



**Andrew Wilkie**  
INDEPENDENT FEDERAL MP

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Dr Cassandra Goldie  
Chief Executive Officer  
Australian Council of Social Service  
Locked Bag 4777  
STRAWBERRY HILLS NSW 2012

Dear Dr Goldie

Thank you for the opportunity to respond to ACOSS's 2019 federal election priorities. Below is a snapshot of where I stand on these issues but I am happy to elaborate further on any issue, or to meet with you or any of your member organisations to discuss.

***Income support to get through tough times***

All government pensions and payments should be immediately increased to levels that people can actually live on. This includes lifting Newstart, Youth Allowance, Austudy, the Disability Support Pension and the Age Pension by \$75 a week. This must be in addition to an increase in supplementary payments like Commonwealth Rent Assistance and Carer Supplement. Pensions and payments must also increase in line with wage movements and must not be allowed to fall even further behind.

Centrelink's robo-debt program is a disgrace and must be abolished and replaced with a system that is timely, accurate and fair. The Government must better resource Centrelink to put an end to the ridiculous situation where people wait months to receive payments, wait hours on the phone and routinely have documents go missing.

The Government also needs to understand that people who are applying for or receiving government pensions and payments are not criminals or liars but rather people in need of support. To that end measures like cashless debit cards, ParentsNext and harsh restrictions on access to the Disability Support Pension must end.

***Real help to find employment***

The current jobactive system is broken and doesn't give people the support they need to find and retain a job. It must be replaced. Work for the Dole and Youth Jobs PaTH should

end and be replaced with a system that genuinely supports jobseekers. The Government needs to put an end to harsh penalties for alleged “non-compliance” (which is often due to no fault of the jobseeker) and unrealistic job application targets, which do nothing but waste the time of jobseekers and employers.

### *A secure, affordable home for everybody*

Everyone has the right to safe, secure and affordable housing. In Tasmania the current housing crisis is in many ways due to a failure of public policy by a series of federal, state and local governments over many years.

A holistic solution is needed and would include: more crisis accommodation; more social housing, more supported accommodation for people with specific needs; rent-to-buy public housing; a 30% increase in Commonwealth Rent Assistance; and improved grants and access to low interest loans for first home buyers. In Tasmania specifically I also want to see the State’s public housing debt to the Commonwealth abolished to release \$15 million a year for more houses, and light rail to the northern suburbs which would better link affordable housing with the city and jobs.

I also want to see Airbnb returned to its original model of making spare rooms available and reforms to negative gearing and the capital gains tax discount on investment properties, both of which should be grandfathered on existing properties and applied to future Airbnb businesses and investment properties.

### *Affordable clean energy and action on climate change*

Because of the enormous challenge, and severe consequences of inaction, dealing with climate change should be a first priority for the Federal Government and a genuine whole-of-nation effort.

Putting a price on carbon pollution is a vital first step in putting Australia on a pathway to zero net carbon emissions by 2030. Ultimately of course we must phase out carbon derived energy, and in particular coal and gas fired power stations, and the almost universal reliance on petrol and diesel for transport, so as to achieve 100% reliance on renewable energy, including solar, wind, hydro and tidal.

The Government must also assist people on low incomes to help them with the cost of energy and to transition to cleaner energy sources. This includes the retention of the Energy Supplement and subsidies for households to install infrastructure such as solar panels.

### *Quality health and community services for all in need*

The public health system needs greater government investment, especially in mental health, primary and allied health care. More must be done to help people on low incomes in particular access health care, for example by ensuring the Medicare rebate paid to GPs catches up after the rebate freeze and making dental care affordable and accessible. We also need greater investment in preventative health care and wellness, including through infrastructure like community sporting facilities, to keep people out of hospital.

Community services organisations need to be able to access government funding that is adequate and secure. Funding contracts should be for longer periods to end the annual uncertainty about whether or not contracts will be renewed. Community organisations need to have a seat at the table when it comes to developing and implementing policy.

### *Funding for our future*

Deep tax reform is needed to ensure that we can pay for all of this. High income earners need to pay more, and to that end the Government should not proceed with tax cuts for people on higher incomes. Reform to negative gearing and the capital gains tax discount is needed to raise revenue and ensure the housing market is not skewed towards wealthy investors. The Government also needs to do more to crack down on multinational tax avoidance. In order to provide for a better deal for the disadvantaged, the Government should not proceed with wasteful spending like doubling the submarine fleet and offshore processing.

### *A strong community and a thriving democracy*

I support ACOSS's call for a National Reform Council to replace existing advisory bodies like the Productivity Commission. Such a Council would provide for a better way for all sectors of the community to provide input and expertise into policy development and to tackle whole-of-government problems like climate change and income inequality.

A vital part of a strong democracy is a strong community sector. Peak bodies and advocacy organisations should be better funded and representatives of these organisations should be free to speak out about bad government policy without putting funding at risk.

Thank you again for the opportunity to comment and please let me know if I can provide any further information.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'A. Wilkie', with a small blue dot above the first letter.

Andrew Wilkie

Independent Federal MP