

# Flourishing Communities, Regional, Remote and Urban

## “Our Vision:

We live in communities where we are connected and we care for one another. In communities all over Australia, from our big cities to remote regions, we seek the well-being of each Australian and uplift those who are on the margins.



## Our hopes

- We are connected. There is a high level of social participation. People feel a strong sense of identity and of belonging.
- We create safe spaces in our homes, in the wider community, online and in our places of faith.
- Rural, regional and remote communities thrive. They have access to critical services, including health, education and technology.
- There is wide representation in our decision making from different ages, cultures, abilities, religion, gender, sexuality and geography. People are free to express their own ideas.
- People with disability in Australia can fully participate in society. They can access, choose and control the services and support they need to live and be included in the community.
- Our lifestyle and culture promote good mental health and our governments, workplaces and communities have policies and practices which support this.
- All people can access the essential services they need, including younger and older generations, people at the end of life, people with disability, First Peoples and people at risk of experiencing violence.
- Vulnerable people receive the support they need, whether that is protection from violence and abuse, quality care, medical services or harm reduction services.
- Remote First Nations communities are supported to stay connected to Culture and Country through adequate long-term government funding for housing, maintenance, municipal and essential services.

## Witness from the Bible

- The witness of the Old Testament speaks to God's desire for communities of "shalom", a peace which encompasses fruitfulness, justice, wholeness and blessing for all people. See for example **Genesis 1: 27 – 28; 12: 1 – 3; Psalms 72, 128; Isaiah 11: 1 – 9; Jeremiah 29:7, Zechariah 8: 4 – 12.**
- Likewise, Jesus spoke of bringing safety, life in abundance and peace (**John 10: 7 – 10; 14: 27**) and taught the importance of meeting the needs

of those who were suffering (**Matthew 25: 31 – 46**). He identified love of God and of others as the primary obligations for shaping life (**Matthew 22: 34 – 40**).

- The New Testament epistles give a vision of a community of inclusion and peace (**Romans 10: 12; Galatians 3: 28; Ephesians 4: 1 – 3**) and highlight the importance of love for all in enabling this vision (**Romans 12: 9 – 13; 13: 8 – 10; 1 Corinthians 13; Galatians 5: 13 – 14; 1 John 4: 16 – 21**).

## What the UCA has said

### **The Statement to the Nation (1977)**

"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."

### **Dignity in Humanity: A Uniting Church Statement on Human Rights (2006)**

"The image of God that is reflected in human life, the form of life that corresponds to God, is the human community – all people – finding its life and sustenance in relationship.

Thus, the Uniting Church believes that every person is precious and entitled to live with dignity because they are God's children, and that each person's life and rights need to be protected or the human community (and its reflection of God) and all people are diminished."

### **An Economy of Life: Reimagining Human Progress for a Flourishing World (2009)**

"The Christian faith understands that God's goal for life is wholeness. The Biblical stories, sacred witnesses to the history of our relationship with God, articulate a vision for human wholeness and wellbeing grounded in the values of the reign of God: love (of God and each other, even our enemy and especially those most vulnerable), justice, peace, grace, mercy and forgiveness, hospitality, inclusion, connectedness and compassion."

# The State of the Nation

## High rates of mental illness

- 1 in 5 people in Australia experiences a mental illness in a given year and almost 1 in 2 will experience a mental health condition at some point in their lifetime<sup>66</sup>.

### Key actions:

1. Adequate funding of appropriate services for people living with mental illness, including continuation of initiatives such as digital health services in rural and remote areas and recovery-based services.
2. A whole-of-community approach to overcome stigma and discrimination against people who experience mental illness.

## Lack of Safe Spaces

- One in 32 children received child protection services in 2019-20, with 67% being repeat clients<sup>67</sup>.
- It is believed that up to 14% of older people in Australia experience elder abuse in any given year<sup>68</sup>.
- Workplace bullying is on the rise<sup>69</sup> and is associated with poor psychological health<sup>70</sup>.
- Many children experience bullying at some stage during their time in school<sup>71</sup>.
- 1 in 5 Australian young people reported being socially excluded, threatened or abused online<sup>72</sup>.

### Key actions:

1. Community approaches to building resilience, teaching respectful relationships, and identifying abuse and neglect.
2. Creating Child Safe Communities to prevent child sexual abuse, in line with recommendations from the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse.
3. Implementing recommendations from the Royal Commission into Aged Care to protect older Australians from abuse and neglect.

## Rural and remote communities are suffering

- Large parts of Australia have experienced the worst drought in recorded history, the most devastating bushfire seasons along with some of the most devastating natural disasters seen in generations.
- Severe environmental impacts have contributed to a decline in agricultural production that impacts the economy and employment in rural and remote Australia. In turn, farmers, their families and communities experience significant decline in mental and physical health due to the ongoing disasters they are experiencing<sup>73</sup>.
- People in Australia living in rural and remote areas tend to have shorter lives, higher levels of disease and injury and poorer access to and use of health services, including mental health care, compared to people living in metropolitan areas<sup>74</sup>.
- Rates of self-harm and suicide increase with remoteness<sup>75</sup>.

### Key actions:

1. Improved mental health support for people in rural and remote Australia that is adequately funded, flexibly used and well managed locally.
2. Investment in rural infrastructure to help prepare for disasters.
3. All people have access to clean water, basic living standards, to be connected to services and have opportunities to connect with people both physically and through reliable technology.
4. Ensuring that isolated children have access to education.
5. All adults recognise their role in creating safety for children.

### ***People with disability need better choice and control***

- An estimated 1.4 million people with disability needed formal assistance from a service provider for at least one everyday living activity<sup>76</sup>. Many people with disability face barriers in accessing services to support them or experience some form of discrimination<sup>77</sup>.
- The roll-out of the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) requires adequate resourcing by the Commonwealth, states and territories.
- The transition to the NDIS is having a significant impact on the support workforce, with some providers struggling to recruit and maintain a suitably skilled workforce<sup>78</sup>.

#### **Key actions:**

1. An NDIS that is fully funded and properly rolled-out where no one is left behind in the process.
2. Improve safeguards of the NDIS to ensure all people providing disability services are screened and only those assessed to be fit and proper are permitted to provide services.

### ***People with drug-related issues are stigmatised***

- Current approaches to drug use which focus on policing and imprisoning increase stigma for people who use illicit drugs and create barriers for people seeking treatment<sup>79</sup>.
- There is a shortage of detoxification and rehabilitation services, particularly in rural and regional areas<sup>80</sup>.

#### **Key action:**

Refocusing policy and responses to drug use on helping people to access drug treatment and harm reduction services.

## **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. How will you support disaster-affected communities?
2. What policies will you put in place to address mental health, including in rural and remote Australia?
3. How will you ensure that the NDIS continues to provide individualised and personalised supports for people with disability into the future?
4. What actions will you take to protect older people, and people with disabilities from abuse, neglect and exploitation?
5. What is your policy or approach to illicit drug use and treatment?
6. How will you address bullying in our workplaces and schools?
7. How does or how can your community assist communities affected by drought and other natural disasters?
8. What local initiatives are possible to address important social issues including mental health, illicit drug use and bullying?

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## Thanks go to...

This document is a **UnitingJustice** project, a collaboration of those engaged in the justice work of the Uniting Church, coordinated by the Assembly Resourcing Unit.

### *We thank the following contributors:*

UnitingCare Australia

UnitingWorld

VIC/TAS Synod

Uniting (VIC/TAS)

Synod of WA

Synod of SA

Uniting Communities

Queensland Synod

UnitingCare Queensland

Uniting (NSW/ACT)

In developing this document, we drew on the excellent work already done in **Australia Remade** by the A24 Alliance, a collection of individuals and diverse organisation with a shared commitment to put people and planet first. We also considered some of the excellent work being done in the **Australian National Development Index (ANDI) Project**.

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.