, with nine people receiving unemployment payments for every entry-level job vacancy and almost a million people struggling on unemployment payments, together with almost 900,000 people who are employed but need more paid hours, 60% of whom are women. This Government must prioritise an ambition to sustain full employment, where the vast majority of people can obtain employment or the extra paid working hours they need.
- 5. Raise the revenue needed to meet the big challenges:** As the daily cost of living dominates our lives while Australia faces persistent poverty, high levels of inequality, a rapidly heating world, extreme weather events, and surging housing costs, we need a government that will raise the revenue needed to properly fund essential services and income supports. As an immediate first step, this Government must rescind the unfair and unaffordable "Stage three" tax cuts for people on higher incomes.
- 6. Secure essential community services:** The shadow of COVID is likely to be long, while the rising cost of living and recent extreme weather events are placing more pressure on community services. This year's Australian Community Sector Survey showed workers are services are stretched beyond the limit. This Government must Create a Community Sector Continuity of Service Enabling Fund to ensure continuity of service delivery, adaptation, secure jobs, prevent loss of jobs or income, and guarantee paid special leave for all workers.
- 7. Deliver Self-determination and justice for First Nations Peoples:** First Nations' peoples have spoken, and Vote Compass data shows most Australians support constitutional change to give Indigenous Australians a greater say over their lives. It is beyond time the Australian government delivered Self-Determination for First Nations peoples.