



CONNIE BONAROS MLC
FRANK PANGALLO MLC
Members of the Legislative Council
Parliament of South Australia

Mr Ross Womersley
CEO
SACOSS

Via Email – sacoss@sacoss.org.au

Dear Mr Womersley

Re: SACOSS Cover the Basics Campaign and Election Report Card

Thank you for providing SA-BEST with SACOSS' *Cover the Basics Campaign and Election Report Card*, and for meeting with us to outline your policy positions across the five key priority areas SACOSS has identified.

We are pleased to provide you with our response to these and have provided more detailed information regarding the policy positions that would require legislation.

As SA-BEST Members of the Legislative Council, we will continue to be very strong and proactive advocates in the policy areas identified by SACOSS, just as they have been in the current Parliament.

We are strongly committed to ensuring that all South Australians have their basic needs met, especially as we all deal with the effects of, and recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic that has only increased inequality, and contributed to low incomes and job insecurity, and poor mental and physical health.

We would like to highlight to SACOSS members the significant influence SA-BEST has had in the 54th Parliament. As you note some legislation can only be progressed by Government but SA-BEST has a strong track record of having a major legislative impact and "boxing well beyond our weight".

The following private members bills were introduced by SA-BEST and passed both houses of parliament during this session and were given assent:

- *Independent Commissioner Against Corruption (CPIPC Recommendations) Amendment Bill 2021*;
- *Dangerous Substances (LPG Cylinder Labelling) Amendment Bill 2021*;
- *Statutes Amendment (Spit Hood Prohibition) Bill 2021*; and
- *Criminal Law Consolidation (Child-Like Sex Dolls Prohibition) Amendment Bill 2019*.

The following Private Members bill's were introduced by SA-BEST but only passed the Legislative Council and did not progress in the House of Assembly during this session.

The provisions of some were progressed in government bills that were subsequently passed:

- Statutes Amendment (Free Menstrual Hygiene Products Pilot Program) Bill 2020;
- Gender Equality Bill 2021;
- Road Traffic (South Eastern Freeway Offences) Amendment Bill 2020;
- Automatic External Defibrillators (Public Access) Bill 2020, and;
- Fuel Watch (No 2) Bill 2020.

The following Private Member's bills introduced by SA-BEST were not progressed in the Legislative Council, but again many of these provisions were adopted into government bills to achieve the same outcome:

- *Assisted Reproductive Treatment (Review Recommendations) Amendment Bill 2020*;
- *Coroners (Miscellaneous) Amendment Bill 2020*;
- *Statutes Amendment (Mandatory Reporting) Bill 2020*;
- *Southern State Superannuation (Choice of Fund) Amendment Bill 2020*;
- *Road Traffic (Drug Screening) Amendment Bill 2020*;
- *Criminal Law Consolidation (Stealthings) Amendment Bill 2021*;
- *Education and Children's Services (Mobile Phones in Schools) Amendment Bill 2021* – not progress yet;
- *Tobacco and E-Cigarette Products (Importing and Packing of Tobacco Products) Amendment Bill 2021*; and
- *Return to Work (Post Traumatic Stress Disorder) Amendment Bill 2020* – not progressed yet.

SA-BEST has spoken on most government, Opposition and Private Member's bills before the Legislative Council for review and consideration, including the *Voluntary Assisted Dying Bill 2021* and the COVID-19 Pandemic Emergency measures.

SA-BEST has really valued the expert submissions SACOSS has provided regarding legislation under development and consideration, and look forward to continuing this very constructive and helpful relationship.

We welcome your request for our response to your Cover the Basics Campaign and Election Report Card and invite you to circulate it to your members and the media.

Yours sincerely,



Hon Connie Bonaros MLC
10 March 2022



Hon Frank Pangallo MLC

Rental Affordability

1.1 Make a significant new investment to increase the net stock of public housing (investment to be at least equal to the Victorian package: pro rata = \$1.4bn over 4 years)

SA-BEST strongly supports the need to substantially increase public housing. To do this we advocate for a significant increase in expenditure on public housing construction and upgrades, to address the huge public housing list.

We strongly support a massive boost to investment in public housing, over a prolonged period.

We would call for annual targets for new construction and upgrades that must be met annually, over a period of at least five years, and a fast tracking of new projects.

We also oppose any further selling off or disposing of public housing and land that decreases the public housing estate any further.

We need to ensure private developments on public land do not only support middle income earners, but rather provide a proportion of real public housing, and a minimum of real affordable housing, to those on low to very low incomes.

SA-BEST is being continually made aware of public housing being not maintained and vacant, or people being forced from their public housing of many years against their wishes. This is at a time when private rental markets and home ownership are beyond the reach of many, with no relief to the current housing shortage in sight. We call for such transitions to be handled much more sensitively and collaboratively with the tenants involved.

We strongly support new and different models of public housing for single and/ or older residents to secure long term housing for those who do not require a larger home, but will not be able to enter the private market.

1.2 Implement minimum energy efficiency standards for private and public rental properties, and mandatory disclosure of energy efficiency ratings for all rental properties in South Australia

Subject to consultation with relevant stakeholders.

1.3 Commit additional funding of \$64 million over four years for Housing SA and other community-based organisations to deliver a targeted energy efficiency program for public and community housing tenants

SA-BEST strongly supports equitable access to the benefits of energy efficiency initiatives, including home based solar and battery systems on public housing. We do not want to see public housing residents denied the savings home owners can achieve from home renewable energy systems.

1.4 Increase the renter payment rate of the Cost of Living concession to the homeowner level

SA-BEST strongly supports equitable payment of the cost of living concession so the homeowner and renter payment rate are the same.

SA-BEST has developed a very comprehensive policy regarding concessions to older people and health care card holders, see attached.

Digital Inclusion

2.1 Commit to a set of digital inclusion goals or benchmarks

SA-BEST strongly supports SACOSS' digital inclusion goals and benchmarks so all South Australians have access to internet connection and devices so that they are able to adequately access information and services from wherever they are, in the metropolitan area or the regions. We are particularly concerned that older people and people with a disability are provided with the necessary training, support and equipment they may need to use this technology and thus connect to essential services. At the same time SA-BEST calls for the retention of bricks and mortar face to face services as also essential.

We have supported the provision of devices to disadvantaged children in the past and we now in this pandemic environment advocate for all secondary school students to be guaranteed access to devices and data at home.

2.2 Commit to a significant (\$120m) state government investment to implement a strategy to reach those goals

SA-BEST will support an increased state government investment to achieve this access.

Concessions

3.1 Initiate a broad review of the concession system as a whole to ensure consistency, proper targeting and ease of access across the system

SA-BEST strongly supports a full review of concessions. We conducted our own research and found that South Australia has one of the most limited range and scope of concessions of any jurisdiction. We will strongly agitate for this in the new parliament.

If the government or opposition will not legislate some of these important changes, SA-BEST has already committed to do so.

3.2 Extend all concessions available to age pension recipients to other Centrelink recipients receiving lower payments (e.g. driver's licence and motor vehicle concessions, and Ambulance Cover)

Please see our concessions policy that extends the concessions currently available to older South Australians who hold concession cards. We would need to see the detail of extending this to all Centrelink payment recipients across the board, but would be amenable to there being discounts applied to those in financial hardship.

3.3 Implement for all concessions an additional low-income eligibility criteria which is not based on receipt of Centrelink benefits

As above we have developed a detailed concessions policy for older South Australians and would be amenable to looking at other eligibility criteria to enable people on low incomes who may not hold those concession cards, to qualify for more concessions.

3.4 Ten specific concessions proposals

SA-BEST strongly supports expanded concessions and has included most of these in our recently announced concession policy. We would be very pleased to expand it further to school children and young people and asylum seekers who do not have the standard concession cards to claim eligibility.

Public Health

4.1 Increase public health, disease prevention and health promotion expenditure to 5% of the health budget

As you are no doubt aware, SA-BEST has been the loudest voice in the Legislative Council and in the various relevant committees calling for an increase in public health and disease prevention expenditure, and we would similarly support an increase in health promotion expenditure.

We would like to see a lot more funding directed to the excellent preventative strategies that we know from research carried out here in South Australia by the Public Health Consortium partners that if we are able to limit consumption of alcohol and thus alcohol related harms, stem the use of tobacco and discourage and prevent substance abuse more broadly, then this upfront investment pays huge dividends further along the health system. We strongly support early intervention mental health, diversion and rehabilitation programmes.

4.2 Build the capacity of the public health workforce

The COVID-19 pandemic has exposed more cracks in our health care system. Now is the time to learn from our mistakes and future proof our public health system – starting with building the capacity of the public health workforce.

For too long we have watched our bright graduates disappear interstate for better job opportunities and a depletion of skills and expertise as graduates and mid-career professionals bore the brunt of job cuts and insecure work.

SA-BEST supports a comprehensive review of the preventative health workforce in South Australia with a focus on immediate investment in dedicated training and development programs to ensure we are prepared for our future challenges.

SA-BEST has been a tireless campaigner for a larger and more highly trained and skilled public health workforce in the hospital and aged care systems. We will continue to advocate for this.

SA-BEST has also announced that it would establish a rebate of HECS Scheme for graduates who move to regional areas with skills shortages, especially those in the public health sector like doctors, nurses and specialists.

4.3 Introduce a floor price for cheap alcohol

SA-BEST is fully committed to reducing the level of alcohol related harm in South Australia. We are particularly concerned about the direct correlation between alcohol and domestic and family violence which is unacceptably prevalent in our communities.

The World Health Organisation recognises price as a proven alcohol prevention measure and a nationwide Minimum Unit Pricing ('MUP') has long been advocated for by the Alcohol and Drug Foundation.

SA-BEST is supportive of MUP for alcohol sold or offered for sale in South Australia as a measure for minimising alcohol harm. Since the introduction of a MUP of \$1.30 per standard drink in the Northern Territory in October 2018, the early signs are promising with a reduction in the sale of cask wine.

4.4 Establish independent state-wide monitoring for health inequalities

Health inequities are avoidable yet where someone lives, what language they speak, educational attainment, employment and disability continues to determine health outcomes. COVID-19 has further exposed the health inequality divide.

SA-BEST recognises the need for accurate and timely data to guide policy and operational systems to help bridge these gaps.

SA-BEST was instrumental in the retention of the Health Performance Council in 2020 when the government attempted to introduce legislation to dissolve it. As an independent body, a well-resourced and supported Health Performance Council is well placed to collect, coordinate and report on data to identify and address trends for better health outcomes.

4.5 Create healthier environments for children, particularly in relation to healthy diets

One in four children in Australia are overweight or obese. Two in three children don't get enough physical activity, and most don't eat enough fruit and vegetables.

Predatory junk food advertising is setting our kids up for a lifetime of bad habits and preventable ill-health. Urgent measures are needed to restrict children's exposure to unhealthy food and drink marketing, branding and sponsorships.

SA-BEST strongly supports a legislated ban on the advertising of unhealthy food and drinks on state owned asset.

We further support a revision of the Right Bite strategy to set a mandated minimum of 60% of green category foods on school menus and a ban on red foods.

We hold real concerns about the bombardment of fast-food advertising at major sporting events and sponsorship by fast food outlets of local sporting leagues. We are committed to looking at strategies to curb children's exposure.

Other SACOSS health policy proposals

4.6 Ensure the continued provision of independent health research and data analysis through an adequately resourced Health Performance Council

See above SA-BEST's record of supporting the independent health research and data analysis of the Health Performance Council stands out as an example of our fierce advocacy and independence from the major parties.

4.7 Extend the Ambulance Cover concession for pensioners to all those on equivalent/lower incomes

See attached our draft concessions policy which extends free ambulance to this group and also those who are on the Seniors Health Care card as well as on a Pensioner Concession Card.

Water

5.1 Undertake detailed steps to ensure everyone in SA has access to safe and affordable water

SA-BEST is appalled that in 2022 access to safe potable water and water security are not givens for all South Australians. We would strongly support your initiatives.

5.2 Regulate for or commit to all Ministerial Directions for SA Water expenditure to be either funded directly from Treasury, or at least included in the regulatory review of SA Water's expenditure

SA-BEST would need more information about this proposal to understand it, but in principle we strongly support a regulatory review of SA Water's expenditure as well as their future plans.

5.3 Revise legislation governing water supply charges for renters to align with other states and make landlords responsible for water supply

Subject to consultation with relevant stakeholders.

Protection and Support

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

SA-BEST notes that this will be the focus of COAG efforts to nationally harmonise these laws and will support a full review of the age of criminal responsibility with a view to increasing it at least to the age of 12.

We will be mindful of the advice and information that stakeholders, research and NGOs like SACOSS provide us and will consult widely on any legislation introduced to effect a change to the age of criminal responsibility.

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

SA-BEST is appalled at the lack of action and impact on this important Closing the Gap target and notes that incarceration of young and adult Aboriginal people is increasing. We will strongly support not only more detailed and regular public reporting on these failures but also that there be accountability and responsibility to act and implement changes that will address this shocking statistic and loss of human potential in the criminal justice system.

6.1.3 Provide the option of extended care from 18 to at least 21 years for all young people leaving care, including those in residential care

SA-BEST supports the option of extended care as required.

Furthermore, SA-BEST supports the extension of support to young people in care to the age of 25 for those who need it, especially considering the long wait lists for services and lack of housing affordability faced by this vulnerable cohort.

Extending care leads to a higher level of engagement with education, improved employment outcomes, stable housing, reduced interaction with the criminal justice system and alcohol and drug dependency. It leads to better outcomes for both mental and physical health, ensures young people remain socially connected and helps address the intergenerational disadvantage often faced by young adults who have been in care as they navigate the developmental phase to adulthood.

6.1.4 Review the impact of the introduction of the 'fee for service' model on access to (and use of) the Communication Partner Service in police interviews and court hearings

SA-BEST would strongly support a review of this model. SA-BEST supports a model that provides free and immediate assistance from a Communication Partner Service that is not a commercial model to assist the most vulnerable in police interviews and court hearings. We also strongly support greater resourcing of the Legal Service of SA and ALRM to ensure that every apprehended person is given immediate legal assistance.

6.2.1 Remove the \$20.90 charge imposed on payment plans for state government fines

SA-BEST supports the removal of this cost from people who can least afford it.

6.2.2 Remove the Victims of Crime Levy on expiation notices for those in receipt of Centrelink payments or SA Government concessions

SA-BEST supports the removal of the Victims of Crime Levy on expiation notices for those in receipt of Centrelink payments or SA Government concessions as these additional payments only go to increase the hardship of paying the fines in the first instance and are likely to contribute to further fine defaults.

6.2.3 Review eligibility criteria for the 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

SA-BEST would need more detail on this proposal but support the principle involved, that is of not making it more difficult for those experiencing hardship to access the EEPS.

6.2.4 Require all retailers to participate in pre-disconnection for non-payment site visit programs for all customers, irrespective of meter type

SA-BEST supports this so that customers receive site visits and assistance so they do not experience lack of power or services.

6.2.5 Legislate to void any requirement for mandatory gas connections in new residential developments

Legislation to achieve this passed the Legislative Council late in 2021 and will be introduced to the new parliament no doubt. We would support this policy but would also support the mandatory provision of renewable energy options on new houses so that the new owners and or tenants can reap those benefits as well as being equipped for battery storage and electrical vehicle options in the future.

Climate change and disaster resilience

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

Recent disasters such as the South Australian bushfires and the Queensland floods have illustrated how the most financially disadvantaged community members were the hardest hit in that they were often unable to get insurance, or to afford insurance as there are no concessions or cheaper schemes. The premiums for example for contents insurance are often prohibitive.

SA-BEST will welcome any policies to assist South Australians and preparing for and recovering from climate change, natural disasters and other extreme events like the pandemic.

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

SA-BEST has called for a Royal Commission into our response to the COVID-19 pandemic and a comprehensive review of the *Emergency Management Act 2004* to ensure that we are better placed to deal with disasters, pandemics and other crisis situations. Establishing a fund such as this could be part of the recommendations of that review.

6.3.3 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

SA-BEST strongly supports these initiatives so that voices that may not be easily heard are seated at the table and their views taken into account and listened to.

Sector Support

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

SA-BEST will need more information to develop a final policy position on this. In principle we support superannuation portability but we need to make sure that any transferring of entitlements is fair to all concerned.

6.4.2 Fix the definition of electoral matters and political expenditure in the Electoral Act and or exempt ACNC regulated charities from SA election expenditure disclosure

As you know SA-BEST worked closely with SACOSS, the Conservation Council of SA and other cross bench members on amendments to the *Electoral (Funding, Expenditure and Disclosure) Amendment Bill 2021*. It is disappointing the Legislative Council passed that bill but the House of Assembly did not sit again to consider it before the election was called.

It will be a high priority for SA-BEST to call for substantial amendments to the *Electoral Act 1985* to properly define electoral matters and political expenditure (separate from policy advocacy) and exempt charities policy advocacy from the disclosure provisions, as well as to improve voting processes and address access issues like phone voting, electronic voting and pre poll voting.

SA-BEST has been exceptionally vocal on this topic and will continue our strong advocacy into the next parliament.

6.4.3 Implement a broad-based, collaborative review of the *Associations Incorporation Act*

SA-BEST believes this Act is well overdue for a comprehensive review and reform.