Opening Message - Call to Parties

The Salvation Army is an established and major provider of social programmes and has given support to the Australian community for more than 125 years.

The Salvation Army’s social and community services are an integral part of its role as a Christian church, demonstrating a commitment to the provision of services which address the physical, emotional, social and spiritual needs of people.

Despite growing national prosperity, many within our communities, including our children, continue to face significant adversity that prevents them from achieving their full potential; socially, economically and spiritually.

The Salvation Army considers the 2007 Federal Election an opportunity for all Australian political parties to make a commitment to, and invest in, a bi-partisan approach to work towards a fair and just society.

The Salvation Army maintains that such a commitment, investment and bi-partisan approach has the potential to readdress the structural inequalities that have contributed to people living in poverty and homelessness and experiencing poor housing, poor health, limited education and employment outcomes.

The Salvation Army has developed a series of key election statements that it maintains will contribute to achieving a fair and just society for all Australians.

These statements are listed as follows -

1. National Poverty Reduction Statement
2. National Housing Affordability Statement
3. National Asylum Seekers Statement
4. National Health Policy Statement
5. National Homelessness Statement
6. National Aged Care Statement

We ask that you give due consideration to these statements and to the plight of the disadvantaged as, in the end, a country will be judged by its treatment of its poor and disadvantaged.

Commissioner James M Knaggs
Territorial Commander
Australia Southern Territory

Commissioner Les Strong
Territorial Commander
Australia Eastern Territory
1 | National Poverty Reduction Statement

The Salvation Army has a long history of working with people experiencing poverty and hardship in Australia through the provision of a range of supports and services.

The Salvation Army is committed to ensuring that the rights and inherent dignity of all people are upheld at all levels of society.

The experience of poverty has a direct impact on the economic, social and spiritual dimensions of human beings.

Poverty has two elements:

i. The lack of access to a fair, decent and minimum standard of living specific to income, employment, health, food, housing and education; and

ii. The lack of opportunity to participate fully in society, including socially and spiritually.

The Salvation Army firmly believes that without these basic needs being met, human beings survive but do not flourish.

Despite growing national prosperity over the last ten years, households living in poverty, or who are vulnerable to poverty, remain a significant concern for The Salvation Army.

Recommendations

The Salvation Army calls upon all Australian political parties to commit to the following:

• The development of a comprehensive plan known as the National Poverty Reduction Strategy involving all levels of government, industry and the non-government sector.

• Within the National Poverty Reduction Strategy, the setting of poverty reduction targets, benchmarks, achievement strategies and time frames across all government departments.

• Within the National Poverty Reduction Strategy, additional and re-current funding of housing, employment, education and health programmes specific to improving the life expectancy and opportunities for indigenous communities.

• The creation of a Ministerial portfolio for social inclusion with its primary responsibility being the development and monitoring of the National Poverty Reduction Strategy.

• The creation of a social inclusion unit reporting directly to the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet. The mandate of this unit should include:

  i. Consultation on a broad range of issues impacting poverty;
  ii. The provision of advice and guidance on policy and programmatic directions aimed at reducing poverty in Australia;
  iii. The establishment of reporting mechanisms to measure and monitor the reduction of poverty.

• A commitment to, and maintenance of, an adequate safety net to protect vulnerable, disadvantaged and low income households.

• A commitment to research that provides awareness regarding the impacts of disadvantage and social exclusion and subsequently informs policy and programmatic directions.
Accessible, affordable and secure housing provides the foundation for the well being and participation of all citizens within community life.

Despite growing national prosperity, in the last 10 years –

- Australia has been identified as one of the least affordable housing markets in the world. Sydney, Melbourne, Adelaide and Perth are ranked in the top 20 least affordable cities in the world.

- In the past 10 years, the median house price in Australia has increased from 4 times the average annual income to 6 to 7 times the average annual income.

- Growth in the private rental market across Australia has been uneven, with a shortage of approximately 134,000 properties at the low cost end of the market.

- Over 1.1 million low to middle income households are suffering ‘housing stress’. Households are paying more than 30% of their income in either rent or mortgage repayments. This represents 1 in every 7 households. This is in contrast to the expectation that in 2001, the number of households experiencing housing stress was expected to double in 15 years and reach 1 million in 20 years.

- 35% of Commonwealth Rent Assistance recipients spend 30% or more of their incomes on housing costs.

- After housing costs, 357,000 Australian families with children have insufficient money for food, clothing, heating and transport.

- Nationally, more than 100,000 people are homeless on any given night.
Recommendations

- The Salvation Army is acutely aware of the impact of the declining level of housing affordability across Australia and calls upon all Australian political parties to support, invest in, develop and integrate a comprehensive National Housing Affordability Agreement, thus ensuring housing for all Australians.

- The development and implementation of a National Housing Affordability Agreement, with a Federal Minister for Housing to ensure that the Agreement is properly implemented.

- It is estimated by the Australian National Audit Office that the Commonwealth State Housing Agreement (CSHA) total funding allocated has in ‘real terms’ decreased by 31% over the past decade. The Salvation Army calls for a reinstatement in the total funding allocated to either a CSHA or a National Housing Affordability Agreement, by a minimum of 31% by 2009.

- Increase the supply of public and community housing by increasing investment from developers and financial institutions.

- Increase spending and building by Government and implement planning reforms to ensure affordable housing requirements for new developments are realised.

- Provide supports and incentives designed to increase investment in affordable rental housing.

- Undertake an independent review of the Commonwealth Rent Assistance (CRA) to improve its effectiveness.

- Seek improved access opportunities to home ownership for low-income households.

- Increase Government Regulation of brokers and financial lending providers to ensure household debt can be serviced.

- Government commitment to a 25% reduction in the number of total households spending more than 30% of household income on housing costs by 2010.

- Provide funding opportunities for the development of new and emerging technologies and building techniques for new affordable housing projects, in light of climate change consideration.
3 | National Asylum Seekers Statement

Australia has demonstrated its commitment to the rights of asylum seekers through being a signatory to such instruments as the 1948 Declaration of Human Rights, the 1951 Refugee Convention, the 1966 International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the 1984 Convention against Torture.

The current treatment of asylum seekers, as demonstrated by such policies as mandatory detention and denial of accessible review processes, is in conflict with their basic human rights.

To be an asylum seeker is not illegal, and those seeking asylum need to be treated with the respect their legal status under International Law grants them, and the compassion that their suffering requires.

Detention of Asylum Seekers

The Salvation Army acknowledges the requirement to ensure that asylum seekers arriving in Australia pass through an appropriate health, security, and identity check process.

However, the prolonged and ongoing detention of asylum seekers as a default position is a violation of fundamental human rights and governments should not detain people beyond the minimum length of time necessary for reception and processing.

The effects of this are an exacerbation of previously experienced trauma and a range of mental health consequences. It is the role of the Government to make any necessary detention process as humane as possible for people that have already been through a traumatic experience.

Asylum seekers should only be detained for the minimum length of time necessary for health, identity and security checks and then supportively released into the community on permanent or bridging visas which entitle them to the full range of supports and opportunities available.

In addition, the current policy of detaining asylum seekers in Nauru or on Christmas Island severely restricts asylum seekers from access to basic rights and needs, including legal representation, education, translators, advocacy and health services. This approach, and the subsequent impact on the mental, physical and emotional health of asylum seekers, is a breach of Australia’s commitment to the Refugee Convention 1951.

Recommendations

- The excising of Australian islands for the purposes of the Migration Act be ceased, and all asylum seekers be received on Australian soil and not detained on Christmas Island or Nauru.
- Change existing detention centres into reception centres, providing accommodation, legal and medical services while the necessary health, identification and security checks are promptly carried out.
- Introduce community management as the primary response for asylum seekers, rather than detention. This involves funding and enabling community agencies to provide case management, other support, and giving asylum seekers access to work, income security and medical benefits.
Temporary Protection Visas (TPV)

The Salvation Army believes that an asylum seeker’s status is defined by the human rights abuses which they are fleeing from, not their manner of arrival or country of origin. As such, the ‘second-class’ regime of temporary protection visas is unnecessary and demeaning.

TPV holders have no assurances of ongoing protection, no ability to travel or be joined by family members, and are offered little to no assistance in regards to accommodation, education, benefits, or employment assistance. This does nothing but add to the mental, physical and emotional trauma, which has already been experienced by most exploited asylum seekers.

Recommendation

- That the TPV policy be abolished and those currently subject to it be permitted the same processes and benefits as those granted permanent protection visas.

Children in Detention

While concerned with the plight of all asylum seekers, The Salvation Army is particularly disturbed at the consequences of detention on children. The impacts of detention, combined with the pre-existing trauma of persecution, escape and dislocation results in a high incidence of personal problems relating, but not limited to, education problems, and psychological growth and development problems.

The Convention on the Rights of the Child requires that children be detained as a last resort and for the shortest period possible, and be provided the right to family unity.

As such, children and their families need to be provided with exceptional and swift processes to ensure a minimum possible detention time.

Recommendations

- That children and their families be detained for the shortest possible time, such as that of the Swedish policy (6 day maximum).
- Child asylum seekers have the same access to medical, dental and educational opportunities available to Australian residents.

Human Rights

A fundamental problem facing the development of compassionate and appropriate policies in relation to asylum seekers is that breaches of human rights, as outlined in numerous international conventions, is permissible under the Migration Act.

The rights of asylum seekers are therefore not protected through legislation, but are subject to the discretion of the Minister for Immigration.

If Australia is to proudly state its commitment to international human rights instruments, it is critical that it demonstrate this through the enactment of appropriate domestic legislation that upholds those rights.

Recommendation

- That the Migration Act be reviewed in the first term of government by an independent body to determine its compatibility with the relevant international conventions, and be amended by legislation to protect the rights of asylum seekers.
4 | National Health Policy Statement

It is well documented that many Australians continue to experience poor and restrictive access to quality health care.

Ensuring equal access and opportunity to quality health care, in particular for people experiencing disadvantage and hardship, requires Government commitment and leadership, collaboration between key stakeholders and significant financial investment, including the provision of targeted resources.

Alcohol, Tobacco and Other Drugs (ATOD)

Alcohol, tobacco and other drugs remain a principal cause of avoidable death and disease, being responsible for more than 20,000 deaths every year.

Barriers to access and delays in service are experienced across all drug sectors, with the situation being exacerbated for vulnerable populations, further compounding pre-existing health, economic and social disadvantage.

Recommendations

- Evidence based programmes and products designed to assist individuals to quit tobacco use should be made affordable to all sectors of the population, and cost less than tobacco products in all cases.

- Standard alcohol drink labelling should include prominently displayed information on the health and social risk associated with excess consumption.

- Increased funding to treatment programmes so as to provide additional places and reduce barriers to access.

- Increased targeted programmes so as to provide additional places for co-occurring mental health and substance abuse issues.

- Increased targeted funding so as to provide cross-sectoral capacity building and education between the mental health and the ATOD sector.

- Implement strategies to reduce barriers for vulnerable populations, including awareness training and education, production of appropriate information resources and targeted programmes to identify and reach vulnerable and isolated populations.

Dental and Oral Care

Dental and oral care are major health care costs primarily borne by the individual.

Australia’s oral health record continues to deteriorate, resulting in an increased disparity in oral health and access to dental care between high and low income adults.

It is estimated that 40% of the adult population face barriers in accessing dental care due to cost.

Further, for people with household incomes less than $80,000, including Concession Card holders, it is reported that these households have a higher incidence of decayed teeth and are more likely to have lost teeth due to decay. This leads to significant health and social impacts, including employment opportunities being restricted, productivity and self-esteem reduced, speech impeded, and the pain, discomfort and difficulties with eating affecting health and quality of life.
Recommendations

- The development of a National Older Australian’s Dental Strategy, including free annual checkups and dental care subsidies.
- Within the first term of Government, undertake an evaluation of public dental care services to improve effectiveness.
- Increase investment in public dental care to reduce unacceptable waiting periods, and to improve access for vulnerable populations.

Mental Health

While 20% of the Australian population experience mental illness of some form, two-thirds of those people receive no treatment in any 12-month period, partially due to unprecedented pressure on the mental health system.

In addition, mental illness is more highly represented in vulnerable populations, with 80% of homeless people having a mental illness.

This prevalence has created an unprecedented pressure on all parts of the mental health system, resulting in delays and barriers to access.

Waiting lists of up to two years are common for early intervention community-based mental health services, with 3000 people being on those waiting lists.

Mental illness is a key factor in social exclusion, leading to such consequences as unemployment, poor housing, poor health and family breakdown. Therefore, early intervention in mental health treatment and prevention is vital to the prevention of social exclusion, particularly among the young and already vulnerable.

Recommendations

- A government commitment to an increased expenditure on mental health, recognising that other first world countries spend 10-14% of the total national health budget on mental health.
- An increase in preventative activities, strategies and programmes in regard to mental health.
- Facilitate and encourage a greater role for community and private sectors in partnership with government in the delivery of mental health care.
Gambling

Through the work of The Salvation Army, the organisation is aware of the enormous extent of gambling within the Australian community. In particular, the increasing reliance and importance to many States of gambling as a source of revenue and the negative impact that its prevalence is causing.

Approximately 2% of the adult population experience harm as a result of their own gambling, with a further 10-20% impacted negatively by the gambling of others.

Due to the concentration of gaming machines in lower socio-economic areas, and the reduced economic capacity of an increasing percentage of the population, the negative impacts of gambling are more seriously experienced by those who can least afford it.

The consequences of this include not only increased poverty, but also such public health outcomes as depression, poor nutrition, suicide, and reduced standards of health.

In addition, The Salvation Army also sees the disproportionate prevalence of those suffering from gambling-related harm in social concerns such as domestic violence, unemployment or underemployment, crime and family breakdown.

The Salvation Army calls upon all Political Parties to demonstrate their commitment to reducing harm related to gambling, both for individuals and the whole community.

Recommendations

- Removal of Automatic Teller Machines (ATMs) from all gambling venues through the Commonwealth's banking and telecommunication powers.

- Commissioning of a new Productivity Commission report into Australia's Gambling Industries to provide a current, comprehensive understanding of gambling and its impacts.

- Develop a comprehensive Commonwealth strategy aimed at encouraging, through incentives and benchmarks, the reduction in dependency on gaming revenue by the States.
The Salvation Army is a major provider of housing and homelessness support services to people at risk of, or experiencing, homelessness.

The Salvation Army calls upon all Australian political parties to commit to effective policy and programmatic responses designed to eliminate homelessness amongst the Australian population.

As per the Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP) Act 1994, it is recognised that homeless people form one of the most powerless and marginalised groups in society. Responses to their needs should aim to empower them and to maximise their independence. These responses should be provided in a way that respects their dignity as individuals, enhances their self-esteem, is sensitive to their social and economic circumstances, and respects their cultural backgrounds and their beliefs.

Australia has acted to protect the rights of all of its citizens, including people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness, by recognising international standards for the protection of universal human rights and fundamental freedoms.

Despite growing national prosperity in the past 10 years, homelessness remains a significant national concern.

- On Census night in 2001, 100,000 Australians were estimated to be homeless, many of them children.
- Nationally, 1 in every 51 children aged under 5, walked through the doors of a homelessness service during 2004-05.
- Each day, 12,000 adults and children are turned away from emergency accommodation services as organisations lack the resources to meet service demands.
- Nationally, there are 186,934 families on waiting lists for public housing.
Recommendations

The Salvation Army calls upon all Australian political parties to commit to the following:

• The establishment of a National Office for Homelessness within the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet. The mandate of this Office should include –
  
i. The provision of advice and guidance to Government on policy and programmatic directions aimed at eliminating homelessness in Australia.
  
ii. The co-ordination of a National Homelessness Strategy, including a commitment to and expansion of the Support and Accommodation Assistance Program, thus providing a coherent approach to responding to homelessness.
  
iii. Consultation on a broad range of issues impacting on homelessness.
  
iv. Commissioning of research specific to the needs of people experiencing homelessness
  
v. Establishing and meeting poverty reduction targets.

• The development of a National Housing Affordability Agreement with a Federal Minister for Housing to ensure that it is properly implemented.

• The full implementation of the international standards for the protection of universal human rights and fundamental freedoms, to which Australia is a signatory –
  
i. The ratification of the International Covenants on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and on Civil and Political Rights; and
  
ii. The ratification of the Conventions on the Elimination of all Forms of Racial Discrimination, on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women and on the Rights of the Child;
  
iii. The acceptance of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and of the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women; and
  
iv. The full application of legislation such as the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission Act 1986.
6 | National Aged Care Statement

Every elderly Australian is entitled to be able to access appropriate levels of care and support to maximise their autonomy and positive life experiences. The Residential Aged Care system is an integral part of such a provision alongside other support and care arrangements. Residential Aged Care has been transformed in the past decade from a cottage industry to a highly professional operation which complies with very intense accreditation requirements.

The current indexation formula based on COPO does not address the recurrent funding needs to meet the real cost of providing care. When plotted on a graph, the gap between real costs and the indexation formula grows wider each year. The care subsidy must be based on a thoroughly costed benchmark for care provision and realistically indexed on an annual basis.

Even after the changes already announced by the government, the capital needs of residential aged care cannot be met within the current guidelines and allocations of funds. Operators are more conscious than ever that capital needs are not limited to one-off construction costs. The government needs to recognise the actual cost of new buildings and provision for their future refurbishment and/or replacement. A means of enabling operators to meet these costs must be identified and implemented.

While welcoming the increased provision of community care options for aged persons, a consequence of this is increased levels of dependency needs, complex needs, palliative care needs and dementia care needs when residents move to residential settings. To meet such needs requires adequate staffing levels and appropriate skill levels for staff. At present, operators are at an unfair disadvantage when they cannot match the wages and working conditions offered to staff engaged in the acute health care sector. Sufficient funding must be provided to recruit and retain necessary care staff and also provide opportunities to continually develop their skills and qualifications.

Recommendations

- The care subsidy needs to be based on a thoroughly costed benchmark for care provision and realistically indexed on an annual basis.
- A means of enabling operators to adequately meet capital costs must be identified and implemented.
- Provision is needed for resources to enable necessary care staff to be recruited and retained and given opportunities to continually develop their skills and qualifications.
The Salvation Army is a worldwide Christian movement. In Australia we are known as one of this nation's largest welfare providers. We are dedicated to helping Australians in crisis. Raised up by God, **our mission** is to:

- Transform Lives
- Care for People
- Make Disciples
- Reform Society

**Our vision** is that we're a growing, loving community of people dynamically living God’s mission in a broken world.

This requires us to be people who are wholly devoted to God, obediently responsive to the Holy Spirit, powerfully committed to each other, compassionately engaged with people in need, totally dedicated to reaching other people with the good news of Jesus Christ and leading them to faith.

**Our Values**

- Human Dignity
- Justice
- Hope
- Compassion
- Community

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