

MEDIA RELEASE

For immediate release

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A more socially inclusive Australia

Anglican Community care is cautiously optimistic with the new Government's first budget to realise its stated aim of integrating social and economic participation.

'We are, of course, fully aware of the difficult circumstances in which this budget has had to be crafted,' said Chief Executive Officer, Rob Foggo.

'Economic conditions have changed quite dramatically since the November election, with a graver threat of inflation and the international financial crisis. This has led, among other things, to the need for significant cuts in government expenditure.

'At the same time, the Government has made a firm commitment to policies of social inclusion which will require greater central intervention — and targeted additional spending.'

'The measures announced in this budget give some reassurance that both objectives can be met. Social inclusion in **relation to rural and regional areas** means that all people living here need to be able to play a full role in Australian life, in economic, social, psychological and political terms. This means in our communities we must be given the opportunity to secure a job, access services, connect with others through family, friends, work, personal interests and local community. Deal with personal crisis such as ill health, bereavement or the loss of a job and have our voices heard.' said Mr Foggo

'We particularly welcome the proposed wholesale review of the tax and welfare systems — something which Anglican Community Care has felt was due. This means that low income and disadvantaged households are spared from most cuts' Mr Foggo said.

Items of major interest locally include:

Financial counselling

Anglican Community Care has supported five staff in Mount Gambier towards studying for their financial counselling diplomas, after identifying this need in the community. The Waikerie Community Centre has identified a gap in services for

workers on low incomes who do not have Centrelink support, as there is a limited availability of financial counsellors, coming once a fortnight but people needing to book 6 weeks.

We trust this funding will be available to rural and regional areas, especially with the drought, as we are seeing more and more people affected by the drought and financial counselling will go some way to support local people suffering from the drought.

Financial counselling will also assist those in the community when they are unemployed, or find their debts have mounted up and do not have the skills to negotiate with debtors

The Government has indicated they will support working families under financial pressure by expanding financial counselling services and support as part of a \$20 million Australian Government commitment over four years.

An extra \$10 million over four years for the Commonwealth Financial Counselling program, a free community-based financial counselling service, will see their annual budget double from \$2.5 million to \$5 million a year.

Housing

Anglican Community Care hopes the commitment to addressing homelessness will take into account rural and regional areas and their model 'Safe as Houses' or similar model for children 14-17 who fall through the gaps of existing services will be funded. We also hope funding will also be available for early intervention measures to assist people to maintain their current level of housing so they don't become homeless or have to go into SAAP

The Government will provide \$2.2 billion for housing and homelessness.

National Rental Affordability Scheme: \$622.6 million over four years

Up to 50,000 new rental properties will be created by the new National Rental Affordability Scheme, at a cost of \$622.6 million over the next four years.

This scheme will increase the supply of affordable rental housing and reduce rental costs for low-to-moderate income households.

The Housing Affordability Fund: \$512 million over five years

The Housing Affordability Fund will invest \$512 million over the next five years, to lower the cost of building new homes, with an emphasis on proposals that improve

the supply of new entry-level housing.

First Home Saver Accounts

The Government is also establishing First Home Saver Accounts to help people save for their first home. The accounts will provide a simple, tax-effective way for Australians to save for their first home through a combination of a Government contribution and low taxes. The Government is providing \$1.2 billion over four years.

A Place to Call Home: \$150 million over five years

\$100 million over the next four years (with another \$50 million in 2012/13), is allocated to build 600 new homes for the homeless across the nation.

Volunteers

Anglican Community Care will be able to support more volunteers with their work with funding to help pay fuel bills, especially important in rural and regional areas.

In a significant expansion of the Volunteer Grants Program, the Government has committed an additional \$15 million over three years to help community organisations and volunteers with their work, including help to pay their fuel bills. The Government will expand items eligible for funding under the program to include petrol vouchers for volunteers who use their vehicle for volunteering purposes.

In addition, volunteer resource centres will receive \$16.7 million to train and manage volunteers over the next four years, effective July 2008, under the Volunteer Management Program.

Indigenous Australians

We hope to see investments in our regions towards Indigenous literacy and child and maternal health services to close the gap between Indigenous and non Indigenous Australians health and economic outcomes.

The policy objective to which the budget's measures for Indigenous Australians are directed is 'to address the structural and systemic problems that are producing appalling outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people'. To 'close the gap' the Government proposes a 'new partnership'. The building blocks of this partnership are given as: healthy homes, safe communities, health, early childhood, schooling, economic participation and governance and leadership.

To this end, the Government has provided \$425.3 million in new funds, across eight portfolios but as part of 'an integrated whole-of-government strategy'. Principal budget measures are:

- \$90 million over five years for child and maternal health services.
- \$56 million invested over four years for an expansion of evidence-based literacy and numeracy programs.

National Child Protection Framework

It would benefit the children in our community to have a framework that is consistent across Australia, with resources to go with it to address this significant issue. The responsibilities for the protection of Australia's children should no longer be determined by State boundaries.

A National Child Protection Framework will be developed at a cost of \$2.6 million to work with all levels of government, child protection workers and the community sector recognising that the safety and wellbeing of Australia's children is critical.

The Government is leading a consultation process towards a practical, action-focused framework that makes a real difference in the lives of children. Consultation is occurring with appropriate stakeholders including state and territory governments, peak organisations working with children, families, out-of-home care systems and foster carers. The National Child Protection Framework will be developed by July 2008. Over the following 18 months, action agreed in the Framework will be progressed by both levels of government and the community sector. Implementation of the framework is expected to be completed by the end of 2009.

A national consultation and communication process will involve key stakeholders from around Australia, and would specifically focus on ensuring participation from people from regional and remote areas.

Welfare payments reform pilots: \$36.4 million over 3 years

We hope the trail in WA where skills training for recipients of welfare, eg, income management and financial literacy, to help deal with immediate financial difficulties and build skills to better manage their finances and provide for their children we hope will be successful and available to other communities.

Working in partnership with the Western Australian Government, the Commonwealth Government will provide an \$18.9 million package to implement income management and financial literacy skills training, to help protect children in selected Western Australian communities from mid-2008.

This is the first trial making income management available as a tool for state child

protection authorities in circumstances where a child may be at risk of neglect. It will potentially affect up to 1000 parents.

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ABOUT Anglican Community Care Inc

Anglican Community Care support regional and rural people when they are struggling with emotional or financial issues and aim to make a positive impact so people are able to fully embrace life and all its opportunities.

Anglican Community Care Inc has provided a range of human services to rural-regional South Australia for over 21 years. The not-for-profit organisation has successfully established offices employing 130 local staff and management throughout the South East, Riverland and Murraylands areas of country South Australia.

In FY206/07 47,000 people found support through Anglican Community Care's many community programmes. Anglican Community Care employs professionally qualified staff who offer confidential, impartial, non-judgemental services to the community.

They are committed to alleviating poverty, building communities, promoting learning, reducing homelessness, strengthening families, supporting children and sharing cultures.

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