

20 March 2019

The Hon Bill Shorten MP
Leader of the Opposition
PO Box 6022
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Mr Shorten

Anglicare Australia is a network of independent local, state, national and international organisations that are linked to the Anglican Church and are joined by values of service, innovation, leadership and the Christian faith that every individual has intrinsic value.

As an organisation that speaks for the country's most disadvantaged people, Anglicare Australia is focused on ending poverty and hardship. We are seeking commitments through this open letter to ensure the next government focuses on making Australia fairer – and helping every Australian to lead a dignified life.

Australia has never been more prosperous, yet we are also a nation facing growing inequality. Nearly three million Australians live in poverty, and wealth inequality is now the worst it has been in seventy-five-years.

Many of these Australians are working, and we appreciate your commitment to a living wage. We hope you will also invest in direct job creation programs – a need that has been highlighted by Anglicare Australia's Jobs Availability Snapshot.

Another 800,000 people who rely on income support are struggling daily to afford basic essentials. That includes parents, carers, people with disabilities, students, pensioners, and those who have been locked out of paid work.

People cannot pursue a better life if they are forced to make tough choices between eating a meal and paying a bill, buying shoes for their children and filling prescription. And they cannot look for work if they are homeless and hungry.

Our safety net has become a poverty trap, with rates of Newstart, Youth Allowance, and related payments stagnant for 25 years. We are heartened by your acknowledgement that Newstart is too low, and your pledge to review income support payments. But a single increase will not stop these payments from losing value over time.

Anglicare Australia calls for the creation of an independent social security commission. This commission should be given the power to set income support payments based on the actual cost of living. Our research shows that most Australians support this commission.

This is not the only change we need to make Australia fairer. Having a place to call home is a basic human need, yet even those working full-time are struggling to put a roof over their heads. Even in the midst of a so-called market downturn, Australians are still spending record amounts on housing.

The most recent figures show that people are spending more of their incomes on rent and housing than ever – and those numbers are only going up. Anglicare Australia's own Rental Affordability Snapshot has shown that affordability has been going down over the last ten years, and that the private rental market is failing those most in need.

We welcome your announcement on affordable rental homes, which will be of great help to working people in rental stress. But this is not a substitute for social housing. The Everybody's Home campaign has estimated that 300,000 social and Aboriginal housing properties are needed across Australia. We call on you, and your counterparts in State and Territory governments, to make this investment for those who simply can't get a home through the private market.

We understand that any government faces competing priorities, and that there are many worthy calls on public funding. But we also believe that what a government funds is a reflection on what it values. Our own research, released last year, shows that Australia foregoes \$68 billion each year in subsidies to the wealthiest Australians.

If we can afford to forego this revenue, then we can surely afford a safety net, a secure home, and a dignified life for every Australian.

We look forward to your response to these priorities. And we hope we can work together towards a fairer and more equal Australia in the next term of parliament.

Best regards



Kasy Chambers
Executive Director
Anglicare Australia

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