

Together.

A year of collaboration



Annual report 2020–2021

15,000 people affected
by disadvantage joining the call
to Raise the Rate for Good

715 organisations
partnering with us across
6 campaigns for change

1,000+ registrants for
8 community events to equip
and connect our sector

15 Poverty and Inequality
Partnership members helping
lead the way in poverty and
inequality research

73 meetings of the 8 ACOSS
member networks to open up
collaboration

Coming
together,
more than
ever, in a
year that
changed
the world.

Welcome



Message from our CEO

This year, the global COVID pandemic continued to wreak economic and social harm here and globally. These impacts have not been felt equally, but have exacerbated existing inequalities, with sometimes lethal results. COVID has placed intense pressures on our community services, and came on the back of a summer of devastating bushfires that left many people in crisis and needing support. In the face of these multiple challenges, the community sector has demonstrated the very best of what we can achieve together.

Our shared work through the Raise the Rate for Good (RTR4G) campaign to fix social security, along with our support of the Everybody's Home campaign to deliver safe, secure housing for all, touched the lives of millions. Through the RTR4G campaign, together we have mobilised a diverse alliance of people on low incomes, grassroots organisations, economists, philanthropists and businesses to call for an increase in social security payments. Although the work to achieve adequate, fair levels of income support for everyone who needs it is ongoing, together we secured the largest new expenditure on social security for people of working age in almost 30 years. The increase is nowhere near enough but is an important demonstration of what we can achieve when we collaborate for good.

Advocating with others across the sector also resulted in wide-reaching impact: extra Commonwealth funding for local jobs and skills taskforces through regional areas, jobs-rich investment in home care packages to help older people stay in their homes, a new crisis payment for those escaping family and domestic violence, continuation of vital Equal Remuneration Order (ERO) funding for community services, greater investment in aged care, protection of the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS), and Australian Energy Market Commission (AEMC) rule changes to support fairer growth of solar and reduce energy costs for people on low incomes.

I extend my heartfelt thanks to the courageous people on JobSeeker who so bravely shared their stories of survival on shamefully inadequate income support; to everyone in the community sector who has worked tirelessly throughout the year to support people directly affected by the pandemic and recession; to our Board of Directors and national members, including the state and territory Councils of Social Service; and all the other allies and partners who enrich, support and collaborate with us for good. Finally, I want to acknowledge the strength and resilience of our extraordinarily dedicated staff team who have worked so hard in often very difficult circumstances during the upheaval of the last 18 months, united in a strong shared purpose. I cannot thank you enough.

It is clear that our greatest strengths lie in our people and communities. ACOSS commits to continuing to strengthen our partnerships and support community action and leadership, in every move we make.

A handwritten signature in black ink, which appears to read 'C Goldie'.

– Cassandra Goldie, CEO, ACOSS

'In the face of multiple challenges, the community sector has demonstrated the very best of what we can achieve together.'





Message from our President

It's been a year of unheralded challenges for the people and communities we serve. But throughout these difficult times, the great strengths of ACOSS have remained more important than ever: evidence-based advocacy, intellectual rigour and the ability to bring together diverse voices around common goals. As we work towards a shared vision, I'd like to thank our members, the Council of Social Service network, and corporate and philanthropic partners for your commitment, support and trust.

While we saw a modest increase to the JobSeeker payment for the first time in over a quarter of a century, it is clear that people who are disadvantaged or vulnerable are the most exposed to the health and financial risks of COVID. For these reasons, ACOSS remains firm in its commitment to advocate for equality, protections, and adequate incomes for people who are not in paid work.

I'd like to acknowledge and thank CEO Cassandra Goldie and the staff team for their unwavering focus during a busy and drawn-out period, which included two federal budgets and the ongoing global pandemic. Cassandra and the team have continued to develop evidence-based policy solutions and sustain high member and stakeholder engagement, all while managing the personal challenges arising from COVID. Thank you!

'We stand ready to play our part to ensure a fairer future for all.'

Thanks also to the Board of Directors whose expertise, availability and commitment has played a central role in guiding the strategic direction and ensuring organisational sustainability. This contribution saw ACOSS end 2020/21 in a secure position, while we elevated the focus of the strategic plan across four priorities: 'Enable and Amplify', 'Engage and Collaborate', 'Ideas and Influence', and 'Inquire and Illuminate'. I'd especially like to acknowledge the support of Connie Digolis (Deputy President), Matt Gardiner (Treasurer) and Mary Sayers (Chair of the Audit and Risk Committee). I also extend thanks to departing Board member Petra Hilton for her service, and welcome new members Jo Taylor and Jana Favero.

Finally, I want to pay tribute to the late, great Merle Mitchell who passed away recently. Merle was President of ACOSS from 1989 to 1993, and a lifelong advocate for equality, community and diversity – right until the end. Merle helped shape and inform state and federal government social welfare policies for decades and improved many lives as a result.

We now look towards 2021/22, uncertain of what challenges it will bring but with hope that our communities and economy will be on a strong path to recovery. We stand ready to play our part in that recovery to ensure a fairer future for all.



– Peter McNamara, President, ACOSS

The change we are here to make.

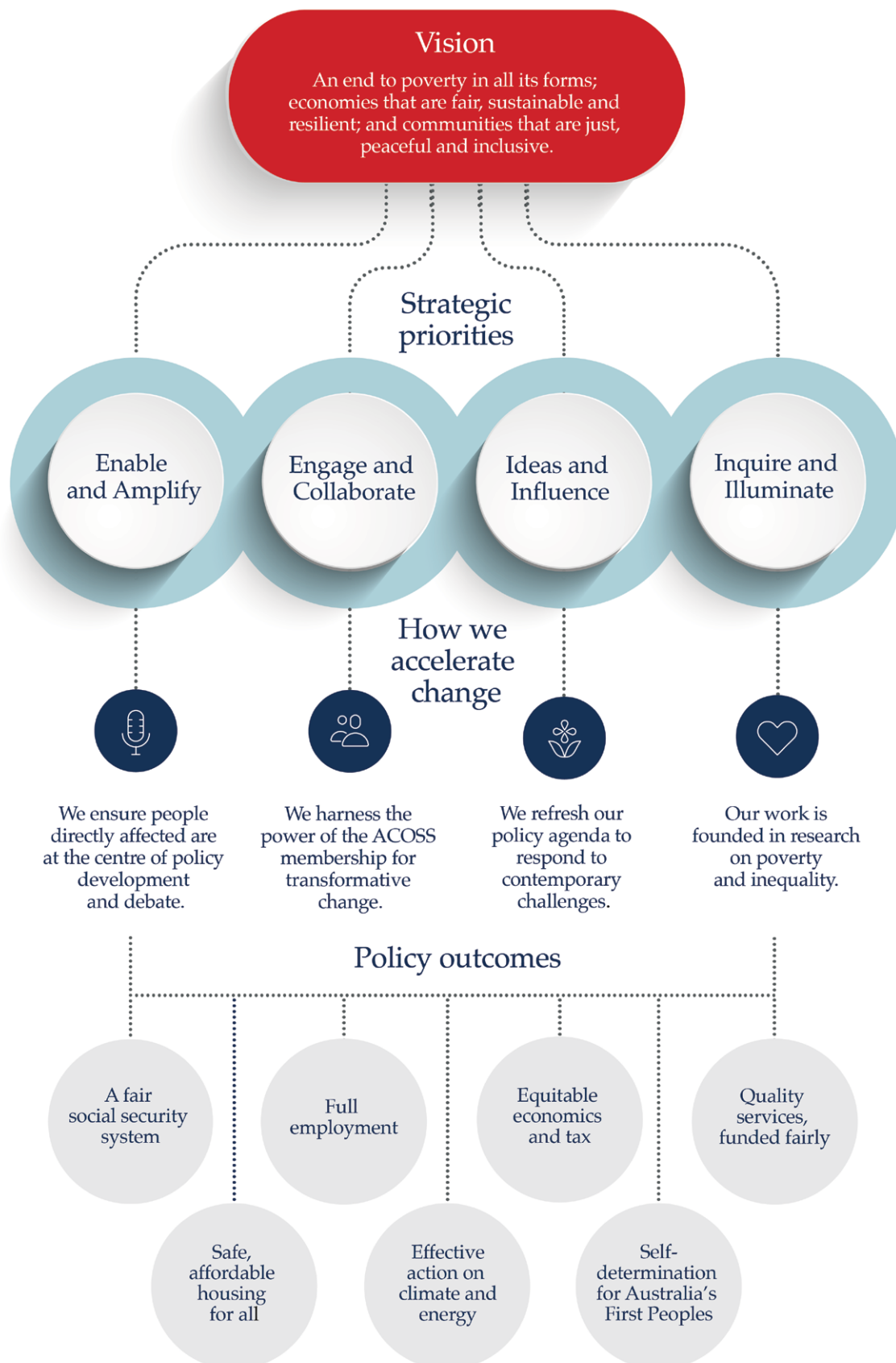


Through our four strategic priorities, we're working hard to accelerate the change that's needed to achieve our policy outcomes and fulfil our vision.

It's all part of our commitment to helping shape a fair, inclusive and sustainable Australia.



Our strategic plan 2020–22



A fair social security system

Ensuring we all have an adequate income to cover the cost of living and to live with dignity, free from poverty.

First permanent increase to JobSeeker in almost 30 years

Thousands of people from around the country came together to drive the ACOSS Raise the Rate for Good (RTR4G) campaign forward, leading to the first real increase to working-age payments in nearly three decades. Through the relentless advocacy of ACOSS, its members, and a broad network of individuals and grassroots organisations across Australia, working-age payments were in April 2021 increased by \$25 per week, **putting about \$3 billion a year back into the social security budget.**

While it was an incredible feat to secure a permanent increase to unemployment, student and parenting payments, the real effect was a cut to these payments on 1 April 2021 by \$50 per week when the \$75 per week Coronavirus Supplement was removed. This paltry \$25 per week base rate rise meant incomes went backwards, again plunging people into deep poverty.

Hundreds of campaign supporters have shared their personal stories of the brutal reality of living on the \$40 per day old Newstart rate, now \$45 per day as JobSeeker, and are taking action by calling, emailing and meeting with MPs. ACOSS has opened up opportunities for people on JobSeeker and other income support payments to make their voices heard, with more than **50 people highlighting their experiences across traditional and social media.** We heard from people battling cancer while living on JobSeeker, single mothers on the Parenting Payment fearing their child's eighth birthday, and people trying to re-enter the workforce while struggling to support their families. The advocacy of people directly affected have been crucial to changing the story of income support in Australia.

As well as those directly affected, ACOSS worked alongside many of our members and other experts who added their support and analysis to the campaign, including Melinda Cilento (CEDA), Jennifer Westacott (Business Council of Australia), economist Chris Richardson (Deloitte Access Economics), Paul Zahra (Australian Retailers Association), Carla Treloar and Bruce Bradbury (UNSW Sydney), Professor Jeff Borland (University of Melbourne) and Peter Whiteford (Australian National University).

Between July 2020 and June 2021, the RTR4G campaign grew in strength and size from **8,727 to 15,000 supporters over the year.** We thank each and every RTR4G supporter for making a real impact on the lives of people across Australia.

We're proud of what we've achieved together so far, but we also know the increase to JobSeeker still isn't enough. We will continue to push for payments to be permanently increased so that everyone can cover the basics, lifting 3 million people out of poverty.

Amplifying our collective voice

50+ people on JobSeeker or other income support payments shared their stories across media


290+ personal stories collected through the ACOSS website

72% increase in RTR4G supporters – grew from 8,727 to 15,000 across 2020–21

600 people surveyed by ACOSS to uncover impact of Coronavirus Supplement and proposed changes

500 people supported to make individual submissions to inquiry into JobSeeker rate and related payments

**RAISE
THE RATE
FOR GOOD**



Karen's story

When I was asked to share my story publicly, I had mixed feelings. Part of me was terrified the media would put me in an unfavourable light and people who know me would see me as a hopeless case.

I went ahead based on courage, because I felt there needed to be greater social awareness. These stories need to be heard.

After attending a few Raise the Rate for Good meetings, I spoke with *The Daily Telegraph* about women's housing and *The Australian* about Newstart. It was nerve-wracking because I felt vulnerable – I was in the middle of it. I had no public speaking experience, and no understanding or interest in politics.

The ACOSS team supported and encouraged me. When I saw the stories in print and on TV, I started to trust that if someone from ACOSS gave me a call, they wouldn't put me in a situation that would expose me in an unfavourable way.

Cassandra [ACOSS CEO] understood that I'm not an experienced advocate. In meetings she would invite me to share my own experience. That was very empowering for me, having the CEO take an interest.

I didn't realise my story was that important – I thought, what difference could it make? The support from the Raise the Rate for Good team encouraged me and I gained a lot. I felt really isolated before. Now I have a sense of community with likeminded people who have gone through similar experiences.

I soon realised there are other people and organisations out there willing to advocate on these issues too. Through the Raise the Rate for Good campaign I have found a world of support I didn't know existed.

Getting help to share my story gave me confidence too. I felt like what I was doing was important, and not just for me. I found my voice and felt I could be a voice for others who are not ready to speak about how policy impacts them.

'Getting help to share my story gave me confidence too.'



A fair social security system

Securing COVID disaster payments to support people through lockdowns

While lockdowns have played a critical role in containing COVID and saving lives, they have also placed enormous financial pressure on many households unable to participate in paid work.

ACOSS successfully advocated for disaster recovery payments for people who are unemployed, including people receiving income support. In June 2021, the Federal Government announced disaster payments of up to \$500 per week, which were increased to \$750 per week in July. Our ongoing advocacy also resulted in a \$200 per week payment from the Federal Government for people receiving income support who lost paid work.

More than 2 million people across Australia have received these disaster payments to date. We'll continue to advocate for improved income support to help people throughout the pandemic and beyond.

Help for women escaping domestic violence

Through collaborative advocacy across our membership, we secured income support to help women overcome financial obstacles that may make it hard to leave an abusive partner. In the 2021 Federal Budget, the government announced \$5,000 packages to support women escaping domestic violence, including \$1,500 in cash payments.

Simplifying support for single parents

Again through collaborative advocacy, we helped make things easier for single parents by securing the removal of third-party verification when claiming JobSeeker or the single Parenting Payment. With 95% of single Parenting Payment recipients women, ACOSS strongly opposed this condition tied to income support because it was both sexist and assumed women were lying about their relationship status.

\$750 per week COVID
disaster payments secured

2 million+
people have received COVID disaster payments

\$5,000 packages for
women escaping domestic violence



Tony's story

For the past 11 years I've been working for my local city council as a casual cleaner and when COVID came, I lost my work. That was at the end of March 2020.

It took me a while to apply for the COVID disaster payment and I did end up going into my local Centrelink office for help. It was a relief to be getting it as I was previously trying to live on \$585 a fortnight.

This extra money helped me pay my bills without requiring the assistance of organisations like the Salvos, who have paid my electricity and phone bills in the past. So a big thanks to ACOSS for lobbying and keeping it on the news on our behalf. Keep up the good work.

'A big thanks to ACOSS for lobbying and keeping it on the news on our behalf.'



Equitable economics and tax

To deliver adequate revenue to fund services and supports – today and in the future.



‘The ACOSS-led community sector [Federal Budget] press conference respects our expertise and strategically enables diverse voices to speak directly to a large media contingency. We walk together as the cameras roll in a visual statement of unity, and often in the context of harmful cuts and wasted opportunities. It is a chance to put a spotlight on what it really means for people – people who are doing it tough, who feel desperate but overlooked. It is the drawing together of the budget intelligence and processes, it is about legitimacy and “telling it how it is”.’

– Terese Edwards, CEO, National Council of Single Mothers and their Children

Our advocacy and impact

We successfully advocated against cuts to expenditure as a means to restore surplus, particularly in the lead up to the 2021 Federal Budget. After years of austerity followed by a pandemic and recession, the Federal Budget signalled a change in government strategy by giving priority to full employment over bringing the budget back to surplus.

We also participated in the Federal Government’s Retirement Income Review, with the final report consistently referring to the level of poverty being experienced particularly by renters and involuntary retirees (older people on JobSeeker).

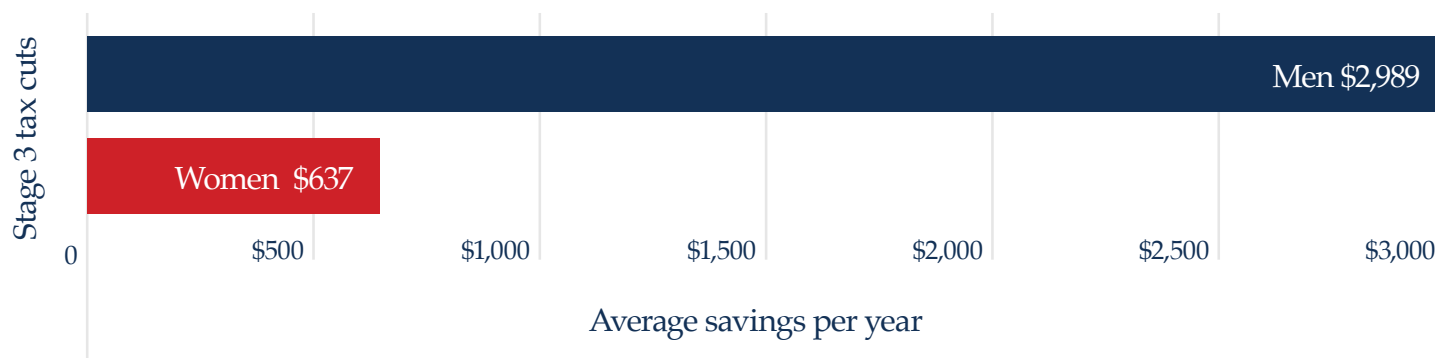
We’ll keep advocating for a stronger public revenue base collected fairly through the tax system, and against further tax cuts, which undermine the government’s ability to fund the services and supports upon which we all rely.

Bringing our sector together – Federal Budget 2021

ACOSS members came together like never before around the Federal Budget. Our program of member engagement included pre-budget literacy training, pre-budget lock-up members’ caucus and post-budget lock-up member briefings, real-time communication via a message group for member CEOs, and a joint sector budget press conference.

The virtual ACOSS [post-budget event](#) was hosted by Stela Todorovic from Channel 10 and featured the Assistant Treasurer and Shadow Treasurer. It attracted a record **556 registrations** from members, the broader community services sector and civil society. Made possible through support from Bendigo Bank and HESTA, the event analysed key budget measures and their impact on the Australian community, particularly through the eyes of people experiencing poverty, disadvantage and inequality.

Tax breaks reinforce gender income inequality



Federal Budget media reach and impact

ACOSS again elevated the impact of the Federal Budget on people with the least through our media coverage. CEO Cassandra Goldie's comments ran in major metro newspapers including *The Australian*, *Sydney Morning Herald/The Age*, *Canberra Times*, and *The Guardian*, and across hundreds of online mastheads, websites and radio news grabs. A highlight of our media coverage was Dr Goldie's review of the budget the following morning, on ABC Radio National Breakfast.

We also helped bring the stories of people impacted by poverty and disadvantage into focus, with single mother Angela leading the ABC News 7.30 budget coverage. Insights from our gender analysis of the budget were covered significantly throughout the mainstream media in a strong story in *The Guardian* as well as multiple press, online and radio stories.

534

total media mentions of
ACOSS Federal Budget
response

ACOSS's response to gender-based issues

This year saw terrible events of gender-based violence unfold, including sexual assault and harassment within Parliament House itself. The ACOSS team proudly went to Canberra to join thousands of women and their allies to #March4Justice and gender equality. We continue to collaborate across the sector particularly on the links between gender-based violence and economic security.

We also released our [gender-based analysis on the Federal Budget](#) to highlight some of the key issues behind the numbers. This analysis showed that, as a group, women were not budget winners, with women on low incomes – including single parents and older women – left behind. Our analysis also revealed that tax cuts overwhelmingly benefiting men on higher incomes cost thirty times the amount of funding pledged in the Women's Budget Statement.

'You let us know what you think about any particular policy or issue, but the way in which you engage with the government very directly, honestly, in a really decent and fair and respectful way, I just wanted to acknowledge and thank you for that.'

– Hon Michael Sukkar MP to ACOSS CEO Cassandra Goldie

Full employment

Ensuring opportunities with adequate paid working hours are available for those who seek them.

Partnership with Ecstra Foundation takes impact and influence to next level

The COVID economic shock and its unprecedented impact dominated the policy work on employment. With our employment-related advocacy more visible than ever, ACOSS secured funding through partnership with Ecstra Foundation to expand our work in employment policy, advocacy and engagement.

In April 2021, we welcomed Simone Casey to the team as ACOSS Senior Advisor – Employment. This role marks the first dedicated employment policy lead at ACOSS in over 20 years, reinforcing our capacity to influence policy outcomes while highlighting the perspectives of people experiencing unemployment, and ensuring they are firmly at the centre of policy development and debate.

Shaping employment services reform

The Joint Parliamentary Inquiry into Human Rights opened up a new opportunity for ACOSS to advocate for reform of the ParentsNext program. The inquiry resulted in a motion to make the program voluntary and although narrowly defeated, the inquiry raised public awareness of the harms created through ParentsNext.

Our work in employment services reform also extended to the New Employment Services Model, which is set to be introduced in 2022. In advance of the transition to the new model, we identified concerns with new legislation that would put in place digital processes that were potentially harmful and could create unfair delays in commencement of payments. Our cross-sectoral collaboration on reforms without due consideration of the risks remains an important focus of our advocacy for fairer, more effective employment services.

ACOSS also advocated for a range of policy interventions to help cushion the economic effects on employment during the pandemic recovery, with a particular focus on extending the JobKeeper payment for as long as possible. Other areas where we took action for change included influencing policy decisions around mutual obligation requirements, and the expansion of the Local Jobs Program.

Connecting the sector through the ACOSS Policy Webinar series

The highly successful ACOSS Policy Webinar series, sponsored by HESTA, was launched in July 2020. Through this series, ACOSS continued to play a key role in bringing the sector together to share knowledge and insights on complex policy issues. The series included two webinars with an employment focus: *The future of unemployment* and *The impact of COVID-19 on migrant workers*, which each attracted **over 150 participants** and featured a range of panellists with deep expertise in employment policy and practice.

300+

participants at two
employment ACOSS
Policy Webinars



{ 'I learnt so much in this [ACOSS] session about experiences of individuals and of the system in law and in practice.'

– ACOSS Employment Forum participant

Quality services, funded fairly

To meet diverse community needs, enable innovation and provide decent wages for workers.

Our advocacy and impact

ACOSS has continued to advocate for adequate funding for essential community services, including for adequate indexation, and a flexible approach to contracting – particularly in the context of the ongoing pandemic. We advocated for a greater investment in the care services sector, with aged care and home care packages a major priority.

Major investments were made in these areas in the Federal Budget, as well as some progress on longer contracting arrangements for community services. We also saw significant new investments in mental health, which were welcomed across the sector.

A win for equal pay for the sector

In the midst of increased demand as a result of the pandemic, the community services sector was at risk of cuts to funding with the looming end of the Equal Remuneration Order (ERO) supplementation payment.

Harnessing the power of the ACOSS membership, we successfully advocated to secure a permanent increase to the base rates of most community sector grants to match previous funding provided for ERO supplementation.

The ERO win will help sustain funding that allows workers in the feminised community services sector to receive fair pay for their crucial work. We'll continue to advocate for fair and adequate funding to support and strengthen community sector organisations into the future.

ERO vital to avoid cuts to essential services

'Without the ERO, our calculations are that [capacity] will be reduced by up to 40%. There is no option – the government must bring this supplement into base contract funding. Can you imagine the impact of cuts to 40% of homelessness, mental health, families, counselling and carer services? It simply is not an option – not when these services are going to be needed more than ever.'

– CEO, Ageing, disability and carer service



Supporting and valuing the sector's important advocacy voice

We have continued to fight against attacks on the sector's ability to undertake systemic advocacy work.

Community organisations know what is happening on the frontline, and their advice and advocacy is crucial to developing the best policy to address some of our most pressing social and economic challenges.

As a steering committee member of the Hands Off Our Charities group, we have collaborated across our sector and beyond to prevent harsh and unnecessary reforms that will impact on charities' abilities to advocate and protest. We'll continue this work with the reforms currently before Parliament.

Australian Community Sector Survey

Each year ACOSS surveys the sector for the Australian Community Sector Survey. It is the longest running survey of the community sector, by the community sector. In partnership with the state and territory Councils of Social Service, the survey monitors changes in the operating environment, gauges major issues of concern, and looks at how the sector is responding to community need.

This year, we published two reports based on qualitative research, drawing on interviews and focus groups with **35 leaders of the community sector** in Australia:

- *Meeting community needs in difficult times: Experiences of Australia's community sector* – revealed the sector is confronting rising levels of need and increasingly complex experiences of hardship in the community
- *Valuing Australia's community sector: Better contracting for capacity, sustainability and impact* – highlighted that funding insecurity is persisting, with too many organisations reliant on short-term contracts that constrain their capacity to effectively help many people experiencing poverty and disadvantage.

We also undertook an additional survey to research the impacts of the COVID pandemic on the community sector. The quantitative survey, *Australia's community sector and COVID-19: Supporting communities through the crisis*, was undertaken in September 2020 and paints a picture of community sector organisations working through a period of escalating need to provide services through new delivery models – all on the back of years of systemic under-investment, resource insecurity, and under-valuation. Despite the complex and unpredictable circumstances of the COVID crisis, the commitment and ongoing dedication of the sector shone through.

Our surveys and follow-up reports generated significant media interest, with print coverage and breakfast television spots including on *Sunrise* and *The Today Show*.

We are incredibly proud of the Australian Community Sector Survey, which serves as a vital tool for advocating directly with government on sector issues such as funding and demand.

By uncovering what's really happening on the ground, we've been able to use key insights to inform work including advocacy for Federal Budget decisions.

We'd also like to acknowledge UNSW's Social Policy Research Centre who undertook the Australian Community Sector Survey research on behalf of the Councils of Social Services and, very importantly, Bendigo Bank for its valuable support.

Sharing our insights: Australian Community Sector Survey media and publications 2020–21

4,047 total report downloads

1,325 webpage views

1,982 COVID report downloads

'We really proved ourselves during the pandemic. But you can't just leave it to market forces, you need to invest in the industry. You need to support it and you need to strategically plan for the future.'

– State peak body, Australian Community Sector Survey

Self-determination for Australia's First Peoples

Championing our First Nations people's calls for self-determination.

Proud supporters and partners for change

ACOSS joined with advocates across Australia as proud partners in calls for full implementation of the [Uluru Statement from the Heart](#), [National Agreement on Closing the Gap](#), and the [Change the Record](#) campaign, which also included the [Raise the Age](#) campaign to lift to 14 years the age of criminal responsibility. Through our ACOSS CEO Member Network, we also explored ways for the sector to harness its combined strength in support of First Nations-led and controlled organisations, building their advocacy for self-determination and justice.

Collective voices leading the way

We were privileged to have Pat Turner, Lead Convenor of the Coalition of Peaks and CEO of the National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation (NACCHO) speak about [A report on engagements with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People to inform a new National Agreement on Closing the Gap](#), and the contribution that ACOSS members can make in response.

In March 2021, we hosted Dean Parkin, Director at [From the Heart](#), and Thomas Mayor, who movingly spoke about and recited the [Uluru Statement from the Heart at our 2019 ACOSS National Conference](#). These community leaders discussed how the sector can back the Uluru Statement from the Heart, including through the Voice to Parliament submissions process.

On the 30th anniversary of the Royal Commission into Aboriginal deaths in custody, we heard from Cheryl Axelby and Antoinette Braybrook, Co-chairs of Change the Record, about the immediate steps governments can take now to end Black deaths in custody.


A First Nations-led response to COVID

ACOSS has continued its support for First Nations community-led responses to the challenges of the COVID pandemic. One of the key ways we've shown our support is through advocating to National Cabinet to ensure safe COVID vaccination rates were achieved before restrictions were lifted, in line with the advice of First Nations leaders and affected communities.



Smarter Justice. Safer Communities.

CLOSETHEGAP



{ 'We have a crisis of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children being taken away from their mothers – and often becoming trapped in the criminal justice system themselves; and women experiencing violence and being criminalised and incarcerated at exponential rates.

If governments are serious about Closing the Gap, they must start listening to First Nations women and taking our safety – and our self-determination – seriously.'

– Antoinette Braybrook,
Co-chair, Change the Record.
Presentation to ACOSS CEO Member Network

Safe, affordable housing for all

Ensuring every Australian has equitable access to secure and sustainable housing.

Uncovering COVID housing insights through PIP research

Through the Poverty and Inequality Partnership (PIP), we critically examined policies developed during COVID regarding homelessness, housing security and evictions, and housing and income support payments, as well as approaches for coming back stronger after the COVID crisis. Major initiatives included:

- **COVID-19: Rental housing and homelessness impacts – an initial analysis** – released in February 2021 with significant media traction, helping to shape public discourse
- **Webinar: How COVID-19 gave us a chance to solve housing and homelessness – and why we're back to square one** – held in partnership with the Community Housing Industry Association with **262 participants**, helping us take our key research findings further and wider.

'It is difficult work, but we want to be there.'

– Housing and homelessness services worker

COVID-19 Rental housing and homelessness impacts report

495
mentions in media

1,924
times downloaded

6,277,536
people reached



A boost for low-income households

Through our climate and energy work, we advocated successfully for improved energy concessions and reduced energy bill hardship for people on low incomes. This work will help ensure growth in distributed energy benefits everyone, that housing is energy efficient, and that energy transition policies are inclusive for all.

By taking a long-term view of household energy, we're looking to help generate opportunities that lower bills and create jobs.

We also continued to support fair household energy access through the [National Low-income Energy Productivity Program](#), which calls on governments to invest directly in energy retrofits for public and community housing, low-income homeowners, and lower-income rental properties. By taking a long-term view of household energy, we're looking to help generate opportunities that lower bills and create jobs. We'll also continue to support the efforts of Victorian organisations that secured a commitment from their state government to improve the energy efficiency of social housing.

Partnering for change

In 2021, we supported the advocacy work of our members and partners to generate widespread public support and commitments from several state governments for investment in social housing construction, helping address homelessness and create jobs.

Other key partnership initiatives included:

- **Healthy Homes for Renters** – ACOSS is a proud partner of the [Healthy Homes for Renters campaign](#). Launched in early 2021, it calls on all Australian governments to introduce basic standards to cut energy waste and ensure renters have healthy homes. This is a critical reform for the millions of people on low incomes who rent and have no control over the energy efficiency of their home, and face high energy bills and poor health outcomes – especially in heat waves and the depths of winter
- **Everybody's Home** – ACOSS continued to advocate for substantial investment in social housing growth through sector partnerships and participation in campaigns such as Everybody's Home. As an operations group manager of the campaign, we stand with **over 300 other advocates** to join the call for a better, fairer housing system for all.



Effective action on climate and energy

Addressing climate change and improving energy affordability through a rapid transition to a clean economy that is just, inclusive, equitable and affordable.

Sparking change through the ACOSS Energy Program

Funded by Energy Consumers Australia (ECA), the ACOSS Energy Program strives to ensure that energy access and the transition to clean energy is equitable, affordable and inclusive.

After 18 months' partnering and collaborating with consumer advocates, energy networks, retailers and market bodies, ACOSS and Total Environment Centre (TEC) secured an important [change to the energy market rules](#). Now, smart investment in electricity networks is required to support the growth of household solar energy, and to continue to reward solar customers and reduce bills for the millions of people who rent, live in apartments or are financially disadvantaged. The electricity reform is a crucial next step to accelerate household use and supply of solar energy, and to tackle the climate crisis in a fair and equitable way.

We also led other areas of work and **collaborated with over 100 members** of the Healthy and Affordable Homes Coalition, to pursue policies improving the energy efficiency of existing and new homes. Other initiatives included coordinating further development of the [National Low-income Energy Productivity Program](#), calling on governments to invest directly in energy retrofits for low-income earners' housing, to help lower bills and create jobs.

The efforts of our people to generate change were also highlighted when Kellie Caught, ACOSS Program Director – Climate and Energy, was named the Energy Efficiency Council's [Energy Efficiency Champion for 2020](#). This award recognised Kellie's outstanding individual contribution to the field of energy efficiency in Australia.

100+ members of
Healthy and Affordable Homes Coalition
collaborated with us

Fair, Fast and Inclusive Climate Change Action

In June 2021, ACOSS launched the Fair, Fast and Inclusive Climate Change Action campaign to influence governments to commit to stronger action on climate change this decade, and adopt policies that improve the lives of people experiencing disadvantage.

The campaign launch [webinar](#) was **attended by 120 representatives** from across the sector. Community leaders at the National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation (NACCHO), Oxfam and Jesuit Social Services spoke about the impacts of climate change in their communities, and why action matters to their organisations and the people they support.

The campaign is building momentum, with individuals and organisations signing up to become [climate change champions](#), access resources and workshops, connect with a network of sector leaders, and [join the #FairFastClimateAction campaign](#).

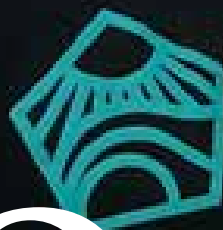
Looking ahead, the campaign will continue to build and coordinate community sector leadership while putting people experiencing disadvantage front and centre of the climate policy debate. We'll keep supporting the community sector to 'walk the talk', working towards achieving net zero emissions by 2035.

120

community sector
representatives
took part in climate
campaign launch



isentia



TOMORROW
MOVEMENT

Zero

Working towards achieving
net zero emissions by 2035



Community-led COVID response

Ensuring no one is left behind in the face of the global pandemic.

When COVID hit in March 2020, ACOSS moved rapidly to bring the sector together. Our focus was on making sure the needs of the community were central in the policy debate, keeping the sector connected while physically distant, facilitating knowledge exchange between our national member organisations, and staying across the impacts of COVID – on the ground, in real time.

Together with our network of almost 100 national organisations and the state and territory Councils of Social Service, we have advocated for a fair, just and effective community-led response to the COVID pandemic.

Coming together in community partnership

ACOSS and our members joined in collective voice to call for the government to take a community partnership response to COVID, to protect high-risk groups in the response and recovery. Working with the Australian Federation of AIDS Organisations (AFAO), we identified lessons from responses to the HIV pandemic – including the importance of community partnership, connection and trust – that could be taken forward into the COVID crisis.

A major priority has been to ensure no one is left behind in the COVID vaccine rollout. We have been partnering with the Operation COVID Shield Taskforce to support community engagement with the vaccination program, while also advocating for data transparency, national vaccination targets, strategies for high-risk groups, and resourcing for the sector to support vaccination.

We also acknowledge our partners at the Paul Ramsay Foundation for their support of our community-led COVID response throughout 2020–21.

2,000+
workers in the sector
signed up to
Community Hub

Coronavirus Information Hub to keep the sector up-to-date

Housed on the ACOSS website and updated weekly, our [Coronavirus Information Hub](#) for the sector has timely and current information and resources, including COVID policy briefs, fortnightly state- and territory-specific updates from the Councils of Social Service, and resources relating to JobSeeker and JobKeeper payments.

Throughout COVID we've also continued to publish the [Community Hub](#), a fortnightly publication showcasing news, campaigns and initiatives from across the ACOSS membership. It also features job vacancies, resources, training and events. Subscriptions for the publication grew rapidly throughout the year and we now have **over 2,000 workers in the sector** actively signed up.

CEO Member Network shares key insights

The ACOSS CEO Member Network met fortnightly throughout the year, with CEOs coming together to share insights in response to COVID. We thank all the members who generously contributed their expertise, strengthening the power of services and the sector, and directly informing policy and advocacy throughout the pandemic.

Going deeper with COVID Response and Recovery webinars

Through our ACOSS Policy Webinar series, we brought hundreds of members and stakeholders together to take a deep dive into COVID impacts, responses and policy. Webinar topics included:

- *How COVID-19 gave us a chance to solve housing and homelessness – and why we're back to square one*
- *Impacts of COVID on international students*
- *Community leadership in times of crisis.*

We extend our thanks to our partners at HESTA for supporting the ACOSS Policy Webinar series throughout 2020–21.



570+

participants at our COVID
Response and Recovery
webinars

ACOSS and UNSW Sydney Poverty and Inequality Partnership

A centralised hub for high-quality research into poverty and inequality across the country.

The ACOSS/UNSW Sydney Poverty and Inequality Partnership (PIP) is a 5-year research and impact collaboration to sharpen the national focus on poverty and inequality in Australia.

The partnership is generously supported by leading community organisations and philanthropists including Australian Red Cross, Brotherhood of St Laurence, Good Shepherd Australia New Zealand, The Salvation Army, cohealth, Mission Australia, St Vincent de Paul Society National Council, The Smith Family, Anglicare Australia, BB & A Miller Foundation, and four Australian Communities Foundation funds (the Impact Fund, Hart Line Fund, Raettvisa Fund, and the David Morawetz Social Justice Fund).

The PIP has moved from strength to strength, and we're now in the final year of our collaboration. The impact we've made together has helped shape the conversation around poverty and inequality – uncovering trends, exploring drivers, and tackling challenges to create change.

Research to guide a shared way forward through COVID

Rapid policy changes due to COVID meant it was critical to quickly understand their significant impact – particularly on people experiencing poverty and vulnerable Australians.

In response, our partnership identified key impacts for people affected by poverty and inequality, with this research essential for policy makers and anti-poverty advocates in shaping their approach.

Housing and homelessness: COVID response

Research conducted through the PIP critically examined policies developed during COVID, taking stock of their impact on factors like homelessness, housing security and evictions.

COVID short report series: *Build back better*

This series of reports examines the effects of the pandemic on issues including employment, inequality, income support and wealth. These reports and associated collateral, scheduled for release in late 2021, will continue to fill significant gaps in the evidence and become important go-to resources for policy makers and advocates alike.

**‘Congratulations to ACOSS
for your tireless work on behalf
of the disadvantaged. It’s
even more important in these
COVID-19 times. Let us indeed
build back fairer!’**

– Dr David Morawetz, Founder and Director, Social Justice Fund

PIP website impact

403 average page views per day

1,964 downloads of each
report 2020–21

Poverty

& Inequality

IN AUSTRALIA

Our people

We know our impact is only made possible through our people. Although we have wide-ranging skills, experience and expertise, each person brings a shared commitment to building a fair, inclusive and sustainable Australia.

ACOSS Board

Peter McNamara – *President*

Connie Digolis – *Deputy President*

Matt Gardiner – *Treasurer*

David Panter – *Board member*

Petra Hilton – *Board member*
(to November 2020)

Hayden Patterson – *Board member*

Violet Roumeliotis – *Board member*

Mary Sayers – *Board member*

Jana Favero – *Board member*
(from January 2021)

Jo Taylor – *Board member*
(from January 2021)

ACOSS staff

Cassandra Goldie – *Chief Executive Officer*

Stacey Batterham (Melbourne) – *Senior Campaigner* (from January 2021)

Bev Carter – *Community Engagement and Support Officer*

Simone Casey (Melbourne) – *Senior Advisor – Employment*

Kellie Caught (Brisbane) – *Senior Advisor – Climate and Energy*

Charmaine Crowe – *Senior Advisor – Social Security*

Peter Davidson – *Principal Advisor*

Penny Dorsch – *Project Manager and Researcher*

Pas Forgione – *Raise the Rate Community Organiser* (to October 2020)

Renata Franz – *Operations Manager*

Cameron Lum – *Digital Communications Officer*

Edwina MacDonald – *Director of Strategy – COVID* (to October 2020), *Deputy CEO, and Director of Policy and Advocacy* (from October 2020)

William Martin – *Communications Officer* (to March 2021)

John Mikelsons – *Senior Advisor – Community Services and Health*

Chryl Perry – *Executive Assistant to the CEO*

Jacqueline Phillips – *Deputy CEO and Director of Policy and Advocacy* (parental leave from October 2020)

Dani Previtera – *Marketing, Communications and Events Coordinator*

Anastasia Radievska – *Climate and Energy Policy Officer* (from April 2021)

Michelle Shackleton – *Policy and Stakeholder Engagement Support* (from August–December), *Community Organiser and Engagement Officer* (from December 2020)

Alyssa Shaw – *Raise the Rate Campaigner* (to September 2020)

Amy Simmons – *Director of Operations and Stakeholder Engagement*

Monique Vandeleur – *Director of Media and Communications*

Brendan Wylie – *Membership Coordinator and Policy Support Officer*

Our partners

Working together means we can accomplish more. To fully achieve what we've set out in our strategic plan, we need strong collaborative partnerships and practice. We are fortunate to have valued partners and supporters who stand beside us in pursuit of our vision. Thank you for your incredible contribution to all we've achieved together over a challenging year.



Poverty and Inequality Partnership



ACOSS would like to acknowledge our core funder, the Department of Social Services.

Our members

For over six decades, ACOSS membership has brought together a diverse cross-section of the community sector to be a strong voice against poverty and inequality in Australia.

Our members, along with people directly affected by poverty and disadvantage, are at the centre of our work. Our success in 2020–21 was a shared effort and a testament to the power of the sector, and what can be achieved when we work together for change.

100 National Organisation Members

Adult Learning Australia Limited
Anglicare Australia Inc
Anti-Poverty Week
Asylum Seeker Resource Centre Inc
Australian Alcohol and other Drugs Council
Australian Association of Social Workers
Australian Baha'i Community
Australian Communications Consumer Action Network Limited
Australian Community Workers Association
Australian Council State School Organisations Ltd
Australian Federation of AIDS Organisations Limited
Australian Federation of Disability Organisations (AFDO) Ltd
Australian Health Promotion Association
Australian Insulation Foundation Ltd
Australian Men's Health Forum Incorporated
Australian Pensioners & Superannuants Federation
Australian Red Cross
Australian Youth Affairs Coalition
Baptist Care Australia Limited
Better Renting
Brotherhood of St Laurence
Carers Australia Limited
Catholic Social Services Australia
Centre for Social Impact
CHOICE
Christians Against Poverty (Australia) Ltd
cohealth
Community Colleges Australia Limited
Community Housing Industry Association Limited
Community Mental Health Australia Incorporated
Consumer Action Law Centre
Consumers Health Forum of Australia Ltd
COTA Australia Ltd
DCSS Australia
Disability Advocacy Network Australia (DANA) Ltd
Down Syndrome Australia

Early Childhood Australia Inc
Economic Justice Australia
Edmund Rice Centre
Family Relationship Services Australia Ltd
Federation of Ethnic Communities' Councils of Australia (INC) (FECCA)
Financial Counselling Australia Ltd
Foodbank Australia Limited
Foundation for Young Australians
Good Shepherd Australia New Zealand
Good Things Foundation Australia
Goodstart Early Learning Ltd
Health Justice Australia
Homelessness Australia
Homes for Homes Limited
HOST International
Indian (Sub-Cont) Crisis & Support Agency
Infoxchange
Jobs Australia Limited
Justice Connect
Life Without Barriers
MacKillop Family Services Limited
Mind Australia Limited
Mission Australia
Multiple Sclerosis Australia
National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Service
National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation
National Association of Community Legal Centres Limited
National Association of People With HIV Australia
National Association of Tenant Organisations
National Ethnic Disability Alliance Inc
National Family Violence Prevention Legal Services Forum
National LGBTI Health Alliance
National Rural Health Alliance Ltd
National Shelter
Office for Social Justice, Australian Catholic Bishops Conference
Oxfam Australia
Playgroup Australia Limited
Public Health Association of Australia Incorporated
Public Interest Advocacy Centre Ltd
Rape & Domestic Violence Services Australia Inc
Reconciliation Australia Limited

Relationships Australia Inc
Save the Children Australia
Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care
Settlement Council of Australia Inc
Settlement Services International Limited
Social Ventures Australia Limited
St Vincent de Paul Society National Council of Australia Incorporated
The Benevolent Society
The Community Transport Organisation Inc
The Lojic Institute
The Salvation Army Australia
The Smith Family
UnitingCare Australia
Volunteering Australia Incorporated
WESNET
YMCA Australia
YWCA Australia

National Consitituecy Organisation Members

Anti-Poverty Network SA
Australian Unemployed Workers' Union
Children and Young People with Disability Australia
National Council of Single Mothers and their Children
People with Disability Australia
Women With Disabilities Australia

67 Associate Members

ADRA Australia Limited
Agencies for South West
Accommodation Inc
Anglicare Community Services
Anglicare Victoria
Association of Childrens Welfare Agencies Ltd
Australian Education Union
Australian Refugee and Migrant Care Services Ltd
Australian Services Union
AWARE Community
Berry Street Victoria Incorporated
BeyondHousing
Blue Sky Community Services
Caboolture Community Care Inc
Cairns Alliance of Social Services
Canberra Community Law
Catholic Social Services Victoria
CentaCare New England North West
Churches Housing Incorporated
Community Industry Group
Community Information & Support Victoria
Community Resources Limited
Container of Dreams
CORE Community Services Limited
Cowra Information & Neighbourhood Centre
Fairpaye
Family Support Newcastle Inc

FD Property Group
Financial Counsellors Association of Western Australia Inc
Financial Rights Legal Centre
Glebe Youth Service
Homelessness NSW
Illawarra Legal Centre Inc
Institute of Child Protection Studies
Jannawi Family Centre
Lifetime Renewable Energy Pty Ltd
Lutheran Community Care
Melbourne's Leading Nanny Agency
Mountains Community Resource Network
Muru Mittigar Limited
Nepean Community & Neighbourhood Services
Northern Rivers Social Development Council Ltd
NSW Federation of Housing Associations Inc
One Future
Orphans and Widows West Africa
PeakCare Queensland Inc
Peninsula Community Legal Centre Inc
Penrith City Council
Rainbow Families Inc
Samaritans Foundation
Sector Connect Incorporated
Single Mothers Lobby Alliance
South East Community Links Inc
South Port Community Housing Group Inc
Southern Youth & Family Services Limited
St John's Youth Services
Sydney Community Forum
Syndromes Without A Name (SWAN) Australia
Tangentyere Council Inc
Tenants Queensland Inc
The Centre for Excellence in Child and Family Welfare Inc
Think+DO Tank Foundation Limited
United Workers Union
Uniting Communities Incorporated
Uniting Country SA Ltd
Welfare Rights Centre Ltd
Westgate Community Initiatives Group Ltd
WESTIR Ltd

8 Councils of Social Service

ACT Council of Social Service Inc
NSW Council of Social Service
NT Council of Social Service
Queensland Council of Social Service
South Australian Council of Social Service Inc
Tasmanian Council of Social Service Inc
Victorian Council of Social Service
Western Australian Council of Social Service

Financial reports.

The background of the entire page is a repeating pattern of light blue triangles. The triangles are arranged in a grid-like fashion, with some pointing upwards and some pointing downwards, creating a tessellated effect. The color is a soft, muted blue.

Treasurer's report



Our financial performance 2020–2021

I am pleased to report ACOSS operated sustainably over the 2020–2021 year, recording a surplus of \$122,075.

The COVID pandemic continued to create challenges during the financial year. While some of ACOSS's income sources were impacted, some areas were made up in stimulus, including JobKeeper for a limited number of staff positions.

Total income for the year was \$3,544,388. In the second half of the year ACOSS received project funding and an additional dividend, which saw income rise.

Total expenditure was \$3,422,313. Wages remain the biggest cost area at 81% of total costs, whilst travel costs were lower for the year due to COVID-related restrictions.

Looking at our balance sheet, reserves at 30 June 2021 are \$735,336, which are slightly above the benchmark set by the Board, and provide a buffer to unforeseen future risks.

The 2021 financial statements have been audited by Stewart Brown and an unqualified audit opinion was issued. The financial statements will be made available on the [Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission \(ACNC\) website](#).

'Reserves are slightly above the benchmark set by the Board, and provide a buffer to unforeseen future risks.'

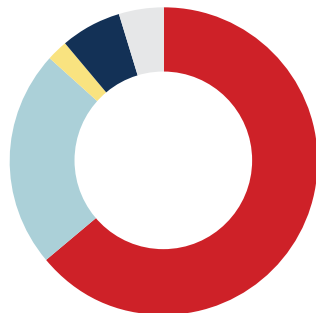


A handwritten signature in blue ink, likely belonging to Matthew Gardiner.

– Matthew Gardiner, ACOSS Treasurer

Financial statement

Our spending FY 2020–2021



Financial performance

FY20/21

Income	
Australian Government Grant	\$935,999
Project funding	\$1,295,424
Membership fees	\$532,900
Sponsorship	\$375,105
Donations	\$19,411
Other	\$385,550
Total	\$3,544,388
Expenses	
Salaries & on-costs	\$2,296,802
Activity costs	\$719,670
Travel	\$52,216
Administration	\$215,039
Premises	\$138,586
Total	\$3,422,313
Surplus (Deficit)	\$122,075

Financial position

FY20/21

Assets	
Cash & equivalent	\$1,959,415
Trade & other receivables	\$780,363
Non-current assets	\$40,421
Total	\$2,780,199
Liabilities	
Trade & other payables	\$1,623,858
Employee benefits	\$398,590
Non-current liabilities	\$22,415
Total	\$2,044,863
Equity	\$735,336

Spreading the word: our collective impact

10,000+ media mentions
to share our message

36 submissions to advocate for
a fair, inclusive and sustainable
Australia

6 reports to educate and inspire

539,717 website page
views and 82,947 website visitors
finding out more

7 new members (7% increase year
on year) joining us for change

50 media appearances secured
for people directly affected by
disadvantage

12,636 Facebook followers
seeing what we do

28,200 Twitter followers
tuning in to the conversation



ACOSS respectfully
acknowledges the
traditional custodians
of the country on
which we work.
We recognise the
rights of all First
Peoples around
the country to
self-determination.



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