

2014 VICTORIA VOTES



The Salvation Army Victorian Election Platform 2014

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CALL TO ALL PARTIES

The Salvation Army has been helping people across Victoria for over 130 years and currently operates over 350 diverse social programs across 175 locations and assists more than 100,000 Victorians every year. This experience provides both a broad and deep understanding of the needs of disadvantaged and vulnerable Victorians in urban, regional and rural communities across the state.

The 2014 Victorian Election provides an opportunity for all of us, political parties and the wider community, to consider the kind of society that we want to live in.

The Salvation Army's greatest areas of concern at this time are:

- ▶ Housing and Homelessness
- ▶ Justice
- ▶ Family Violence
- ▶ Out of Home Care
- ▶ Health – including mental health and alcohol and other drugs (AOD)

We ask all political parties to consider the following statements, reflecting on their own policies and the opportunity to build a better Victoria, where all have the chance to thrive.



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Housing & Homelessness

OUR EXPERIENCE

The Salvation Army is the largest provider of homelessness support services in Victoria and provides beds to around 2,500 people each year in the form of emergency accommodation, transitional housing and long-term community housing.

WHAT'S THE PROBLEM?

The apparent intractability of complex social problems like homelessness requires long-term vision and commitment by government and the community sector. Homelessness can't just be seen as something that happens to individuals while structural issues continue to push too many Victorians into housing stress and ultimately homelessness.

Some of the most pressing issues are:

- ▶ costs of housing, including private rental, increasing faster than the average wage and government income support payments;
- ▶ lack of social housing for low income earners;
- ▶ old, poor quality public housing stock;
- ▶ shortage of crisis accommodation; and
- ▶ a backlog in transitional housing due to the lack of affordable exit options.



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In addition to structural barriers that push people into financial crisis, housing stress and ultimately homelessness, many of the people we work with struggle with issues that affect their ability to maintain a tenancy once they have found a place to live.

These issues include:

- ▶ trauma associated with surviving violence or abuse;
- ▶ family breakdown;
- ▶ mental illness;
- ▶ addictions;
- ▶ intellectual, physical or multiple disabilities;
- ▶ the legacy of being in state care as children and trying to transition to adulthood; and
- ▶ involvement with the justice system.

Many of these people have been homeless for years and some have long histories of sleeping rough on the streets. They need long-term, sustained support to deal with these issues in order to stabilise their lives and stay housed.



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WHAT CAN BE DONE?

The Salvation Army supports the following policy and budgetary initiatives to help deal with structural issues like housing affordability:

- ▶ extensive and long-term investments in social housing, including public housing, to match levels of demand, with a goal of increasing social housing stock to equal at least 5% of all Victorian housing;
- ▶ increasing the options for long-term, supported housing to help people with multiple and complex needs;
- ▶ substantial investments in rapid rehousing initiatives to alleviate pressure on crisis and transitional housing; and
- ▶ an affordable housing strategy for Victoria.

To help people at risk of homelessness, or people already in crisis, address issues in their life that impact on their ability to obtain and maintain housing, The Salvation Army advocates for:

- ▶ increased private rental brokerage programs to help people access private rental;
- ▶ medium-term subsidies to help renters at risk of homelessness sustain their tenancies and maintain housing costs at 30% of the household income;
- ▶ the expansion of tenancy support programs for people in social housing and private rental;
- ▶ a housing guarantee for young people leaving state care, up to the age of 25, to help them through this transition and prevent them from becoming homeless;
- ▶ increased intensive, long-term case management and support to help vulnerable individuals sustain their housing once they are housed; and
- ▶ better exit planning and resources for people leaving hospitals, mental health facilities or prison who have nowhere to go.



Justice

OUR EXPERIENCE

In Victoria, The Salvation Army has 10 chaplains providing more than 10,000 support hours in prisons across the state, as well as 23 chaplains in courts supporting people for 30,000 hours every year.

WHAT'S THE PROBLEM?

Recently, Victorian justice policies have been driven by an unapologetic 'tough on crime' agenda that has resulted in unprecedented growth in the prison system and justice budgets. However, both international evidence and our own firsthand experience point to the fact that 'tough on crime' policies, particularly locking more people up in prison for longer, don't work and actually make crime worse. This is because locking people in prison does not address the reason people commit crime in the first place.

The biggest problems with our justice system are:

- ▶ people in prison are usually from poor and disadvantaged backgrounds:
 - ▶ only 6.5% of male and 18% of female Victorian prisoners completed secondary, trade or tertiary education;
 - ▶ two-thirds of men and half of women in prison were unemployed when they entered prison;

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- ▶ nearly 9 out of every 10 female prisoners had been sexually, physically, or emotionally abused before they came to prison; and
- ▶ people in prison are also more likely to have an intellectual disability, struggle with addictions or mental illness, experience homelessness, or have been involved with child protection as children.
- ▶ putting people in prison doesn't deter future crime and does not rehabilitate offenders:
 - ▶ the longer someone has been in prison, the less likely they will reintegrate into society and the more likely they will offend again;
 - ▶ 50% of men in prison and 38% of women have been in prison before; and
 - ▶ 1 in 3 people in prison will return to prison within 2 years after they are released.
- ▶ vulnerable young people are over represented in the youth justice system:
 - ▶ roughly half of Out of Home Care leavers are involved in the justice system and 12% had been in detention within 12 months of leaving care; and
 - ▶ extended involvement with youth justice increases the chances of a young person being involved with the adult justice system.
- ▶ 'tough on crime' policies are expensive:
 - ▶ the annual prison budget in Victoria is approximately \$940 million a year; and
 - ▶ an extra \$1.2 billion in capital costs was spent in the last three years alone to build a new prison and expand prison beds.

Prison populations are skyrocketing since the introduction of 'tough on crime' laws. The cost of running and maintaining these prisons is stripping valuable money out of other infrastructure like schools, hospitals and public transport, and despite the huge investment in the justice system our communities are not much safer.



WHAT CAN BE DONE?

We need to think smarter about how to spend the money in the justice system to get more value for money.

To make our communities safer we recommend:

- ▶ investing in Restorative Justice models similar to Youth Group Conferencing, which brings victims and offenders together where appropriate to establish accountability and understanding between affected parties;
- ▶ reinstating home detention and suspended sentences as an alternative to imprisonment;
- ▶ adopt a Justice Reinvestment model to guide future spending within the justice system to target money at highly disadvantaged communities where the majority of crime takes place to address the reasons for crime instead of building new prisons;
- ▶ ensuring that vulnerable young people across the state who are involved with youth justice have access to youth justice diversion to address the underlying causes of offending and make sure they do not become involved in the adult system;
- ▶ reducing young people's contact with incarceration by ensuring that young people are not transferred to adult prisons, and expanding bail support services to reduce the time young people are kept on remand;
- ▶ reducing the number of people who return to prison after leaving by increasing pre- and post-release support for exiting prisoners, including better access to housing, mental health programs, employment and addiction support; and
- ▶ conducting an inquiry into recidivism rates and the effectiveness of programs within prisons at 'rehabilitating' offenders.



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Family Violence

OUR EXPERIENCE

The Salvation Army runs four family violence services in Victoria and assists over 2,000 women per year. Many women experiencing family violence face multiple barriers when trying to leave an abusive relationship. These barriers can include stigma, judgement, low self-esteem, a lack of financial independence, low levels of education and training, no legal support, and difficulty financially supporting their children on their own.

WHAT'S THE PROBLEM?

Family violence has been shown to be connected to deeply rooted social and cultural attitudes and beliefs about men and women, their roles in society, how men should treat women, and their sense of entitlement. To really deal with family violence, cultural attitudes about the treatment of women by men need to change. Cultural change of this magnitude is difficult. However, it must start with breaking down myths about family violence, such as it is the woman's fault, bringing the prevalence of family violence to light, and encouraging men to collectively take responsibility for violence.

Part of this cultural change has begun with Victoria Police improving the way they respond to instances of family violence. Improved practices and understanding of family violence among police has resulted in an exponential increase in the reporting of family violence cases in Victoria. It is important for family violence to be brought to light in this way; however, the increased pressure this has placed on services trying to respond is immense and unsustainable.



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Strains on the system include:

- ▶ reporting rates have increased over 20% in the last year alone and funding has not kept pace;
- ▶ there is a shortage of crisis and refuge accommodation for women and children trying to escape family violence;
- ▶ high costs of housing make it difficult for women and children to find an affordable place to live and leave a violent relationship; and
- ▶ the amount of family violence cases that need to be followed up place staff under pressure to respond and give women and children the support they need.

Family violence is the main reason women and children become homeless and the trauma women and children can experience as a result of family violence can make it difficult to move on with their lives. In addition to finding a safe place to live, many women need additional support in finding employment and parenting their children who may be struggling with behavioural issues as a result of trauma.



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WHAT CAN BE DONE?

To help bring an end to family violence and better support women and children currently experiencing or escaping family violence, The Salvation Army supports:

- ▶ a Primary Prevention Strategy for Family Violence to focus on the role of men in family violence and the nature of relationships in our society;
- ▶ an expansion of the Safe at Home program to help women leaving violent relationships and their children stay in their family home instead of moving, which would allow the family to maintain any ties they had to family, neighbours, schools or their community;
- ▶ an increase in private rental brokerage programs for women and children leaving violence who cannot or do not wish to stay in the family home to help them access private rental and gain independence;
- ▶ children-specific workers to be co-located with family violence services who understand the effects violence and trauma can have on children's development and behaviour and help them recover; and
- ▶ an increase in funding for family violence services across the state, which reflects the incredible increase in demand for family violence services.



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Out of Home Care

OUR EXPERIENCE

The Salvation Army in Victoria provides a range of Out of Home Care (OoHC) services to children and young people of all ages who are unable to safely live with their families because of violence, abuse or neglect. These services include foster care, adolescent home-based care, lead tenant, residential care, therapeutic foster and residential care, case management, transitional housing support and educational programs.

WHAT'S THE PROBLEM?

Many children and young people in OoHC struggle to build positive relationships because of trauma. They may also suffer from developmental delays, intellectual disability or mental health issues and frequently have poor educational outcomes.

They are also more likely to:

- struggle with substance abuse;
- be involved with the justice system:
 - 51% of young people in the Youth Justice system had previous or current involvement with child protection; and
 - 55% of young people in the Youth Justice system had a history of abuse, trauma and neglect.



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- ▶ experience homelessness:
 - ▶ 1 in 3 young people in OoHC will be homeless within their first year of leaving care; and
 - ▶ a quarter of these young people will still be homeless 7 years after leaving care.

The OoHC and Child Protection systems are under increasing strain to deal with the rising number of kids entering the system with limited resources. The number of foster carers are in state-wide decline as the complexity of children's needs increases and carer payments fall further behind the actual cost of care. Residential units are also under pressure as the cost of running and maintaining units goes up in relation to the complexity of the children they house. Lack of resources and placement options within the system mean that placements are not always appropriate for children and can breakdown

as a result. Placement breakdowns are difficult for carers and increase trauma and instability for children who are already vulnerable.



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WHAT CAN BE DONE?

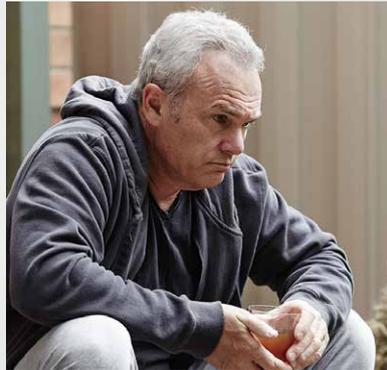
Many young people in OoHC struggle to transition from care to independent living. The state has a responsibility to young people in its care to help them recover from the trauma they have experienced and thrive as successful adults as much as possible.

To get better outcomes for children and young people in and leaving state care The Salvation Army is asking for:

- ▶ the immediate upgrade of all inadequate and underfunded RP2 residential OoHC places to the RP3 level of funding;
- ▶ therapeutic care to be introduced in all OoHC services across the state to help children and young people recover from trauma associated with abuse and neglect;
- ▶ individual support packages for all children and young people in care to be funded in addition to base funding for placements to ensure that children's specific needs are met and placements are sustained;
- ▶ improved Transition from Care Plans to ensure that young people leaving care have adequate supports during their transition to achieve independence;
- ▶ a housing guarantee for young people leaving OoHC to ensure they have access to housing and support until the age of 25; and
- ▶ increased support for foster and kinship carers in the form of more training and better pay and reimbursements to reflect the valuable role they do and the complexity and difficulty of the children they care for.



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Health

OUR EXPERIENCE

Many of the people that The Salvation Army works with have health problems that impact their quality of life and ability to participate in society. Mental health and addictions are two of the most prevalent health issues among our client group. As a result, we have a long history of working with people who experience these issues and offer a range of services, including residential and home-based withdrawal, rehabilitation, drug diversion, pharmacotherapy, needle and syringe exchange programs, and integrated community mental health programs that work closely with our homelessness and other services.

Mental Health

WHAT'S THE PROBLEM?

The Salvation Army has been heavily involved in the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) pilot in the Barwon Region and the state-wide retendering process for non-NDIS community managed mental health services (CMMHS), and has seen first-hand the impact these policy shifts have had on the sector.

The main challenges for the sector include:

- ▶ maintaining the sustainability of the CMMHS system as it transitions to the NDIS client-directed, individual support package funding model;
- ▶ workforce retention and capacity building among CMMHS staff;



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- ▶ service fragmentation following the disruption of existing partnerships and integrated service models as a result of retendering; and
- ▶ ensuring the needs of vulnerable clients with multiple and complex needs are met and that these individuals are not required to go through multiple central intake assessments to access holistic care.

Our experience of participating in the Barwon trial is that the NDIS was built with people with a disability in mind, not those with a mental illness. This is problematic because:

- ▶ the NDIS and the consumer-based care model operate on the assumption that people with a disability have family or a carer to help them access and navigate the system; however, many people with a mental health issue do not have these support networks;
- ▶ the nature of mental illness can limit a person's autonomous decision-making capability and limit their ability to make informed choices that are in their best interest;
- ▶ to be eligible for the NDIS you must have a 'permanent disability', which is at odds with the principles of a recovery-focused mental health service and misses opportunities for early interventions;
- ▶ Victoria is the only state that did not use NDIS funds to 'value add' to existing community health services, but instead used existing community mental health funds to fund the NDIS, resulting in a net loss of funding for community mental health;
- ▶ if an individual with a mental illness does not qualify for the NDIS, or continuity of support through in-kind funding, there will be no remaining mental health services to support them in the community; and
- ▶ the recent retendering of community mental health services has left only three providers in each region, which will severely limit consumer choice, particularly in regional and rural areas, when accessing services once the NDIS is rolled out state-wide.



WHAT CAN BE DONE?

To better support the sector and individuals with a mental illness, transition to the NDIS and maximise the effectiveness of this reform, The Salvation Army recommends:

- ▶ the Victorian Government alter the funding arrangements for community mental health services under the NDIS to mirror that of the rest of the country and use NDIS money to 'top up' base funding for the community mental health sector. This would ensure:
 - ▶ individuals with a mental illness who are not assessed to qualify for the NDIS still have supports they can access in the community; and
 - ▶ mental health services that exist outside of case management such as community day programs will still be available to people otherwise isolated from the community.
- ▶ the formation of new NDIS Support Clusters that have specific expertise and responsibility for mental health; and
- ▶ community mental health programs are funded to integrate with homelessness services to ensure vulnerable clients who experience homelessness and mental health issues are supported.

Alcohol and Other Drugs (AOD)

WHAT'S THE PROBLEM?

The Salvation Army supports the principles of reform. However, as we transition to new service delivery arrangements, we have concerns about how the reform will affect vulnerable Victorians who have traditionally been excluded from services. Our past experience of working with complex clients who struggle with homelessness and addiction suggests that these people typically do not access generalist alcohol and drug services.



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The main barriers to access include:

- ▶ difficulty completing the assessment process;
- ▶ difficulty in following up a referral and keeping appointments;
- ▶ tendency to prioritise housing and other basic needs like food over accessing AOD treatment;
- ▶ a general distrust of government services; and
- ▶ wait times for residential withdrawal and rehabilitation services and lack of safe accommodation to participate in home-based withdrawal.

Our experience in working with this group of people demonstrates that people experiencing homelessness and addiction issues are more likely to access the service system through a homelessness service than an AOD service. However, without adequate support for their substance abuse through services like Supported Accommodation Programs, individuals struggle to sustain housing. It is our concern that without specialised funding designed to work with people with complex needs, these individuals will fall through the gaps in the service system and the revolving door of homelessness will increase.

WHAT CAN BE DONE?

To ensure that highly marginalised individuals with multiple and complex needs are not excluded from the system following reform, The Salvation Army is asking for:

- ▶ specialty AOD services targeted towards supporting vulnerable individuals, specifically those experiencing homelessness, to be integrated into homelessness services to ensure the needs of this client cohort are met;
- ▶ services that help people experiencing mental health and addiction issues access housing to be expanded; and
- ▶ increase AOD services in regional and rural areas to respond to the increasing need in these communities.



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The Questions

QUESTIONS FOR VICTORIAN POLITICAL PARTIES

In light of the preceding series of social and community concerns, The Salvation Army is raising the following questions for consideration by parties involved in the 2014 Victorian state election. Responses to these questions will be collated and published on the website of The Salvation Army Victoria Social Programme and Policy Unit (sarmy.org.au/vsppu) in the lead up to the election.

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The Questions

Housing & Homelessness

- 1) The cost of housing is putting pressure on all Victorians but low income households are particularly struggling. What will your party do to reduce the cost of housing for Victorians, particularly those on low incomes?
- 2) Demand for social housing is growing and in 2009 the Victorian Parliamentary Inquiry into Public Housing called for social housing stock to be increased to 5% of the total Victorian Housing Stock by 2030. How do you plan to grow social housing?
- 3) Many of The Salvation Army's clients are very disadvantaged and struggle to access any housing other than public housing. However, waitlists are long and around 42% of public housing is more than 30 years old and in need of repairs or replacement. How will you improve public housing and increase availability for disadvantaged Victorians?
- 4) People become homeless for many reasons, including family violence, mental health issues, addictions, or leaving care or other institutions like hospitals and prison. Ending homelessness will require sustained commitment to joined-up solutions that meet people's individual and family needs. What will your party do to end homelessness in Victoria?
- 5) Maintaining stable housing is just as important as finding housing in order to end homelessness. Unfortunately, many people experiencing homelessness have been through the system multiple times. What will your party do to stop the revolving door of homelessness?



The Questions

Justice

- 1) Existing youth justice diversion programs have been successful at reducing young people's involvement with the justice system and preventing them from becoming involved with the adult system later in life. How will you ensure that young people across the state are diverted from the justice system as often and effectively as possible?
- 2) High recidivism rates of exiting prisoners suggest that prisons are not effective at deterring future criminal behaviour or making our communities safer. How will you deal with high recidivism rates and ensure that prisons are more effective at rehabilitating offenders?
- 3) 'Tough on crime' policies are expensive, ineffective and have a disproportionately negative effect on people from poor, disadvantaged backgrounds. If elected, how will you address the causes of crime, not just its consequences, particularly in disadvantaged communities?
- 4) Research has found that access to stable housing after release from prison has one of the greatest impacts on recidivism rates. What do you plan to do to increase access to pre- and post-release programs, including housing, for exiting prisoners to ensure they are able to better reintegrate into society and decrease their chances of reoffending?

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The Questions

Family Violence

- 1) Although the increase in reporting of family violence incidents has been widely recognised by the sector, Victoria Police and the State Government, extra funding proportionate to the increase in demand has not been granted. How will you ensure that the family violence sector is adequately resourced to deal with increasing demand?
- 2) The Safe at Home program has been evaluated to be effective for many women and children escaping family violence and is significantly cheaper than housing a woman and her children in crisis accommodation for an extended period of time. However, future funding for the program has not been guaranteed. What do you plan to do to ensure that homelessness among women and children escaping family violence does not continue?
- 3) Private rental brokerage programs have been found to be successful and cost-effective at ending homelessness for people from all cohorts, but particularly for women and children experiencing family violence. How will you further support the success of private rental brokerage programs in Victoria?
- 4) Experiencing family violence can be traumatising for children and can have a negative impact on their development, ability to form relationships, and behaviour later in life. How will you ensure that children experiencing family violence get the support they need to deal with this trauma?



The Questions

Out of Home Care

- 1) Too many children and young people in OoHC suffer extreme trauma and many continue to struggle throughout adulthood as a result. What will you do to ensure that young people leaving care have better outcomes as they approach adulthood?
- 2) The number of foster carers across the state is in decline and is limiting the placement options for children entering the system. What will your party do to boost the number of foster carers in Victoria?
- 3) One in three young people leaving care become homeless within their first year. What will you do to ensure that this vulnerable group of young people do not become homeless after exiting the system?
- 4) A large proportion of young people in care are involved in the youth justice system. What will you do to ensure that these young people do not become involved in the adult justice system later in life?

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The Questions

Health

- 1) Many of our clients have multiple and complex needs, including mental health and alcohol and drug issues. How will you ensure that this group of people do not fall through the cracks of state and Commonwealth system reform processes?
- 2) Access to community mental health and AOD programs is limited, particularly in rural and regional areas. Unfortunately, these communities have a high prevalence of mental health issues and drug abuse. How will you ensure that all Victorians have equal access to the supports they need in these areas?
- 3) The move to the NDIS and individual support packages for clients is a fundamental shift in the way that social and community services are funded. While client directed funding has some advantages, there is a risk that the base funding needed to run services will erode and that services may close as a result. How will you ensure the sustainability of the sector amid funding changes?
- 4) Once the NDIS is rolled out across the state to include all community mental health services, there is a concern that people who are assessed as not eligible for the scheme will be left with no services to support them. What will your party do to ensure that these individuals receive adequate support?
- 5) The community sector has built extensive partnerships that enhance local responses to people with complex needs. Reforms of both state and Commonwealth funded service streams are putting some of these partnerships under threat due to processes such as competitive tendering, which have created large consortia and often excluded smaller agencies. How will you support joined-up responses in local communities, such as co-location and integrated service delivery partnerships?

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The Victoria Social Programme and Policy Unit (VSPPU) was established to support and resource Salvation Army services and leadership in Victoria by coordinating our response to state-wide policy issues and advocacy.

Part of the VSPPU's role is to act as a central access point through which government departments, Ministers and other stakeholders are able to be directed to the appropriate people and services within The Salvation Army in Victoria. In addition, we actively participate in advocacy and policy development through written submission, social justice campaigns and collaboration with other CSO policy units and peak bodies.

For more information regarding the VSPPU or The Salvation Army in Victoria, please contact The Salvation Army Victoria Social Programme and Policy Unit (VSPPU) on 9353 5200.

We look forward to working with you.

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