



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. Communities are places of safety and inclusion for all people.
- 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. They experience food and water security and have the connectivity needed for effective communications and for people to be safe.
- Costs of living for essential services including food, housing, education, health care and transport are affordable, particularly for communities in rural and remote Australia.
- 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.
- Our lifestyle and culture promote good mental health and our governments, workplaces and communities have policies and practices which support this. Appropriate mental health support services are made available across all communities and especially in rural and remote areas.
- All people can access the essential services they need, whether that is protection from violence and abuse, quality care, medical services, or harm reduction services. This includes younger and older generations, people at the end of life, people with disability, First Peoples and people at risk of experiencing violence.

THE STATE OF THE NATION

High rates of mental illness

- In the last 12 months, 1 in 5 people in Australia have experienced a mental illness and around 43% of Australians will experience a mental illness at some point in their lifetime¹.

Lack of Safe Spaces

- In 2022-23 about 1 in 32 children (180,000) came in

contact with the child protection system².

- 1 in 5 Australian young people reported being socially excluded, threatened or abused online³.
- As many as 1 in 3 children report being the target of school bullying on a regular basis⁴.
- Workplace bullying is a significant factor in Australian workplaces, affecting 1 in 10 workers⁵.
- In 2021-22 an estimated 1.7 million Australian adults (8.7 per cent) experienced sexual harassment⁶.

Rural and remote communities are suffering

- Rural areas contribute at least 80% of Australia's exports, valued at almost \$500 billion a year. They also contribute to almost 50% of tourism revenue and produce 90% of the food we consume⁷.
- Large parts of Australia are experiencing more frequent damaging weather events, while many are also continuing to recover and rebuild from previous natural disasters.
- Cost of living pressures are disproportionately impacting people in rural and remote communities. Factors include paying for groceries, fuel and services, rising freight costs, rising costs on repairs to vehicles and dwellings, unavailability or high costs of insurance for homes/contents, limited availability of housing and qualified tradespeople^{8,9}.
- People living in rural and remote areas of Australia 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 areas¹⁰.
- Rates of self-harm and suicide increase with geographic remoteness¹¹.

WITNESS FROM THE BIBLE

- The witness of the Old Testament speaks to God's desire for communities of "shalom", a peace that 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 AFFIRMS

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.”

OUR ASKS

1. Community approaches to building resilience, teaching respectful relationships, and identifying abuse and neglect.
2. Governments adequately fund health services, education, housing and support for existing communities and people seeking to settle in rural and remote communities.
3. Investment in rural infrastructure to help build community resilience and prepare for disasters.
4. All people have access to clean water, affordable food and housing, are connected to services and have opportunities to connect with people both physically and through reliable technology.
5. Isolated children are guaranteed access to quality education.
6. Governments address cost of living pressures, recognising and focusing on the particular impacts these pressures have on communities in rural and remote Australia.
7. Appropriate services for people living with mental illness are adequately funded, including initiatives to ensure appropriate services in rural and remote areas.
8. Continuing a whole-of-community approach to overcome stigma and discrimination against mental illness and people who experience mental illness.

CONVERSATION STARTERS

You may like to select one or more questions to put to MPs or community leaders:

1. How will you support communities impacted by extreme weather and natural disasters?
2. What policies will you put in place to address mental health, including in rural and remote Australia?
3. How are you addressing / will you address bullying

and harassment in our workplaces and schools?

4. What local initiatives are possible to address important social issues including mental health, illicit drug use and bullying?

References:

1. <https://www.aihw.gov.au/mental-health/overview/prevalence-and-impact-of-mental-illness>
2. <https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/child-protection/child-protection-australia-insights/contents/child-protection-system-in-australia>
3. <https://www.esafety.gov.au/educators/training-for-professionals/professional-learning-program-teachers/cyberbullying-factsheet>
4. <https://bullyingnoway.gov.au/resource/fact-sheets/familyfactsheets/bnw-factsheet-2-bullying-facts.pdf>
5. <https://www.worksafe.qld.gov.au/resources/campaigns/mental-health-week/addressing-workplace-bullying>
6. <https://www.abs.gov.au/media-centre/media-releases/17-million-australians-sexually-harassed-2021-22>
7. <https://www.ruralhealth.org.au/rural-health-australia-snapshot#page=2>
8. <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2022-06-13/fresh-produce-too-expensive-remote-living-cost-of-living-crisis/101057668>
9. <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2024-06-04/high-cost-of-living-in-remote-australia-national-strategy/103902456>
10. <https://www.ruralhealth.org.au/rural-health-australia-snapshot#page=2>
11. <https://www.aihw.gov.au/suicide-self-harm-monitoring/data/geography/suicide-by-remoteness-areas>