

ACOSS

Annual

Report

2024



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A MESSAGE FROM ACOSS PRESIDENT

Hang Vo

A key focus of my presidency this year has been ACOSS's commitment under our Five-Year Impact Strategy 2023-2028, Impact Priority 1, which states that we will be successful if *'The community sector builds support for self-determination and justice for First Nations peoples including support for Voice, Treaty and Truth, enabling participation of First Nations peoples in decisions that directly affect the outcomes for their communities.'*

In line with this commitment, the ACOSS Board engaged in a dialogue with ACOSS First Nations member organisation leaders on how ACOSS and its membership could best support First Nations organisations and their priorities, and what would be the most effective way of doing so. Key outcomes included a plan to create two dedicated First Nations Director positions on the ACOSS Board, ensuring appropriate weight, representation and First Nations sector capability building, as well as a range of priority actions, both for ACOSS and the sector, for strengthening and demonstrating our solidarity with First Nations organisations. We look forward to progressing this work, alongside our First Nations and other National member organisations, in the years ahead.

I would like to extend my heartfelt thanks to the chief executives and chairs of the ACOSS First Nations member organisations with whom we were privileged to meet. I am grateful for your time and thoughtful reflections, as well as the opportunities to listen and learn that you so generously afforded us during this crucial period for First Nations peoples and our nation.

My sincere thanks also to my colleagues across the State and Territory Councils of Social Service (the COSS Network) for your time and support, as well as to the ACOSS Board, team and members. I look forward to working with you as we continue to progress our shared goal of an Australia that is free of poverty and fair and inclusive for all.



A MESSAGE FROM ACOSS CEO

Dr Cassandra Goldie AO

As we moved towards the Voice Referendum in October 2023, ACOSS was privileged to work with the Fred Hollows Foundation, ANTAR and Oxfam Australia to launch the Allies for Uluru Coalition in support of the Uluru Statement from the Heart and an Indigenous Voice to Parliament.

I was truly heartened by the active and overwhelming support across our sector for the 'yes' vote – and, following the devastating referendum result, by the many sector organisations that signed on to the Statement of Solidarity with First Nations Communities, reaffirming their commitment to true allyship with First Nations peoples. ACOSS has also made its own pledge to walk beside First Nations communities to a brighter future, and as Australia's peak body for the community sector we will continue to advocate for Voice, Treaty and Truth.

This year ACOSS also launched the community sector's Blueprint Framework for Fair, Fast and Inclusive Climate Change Action. The Blueprint Framework has been widely recognised as vital to bringing together action to tackle climate change and inequality. Key actions to deliver on the

framework included partnering with the First Nations Clean Energy Network to conduct and publish a heat survey – enabling people to tell their stories about the impacts of heat, inefficient housing and high energy bills – and supporting a delegation of people to meet with federal politicians to ask for greater investment in home energy upgrades for low-income housing.



In response to the ongoing cost-of-living crisis, other key areas of focus throughout the year included:

- Calls for urgent funding for crisis-response services, better and more transparent sector grants and funding processes, appropriate disbursement of indexation on Commonwealth Grants, and greater legislative protections for charities to undertake systemic advocacy about these and other critical issues.
- Action to elevate the experiences of people suffering the harshest impacts of increasing costs, with the Raise the Rate campaign surveying people on income support and mobilising leaders from across the wider community to publicly back the urgent need for substantial increases to income support payments.
- Urgent calls for an immediate end to automated payment suspensions in Workforce Australia, alongside sustained advocacy highlighting the harms of mutual obligation and engagement on the replacement of the harmful ParentsNext program.
- Bringing attention to the role of interest rate rises on rising unemployment and the employment opportunities of people on low incomes, as well as the full

employment commitment in the RBA's mandate.

In addition, we engaged extensively with the Economic Inclusion Advisory Committee to bring advice to the federal government on policy settings to enhance economic inclusion. Our work with the UNSW and ACOSS Poverty and Inequality Partnership to inquire into and illuminate the nature and extent of poverty in Australia was also ongoing. We warmly thank all partners in this crucial work.

As we reflect on the significance of the recent US election, I am powerfully reminded of our role in bringing people together, building bridges and closing divides. Our responsibility to tackle inequalities, particularly for those with the least, is more important than ever. Likewise, our role in supporting people across communities to share their experiences and build understanding is crucial to social cohesion, and to supporting democracy and human rights.

Finally, my heartfelt thanks to the colleagues with whom I have the privilege to work, including our National Members, the State and Territory Councils of Social Service, the many other friends and partners who provide invaluable support, the ACOSS Board of Directors and the ACOSS staff team. I am grateful every day for all that you do.

LIVED EXPERIENCE

Emily Lightfoot

The shortfall in income support payments relative to the actual cost of living in Australia today is now so great that maintaining most of the basic necessities of life – even over the short term – is completely unachievable. I have relied heavily on financial and other assistance from family and friends over the past 12 months just to get by.

Australia no longer has universal education or healthcare. This is the reality we are experiencing right now.

We home school for educational reasons; however, I no longer have the option of sending my son to a public school because we simply can't afford to. The various associated costs are an absolute barrier to an education in a government-run mainstream school.

Our access to healthcare is limited. It is based primarily on what we can afford, rather than according to our needs. I suffer from a chronic illness that severely impacts my ability to work. Without family financial support, I would be unable to pay for specialists' fees to gather the medical evidence necessary for a Disability Support Pension application.

The housing crisis has forced me out of the city I have called home for the past 35 years – away from essential services and everything and everyone I know.

Over the past few months, I have also borne witness to many of my friends and acquaintances losing their housing in the tidal wave of mass homelessness that is sweeping the country.

Things are worse now than they've ever been during my lifetime, but our cries for help are falling mostly on deaf ears. Government responses to this catastrophic humanitarian crisis have been grossly inadequate. We are not the forgotten – even worse: we are the wilfully neglected, the disregarded.





MAJOR CAMPAIGNS

The Voice Referendum

In the lead-up to the Voice Referendum, ACOSS partnered with the Fred Hollows Foundation, ANTA and Oxfam Australia to launch the Allies for Uluru Coalition in support of the Uluru Statement from the Heart. At the time of the referendum, the Allies for Uluru Coalition consisted of over 300 organisations committed to cross-sector collaboration in support of the Voice to Parliament. It organised joint training sessions, distributed resources and convened action opportunities in support of the 'yes' vote.

Highlights

- In the months leading up to the referendum, ACOSS mobilised members and the community sector to play an effective role in advocating for a 'yes' vote. We convened events and meetings to build knowledge and capacity in the community sector, including training 62 media and communications staff from member organisations to help them drive their own engagement efforts. ACOSS created resources and enabled them to be shared, and utilised member communications channels to provide updates and amplify the messages and engagement opportunities of First Nations-led campaigns.
- During the referendum campaign, ACOSS supported staff to participate in grassroots community campaigning for the 'yes' vote. In addition, we coordinated regular staff activities including phone banking, leafleting, and corflute waving.
- Throughout the referendum campaign, ACOSS worked with the Centre for Australian Progress and Climate Action Network Australia to coordinate the distribution of corflutes, t-shirts and other campaign materials. We collectively distributed 12,000 corflutes, along with t-shirts and flyers, to 86 First Nations community-controlled groups and 66 community sector and climate groups.

In the days following the devastating result of the Voice Referendum, ACOSS knew it was critical that the community sector not only committed to continuing to back First Nations-led calls for self-determination and justice, but also that we ensured our own practices and partnerships respected First Nations people's voices, leadership and right to self-determination. The ACOSS and the COSS network therefore asked community sector organisations to sign a Community Sector Statement of Solidarity reaffirming their commitment to true allyship. Over 230 individuals signed the statement, which was later delivered to First Nations community-controlled members.

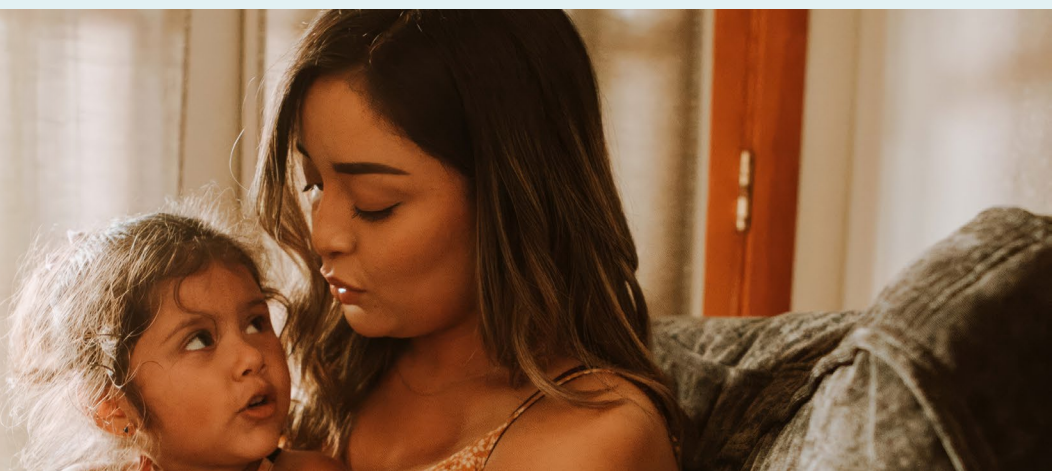
MAJOR CAMPAIGNS

Raise the Rate: Lifting incomes so everyone can cover the basics

Alongside hundreds of members and supporters, ACOSS's Raise the Rate for Good campaign continued to call for the JobSeeker rate and related income-support payments to be lifted.

- In September 2023, ACOSS carried out research to examine the impact of increased living costs on people receiving Jobseeker, the Youth Allowance and related income-support payments. The research also canvassed the likely impacts of payment increases due to take effect later that month. The subsequent report, *"It's not enough": why more is needed to lift people out of poverty*, showed that almost three-quarters of people receiving working age payments were eating less and skipping meals, and indicated that the upcoming increases to rates would not be enough to prevent widespread financial distress. The report was picked up by media, with 203 media mentions and a potential cumulative reach of 2.7 million people.
- Throughout the year we mobilised people with lived experience, and members of the community, to call and email their local MPs and make submissions to parliamentary processes. Between July 2023 and June 2024, Raise the Rate for Good supporters collectively emailed, called, and submitted 717 times. During this period, they helped to continue to build support for an increase to income support among parliamentarians.
- In the lead-up to the May 2024 Federal Budget, ACOSS mobilised prominent individuals to publicly voice their support for an increase to income support. In the two weeks prior to the Budget, we released a letter signed by over 700 advocates and leaders from business, unions, philanthropy, academia and the community sector. Critically, 26 members of the Federal Parliament went on the record supporting an urgent increase to Jobseeker, Youth Allowance, and related payments at the 2024 Federal Budget.

**RAISE
THE RATE
FOR GOOD**



MAJOR CAMPAIGNS

Fair, Fast and Inclusive Action on Climate Change

With the support of more than 114 community organisations, ACOSS developed and launched the community sector's Blueprint Framework for Fair, Fast, and Inclusive Climate Change Action. The campaign aims to guide Federal Government climate change policy to ensure that – as well as reducing greenhouse emissions – it supports people and communities experiencing disadvantage to benefit from the transition to a clean economy and increases their resilience to climate change impacts.

- ACOSS hosted an event at Parliament House to build support among parliamentarians for the Blueprint Framework for Fair, Fast, and Inclusive Climate Change Action. Speakers included then-Assistant Minister for Climate Change and Energy Jenny McAllister, Greens Leader Adam Bandt, independent MP Zali Steggall and Liberal Party MP Bridget Archer. More than 60 people, including politicians, advisers, and representatives from the community services, environment, and climate change sectors, attended the event, and a delegation of signatories met with MPs over two days.
- ACOSS partnered with the First Nations Clean Energy Network to conduct and publish a landmark heat survey. More than 1000 responses were received, revealing that people on low incomes struggle to stay cool in summer or pay energy bills, and become sick because of energy-inefficient homes, high energy prices, and inadequate incomes.
- After extensive consultation with members, stakeholders and finance experts, ACOSS released a seminal report outlining how to scale up, fund and finance energy performance and resilience retrofits for low-income housing.
- We produced online maps that show the energy bill savings, job creation, and emissions reductions achieved, by federal electorate, as a result of investing in home energy upgrades for low-income housing.
- ACOSS supported people to tell their stories about the impacts of heat, inefficient housing, and high energy bills. This included taking a delegation to Parliament House to meet politicians and ask for greater investment in home energy upgrades for low-income housing.
- We made submissions, attended stakeholder consultations, and met with ministers and their offices to contribute to the Federal Government's implementation of more ambitious fuel efficiency standards to reduce transport emissions and lower vehicle transport costs.
- We worked with the COSS Network and members to influence energy market bodies to pursue reforms that will benefit people on low incomes, including influencing the Australian Energy Regulator to set a lower default market offer and review its payment difficulty framework.

MAJOR CAMPAIGNS

The 2024 Federal Budget

ACOSS's Budget Priorities Statement (BPS) 2024-25 was a detailed submission to the Treasurer on the 2024-25 Federal Budget. It focused on lifting income-support payments, achieving and sustaining full employment, removing the Stage 3 tax cuts, and fair, fast and inclusive climate change action. Recommendations were informed by the views of members via policy network meetings and formed a platform for advocacy in the lead-up to the May Budget. Senior policy staff briefed key government ministers and departmental officials on Budget recommendations, and a briefing session was also held for media prior to the submission's public release.

- **Media engagement:** ACOSS accumulated 298 media mentions on the day of the BPS release, with a potential reach of 3.56 million. During Federal Budget week, ACOSS received 589 media mentions, with a potential reach of 9.75 million.
- **ACOSS Federal Budget Member Engagement:**
 - ACOSS facilitated the Member Rapid Response WhatsApp Group with member CEOs and policy leads
 - ACOSS Budget Literacy Training helped 66 members read and analyse the Budget papers and better understand the Budget rollout process
 - the ACOSS Budget Member Caucus enabled the 46 members planning to be in lockup or involved in Budget Day advocacy to come together and share knowledge
 - the ACOSS Budget Night Briefing provided a space for ACOSS staff and 93 members to share initial impressions following the Budget announcement.
- **ACOSS Post-Budget Event 2024:** The ACOSS Post-Budget Event, featuring briefings on key Budget measures and their likely impacts on people experiencing poverty and inequality, was held in Sydney. As the key annual event for civil society and the community services sector, attendees included approximately 120 community sector chief executive officers and senior executives, national community leaders, academics, campaigners and communicators, policymakers, and members of government. The Federal Treasurer, the Hon. Dr Jim Chalmers, addressed the community sector directly and engaged in conversation about Budget outcomes. The event also included an in-depth Budget analysis from ACOSS and an expert panel discussion.

Major Impacts

We played a direct and significant role in achieving the following outcomes under our [Five Year Impact Strategy 2023-2028](#).

Participation and Agency

- Strong support for a Yes vote in the Voice Referendum with over 230 organisations signing the Community Sector Statement of Solidarity [Community Sector Statement of Solidarity](#).
- Over 1000 people with lived experience of poverty engaged in Commonwealth Parliamentary and Government processes and public commentary.
- People with lived experience consulted or participating in the Economic Inclusion Advisory Committee, the Review of Employment Services and the Department of Employment's Parents Advisory Group.
- People with lived experience directly involved in research including the ACOSS National Heat Survey and the Cost-of-Living Surveys.
- The Robodebt Royal Commission highlighted the need for greater participation by people with lived experience and backed ACOSS's call for a client council to advise Services Australia, which is in progress.

Income Support and Housing

- A stronger social safety net for over 2 million people with increases to Jobseeker, Youth Allowance, and Parenting Payment Single.
- The abolition of Cashless Debit Card and phasing out of Compulsory Income Management empowering about 50,000 people.
- Partnership with Government to drive cultural change in Services Australia following Robodebt and continued pressure for accountability for those involved in inflicting harm on over 430,000 people.
- Commitment to build 30,000 new social or affordable homes through the Housing Australia Future Fund.

- First increase to Rent Assistance in 30 years.

Employment

- Improvements to automated payment suspensions in employment services, potentially protecting about 250,000 people from threats to income.
- Influenced the Hill Report on employment services which recommends a major overhaul of employment services.
- The transformation of ParentsNext, benefiting about 60,000 parents via creation of a new, voluntary employment program for parents.

Community Services

- More resourcing for community service organisations valued at \$560 million over 4 years.
- Improvements to Commonwealth indexation arrangements worth \$4 billion over 4 years.
- A primary leadership role in the DSS Community Sector Advisory Group and development of the NFP Blueprint for future reform of the charitable sector.

Climate and Energy

- Increased support for Fair, Fast and Inclusive Climate Change action, now supported by more than 100 climate and community organisations.
- About 60,000 social housing properties receiving energy performance upgrades.
- Growing cross-sector support for large scale investment in energy performance upgrades for all housing, with first focus on low-income housing.

Tax and Revenue

- A more equitable package of Stage 3 tax cuts, delivering more help to 11.5 million modest income earners, including 5.8 million women.

What we achieved

Participation and agency for people directly impacted

ACOSS continued to advocate for government decision-making processes to involve greater representation and inclusion of people directly impacted by poverty and inequality. We pushed for increased participation in service design and delivery, as well as more support for those affected to advocate for change and share their experiences with decision-makers. Through its Enable and Amplify Program, ACOSS also directly supported people to share their stories with local members of parliament, and traditional and social media, and to advocate directly through meetings with politicians and other key decisionmakers.

In 2023-24:

- We advocated for people directly affected to be involved in the legislated Economic Inclusion Advisory Committee (which recommended in its 2024 report that people on low incomes be appointed as members); with the Net Zero Transition Authority, within Services Australia and as part of Reserve Bank of Australia advisory and engagement processes.
- We helped over 1000 people share their story via email, phone call or submission with federal politicians or the media. We arranged ACOSS delegations to Canberra to directly advocate for increased income support, and improved tax, climate and energy policy.
- As part of ACOSS's Heat Survey report, we helped over 130 survey respondents to write directly to their member of parliament calling for reform.
- We worked with people receiving JobSeeker, Austudy and the Parenting Payment to participate in consultations for the Economic Inclusion Advisory Committee as part of its 2024 report to government. This enabled them to share their experiences and proposals for reform directly with committee members.
- We facilitated and supported participation for people with lived experience to be involved in the Review of Employment Services, the Hill Review, the ParentsNext Advisory Group, and as part of the response to the Federal Budget.

HIGHLIGHTS AND IMPACTS

Engaging and collaborating through campaign alliances

We collaborated in major campaign alliances to deliver better outcomes for people on lower incomes facing poverty and inequalities:

- **Allies for Uluru**, a coalition of more than 275 community, non-government and corporate organisations supporting the implementation of the Uluru Statement from the Heart. alliesforuluru.antar.org.au/
- **Close the Gap Campaign**, which aims to close the health and life expectancy gap between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and non-Indigenous Australians within a generation. closethegap.org.au/
- **Change the Record**, calling for reduction in the over-representation of First Nations people in prison. changetherecord.org.au
- **Everybody's Home Campaign**, a national campaign to fix the housing crisis, calling for more social and affordable housing and immediate relief for those in chronic rental stress. everybodyshome.com.au/
- **Healthy Homes for Renters**, a national campaign to deliver minimum energy performance standards for people in rental homes. healthyhomes.org.au/
- **Activate Australia's Skills Campaign**, to unlock the skills of people with overseas qualifications to improve employment outcomes. activateaustralia.org.au/
- **For Every Child Campaign**, calling for full funding for public schools where 80% of young people from lower socio-economic backgrounds are learning. foreverychild.au/
- **Renew Australia for All**, a cross-sector collaboration calling for homes to be powered by affordable clean energy. renewaustraliaforall.org
- **Climate Action Network Australia**, a network of civil society organisations calling for better climate solutions to protect the environment and build a fairer and healthier Australia. cana.net.au/



HIGHLIGHTS AND IMPACTS

Spreading the word: our collective impact

- **5,800+ media mentions** with a cumulative potential reach of 109 million+
- **Hansard data:** 106 mentions
- **Parliamentary Meetings:** ACOSS chief executive participated in 69 political meetings
- **Community Hub:** 53% increase in subscribers to the ACOSS Community Hub to share, collaborate with and amplify the work of our members with our community (November 2023 – November 24).

Social media

13,112 Followers

ACOSS Facebook:

- New followers: 325
- Reach: 184,900
- Engagement: 7691
- Video Views: 2516



479 Followers



Instagram

- Followers: 479
- Reach: 62,833
- Engagement: 151
- Link clicks: 574

Raise the Rate Facebook

- Followers: 4,188
- New followers: 126
- Reach: 15,500
- Engagement: 1,507

28,614 Followers



Twitter (X)

- Impressions: 594,491
- Engagement: 19,487
- Clicks: 3,415

4,491 Followers



LinkedIn

(NOV. 23 – JUN. 24)

- Reactions: 1,643
- Comments: 37
- Reposts: 81
- Impressions: 86,245
- Reach: 35,435
- Views: 2,294
- Unique visits: 985

ACOSS Website

- New users: 95,523
- Returning: 14,018
- Engagement: 147,731
- Views: 230,299

97,557 Users



HIGHLIGHTS AND IMPACTS

Partnering to inquire and illuminate: ACOSS and UNSW Sydney Poverty and Inequality Partnership

In the seventh year of our partnership, we released the latest updates to our Inequality in Australia series, *Inequality in Australia 2023: Overview* and *Inequality in Australia 2024: Who is affected and how*. These reports provide an updated analysis of income and wealth inequality in Australia.

Additionally, we launched our wealth calculator, which complements our existing income calculator. This interactive tool allows users to compare their household wealth with the rest of Australia. We also introduced the first report in our community attitudes series, *Community attitudes towards poverty and inequality 2023*. This report provides an attitudinal survey that will serve as a baseline for future comparisons.

Poverty and Inequality Partnership website: 386,481 page views (45% increase over last reporting period)

- Partnership reports published during this reporting period: viewed online/downloaded 14,373 times
- Poverty and Inequality data charts and tables: viewed/shared 1,137,711 times during this period



INEQUALITY IN AUSTRALIA 2024:
WHO IS AFFECTED AND HOW
A POVERTY AND INEQUALITY PARTNERSHIP REPORT

APRIL 2024



ACOSS AND UNSW SYDNEY
INEQUALITY IN AUSTRALIA 2023:
OVERVIEW

SEPTEMBER 2023



COMMUNITY ATTITUDES TOWARDS
POVERTY AND INEQUALITY, 2023:
SNAPSHOT REPORT
A POVERTY AND INEQUALITY PARTNERSHIP REPORT

DECEMBER 2023



OUR WORK

The issues we tackled

Securing quality essential services for all

- We worked with our national members to call for urgent funding for crisis-response services to deal with high levels of financial distress in the community.
- ACOSS directly helped secure a Federal Government commitment to ensure monies appropriated for indexation on Commonwealth Grants are used for that purpose and no other, addressing a longstanding systemic issue within grants administration by line agencies.
- ACOSS has been a leader in the Community Services Advisory Group advocating for more substantial action on delivering a better grants and funding process for the sector, and a more collaborative working relationship with government.
- As a member of the Stronger Charities Alliance Steering Group, we called for greater legislative protections for charities to undertake systemic advocacy.
- We caucused with counterpart peak bodies to collectively push for improved funding and a more supportive framework for select peak bodies as part of the Families and Communities Service Improvement Activity, managed by the Department of Social Services.
- We were active as a member of the Blueprint Expert Reference Group working to develop a National Blueprint for the not-for-profit (NFP) sector. The Blueprint will set a ten-year plan to strengthen the NFP sector across the country, including improving its financial sustainability, engagement with government and allyship with First Nations organisations and communities.

OUR WORK

Employment opportunities for all, with no one left behind

- ACOSS was a prominent voice in the public debate around RBA interest rate rises, emphasising the full employment commitment in the RBA's mandate and highlighting the impacts of interest rate rises on unemployment and the employment opportunities of people on low incomes.
- ACOSS advocated for a root and branch reform of Employment Services, calling for an immediate end to automated payment suspensions in Workforce Australia and for the government to commit to a fundamental reform of the system and a plan to deliver it. This advocacy included a joint letter from over 20 community sector organisations and allies on the government response to the Hill Report, which called for fundamental reform of Workforce Australia.
- ACOSS continued to highlight the harms of mutual obligation, producing a report and national media stories that demonstrate the high percentage of people affected by the compliance system in Workforce Australia and the harms the system causes.
- We contributed to the Employment Department's engagement on the replacement to ParentsNext (Parents Pathways).

Affordable housing for people on low incomes

- ACOSS continued efforts to influence change to federal housing policy to ensure affordable, secure housing for people on low incomes, with an explicit focus on First Nations communities. This involved direct advocacy and policy development, close collaboration with national peak bodies, and participation in national campaigns and alliances including the Everybody's Home campaign and the National Affordable Housing Alliance. Sustained pressure helped result in maintaining or modestly increasing funding in areas of social housing, rent assistance, and homelessness services.



Self-determination and justice for First Nations people

A key commitment under our Strategic Plan, Impact Priority 1, is that we will succeed if *'The community sector builds support for self-determination and justice for First Nations peoples including support for Voice, Treaty and Truth, enabling participation of First Nations peoples in decisions that directly affect the outcomes for their communities.'*

In line with this commitment and ACOSS's long history of allyship with First Nations peoples and organisations, we continued our strong support for the Uluru process and a Voice to Parliament, including facilitating a dialogue between First Nations leaders and ACOSS leaders about how the sector could support a 'yes' vote in the historic Voice campaign.

In the wake of the devastating referendum result, ACOSS and the COSS Network established and sought sign-on to a Community Sector Statement of Solidarity with First Nations Communities. This statement invited sector organisations to reaffirm their commitment to true allyship by taking measures such as developing and adhering to partnership principles that limit competition with Aboriginal community-controlled organisations, which are best placed to develop policy solutions and deliver services for their communities.

Following the referendum and after direct consultation with our First Nations member organisations, we also held the first annual ACOSS Board and First Nations Member Roundtable Dialogue, through which we:

- established guidelines for two dedicated First Nations Director positions on the ACOSS Board, with appointments to be made prior to the end of 2024
- developed and adopted the internal ACOSS First Nations Solidarity Pledge to guide our work under Impact Priority 1, as detailed above.

Thus far under the ACOSS First Nations Solidarity Pledge, we have:

- held the first meeting of the ACOSS First Nations Policy Network to identify, engage with and support our First Nations member organisations on relevant policy issues
- raised First Nations policy priorities, identified via the First Nations Policy Network, in political meetings, as well as through our Budget and MYEFO priorities and a range of submissions to government
- actively engaged with the Close the Gap Campaign and the Change the Record Steering Group
- met with the Coalition of Peaks to seek an agreement on an approach to partnership
- committed to strong and public support of non-compete approaches, so First Nations community-controlled organisations are first priority for funding for First Nations solutions and services across the community.

This work is ongoing, and we look forward to continued engagement with our First Nations members and national members on the established priorities, with these to be further developed and refined over time. We also look forward to reporting our progress at regular intervals.

OUR WORK

A fairer economy and tax system

Australia's tax system is unfair, favouring those with the most over those with the most need. It helps to drive inequality in Australian society, which increases economic insecurity and social division – and, without major tax reform, Australia's tax system will remain unfair. We also need to secure more revenue to fund community needs. This is why ACOSS has advocated for many years for a fairer tax system that generates sufficient revenue to support services, safety nets and economic development, and which better serves the community.

- In response to the government's legislative review of the Reserve Bank of Australia (RBA) and successive increases in official interest rates, ACOSS has called for a stronger commitment and clear targets to restore full employment, pointing to the sharp decline in people's incomes and spending power over the last two years. We have also advocated for the proposed Monetary Policy Board to include people with expert knowledge of the circumstances of, and impact of RBA interest rate policies on, people on the lowest incomes.
- We have supported government legislation to increase taxes on the investment income of large superannuation accounts and advocated for more far-reaching reform to end the tax-free status of investment income from superannuation accounts after people retire.
- ACOSS has consistently advocated for reform of tax concessions that encourage speculation in property values, including the Capital Gains Tax 50% discount and negative gearing, pointing to their impact on housing affordability. Public opinion is turning against these concessions and at the time of writing the government had asked Treasury for advice on reform options in this area.

Enablers update

To achieve our Strategic Impact Priorities, we are committed to building and maintaining a high-performing organisation. To do this, we have ensured the following enablers are in place within our organisation to strengthen our operational success.

Inclusion, Equity and Diversity

Over the past year, ACOSS continued its journey towards a more diverse, inclusive and equitable workplace. The staff team worked to deepen their understandings of key concepts, in part through a range of targeted training sessions delivered by Diversity Council of Australia. Inclusion, Equity and Diversity are at the forefront of our thinking. We have accelerated our inclusion and equity practices, embarking on our journey to review internal policies and processes to lead to a more diverse workplace, with greater representation across our organisation, including in our governance, staff team, membership, relationships and networks. In the new year, we will continue to progress this work to deliver on our goals in this area.

Sustainable Resources

Our work to ensure a fair economy, support an end to poverty and ensure inclusive communities is enabled by securing necessary resources, including through funding partnerships with philanthropic and government partners, our membership base and donations. We regularly explore working with new funding partners and seek opportunities that align with our priorities. Over the years, we have also developed partnerships with generous pro bono entities to support us with advice in the areas of corporate services, legal concerns, governance and risk management.

Our Members

ACOSS continued to grow and increase the diversity of our membership throughout this past year, making progress towards our strategic goal of more diverse representation that better reflects the community. Since our 2023 Annual General Meeting, ACOSS warmly welcomed twelve new National Organisation Members:

- Arise Foundation
- Australians for Mental Health
- Australian Institute of For-Purpose Leaders
- Centre for Women's Economic Safety
- Ending Loneliness Together
- Foundation for Alcohol Research and Education
- National Older Women's Network
- OzHarvest
- Scarlet Alliance – Australian Sex Workers Association (National Constituency Organisation Member)
- SecondBite
- Wilya Ajjul Janta Aboriginal Corporation (National Constituency Organisation Member)
- Women's Legal Services Australia.

During the year, we regularly engaged with and sought input from our National Members, including through our eight National Policy and Advocacy Networks, with the ACOSS National CEO Network meeting fortnightly and other ACOSS Policy Networks meeting quarterly. We also communicated with the wider sector weekly via the ACOSS CEO

End-of-Week Update and fortnightly via the ACOSS Community Hub Newsletter.

Our 2023 Member Survey confirmed that ACOSS membership is valued because it provides up-to-date information, policy advice and analysis, cross-sector networking and collaboration, advocacy on key issues, and leadership to the sector on key issues. Notable improvements relative to our 2022 survey results included:

- On 'improving public understanding of the level and drivers of poverty', 88% of respondents gave a rating of 'extremely well or very well', up from 56% in 2022
- On 'how well ACOSS influences decision-makers to achieve systemic change', 73% of respondents gave a rating of 'extremely well or very well', up from 43% in 2022
- On 'bringing the sector together', 66% of respondents gave a rating of 'extremely well or very well', up from 52% in 2022.

In addition, we received extensive positive feedback from ACOSS National Members in relation to our 2024 Federal Budget Engagement, indicating that:

- ACOSS's Federal Budget work is viewed as a highlight of our member deliverables and a key benefit to the sector
- The visibility of ACOSS's Federal Budget process supports the confidence of smaller organisations in relation to their own Federal Budget advocacy and responses
- The 'how to read budget papers' training is important capacity building work for the sector
- The Community Sector Post-Budget Press Conference convened by ACOSS contributes positively to sector solidarity and the media profile of the sector as a whole
- ACOSS's Federal Budget media presence serves to raise the public profile of the sector, while keeping the Government on target on the issues that matter.

A Thriving Team

We are committed to supporting the health and wellbeing of our team by supporting an inclusive, supportive and sustainable work environment. We are committed to regular reviews to improve our support, collecting feedback and guidance from our team through surveys and regular check ins. We recognise and celebrate team successes and learn from our failures together.

Effective Governance and Operating Systems and Technology

Like many organisations across the sector, we worked this year to elevate our focus on cybersecurity, undertaking a range of actions and ongoing projects. This work included appointment of an external Chief Information Officer to assist with creation and implementation of a Cybersecurity Plan, review of internal policies and procedures to identify process gaps that might introduce cybersecurity risk, creation of an overall IT strategy, and facilitation of internal workshops and trainings. We also completed our transition to SharePoint, including creation and implementation of a SharePoint Governance Portal to support the work of our Board.

Adaptive Planning and Impact Measurement

The ACOSS staff team engaged in a series of Impact Priority workshops in June. An integral part of our annual planning and impact measurement cycle, these workshops provided an opportunity to build a strong shared understanding of our priority outcomes, discuss planned activities and assess resource implications.

We track our success in achieving our Impact Priorities using our Impact Measurement Framework (IMF), which enables us to gather and share evidence to evaluate and demonstrate our impact. We have now embedded the IMF in key reporting documents and impact reports.

Financial statement

I am pleased to report ACOSS operated sustainably over the 2023-2024 financial year, recording a surplus of \$221,817.

The total income for the year was \$4,336,725, reflecting an 8% higher increase compared to the previous year.

Key sources of growth included a steady increase in membership and enhanced philanthropic support along with individual donations.

We sincerely thank and deeply appreciate all our supporters for their continued dedication to ACOSS and its mission.

The total expenditure for the year amounted to \$4,114,908, with wages comprising the largest expense at 72% of total costs. Travel activities have returned to pre-Covid level, and there has been an increase in administration costs including continued investments in IT and cyber security.

As of June 30, 2024, ACOSS's balance sheet shows a healthy financial position in line with the benchmark established by the Board to safeguard against unforeseen financial risks.

The 2024 financial statements have been audited by SDJA, resulting in an unmodified audit opinion. The financial statements can be accessed [here](#) and will also be available on the Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission (ACNC) website.

Matt Gardiner
ACOSS Treasurer

Partners and Supporters

No meaningful impact is achieved alone. This past year has been a testament to the power of partnership, collaboration, and shared commitment to creating positive change.

We are deeply grateful to our partners and funders whose support has been vital to our ability to continue working towards a sustainable poverty-free future in which all people are treated with dignity and respect. Your commitment goes beyond funding; you are allies in our mission to create meaningful, lasting change.

As we look to the future, we are inspired by the collective vision and dedication that drives our work together.





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