



Catholic Social Services  
**Victoria**

## **Catholic social teaching and agency experience speak for the marginalised in submission to the *Australia 2020* Summit**

“Government leadership must extend beyond funding, to foster community understanding that, through our taxes and our personal and organisational efforts, we all have a role in helping all our fellow Australians to live life to the full. Together, we must ensure that those who have ‘fallen through the cracks’ are looked after, and that the ‘cracks’ in the system are systematically addressed.”

Such a role for Government is advocated in a submission to the *Australia 2020 Summit* by Victorian Catholic social service and justice agencies. These agencies have built their recommendations on the experience of the poor, the disadvantaged and the marginalised who their member agencies work with on a daily basis, and on Catholic social teaching that has developed over time as a basis for the building of a just society.

Grounded in the social and ethical teachings of the Old and the New Testament, the principles of Catholic Social Teaching provide guidance on effective and just relations between groups and societies. Key among these teachings is the affirmation of the dignity of each person, and the promotion of the common good as the main purpose of government.

A common theme in the recommendations to *Australia 2020* that are based on these principles is that government funding is needed in many areas to achieve the minimum level of services and well-being that is commensurate with a society as wealthy as Australia is today.

But Government funding will not itself achieve adequate achievement of human potential. On behalf of the social service and justice agencies, Denis Fitzgerald, Executive Director of Catholic Social Services Victoria, explains: “Sufficient Government funding is important, but it is not enough: the disadvantaged and marginalised need to be listened to, and they need personal support; access to relevant services; and acceptance into a broader community within which they can achieve their full human potential.”

### **Attachments:**

Key recommendations  
Relevant principles of Catholic Social Teaching

A full copy of the submission is available at <http://www.css.org.au/news.html>

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11 Apr 08/02

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**MEDIA RELEASE**

Key recommendations that emerge from the submission are:

### **Just and sustainable economic directions**

A fundamental orientation of a just approach to the management of our current national wealth must be to ensure that those who have ‘fallen through the cracks’ are looked after, and that the ‘cracks’ are systematically filled. As we strive to develop and retain skills across the economy, an integral policy objective must be to ensure that the acquisition of these skills is an option for all.

The integration of economic growth and social justice is a fundamental obligation of Government, to ensure economic and social cohesion, and to redress the imbalance that would otherwise govern employment relationships.

### **Engagement of the community**

A commitment to engagement is the first step. Effective government must support and enable the aspirations of all members of the society. For this to happen, governments need to work with those faith-based and other groups whose mission it is to provide a voice for the poor, the disadvantaged and the marginalised.

### **Assisting rural communities**

The daily experience of our agencies is that rural communities are hurting badly, caught in the grip of major economic adjustment that is itself the result of ecological, technological and other developments. Our response needs to provide both short-term and long-term support for families and structural steps to re-build healthy rural communities.

### **Maximising practical support for families**

Families provide the front-line services and the broader enabling environment for human development. Support for the family needs to go beyond the level of rhetoric, to take in tax and benefit structures, and legal frameworks that give long term strength and support for the family. A government commitment to support for the right to life of all our people is a necessary part of a full commitment to community well being.

### **Tackling homelessness**

The homeless are among the most socially excluded in our society, and their needs are complex. Affordable and appropriate shelter is a starting point – money is the main constraint here, and the role of government is to ensure its availability. But money alone is not enough. The homeless need personal support; access to relevant services; and acceptance into a broader community within which they can achieve their full human potential.

### **A more humane approach to refugees**

An overhaul of Australia’s refugee assessment and detention system is required in order to make the system humane, to respect the rights of individuals and families, and to reflect the solidarity of the Australian people with this very marginalised group. Areas where this overhaul is needed include the geographical limits of the Australian migration zone, incarceration policies, and visa conditions for people seeking asylum and for those whose claims have been heard.

### **A better future for Indigenous Australia**

Partnerships based on respect, trust and a mutual understanding of objectives will help build a better future for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. We call on each institution in Australia to play its own part in establishing such partnerships, at the appropriate level.

Principles of Catholic Social Teaching as applied in the submission include:

The purpose of government is promotion of the *common good*. Governments serve, within the constitutional and legal framework, to promote and ensure the well being of all, including justice between sections of society.

The common good involves upholding *the inherent dignity of all people*, as well as *effective stewardship of the natural environment* that is to serve future generations as well as ourselves. The common good also entails that *solidarity* with other groups and individuals within our society and beyond – ‘no man is an island’, and none of us can rest secure while others are suffering.

This leads to a *preferential option for the poor* in the framing of public policy and the use of public goods – the poor, the disadvantaged and the marginalised do not automatically benefit from main-stream developments.

*Australian society is* based on and comprises individuals, families, small groups, communities, organizations, etc. To achieve just government, participation of individuals and groupings in decisions that impact on them. The *principle of subsidiarity* emphasises the rights of individuals and social groups to make their own decisions and accomplish what they can by their own initiative and effort; and that involvement of government is useful and necessary, but only when it can support and enable the aspirations of individuals and groups.

*Families* are central to our well-being. As a fundamental unit of society they are the providers of a significant part of the support that is needed for our well-being.

*Indigenous Australians* are central to our identity and our standing as a nation. Their custodianship of the land, their suffering and dispossession since European settlement, and their particular cultures, require that Australia as a whole accord a high priority to supporting them in the building a just and compassionate future.