



Uniting Church in Australia
ASSEMBLY
Assembly Standing Committee

11 – 13 March 2022

DOCUMENT 13

| | |
|---|---|
| Title | Annual Update from UnitingCare Australia |
| Type of Paper (Information/Decision) | For Information |
| Assembly or ASC Minute | |
| Consultation | N/A |
| Purpose | To provide the annual update on the work of UnitingCare Australia to the Assembly Standing Committee. |
| Rationale & Findings Summary | UnitingCare Australia is required to provide an annual update on the work of UnitingCare Australia. This report and the accompanying presentation at the March Committee meeting fulfil this requirement. |
| Attachments | Attachment 1 – Submissions and Media Releases |
| Proposal/s | That the Committee receive the Report |
| Submitted by | Clærwen Little, National Director UnitingCare Australia |

UNITINGCARE AUSTRALIA

ANNUAL UPDATE TO THE ASSEMBLY STANDING COMMITTEE

Introduction

1. It has been another big year for UnitingCare Australia and the UnitingCare network as we have continued through the challenging pandemic environment. Dealing with immediate and often long-term lockdowns across different states and territories, equitable access to vaccinations and rapid antigen tests, and adequate personal protective equipment (PPE) for our community services to ensure the safety of all have been key issues and formed a significant part of our advocacy. With the Federal Election imminent we have lodged our pre-budget submission focused on three priorities which will in turn inform our election asks. We have had a number of positive meetings with key politicians and policy makers to discuss these initiatives.
2. We have been very actively engaged in aged care advocacy including chairing the Australian Aged Care Collaboration (AACC) and working with the other five peak and church bodies on the aged care campaign: *It's time to care about aged care* to influence government's response to the Aged Care Royal Commission Final Report resulting in a \$17.7 billion package for aged care in the 2021 Federal Budget. Our broader advocacy has continued to focus on our priority areas of Addressing Economic Inequality, Justice for First Peoples and responding to the Disability Royal Commission.
3. We have welcomed a third new independent member to our Board – Adam Connolly who brings strong media and communications skills to the Board. The three-year term for the six Synod appointed representatives on the Board is finishing this year and we are in the process of seeking nominations or re-nominations from Synods which will be put to the July 2022 ASC meeting for endorsement.

Risks

4. The voluntary nature of our levy structure and the dependence on two large organisations for just over half our income still remains the ongoing number one risk for UnitingCare Australia. However, the network remains committed to the work of UnitingCare Australia and to date continue to support its work through the levy contributions. The Board continues to monitor our sustainability and ensure our value proposition is strong.
5. The risk around our leadership role in the aged care campaign was somewhat mitigated with the establishment of the separate legal entity – the AACC. The Assembly is contracted through a Service Level Agreement to provide the governance and accounting support for the AACC.
6. The pandemic has continued to deliver many disruptions to our work, including the capacity to work in the office. We have adjusted to a hybrid model of working sometime in the office (when lockdowns permit) and some time at home. This brings some risk to team cohesion, which is being mitigated through the use of technology, good communication arrangements, structure and ensuring face to face working and meetings where at all possible.
7. Staff recruitment has also been a risk for us in being able to deliver on our priorities given that there is a flood of like positions available within government in Canberra at a higher pay level. This is mitigated to some degree by the fact that we are a purpose driven organisation but does mean permanent positions take longer to fill and we have relied on contract staff for some roles.

8. We continue to lead the national response to the Disability Royal Commission on behalf of the Church and its agencies. The National Task Group is the key body to ensure effective governance, communication and response and is meeting regularly. The Aged Care Royal Commission has been extended due to COVID and is now due to hand down its final report on 29 September 2023.

Governance and Compliance

9. The Board met in May, August and November 2021 and February 2022. As noted above, the third Board member external to the UnitingCare network, Adam Connolly, commenced in August 2021. Adam is the CEO of Apollo Communications and has extensive experience in communications, media and government relations and has a Uniting Church background.
10. The three-year term of the six Synod nominated representatives on the Board are due to finish this year and we are in the process of seeking nominations or renominations from each Synod which will be put forward to the ASC for endorsement in July 2022.
11. The Board will be undertaking an evaluation of its performance in 2022 and is currently discussing the best option and timeline for this activity.
12. The current UnitingCare Australia strategic plan has come to the end of its three year period and as such the Board will be commencing a new planning process shortly to determine its priorities for the coming period, in line with a new term of government.
13. UnitingCare Australia continue to meet all its funding compliance requirements with the Commonwealth Department of Health for the Remote Accord project. The Department is aware that we have been underspending in the project due to the restrictions on travel and face to face meetings and agreed to roll the money over to the next financial year.
14. To support the Aged Care Campaign and create good governance, a new body was set up – The Australian Aged Care Collaboration Ltd (AACC), comprising membership from the 6 national bodies: UnitingCare Australia, Anglicare Australia, Baptist Care Australia, Catholic Health Australia, Leading Age Services Australia (LASA) and Aged and Community Services Australia (ACSA). UCA Assembly Ltd is a member of the AACC and UnitingCare Australia is on the Board of Directors on its behalf and takes a lead role as Chair of the organisation.
15. UnitingCare Australia facilitated the creation of a successful consortium bid to the Department of Social Services for the Government's Escaping Violence Payment 2-year trial program. This \$140m program provides up to \$5,000 in assistance to people escaping a violent relationship. Uniting Vic.Tas holds the head contract with the Department. Consortium members are UnitingCare Australia, UnitingCare Qld, Wesley Mission NSW, Somerville, Uniting Communities, UnitingCare Wesley Bowden, Uniting Country SA, Uniting SA and UnitingWA. Each holds a sub-contracting agreement with Uniting Vic.Tas for their role in the delivery of the service. UnitingCare Australia provides a 'national advisory' role and does not receive any funding from the contract.

Financial

16. UnitingCare Australia is tracking well against budget with levies and return on investments in line with budget estimates. At the time of writing this we have 8.2 months in cash reserves and 14.3 months in cash and investment reserves.
17. The UnitingCare Australia Board funded the Executive Officer role for the Church's Disability Royal Commission National Task Group for the 2021/22 financial year from its general funds. This recognised the importance of the role across the Church and its community services network.

The Board will consider in its upcoming Budget process the future of this role, taking into consideration the extension of the Royal Commission until September 2023 and the work of the National Task Group.

Public profile

18. UnitingCare Australia is widely regarded as a trusted adviser to the Commonwealth Government, federal parliamentarians and members of the Australian public service. We are an authoritative voice and regularly provide a platform to share the lived experience and expertise from within our network. Our advocacy has a direct impact on policy and program outcomes.
19. National Director, Claerwen Little, sits on a number of high profile advisory committees and notably is Chair of the National Coordination Group on Emergency Relief, reporting to the Minister for Families and Social Services, and has been recently appointed to the National Aged Care Advisory Council, advising the Minister for Health and Aged Care and Minister for Senior Australians and Aged Care Services. She also chairs the Steering Committee for the Aged Care Representation and Development Project and is on the National Leadership Group for the Stronger Places Stronger People initiative.
20. UnitingCare Australia takes a lead role in collaboration with other organisations in the sector. Our National Director is Chair of the Australian Aged Care Collaboration, we are a founding member of Ending Loneliness Together, and actively engaged with several other groups including the Major Church Providers, Everybody's Home, Every Child, and Hands Off Our Charities.
21. We have increased our engagement and reach across key communications channels in the reporting period. Our National Director appeared on high profile media platforms including ABC RN Breakfast, ABC News 24 and The Australian. UnitingCare Australia is referred to in Parliament and we appear regularly at inquiries. A list of our media releases is at Attachment 1.
22. The last Target Christmas Appeal ran in December 2020, with more than \$4 million raised through a 30 year partnership. Target Australia advised in April 2021 that the appeal would cease due to a major change in their operating model, primarily the smaller number of stores and stronger online presence. UnitingCare Australia commends and congratulates all those involved in three decades of the Christmas Appeal and note the local initiatives being implemented throughout the network.
23. A major rebrand of UnitingCare Australia has been delayed for the time being in favour of a modest refresh of the brand identity through digital channels, including a new website. Resources have been allocated to responding to the pandemic and supporting our services, and building relationships of influence to improve advocacy outcomes. The current brand has not had a material impact on those outcomes and we think this approach strikes the right balance.

The work of the Agency

24. The Federal Budget is due to be handed down on 29 March 2022 and UnitingCare Australia has lodged a Pre-Budget Submission with three specific asks that will go some way toward addressing inequality in Australia and ensuring that everyone has an adequate income or support to live a decent life: a national stagnant incomes inquiry, increase to wages in aged care and superannuation on parental leave pay. We lodged a second Pre-Budget Submission with a focus on COVID safety for front-line community services.
25. UnitingCare Australia has four strategic priorities: Justice for First Peoples, Addressing Economic Inequality, Ageing to our Full Potential and responding to the Disability Royal Commission. Our advocacy is grounded in the experience and expertise of our services and includes a combination

of submissions, media releases, meetings with key influencers including politicians, peak bodies and others in the sector. A list of submissions and media releases during the reporting period is provided in Attachment 1.

26. Justice for First Peoples – we continue to work closely with the UAICC and First Peoples Working Group to inform our advocacy in this priority area. In September 2021 the second Gathering of First Peoples from across the Church and its service network was held to build relationships and focus on advocacy priorities. We have appointed Sam Gledhill, a proud Murri woman from North Queensland, as our Senior Advisor focused on this priority area and Sam is building relationships both internally and externally. The First Peoples Working Group has been actively contributing to our advocacy activities including those around the Cashless Debit Card, the new National Plan to End Violence Against Women and Children and COVID vaccinations.
27. Addressing Economic Inequality – extensive activities have been undertaken in this priority area during the year particularly related to the pandemic. These included ensuring access to vaccinations for the most vulnerable in our communities and an increase to the JobSeeker rate (a success albeit a small one) and adequate resourcing, PPE and Rapid Antigen Tests for community services to sustain them in their work.
28. We have undertaken research and network consultation to inform submissions around Women’s Justice including to the consultation process for the development of the new National Plan to End Violence Against Women and Children. We also lodged a submission and appeared before a Senate Committee in relation to waiting periods for migrants to receive support.
29. Ageing to our Full Potential – we were a key leader in the Aged Care Campaign “It’s time to care for aged care” which called for a world-class, rights-based aged care system that meets the needs of older Australians now and into the future. The campaign culminated in the release of the 2021 Federal Budget which contained a \$17.7 billion package for aged care. As detailed above, the AACC was set up to support the campaign and continue advocacy to ensure recommendations from the Aged Care Royal Commission Report were implemented by government.
30. In June 2021 we established Uniting Friends of Ageing – a new national network for Uniting Church members interested and concerned about ageing and aged care. We produce a monthly newsletter for members and appear regularly in the national Assembly update, in addition to hosting a regular gathering for participants to discuss key issues. On 2nd October 2021 Older Persons Sunday was included in the Uniting Church’s national calendar. It was first time UnitingCare Australia had an official date in the UCA calendar.
31. Responding to the Disability Royal Commission (DRC) – we continue to provide the secretariat lead for the Disability Royal Commission National Task Group. This Group is meeting regularly to focus on the Disability Royal Commission and have commenced work on a future plan to respond to themes emerging from the Royal Commission.
32. The secretariat support and project management for the Aged Care Workforce Remote Accord initiative continues. This group is chaired by Chris Hall, CEO of Juniper in Western Australia. The Accord is an industry led initiative with the objective to achieving an adequate, robust and appropriately skilled and supported workforce in remote and very remote Australia. A proposal for additional funding from the Department of Health has been lodged and we have received verbal support and await written contractual information. The additional project is to trial a place-based approach to service delivery reforms in in three remote locations of Australia. The project will run for two years with a \$2M budget.

33. After a sustained effort over many months, we were successful in ensuring that several Bills introduced to Parliament that were threatening the ability of charities to undertake advocacy were squashed in the last Parliament Sitting Days of 2021. This was a real win!
34. UnitingCare Australia has contributed to the Assembly's submission to the Senate Committee in relation to the Religious Discrimination Bill and the National Director appeared at two Senate Committee hearings alongside the President.
35. Our Synod insurance managers and our agencies raised an issue this year regarding a market failure in the insurance industry to provide sexual misconduct insurance, a contractual requirement that has impacted a number of our service areas and also our church. As a result, reached out to government and the insurance sector to seek a solution. We are continuing to liaise with the Insurance Council who are investigating the issue with the aim of working towards a long-term solution.
36. As an Assembly agency, we are committed to contributing to the Assembly Climate Action Plan and lodge quarterly Action Plan Reports. To further support our commitment in this space, we are facilitating a "Climate Change Lab" in coming months for senior leaders from across the UnitingCare network, Church and interested Board members. The Lab will be run by Deloitte at no cost.
37. As part of our engagement with the Act2 project we facilitated a forum to provide an opportunity for our network CEO's to have input into the first phase, and will be building on this with further input in the second phase. The role of our agencies is a really important part of who we are as a church.
38. Given our work is grounded in the experiences of our services and those who use them, we have continued to hold a considerable number of consultations and meetings across the network utilising videoconferencing technology. UnitingCare Australia currently leads twelve regular network groups, bringing together practitioners and subject matter experts to inform advocacy and contribute to current issues. The groups also provide much welcomed peer support and sharing of ideas and practice wisdoms. One off consultations and working groups are held as required for submissions and policy input.
39. Despite the challenges and adversities that our services have continued to face over this very extended pandemic, the quality and standard of care and the responsiveness of support that is provided to individuals, families and communities remains some of the best in the country and as a church we ought to be immensely proud. It is a privilege to work with them each day to hear their stories and find ways to bring the lived experiences of real people to the policy makers in Canberra. We are continuing to build our status as a trusted advisor to decision makers which opens the channels for these stories. It is our collective voice and commitment to social justice that is a powerful force for change.

Claerwen Little
National Director
UnitingCare Australia
Email: claerwenl@nat.unitingcare.org.au
Tel: 0412688268

Attachment 1 – Submissions and Media Releases

March 2021 – February 2022

| | Media release | Date |
|-----|---|-------------------|
| 1. | Royal Commission provides opportunity to 'fix' the aged care system forever | 1 March 2021 |
| 2. | It's all about the people: older people, families, workers must be centre of aged care reform | 2 March 2021 |
| 3. | New figures show Government intervention urgently required in aged care | 21 March 2021 |
| 4. | Investing in solutions led by First Peoples key to Closing the Gap | 18 March 2021 |
| 5. | Aged care – the way forward | 12 April 2021 |
| 6. | UnitingCare Australia backs calls for major aged care reform ahead of the Federal Budget | 14 April 2021 |
| 7. | The real test of aged care reform will be the Federal Budget | 20 April 2021 |
| 8. | New rules would target charities: Church providers speak out | 6 May 2021 |
| 9. | Safety, security and support - UnitingCare Australia calls on the Government to deliver for all in Tuesday's Budget | 9 May 2021 |
| 10. | Federal Budget delivers historic aged care reform | 11 May 2021 |
| 11. | UnitingCare Australia welcomes historic investment in aged care and key services | 11 May 2021 |
| 12. | Stop blaming aged care workers for government failures on vaccines - Providers and unions unite | 9 July 2021 |
| 13. | Funding providers welcome boost for Emergency Relief and Food Relief in Greater Sydney and Victoria | 20 July 2021 |
| 14. | The race is on to protect our most vulnerable, not just the elderly | 22 July 2021 |
| 15. | National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children's Day | 28 July 2021 |
| 16. | UnitingCare Australia welcomes much-needed boost to income support in lockdown areas | 30 July 2021 |
| 17. | Aged care workers on the frontline - we're calling on all Australians to say #Thanksforcaring | 4 August 2021 |
| 18. | #ThanksforCaring – aged care workers proudly dedicated to safeguarding older Australians | 6 August 2021 |
| 19. | Prevention, intervention, and financial security key to women's safety outcomes | 8 August 2021 |
| 20. | Opening Statement, Community Affairs Legislation Committee, Social Services Legislation Amendment (Consistent Waiting Periods for New Migrants) Bill 2021 | 13 September 2021 |
| 21. | Let's age out ageism | 1 October 2021 |
| 22. | UnitingCare Australia Consortium selected to deliver new program to help people escape family violence | 17 October 2021 |
| 23. | Urgent call to protect older people from an aged care workforce crisis, | 23 November 2021 |
| 24. | UnitingCare Australia National Director appointed to the new National Aged Care Advisory Council | 24 November 2021 |
| 25. | Aged care providers welcome new National Aged Care Advisory Council | 24 November 2021 |
| 26. | Media Statement on the Religious Discrimination Bill 2021 | 26 November 2021 |
| 27. | Aged care peaks commit to change in the service of older Australians | 26 November 2021 |

| | Media release | Date |
|-----|---|------------------|
| 28. | AACC launches Aged Care Reform Scorecard tracking Royal Commission reform progress | 13 December 2021 |
| 29. | MYEFO sidesteps aged care workforce crisis | 16 December 2021 |
| 30. | Next Steps to Develop New Sector Representation Model | 22 December 2021 |
| 31. | 'This is an emergency situation': aged care needs more Omicron support from National Cabinet | 5 January 2022 |
| 32. | Appearance at Senate Parliamentary Joint Committee on Human Rights | 7 January 2022 |
| 33. | Staff shortage emergency: providers and unions call for ADF support and COVID-19 wage payment | 19 January 2022 |
| 34. | Staff shortage emergency requires more than a two-payment bonus | 1 February 2022 |
| 35. | Aged Care COVID-19 situation report paints a grim picture | 2 February 2022 |
| 36. | Aged care providers welcome ADF workforce assistance | 7 February 2022 |
| 37. | New visitor guidelines to help providers and families support residents through workforce emergency | 14 February 2022 |

| | Submission | Date |
|-----|---|-------------------|
| 1. | Submission to the Senate Standing Committees on Community Affairs into the Social Services Legislation Amendment (Strengthening Income Support) Bill 2021 | 11 March 2021 |
| 2. | Hands Off Our Charities alliance - Submission to Treasury re the Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission Amendment (2021 Measures No. 2) Regulations 2021 | 18 March 2021 |
| 3. | Unlawful activity - changes to the governance standards for registered charities | 18 March 2021 |
| 4. | Aged care – the way forward. Priorities for reform in response to the Aged Care Royal Commission | 12 April 2021 |
| 5. | Submission to the Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability - Response to the Promoting Inclusion Issues Paper | 30 April 2021 |
| 6. | Uniting First Peoples Network and UnitingCare Australia Submission – Indigenous Voice Co-design Interim Report | 30 April 2021 |
| 7. | Hands Off Our Charities Alliance: Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission Amendment (2021 Measures No. 2) Regulations 2021 | 6 May 2021 |
| 8. | Submission to the Senate Standing Committee on Community Affairs into the Social Services Legislation Amendment (Consistent Waiting Periods for New Migrants) Bill 2021 | 17 July 2021 |
| 9. | Developing the next National Plan to End Violence Against Women and their Children | 17 September 2021 |
| 10. | Submission to the Parliamentary Joint Committee on Human Rights Inquiry into Religious Discrimination Bill 2021 | December 2021 |
| 11. | Submission to the Senate Legal and Constitutional Affairs Legislation Committee Inquiry into Religious Discrimination Bill 2021 | January 2022 |
| 12. | COVID-19 in Aged Care Situation Report | 2 February 2022 |
| 13. | Pre-Budget Submission 2022-23: Covid Safety for Front-line Community Services | 7 February 2022 |
| 14. | Pre-Budget Submission 2022-23: Addressing Economic Inequality | 8 February 2022 |