



State Budget Submission 2010-11

Building on the Blueprint

SACOSS STATE BUDGET SUBMISSION 2010-11
Building on the Blueprint

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This is the fifth in a series of documents presenting a comprehensive set of strategies that will contribute towards meeting the targets outlined in *Blueprint for the eradication of poverty in South Australia* (SACOSS, 2007).

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© South Australian Council of Social Service, 2010
47 King William Road
Unley, SA, 5061 Australia
Ph (08) 8305 4222
Fax (08) 8272 9500
sacoss@sacoss.org.au
www.sacoss.org.au

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Justice, Opportunity and Shared Wealth for all South Australians

OUR VALUES

Accountability
Collaboration
Courage
Diversity
Dignity
Inclusion
Respect
Sustainability

OUR PURPOSE

To harness the views of the community to achieve

Progressive improvement of the quality of life for those most in need

A healthy, clean and safe environment

Equal access to social, political, economic, spiritual, and
cultural opportunities and benefits

A vibrant and dynamic community sector

A strong and representative membership base

OUR STRATEGIC DIRECTIONS

Fair and Just Policy On a systemic level, we advocate on behalf of disadvantaged people and our member organisations. We initiate, develop and provide expert advice and opinion to achieve fair and just social policy.

A Strong and Credible Voice We provide independent information and comment to the South Australian community about social justice issues.

A Strong and Cohesive Sector We work closely with the community, government and our membership to promote cooperation, the sharing of resources, information and discussion and action on common issues.

A Well Managed Organisation We set and model a high standard of governance and responsible management and build the skills and capabilities of staff to meet the challenges of the organisation and the environment we work in.

Preamble – disadvantage in South Australia

Throughout its budget submission process, as in all other work, consideration is given by SACOSS to those for whom disadvantage is more common and more entrenched. While this Budget Submission does not specifically mention all of these groups in detail, the core work of SACOSS – based on its vision of Justice, Opportunity and Shared Wealth for all South Australians – leads it to always bear in mind the plight of the most vulnerable and disadvantaged in our society.

Who, then, is most disadvantaged? The question is often framed in a negative way – that is, who is, and who isn't, most deserving of understanding and assistance at the expense of the less deserving. SACOSS does not view these issues in this way, nor does it believe that they should be. There are many groups in society disproportionately represented in statistics on poverty, unemployment, incarceration, low levels of schooling and skills acquisition, and poor access to many more of the societal goods many of us take for granted every day. Evidence suggests that the following groups are most disadvantaged in contemporary South Australian society, and must be kept in mind when reading SACOSS materials:

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people
- Children from low income families
- The ageing population
- Homeless people
- People with a disability
- Regional and remote communities
- Women
- Young people
- Culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) communities

Members of these groups are overrepresented on a number of indicators of poverty and disadvantage, often interacting and compounding. These indicators include:

- Poor access to safe, secure and affordable housing
- Unemployment and under-employment
- Lack of access to education and training opportunities
- Poor access to health and other support services
- Lack of access to appropriate transport and transport services
- High levels of drug and alcohol abuse
- High levels of incarceration
- High levels of family breakdown
- Lack of social participation

Throughout its policy and research papers, the focus of SACOSS is on the specific policy areas that they are aimed to address. By maintaining a broad view of the issues it sees as important, SACOSS aims to make use of the facts, figures and findings of the information presented to foster informed views of the recommendations contained in this submission. As noted throughout, this Budget Submission is designed to be read in conjunction with the SACOSS *Blueprint for the eradication of poverty in South Australia*.

Acronyms

ACOSS	Australian Council of Social Service
ACPC	Australian Crime Prevention Council
CAA	Courts Administration Authority
CAMHS	Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service
DECS	Department of Education and Children's Services
DEST	Commonwealth Department of Education, Science and Training
DTEI	Department of Transport, Energy and Infrastructure (SA)
DEWR	Commonwealth Department of Employment and Workplace Relations
DFC	Department for Families and Communities
DFEEST	Department of Further Education, Employment, Science and Technology
DPC	Department of Premier and Cabinet
FaHCSIA	Commonwealth Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs
OARS	Offenders Aid and Rehabilitation Service
SAPOL	South Australian Police
RTOs	Registered Training Organisations
SACOSS	South Australian Council of Social Service
SASP	South Australia's Strategic Plan
TAFE	Technical and Further Education
TASC	Training and Skills Commission
TOD	Transport Oriented Development
VET	Vocational Education and Training
YACSA	Youth Affairs Council of South Australia

Introduction

In 2010-2011 SACOSS, its members, and the South Australians on whose behalf it advocates and represents are seeking visionary, innovative and equitable budget results that build justice, opportunity, and shared wealth for all South Australians.

On 5 December 2007, SACOSS released the *Blueprint for the eradication of poverty in South Australia*. This document outlines a range of high level targets, related strategies and measures of success that if adopted and achieved would lead to the eradication of poverty in South Australia. As part of SACOSS's ongoing remit to tackle economic disadvantage and inequality in South Australia, our Budget Submission builds on the *Blueprint* by highlighting contemporary priorities for government leadership and investment, and whole of community action. These priorities have been developed through in-depth and considered consultation with SACOSS members and stakeholders. The priorities further identify the key stakeholders, related initiatives, and connections to *South Australia's Strategic Plan* and community impacts, as well as explore the connections that these strategies have to existing government initiatives.

The social, political and environmental contributors to poverty are deep seated and complex, and SACOSS is cognisant that the eradication of poverty will not occur within a single term of any government. Consequently a committed adoption of short and long range strategies that seek to challenge and change unjust societal structures and ameliorate disadvantage is essential. Only then will real and measurable progress be made in redressing societal injustice and creating positive pathways out of poverty for our most vulnerable and disadvantaged South Australians.

Contained within this submission are twenty of the most important priorities that SACOSS and its members have identified as essential in lessening the impact of poverty amongst the most vulnerable and disadvantaged South Australians for 2010-2011. SACOSS views the opportunity to have meaningful input to the State Budget as very important in achieving our goal of advocating for the progressive improvement of the quality of life for those most vulnerable in our community.

We recognise that the South Australian Government faces critical external challenges that must be addressed, including impacts of climate change, building economic recovery after the GFC, and the Council of Australian Governments National Reform Agenda. One element of the Reform Agenda of particular interest and concern for SACOSS and the state government is Award Modernisation and the attendant Pay Equity Case. With award wages set to rise significantly in the health and community services sector, the government will need to ensure that funding arrangements provide the means for organisations to meet wage requirements. SACOSS believes that while this will represent a significant financial burden on the government, the cost to low income and disadvantaged South Australians and the community as a whole would be greater if funding arrangements were not changed accordingly. Additionally, the recent financial crisis will continue to have ramifications for South Australia's long term social, economic and environmental stability, and ultimately any government priorities in terms of equality.

The South Australian Government is also at a challenging point in its cycle. After two terms of government and eight budgets, many objectives have been achieved as a result of investment in social policy that has been reasonably well placed, although not always based on clear evidence. However entrenched issues of disadvantage remain, and further targeted and enduring investment will be necessary to meet the upcoming challenges. Of particular concern to SACOSS and its members are the seemingly intractable issues of child safety and wellbeing, and Aboriginal health outcomes. These are key challenges for policy makers in the coming years.

Our Budget submission focuses on the five key themes of our *Blueprint*, and identifies twenty priorities for consideration in 2010-2011. Some priorities require no financial investment, while others advocate better use of existing resources. There are also a number of priorities which are new and therefore require substantial investment.

SACOSS Blueprint Targets

Income Inequality

1. Increase the median income of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander South Australians to that of the wider population.
2. Ensure that all working South Australians earn a decent living wage and that youth wage and that trainee/apprentice wage levels are decent, equitable and fair.
3. Increase the SA net household disposable income per capita to at least 100% of the Australian average.
4. Raise the income levels of the poorest groups (principally households whose main source of income are government benefits) above the national average.

Labour Force Participation

5. Increase the participation rate for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders to equal that of the wider population.
6. Increase the labour force participation rate to equal or better the national participation rate.

South Australia's Strategic Plan Targets

Target T1.1

Economic growth: exceed the national economic growth rate by 2014.

Target T1.6

Labour productivity: exceed Australia's average labour productivity growth rate in trend terms by 2014.

Target T1.11

Unemployment: maintain equal or lower than the Australian average through to 2014.

Target T1.12

Employment participation: increase the employment to population ratio, standardised for age differences, to the Australian average.

Target T2.12

Work-life balance: improve the quality of life of all South Australians through maintenance of a healthy work-life balance.

Target T6.5

Economic disadvantage: reduce the percentage of South Australians receiving government benefits (excluding age pensions) as their major income source to below the Australian average by 2014.

Target T6.22

People with disabilities: double the number of people with disabilities employed by 2014.

Income

While poverty remains entrenched in South Australian society, the issue of income disparity cannot be ignored. Income may not be the only indicator of disadvantage, but it is the main reason behind inequities in our society and one of the main determinants of a person's health and wellbeing throughout the life cycle. It is true that many people on low incomes are more likely than those on higher incomes to live in poor quality housing, struggle to pay rent and utility bills, and live in more geographically isolated areas. Furthermore, certain population groups are more likely to have to subsist on low incomes and are caught in a cycle of poverty, including people with a disability, young people, older people, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People, women, and those with low levels of education.

Census data shows that in 2001, 23.8% of all South Australian families were living on low incomes, and that this figure was higher outside the metropolitan area, at 27.3% (Glover et al, 2006). The recently released SACOSS *Cost of Living* updates (SACOSS, 2009a, 2009b) show that for the 31.2% of South Australians who rely on government benefits as their main source of income, the costs associated with housing, utilities and transport are such that even food becomes difficult to afford. Metropolitan housing costs, for example, have risen by between 40.4% (3 bedroom house) and 42% (1 bedroom unit) between March 2006 and September 2009, while Centrelink benefits (incorporating core payments and additional allowances) have risen by between 11% and 23.5% over the same period.

While at the state government level concessions are designed in part to make up for the failures of the federal benefits system, the politically challenging nature of concessions means that they are less than effective in providing a safety net for those requiring assistance to make ends meet. Not only do concessions fail to provide equity by being provided to those in similar financial circumstances, but the real value of some concessions have fallen dramatically over the years. The energy concession, for example, is provided to around 30% of residential electricity consumers in South Australia, and the maximum rate of \$120 per year and has not changed since 2004. SACOSS notes and welcomes the government's election commitment to increase this to \$150 per year with 5% increases per annum following that, (Premier Rann Media Release, Significant Boost for Concessions, 17 February 2010). However, as fixed charges have risen by 34.2% since 2006 alone (SACOSS, 2009a, 2009b), the promised increase will still not cover the decline in the real value of the concessions.

It is clear that while the role of the South Australian state government in respect to income disparities is somewhat limited by jurisdictional arrangements, SACOSS is of the view that there is scope for action to ameliorate the worst effects of poverty through a range of policy options.

PRIORITIES FOR 2010-2011

detailed on following pages

- **Review of the effectiveness of the current concession payment system.**
- **Establish an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander enterprise clearing house.**
- **Increase state government research and development funding to establish clearer pathways for disadvantaged groups into key growth industries.**
- **Determining essential vs. non-essential expenses within the cost of living and providing safety nets for essential expenses.**

PRIORITY**Review of the effectiveness of the current concession payment system.**

The current concessions regime in South Australia is outdated, rife with inequities, and lacking in clarity. The maze of eligibility requirements and other factors potential beneficiaries must consider when dealing with the concessions system is not conducive to easy navigation, nor to effective administration for the numerous agencies given this task. Additionally, current concessions often fail to deliver horizontal or vertical equity and their value in real terms has diminished as the value of goods and services whose costs they were designed to subsidise have risen.

While the state government has recently undertaken a review of the concessions system with a view to making information more readily available, and has also committed to increasing the value of core concessions, more needs to be done on a fundamental level to ensure that concessions are:

- Clear in their stated aims
- Equitable in assisting those in need equally
- Accessible and easy to understand for all
- Able to make basic needs more affordable in the short and long term
- Flexible enough to maintain value and relevance into the future

By undertaking a more robust review of concessions in South Australia, the government can ensure that essential services and socially inclusive activities are affordable for all South Australians.

By providing a more targeted system that has as its focus both horizontal and vertical equity, government can ensure that all South Australians can have equitable access to goods and services. A more coherent system would result in a streamlined approach to the provision and administration of concessions, saving the government money in the long term and providing the South Australian community with a more assured standard of living.

Cost Estimate: \$250,000 in 2010-2011 for the review

PRIORITY**Establish an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander enterprise clearing house.**

The disparity in wages, income, and labour force participation rates for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are well known. One way of tackling these issues is to provide incentives and supports for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People to develop and operate their own businesses, tapping into emerging opportunities in a wide range of fields. Each viable business generated will contribute to meeting state economic growth goals as well as skills and employment goals.

An 'enterprise clearing house' would give Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander small business owners and those who wish to develop a business idea the nurturing and direction necessary to run a small business in South Australia.

By enabling business start-up for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, the gap in incomes between indigenous and non-indigenous South Australians will diminish. Ultimately, outcomes in the areas of health and wellbeing, economic disadvantage, mental health and social inclusion will become evident and the entire South Australian community will benefit through increased economic activity and greater social wellbeing.

Cost Estimate: \$300,000 per year over four years (\$1.2m total)

PRIORITY**Increase state government research and development funding to establish clearer pathways for disadvantaged groups into key growth industries.**

Employment is one of the clearest pathways out of poverty and for many disadvantaged groups unemployment and underemployment remain the main cause of ongoing poverty and social exclusion. With a changing economy new opportunities are emerging for employment growth in key growth and emerging sectors, and these need to be identified and taken advantage of. The 5 Year Skills Plan for South Australia needs to be cognisant of the needs of disadvantaged groups in planning for education and training pathways for the new economy, including the provision of funding for the establishment of pathways between education and training and emerging skills shortage areas.

A shift to a greater focus on a carbon constrained economy means that opportunities exist to focus research and development funding on action to utilise South Australia's comparative advantages in a greener economy. This funding should be combined with additional funding for the identification and development of dedicated pathways for disadvantaged groups into these growth industries.

By preparing the way through funding for clearer pathways for disadvantaged people to enter employment in key growth sectors, policy action by the government can have a positive impact that extends well beyond disadvantaged groups. Linking traditional research and development funding to funding for education and training would mean benefits for emerging and growth industries and ultimately the SA economy as a whole.

This initiative would complement the government's training agenda and quota system for government infrastructure projects and contribute to the goal of 100,000 new jobs in South Australia (ALP Jobs Strategy Policy 2010).

Cost Estimate: \$200,000 per year over four years (\$800,000 total)

PRIORITY**Determine essential vs. non-essential expenses within the cost of living, and provide safety nets for essential expenses.**

A great deal of government social and economic policy revolves around household income. Income alone does not tell the real story of disadvantage however, as many South Australians struggle to maintain standards of living despite rises in average household income. There is a need to increase understanding in government agencies and the general community around what household costs are essential and non-essential in order to reach an understanding of what is required to assist those in need through social policy. By understanding the unavoidable costs of housing, utilities and transport in particular, and thus the value of truly 'disposable' income, policy directions can be pro-active in their approach to disadvantage by identifying thresholds for these costs and capping them to ensure that social inclusion targets are met.

The identification of essential and non-essential expenses within a range of household budgets will allow for more targeted and effective social policy. It would help to avoid bad policy made on the basis of average incomes and average expenses and help to facilitate the identification of policy directions that would allow for the diminution of disparities in what can truly be called 'disposable' income – income left over after utilities, housing, food, transport, health and education needs have been accounted for.

**Cost Estimate: \$200,000 for determining the issues.
Future funding based upon the findings.**

SACOSS Blueprint Targets

Access to Jobs

7. Reduce by more than half the current numbers of long term unemployed in South Australia.
8. Increase the rate of employment amongst young people and the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community to equal that of the wider community.

Quantity and quality of jobs

9. Increase the percentage of jobs in the market that are skilled, high income and permanent.
10. Ongoing State-wide planning to identify areas of skills/labour shortage.
11. Reduce the labour 'under-utilisation' rate in South Australia.

Skills, education and training

12. Free education for all who seek it.
13. Ensure that all South Australians have training /education opportunities that will enable them to effectively compete for employment.
14. Ensure equity of access and high quality of education/training in rural and metropolitan areas.

South Australia's Strategic Plan Targets

Target T1.1

Economic growth: exceed the national economic growth rate by 2014.

Target T1.6

Labour productivity: exceed Australia's average labour productivity growth rate in trend terms by 2014.

Target T1.11

Unemployment: maintain equal or lower than the national average through to 2014.

Target T1.12

Employment participation: increase the employment to population ratio, standardised for age differences, to the Australian average.

Target T6.15

Learning or earning: by 2010 increase the number of 15-19 year olds engaged fulltime in school, work or further education/training (or combination thereof) to 90%.

Target T6.16

SACE or equivalent: increase yearly the proportion of 15-19 year olds who achieve the SACE or comparable senior secondary qualification.

Target T6.22

People with disabilities: double the number of people with disabilities employed by 2014.

Employment, Education and Training

South Australia is currently undergoing a vital period in its economic and social development. To ride the post-GFC wave of economic growth and fully capture benefits from the mining boom and nascent 'green' industry development, South Australia will need to greatly increase university and VET graduate numbers over the next seven years. In 2009 SACOSS estimated that 337,000 places would be needed in that timeframe just to weather the GFC. However, South Australians are less likely to have post-school qualifications than other Australians: currently 50.7% compared to the Australian average of 53.9% (Stead, 2009, p.iv).

While Australia, and South Australians in particular, were promised a large windfall as a result of the much-publicised mining "boom," research has since shown that the benefits of the boom barely went beyond the mining industry itself, as the increased incomes from mining products were not reflected in increases to either wages or government income-support payments. In fact, higher mortgages and other borrowing costs meant that many households were actually worse off as a result of the mining boom. (Richardson, 2009, p.2)

To ensure the state economy remains resilient in the face of the sometimes dramatic economic changes taking place in Australia and across the world, South Australia needs to focus its energies on creating and implementing strategies that will not only protect the economy and employment, but position the state to take advantage of the opportunities that may arise in the near future. It is also imperative that South Australia looks to its social infrastructure and ensures that the focus of any initiatives and strategies are not too narrow. A vital element of these changes will be the area of Employment, Education and Training.

A particular focus needs to be the creation and support of the "green jobs" sector – South Australia has already taken significant steps towards becoming a world leader in the area of sustainability, but in order to maintain this momentum, we must continue strategic and well-planned investment in innovation in the renewable energy sector, as well as ensure our population is trained and ready to take up "green jobs" as they become available (Stead, 2009, p.9).

To get the most from the above investments, they must be coupled with further investment in the training of young people – particularly through the development of improved school-to-work transition programs, and ensuring young people under the Guardianship of the Minister receive the training required to fulfil their potential.

Improved training, and setting increased quotas for the number of long-term unemployed people working on government projects, will also assist in increasing the number of people engaged in the workforce – the state's current participation rate is only 63.6%, compared to an Australian average of 65.4% (ABS, 2009).

PRIORITIES FOR 2010-2011

detailed on following pages

- **Provide training opportunities for young adults who have been under Guardianship.**
- **Review of existing school support programs for children from low income groups, with a view to extending school-to-work transition programs.**
- **Focus on creating and supporting the "green jobs" sector.**
- **Increase the quotas for long term unemployed people working on government projects (particularly in the Northern suburbs) and assess the viability of rolling the program out across the state.**

PRIORITY**Provide training opportunities for young adults who have been under Guardianship.**

A large body of evidence currently exists demonstrating that young people under the Guardianship of the Minister for Families and Communities have much poorer education, training and employment outcomes than their peers (Wade et al, 2006, p.76). Many reports and studies suggest that entry into the care system often not only fails to compensate for the disruptions it causes in a young person's life, but actually exacerbates any issues that may be caused by past family experiences (Wade et al, 2006, p.76).

Consequently, SACOSS contends that significant effort is warranted to ensure that young people leaving care are provided with training opportunities that will enable them to build their skills and capabilities, and secure meaningful employment in the future. This is particularly crucial in the current climate, as South Australia faces a rapid decline in the number of suitable alternative care placements for young people, caused by a decreasing number of people in the community willing to be foster carers (Cannon, 2009, p.iii).

One potential impact of taking this approach may be higher numbers of students enrolling at TAFE and University, particularly if the practices of removing or reducing fees & charges and providing quarantined places for care leavers entering tertiary education (McDowell, 2008, p.8) are continued and expanded.

However, the most important impact of this strategy will be on the employment, education and training outcomes of young people under the Guardianship of the Minister. Improving their knowledge, skills and employment opportunities will have an enormously beneficial impact on individual young people, as well as significant flow-on effects within their communities, including additional positive social impacts as young people leaving care become increasingly involved in their local communities as members of the workforce.

Cost Estimate: \$90,000 in 2010-2011, funded through employer contributions and the DECS *Skills for the Future* program.

PRIORITY**Review of existing school support programs for children from low income groups, with a view to extending school-to-work transition programs.**

SACOSS supports the state government's \$84m School to Work strategy, particularly those elements which target students who need to improve their literacy and numeracy skills prior to beginning the revised South Australian Certificate of Education (DECS, 2008). However, there are numerous other initiatives operating throughout South Australia attempting to offer school support to children from vulnerable and disadvantaged backgrounds.

These programs may be run by large, well-funded organisations such as Anglicare, or operate on a small-scale, community-based footing; they may have a specific focus, for example on combating truancy or providing extra classroom assistance; and they may work with specific population groups such as Aboriginal students, or students at a particular school. What is clear, however, is that there has not yet been a comprehensive review of this wide range of programs.

SACOSS advocates undertaking such a review, to determine not only the scope and number of pre-existing school support programs, but their efficacy and suitability for purpose across South Australia. A review of this nature will allow conclusions to be drawn regarding which

programs do and do not work well, so funding and policy decisions can be made accordingly. SACOSS is particularly interested in extending current school-to-work transition programs, to improve and clarify the pathways to employment available for young South Australians

Cost Estimate: \$250,000 in 2010-2011 for the review

PRIORITY

Focus on creating and supporting the “green jobs” sector.

The twin pressures of climate change and the global financial crisis have combined to provide South Australia with an ideal opportunity to reposition our economy to take advantage of the opportunities presented by a projected increase in the number of people employed in the “green jobs” sector, and the consequent increase in the sector’s value to the economy. The recent Green Gold Rush report (ACF and ACTU, 2008) identifies six main industries which have the potential to provide a sustainable future for the Australian economy - renewable energy, energy efficiency, sustainable water systems, biomaterials, green buildings, and waste & recycling.

South Australia has already positioned itself as a leader in some of these fields, implementing a number of ongoing projects and infrastructure that represent both best practice and national leadership in sustainability. For example, South Australia leads Australia in the generation of wind energy, and now sources around 20% of its power from renewable sources; the wetlands created by Salisbury Council in the north of Adelaide represent a sustainable form of water conservation; and South Australia leads Australia and much of the developed world in its rate of recycling, partly due to its Container Deposit Legislation, and partly due to the zero waste target administered by Zero Waste SA. (Stead, 2009, p.9)

SACOSS contends that there are two main elements to the creation of a green economy and thus green jobs: investment in innovation in the renewable energy sector and the necessary infrastructure, and through the targeted provision of training and workforce development (Stead, 2009, p.9). Therefore, we encourage the government to support the shift to a green economy by supporting “green-skilling” - the development of environmentally sound business practice - through TAFE and other institutions, through on-the-job training in green industries, through the introduction of green or sustainable modules into existing trade qualifications, and through assisting the higher education sector to offer more undergraduate and eventually postgraduate courses that provide the high level skills needed (Stead, 2009, p.9).

This initiative would assist in reaching the government’s election target of the creation of 100,000 new jobs and will support the government’s existing and promised investments in “clean tech” and green industries. The election policy promised \$194m to provide an additional 62,000 training places over the next six years (ALP Jobs Strategy Policy 2010, p 13). To assist the development of the green economy and green jobs, at least one-quarter of this money should be allocated for training in the green-jobs sector.

Cost Estimate: \$48.5m over six years (from already promised money)

Additional Cost Estimate: Nil

PRIORITY

Increase the quotas for long term unemployed people working on government projects (particularly in the Northern suburbs) and assess the viability of rolling the program out across the state.

The recent Review of Skills and Workforce Development noted that South Australia faces a number of challenges in the near future, as more skilled jobs become available without there necessarily being an increase in the number of people able to take those jobs. The review concludes that what is required is a “comprehensive approach that recognises that skills acquisition is a necessary condition to increase employment participation, but that skill formation needs to be integrated into a wider context through the provision of other supporting measures” (Keating, 2008, p.7).

SACOSS contends that one of these key supporting measures should be an increase in the quotas currently in place for long-term unemployed people working on government projects. An increase in this quota would allow for greater workforce participation from within disadvantaged communities, as well as increasing the education and training opportunities available to those currently disengaged from the workforce.

Particular focus should be given to the Northern suburbs of Adelaide, which face some of the highest levels of disadvantage in Australia - the Australian Bureau of Statistics has determined that the northern Adelaide region is heavily over-represented in the most disadvantaged Census Collection Districts (ABS, 2008a). Furthermore, SACOSS believes that there is an opportunity to roll out similar quota systems across South Australia, and we encourage the government to assess the viability of this as a matter of priority.

SACOSS notes the government’s commitment to set a target for apprentices and trainees, Aboriginal people, and local people with barriers to employment at 15% for construction and infrastructure contracts, and the target of 20% Aboriginal people for particular projects in Aboriginal communities (ALP Jobs Strategy Policy 2010: p 17). SACOSS welcomes this announcement, but wishes to ensure that the quotas for long term unemployed are not subsumed or lost in these other targets.

Cost Estimate: NIL

SACOSS Blueprint Targets

Focus on prevention and early intervention

15. Move the focus of health services provision from tertiary to primary health care.
16. Establish integrated primary health care networks, addressing dental, physical, mental and social health and wellbeing, and encompassing prevention and early intervention.
17. Ensure access to the infrastructure required to enable all members of the community, throughout the State, to live safely and healthily.
18. Ensure that all children and young people have access to health education and awareness in the school curricula.

Access and equity of outcomes

19. Provide equity of access to all public and private health-related services for all communities.
20. Eliminate health status inequities in all areas for populations within the State, based on geographic and population groups, to a variable rate of no greater than 10%.
21. Ensure access to affordable, healthy food for all communities.
22. Reduce waiting lists to ensure sufficiently timely access to health services such that any wait does not compound either the medical condition or adversely impact on an individual's wellbeing or circumstance.

South Australia's Strategic Plan Targets

Target T2.4

Healthy South Australians: increase the healthy life expectancy of South Australians by 5% for males and 3% for females by 2014.

Target T2.5

Aboriginal life expectancy: lower the morbidity and mortality rates of Aboriginal South Australians.

Target T2.7

Psychological wellbeing: equal or lower than the Australian average for psychological distress by 2014.

Target T6.1

Aboriginal wellbeing: improve the overall wellbeing of Aboriginal South Australians.

Target T6.7

Affordable housing: increase affordable home purchase and rental opportunities by 5 percentage points by 2014.

Target T6.9

Aboriginal housing: reduce overcrowding in Aboriginal households by 10% by 2014.

Health and Wellbeing

SACOSS maintains a commitment to seeking the eradication of health inequities across all population groups and the establishment of a primary health care focus for wellbeing in the state. Our submission to the 2010-2011 State Budget sets out some of the key areas for improvement in the South Australian health system. Within this commentary we provide a series of strategies that can contribute to both the eradication of health inequities and more broadly, poverty in South Australia.

A looming impact upon the health system in South Australia is our rapidly ageing population. According to the *State of Ageing Report* (Government of South Australia, 2009), the proportion of the population aged 65 and over is growing at three times the rate of the rest of the population. In addition our older population is living longer with the average male aged 65 expected to live another 18.3 years and females expected to live another 21.6 years.

Nationally in 2006-07, total expenditure on health services reached \$94 billion (or \$4,507 per person). This figure represented an increase of over \$7 billion (or \$286 per person), on the figures for 2005-06. South Australia has seen an increase in total expenditure from \$6.1 billion to \$6.7 billion from 2003-04 and 2006-07, this represents an increase of 9.5% (AIHW, 2008). This growth and projected growth will have a significant impact upon already stretched health resources and create a greater disparity in health equity across the population.

SACOSS advocates for a 'Social Determinants of Health' framework as an initiation point for addressing South Australia's health inequities. The social determinants of health approach suggests that the social, political, environmental, and economic conditions of people's lives contribute to an individual's experience of health and wellbeing. The most significant determinants include income, socio economic position, social support, education, employment, social and physical environments, gender, and access to services.

In sum, there must be cognisance of the range of environmental, social and political issues that are beyond the control of an individual, but which can have a significant impact on their health.

PRIORITIES FOR 2010-2011

detailed on following pages

- **Develop a comprehensive early years intervention plan.**
- **Develop a response and comprehensive plan to address South Australia's rapidly ageing population and the impacts upon the health care system.**
- **Address the issues arising from SACOSS' *Social determinants of health* paper.**
- **Address Aboriginal health inequalities in a systemic and meaningful way.**

PRIORITY**Develop a comprehensive early years intervention plan.**

It has been established both anecdotally and empirically that living in poverty is a significant determinant of health. Social and economic disadvantage impacts upon people throughout the life cycle, with those further down the social gradient having double the risk of serious illness and premature death as those on the upper rungs

The work of Dr Fraser Mustard (South Australia's Thinker in Residence for 2007) called for the development of a comprehensive early years intervention plan to address social and health inequities throughout the life cycle. Dr Mustard highlighted the nexus between the experience in the early years of our lives (in regards to brain development) and the related biological pathways that set trajectories affecting both physical and mental health, as well as future inequities in social and economic terms.

Dr Mustard recommends that this plan incorporates Early Childhood Development Centres, links with universities to establish an institute or program to promote neuroscientific research and teaching, changing government programs and policies, educating child development staff, supporting local families, and ensuring cultural sensitivity with Aboriginal families.

The plan should support the full development of young people and should be targeted more specifically at children from low income families and those living in poverty.

Cost Estimate: \$2m to develop and implement the plan.

PRIORITY**Develop a response and comprehensive plan to address South Australia's rapidly ageing population and the impacts upon the health care system.**

South Australia's rapidly ageing population will have a significant impact on the costs of health services delivery and the experience of health equity in the community. Figures contained in the *State of Ageing Report* (Government of South Australia, 2009), demonstrate that the proportion of the population aged 65 and over is growing at three times the rate of the rest of the population. We are also living longer with the average male aged 65 expected to live another 18.3 years and females at age 65 expected to live another 21.6 years.

The health-spend for governments is phenomenal. Nationally in 2006-07, the total expenditure on health services reached \$94 billion. South Australian figures have seen an increase in total expenditure from \$6.1 billion to \$6.7 billion between 2003-04 and 2006-07; this represents an increase of 9.5% (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2008). Health resources in South Australia are already stretched with current levels of demand, so projected growth from our ageing population is expected to take over much of the government budget in the future.

SACOSS recommends that a comprehensive plan that focuses on primary health care, prevention and early intervention, and access to health care be developed to address both current and projected demand for health services in South Australia. This plan must seek to limit both the opportunity and the impact of health inequities and the burgeoning public spend on health in South Australia.

This growth and projected growth will have a significant impact upon already stretched health resources, and create a greater disparity in health equity across the population.

Cost Estimate: \$2m to develop and implement the plan

PRIORITY**Address the issues arising from SACOSS' *Social determinants of health* paper.**

The SACOSS *Social determinants of health* paper highlights the nexus between the individual experiences of poverty and disadvantage and negative health consequences. Research highlights that the factors contributing to negative health effects are based upon the individuals' experience of: income; healthy living conditions (including access to housing, food, water and sanitation); education; literacy and health literacy; stress; early life; social exclusion; employment and unemployment; age; sex and heredity factors; culture; racism and discrimination; access to information, appropriate health care, and social supports; and access to transport.

The health care system within South Australia is a complicated set of competing priorities and perspectives. Nationwide, the health sector costs Australia over 9% of its gross domestic product, which equates to over \$3,500 per person per year. This cost is significant and will be growing each year as the impacts of our ageing population are felt fully. Therefore it is in the best interest for governments to strategically target the causes of illness as part of a prevention and early intervention focus (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2004, cited in Cannon, 2009). Traditionally, health promotions have focused upon behavioural risk factors amongst target groups to address current health issues. By addressing the underlying causes of ill health, a preventative and early intervention focus can be achieved. Overseas studies have shown that the role for health promotions in relation to improving the social determinants of health in disadvantaged groups can include advocacy, partnerships with other sectors and becoming an agent of change in a 'whole of government' strategy.

SACOSS suggests that a focus upon the social determinants of health, particularly those surrounding housing, education, early life, access to health care and social exclusion has the potential to reduce negative health effects and as such decrease health spending in the longer term.

Cost Estimate: \$2m to implement a prevention and early intervention plan**PRIORITY****Address Aboriginal health inequalities in a systemic and meaningful way.**

Despite Aboriginal disadvantage being included on the government's agenda (including on the Commonwealth government's agenda through COAG), Aboriginal disadvantage, particularly in regards to health inequality, has not decreased in any significant way over the last decade.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have a greater likelihood of suffering from ill health than the rest of the population. In regards to reduced life expectancy, there is a marked disparity in the life expectancy of Aboriginal people and non-Aboriginal people. According to ABS figures published in 2006, the median age for Aboriginal people was 21 years. This is in marked contrast to the median age of non-Indigenous Australians which is 36 years. Further, Aboriginals stand an increased risk of dying at a younger age, experiencing a disability and experience an overall reduction in the quality of their lives. Long-term health conditions are also more prevalent within the Aboriginal population such as circulatory diseases (including heart disease), diabetes, respiratory diseases, musculoskeletal conditions, kidney disease and eye and ear problems.

Statistics also tell us that Aboriginal people are more likely to drink alcohol excessively, smoke tobacco and use illicit drugs in greater numbers than the rest of the population. Access to appropriate health care is particularly difficult for many Aboriginal people and communities, and not only in remote communities. It has been reported that Aboriginal people in non-remote areas were more likely than those in remote areas to report the cost

of seeking treatment as a reason for not seeking health care, while Aboriginal people living in remote areas cited no services in the area, the lack of transport options, and the distances that they needed to travel as the reasons for not seeking treatment (ABS, 2008b).

SACOSS suggests that to address Aboriginal health inequality in a comprehensive way, a re-framing of the system needs to occur that embraces a primary health care and prevention and early intervention focus as provided by Aboriginal health care controlled services. The value in primary health care is in that it protects and promotes the health of defined communities and addresses individual and population health issues at an early stage. SACOSS notes that this approach is not new, and that the focus in recent times has shifted away from Aboriginal controlled health care services to the detriment of Aboriginal people in South Australia.

Cost Estimate: \$2m over four years

SACOSS Blueprint Targets

Access and affordability

23. Ensure equity of access to secure, affordable, adaptable housing for all, in particular for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander South Australians.
24. Increase in support and accommodation services for disadvantaged South Australians.
25. Ensure all new social housing is affordable (including bills and utilities), and environmentally sustainable with adequate quality of essentials and amenities.
26. Establish a charter of rights for public and community tenants, and tenancy legislation to guarantee rights and security.
27. Ensure affordable housing for all costs not more than 25% of a household's gross income.

Infrastructure

28. Ensure social and affordable housing is located in areas of high employment, and adequate social infrastructure and supports.
29. Ensure access to appropriate housing for those in urgent need, with a priority for women and children.
30. Ensure equity of access to affordable housing for South Australians living in rural and regional communities.
31. Increase public and community housing stock and infrastructure to meet the State's population needs.

South Australia's Strategic Plan Targets

Target T6.6

Homelessness: halve the number of 'rough sleepers' in South Australia by 2010 and maintain thereafter.

Target T6.7

Affordable housing: increase affordable home purchase and rental opportunities by 5 percentage points by 2014.

Target T6.8

Housing stress: halve the number of South Australians experiencing housing stress by 2014.

Target T6.9

Aboriginal housing: reduce overcrowding in Aboriginal households by 10% by 2014.

Target T6.10

Housing for people with disabilities: double the number of people with disabilities appropriately housed and supported in community based accommodation by 2014.

Housing

Housing remains one of the most important features of life for every South Australian. The appropriateness of housing can determine the health status of individuals and families and contribute to a range of poor health, education and general wellbeing outcomes throughout the life cycle. The cost, location and physical accessibility of housing can all have an impact on these outcomes.

Housing costs have been the focus of much attention in recent years and for good reason. As the costs of home purchases have risen – in part due to federal government policies – so too have rental costs. Additionally, social housing stocks have been on a steady decline for over a decade in South Australia as Commonwealth/State funding relations have deteriorated into a blame game scenario. While funding has come down through the stimulus package for additional social housing, through both public and community housing, the perfect storm conditions remain for many low income and vulnerable people. SACOSS *Cost of Living* (SACOSS, 2009a, 2009b) data shows that the costs for housing in metropolitan Adelaide rose by between 23% (3BR house) and 33% (1BR unit) between 2006 and 2009. In rural and regional South Australia, the corresponding rises ranged from 15% (2BR unit) to 25% (3BR house).

The direct cost of housing for many people represents not only a burden, but a significant barrier. Census data from 2001 and 2006 show that the numbers of homelessness people in Adelaide dropped, while the figures for some regional areas showed a dramatic rise. In inner Adelaide there was a decrease from 548 to 457 persons per 10,000 and outer Adelaide from 44 to 33 per 10,000. However in Port Lincoln there was a dramatic rise of 113% – from 49 per 10,000 to 103, and this was mirrored in West Coast, with a rise from 77 persons per 10,000 in 2001 to 200 per 10,000 in 2006 (Homelessness Australia, 2009). What these figures show is that there is a need to recognise the issue of regional homelessness and to regionalise homelessness strategies.

It is not only cost, but locational and design factors which affect the way in which individuals interact with housing. The urban sprawl which has defined housing development in recent times means that households – those renting and buying – have been forced to settle in outer metropolitan areas that often have poor access to transport and other services. Additionally, contemporary housing design does not lend itself to being physically accessible for an ageing population. Simply requiring designs to include adaptability standards that allow for older people with mobility issues to move freely would lead to housing that is usable into the future.

Aspects of the *30-Year Plan for Greater Adelaide* foster hope in a more realistic and reasonable urban form for Adelaide into the future, but must incorporate more detailed and robust directions for the inclusion of social and high needs housing and social infrastructure in order to provide for South Australia in 30 years' time.

PRIORITIES FOR 2010-2011

detailed on following pages

- **Setting new standards and design laws including the adoption of universal design principles.**
- **An increased focus on homelessness in regional areas.**
- **Location of social housing and access to adequate supports for high needs housing tenants that reflect the new housing packages.**
- **Increased protection mechanisms for renters, including in the areas of energy efficiency and long term affordability.**

PRIORITY**Setting new standards and design laws including the adoption of universal design principles.**

South Australia's ageing population means that current housing designs will prove to be limited in their utility into the future. Current designs do not allow for the mobility impaired to enjoy the benefits of an easily navigable home that includes ease of entry, and this requires remedy given that we know that the proportion of the South Australian population that is aged over 65 is represented by a growth rate three times that of the general population (Government of South Australia, 2009). With the population expected on average to live longer than ever before, the need for adaptable housing will be felt in the medium and long term.

There are two key reasons for taking the universal design approach. Firstly, consumer choice and the widening of the housing market will result from requiring homes to be built to be useful for all – regardless of age or mobility requirements. Secondly, appropriately designed housing that is appropriately located can improve the quality of life for the ageing, by allowing for ease of maintenance and more energy to be given to various aspects of health and wellbeing, including social participation. If universally designed homes drop in value, their usefulness does not, providing affordable options for the ageing population (Luszcz et al, 2004).

As design principles based on energy and water efficiency are put in place, so too should adaptability be accounted for. By providing all South Australians with a baseline of standards, the future housing needs of an ageing population can be in some way provided for in the present. This would impact on the ageing as well as on health and community services, as referral and presentation to service agencies would be less frequent as independent living would be enhanced.

Cost Estimate: \$250,000 for an industry education programme

PRIORITY**An increased focus on homelessness in regional areas.**

While homelessness in the Adelaide metropolitan area receives much attention in the media and in policy circles – including through the social inclusion agenda – there exists a growing problem with homelessness and rough sleeping in regional areas of South Australia. Census data shows that numbers of rough sleepers in the Adelaide CBD dropped between 2001 and 2006, although these numbers have grown most notably in the Port Lincoln and West Coast areas. These figures represent the need for greater focus on homelessness in rural and regional South Australia in policy formation and most importantly in funded action.

Government funded programs and projects such as Common Ground clearly need to be extended beyond the urban boundaries of Adelaide to cope with the emerging crisis in rural and regional areas. The lack of employment, education and training opportunities in these areas mean that homelessness and (more generally) housing stress will continue to be a problem and will continue to harm the government's social inclusion agenda.

SACOSS recognises that some 25% of houses built under the National Economic Stimulus program are being built targeted for country areas and that the government has committed to building 340 new homes in regional areas, but more funding and a broader, more integrated perspective is needed to address issues of homelessness in the regions.

Making additional resources available to regional housing roundtables would greatly increase the capacity of these roundtables to create and implement housing and homelessness programs that are adaptable to local needs and are linked to additional employment, education and

training initiatives. Homelessness programs of the type needed clearly require the local knowledge and experience embedded in the regional housing roundtables and would assist with the regionalisation of *South Australia's Strategic Plan*.

Cost Estimate: \$3m over four years

PRIORITY

Location of social housing and access to adequate supports for high needs housing tenants that reflect the new housing packages.

The National Economic Stimulus package funding for social housing in South Australia and additional commitments by the state government should see an increase in the net number of social housing dwellings. While these are promising signs that the need for additional housing stock has been recognised (notwithstanding recent downgrading of funding) there are concerns as to the appropriateness of this housing and the additional support services required for high needs tenants.

The *30-year Plan for Greater Adelaide*, while promising much in terms of a new urban form and increasingly carbon constrained development, neglects the area of social housing in that it does not identify specific requirements for the inclusion of social housing in key urban growth areas. Without mandatory targets within planning and development legislation and guidelines for the inclusion of social and high needs housing in transport corridors, there is a risk that low income and disadvantaged South Australians may miss out on the opportunities enjoyed by the less disadvantaged.

More importantly, well planned social housing policy – whether in relation to metropolitan, regional or rural areas – also requires that adequate provision be made through state government policy to the supports required by high needs tenants. Federally funded housing managed by the state government needs to be accompanied by a range of identified support services funded by the state government to help alleviate disadvantage that often accompanies social housing tenancy. These supports not only need to be immediate in terms of imminent housing builds, but also to be incorporated into the 30-year plan to ensure the ongoing needs of tenants are met.

The impacts of providing the required supports would be to ensure that the multiple indicators of disadvantage are dealt with along with housing needs. This would benefit social housing tenants and also the wider population as ghettoisation would be avoided while social participation would ensure safer and more complete communities.

Cost Estimate: \$300,000 for the development of the plan

PRIORITY**Increased protection mechanisms for renters, including in the areas of energy efficiency and long term affordability.**

While the Office for Consumer and Business Affairs (OCBA) provides for the protection of tenants through the Residential Tenancies Act ('the Act'), there is scope for greater protections given the changing nature of housing composition and other efficiency measures. Energy and water efficiency loom as major issues in the private and social housing rental markets as the costs of utilities rise and renters – like buyers – look for greater efficiency when making housing decisions. Changes to the Act and to OCBA information forms for tenants and potential tenants can assist to better protect renters from rising rental costs and better inform them about energy and water efficiency within rental accommodation.

With federal affordability programs rolling out in South Australia there is a need to ensure that affordability within the private rental market is assured. While tax and other incentives will see the building of additional private rental stock to be priced at 80% of market rent, this limited level of affordability needs to be assured through state legislation and, more specifically, through the Act. This would provide a level of rental cost protection to tenants and allow for more choice in the private rental market.

Similarly, requiring private, not for profit and public landlords to provide detailed information regarding the efficiency of rental accommodation will result in a greater ability for potential tenants to make informed choices regarding accommodation options. This would also encourage landlords to take advantage of state and federal concessions and rebates for efficiency measures for landlords.

Providing greater protection to renters through these means would impact positively on the affordability of housing as well as the management of the costs of essential services attached to housing. By rendering these costs more manageable, the government can help to ensure disadvantaged South Australians do not slip further into housing related poverty.

Cost Estimate: \$900,000 in 2010-2011

SACOSS Blueprint Targets

Access and Opportunity

32. Increase involvement by vulnerable and excluded groups in all community activities.
33. Eliminate health status, including mental health status, as a barrier to community participation.
34. Eliminate lack of transport or mobility as an impediment to social participation.

Addictions

35. Reduce average gambling losses per adult from electronic gaming machines in regions of socio-economic disadvantage by 30%.
36. Reduce incidences of alcohol and other substance abuse and recidivism (in relation to substance abuse).

Restoration and rehabilitation

37. Access to effective rehabilitation programs for all offenders
38. Reduce the numbers of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in prison, proportionate to their numbers in the overall State population.
39. Halve the numbers of South Australians sent to prison, through the vigorous pursuit of restorative justice, diversionary court systems, and alternative sentencing options.
40. Ensure living conditions within prisons are safe and consistent with community living standards.
41. Increase in use of restorative justice processes to enable victims of crime to engage more meaningfully.
42. Reduce the impact of crime on its victims.

South Australia's Strategic Plan Targets

Target T2.7

Psychological wellbeing: equal or lower than the Australian average for psychological distress by 2014.

Target T2.8

Statewide crime rates: reduce victim reported crime by 12% by 2014.

Target T5.9

Regional population levels: maintain regional South Australia's share of the state's population (18%).

Target T6.6

Homelessness: halve the number of 'rough sleepers' in South Australia by 2010 and maintain thereafter.

Social Participation

Social participation refers to the ways in which people feel able to participate in the community around them. As was explored within the SACOSS Social Determinants of Health paper, the individual experience of social participation determines the level of connection to the community and perceptions of individual value. These perceptions and subsequent individual behaviour help to influence the overall function and vibrancy of communities. Conversely, little to no individual connection to the community and subsequent negative feelings of self worth impact disastrously on the level of social cohesion, social inclusion and social capital felt by communities.

There is an enormous cost burden both in financial and social terms to maintain our current criminal justice system. The OARS/SACOSS paper *Incarceration: Unsustainable Costs and Diminishing Benefits* (2008) highlights the enormous costs associated with housing the increasing numbers of prisoners within our burgeoning and overcrowded prison system and how the act of incarceration creates negative social impacts. While incarceration is necessary for certain individuals we must be cognisant that the health and social consequences of incarceration have the potential to affect our communities for generations to come. Our law and justice legislation is becoming more punitive, and our government's mantra of "rack em', pack em' and stack em'" has led to an overcrowded and fiscally and socially untenable situation. Add to this the virtually non-existent rehabilitation programs and dearth of post-release support and we are creating an environment that fosters recidivism.

Social participation can also be bolstered through processes such as the use of 'social impact statements'. Social impact statements have been utilised to great effect by governments in Australia and overseas to identify how decision making and policy formulation impacts upon the community. This is an important way in which government can limit the negative effects of policy development/change and increase and focus upon the positive effects while also increasing the participation of the community in government decision making.

In regards to regional and rural communities, recent drought has exacerbated many of the issues that already befall regional and rural areas. Recent rains and current flooding in the Channel Country and Lake Eyre Basin, and increased flows in the Murray, have eased some of the crunch points but this should not be allowed to cover up the longer term issues of rural sustainability stemming from climate change, unsustainable past practices, and technological and market changes. Rural sustainability impacts upon employment, income, social connections, mental health, access to services and the overall health, wellbeing and vibrancy of a community. Therefore, government needs to investigate the issues present within rural communities and develop long-term strategies to address the social impacts of short and long term changes in rural sustainability.

Similarly, research tells us that social participation and social inclusion aid in both the recovery and decreasing the chance of relapse from mental illness. Therefore increasing social supports for people recovering from a mental illness enables social inclusion and greatly increases the chances of living more fully within the community.

PRIORITIES FOR 2009-2010

detailed on following pages

- **Develop socially inclusive support structures and rehabilitation & release programs for newly-released prisoners.**
- **Develop 'social impact assessments' for all new state government policies and proposals.**
- **Ministerial Taskforce to address the long-term viability of environmentally-stressed rural communities.**
- **Increase the social supports available for people with mental health issues living in the community.**

PRIORITY**Develop socially inclusive support structures and rehabilitation & release programs for newly-released prisoners.**

Recently released prisoners can experience significant disadvantage upon their release into the community. When we consider that a vast majority of prisoners are within the prison system due to sustained and often intergenerational disadvantage, releasing them into the same (if not a more desperate situation) is setting them up for failure and re-offending. For example, Baldry et al (2003) found a distinct correlation between recently released prisoners and homelessness. The researchers found that the housing opportunities for post-release prisoners are significantly inadequate, and that the lack of long-term, stable accommodation leads to an increase in transitory lifestyles, drug and alcohol abuse and eventually recidivism.

The rehabilitation programs offered within the South Australian prison system are inadequate, and the scarcity of post-release supports for recently released prisoners is in effect perpetuating the cycle of offending.

SACOSS argues for the development and implementation of a socially inclusive rehabilitation and post-release support program that prepares and supports the reintegration of individuals back into the community.

Cost Estimate: \$4m over four years

PRIORITY**Develop 'social impact assessments' for all new state government policies and proposals.**

The value of social impact statements is in that the process assists government to identify and understand the potential social impact of proposed policy decisions and decisions. This enables greater and more informed decision making processes to occur that take into account more than just pressure groups and political influences. The use of social impact assessments has been undertaken in Australian state and local governments and has been trialled in the UK and other international jurisdictions. There is emerging evidence that along with improved policy outcomes they can improve the process of government policy-making itself.

In adopting a process of social impact statements government is able to demonstrate the following:

- Maximise the positive social impacts of government decisions/policies
- Identify and ameliorate negative impacts of proposed decisions/policies
- Accountability transparency in the development of governments' proposed policies
- Enable change to occur to plans/decisions/policies that will potentially have negative impacts
- Increase social participation in government decision/policy making including the ability of the community to contribute to and influence decision making.

In order to reach their full potential, social impact statements need to be undertaken by a body independent of government, and funding needs to be guaranteed. Ideally this would involve a dedicated funding stream administered through the Department of Treasury and Finance or the Department of Premier and Cabinet.

Cost Estimate: \$300,000 in 2010-2011

PRIORITY**Ministerial Taskforce to address the long-term viability of environmentally-stressed rural communities.**

A key strategy is needed to address the issues facing disadvantaged groups specifically in rural areas affected by drought, climate change and other changes to the sustainability of primary production and rural communities. The personal distress and trauma that is associated with such environmental stresses effects the whole community, and the effects are often exacerbated by the remoteness of communities and the often accompanying social isolation. Employment and access to appropriate housing often decrease during periods of excessive drought and this affects families and communities significantly. Anxiety, depression, as well as increased prevalence of suicide and suicide ideation are linked to remote communities. These illnesses and issues often go untreated due to limited access to health and mental health facilities (Sartore, 2007).

SACOSS notes the range of initiatives for regional development committed to by the government in the election campaign (ALP Strengthening Regional South Australia Policy 2010). However, we want to ensure that all such initiatives are based on a realistic long term assessment of the viability and requirements of regional communities and that the specific needs of disadvantaged groups are addressed.

The proposed taskforce should examine key issues facing these groups, including the issues of employment, housing, access to health care and relevant infrastructure issues. The longer-term viability of these communities will be assessed by this taskforce and strategies put in place to mitigate the effects of the changing rural environment.

Cost Estimate: \$750,000 in 2010-2011

PRIORITY**Increase the social supports available for people with mental health issues living in the community.**

Social connections and social supports are vitally important for maintaining good mental health for everyone. For people recovering from mental illness these connections and supports are vital in adding in recovery and decreasing the chances of relapse. While research shows that the social networks of people with a mental illness are often quite small, social connections can include engaging with family, friends, peers, work colleagues, maintaining employment and a viable income, study, recreational activities, art, hobbies, sport and a connection to the community around them (Mental Health Coordinating Council, 2007). As was highlighted earlier, this social participation fosters a sense of belonging, purpose, self worth and having hope for the future.

A core element is stable housing. If an individual with a mental illness is unable to access stable housing then it is virtually impossible for them to gain regular employment or a regular income and as such will have a reduced chance of accessing social and community activities. Social supports are vitally important for people with a mental illness to enable them to sustain and maintain living within the community. Supports such as personal support, help with access to health and mental health services, and personal advocacy (Mental Health Coordinating Council, 2007).

SACOSS suggests that as social inclusion is important in both recovery from mental illness and decreasing the chance of relapse, social supports should be increased to people with a mental illness to enable them to live more fully within the community.

Cost Estimate: \$4m over four years

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