

Greens Clear Winners for Community Services & Health Sector

An exit poll today of people attending a pre-election community services and health forum revealed huge support for the Greens policy positions. The forum was jointly hosted by South Australian Council of Social Service (SACOSS) & the Association of Major Community Organisations (AMCO).

AMCO spokesperson Simon Schrapel said after the forum: "We asked each of the candidates from the four major parties to respond to three key questions:

1. How their party would contribute to building a fair and just Australia?
2. How they would seek to increase the standard of living for the poorest people in our community?
3. We asked them to consider the staffing crisis the sector faces, and the attitude of the parties to the need for better wages and conditions for the people who serve some of our most marginalised and vulnerable community members"

Schrapel went on to say, "The exit poll we conducted was extremely revealing. It is clear that people overwhelmingly felt the Greens, represented by lead senate candidate Penny Wright, had by far the best responses to all three of these key questions. The Labor party, represented by Minister for Climate Change, Energy Efficiency & Water Penny Wong, ranked second on all counts. Both of these rated well ahead of the two other parties — Family First, represented by Senate candidate Bob Day, scored a narrow victory over Senator Mary Jo Fisher, the Liberal representative today"

Executive Director of SACOSS Ross Womersley said, "A growing concern in our sector is the push led by both major parties towards seeing the availability of welfare as something of privilege rather than something of a right and an obligation of a prosperous nation like Australia. There is a deep anxiety about policy positions like Compulsory Income Management (Labor) or Income Quarantining (Liberal)."

He went on to say, "Community members and our political representatives should be in no doubt that members of our community who experience serious hardship and disadvantage (for example those who experience long term unemployment, who live with a disability or a mental health issue, who are homeless and have nowhere to safe and affordable to live, who are struggling to raise their families while living on a welfare payment, etc.) didn't set out with an ambition to have a life like this. No-one ever wants to be poor, or unemployed, or chronically dependant on the State."

"The challenge for our political parties, and for the organisations that work with some of the most disadvantaged members of our community, is to promote social policy which enables people to build real skills, to become financially secure, to make contributions to their own communities, to develop confidence in their own abilities, to be welcomed and to develop a sense of being valued by others in their community. The 100 plus senior representatives of the community services and health sectors present today obviously felt the Greens and the Labor party were in front on this account."

For further comment, please contact:

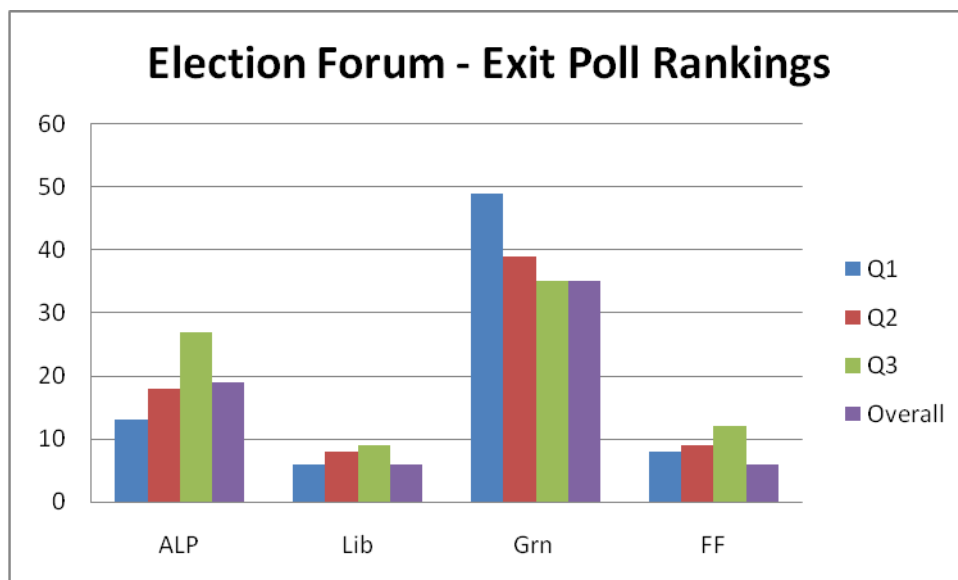
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QUESTION 1: A Just and Fair Australia?

Please outline how, if elected, your party would work toward an Australia which was widely acclaimed for its justice, fairness, and inclusiveness as well as for protecting our most vulnerable citizens including indigenous Australians?

QUESTION 2: A decent standard of living for all Australians?

There are numerous reports that demonstrate that most of the benefits and allowances for the most vulnerable in our community (e.g. those living with a mental illness, disability, sick) are below the poverty line and many people miss out on basic needs. What will your party do if elected to ensure a decent standard of living for all (not just in raising the level of benefits but also in changing the system and supports)?

QUESTION 3: Community sector sustainability and staffing?

Many full time workers in the community services sector earn half of the average national wage. The sector faces a crisis in both attracting and retaining good people to assume roles in support of our most vulnerable and disadvantaged citizens. Currently a pay equity claim is being heard by Fair Work Australia. Based on a recent and similar case in Queensland, this could lead to a major increase in wages across the sector. Will your party make a commitment to help the vital services the Community Services sector provides by fully funding the outcomes of this important case?

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