



# Uniting Church in Australia

## ASSEMBLY

Assembly Standing Committee

10-12 November 2023

DOCUMENT 10

Type of Paper (Information/Decision)	For Decision	
Title	UnitingCare Australia 30 <sup>th</sup> Anniversary	
Assembly or ASC Minute	N/A	
Consultation	N/A	
Purpose	To provide information on the 30 <sup>th</sup> Anniversary of UnitingCare Australia to the Assembly Standing Committee and recommend that the Assembly Standing Committee seek a formal acknowledgement of the Anniversary at the 17 <sup>th</sup> Triennial Assembly	
Rationale & Findings Summary	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. UnitingCare Australia, then Community Services Australia, was established as an Agency of the Assembly of the Uniting Church in Australia through the Mandate approved by the Assembly Standing Committee in September 1993.</li><li>2. The Seventh Triennial Assembly formally endorsed the Mandate in July 1994.</li><li>3. UnitingCare Australia is the national body for the Uniting Church's community services, known as the UnitingCare Network.</li><li>4. The first report provided by Community Services Australia to the Seventh Triennial Assembly in July 1994 stated <i>"Despite the fact that the Uniting Church is heavily involved in community services activities throughout Australia, this work has until recently not found a place in the life of the Assembly. Consequently there has not been a national Uniting Church voice on important policy issues, nor has there been a place for synod staff to share ideas and plans."</i> The final part of the report states <i>"We firmly believe that the time for a national Uniting Church voice on community services is long overdue"</i>.</li></ol>	

	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>5. Today UnitingCare Australia is recognised as a trusted adviser to the Federal Government, and is acknowledged as a vital part of the life of the Uniting Church. The UnitingCare Network of community services is one of the largest in the country. The Network is comprised of 19 organisations, 50,000 staff and 30,000 volunteers, and supports 1.4 million people every year across 1,600 locations.</li> <li>6. In September 2023, UnitingCare Australia celebrated its 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary. A suite of materials were produced to capture key historical milestones, achievements and developments over the three decade history. This was the first time the history of UnitingCare Australia has been formally documented.</li> <li>7. The 30<sup>th</sup> Anniversary campaign was launched at the 2023 UnitingCare Australia Leaders Forum held on the 19<sup>th</sup> September at UCity in Adelaide, South Australia. Over eighty leaders from across the UnitingCare Network and Uniting Church gathered for the annual event.</li> <li>8. UnitingCare Australia commends the 30<sup>th</sup> Anniversary campaign to the Assembly Standing Committee and recommends that a formal Acknowledgement be presented to the 17<sup>th</sup> Triennial Assembly in July 2024.</li> </ol>	
Attachments	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <i>UnitingCare Australia 30<sup>th</sup> Anniversary</i> publication</li> <li>2. <i>Thirty years of influence, three decades of change: UnitingCare Australia’s history within the Australian political context</i></li> <li>3. <i>A collection of highlights, a message of hope</i></li> </ol>	
Recommendations	<p>That the Assembly Standing Committee:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. receive the report and attachments; and</li> <li>2. bring the following recommendation to the 17<sup>th</sup> Triennial Assembly –  “acknowledges the 30<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of UnitingCare Australia, recognising their faithful service and advocacy over many years.”</li> </ol>	
Submitted by	<p>Claerwen Little  National Director UnitingCare Australia  claerwenl@nat.unitingcare.org.au</p>	



# A History of Influence. A Future of Impact.

1993–2023  
Celebrating 30 years



We are here  
to speak truth  
to power.

“For the past 30 years, UnitingCare Australia has given voice to the Uniting Church’s commitment to social justice through advocacy and by strengthening community service provision. From the very beginning, our commitment to service has mirrored what is stated in the Basis of Union, perpetuating the link between “service and caring with political action and witness”. Today the UnitingCare Network of community services is one of the largest in the country. Together we have significant impact and influence – and we’re just getting started.”

**Claerwen Little**  
National Director, UnitingCare Australia



We are not fully  
who we are  
without each other.

“The Uniting Church is richer because UnitingCare Australia really is the face and the voice of the people that we long to serve. I hope that UnitingCare Australia and the agencies that make up the UnitingCare network really see the life of the church as part of and essential to who they are. Knowing what it means to follow Jesus Christ in this day and age really enhances the work and the well-being of UnitingCare Australia and provides the guiding principles, of what we do and why we do it.”

**Rev Sharon Hollis**  
President, Uniting Church in Australia

# A Proud Past

**“What we need is a national network of community services in the Uniting Church.”**

**Rev Brian Whitlock**

Director of Community Services, Queensland Synod  
Inaugural Chairperson, National Committee, Community Services Australia

This statement from Rev Brian Whitlock in conversation with Rev Harry Herbert in 1991 sparked a movement. A movement that was to become the UnitingCare Australia of today. All in the name of the Uniting Church, driven by justice, compassion and human rights.

Now regarded the founders of UnitingCare Australia, the late Reverends Harry Herbert and Brian Whitlock understood the need for the Church's community services to have a national voice and presence in Canberra. Their vision was to create a national body which could leverage and connect the lived experience of community service providers in the pursuit of social justice and reform of government policy in Australia. Its establishment, approved by the Assembly Standing Committee in 1993, demonstrated love and faith in action underpinned by the belief that we are better together.

**“If we keep a strong social justice agenda, then we will remain within the mission and vision of the Church and that will be important for us in the future.”**

**Rev Harry Herbert**

Executive Director, UnitingCare NSW.ACT  
Inaugural Secretary, National Committee, Community Services Australia

The early years of UnitingCare Australia, then called Community Services Australia, focussed on establishing a national presence. With the appointment of a National Director based in Canberra, UnitingCare Australia offered the Church's community service providers a unified point of connection for national advocacy and collaboration.

UnitingCare Australia's value as a national voice representing a large community service footprint was quickly realised with invitations to sit on many government working groups and ministerial committees. The fledgling entity, working with the Catholic and Anglican national bodies, stopped the Howard government's election commitment to introduce accommodation bonds for high needs aged care residents and instead negotiated an offer of additional funding to aged care providers with concessional residents. It also advocated to ensure that the introduction of the GST did not unfairly impact the most vulnerable in our community.

**“We are a pivotal voice in Canberra. A voice that matters. A voice that cares.”**

**Libby Davies**

National Director, UnitingCare Australia  
1994–2001

The legacy of this early collaboration and unwavering courage to advocate for the common good continues to this day. Federal governments of both political parties now recognising the importance and potency of UnitingCare Australia as an adviser and advocate for better and fairer policies.

## 1993

Assembly Standing Committee approves mandate of Community Services Australia.

Rev Harry Herbert appointed National Committee Chair. Libby Davies appointed Executive Director.

## 1994

Seventh Triennial Assembly formally endorses Community Services Australia.

Secretariat established in Canberra.

## 2000

Community Services Australia becomes UnitingCare Australia and the UnitingCare brand is officially launched.

# Catalysts of Change

By the late 2000s the federal government was becoming more sophisticated in its policy reform and development agenda. Data and impact were the new currency. It was in this environment that UnitingCare Australia's maturity and capacity as an agent of influence and strong advocacy came to the fore. A great idea was no longer the only catalyst for change, evidence now mattered.

Leveraging the lived experience and evidence of UnitingCare Australia's vast network of service providers was now the crucial ingredient for effective change and reform. While walking a well-worn path to and through Parliament House remained important, it would be the compelling evidence from the UnitingCare members that would hold sway. The expertise of the network in aged care, children and family services, employment, welfare payments, tax and transfers as well as confronting issues of inequality and service sustainability became the foundations of UnitingCare Australia's advocacy agenda.

UnitingCare Australia's participation in government and parliamentary inquiries, working groups and committees drew upon the network's extensive cache of data and evidence. Now with a seat at the table, UnitingCare Australia had positioned itself and the network it represented as credentialed partners of choice for governments interested in policy reform.

**“Our role is to go after structural issues that stop people thriving.”**

Lin Hatfield Dodds

National Director, UnitingCare Australia  
2001–2016

Success in UnitingCare Australia's policy advocacy agenda was also based upon a continued commitment and belief in the philosophy of its founders that we are better together. Collaboration with and amongst the UnitingCare Australia members took on many forms over the years.

The establishment of working groups in areas such as aged care and children services, campaigns such as Pancake Day and the Target Christmas Appeal unified the network and provided members with opportunities to share practices and create service delivery opportunities at a national level. This served to further enhance the collective authority, power and influence of UnitingCare Australia and its network while providing strength and agility to confidently deal with the challenges ahead.

The last decade has been dominated by royal commissions, a global pandemic and significant environmental and economic challenges, all of which have tested the resilience of UnitingCare Australia, the network, and the nation.

**“We must never lose sight of our Christian values and continue to find expressions of love for the people we work with through all the compliance.”**

Peter Bicknell

Chair, UnitingCare Australia  
2006–2016

During this period of profound challenge, UnitingCare Australia was a significant contributor to the Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety and a powerful voice for increased wages and funding for the sector. It was instrumental in creating the Aged and Community Care Providers Association, a single national peak body for aged care in Australia.

It held a seat at the table during the Government's pandemic response, helping shape the Government's policy across key community services, harnessing the expertise of service providers responding to the impacts of the pandemic.

## 2001

Lin Hatfield Dodds appointed National Director.

## 2002

Rev John Pettman appointed Chair.

## 2003

Richard Miller appointed Chair of National Committee.

## 2005

Assembly Standing Committee approves new mandate for UnitingCare Australia, and the UnitingCare National Reference Committee becomes known as the National Committee.

# A Fearless Future

The strength, expertise and vast footprint of the UnitingCare Australia network of services continued to be recognised by the Government when a consortium of nine members led by Uniting Vic.Tas, was selected to deliver a \$140 million national Escaping Violence Payment pilot program. After two successful years, an additional \$38.2 million in funding extended the program until 2025, demonstrating that both advocacy and national service delivery achieves even greater impact when done together.

UnitingCare Australia has continued to engage with the Government and Parliament, in grappling with complex policy and service delivery issues. This has been done quietly, intentionally and deliberately achieving significant political capital which it now draws upon to speak truth to power. In collaboration once again with our other church provider colleagues, UnitingCare Australia would be a central player in seeing off proposed changes to the regulation of charities which, if implemented, risked their ongoing existence for simply seeking to be a voice in the public square.

**“The work of community services is absolutely vital to the life of the Uniting Church – it is our expression of our Christian faith in action.”**

**Bronwyn Pike**

CEO, Uniting Vic.Tas  
Board Member, UnitingCare Australia

Australia faces an uncertain future. Geopolitical tensions in the region, concerns with climate change and an uncertain economic outlook will continue to be in the forefront of the minds of Australia’s leaders. Collaboration between governments, business, charities and broader civil society will be the only way forward in addressing some of these issues.

**“Having influence and impact at the centre of power is a great privilege.”**

**Claerwen Little**

National Director, UnitingCare Australia  
2017–

UnitingCare Australia will continue to play its part in addressing the many challenges ahead as an even stronger and more influential voice of impact for justice and equality. It will do this by working with and drawing upon the collective wisdom and experience of a robust and innovative network of community service providers, willing to share and work together in the advancement of the common good.

The ongoing success of UnitingCare Australia and its members is assured because we hold true to the belief that in the pursuit of equality and justice for all, we are better together.

## 2006

UnitingCare Australia merges with the Uniting Missions Network. Peter Bicknell appointed Chair of National Committee.

## 2017

Claerwen Little appointed National Director. Bronwyn Pike appointed Chair of National Committee.

## 2019

UnitingCare Australia National Committee becomes UnitingCare Australia Board. Paul Linossier appointed Interim Chair.

## 2020

Geoff Batkin appointed Chair of UnitingCare Australia Board.

# UnitingCare Australia Today

## Our Mission

To give voice to the Uniting Church's commitment to social justice through advocacy and by strengthening community service provision.

## Our Values



Hope



Justice



Integrity



Respect



Compassion



Innovation

## Four Strategic Objectives

### Impact

To position UnitingCare Australia as a high impact organisation.

### Identity

Be recognised as a leading advocate with a clear profile and strong identity.

### Relationships

Nurture and extend critical internal and external relationships with key stakeholders for impact and influence.

### Resources and Capability

Ensure we have adequate resources and capability to deliver on our Mandate.

## Three Advocacy Priorities

### Justice for First Peoples

That the unique place of our First Peoples in the life of our nation is acknowledged and upheld.

### Ageing to our Full Potential

That all people experience compassion and dignity as they age and exercise their rights as full members of society.

### Economic Equality and Inclusion

That all people are able to fully participate across all domains of life.

## Advocacy is amplified through action

Over the last few years alone, UnitingCare Australia has completed:



**109** submissions to government



**7** campaigns advocating for First Peoples



**200+** meetings with ministers and politicians



**376** media releases



**1,000+** news stories



**6** Royal Commission appearances



**Policy changes** for the people we serve



“The growth, consolidation, development, and impact of our agencies over the last thirty years has been nothing short of miraculous. We are at our best when we work collaboratively and together as a team. May we continue to be one Uniting Church family, working together as part of God's mission in the world.”

**Geoff Batkin**  
Chair, UnitingCare Australia

**We are a brave and courageous Church.**



# Braver, Stronger, Together

The UnitingCare Network has a proud history of serving vulnerable and disadvantaged people in urban, rural and remote communities across Australia for more than 100 years. We are the community services of the Uniting Church in Australia with an unwavering commitment to social justice and human rights.

“UnitingCare Australia has made an extraordinary contribution to the social fabric of Australia, making us a happier, more connected nation.”

Hon Dr Andrew Leigh MP

Assistant Minister for Competition, Charities and Treasury  
Assistant Minister for Employment

Today, we are 19 organisations working together serving more than 1.4 million people every year, powered by 50,000 staff and 30,000 volunteers. Our services include aged care, disability, children’s services, mental health, youth and family, homelessness, disaster relief, health care, and employment.

We have grown to become a cohesive, collaborative and diverse collective of community services with a reputation for being innovative, ambitious and passionate about inspiring a better world for all Australians.

-  **50,000** staff
-  **1,600** locations
-  **19** community service organisations
-  **30,000** volunteers
-  **1.4 million** people supported across Australia
-  **100+** years of service

## Our Network



# Thirty years of influence. Three decades of change.

UnitingCare Australia's history within  
the Australian political context.

# UnitingCare Australia

Influencing policy. Inspired by people.

Community Services Australia (UnitingCare Australia) was established in 1993, a time of profound social and economic change. It is an agency born of the Uniting Church in Australia, charged with giving voice, hope and dignity to the vulnerable and marginalised.

UnitingCare Australia's story is one of strength, influence and goodwill. Its foundation of faith and deep connection to its member agencies' lived experience has allowed it to shape and influence national policy. It is a success built upon respect and authenticity, of relationships and quiet diplomacy, often out of the public eye.

Like society itself, UnitingCare Australia has evolved over the last 30 years and will continue to do so as it meets the social and economic challenges of the next 30 years.

# Three decades of change

## The policy landscape of successive Australian governments

Australia's social, economic and technological outlook has evolved over the last 30 years. The era of the Hawke-Keating governments (1983-1996) laid the path for Australia's entry into the world of trade liberalisation, globalisation and economic rationalism. It was done in the true tradition of Labor – wide consultation and a focus on delivering a strong social dividend. It was a time of economic and social revolution which the Howard Government would continue.

The Howard government (1996-2007) would advance the agenda of economic rationalism in Australia and include a new social paradigm of personal responsibility and choice. Less government and more free markets would be the prevailing view of the time. Marketisation of government services would prove to be a financial windfall for charities, but it would come with a price.

The sale of government owned assets and a mining revenue windfall would see the Howard government build its reputation as being strong economic managers. Similarly, the government's focus on national security and border protection would create a legacy that future governments would be measured against.

The Kevin (Rudd) 07 campaign sought to reinvigorate the national government agenda. It was a time of reviews, summits and ideas. Charities were part of the consultation process, and policy changes to support the new standing of the sector were implemented. Climate change would become a major focus, though it would be a battle ground between and within both of the major parties. Social policy initiatives would be central to the achievements of the Labor government.

However, it would be climate change and leadership instability that would dominate the political discourse for the next decade of Australian politics, impacting both the Labor and Coalition governments.

In 2013 the Coalition swept into power. There was an agenda of repealing the former government's various initiatives and reigning in government debt and spending. Many of its harshest measures relating to welfare, health and education spending were blocked by the Senate, but it continued to advance an agenda of fiscal control, though all too often aimed at the most vulnerable in our society. Leadership instability would strike again, with the Coalition government having three Prime Ministers between 2013 and 2022. It would be seen as a decade lost, with Australia's standing in the global community on climate change and the treatment of refugees at a low. In 2020 the Morrison government would confront the COVID-19 pandemic.

It would form a national cabinet which would require leaders of the State/Territory and Commonwealth governments to operationalise a national strategy to protect the health and financial wellbeing of the nation and of the Australian economy.

# Hawke-Keating Era

## The era of economic rationalism

The 1990s was a time of reform, one which would establish Australia's new place in the global economy and offer Australians the promise of improved social and economic prosperity. This era of reform began in 1983 with the election of Labor Prime Minister Bob Hawke and his Treasurer Paul Keating. The Hawke-Keating government, which spanned from 1983-1996, pursued a consensus model of economic rationalism, underpinned by the Prices and Incomes Accord negotiated with the Australian union movement.

This new economic rationalism would see the privatisation of state-owned enterprises such as Qantas and the Commonwealth Bank. It also marked a new era for Australian businesses one which required them to navigate a floating Australian dollar, increased international capital flows, and the removal of high tariffs that protected local manufacturers from imports, especially from the Asia-Pacific region.

In a speech<sup>i</sup> to the National Social Policy Conference at the University of New South Wales in 1995, then Prime Minister Paul Keating stated:

**“Over the last 12 years, we have transformed the economic structure of Australia. We are well known for this... What is sometimes forgotten is that at the same time we transformed the social infrastructure of the nation.”**

The list of social policy initiatives implemented during this era of economic reform is long and include legacy social programs such as Medicare and improved retirement income through compulsory superannuation for all working Australians.

Other policy measures, some of which were the green shoots of future government policy initiatives included: introduction of a Job Compact offering everyone unemployed for 18 months or more a job, the establishment of the Child Support Scheme, the recognition and protection of native title through the enactment of the Native Title Act, reform to Australia's education system which saw more than 7 in 10 young people completing high school as compared with only 3 in 10 in 1983, the establishment of the Home and Community Care program, the enactment of the Disability Discrimination Act as well as the Sex Discrimination Act, and the introduction of a Maternity Allowance.



i. The Hon P J Keating MP, National Social Policy Conference University of New South Wales, Sydney, 7 July 1995.

# The Howard years

## A time of Market Freedom and National Security

The reforms under the Hawke-Keating era might best be described as economic rationalism guided by the principle of the collective good. The election of John Howard in 1996 would see him deliver a purer form of economic rationalism guided by the principles of individual responsibility and choice.

John Howard was the Prime Minister of Australia from 1996 to 2007. Like Hawke and Keating before him, Prime Minister John Howard was a strong advocate of economic rationalism. His government would both broaden the scope and increase the pace of privatisation and outsourcing of government services. He would also make one of the most significant changes to Australia's taxation system through the introduction of a Goods and Services Tax. The period immediately following the election of the Howard government represented the biggest disposal of public enterprises in Australian history<sup>ii</sup> including the sale of the national shipping line, the National Rail Corporation as well as airports, Australian Defence Industries and the partial sale of Telstra.

Within Government administration itself a major divestment (or outsourcing) of services was underway including most of those agencies that provided services to the public sector such as car hire, travel services and office removals. The then Minister for Administrative Services, David Jull, was purported to have claimed that he took a 'yellow pages' approach to public enterprises: if such services were advertised in the yellow pages, there was no reason for them to be provided by government<sup>iii</sup>.

The outsourcing agenda required a fundamental shift in the way in which the public sector operated, one where there was an increased focus on contract management and the procurement of services. The procurement of services extended beyond corporate activities, encompassing program delivery. The most significant of these for the charity sector was the creation of the Job Network to replace the Commonwealth Employment Service.

It was one of the largest tenders in social services ever undertaken and would be the blueprint for a new market-based model of government service delivery. The outsourcing of program delivery would forever change the relationship between the Government and the charity sector.

Charities were now operating in a quasi-market, one which the government would contract with them (and the private sector) for the delivery of a range of human services. The delivery of services would be enforced under contract law with binding terms and conditions and specified outputs. The contracting out of human services would become a new and lucrative source of funding to the charity sector, a point not lost on the government. New restrictive clauses commonly referred to as "gag clauses" would be part of the new contracting regime under the Howard government.

Gag clauses sought to stifle advocacy by charities holding government contracts. This would prove to be a master stroke given the criticism that was being generated against the government's policy agenda in relation to asylum seekers, welfare recipients and first nations people in the Northern Territory. However, UnitingCare Australia, unencumbered by such obligations, would continue to undertake national advocacy on these and other social issues on behalf of the Church's community services and those they served.

The social and economic policies of the Howard government reflected a strong commitment to the idea of free markets and personal choice and responsibility. It was part of the economic rationalism continuum, without the social guardrails of the previous government.

The Howard government was one which focussed on national security, management of the economy and encouraged a social construct of user pay and personal choice and responsibility.

ii. Aulich, Chris and O'Flynn, Janine, (2007) 'John Howard: The Great Privatiser?', Australian Journal of Political Science, 42:2, 365-381.

iii. Taylor, M. 1997. 'No Holding Back the Outsourcing Flow-on.' The Canberra Times 11 April.

# The Labor Era

## Reviews and Renewal

The 2007 election saw the Labor party return to government, led by Kevin Rudd. The Labor party would remain in office until 2013, however leadership instability would see Prime Minister Rudd replaced in June 2010 by Julia Gillard who in turn would be replaced by Kevin Rudd in June 2013. This was a period of reviews and renewal, a time of summits, studies and commissions.

Despite leadership issues, the Global Financial Crisis (GFC) and a minority government from 2010, the Labor government delivered on a range of economic and social reforms. The national apology to the stolen generation, the creation of the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) and the establishment of a Royal Commission into institutional responses to child sexual abuse, recognised the importance of acknowledging and rectifying actions of the past in the hope those affected would have the opportunity for a better future.

Tax reform in this period of government was limited. Both the minerals resource rent tax (MRRT) and the carbon pricing scheme (carbon tax) were short-lived, being quickly repealed by the Coalition government in 2014.

However, this was an era of important reform including the establishment of the NDIS, the creation of the National Health and Hospitals Network, a new "Better Schools" (Gonski) funding model and a universal paid parental leave scheme. In response to the GFC the government invested billions of dollars in critical small-scale infrastructure including building new school facilities, community housing and home insulation.

Later it would invest heavily in a range of national infrastructure projects including the national broadband network. While the government was successful in moving forward on climate initiatives such as the carbon pricing scheme, its repeal would be part of a decade long story of climate change battles.

It was also a time when charities were brought into the fold, playing a major role in the government's social policy agenda. In turn the government would introduce the Freedom to Advocate Act, outlawing gag order clauses in commonwealth government contracts and establish a new Charity regulator designed with the sector to ensure that it was fit for purpose.

In 2012 Fair Work Australia (FWA) handed down a landmark decision which recognised that workers in the care and support sector suffered a pay disparity because the sector was predominately made up of women. This decision would be funded by the government, supporting wage increases in the order of 20-45% for about 150,000 employees.

During this period of government UnitingCare Australia proved itself to be a valued confidante to Ministers and senior public servants. It helped the government navigate complex social policy issues, harnessing the lived experience of the network.

# The Coalition Era

## A pandemic that took us back to the basics

After years of political instability, the Labor party lost the 2013 election which would see the Coalition government in power until 2022. Like the Labor party before it, leadership instability would be the hallmark of the Coalition government with three Prime Ministers over the nine years it would be in office.

The return in 2013 of a Coalition government, led by Prime Minister Tony Abbott, focussed its attention on repealing the Minerals Resource Rent Tax (MRRT) and carbon tax as well as addressing the government's fiscal position. It campaigned on a mantra of returning the Budget to surplus and ending government debt. The Government's 2014 Budget was regarded as one of the toughest in decades. Informed by the National Commission of Audit, the budget sought to impose significant cuts to government expenditures in areas of health, education and welfare. While many of the measures failed to pass the Senate, it set a clear direction of the government's intent and the extent it would go to achieve its mantra.

Repealing the MRRT and carbon tax and the introduction of Operation Sovereign Borders, aimed at deterring and stopping the arrival of asylum seeker boats, were often seen as the major outcomes under the leadership of Prime Minister Abbott. His 2014 Budget would see support cut to Australian car makers and eventually leading to the end of car manufacturing in Australia. By September 2015 Prime Minister Abbott would be replaced by Malcolm Turnbull.

Under Prime Minister Turnbull, Australia legalised same-sex marriage and moved to introduce the National Energy Guarantee (NEG), a new mechanism to encourage investment in renewable energy to address growing concerns with climate change. The NEG failed to win the support of government members.

Prime Minister Turnbull was particularly interested in advancing Australia's national capacity in innovation and science, with a range of measures such as tax incentives for startups, funding for research projects, and initiatives to promote digital innovation. His government's focus on technology was particularly prevalent within government service delivery and would include the infamous Robodebt scheme.

In 2018 the government initiated a Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety. Its final report was tabled on 1 March 2021.

In 2018 Scott Morrison became Prime Minister. He would secure an election victory over Federal Opposition Leader Bill Shorten in 2019 despite polling suggesting a Shorten win. Soon after his election win, concerns with his leadership began to unfold notably his absence overseas during the catastrophic bushfires in the summer of 2019/20 and his subsequent engagement with its victims. His government would struggle with a series of scandals including the infamous 'sports rorts' affair.

In 2020, the Morrison government faced its greatest challenge, managing the health and economic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. The government instituted a range of measures such as a mass vaccination program, the introduction of the Jobkeeper payment, a temporary lift to welfare payments and the funding of essential industries. The government and charity sector worked well together in coordinating a program of support to vulnerable Australians impacted by the pandemic.



# The new team in town

Let's take today, tomorrow, together.

In May 2022 Anthony Albanese became Prime Minister. His government's immediate focus was on implementing their election commitments including measures to increase funding for aged and childcare. The Albanese government moved quickly to reposition Australia's international reputation on climate change while continuing with the previous government's strategic defence commitments under the AUKUS initiative.

Domestically the government has faced a series of economic challenges, including cost of living and housing pressures as a result of high inflation and the impacts of some twelve official interest rate rises. The increased cost of living has dampened the benefits of the Albanese government's positive agenda to lift wages, at least in the short term.

The issue most likely to define the Albanese government's time in office is its support for constitutional recognition of an indigenous voice to parliament. Despite a lack of bipartisanship on this issue, the government is actively pursuing this agenda which will include a referendum in October 2023.

The Albanese government like all those before it, will continue to face challenges round the economy, environment, equality and justice. These issues are not for governments to solve alone, they require the collective wisdom and effort of people and organisations of goodwill to encourage our political leaders to work toward a common goal which will harness the potential of us all and offer life of dignity and hope.

UnitingCare Australia will continue to play its part in shaping the national narrative and policy solutions that promote dignity and create a country of inclusion and care for its people and the land upon which we so rely.

# A collection of highlights. A message of hope.

Celebrating 30 Years  
1993-2023

As part of celebrating our 30th anniversary, we collected stories and reflections through a widely distributed survey, short video vignettes and in-depth interviews. This is a summary of what we collected.

# Greatest achievements

Strong and influential advocacy and relationships with Government underpinned by front-line experience and a united voice of the UnitingCare network. This is further amplified and validated through the lived experience of people who are marginalised and disadvantaged.

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Building a united network and identity that operates as a collective to achieve influence and impact with Government and to improve service delivery and collaboration.

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Recognised as a strong national voice for justice representing Uniting Church community services.

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Reforms achieved together with the network in areas of aged care, treasury, employment, social services and early childhood education and care.

“The moment that I remember with most satisfaction sitting on the national body was one day when Anne Cross from Queensland put up a hand and said, ‘We’ll do it.’ She was saying that they would take on the services that had failed or were close to failing in the Northern Territory with the collapse of Frontier Services...they did it: full of grace, full of generosity, they did it with a little bit of help from the rest of us. And they’ve done a fabulous job. It’s that moment that I recognise the real significance of a national entity like UnitingCare.”

**Peter Worland**  
Past CEO Uniting NSW.ACT

“A while back we had some NDIS issues. We’d applied to conduct more services and some three and a half, four months down the track, despite repeated attempts...trying to get in touch with the NDIA – absolutely no luck. I drafted a letter to UnitingCare Australia, chatted about the issue and within two weeks, the problem was resolved. That was an absolute godsend for me. It was fantastic and really reinforced to me the important work that UnitingCare Australia does.”

**Dr Harry Randhawa**  
Chief Executive and Director, Uniting Country SA

“One of the key achievements of UnitingCare Australia has been to advocate strongly and positively for ‘ageing to our full potential’. And against the backdrop of the Aged Care Royal Commission this was so important. There’s no doubt that UnitingCare Australia has had a significant and influential impact on governments and other key stakeholders. Facilitating the creation of a unified peak body for aged care was another extraordinary achievement of which they can be very proud.”

**Chris Stewart**  
Chief Executive Officer Helping Hand

# Memorable experiences and highlights

Seeing stories and experiences of people in our services being shared with policy makers and included in submissions that created a deeper impact on our advocacy.

National Pancake Day events raising money for our local services provision.

Our work during the Rudd/ Gillard Government on a range of important social policy measures from the implementation of the Equal Remuneration Order, aged care reform, Springboard employment program to the establishment of the ACNC (Australian Charities and Not for Profits Commission).

Attending the UnitingCare Australia 2022 Leaders Forum in Canberra which was both informative and an opportunity to meet more network colleagues face to face.

Real results achieved together as a network in aged care advocacy surrounding the Aged Care Quality and Safety Royal Commission such as increased funding and a wage increase for workers.

UnitingCare Australia's leadership in the creation of ACCPA (Aged Care and Community Providers Association) resulting in a single national peak body for aged care in Australia.

The relationships formed and expertise shared through the various working groups facilitated by UnitingCare Australia.

Network collaboration and strong advocacy throughout the COVID-19 pandemic.

“There's lots of achievements over those 30 years. One that I've actually played a bit of a role in, is around a really punitive public policy: the approach to welfare payments in Australia with the cashless debit card. This new government has been able to actually overturn a part of Australia's history, which has been a very sad one. One, which was both racist in its nature, but also one that controlled the lives of far too many people and took away their agency.”

**Simon Schrapel**  
Chief Executive, Uniting Communities

“Some of the (best) experiences I had with UnitingCare Australia was (due to) the (great) diversity and connection, shared learnings and respect. And in giving a voice to service providers of some of the most vulnerable people in our community. We met with influential bureaucrats and ministers. We were able to share the stories of individuals and how policy was impacting on some of the people in our community. Service providers highlighted the positives of policy, but also some of the challenges. And I think that drawing on that experience was very valuable in helping shape policy of the future.”

**Libby Craft**  
Past CEO Uniting SA

“...(One of the) memorable experience(s) of my time working with UnitingCare was trying to tell a senate committee inquiring into poverty in Australia that poverty is a human rights issue. There was a lot of pushback from the committee for that, particularly from the Chair, but we managed to stand our ground and make our point.”

**Rev Dr Elenie Poulos**  
Board member Uniting NSW.ACT, past National Director UnitingJustice Australia

# Our common bond

Our Uniting Church commitment to compassion and service driven by social justice and love for all.

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A call to live Christ's gospel in practical ways through community services.

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A belief that our advocacy and input into government decision making and social and economic policy achieve better outcomes for the communities we serve.

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A common purpose to positively impact the lives of people who are marginalised in society.

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Our shared vision for a just, connected and caring society in the way of Christ.

“I think the common bond we have as a network...is really inspired by Jesus as a social disruptor. He was always fighting for inclusion, always fighting to make the world a better place for vulnerable people, as I believe we are all trying to do as well.”

**Tracey Burton**

Chief Executive/Executive Director Uniting NSW.ACT

“Not only do the community services agencies and outreach activities of the church have a common bond from simply being part of the Uniting Church in Australia, they also share a sense of collective identity in striving to be bold and courageous in who they are and what they do. For people doing it tough...”

**Chris Hall**

Past Chief Executive Officer Juniper, past CEO UnitingCare West, past CEO Wesley Mission (Perth), past Director Uniting Missions Network



## Our collective identity

Generosity  
Unwavering **Change**  
Diakonia **Caring** Prophetic  
**Love** **Uniting** Solidarity  
Compassion **Together** Passion  
**Voice** Philanthropic **Dignity**  
**Community** Advocacy



Hopeful



The dove



Caring hands

“For me, a standout example of the network at work was the response to the failing aged care services in the Northern Territory in Northwest Australia, you know, a decade ago. Whilst UnitingCare Queensland and Juniper in Western Australia did the heavy lifting on assuming responsibility...I think what was important was that the network already existed and could be mobilised when it was actually needed. We were together in asking and answering the question, ‘If not the church, who would step up to provide services?’”

Anne Cross

Past Chief Executive Officer UnitingCare Queensland

# Hopes for the future

Opportunity to continue to work collaboratively with a focus on becoming leaders in providing new service models for vulnerable communities, and innovative solutions in social and economic issues that affect the nation.

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Continuing to strengthen our collective voice and shape public policy in Canberra.

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Ongoing collaboration and networking to better serve vulnerable people and communities.

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Expanding our service reach and support as a faith-based network.

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Seeing the network as an embodiment of the movement of God, not an accompaniment to it.

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Creating an even stronger culture and reputation that continues to attract talented people to influence for the common good.

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Walking together with First Nations People.

To look at how to unlock underutilised assets held by the Uniting Church to make an extraordinary and multi-generational impact on homelessness and housing insecurity in Australia.

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Tapping into the vast intellectual property to develop resources for mission and helping the Assembly in governance reform.

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Continued growth, reach and scope as a visible mission of expression of the faith and values of the Uniting Church.

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Steadfast and authentic in our service delivery grounded in our mission and mandate while being courageous as we encounter significant barriers – environmental, cultural, financial, theological.

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The Church will need to be more agile and encompassing as services become more relevant to community than traditional church.

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Service to be seen as mission. It is time for this mission to shape and inform the future of the Uniting Church.

“Happy 30th anniversary, you deadly mob. So proud to be part of the justice narrative with you all. Now with strength from my ancestors and elders from forever and beyond. Stay deadly.”

**Alison Overeem**

UnitingCare Australia Board Member, Manager Leprena  
Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress (UAICC)  
Lutruwita Tasmania

“I’ve been absolutely pleased to see the leadership with a new strategic plan that reflects the importance of people with disability in the Australian community and how we can foster their inclusion and independence through greater financial and social reform.”

**Kane Blackman**

Chief Executive Officer Good Sammy Enterprises

“We are called to journey together to serve the poor, to shape a just society for the marginalised. The Uniting Church and the UnitingCare Network are not two but one. In many ways, we are legally, financially connected, but above all, we are called to mission with God in and for the world.”

**Rev Dr Ji Zhang**

Past Uniting Church in Australia Assembly Theologian-in-Residence