

Dr Catherine Earl
Chief Executive Officer
South Australian Council of Social Service

Email: sacoss@sacoss.org.au

Dear Dr Earl

RE: SA-BEST response to the SACOSS 2025-26 Policy Priorities

Thank for you the opportunity to respond to the South Australian Council of Social Service (SACOSS) 2025-26 Policy Priorities for the March state election.

As you know, I frequently engage with SACOSS as a key stakeholder, and often directly reference your research and advocacy during parliamentary debates, across many policy areas.

The important work of your organisation very much aligns with my anti-poverty and wellbeing agendas and, should I be re-elected, I will continue to engage with you to improve the lives of our most vulnerable and disadvantaged community members.

I am pleased to respond briefly to the particulars of your policy proposals and would be delighted to meet with you to discuss those proposals in more detail.

Sector Support

Funding

SACOSS has proposed changes be made to the way the not-for-profit (NFP) sector is funded including:

1. The adoption of a purpose-built indexation formula
2. A catch-up funding increase
3. Review of all contracts to ensure funding is outcome based
4. An allowance for profit margins in contracts and limitations on funding clawbacks

The NFP sector is without doubt facing systemic funding challenges. The inflation fuelled, cost-of-living crisis has resulted in an increased demand for services, and an increase in the cost of providing those services. Many not-for-profit organisations are now running on cash reserves and incurring operational losses. Without consideration of the way NGOs are funded, those reserves will eventually run out - which means so will the services they provide to the community. This cannot be allowed to happen.

SA-BEST **SUPPORTS** an appropriate increase in funding to the NGO sector, and an adoption of an indexation formula to assist organisations with forward planning.

Funding should without a doubt be outcome based, and to that end SA-BEST **SUPPORTS** a review of contracts to ensure that outcomes are clear and measurable.

I also provide in principle **SUPPORT** for placing some limits on funding clawbacks and allowing for some profit margins to be included in contracts, subject to further consultation with the sector and government to understand how this could be applied, and the impact it might have on state finances and the sector.

Workforce Development

SACOSS is requesting that government fund and co-design a ten-year workforce development plan for the sector, to ensure the sectors ability to attract and retain staff who can provide the current breadth of services to the community.

Recruiting and retaining appropriate staff in caring and community roles has become increasingly difficult. There are numerous reasons for this, not the least of which being salary and working conditions. Governments at both a state and federal level, need to be involved in these discussions, and to that end SA-BEST **SUPPORTS** the development of a ten-year workforce plan, funded by government.

Housing

Everyone has a right to live in safe and secure housing. Unfortunately, there are too many members of our community who are not afforded this right. Some of the solutions to this are complex, but some of them are remarkably simple.

Public and Community Housing

Securing people's safety by increasing public and community housing stock is one of the remarkably simple ideas. We know it works, and that its benefits have a ripple effect. More public and community housing stock improves broader housing affordability, supports vulnerable citizens, creates jobs, eases pressure on rental markets and generates long-term social and economic benefits for all South Australians. It astounds me that successive governments in this state have been complicit in the sell-off of public housing stock. The housing crisis did not start overnight, and the position we now find ourselves in was foreseeable. SA-BEST **SUPPORTS** an increase in the development of public and community housing.

Rent caps

SACOSS are advocating for the introduction of rent caps. This is a complex policy area that has the potential to give rise to unintended consequences. Whilst I appreciate that many renters are on low incomes and that sharp rent increases can lead to housing stress or homelessness, I hold concerns that this type of market intervention will severely impact rental stock and exacerbate the problem it intends to fix.

Rental affordability should be addressed by governments through rent allowances and supply, but I **DO NOT** at this point **SUPPORT** the introduction of rent caps.

Better definition of “affordable housing”

The current definition of affordable housing is determined by the Minister responsible for the *South Australian Housing Trust Act 1995* and is integrated into the state’s Planning and Design Code. The code distinguishes between housing for purchase and housing for rent. As of August 2024, the housing for purchase price cap has been set at \$490,000. Whilst I appreciate that would not sound very affordable to a low-income family, it is reported that the building industry is having difficulty producing homes at this price point.

I would like to understand more about the barriers to producing homes at an affordable price point, to gauge if there is any further work to do in terms of how the scheme is being administered.

SA-BEST provides **in principal SUPPORT** for a better and more realistic definition of affordable housing.

Expand homelessness services

The reality is that no government can fix the housing supply and affordability crisis overnight. In the time that it will take to build houses and develop policy settings to address these issues, homelessness will continue and likely increase.

SA-BEST **SUPPORTS** SACOSS’s submission that the government must develop a roadmap for supporting homeless people.

Energy

The cost-of-living crisis is significantly impacted by the cost of energy in South Australia. High energy prices impact the cost of running a house and putting food on the table.

New NEO objective

SA-BEST **SUPPORTS** SACOSS’s call for South Australia to advance an amendment to the legislated National Energy Objectives to introduce two new objectives: social equity and the minimisation of consumer harm and risk.

Energy efficiency

I am on the record as **SUPPORTING** minimum energy efficiency standards for rental homes. I also provide **in principle SUPPORT** for a requirement to disclose energy performance, and a pathway to assist with energy performance upgrades, subject to understanding what those disclosures would entail, and what type of assistance would be required.

Electrification

SACOSS is proposing:

- the phase out of gas appliances by mandating upgrades to efficient electric alternatives at end of life from 2028
- halting new residential gas connections and gas connection abolishment costs
- development of a comprehensive household electrification roadmap.

Whilst I appreciate there has been a lot of discussion about the phasing out of gas in favour of the electrification of homes, I am not convinced the theory aligns with the practical realities of these proposals - especially in the medium term.

First, we do not at present have certainty in our electricity market. Government subsidies of electricity costs are due to expire this year which will result in price hikes of 25% for South Australian homes.

Second, whilst it is true that the uptake of solar energy has reduced pressure on the grid, we do not at this time understand additional pressures to the grid, created by new industries, including AI, which might be imminent.

SACOSS's proposal that homes be fully electrified may indeed turn out to be a sensible path forward. However, I think there are some hard roads to traverse in terms of understanding our future energy requirements and supply issues, before one could commit to the propositions. To that end, SA-BEST **DOES NOT SUPPORT** these proposals at this time.

Human Rights

My legislative work and public comments consistently align with supporting stronger human rights protections in law.

I have expressed clear support for the establishment of a Human Rights Act or Bill of Rights in South Australia. I have argued that the current legislative framework is insufficient to protect the rights of South Australians, particularly marginalised groups.

SA-BEST **SUPPORTS** the commencement of consultation on the contents of a Human Rights Act for South Australia.

Health

I am a strong supporter of preventative health measures and was a vocal supporter of the *Preventive Health Bill 2024*, which established the agency that funds the People's Health Voice. Should I be re-elected I will continue to **SUPPORT** the People's Health Voice, including appropriate funding.

Final Comments

Thank you again for the opportunity to consider the 2025-26 Policy Priorities of the South Australian Council for Social Service.

I also congratulate you on the good work that your organisation undertakes and thank you for the way in which you engage with stakeholders in respect of your advocacy work.

Warmest regards



Hon. Connie Bonaros MLC
SA-BEST

3 February 2026