

baptist care australia

we have a dream

PRE-BUDGET SUBMISSION 2016/17

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WHO WE ARE

Baptist Care Australia is a passionate and innovative association of Baptist organisations around Australia. Our members bring life-enriching care to their clients, residents, families and communities. Our care for people arises from our belief that God desires wholeness in all aspects of life. Our collective mission is to express Christ's love as we serve people and includes addressing their physical, emotional and spiritual needs.

We are a significant member of our civil society, contributing substantially to the economic, physical and spiritual well-being of our community. The members of Baptist Care Australia have an annual turnover of around \$0.6 billion, employ around 7,000 staff, and engage with almost 2,000 volunteers annually. We deliver services direct to tens of thousands of individuals nationally.

Our members are actively involved in the provision of Home Services and Residential Aged Care, with more than 300 villages and Residential Aged Care facilities as well as an ever increasing number of social and affordable housing units, providing homes to over 6000 older and vulnerable Australians.

In addition, member agencies of Baptist Care Australia are engaged in:

- Homelessness services
- Care services for young people under guardianship
- Refugee and Asylum seeker services
- Disability support services
- Respite services
- Outdoor recreation and adventure camping
- Community development initiatives
- Foster care
- Food for Life programs to vulnerable communities
- Chaplaincy
- Gateway and referral services
- Food bank services to over 130 organisations
- Mental health support services
- Semi-independent and supported accommodation for young people
- Youth education and training services
- Employment services
- Community nursing services
- Delivery of training courses for individuals and families
- Aboriginal services
- Family relationship counselling
- Domestic violence accommodation and support
- Community housing
- Drug and alcohol services
- Low income services including financial counselling, 'no interest and low interest loans'

INTRODUCTION

In offering this pre-budget submission Baptist Care Australia wishes to affirm the efforts of the Australian Government to manage the resources entrusted to it by the Australian people.

The Baptist Care Australia community partners with the Government to support some of the most disadvantaged people in Australia, from small children to the vulnerable and frail ageing, and many in between. Baptist Care Australia has also sought to take leadership to meet our mission and values and contribute to the social welfare net by generating our own revenue, assets and supporter base through our volunteer programs, corporate sponsors, philanthropic donors, the communities of our Baptist churches and other measures.

The Baptist Care Australia community self-invests in many critical services which do not attract government funding and is alert to opportunities to co-invest with other members of the Baptist Care family. Our community has invested in and provides a broad range of housing support for people with a range of needs.

Baptist Care Australia has sought to contribute to public discourse around deepening the federal revenue base from which funding to support disadvantaged people may be drawn. To that end we have considered a range of taxation reform measures arising from principles of equity, efficiency, sustainability, policy consistency, and have invested in related academic modelling to test progressivity and revenue gain. This formed the basis of our submission following the Taxation Reform Discussion Paper released on 30 March 2015 and has been submitted to those currently considering the Taxation White Paper under the current treasurer, Scott Morrison. We have also engaged in conversations and ‘think tanks’ with other agencies and was invited to attend the Taxation Reform Summit in late 2015.

It is from this stance we offer this pre-budget submission. Broadly, Baptist Care Australia supports budget initiatives providing a safety net for the disadvantaged, enabling social investment, promoting innovation and displaying Australia’s commitment to the international context. Baptist Care Australia supports budget initiatives increasing the opportunities presented by social impact principles and projects to attract additional capital from other sources (e.g., private markets, equity partners) and to deliver more innovative and cost effective social benefit services.

While the Baptist Care Australia secretariat receives no funding and does not seek it, we support budget measures designed to recognise the importance of other advocacy groups also seeking to give a voice to those who are unable to advocate for themselves.

Specifically, this submission will focus on areas pertaining to the community welfare work of Baptist Care Australia member organisations for which we have developed considered advocacy and budget policy positions. It outlines principles and initiatives for building focused support for the vulnerable and disadvantaged in our care. It does not, however, address the aged care side of our operation.

2016 PRE-BUDGET SUBMISSION FOCUS AREAS

- 1. Homelessness**
- 2. Domestic and Family Violence**
- 3. Food Security**
- 4. Disability**
- 5. Asylum Seekers, Refugees and Settlement Services**

This submission reflects the views of Baptist Care Australia and acknowledges it may not accurately represent the views of individual members.

Homelessness

Our vision is for a society where all Australians can access safe, secure, appropriate and affordable housing that contributes to social and economic participation, leading to an end to homelessness.

Baptist Care Australia encourages all tiers of Government to recognise homelessness as a national issue needing urgent resolution. We support the Federal Government's commitment to halve homelessness by 2020.

The Government needs to ensure the national homelessness response is viewed as a long-term strategy, and meets the diverse needs of at risk groups including young Australians, women over 60, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders, refugees, people experiencing mental illness, substance abuse, and domestic and family violence.

The links between homelessness, unemployment, mental health, and other health related issues and domestic violence are significant. Funding that is more specifically focused on these areas as well as preventative measures to support people experiencing homelessness on the pathway back to employment and self-determination is critical.

Recommendations:

- Extend the objectives of the *National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness* for a further five years to provide service delivery security with an option to extend for a third term. By keeping this funding agreement secure, service delivery providers will be able to focus on helping vulnerable people break the cycle of homelessness.
 - As a step towards this, we recommend \$30 million in the 2016/17 budget to provide operational funds to service providers to run evidence based innovative pilot programs specifically targeted at refining service delivery and ending homelessness.
- Index the *National Affordable Housing Agreement* funding to CPI.
- Increase the maximum rate of *Commonwealth Rent Assistance* by at least 30% to restore its real value to the household budget and to index it to the rent component of the CPI.

Domestic and Family Violence

Australian women and their children live free from violence in safe communities.

Baptist Care Australia affirms the above vision of the Government's *National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children by 2022* and supports its six outcomes:

- i. Communities are safe and free from violence
- ii. Relationships are respectful
- iii. Indigenous communities are strengthened
- iv. Services meet the needs of women and their children experiencing violence
- v. Justice responses are effective
- vi. Perpetrators stop their violence and are held to account

We encourage the Federal Government to take a wholistic approach that looks not only at women and their children but also the perpetrators to break the cycle of domestic and family violence. We are supportive of the commitments the Federal Government has made to end family and domestic violence and promote them being maintained and funded appropriately in this and future budgets.

Recommendations:

- Double the investment in the domestic and family violence awareness campaign which was announced in the last Federal Budget
- \$150 million provided over two years for new and targeted initiatives (working in parallel with the above increased awareness campaign funding) to support victims of domestic and family violence access essential services, particularly legal and housing support.
- Continue to fund the implementation of the research priority noted within the agreed priorities in the *National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children*, recognising the potential for such research to inform future funding decisions in this area.

Food Security

Food security is a basic human right. All Australians should have access to affordable, nutritious food sourced in an ethical way.

Baptist Care Australia acknowledges the importance of funding groups involved in food distribution to a range of food security services.

We also note the importance of directly funding local food security services themselves, since such services often struggle on a daily basis to survive, operating as they do at the front line of affordable food service delivery to the most marginalised.

Baptist Care Australia does not support any tax increase that would have a negative impact on the purchasing of fresh food for low income earners.

Recommendations:

- Immediately increase the current *Emergency Relief Funding* allowances by 10% as a matter of priority.
 - Baptist Care Australia would like to emphasise the importance of the *Emergency Relief Funding* (administered by the Department of Social Services) in providing food security for the most marginalised.
 - We would be supportive of a specific emergency relief initiative targeting rural and remote communities where food supply is an issue of daily critical importance.

Disability

Our vision is for people with disability to be known for their ability and for those who support them to do so in ways that are collaborative, inclusive, participatory, wholistic and reflective.

Baptist Care Australia affirms the *National Disability Strategy's* six priority areas for action to improve the lives of people with disability, their families and carers, summarised below:

1. Inclusive and accessible communities.
2. Rights protection, justice and legislation.
3. Economic security.
4. Personal and community support.
5. Learning and skills.
6. Health and wellbeing.

We support an appropriately funded National Disability Insurance Scheme, noting and affirming the inclusion of individuals with mental illness, as well as its ongoing rollout. We believe it is imperative to the success of the NDIS that the scope remains consistent and the funding allocations remain consistent over time. We recognise the critical importance for those who are using (or will be using) the NDIS to have full choice, flexibility and control over their package.

People with persistent complex needs are more likely to experience chronic health problems, particularly those with disability or a mental illness. Support needs will often vary over time and be cyclic in nature. For these reasons, the interface between the NDIS and 'mainstream' services is critical.

Recommendations:

- Ensure the Department of Social Services is adequately resourced to implement and fund the six priority areas of the *National Disability Strategy*.
- Bring forward the welcome second tier of funding under the *Information Linkages and Capacity Building* program to the 2016/17 budget period.
- Baptist Care Australia recommends retaining some level of block funding for services to address critical gaps between the NDIS and 'mainstream' services.

Asylum Seekers, Refugees and Settlement Services

Our vision is for a welcoming and inclusive society of justice, hospitality and refuge for all migrants including refugees.

Baptist Care Australia calls on our nation to take a leadership role within the international community in dealing justly and compassionately with refugees and asylum seekers. We support the on-shore community processing of all those seeking asylum, particularly children and their families.

Refugees settling in Australia experience significant hardship and have a range of increasingly complex needs. The settlement services designed to support them are significantly underfunded. These providers require additional funding to support refugees in accessing essential services such as support to find suitable accommodation, employment and access to education.

Recommendations:

- Deliver funding to settlement service providers for case management support so refugees are able to transition from arrival to employment and economic participation.
- Continue funding peak bodies involved in giving a voice to refugees and asylum seekers to ensure their voices are heard at a national level.