



# An Inclusive and Equal Society

## “ Our Vision:

We live together in a society where all are equal and free to exercise our rights equally, regardless of faith, cultural background, race, ability, age, sexual orientation and gender identity. We defend those rights for all.

## Our hopes

- All people are free to exercise their right to be treated equally, regardless of gender, age, race, ability, sexual orientation or gender identity.
- Every person can participate in society as they wish, free from preconceptions, stereotypes and discrimination.
- Older people and people with disability are treated with respect and dignity and able to live their life to the full. Where they require supports to live independently, they have voice and choice in those supports.
- Every child can live their best life.
- A person's sexual orientation and gender identity does not impact on their ability to live, work and contribute to society.
- Every person is safe in their own home and community.
- Disability and age are not barriers to participating as an equal member of society.
- People in Australia of all backgrounds and beliefs feel safe and able to challenge destructive and demeaning language and behaviour.

## Witness from the Bible

- All people have been made in the image of God (Gen 1: 26 – 27).
- The prophet Isaiah's vision of a servant of God, which Jesus later claimed for himself, was of someone who lightens the burden of workers, breaks chains and brings freedom to the oppressed, brings good news to the poor and comforts the broken hearted (Isaiah 58: 6; 61: 1 cf. Luke 4: 18).
- Jesus is described as coming to enable a rich and full life (John 10:10). During his ministry he regularly crossed social boundaries, including within his ministry many who were otherwise dismissed or avoided by his society including "sinners and tax collectors" (Matthew 9: 10 – 11; 11: 19), Samaritans and other non-Israelites (Luke 17: 11 – 19; John 4: 7 – 30), lepers (Matthew 8: 1 – 4; 11: 4 – 6) and women, including those seen as unclean or undesirable (Matthew 9: 18 – 26; Luke 7 36 – 50; 8: 1 – 3). Jesus even taught that enemies should be treated with love and care (Matthew 5: 43 – 48).

- The New Testament epistles look toward a community for all with no distinctions or favouritism (Galatians 3: 28, James 2: 1 – 9) and a final gathering in of all nations and peoples (Revelation 7: 9 – 10; 22: 22 – 26, Colossians 1:20).

## What the UCA has said

### The Basis of Union (1971, 1992 Edition)

"God in Christ has given to all people in the Church the Holy Spirit as a pledge and foretaste of that coming reconciliation and renewal which is the end in view for the whole creation. The Church's call is to serve that end: to be a fellowship of reconciliation..."

### The Statement to the Nation (1977)

"We affirm our eagerness to uphold basic Christian values and principles, such as the importance of every human being, ... rights for each citizen to participate in decision-making in the community, religious liberty and personal dignity, and a concern for the welfare of the whole human race.

We affirm the rights of all people to equal educational opportunities, adequate healthcare, freedom of speech, employment or dignity in unemployment if work is not available. We will oppose all forms of discrimination which infringe basic rights and freedoms."

### Australian Bicentennial Year Statement (1988)

"We give thanks for those times when the Australian society has established justice, equality, and mutual respect among people; has placed care for the people who have least above sectional interests; has welcomed new migrants and refugees; has exercised solidarity and friendship in times of crisis in Australia across divisions of race and culture..."

We deplore the divisions of humanity along racial, cultural, political, economic, sexual and religious lines. In obedience to God, we struggle against all systems and attitudes which set person against person, group against group, or nation against nation."

### Reconciliation People: A Statement from the National Young Adult Leaders' Conference (2010)

"We believe that we were all created equal and are one people in the eyes of God. We encourage our country to embrace and celebrate our diversity. We challenge

our government to welcome, with empathy, those who seek refuge in our land. There is no supremacy of any culture or gender; rather, when we work together as a united people, in recognition of, but regardless of difference, we will bring about change.”

## The State of the Nation

### *Disadvantage is determined early in life*

- 17.7% or 1 in 6 Australian children aged 0-14 years live in poverty<sup>50</sup>.
- Nearly half (44%) of all children in single parent households live below the poverty line – more than three times the rate for children in couple families. Families with children with a female main income earner are more than twice as likely to be in poverty as those with a male main income earner<sup>51</sup>.
- Children from areas of greatest socioeconomic disadvantage are more than 10 times more likely than those living in areas of least disadvantage to be in youth detention. One in five children in youth detention are aged 10-14 years of age<sup>52</sup>.
- Declining rates of home ownership among some groups including younger people, lower income people and older women, is increasingly become a determining and magnifying factor in wealth and wealth inequality in Australia<sup>53</sup>.

### **Key actions:**

1. Provide universal access to quality early learning for all children aged three and four, prior to their commencing school.
2. Work is done to ensure disadvantaged children are able to access early education and care.
3. Significantly increase investment in prevention and early intervention programs to support vulnerable families.
4. Provide families with child protection concerns priority access to services such as social housing, early childhood education and health services.
5. Provide national leadership to support raising the age of criminal responsibility to 14 across all jurisdictions in Australia and increase investment in early intervention services and wrap-around support for

children who come into contact with the criminal justice system.

6. Ensure social security and family payments settings provide adequate support to low-income families, including single-parent families.

### *Many others face barriers to social and economic participation due to their faith, cultural background, race, ability, age, sexual orientation or gender identity*

- Abuse is most prevalent among physically, financially or emotionally vulnerable people<sup>54</sup>.
- A Royal Commission was established in 2018 in response to concerns about the quality and safety of aged care services in Australia and a Royal Commission was established in 2019 to examine violence, abuse, neglect and exploitation of people with disability in Australia.
- Homelessness is a growing problem for older people in Australia and will likely continue to increase over time due to an ageing population and declining rates of home ownership among older people<sup>55</sup>.
- One in twelve older people in Australia experience significant financial or social disadvantage<sup>56</sup>.
- Gender-based inequalities and discrimination disproportionately affect women and girls with disability. They face greater risk of violence, especially sexual violence, abuse and harassment. The Disability Royal Commission's Research Report – Nature and extent of violence, abuse, neglect and exploitation against people with disability in Australia highlights that the lifetime exposure of women with disability to sexual violence is twice that of non-disabled women<sup>57</sup>.
- People with high support needs, people living in rural and remote areas, people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, members of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and members of LGBTIQ communities can face even greater difficulties accessing appropriate services and support, particularly when they belong to more than one of these groupings.

- 18 per cent of people in Australia say they have experienced discrimination because of skin colour, ethnic origin or religion<sup>58</sup>.
- Only 53% of people in Australia with disability are employed, compared to 84% of all working-age people<sup>59</sup>, with lower employment rates contributing to high rates of poverty<sup>60</sup>.
- A disproportionate number of LGBTIQ Australians experience poorer mental health outcomes and have higher risk of suicidal behaviours than their peers. These health outcomes are directly related to experiences of stigma, prejudice, discrimination and abuse on the basis of being LGBTIQ<sup>61</sup>.

### Key actions:

1. People with disability and older people have access to appropriate, quality, well-funded services that meets their needs in the location they choose.
2. Safeguards which protect against violence, abuse, neglect and exploitation of older people and people with disability.
3. Ensuring our legal system protects all people from discrimination.
4. Prioritise promoting inclusion and addressing all forms of discrimination in communities, including through awareness-raising, policies and action plans.

### High levels of family violence

- 119,000 people sought homelessness services in 2019-2020 due to domestic/family violence; this included 37,000 children, with women making up the majority (90%) of adults seeking support<sup>62</sup>.
- Approximately one in four women (23%) has experienced violence by an intimate partner<sup>63</sup>, and it is the leading cause of illness, disability and premature death among women aged 25 to 44<sup>64</sup>.
- Domestic or family violence against women is a leading cause of homelessness for women<sup>65</sup>.

### Key actions:

1. A comprehensive approach to preventing gender-based violence and domestic and family violence with targeted strategies for those most at risk. This includes challenging the social norms and practices that underpin it.
2. Sustainable funding for services and housing which support survivors of domestic and family violence.

### Discussion starters

You may like to ask one or more of the following questions in a small group discussion or select one or more to put to MPs or community leaders.

1. What policies will ensure all children receive the best start in life?
2. How can we ensure older people in Australia are treated with dignity, and where care is needed, that they receive high quality care?
3. What is your commitment to the equality of women across our community and what actions will you take to promote this?
4. How will you tackle the high rates of domestic and family violence, both in terms of prevention and supporting people who are affected?
5. What is your response to discrimination based on race, religion, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity or disability?
6. What initiatives are already happening or could happen in your local community that could:
  - a) Offer care and support for older people?
  - b) Promote awareness of domestic and family violence and offer support for people impacted by this violence?
  - c) Offer care and support for people suffering from discrimination on the basis of gender, race, religion, sexual orientation, gender identity or disability?
  - d) Increase accessibility for and inclusion of people with disability and older people in your community?

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Uniting Church members are encouraged to visit the websites of all the above groups to further explore the issues and questions that arise as we consider what it means to live and act justly.