**ACOSS SUMMARY OF THE PARTIES' RESPONSES IN KEY AREAS**

These are the main messages from the Party responses to our questions.

This is not intended as an endorsement of any particular party, but a tool to assist voters in evaluating each party’s social policy position.

We note that there are still **two** weeks to go **in the campaign** and that more policy announcements can be expected from the Parties and we will comment on those as appropriate.

**1.       Measuring social and economic progress**

* We welcome the ALP’s [*Growing Together*](http://www.alp.org.au/growing_together) statement, and commitment to set goals and targets for social progress, and framing of connection between social **and** economic policy.
* We welcome the Greens’ commitment to anti-poverty targets and their [*Tackling Inequality: A Social Safety Net for the 21st Century*](http://greens.org.au/inequality)statement
* We are disappointed at the lack of positive social policy in the Coalition’s response which reflect an over-reliance on a 'trickle-down' approach. We remain seriously concerned that service and payment cuts affecting people on low incomes would entrench inequalities and increase levels of poverty.

**2.       A balanced approach to budget repair**

* We welcome the ALP and Greens agreement that revenue increases are needed as well as action on the spending side, though urge them to go further and make a clear commitment to rigorous review of tax expenditures.
* We are concerned that the Coalition proposes to continue to rely in a one-sided fashion on expenditure restraint (i.e. budget spending cuts) which in our targeted welfare system often falls most heavily on people with low and fixed incomes.
* We are disappointed that only the Greens explicitly commit to not pursuing a budget policy that disproportionately impacts on low income households (those in the bottom 40%). The lesson of the 2014 budget is that budget cuts which are targeted to those on the lowest incomes will not be accepted by the broader community. We welcome the ALP’s rejection of specific policies that would impact on low earners, including family payment cuts.

**3.       Improving the integrity an equity of the tax system (including the retirement incomes system)**

* The emphasis from all three parties on closing shelters and loopholes is welcome: this is the fairest way to restore the budget without causing economic and social harm.
* We note that there are different strengths and weaknesses in this area: the [Coalition’s policies](http://budget.gov.au/2016-17/content/glossies/tax_super/html/) on superannuation are stronger, taking us further towards a fair and sustainable system; while the ALP has a stronger housing tax and capital gains tax reform plan. The Greens take a step further that the other parties to close tax loopholes with their proposal to clamp down on tax avoidance through private companies and trusts.
* We note that all parties support tax cuts for companies, but would extend these to companies of different sizes (with the ALP and Greens only supporting tax cuts to small business). The key issue, not yet resolved by any Party, is how this would be paid for.

**4.       Improving support for people who are unemployed and reducing child poverty**

* Policies to reduce poverty havebeen missing in action in this campaign. Only the Greens propose a poverty reduction target (though unspecified).
* We welcome acknowledgement from the ALP and the Greens that Newstart is inadequate, the Green’s commitment to a $55 per week increase and the ALP’s commitment to a review of the adequacy of Newstart and related payments.
* The Greens and the ALP both commit to working to reduce child poverty. The Coalition commits to ensuring “that every child has the greatest possible chance in life to succeed and not live in poverty”. The Greens propose to raise social security payments for sole parents who face a high risk of poverty while Labor commits to a review of family payments. The Coalition refers to previous announcements on child care and other budget measures, which have both positive and negative impacts of low income families. We reject the Coalition assertion that ‘the Coalition family payment system is generous’. ACOSS’ last Poverty Report showed that a single parent fully reliant on income support and family payments is living below the poverty line.
* We remain concerned that the Coalition is still committed to the ‘zombie’ payment cuts for young unemployed people and low income families [see ACOSS policy brief at: <http://www.acoss.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/ACOSS-policy-briefing_payment-cuts_June-2016-FINAL.pdf>]
* The parties’ responses are weaker on how to improve employment opportunities for people currently excluded especially the half a million Newstart recipients who are long term unemployed, including but not limited to young people. Employment assistance programs announced so far would not reach the majority of those unemployed long-term.
* The Coalition’s PaTH program would reach more of the most disadvantaged and the combination of regular work experience and training is a good starting point but in its present form poses unacceptable risks for unemployed people and existing workers [see policy analysis here: <http://www.acoss.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/ACOSS-policy-briefing_Youth-Jobs-PaTH-program_May-2016.pdf>].  We welcome the release today of the ALP’s youth employment program which provides stronger protections for younger people.
* The Greens, along with Labor, propose a regional ‘bottom up’ approach to employment assistance with partnerships between employers unions and the community sector.

**5.       Access to basic services for all who need them**

* The ALP and the Greens commit to restoring funding cuts to hospitals and schools (though in ALP’s case with hospitals only for the next 4 years).
* In addition the ALP proposes to increase funding for legal aid and domestic violence services
* We especially welcome the Greens' proposal to invest $500 million in essential community services including restoring funding cuts.
* The Coalition would invest an additional $1.2 billion in education (but is not committed to a fair funding formula for schools over the long term) with additional support for students with disabilities, and $2.9 billion over 3 years to hospitals (which would not fully restore funds cut in the 2014 Budget).

**6.       Ending the housing crisis**

* Labor proposes to curb ‘negatively geared’ investment in existing housing and reduce the Capital Gains Tax 50% ‘discount’, both of which would help reduce the tax bias towards speculative housing investment and improve affordability in the long run. They have also announced a commitment to develop a national affordable housingplan.
* The Greens would also develop a national housing affordability planand have gone a step further with their commitment to a 30% increase in Rent Assistance and a doubling of homeless services funding.
* The Coalition has rejected reforms to negative gearing and Capital Gains Tax and does not yet have a commitment to an affordable housing plan or an increase to Rent Assistance. It points to the work of the Affordable Housing Working Group to report by 30 June 2016.

**7.       A strong, independent and diverse civil society**

* We welcome the ALP’s commitment to support community organisations’ right to advocate, to reinvigorating the 'National Compact' with the community sector and to reviewing community services funding to address gaps and provide longer term funding.
* We welcome the Greens' funding commitments to a range of essential community services, including restoring funds cut to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander services.
* We are concerned that although the Coalition promises the 'reduce red tape' it does not provide any commitment to generally protect community organisations’ freedom to advocate or address problems with funding levels and contracting.

**8.       Ensuring effective action to address climate change and its impacts on people on low incomes**

* The ALP proposes to introduce an ETS for energy generation and establish a ‘community power network’ including in social housing.
* The Greens propose an economy wide carbon price with compensation for households.
* The Coalition points to reforms to the Australian Energy Regulator and the repeal of the carbon tax.
* Robust action is essential and an economy wide ETS the most cost effective approach. It is very important that any impacts on low income households are mitigated. The Coalition policy doesn’t go far enough. The ALP’s is stronger, though not as robust as when previously in Government. The Greens have consistently pursued a broad based price on carbon.