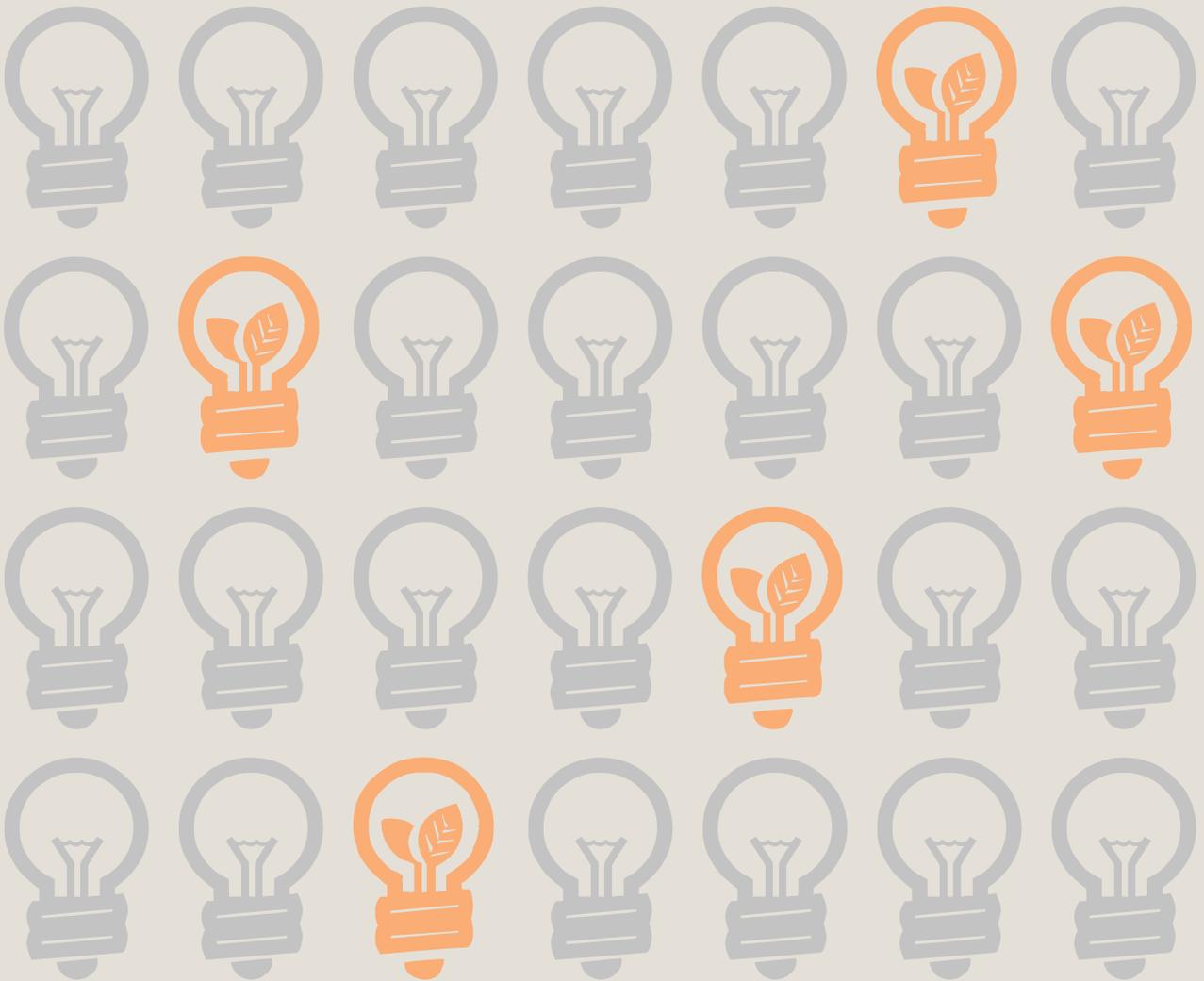


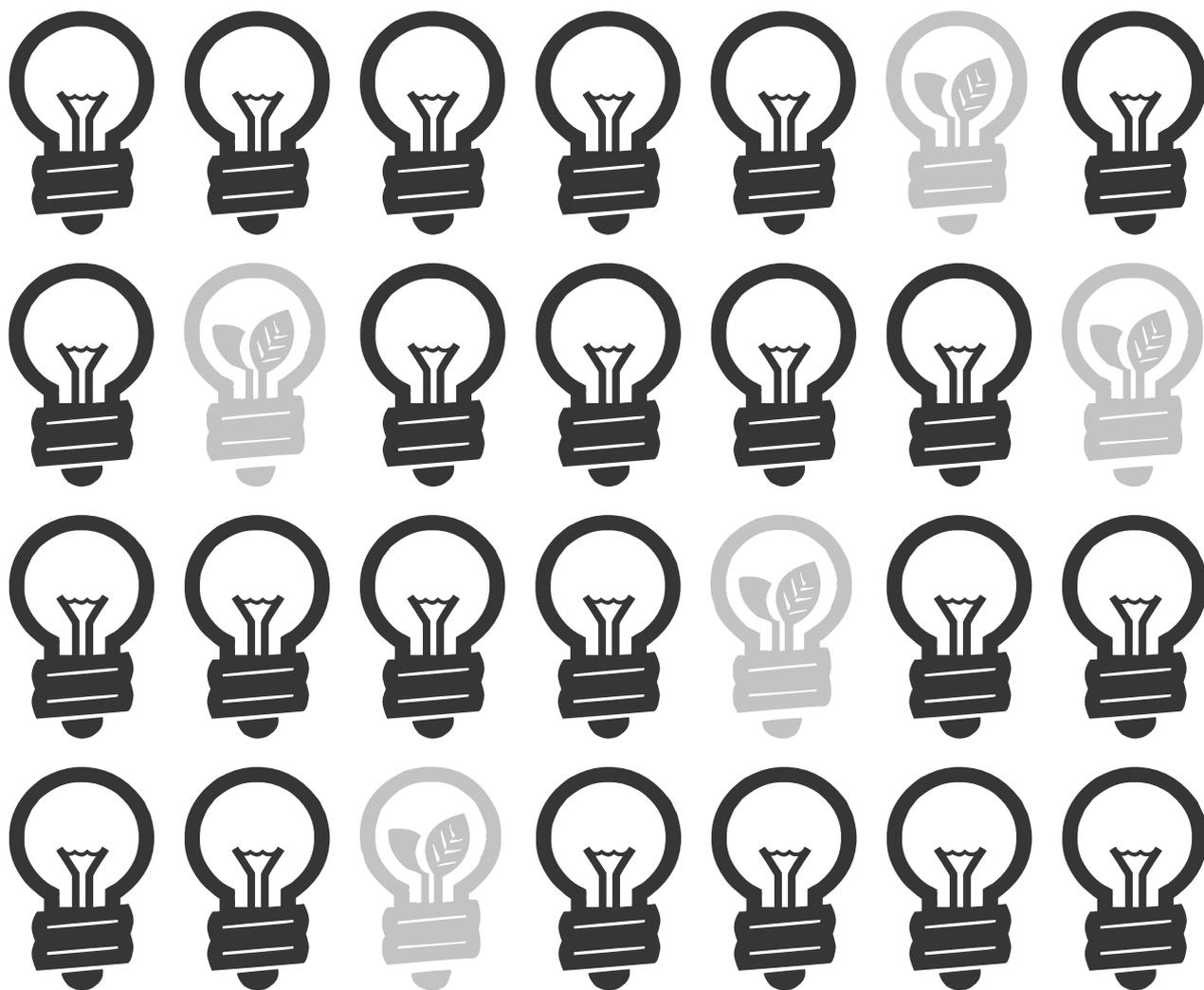
# FIVE IDEAS



AUSTRALIA NEEDS NOW



# FIVE IDEAS



AUSTRALIA NEEDS NOW

In Five Ideas Australia Needs Now, Anglicare Australia puts forward our ideas for how to change Australia for the better, and tackle some of the problems we are facing for good. We call for a basic income; a job guarantee; a community climate fund; a home for everyone; and a people's inquiry into government responses to Covid-19. The author is Maiy Azize.

This and previous reports are available on the Anglicare Australia website:

[www.anglicare.asn.au](http://www.anglicare.asn.au)

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. Our services are delivered in partnership with people, the communities in which they live, and other like-minded organisations in those areas.

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Azize, M. (2022) Five Ideas Australia Needs Now. Anglicare Australia: Canberra.

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# Foreword



It is said that nature abhors a vacuum. Perhaps the same can be said of politics. Negativity, minutiae, and fear can come to dominate public life

when there isn't a positive vision compelling enough to crowd it out. Australia's journey over the past two years seems to bear this out.

At the beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic, we faced an unprecedented challenge with a sense of purpose and optimism. We are all in this together, we were told.

At first, this seemed to be true. People who had been sleeping rough were quickly housed. Renters could no longer be turned out of their homes if they couldn't pay the rent. Payments to people out of work were doubled. Those in danger of losing their jobs were paid a living wage. Some commentators were optimistic about Covid-19 as an opportunity to reshape our communities for the better. But as time went on and support began to fall away, the pandemic exposed how our systems were designed to look after the most advantaged best.

Now, we enter the next phase of the pandemic with a sense of stasis. The creativity and possibility that framed our initial response is gone, replaced with an expectation that we will 'push on' and then 'snap back' to normal.

It is striking that the major challenges facing the country before the pandemic remain unchanged. Hundreds of thousands of Australians are still struggling to find an affordable home. Those who are out of work are struggling to make ends meet. The very real and existential threat of climate change continues to loom over our polity.

These issues are part of the 'normal' we are snapping back to. Yet in many cases, the pandemic showed that we can solve these problems quickly if we choose to.

In *Five Ideas Australia Needs Now*, Anglicare Australia puts forward our ideas for how to change Australia for the better, and tackle some of the problems we are facing for good.

We call for a basic income that would end poverty in Australia once and for all. We put forward a jobs guarantee that would deliver a secure job to every person who wants one, while building the workforce we need for the future. We propose to put the community, and the community sector, at the centre of the climate challenge facing Australia; and we call for a home for every Australian.

Most importantly, we propose to put people at the centre of decisions about our future. We call for leadership, for long sighted governments that govern for everyone. Our call for a people's inquiry into the Covid-19 response is not about undermining leadership but about encouraging it, and challenging our leaders to do better.

If the past two years have shown us anything, it is that people are hungry for leadership. These ideas are our attempt to fill the vacuum in leadership, and offer a vision that goes beyond our current crisis to take us towards a better future.



Kasy Chambers  
Executive Director  
Anglicare Australia

## **Five Ideas Australia Needs Now**

Anglicare Australia is calling for:

- A basic income
- A jobs guarantee
- A community climate fund
- A home for every Australian
- Governing for all: A people's inquiry into Covid-19.

# A permanent basic income

Anglicare Australia has long called for all Australians to have an income above the poverty line. Decent incomes are vital to building a fair society. Yet changes to the labour force and a broken safety net have pushed more and more people into income insecurity and poverty. As a network that supports people in times of greatest need, we have seen first-hand the impact of poverty on people's lives. We have also seen the benefits that a secure income can bring.

For a short time, Australia's JobSeeker payment was doubled in response to the Coronavirus pandemic. Obligations for those getting the payment were lifted. The JobKeeper wage subsidy was brought in to help workers, especially casuals, stay afloat if work dried up. This support package gave many Australians access to a form of basic income. Almost immediately, hundreds of thousands of people were lifted out of poverty – many for the first time. Research, including research conducted by Anglicare Australia, has documented the profound impact this had on poverty levels and on people's lives.<sup>1</sup>

The changes were only temporary. Yet they confirmed what many have always known – poverty is not inevitable. It is a policy choice. The simple act of providing a liveable income to so many people, including those who were out of work or employed casually, all but eradicated the problem of poverty in Australia. Why, when a liveable income above the poverty line brought so many benefits to so many communities, shouldn't Australia have a permanent basic income?

## **The poverty crisis**

Australia's social security system leaves hundreds of thousands of people well below poverty line. It takes for granted that every working age household will be supported by income from paid work. This assumption has led to a system which treats unemployment as an individual problem rather than a structural one, while also approaching disability, illness, single parenthood, and major life disruptions as outlier issues.

This system assumes that all working-age individuals should be able to find full-time, full-year work. While some people may combine part-time or intermittent work with income support, the expectation is that reliance on income support will be temporary and short term. Payments are designed to support people through temporary spells of joblessness, while moving people into the labour market is how the Government purports solve the problems of poverty and social exclusion.

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This approach has never worked. Many people lack the qualifications or experience to compete for available jobs, while others find themselves trapped in a system that cannot accommodate the circumstances of their lives. With the value of income support payments deteriorating over time, they are caught in a poverty trap as they navigate a system which is not equipped to help them. The failures of the system have been easy to hide because most Australians have not had to rely on it.

As the labour market changes and people's lives grow more complex, the system is coming under growing pressure. It was designed on the assumption that only small numbers of people would be unemployed, and that work would provide people with enough income to live. The past two years have upended those assumptions. When large numbers of people lost work in 2020, it became clear that stringent obligations and activity tests were futile in the face of systemic barriers. Later, when shorter lockdowns were introduced in response to outbreaks in 2021, casual workers found that the system automatically assumes that their work gives them an adequate income and excludes them from support. Major features of the system had to be suspended to stop it from collapsing.

Anglicare Australia has conducted research that speaks to these failures. It also contains vital insights on how to create a fair society where everyone can live a dignified life and nobody lives in poverty.

## **Basic income: Research backs the benefits**

In 2021, Anglicare Australia conducted a nationally representative survey of over 1,000 respondents to study the possible impacts of a basic income. The results showed very high levels of income insecurity. We found that 39 percent of respondents had experienced income insecurity in the previous year,<sup>2</sup> with figures especially high among young people. A staggering 56 percent of respondents aged 18-29 had experienced income insecurity in the past year.<sup>3</sup>

Unsurprisingly, those who were most likely to have experienced an insecure income were most likely to say that they would spend basic income payments on saving and reducing debt, furthering study, and changing their career. For many proponents of a basic income, this is at the core of the case for the payment – with greater demand for high-skilled work, and with automation hurting jobseekers looking for entry-level work, it is critical to assist people to adapt to a changing labour force. As past Anglicare Australia research has shown, it is very difficult to take these important steps while living well below the poverty line.

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Experiments and trials of basic income around the world show that most people continue to undertake paid work when they receive a basic income. This is supported by the findings of Anglicare Australia's study, although many would use their income to reduce their hours and seek more flexible arrangements. More than one in ten respondents said they would reduce their paid work hours,<sup>4</sup> with those most likely to offer this response at the peak of their earning potential and job security.

Surveys and studies of Australian workers repeatedly show a contradiction at the heart of the Australian workforce. Large numbers of people want to work less and reduce their hours, while a growing number of people are underemployed and actively trying to work more. The latter is especially true of younger people and those trying to establish themselves in the workforce. The results of our research offer the possibility of a more dynamic workforce that meets people's needs, freeing up some people to work less and creating space for new workers to establish themselves.

Finally, the results of our research suggest that a permanent basic income would promote informal caring, volunteering, and charitable giving across most demographics. Almost one in four respondents said they would use a basic income to spend more time volunteering, while one in five said they would spend income from their basic income payments on donations.<sup>5</sup> Australians on high incomes already donate and volunteer in large numbers, and these results suggest that a basic income would broaden this opportunity to more people.

Importantly, almost one in five respondents hoped to dedicate more time to caring for friends and family. We found that 13 percent of respondents hoped to take on additional domestic and household responsibilities, with men slightly more likely to offer this response.<sup>6</sup> The benefits of this could be profound, with carers losing \$15.2 billion in foregone earnings each year, contributing to a projected growth in demand for informal care work.<sup>7</sup>

## **Getting it done**

Australia has entered a period of historically high living costs, stagnant wage growth, and insecure work. With record-high levels of debt, people seeking to work longer hours to keep up with the demands. Yet as Anglicare Australia's research shows, many would rather reduce their hours, contribute time to their communities, and spend time with their family. Another cohort of people are underemployed or stuck in insecure work, trying but failing to gain more work and more security. This contradiction is the symptom of a system that is failing. A permanent basic income offers a reprieve, and hope.

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Communities across the country are in need of this hope. For decades, governments have been struggling with their Closing the Gap targets on poverty, education, life expectancy, and more. The simplest solution – lifting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people out of poverty directly – has been overlooked in favour of measures that strip people of agency and make their lives worse.

Some argue that a basic income would undermine paid work, but our research refutes that notion. Most people would continue to work, although some may seek to reduce their hours and work more flexibly. Indeed, the findings suggest that it could allow people to adjust to a changing labour force, living and working more securely as they adapt their skills to changing needs. Australia has previously sought to adapt to these changes by moving towards increasingly tough punishments and activity tests, but this approach is failing. Long-term unemployment continues to rise. People subjected to these obligations and activity tests actually take longer to find work. By contrast, financial security and better access to education, training, and childcare have all been shown to promote employability. A permanent basic income would help make all of this possible.

There is increasing interest in a basic income in Australia. Detailed analysis has been carried out on possible models for its introduction, including examining the socio-economic benefits for particular cohorts, such as parents.<sup>8</sup> Another Australian example is an income-tested model that includes a \$300 per week universal income floor with payment reduced for higher income earners, at an estimated cost of \$100 billion a year.<sup>9</sup> Various forms of basic income are being or have been trialled in countries as diverse as Finland, Namibia, the Netherlands, India, Scotland, Kenya, Canada, and the United States. In Australia, there has been a small-scale trial of a guaranteed basic income by the Brotherhood of St Laurence, from 1972-75 as part of the Family Action Centre project.<sup>10</sup>

Whether it is achieved through a universal payment or a guaranteed adequate income for every Australian over the poverty line, it is clear that such a scheme would tackle poverty and income insecurity across Australia. With public support and early research into possible models, it is policy makers who are lagging behind civil society and public opinion by dismissing its potential.

# A job guarantee for every Australian

Anglicare Australia's Jobs Availability Snapshot, released each year, shows what the job market is really like for jobseekers who don't have qualifications or relevant experience to draw on. In every part of the country, these jobseekers outnumber entry-level vacancies by as many as eight to one.<sup>11</sup>

Our most recent Snapshot, released in October 2021, shows that these job seekers are not benefiting from the economic recovery. The recent push for full employment will not be possible simply by growing the pie, or having the economy 'bounce back.' Last year saw job advertisements increase while unemployment, underemployment, and the Jobactive caseload all declined. However at the same time, we found that the number of jobseekers with barriers to work remains stubbornly unchanged.<sup>12</sup> Even with a resurgence in the number of entry-level job vacancies, people with the greatest barriers to work simply aren't getting a look in.

This points to the difficulty many people face in securing work, in spite of the rhetoric of recovery. People are being forced to look for jobs they are unable to get. For those at the lowest rung of the job market any jobs that are available to them are increasingly precarious and insecure.

The labour market continues to fail people with barriers to work. We need to change how we support jobseekers, particularly for those with barriers to work.

## **A job guarantee**

A job guarantee is an assurance from government that every person wanting to work could be employed through services to their community. People would be assured the minimum wage and employment entitlements, and the scheme would be voluntary. The core values of a job guarantee scheme are contribution, reciprocity, citizenship, and participation. The aim is to ensure everyone who wants to work is able to, and can contribute to their community and have the dignity of paid employment, all while providing valuable skills development and experience.

Many different models for a job guarantee have been developed, involving a government administrative system with community organisations partnering to facilitate employment opportunities. In Australia, researchers at the Centre of Full Employment and Equity at the University of Newcastle have developed an extensive workable model for a job guarantee in our context.

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A core principle of a job guarantee is that it is person-centred, accepting each person as they are and where they are, and fitting a job to their expressed interests and skills. This allows people to invest in their community where they have existing networks and social connections, and build on their strengths and aspirations. The kind of employment offered through a job guarantee scheme would be valuable to the community. The job guarantee provides a buffer when employment through the public or private sector shrinks or expands, as it would be expected that most people would transition from a job guarantee role into other employment. This approach accords with the findings of Anglicare Australia's research into the most effective approach to providing employment services.<sup>13</sup>

A job guarantee has the potential to enhance the quality of paid work across all sectors, as employers in the public, private and not-for-profit areas would need to guarantee employees at least equal or better conditions than the job guarantee. Essential to the job guarantee is a broader recognition of different kinds of contributions people can make to society and an expanding imagination of what paid work could be. For example, job guarantee positions could be social and community services drawing on individual strengths and interests, such as assisting with local art classes, community visitor schemes, or Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities taking care of land.

## **Investing in job creation**

Anglicare Australia has previously showcased the potential for job creation in the aged and disability care sectors, including for people with barriers to work, through a series of case studies.<sup>14</sup> The coronavirus pandemic has shown us that this is even more urgent. The Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety is already forecasting a major need to increase the aged care workforce, and ensure it provides proper training and careers for workers.<sup>15</sup>

As just one example, The Brotherhood of St Laurence, a member of the Anglicare Australia Network, is an expert in developing job creation programs for young people and those with barriers to employment. They have shown that job creation is possible and has enormous benefits for people who have found it the hardest to get work. Their work also shows the advantages of both systems-wide and place-based approaches.<sup>16 17</sup> They have put forward a proposal for a national skilled pathway into aged and disability care work. This pathway would be co-designed and trialled with people seeking such work, aged and disability care providers, training organisations and governments.<sup>18</sup> It can be trialled in some of the areas hardest hit with persistently high unemployment, now exacerbated by the recession.

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Of course, care work is not the only sector in Australia where there is future demand for workers, or where opportunities could be created. Other organisations have identified additional areas for jobs creation and growth in Australia, such as manufacturing. In smaller communities too, there is the potential to support local businesses, councils, and people to work together to create the right jobs. Programs that support Indigenous Rangers, Indigenous Protected Areas, and caring for country offer an outstanding example. This place-based job creation is critical, particularly for regional Australia.

The Government has shied away from direct job creation, treating it as the work of the private sector. Incentives for employers in the Government's recent JobMaker scheme are a good example. Incentives like these simply do not have a track-record of creating lasting jobs. It is clear that government investment in job creation has become critical. Job creation programs offer pathways for people with barriers to employment. Job creation simply cannot be left to an already failing market – especially when the government public health response has exposed and added to the many fault lines in our system.

## **Shaping the workforce of the future**

For years, our research has shown that government intervention must move away from failed policies that force people onto an endless hamster wheel of job searching and obligations unlinked to real job prospects. Indeed, a recent Anglicare Australia survey showed that the overwhelming majority of jobseekers found that their obligations and activities were pointless and failing to lead them to work.<sup>19</sup> Instead, we need to drastically overhaul employment services and create activities that actually lead to work. The same survey showed that three quarters of jobseekers want to participate in activities that actually lead to work.<sup>20</sup>

The Omicron variant has revealed that many essential industries are vulnerable to workforce shortages. Outbreaks affecting workers in food manufacturing and supply, the logistics supply chain, and essential retail among others, are leading to supply shortages across the country. The aged care workforce is widely acknowledged to be in crisis as a result, while other frontline service areas such as disability are on the precipice. The deployment of ADF personnel to aged care is the latest sign of that crisis. Both industry leaders and people out of work themselves have noted that many people out of work are simply not equipped to fill these positions, which are often wrongly assumed to be unskilled.

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There has never been a more important time to do away with pointless obligations and training offerings that people out of work are subjected to and replace them with a system that works. Our research has repeatedly shown that the current system of employment services and training is an expensive failure that is not meeting the needs of the job market, or job seekers themselves. Instead, people out of work should be given the option to participate in meaningful training that equips them to work in areas of known demand, such as the care sector, or the support to gain competencies that are increasingly essential to gaining work.

These could include financial support to complete a police check, a working with children or vulnerable people check, training in the use of PPE, first aid, or support to obtain a driver's licence. These offerings are far more useful than the training options currently on offer, and many people would gladly take them up.

# A community climate fund

Australia has been coping with ever more extreme weather events with each passing year. The Black Summer Bushfires were perhaps the worst in living memory. In the past two years, those fires were followed by floods, hail, and more extreme weather. Many communities had been facing crippling droughts for a decade before the fires struck. Across the country, the Anglicare Australia Network has been helping communities recover from this devastation.

Extreme weather events leave people without shelter, food, water, and everyday basics. Some of the worst-hit communities are small, and hard-hit by changes. The losses in regional areas are felt by everyone. Everybody knows someone who has lost their home, their livelihood or livestock, who barely escaped with their life.

Aboriginal communities have been among the hardest hit. The Black Summer Bushfires disproportionately impacted on Aboriginal peoples, and this was true across all affected areas as well as being more pronounced in some regions where Aboriginal people are a larger portion of the population.<sup>21</sup>

In each community, these losses cause grief. As a network led by locals we know that we lose a piece of Australia's history with each fire, flood, and hurricane. We also know that recovery takes much longer than many realise. The impacts of trauma, mental ill-health and financial hardship can continue for years. For example, family violence rates were affected for several years following New Zealand's Christchurch earthquakes.

This climate crisis has been unfolding for years. Scientists, community groups, and locals have been warning that we face serious risks from climate change and extreme weather. Time is running out to act. We must do everything we can to stop further warming – and we must respond to the warming that's already happening.

## **A community climate fund that puts people first**

Every day, the Anglicare Australia Network is helping people cope with the effects of our overheating world. Organisations like ours are shock absorbers for those in need. In the Black Summer, we bridged the gap between the actions of government and the reality on the ground. It was only after months of raging fires that the welfare system recognised that people needed face-to-face help, top-ups on their already low payments, and flexibility in a time of need. We saw the chaos this caused first-hand.

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Nor was the housing system ready. People who lost their homes are still stuck in limbo years later. Many of those who are insured are still without a permanent home, and those who aren't face an uncertain future. Renters are finding that their communities are even more expensive than they were before.

On top of that, living costs skyrocket after disasters. People who need to repair damage to their homes, replace a car, or buy new equipment for their business are priced out. Even the cost of food goes up. People turn to organisations like ours to help pick up the pieces.

These issues might not seem related to climate. But these experiences, and so many more, show that it is critical to resource our communities and help them adapt.

In the aftermath of extreme weather events, governments often turn to the business community. Yet to be fully prepared, the government must work more closely with the community sector. More and more, we will be called upon to help people cope with disasters. We cannot be ignored in efforts to tackle climate change and extreme weather. Our sector must be resourced to support communities through these extreme weather events as they increase in number, length and intensity. This must include Aboriginal community organisations, who have often been left out of crisis planning and responses.<sup>22</sup>

Most importantly, the people most affected by climate change have to be part of the conversation. Some are especially vulnerable – rural and remote communities, older people, and those who can't afford to rebuild their lives after crisis. We have a chance to make their communities fairer by rebuilding new affordable homes, switching to renewable energy, and improving local infrastructure.

A climate adaptation fund, led by the community sector, will help communities adapt and respond to climate change impacts. It will also support local communities with adaptation and response. A climate adaptation fund would give the community sector a leadership role in everything from retrofitting buildings, responding to extreme weather events, and preparing people on low incomes for the impacts of climate change.

# A home for everyone

After two years of volatility and shock, Australians are facing a housing market that has never been less affordable. As we move into the next phase of the Coronavirus recovery, much of the commentary has been optimistic. Australia is bouncing back quickly, we are told. But this narrative leaves behind those who were hardest hit by the pandemic – and those who were struggling long before it hit.

Anglicare Australia's most recent Rental Affordability Snapshot surveyed over 74,000 rental listings. It shows that there is a major disconnect between the commentary on the rental market and how it's actually working for those on the lowest incomes. Affordability has not improved for these people. Instead, it has crashed. We found that 0 percent of rental listings were affordable for a person on the Age Pension, the Disability Support Pension, the JobSeeker payment, or Youth Allowance.<sup>23</sup>

Government actions are failing to match the scale of the housing crisis. Initially, the Coronavirus pandemic forced governments to take action to help renters and people sleeping rough. But these actions were not permanent, and they were not structural. Rent deferrals and eviction moratoriums have long since expired, and support to stop people from sleeping rough has ended as we 'snap back' to normal.

No corner of Australia has been spared the effects of this volatility. Demand for social housing in Aboriginal communities has surged in recent years, with the pandemic worsening the effects of overcrowding.<sup>24</sup> Across all regional areas, affordability has crashed in the years since the pandemic hit, challenging the myth that country areas offer an affordable reprieve from the city.<sup>25</sup> It seems that people flocked to regional areas when they had the opportunity to work flexibly, putting unprecedented pressure on regional housing markets. Yet in spite of this shift, the homes they left behind in urban areas remain far too expensive for people on low and even middle incomes.

It seems that even a global economic downturn has failed to make a dent in Australia's rental crisis. As the Australian housing market continues to defy all assumptions, we must face the reality and the scale of this problem. We must find permanent and structural solutions to ensure every Australian has the income they need to find a home, and to make sure that the homes are there to be found.

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## **500,000 homes for people who need them**

The lack of social housing is one of the reasons our housing market is so unaffordable. Ending the shortfall would be our most powerful solution.

Social housing is for people who are on very low incomes who need a home. Often these are people who have recently experienced homelessness, family violence, have a disability, have specific housing needs, or are employed in low paid or insecure positions. They're couples, families and single people; and they include childcare workers, cleaners, people on the pension and job seekers. The affordable rents, security of tenure, and other support available in social housing reduces their risk of homelessness for these people by more than half.

It is mind-boggling that despite governments and citizens repeatedly identifying affordable housing as a national priority, research shows there is a national shortage of 500,000 social and affordable rental homes for people who are homeless or living on the lowest incomes.<sup>26</sup> Some state governments, such as Western Australia, have developed stimulus packages on social housing. Others such as Victoria, which has the highest per capita waiting list for social housing in the country, are focusing on upgrading their housing stock rather investing in a substantial number of new homes. No State or Territory government is proposing an investment large enough to close their shortfall.

Ending our affordable housing shortfall would be the most powerful way to tackle the homelessness crisis and boost regional economies. There is no time to waste. Social housing projects can get off the ground much more quickly than road or rail infrastructure – and bring greater long-term benefits. For every dollar invested, social housing is estimated to boost GDP by \$1.30.<sup>27</sup>

But this investment isn't just about bricks and mortar, or dry economic outcomes. Affordable housing guarantees everyone a right to safe and stable housing and provides benefits to us. An investment in affordable housing is an investment in social infrastructure, just as we invest in schools and hospitals. For Aboriginal people, it means more housing that is managed by Aboriginal organisations and a real investment in communities. Social housing is about social wellbeing and the creation of homes, not houses; and communities not estates.

We can begin by building at least 25,000 social housing properties each year. This investment recognises the duty of federal government to resolve a social crisis. It is time for governments to take real action, and ensure every Australian has a home.

# Governing for all: A people's inquiry

Over the past two years, Australians have made unprecedented sacrifices in the face of the pandemic. Businesses have failed under the pressure of lockdowns, students have lost years of face-to-face education, and relationships have come under strain as long-term plans have been put on hold indefinitely. Throughout it all, Australians have shown high levels of compliance with some of the most stringent public health measures in the world. In return, they expect honest and transparent leadership from decision-makers.

In many ways, Australia has had a strong response to Covid-19. Vital measures such as JobKeeper and the Coronavirus Supplement provided people with support in the early stages of the pandemic, while health and frontline service systems were protected from its worst impacts throughout 2020 and 2021. Most importantly, Australia boasted world-leading hospitalisation and mortality rates throughout this period, providing us with the time to learn and plan for the next phase of the pandemic. This early response showed Australia's leaders at their best.

Unfortunately, this response and the leadership that drove it was short-lived.

Leadership is a simple concept, yet one that has been missing from public life as politicians have sought to make themselves small targets and focus only neutralising issues. Leaders in the community, including in the Anglicare Australia Network, have moved to fill this void in recent years. This has only highlighted the lack of leadership coming from the political arena.

Good leaders have humility. They know that they don't know everything and so they listen. They listen to those with experience, and they listen to those in different circumstances. Nobody expects that leaders will get everything right. Indeed, one of the characteristics of good leadership is making mistakes, admitting them and learning from them quickly and honestly. Listening and learning leads to good planning and responses that work for everyone.

Of course, it is impossible to have perfect foresight amidst a global crisis. Government systems and processes that were working well by the winter of 2021 proved to be no match for the Delta outbreak, and it is understandable that processes needed time to change and adapt. Yet it is a source of great frustration for many that the handling of each new outbreak does not seem to reflect the lessons of the past.

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By the time the Omicron outbreak struck, experts had long been warning of the danger of new mutations. Countries around the world were preparing to transition their testing systems away from a reliance on PCR tests. Australia had a wealth of lessons learned from our own experiences with the initial vaccine rollout and early outbreaks in aged care in 2020. Yet when Australians entered the most dangerous of the pandemic yet this summer, they found themselves without the support and protections available in the early stages. Responsibility for testing, workforce management and public health was outsourced to ordinary Australians and the private sector.

Lessons that ought to have been humbly learned were complacently ignored. At the start of the Delta outbreak in NSW, advocates called for a Covid-19 hotline to answer questions from Aboriginal people, mass vaccination hubs specifically for Aboriginal people, an Aboriginal-led vaccination rollout in regional and remote communities, and capacity to create emergency accommodation to allow people to isolate away from their families. These requests were ignored. Aboriginal communities in NSW went on to bear brunt of the Delta outbreak only to see the same mistakes repeated in other communities when Omicron struck months later.

Each wave of this virus has shown that Federal, State and Territory governments cannot simply rely on the private sector and market forces to deal with the pandemic. Australia needs clear planning and better coordination. We also need accountability. Each piece of news about ignored health advice or unanswered warnings from experts damages public trust, and should be explained.

Economists, health experts, and the community sector had been warning of many of the issues we are facing for months. These warnings cannot go unheeded again. Governments across the country must learn the lessons from the first two years of managing the pandemic, heed the updated advice and warnings of health professionals and experts, and adopt the best strategies to mitigate the health risk, economic chaos and social disruption that accompanies the virus.

As we face the current Omicron wave, leaders have said that testing can no longer be free for Australians in spite of record-high case numbers. We have been told that the time for income support is over, in spite of the unprecedented workforce crisis. We have been told that it would be 'unsustainable' to pay aged care workers properly, even though many are at their wits end after years of demanding work. These are pleas for leadership from a country in crisis, yet the reply is often that these calls do not pass the 'pub test.'

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There is a simple way to test the pub test proposition. Leaders should be accountable to their citizens directly, not just once every few years at the ballot box. Put simply, this is not happening as part of the current democratic process. The rift between citizens and their politicians has been worsening for years. It is not good enough for people to accept opaque decision-making from governments and parliaments. Ordinary citizens give politicians their power, and we should hold them accountable throughout their terms. We should also feel encouraged, and obliged, to support them in their role by helping them to develop empathy, to understand how things affect different communities, and supporting them to govern for everyone.

A people's inquiry into the Covid-19 response would make ministers and senior public servants directly accountable to citizens. They would answer questions about spending, performance, and decisions. They would produce documents, advice they received and explain future plans. This people's inquiry should truly be open to every citizen, visiting regional and remote areas and giving everyone the opportunity to ask questions and seek accountability. This will make it more difficult to ignore warnings, harder to dismiss community need, and create a mandate for real leadership.

After years of sacrifice, Australians deserve no less.



# The leadership we need

In the past two years, Australians have lived through emergencies that have devastated livelihoods, health, communities and our environment. Each crisis has exposed weaknesses in our social, environmental and economic support systems. In changing much of the employment support and social security system, the Government acknowledged that its existing policies were not fit for purpose. In spite of this temporary acknowledgement, the major challenges facing the country before the pandemic remain.

Australia can do better. These are the choices we are asking the country, and decision-makers, to take.

We need to tackle poverty. Under extreme pressure, Australia's systems and safety net threatened to fail those who needed it most. Never has this been more true than in our support for people who are out of work. As jobs were shed in record numbers, the Government could no longer ignore the gaping holes in our system. In raising JobSeeker payments, the Government single-handedly lifted hundreds of thousands of people out of poverty and introduced a form of basic income. We have done this before. We can do it again.

The Government itself has made jobs a priority in the pandemic recovery. This is a challenge, but it is also an opportunity to rethink our systems. It is past time for Government to invest in direct job creation, overhaul employment services, and build the workforce we need – instead of forcing people to live in poverty and accept insecure work while watching industries cry out for a trained workforce.

Housing is a central part of our vision. Everyone agrees that a home is a basic human need, and nobody doubts the scale of the affordability crisis. Yet even those working full-time are struggling to put a roof over their heads. Somehow, in spite of all of the dire predictions for the housing market, Australians are still spending record amounts on housing. We must act now to stop Australia from becoming a country where only the very wealthy can avoid housing stress.

It is difficult to be anything other than deeply alarmed about the incapacity of modern politics to deal with climate change – but the appetite for action has never been stronger. Anglicare Australia is proposing to put those hardest hit by the climate crisis at the centre of the response, adapting to the warming that is already happening and doing what we can to stop it from getting worse.

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Looking at these issues, it can feel like the people and the issues that we work with are invisible in the political debate. But the pandemic has shown that their needs are universal. A home, a decent income, and a safe environment are things that every Australian deserves. Each of these areas is key to making life better for all Australians – and to delivering on the message of unity we were promised.

In 2022, we are calling for a broader view of what it means to be part of the Australian community.

If it is true that we are all in this together, then everyone must be 'we.'

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