Peter Malinauskas

SA Labor Leader



Mr Ross Womersely CEO SACOSS 47 King William Road UNLEY SA 5061

Dear Ross.

Thank you for your letter of 15 December 2021 regarding the SACOSS Cover the Basics Campaign and Election Report Card regarding rental affordability, digital inclusion, concessions, public health, water, and protection and support.

Before turning to the matter of election policy, I would like to express my thanks to SACOSS and its members for their tireless advocacy on behalf of vulnerable and marginalised people who are helped by our social service sector every day. I also appreciated the opportunity to be the first speaker as part of your Pre-election Couch Series sessions.

The Labor Party stands for many things - a strong economy, better education, decent health care and caring for our environment - but we were born 130 years ago when workers and their families united to demand a better deal. In many ways, SACOSS carries on this tradition by challenging the status quo to help those who are too often looked over - or locked out - by society. You can rest assured that Labor and SACOSS share many values including that a prosperous community has an obligation to look after those who need help.

Notwithstanding our shared values, a government that I lead will not be able to deliver on every request every time. The bulk of Labor's policies for the 2022 election are focused on fixing the crisis in our health system and helping neglected parts of our economy recover from two years of tough restrictions. I trust that the following



information will assist your members and supporters in deciding that Labor offers the best policies that will support our social service sector and vulnerable members of our community.

Rental Affordability

The SACOSS policy proposals for rental affordability included additional investment in public housing, energy efficiency standards/ratings for all rental homes, investment in energy efficiency for social housing, and an increase in a renter concession to the same level as homeowners.

It's an understatement that we are in a housing crisis. When I grew up in Adelaide, almost one in every two rental properties was public housing and, thanks to organisations like HomeStart Finance, a couple on an age pension could buy a home. A combination of tax changes and very low interest rates saw house prices rise steadily over the first two decades of this century but they jumped by a quarter in 2021 alone. Rents are now rising rapidly across South Australia and, combined with higher prices, saving for a home has never been harder. Households need to save more but they have less money left over after paying rent. In turn, fewer rental properties are coming on to the market and those who can't compete for properties are increasingly becoming homeless. To add to the growing housing crisis, key inputs like timber, concrete and steel have all jumped in price and the current war in Ukraine is further complicating supply chains.

In 1989, the Labor Party established HomeStart Finance that remains one of only two government-backed mortgage lenders in Australia that helps low-income households to buy a home. Last Saturday, Labor announced a policy that will allow home purchases through HomeStart Finance with a 3% deposit. Previously, this low deposit option was only available as part of the HomeStart Graduate Loan and only for established properties. Under the new policy, non-graduates will be able to take advantage of the low deposit loan and use it for either building a new home or buying an established home. This will support the construction of new homes – where it is much easier to incorporate accessibility and sustainability features for which SACOSS advocates – while also freeing up established homes for the rental market.

SA Labor's public housing policy is due for release in coming days but I am pleased to advise that it will include more than \$180 million in additional funding for the South Australian Housing Trust (SAHT). This will build hundreds of new homes and bring hundreds of existing vacant homes back up to standard so that they can again be a home for those in need. At a recent discussion with SACOSS, I undertook that there would be no further net reductions of public housing under a Labor Government.

Labor will also work with the SAHT on prioritising maintenance expenditure toward greater energy efficiency in public housing noting that, in our previous term of government, significant investments were made in more modern water heaters, sealing gaps in doors and window frames along with installing insulation and low-flow water devices. Labor also initiated the Virtual Power Plant with a vision to place solar panels on 50,000 homes — half of which were to be public housing.

While South Australia historically had a very high rate of public housing, and continues to have a higher rate than most jurisdictions, there has been an underinvestment in public housing by both sides of politics. When the Liberals were last in government, around 12,000 public housing properties disappeared in 8 years – an average of 1,500 per year. This period included a reduction of almost 3,000 homes in a single year when Rob Lucas was Treasurer for the first time.

While there were also public housing reductions under Labor – at around a third of the rate that we saw under the Liberals in the 1990s and early 2000s – there was also significant investment and innovation. Social housing tenants were offered a special product – the EquityStart Loan – that saw around 1,500 buy their own home. Half of the proceeds from the first 1,000 EquityStart house sales were partnered with contributions from community organisations to deliver hundreds of new homes under the Affordable Housing Innovations Fund (AHIF).

In partnership with the Federal Labor Government at the time, more than \$700 million in stimulus and National Partnership funds were invested in new land and buildings for social housing from the Adelaide CBD to the APY Lands. Under Labor, the SAHT adopted a target for at least 75% of new public housing to include various accessibility and sustainability features and the outcome often exceeded 90%. In Labor's last term of government, Community Housing Providers were also supported through the long-term transfer of thousands of public housing properties.

Sadly, the Liberal Government's current housing strategy is underpinned by building and then selling 1,000 "affordable" homes that are out of reach for people on low incomes. Even worse, these sales include divestment of critical land that could otherwise be used for new public housing.

With regard to energy efficiency ratings or standards in rental properties, the call for higher standards is being made in parallel to proposed changes to the National Construction Code (NCC) that would require higher levels of accessibility in new homes. While the Liberal Party has reportedly rejected implementing the proposed NCC accessibility standards, Labor will consider the issue of housing standards – including efficiency, sustainability and accessibility – from government in consultation with all stakeholders. The decisions we make about our homes, and the investments we make in them, will be with us for the next fifty to one hundred years so it's critical that we get these right.

I note that SACOSS has also called for an increase to a concession for renters and I will address this later in my response to other concessions policy proposals.

Digital Inclusion

As noted in our recent *Pre-Election Couch Series* discussion, Labor does not have specific a 2022 election policy to increase digital inclusion. This does not diminish the importance of digital inclusion and I acknowledge that it is a matter that has been raised by various stakeholders.

Prior to Covid, it had been highlighted that older people and people with disability were being disproportionately impacted by the 'digital by default' position of both government and businesses. While online transactions are incredibly efficient and convenient for most of us, we need to make sure that these processes do not inadvertently further isolate people who may already face barriers to full participation in the community. This is one of the many reasons that Labor fought hard to stop the Liberals' planned closure of Service SA centres.

The Covid and post-Covid world relies on technology in ever greater ways from reducing the use of cash, to home schooling and holding many meetings online and I appreciate that this will increase calls for greater digital inclusion. Whilst we have no formal policy for the election, Labor's record in government shows our commitment to expanding access to data and technology along with reducing the cost of utilities.

In 2017, Labor established an energy supply deal – after holding an expression of interest process with retailers – specifically for people who receive state government concessions. Subject to interest from retailers, a similar approach may be considered regarding access to data. In the same year, Labor established Australia's first free Wi-Fi network in a capital city. This was one of those great initiatives that helped everyone from business and tourists to public transport passengers and the homeless.

In government, Labor funded – and went to 2018 election promising – laptops for high school students but this was cut from budget by the Liberals. Labor also established a program to improve school software systems and improve the speed of data connections in our educational institutions.

Concessions

SACOSS has requested a range of new concession policies including a review to improve consistency and targeting along with changes to the eligibility criteria and rates of payment for a range of concessions.

Labor's concession policy will be released in coming days but I am pleased to advise that it will include an increase in payment rates. Consistent with my commitment at the recent discussion with SACOSS, Labor will also undertake a review of the concessions system.

Labor recently announced an extension of the public transport concessions for seniors – at a cost of more than \$5 million over the forward estimates – who will be able to travel all day every day for free under a Labor government.

On a related matter, Labor has committed to no new privatisations of public services and to bring control and management of our trains and trams back into public hands. We have also committed to establishing a Parliamentary Committee to investigate the return of bus services to public control. Too often, promises of lower costs and better services through privatisation have not been realised. This has the greatest negative impact on those who rely on public services and concessions – including many people with low income or other barriers to community participation.

Concessions form part of broader policy discussion that covers income, whether from social security or wages, and how this meets the cost of living. This issue is further complicated by the involvement of different levels of government that influence wages, social security, concessions and other services. SA Labor will stand up for South Australians in discussions with the federal government — regardless of which party wins the upcoming federal election. Our industrial relations policy also includes critical reforms such as criminalising wage theft to better protect the income of low-paid and vulnerable workers. Whilst I will discuss it further later, we are also committing to expanding portable long service leave so that more workers can retain their accrued benefits in a labour market where fewer people stay with the one employer for many years.

Public Health

The SACOSS election policy document asks for public health policies across a range of areas: health promotion and disease prevention; a floor price to reduce damaging alcohol consumption; monitoring, reporting and evidence-based interventions regarding health inequities; cessation of unhealthy advertising on public property; a revision of the Right Bite strategy; support for the Health Performance Council; and an extension of ambulance concessions.

In government and opposition, Labor has been a champion of both public health and primary care. Our election policies that have been released to date include historic investments in our health system – largely built on a deliberate choice to **not** spend \$662 million on a basketball stadium. Under a Labor Government, this money will be invested into health and we have already committed to 100 additional doctors, 300 additional nurses, 300 additional beds plus new ambulance stations and 350 extra ambulance officers. While these commitments focus on primary care, the two aspects of our health system – public and primary – share a range of functions and outcomes.

In recent years, we have seen too many people simply unable to access the health care they deserve when ambulances don't arrive or they spend hours ramped outside a hospital. Once they get into emergency departments, they then face major delays to be admitted. This has had a disproportionate impact on people who rely more heavily on the public health system – people with low income, those with comorbidities and people from higher risk groups including older people and Aboriginal South Australians.

I am pleased that Chris Picton, our next Minister for Health, has a background in critical public health initiatives including the former federal Labor Government's move to require plain packaging on tobacco. I expect that, in government, Chris will bring forward a range of public health proposals to improve what we consume, the advertising that influences us and the choices we make about physical activity and exposure to harm. Chris and I both share an understanding of the social determinants of health that cut across all parts of government from income and housing to education, family, work and social relationships.

The reality is that the social conditions in which people are born, live and work is the single most important determinant of good health or ill health. For example, the life expectancy of a man born on the APY Lands is only slightly more than half of the life expectancy of people born in Adelaide. That is why we have committed \$5.2 million over four years to fund the full implementation of Gayle's Law that will improve the safety of remote nursing staff and ensure that clinical health services continue on the APY Lands. Together with Federal Labor, we are also investing more than \$15 million to completely replace the Yadu Health building in Ceduna that services

thousands Aboriginal people every year along our far west coast. This service currently occupies a building that is partially condemned, has crumbling asbestos and water leaks around live electrical cables. The Liberals – both state and federal – have failed to fund its replacement despite desperate pleas for help.

With regard to alcohol, Labor has not committed to a floor price but we have committed to proper consultation before any further changes are made to liquor licencing laws in South Australia. In 2021, the Liberal Party introduced a Bill to reform liquor licencing that managed a rare achievement by unifying both public health advocates and representatives of liquor licensees in their opposition to the legislation. Both groups protested about the lack of consultation and that the reforms lacked sufficient safeguards to minimise potential harm to the community.

The health, wellbeing and development of children has been central to Labor policy for decades. The Right Bite Healthy Food and Drink Supply Strategy for schools and preschools was launched by Labor in 2008 and, if elected, we will ask the department to report on its progress and any opportunities to improve nutrition.

Labor had made two key commitments to improving the health, wellbeing and future prospects of our children. We will hold a Royal Commission into fully-funded preschool for children starting at age 3 along with extending care hours to align with the needs of modern families. Providing education and care earlier, and helping families by aligning work and care ours, has huge potential to improve the future for generations of South Australians. Labor has also committed \$50 million to employ a central pool of 100 new mental health and learning support specialists to be deployed to primary and secondary schools. This will provide the kind of timely support students so desperately need, as well as guidance for school staff on how to provide ongoing assistance for children.

With regard to supporting the Health Performance Council (HPC) and reporting of health data, the Liberal Party moved legislation to disband the HPC and Labor worked with SACOSS to move amendments that would save it.

I also note that SACOSS has requested changes to the ambulance concession arrangements, and I have addressed concessions above.

Water

SACOSS has requested a range of water policy reforms including an expanded water security stocktake for remote communities, agreed basic service levels, community service obligations and the funding of Ministerial Directions.

The most important Labor commitment to water in 2022 is that we will pass legislation to stop the privatisation of SA Water. This will help to ensure safe and affordable water across South Australia.

For remote Aboriginal communities, SA Labor has made a public commitment to a state-based implementation of the Uluru Statement from the Heart including Voice, Truth and Treaty. We will work with individual communities and Nations on agreements under a Treaty Process that may cover a range of services and polices. In contrast, Steven Marshall described Treaty as a "cruel hoax" and cancelled the Treaty process in SA when he was elected

SA Labor has also secured a commitment for \$500,000 from Federal Labor to investigate the ongoing issues of water supply in Scotdesco on the far west coast.

While we already have remote communities that struggle to access clean and safe water, many more South Australians face uncertainty about water from ongoing threats to the River Murray from both climate change and poor management.

Labor's plan for the Murray – that will help to underpin the future water security of South Australia – will:

- act on every recommendation of the Murray-Darling Royal Commission 2019
- reverse the Marshall Liberal government endorsement of complex criteria restricting the funding of water efficiency projects up-river
- engage with Aboriginal people on their water needs and interests
- appoint an eminent jurist to be the Commissioner for the River Murray in SA.
 The Commissioner will report annually to parliament, will deal with the Murray-Darling Basin Authority, will advise the government and will be someone who irrigators, environmentalists and communities can work with on their challenges in in water management. (\$2m over four years.)
- prepare for legal action to defend our water rights against the inaction and negligence of the Australian and eastern states' governments
- appoint a South Australian to the Murray-Darling Basin Authority Board
- replace the former National Party Member of Parliament as Inspector General of Water Compliance with an expert with no political affiliations
- instigate an immediate scientific review of the water necessary to be allocated to South Australia given the latest in climate science
- ensure that the Australian government takes responsibility for the delivery of the 450GL for South Australia's end of the River Murray in the face of eastern

- states' refusal to cooperate in its delivery (through voluntary water buy-back if necessary).
- remove the Barnaby Joyce cap on voluntary water sales by willing sellers to achieve environmental flows in the Plan.

Protection and Support

SACOSS has requested 14 policy commitments under a broad banner of 'protection and support'. Noting that these don't fall into grouped categories that may link to other policy announcements, I will address them individually.

1. Commit to passing legislation to raise the age of criminal responsibility from 10 to at least 14 years of age, without exception.

A national position is forming around changing the age of criminal responsibility to 12 with some exceptions and this is broadly consistent with the recommendations of a Northern Territory Royal Commission that considered this matter. In government, Labor will work with other states and territories on establishing a nationally consistent age of criminal responsibility.

2. Provide more detail and regular public reporting about meeting Closing the Gap commitments to reduce by 2031 the incarceration of young and adult Aboriginal people by 30% and 15% respectively.

As noted earlier, SA Labor has committed to a state-based implementation of the Uluru Statement from the Heart including Voice, Treaty and Truth. We have also committed to enshrining the Nunga Court (Aboriginal Sentencing Court) into law. Both of these initiatives provide opportunities to better understand, report on and address rates of Aboriginal incarceration.

3. Provide the option of extended care from 18 to 21 years for all young people leaving care, including residential care.

Labor will be releasing its detailed Child Protection policy in coming days but I note that our Shadow Minister for Child Protection, Katrine Hildyard, recently spoke with SACOSS about our commitment to child protection. Labor will put every effort into breaking the cycle of disadvantage for young people with challenges at home. That means supporting families to stay together where possible, supporting children in care to participate in the community and guiding young people as they leave care.

SA Labor supported the extension of assistance to young people in family based care to the age of 21 in 2019 and we also support the recently commenced trial

to extend similar assistance to young people in residential care. We look forward to the outcomes of the trial and then considering the best way forward for assisting these young people as they transition out of care.

In the interim, as part of our 2022 election policies, Labor will commit additional funding to Elm Place that provides vital services to those whose lives have been affected by institutional and out-of-home care as children. This will help Elm Place to ensure they are reaching all care-leavers to offer and provide the supports that will help them break the cycle.

4. Review the impact on service access and service use of the imposition of fees for the Communication Partner Service in police interviews and court hearings.

In its last term of government, Labor made a number of reforms to help vulnerable people in the justice system. This included the introduction of the Communication Partner model in 2016 as part of the *Disability Justice Plan*. This aimed to assist persons with complex communication needs, whether suspects, defendants, victims or witnesses.

The South Australian Law Reform Institute released a major report in November 2021 - *Providing a Voice to the Vulnerable: A Study of Communication Assistance in South Australia.* The report runs to 520 pages and contains 51 recommendations with many of these related to the funding, legislation, policy, promotion and culture associated with Communication Partners. In government, Labor will consider the recommendations – a process that will be greatly assisted by departmental resources – and engage with stakeholders in good faith.

The need for improvement in our court system was highlighted in the most recent Report on Government Services that revealed hundreds of requests for Pitjantjatjara court interpreters go unanswered every year. Labor funded a South Australian Aboriginal Interpreter Service in 2017 but, sadly, the initiative sat on Steven Marshalls' Aboriginal Affairs Action Plan for years without being implemented. Responsibility for the initiative was handballed from Steven Marshall's own department to the Department for Human Services after it was not progressed by the agency with responsibility for Aboriginal Affairs and Reconciliation.

5. Remove the \$20.90 charge imposed on payment plans for state government fines. Remove the Victims of Crime Levy on expiation notices for those in receipt of Centrelink payments or SA government concessions.

As noted earlier, A Labor government will undertake a broad review of concessions that will consider a range of cost impacts on, and supports for, low-income South Australia households.

6. Review eligibility criteria for Emergency Electricity Payment Scheme (EEPS) with a view to raising the debt cap and ensuring those on hardship programs are not prevented from eligibility or referral.

As noted earlier, A Labor government will undertake a broad review of concessions that will consider a range of cost impacts on, and supports for, low-income South Australia households.

- 7. Require all energy retailers to participate in pre-disconnection for non-payment site visit programs for all customers, irrespective of meter type. and
- 8. Legislate to void any requirement for mandatory gas connections in new residential developments.

As noted earlier, Labor will consider the issue of housing standards – including efficiency, sustainability and accessibility – from government in consultation with all stakeholders. We are also committed to a broad review of the concessions system. Matters relating to utility connection and disconnection may form part of these processes.

9. Implement a percentage-based concession scheme for home, contents, and vehicle insurance for people on low income and resource non-government organisations to facilitate access to the concessions for communities that would benefit

As noted earlier, A Labor government will undertake a broad review of concessions that will consider a range of cost impacts on, and supports for, low-income South Australia households.

10. Establish and fund a disaster resilience and risk reduction fund to be managed by the People at Risk in Emergencies Action Group

The National Strategy for Disaster Resilience was endorsed by the Council of Australian Governments in February 2011 and South Australia's local strategy runs from 2019 to 2024. As reported in early February, Labor is supportive of a review of the Emergency Management Act 2004 and we will consider this SACOSS proposal in the ongoing monitoring and review of the South Australian disaster resilience strategy.

11. Amend the Climate Change and Greenhouse Emissions Reduction Act 2007 to include a representative of the non-government health and community services sector on the Premier's Climate Change Council, with the appointment to be made after consultation with SACOSS

Labor is committed to updating the Act and will consult with stakeholders about a range of potential amendments including sector representation.

12. Legislate and provide seed-funding for a portable long service leave scheme for all SCHADS workers in SA.

SA Labor's industrial relations policy includes the commitment that we will consult with workers, unions and businesses to expand our portable long service leave system – modelled on the Construction Industry Long Service Leave Board. This will be underpinned by an investment of \$1.5 million in this and other initiatives to increase safety and fairness at work.

13. Fix the definition of electoral matters and political expenditure in the Electoral Act, and/or exempt ACNC-regulated charities from SA election expenditure disclosure.

The Liberal Government introduced a bill to amend the law regarding electoral funding and disclosure on 9 June 2021 when the relevant funding period commenced just three weeks later on 1 July. Labor objected to the bill on the basis that, if passed, it would have been implemented during a legislated funding period that would have already commenced. This stands in stark contrast to Labor's previous approach to legislation on electoral funding that provided a lengthy period for debate on the legislation and for affected groups to plan for the changes. Labor acknowledges the need for a range of changes to electoral laws and will consider the SACOSS proposal along with proposals from other stakeholders and any recommendations arising the Electoral Commissioner's review of the 2022 election.

14. Implement a broad-based, collaborative review of the Associations Incorporation Act.

Labor acknowledges the concerns of various organisations – particularly peak bodies and not-for-profits – about statutory limitations and regulatory requirements that may be disproportionate or poorly targeted. We welcome the contribution of SACOSS and other organisations in proposing changes to legislation and Labor will work collaboratively with all stakeholders in the ongoing review and updating of legislation.

In closing, I again reiterate my thanks to SACOSS for you work in advocacy, policy development and educating the community about the critical role of social services in our community. I look forward to working with you as the leader of a Labor government that supports South Australians in need.

Yours sincerely,

Peter Malinauskas

Ph

Labor Leader

March 2022



Ross Womersley Chief Executive Officer SACOSS

E: ross@sacoss.org.au

Dear Mr Womersley,

2 March 2022

Thank you for the opportunity to provide further information on Labor's commitments to preventative health, performance oversight, and independent patient advocacy.

Independent Prevention Agency

Currently South Australia has no dedicated independent government agency focused on health prevention.

Labor will reallocate resources to create a new and independent agency, Preventative Health SA, with a mandate to develop evidence based programs and policies to keep South Australians healthy.

Priorities for Preventative Health SA will include action to address tobacco, alcohol, obesity and mental health.

Healthier environments for children

The new independent prevention agency will be asked to develop policy proposals to improve healthier public environments for all children, particularly in relation to the promotion of healthy diets and re-instigating the Rite Bite strategy that was developed under the previous government but has lacked momentum over the past four years.

In addition Labor has made significant commitments to address prevention and early intervention for childhood mental health, including 100 additional mental health and early intervention workers in schools.

Health in all policies

More than a decade ago, Labor rolled out world leading 'health in all policies' – calling on all areas of government to consider their impact on South Australians' health and wellbeing.

Labor will restore and enhance the momentum of 'health in all policies', calling on all areas of government to focus on health promotion and prevention and to address the social determinants of health.

Public health workforce

We sadly have not seen comprehensive planning for any of our health workforce, and the public health workforce is no exception.

Labor in Government will commit to properly planning for the public health workforce, as part of planning for workforce in all areas of health.

Preventive Health SA will review the current state of the public health workforce in South Australia and will provide advice to government on actions to address education, training and career pathways.

Independent monitoring the performance of the health of the population and health status

Having information about the performance of our health services is vital to improving those services. It's critical that information is accurate, and readily available to our clinicians and researchers.

Unfortunately, clinicians and researchers alike have found SA Health data at times inaccurate, and often difficult to access.

Labor created the Health Performance Council and strongly believes in its importance as an oversight over both the health system and the health status of South Australians generally.

Labor led the fight to stop the Liberals attempts to abolish the Health Performance Council – and in Government we are committed to keeping the Council and strengthening its role.

The Council will maintain its role as an independent body enshrined in law – giving it the independence to inquire into the performance of health services free of government interference.

Importantly Labor wants to improve the Council's role in the provision of independent data on the health of South Australians, in a more readily accessible format for researchers and the general public. This would involve providing and reporting on data on both health status but also health inequalities across SA.

Independent health consumer and patient advocacy

The Liberals cut all funding out of the Health Consumers Alliance, forcing the organisation to close and leaving South Australia the only state without an independent patient voice.

Labor believes in re-establishing a strong and independent voice for South Australian patients.

We further recognise the importance of developments in our health system being guided by lived experience and embedding peer workers within health services.

A Malinauskas Labor Government will invest \$800,000 over four years to reestablish an independent patient voice.

Labor also believes in a strong advocacy voice specifically for mental health patients.

And we know how important it is that changes to the mental health system are guided by South Australians with lived experience.

We need a strong, dedicated mental health advocacy body that elevates the voices of people who have lived through the system.

Labor will invest and additional \$800,000 over four years to boost mental health voices, with funding for the Lived Experience Leadership and Advocacy Network.

This four-year funding guarantee will allow LELAN to employ more staff and expand their work making sure mental health services put people first.

These commitments are just part of our comprehensive set of health policies that Labor is taking to the state election. You can read our other policies at www.forthefuture.com.au

Once again thank you for the opportunity to provide further feedback to SACOSS' 2022 election submission. I look forward to continuing our valuable relationship with SACOSS well into the future.

Yours sincerely,

Chris Picton MP

Shadow Minister for Health and Wellbeing