



## Jesuit Social Services

Victorian State Election Platform:  
Housing, Mental Health and Wellbeing

November 2018



Jesuit  
Social Services  
Building a Just Society

## The Victorian State Election

Elections are times for asking what kind of a society we want. They invite us to name our own vision. At election times, too, politicians offer us their visions for a good society. We have a responsibility to assess what they offer, and have an opportunity to advocate for change.

Jesuit Social Services accompanies and works with people and communities who are excluded and isolated.

Our work with people on the margins draws our attention to the multiple and interrelated factors that cause disadvantage, push people to the margins, diminish communities' capacity to shape their future, and damage the natural environment we all depend on. This understanding challenges us to take account of these challenges in our accompaniment and our advocacy. We bring together 'doing' and 'influencing' to ensure our programs and advocacy are shaped by our practice wisdom, evidence and rich heritage.

We work with people with significant barriers to participation and social and economic inclusion.

We accompany them, address their needs and partner with community, business and government to support them onto a pathway to education, training and employment.

Our doing and influencing spans:

- Disadvantaged and marginalised communities
- People with complex and multiple needs
- People involved or at-risk of entering the youth and adult justice systems
- Boys and men who are in trouble or causing trouble
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities
- People and families seeking asylum
- Education, training and employment

The experiences of vulnerable people are diverse. So are their needs. Effective responses demand programs that can be tailored to individual needs, constant adaptation for successful delivery, and sustained commitment from governments. Above all, they must be founded on the recognition that every human being deserves a second chance.

## Housing, mental health and wellbeing

Housing and mental health services are critical to addressing the complex and entrenched disadvantage that marginalised individuals and communities face. At this election, we call on the future state government to meaningfully invest in these services across the state.

Our work involves people who have experienced homelessness, housing instability and housing stress. Our experience tells us that the provision of public, social, and affordable housing helps us to build safer and cohesive communities. Long-term housing can help set a firm foundation for improving well-being and enhancing personal agency. Safe, affordable and supported housing is fundamental to supporting people to get their lives back on track, particularly for people with mental illness, alcohol and drug problems, and other complex needs.

At this election, we call on the state government to build new public housing stock and increase access to social housing. The elected government must provide care, support and housing for individuals with multiple and complex needs, including for vulnerable young people leaving out-of-home care. The elected government must urgently invest in a range of housing options for people leaving prison to support people on the path to reintegration and prevent recidivism.

Jesuit Social Services supports a holistic approach to mental health and wellbeing that takes account of key drivers like poverty, discrimination, family dysfunction and histories of trauma. We also recognise that mental illness (as well as alcohol and drug issues) is often a contributing factor to involvement in the criminal justice system.

Since 2004, Jesuit Social Services has delivered Support After Suicide throughout Melbourne and regional Victoria, providing timely service for people bereaved by suicide. At this election, we call for ongoing investment in this vital service, and for the establishment of residential care for people who have attempted suicide or are suicidal.

Addressing complex disadvantage requires investment in these basic systems and services. It is up to the elected Victorian government to ensure these vital supports are upheld.

## Our asks

We call for the next state government to:

- Increase access to social housing and build at least 2,000 new public housing properties each year over the next decade. Invest in support for individuals with multiple and complex needs.
- Invest in support for vulnerable people leaving prison and state services.
- Raise the age of leaving care to 21 years.
- Develop secure, long-term funding for postvention, early intervention services for suicide bereavement and increase access to suicide bereavement services for regional and rural areas.
- Fund support for those who have attempted suicide and those who are suicidal through the provision of short-term residential care.

**Increase access to social housing and build at least 2,000 new public housing properties each year over the next decade. Invest support for individuals with multiple and complex needs.**

The state of social housing in Victoria is in need of urgent attention, and Jesuit Social Services has long called for more innovative responses to improving Victoria's public housing system. At this election, we reiterate this call.

The elected government must immediately increase capital funds to develop new housing stock, invest in housing support to enable people to maintain their tenancy, and strengthen incentives for the private sector to invest in social housing.

**We support the Victorian Public Tenants Association's call to build at least 2,000 new public housing properties each year over the next decade.**

**The elected Victorian government must invest in a diversity of housing options for people with multiple and complex needs.** Specific housing initiatives are needed for single people, young people, women, and people with experience of trauma. The Government must also provide incentives for social housing providers to offer housing to complex and high support participants. Measures such as eligibility criteria and safeguards and regulations should be introduced and strengthened in order to protect social housing households, especially for vulnerable groups presenting with challenging behaviours.

Finally, more opportunities are needed for tenants and community sector providers to actively participate in the process of designing the social housing system and informing ongoing improvements.

## **Invest in support for vulnerable people leaving prison and state services.**

Safe and affordable housing is fundamental to people's ability to get their lives back on track. For vulnerable people leaving state services, a range of appropriate housing options is needed, as well as support to maintain housing.<sup>1</sup>

### *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander men exiting state services*

The elected Victorian government must support single Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander men exiting prison and invest in culturally safe accommodation, to reduce re-incarceration. They must also support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander men making other transitions from services, such as from hospital services

### *Young people involved in the criminal justice system*

Many young people leaving youth justice exit into homelessness. The Youth Parole Board found that, of a snapshot of young people involved in the youth justice system, 13 per cent were homeless with no fixed address or living in insecure housing before being taken into custody.<sup>2</sup> Young people leaving the justice system need access to appropriate transitional, step-down housing, and often require tailored supports. In the last annual report, the Youth Parole Board highlighted that a lack of appropriate accommodation after release from custody can compromise a young person's ability to re-engage in the community and desist from offending behaviours.<sup>3</sup>

The *Link - Youth Justice Housing Program* supports young people aged 15 to 22 exiting the justice system through a unique, integrated model to secure and sustain appropriate and stable housing and provides essential after hours support. It engages young people at high-risk times - outside of business hours and on the weekend - when young people exiting the justice system are most likely to reoffend - and when tenancies and relationships break down in the community.

The ultimate goal of *Link* is to support young people to transition from residential services to private rental, assisting them to develop independent living skills. Jesuit Social Services delivers the program alongside VincentCare to a small cohort of young people at risk of homelessness after justice supervision. Currently the program operates across North West Metropolitan Melbourne.

The program provides exit planning and case management and feeds into the development of a housing support continuum.

**We call on the elected Victorian government to provide recurrent funding to this program and expand it statewide.**

### *Women leaving prison*

Many women leaving prison do not receive effective transitional support that caters to their unique needs.<sup>4</sup> The result of this is that women are at high risk not only of re-offending, but also of post-release death. One Australian study found that young females under 25 had 20 times greater risk of death than their counterparts in the community, which was higher than any other group of post-release prisoners, including young men.<sup>5</sup>

To address this need for appropriate housing services Jesuit Social Services developed the Next Steps project, a model of supported accommodation for young people aged 16-24 who have been involved in the criminal justice system and are at risk of, or experiencing, homelessness.

Next Steps aims to prevent homelessness and reduce recidivism rates. Its key features include long-term intensive case management support, small caseloads, stable and appropriate housing, and outreach to young people and their families.

Given the particular vulnerabilities of women leaving prison, Jesuit Social Services has identified the need for a dedicated program for young women based on the Next Steps model already used for young people.

**We call on the elected Victorian government to fund a housing model statewide, similar to Next Steps, for women transitioning from prison back into the community.**

## Raise the age of leaving care to 21 years.

The pipeline between state care, youth justice and prison is an all too common trajectory in Victoria. Research by Victoria Legal Aid has shown that 83 per cent of children aged 10-17 placed in out-of-home care receive a criminal charge within their first 12 months of being placed in care.<sup>6</sup>

Young people leaving care experience significantly more limited opportunities compared with their peers not involved in out-of-home care. These young people have restricted accommodation options within the current housing climate and many have not been supported during their placements in care to actively develop their independent living skills, causing living placements post-care to break down<sup>7</sup>. The outcomes for children leaving care are unacceptable.

One effective model of providing care and support to young adults is Targeted Care Packages (TCP). TCPs are individually designed packages providing support to young people exiting residential care, specifically targeting those that have or are at risk of involvement with the youth justice system. We welcome the Government's announcement to fund additional TCPs for young people transitioning from residential to home-based placements.

However, the age of eligibility for care remains too low. **Jesuit Social Services endorses raising the age of leaving state care to 21 years old, and welcomes recent commitments to make this a reality.**

## **Develop secure, long-term funding for postvention, early intervention services for suicide bereavement and increase access to suicide bereavement services for regional and rural areas.**

In 2017, in Australia, the rate of death from intentional self-harm rose 9.1 per cent from 2016. The preliminary standardised death rate for 2017 was 12.6 deaths per 100,000 persons, equal with 2015 as the highest recorded preliminary rate in the past 10 years.<sup>8</sup>

Jesuit Social Services has delivered Support After Suicide throughout Melbourne and regional Victoria since 2004. In 2016-17, Support After Suicide assisted 555 children, young people and adults bereaved by suicide. The program provides counselling, support groups and online resources. We also deliver training to health, welfare and education professionals.

It is critical to recognise the risk of suicide amongst those who are bereaved by suicide. Support After Suicide works to reduce this risk by working closely with people affected by suicide. However, Support After Suicide is significantly underfunded, and there is a lack of certainty regarding ongoing funding, putting Victorians at risk of missing out on timely service, including those referred by the Victoria Police. Additionally, while Support After Suicide operates in regional areas (the Macedon Ranges and Geelong), its ability to provide robust services, in spite of increased demand, is limited due to restricted funding. **We call on the incoming state government to address this instability and commit to secure and expanded funding of Support After Suicide.**



## **Fund support to those who have attempted suicide and those who are suicidal through the provision of short-term residential care.**

We welcome recent Government announcements to expand funding for the HOPE initiative, which provides support and follow up for people leaving hospital after a suicide attempt.

Research has established that people are at high risk of suicide after a discharge from hospital following a suicide attempt.<sup>9</sup> The Victorian Suicide Prevention Strategy cites a study in the United Kingdom which found that 43 per cent of deaths by suicide occurred within one month of discharge from hospitalisation or treatment following a previous suicide attempt, with nearly half of those deaths occurring before the first follow-up appointment. The Victorian Chief Psychiatrist's investigation into inpatient deaths between 2008 and 2010 attributed this increased risk after hospitalisation in part to the emotional isolation and lack of social support individuals often experience after a suicide attempt.<sup>10</sup>

We applaud the HOPE model of assertive outreach, which works with families, friends and carers of people who have attempted suicide. We know that suicide can occur in clusters, making support for the networks around people after suicide all the more critical.<sup>11</sup>

We call for the establishment of short-term residential care following suicide attempts, beyond a clinical environment. We can look to the UK for examples of this model – the Maytree Respite Centre offers a free stay in a non-medical setting, filling a gap in service provision for individuals experiencing suicidal crisis. However, we note that the Maytree facilitates a stay of up to five days. Jesuit Social Services believes that a longer term program, of up to six weeks, would be more effective in delivering holistic support.

Jesuit Social Services supports a short-term residential care model that is therapeutic and offers relationship-based support and counselling. A residential option will help fill a service gap for the most vulnerable who may have limited family and community support.

In addition, programs will include families of individuals who have attempted suicide, providing education on responding to suicide and suicide attempts. Tapping into family and community networks around individuals, and ensuring this network is well-informed, gives individuals at risk of suicide much-needed support.

We believe the period immediately after a suicide attempt is a critical time in which to provide support to individuals in crisis. We call on the elected Victorian government to invest in short-term residential care for people who have attempted suicide or who are suicidal.

## Endnotes

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