

OPENING STATEMENT

Thank you for the opportunity to represent UnitingCare Australia here today.

Before I begin, I would like to acknowledge the sovereign First Peoples of the lands on which we are meeting – the Ngunnawal people – and to pay my respects to their elders past, present and emerging. I'd also like to express my solidarity with their ongoing struggle for justice at this critical point in time in our history.

The COVID-19 pandemic has brought social, health and economic inequalities into sharp focus.

We commend the government for decisive interventions which have flattened the curve and provided urgent relief to many of the most vulnerable people in our communities.

But the effects of these policy responses have been uneven. They have exposed and exacerbated pre-existing inequities.

As the pandemic and its effects continue to be felt across communities, the decisions we make now have the potential to either ease or amplify deepening disadvantage.

We are particularly worried about the fast-approaching funding cliff in September and the impact of rapidly withdrawing JobKeeper and the Coronavirus Supplement.

As we face the worst recession since the Great Depression, we cannot return to the unacceptably low, pre-JobSeeker rate. We need to ensure an adequate social safety net so that everyone can live with dignity.

In our submission, we outlined a number of areas that we are deeply concerned about. These include financial relief and economic assistance,

issues for First Peoples, housing and homelessness, older Australians, people on temporary visas and the sustainability of the community services sector.

Throughout the pandemic we have been actively working with government to find the best solutions for people in the most vulnerable circumstances, and advocating to ensure they are at the very heart of policy making.

We must ensure that no one is left behind.

We are also joined today by Chief Executive Officer of Uniting Vic.Tas, the Honorable Bronwyn Pike, who can speak to the issues on the ground, as Victoria's largest community services provider. We welcome the opportunity to discuss our concerns with you more fully. Thank you.