

19 January 2017

Budget Policy Division
Department of the Treasury
Langton Crescent
PARKES ACT 2600

UnitingCare Australia – 2017-18 Pre-Budget Submission

UnitingCare Australia appreciates the opportunity to provide a submission to the Australian Government's 2017-18 Budget.

UnitingCare Australia facilitates social investment through advocating for policies and services that strengthen people's capacities to participate in society to their full potential. We believe that economic policies should similarly reflect this focus on social investment to achieve a strong and thriving Australia.

Well developed social investment policy to support older people, children and families, jobseekers, people from diverse backgrounds, people with disability and people at risk of homelessness, benefits the entire community.

We acknowledge that our country currently faces economic challenges, but believe the economy needs to have capacity to support strong social investment should be a Government priority. We believe that maintaining this capacity can be achieved through improving Government revenue without adversely impacting those in need.

This submission identifies a number of focus areas and strategies for the Federal Budget 2017-18 to improve the Australian economy and the wellbeing of the broader community. These areas include:

- Tax and Transfer
- Aged Care
- Early Childhood Education and Care
- Employment
- Disability
- Housing and homelessness
- Supporting high quality Community Services
- National Redress Scheme
- Gambling

1 Tax and Transfer

UnitingCare Australia believes it is critical to reform the tax system to ensure it is fair, equitable and adequately funds the services the community requires without adversely impacting those in need. A strong focus needs to be placed on aligning economic growth, fiscal discipline and equitable public policy.

We support a process of comprehensive tax reform that is aimed at improving the efficiency and stability of the tax system so it raises sufficient revenue and is focussed on sustainable growth. Reform of the tax system must be sufficiently comprehensive to recognise that the payment system itself is part of a wider social services system. We support the alignment of payment to rates that reflect need. Additional tax revenue must be generated from those most able to pay. Similarly, tax concessions should not be directed towards wealthy individuals and companies.

2 Aged Care

Continued Government and sector collaboration is needed to develop and implement an aged care funding model that is sustainable and stable. The model must enable aged care providers to deliver high quality services that meet the needs of consumers, facilitate planning for future services and maintain a professional and committed workforce.

The Government needs to invest sufficiently to ensure there are not unacceptably long waiting times for consumers to access home based care, including high level care packages.

It is also critical that the Government boost its efforts to ensure that aged care consumers are well informed and empowered to understand the care and service options available to them as part of consumer directed care.

We again call on Government to work with the aged care sector to design and implement a workforce development strategy to ensure the delivery of high quality care to older members of the community.

We emphasise the need for adequate funding that ensures the system is resourced to care for the chronically ill in residential aged care rather than impact on other parts of the health system such as hospitals.

3 Early Childhood Education and Care

Early investment in children and families breaks the intergenerational cycle of welfare and prevents young people from entering the welfare system. We call on the Government to provide funding to resource initiatives identified in the *Third Action Plan of the National Framework for the Protection of Australia's Children*.

We support the National Quality Framework and continuation of funding for universal access to early childhood education for all Australian children. This includes a childcare

package that allows access to two days per week of quality early learning for all children, with priority for low income and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children. Funding should not be conditional on savings in other areas that will impact vulnerable people. Additional funding should be made available for the inclusion and support of children experiencing disadvantage and strengthening workforce capacity to respond to increasingly diverse needs.

4 Employment

We support continued investment in innovative pathways to assist people to move into sustained employment. Initiatives such as *Launch to Work*, the *Try, Test and Learn Fund*, *Disability Employment Programmes* and *Youth Jobs PaTH Programme* should be fully developed, refined if necessary and maintained. As indicated in our submission to the Senate inquiry, it is important that vulnerable young people are not exploited in employment programmes and that working conditions and pay are fair.

5 Disability

We support a client safe, quality NDIS that is adequately funded in its own right and accessible to all people who are eligible. We do not support funding the Scheme through cuts to programmes to support people in need, particularly those with a disability including mental illness.

6 Housing and Homelessness

We support the development and adequate resourcing for future implementation of a comprehensive national strategy to address both homelessness and housing affordability. This strategy should be developed in collaboration with the States and Territories and the sector. Participation should also be sought from the private sector and researchers, particularly to encourage innovation.

Given that the 2016 Rental Affordability snapshot found that just 0.5% of rental properties advertised on the weekend of 2 and 3 April were affordable for single people living on a Disability Support Pension anywhere in Australia, we also advocate for increased support for disability housing.

7 Supporting high quality Community Services

We believe that efficiencies can be gained through long term grants that can ensure service providers have adequate time to set up, deliver and quality assure service delivery. We support a minimum of three year funding agreements with the opportunity for five year grants for services and providers that consistently meet deliverables.

8 National Redress Scheme

UnitingCare Australia welcomes and supports a sustainable National Redress Scheme. This Scheme must remain a high priority for the Government and be adequately resourced.

9 Gambling

UnitingCare Australia welcomes the Government initiatives addressing problematic online gambling and calls for further reforms in relation to advertising sports gambling and reducing the harmful impact of poker machine gambling.

Conclusion

UnitingCare Australia views the 2017-18 Budget as the fundamental vehicle through which the Government can continue to get the economy back on track while building strong foundation for social investment. While this will require a long term approach it will result in a more resilient nation. We appreciate the importance of fiscal repair, but emphasise it must be achieved with social and community goals in mind, not just economic.

We would be pleased to provide further commentary on the recommendations made in this submission. Please contact Claerwen Little, incoming National Director or Fay Mound, Manager Relationships Advocacy and Policy on 02 6249 6717.

Yours faithfully



Peter Bicknell
Chair
UnitingCare Australia

UnitingCare Australia is the national body for the UnitingCare Network, one of the largest providers of community services in Australia. With over 1,600 sites, the network employs 40,000 staff and is supported by the work of over 30,000 volunteers. We provide services to children, young people and families, Indigenous Australians, people with disabilities, the poor and disadvantaged, people from culturally diverse backgrounds and older Australians in urban, rural and remote communities.

UnitingCare Australia works with and on behalf of the UnitingCare Network to advocate for policies and programs that will improve people's quality of life.

UnitingCare Australia is committed to speaking with and on behalf of those who are the most vulnerable and disadvantaged.