# Social Justice
# STOCKTAKE

*Taking stock of our communities*

THE SALVATION ARMY

WESTERN AUSTRALIA

# Acknowledgement of Country

The Salvation Army Australia acknowledges the Traditional Owners of the land on which we meet and work and pay our respect to Elders past, present and future.

We value and include people of all cultures, languages, abilities, sexual orientations, gender identities, gender expressions and intersex status. We are committed to providing programs that are fully inclusive. We are committed to the safety and wellbeing of people of all ages, particularly children.

# A practical approach to social justice

The Salvation Army is committed to seeking reconciliation, unity and equity throughout Australia. We value all people – regardless of age, culture, capacity, language spoken, sexual orientation, gender identity and/or expression.

We aim to provide safe, welcoming and fully inclusive programs to people of all ages, abilities and backgrounds. Our Salvation Army mission worldwide, is to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ and to meet human needs in His name with love and without discrimination.

We recognise and are sensitive to the needs of people who often find it difficult to access and use services in times of crisis. This includes Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, people who identify as LGBTIQA+, people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, and people with disabilities.

The Salvation Army believes all people deserve compassion, dignity, hope and respect. We are committed to the safety and wellbeing of people of all ages, particularly children.

# Contents

The hand–heart–shield motif speaks of the need to **raise our hands and be counted**, and that we need to do so with **love and hope**.

# The Social Justice Stocktake

Working for justice is at the heart of what The Salvation Army does in Australia. It is integral to our ethos, our mission and our vision.

The experience of the pandemic has given us all greater insight into just how deeply social injustice is embedded in Australia. In this Stocktake, The Salvation Army wanted to get to the heart of what people were seeing in their local communities, and from there build a map of social justice priorities across Australia. We checked in with over fifteen thousand Australians across every State and Territory and in every electorate.

*We found that Australians care deeply about social injustice — but don't always know what to do about it.*

We heard that many people feel overwhelmed, even hopeless, when asked how Australia can address the issues they see in their local communities. Some felt they needed government to act before they could do anything individually. Some despaired that governments (of any level and any political persuasion) don't seem to care enough about the issues and injustices going on around them every day.

So instead of just providing our findings, we've tried to help alleviate that sense of hopelessness by also outlining practical solutions. We firmly believe that every social justice issue can be addressed.

*Every person can make a difference.*

*Together, we can make an even greater difference.*

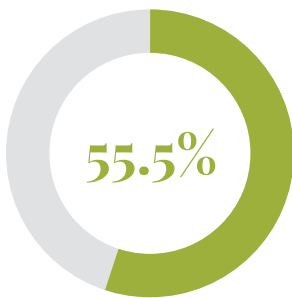**Our hope is that the following report will show how.**

The Salvation Army Australia is a Christian movement dedicated to sharing the love of Jesus. **We do this by:**

- *Caring for people* • *Creating faith pathways*
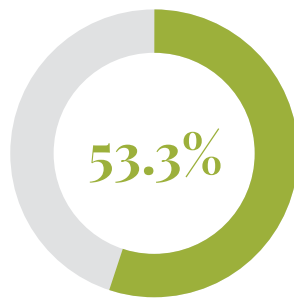- *Building healthy communities* • *Working for justice*
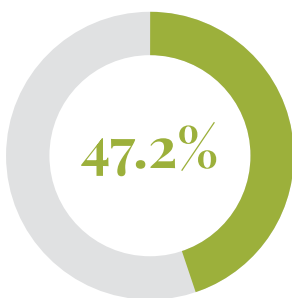
# Social Justice in Western Australia
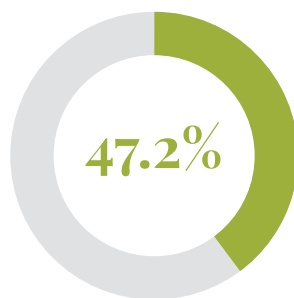
## Breakdown of responses

**55.5%**
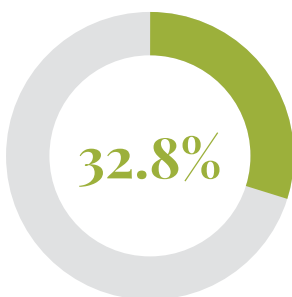Mental health

**53.3%**
Alcohol and drug misuse

**47.2%**
Housing affordability

**47.2%**
Homelessness

**32.8%**
Family violence

## Compared to Australia

Western Australia's top five social justice issues were very consistent with national results, with mental health, alcohol and other drug misuse, housing affordability, homelessness and family violence all being the most commonly identified issues across Australia.

While mental health was the most commonly chosen issue in WA and nationally, far more Western Australians are concerned about homelessness **(47.2 per cent)** than the national result **(35.1 per cent).**

Respondents in six of WA's **15 electorates** identified homelessness as one of the top two issues, with residents from Curtin **(52.5 per cent),** Fremantle **(62.4 per cent)** and O'Connor **(71.4 per cent),** identifying it most often.

Similarly, Western Australians identified alcohol and drug misuse more commonly **(53.5 per cent)** than the national result **(42.56 per cent).**

### What stands out

Mental health is a major concern for Western Australians.

Supporting the results, WA had the **fourth highest suicide rate** in Australia in 2020. Between 2016 and 2020, WA had the highest suicide rate among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and the second highest rate among children (aged five to 17 years).[1]

WA's high proportion of FIFO (fly in/fly out) and DIDO (drive in/drive out) workers poses a unique risk, as psychological distress is significantly more prevalent in the remote mining and construction workforce than in the overall Australian population.

Probably the most striking thing about the appearance of mental health is how consistently it was ranked highly in almost every electorate in Australia irrespective of whether respondents were in lockdown during the survey period or experiencing other forms of disadvantage or hardship.

In 2017-18, **18,589 individuals** received treatment for alcohol and drug misuse in WA. Both the number of individuals receiving treatment **(830 clients per 100,000 people)** and number of episodes **(1100 per 100,000 people)** were higher than the national average of **601 individuals** and **967 episodes.**[3]

In 2019, WA consistently had the highest percentage of alcohol-related emergency department presentations nationally, with more than one in five **(22 per cent)** patients there in relation to alcohol.[4]

Perth house prices have surged more than **18 per cent** in the past year, and **19.9 per cent** in regional WA.[5]

The weekly asking rent for 'all houses' increased in some WA regions by more than **2 per cent** between July 2020 and July 2021. In Northern WA, rents increased by **26.7 per cent** and in WA Goldfields region by **21.5 per cent.**[6]

Research shows there are an estimated **9100 people** experiencing homelessness in WA, with the highest numbers in the electorates of **Durack (2400), Perth (1100)** and **O'Connor (800).** There is an estimated shortfall in social housing of **38,500** dwellings across the state.[7]

Of all assaults in 2017, **61.3 per cent (N=18800)** were related to family violence – the highest rate in all states and territories, excluding Victoria and Queensland (where data was not available). COVID-19 and responses to the pandemic appear to have increased both the frequency and severity of family violence. This, coupled with increased efforts by governments and community groups to raise awareness around family violence, explains the strong prevalence of this result in almost every electorate in WA (and across Australia) despite family violence often being hidden in our community.

One of the themes that came through the comments from respondents in WA and across Australia was a sense of disempowerment. There was a strong sense that these issues need to be addressed, but a certain hopelessness about how that could happen. In the following pages, we have prepared some further information about the issues identified by the people of WA and some concrete actions we can take together to make a difference.

*"I would like the government to actually develop clear policies on climate change, rather than fight about whether to adopt net Zero. There is a complete leadership vacuum. More needs to be done to address gender inequality, as women are still paid less, are regularly harassed assaulted or killed and nothing changes. Housing affordability is a growing crisis for young people and the inequity in the system has been further exposed by Covid.*

*"More people recognising that these issues occur and start making small personal contributions to change. If enough people start with small change it will all add up."*

*"Mental health support. Community engagement. Real action on climate change."*

*"More consultation with community and area experts to ensure that funding is used in effective and sustainable ways. Extra funding to also look into where existing money is not meeting needs."*

*"More education about [social justice] issues in schools."*

*"Stronger initiatives to address trauma and subsequent alcohol use and domestic violence for Indigenous people."*

*"I'd like to see more campaigns to educate people and more community initiatives to help combat them."*

*"Needs to be led by the government, but there are some small things that people can do to assist towards it, too. The community needs to be equipped to deal with the issues."*

*"There seems to be such division and a lack of empathy and kindness. I'm not sure how to change that. Perhaps there needs to be more community projects that bring people together, workshops that help people gain social and emotional skills as well as practical skills."*

# Addressing
## *Social Injustice*

# Mental health

A person's mental health is a central component of wellbeing. Mental ill-health, whether a condition is considered severe or not, undermines the quality of life of millions of Australians. There are many factors that can cause a person to experience mental ill-health. Some of the societal contributors include economic stresses, such as unemployment and homelessness, and social factors including family and domestic violence, substance use disorders and loneliness and social isolation.

Once a person is experiencing mental ill-health, it's easy for minor conditions and setbacks to snowball, and for this to have monumentally negative impaacts upon every part of a person's life.

Mental illness does not discriminate. It's important that anyone experiencing mental ill-health can access timely, non-judgmental and effective support so everyone can achieve and maintain mental health and wellbeing.

We probably can't eradicate all underlying causes of mental ill-health, but we certainly can address much of the hardship that comes with it.

Every year, **3.2 million Australians (13.1 per cent)** experience an anxiety-related condition and **2.4 million (10 per cent)** experience depression or feelings of depression. These numbers are growing.[1]

**Nearly half of Australians (46 per cent)** experience a mental disorder throughout their lifetime.

**One in seven (13.9 per cent) of children between 4 and 17** experience mental ill-health in any given year and more than three quarters of mental health problems occur before the age of 25.[2]

## What we can do?

### AS A NATION

» **We can design our support systems to recognise the societal, as well as medical contributors to mental ill-health.** This means our national approach to mental health needs to acknowledge systemic issues such as poverty, housing insecurity and family and domestic violence. One 'big thing' the Australian Government can do is reform our social security system, so there is adequate income support for people who become unemployed due to mental illness.

### AS A STATE OR TERRITORY

» **We can focus on early intervention – providing support before a person finds themselves in crisis.** This will require a change in how services are delivered and will need diverse, ambitious, evidence-based trial programs based on the lived experience of people experiencing mental ill-health, as well as experts.

### AS A COMMUNITY

» **We can break down the stigma around mental ill-health and asking for help.** If we treat mental illness in the same way we treat physical illness – recognising that the person with the condition is not to blame and needs appropriate support – we can change the conversation and provide an avenue for people to reach out for support.

### AS INDIVIDUALS

» **We can educate ourselves about mental illness and also about how to support someone experiencing mental ill-health.** There are many resources online, as well as specific courses (such as mental health first aid) that can help us on this journey.

# Alcohol & drug misuse

The consumption of alcohol and illicit drugs can place a heavy burden on individuals, families and society. For individuals, it can affect health, relationships, jobs and education. For the community, the cost to the community from alcohol-related harm is estimated to exceed $14 billion annually. For illegal drugs it exceeds $8.2 billion.[1]

Alcohol and other drug related harm is both a driver for and result of other forms of disadvantage. Often a person experiencing alcohol or other drug harm is also experiencing multiple disadvantages at once. Alcohol and drug misuse itself can change an individual's brain, making it harder for them to change behaviour – even when they want to.[2]

Alcohol and drug misuse is widespread in Australia. Around 43 per cent of Australians aged 14 and over had illicitly used a drug at some point in their life (including pharmaceuticals used for non-medical purposes) and 16.4 per cent had used one in the last 12 months.

There is a lot we can do to address the harm that comes from alcohol and drug misuse.

It's estimated that every year in Australia:[3]
- **4,816 people die** from alcohol-related injuries, illness and accidents
- **75,772 people are hospitalised** due to alcohol consumption
- **2,070 people die** from drug-related deaths
- **More people die** from drug overdoses than die on the roads

**More than one in five** Australians (21 per cent) aged 14 and over have been **verbally or physically abused** or put in fear by another person who was under the influence of alcohol.[4]

The proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people living in Australia who consume alcohol at levels that exceed lifetime risk guidelines was **18.4 per cent in 2018–19**. Over the same period, **23 per cent** of Indigenous Australians had **used an illicit drug** in the last 12 months.[5]

## What we can do?

### AS A NATION

» **We can invest in harm reduction.** This means that we focus on solutions to mitigate the problems that come with misuse. In doing this, we need to acknowledge that alcohol and drug misuse often occur alongside other forms of disadvantage, so we need to ensure that policy responses are tailored and culturally appropriate.

### AS A STATE OR TERRITORY

» **We can take a local approach that protects vulnerable people and communities.** We need to understand local populations to provide accessible and effective alcohol and other drug treatment systems. Such systems need to be situated within the wider welfare support response to create pathways and services that better engage, maintain and successfully exit people from treatment.

### AS A COMMUNITY

» **We can provide social connection that is not reliant on alcohol or drug use.** Community groups can ensure their events and activities are supportive and accepting as a way to create pathways for people to build hopeful, purposeful and meaningful lives.

### AS INDIVIDUALS

» **We can recognise that alcohol and drug misuse are health issues that take great effort and courage to seek help with.** We can listen carefully and connect with people experiencing alcohol and drug misuse, and reduce the stigma associated with alcohol and other drug misuse.

# Homelessless & housing affordability

Homelessness is a widespread and serious issue in Australia – well over 100,000 people are homeless in Australia.[1] The risk of homelessness is highest for those who have experienced family and domestic violence, young people, children on care and protection orders, Indigenous Australians, people leaving health or social care arrangements and Australians aged 55 or older – particularly women.[2]

People experiencing homelessness are amongst the most socially and economically disadvantaged in our society. Homelessness leads to increased impact and complexity of existing trauma, substance use and mental ill health.[3] The cost of homelessness to individuals, our community and economy is enormous and increases the longer the individual remains homeless. Homelessness is a result of systemic and structural issues, such as poverty, low income and a lack of safe, affordable housing.

Housing affordability relates to how much money a person has to spend on housing (mortgage payments or rent) relative to their household income.[4] Any type of housing (including rental/home ownership, permanent/temporary, for-profit/non-profit) is considered affordable if it costs less than 30 per cent of household income. [5]

Access to appropriate, affordable and secure housing is the foundation of any family or individual's engagement in work, education and social relations. It's also the single most critical exit point from homelessness services. The lack of affordable housing is one of the main factors for increasing homelessness across the nation.

Housing prices in Australia have been steadily increasing since the mid-1980s, while wages and support payments have not increased at nearly the same rate.[6] This is a significant factor driving the crisis of housing affordability.

The superficial solution to addressing homelessness and housing affordability is to just build more houses (or appropriate accommodation of any kind). Of course, it's a bit more complicated than that, but addressing housing supply, especially ensuring there are enough suitable accommodation options available, is a solid start.

Eradicating homelessness and addressing housing affordability issues are possible in Australia, but it is going to take concerted efforts.

**One in 200 people are homeless** on any given night.

One third of people experiencing **homeless** in Australia are **under 18 years of age**.

**Social housing,** as a proportion of housing, has **dropped from 4.6 per cent to 4.2 per cent** between 2014 and 2020.

**Rents have increased** nationally by **8.2 per cent over the 12 months** ending August 2021, the largest rise in rents since 2008.

In 2020, approximately one in three **women and children escaping family violence** seeking homelessness services were **turned away** due to a lack of accommodation.

A survey considering **74,266 rental listings** showed that:
- **zero per cent of rentals** were affordable for a single person on either JobSeeker or Youth Allowance anywhere in the country
- only **two per cent of rentals** were affordable for a couple living on the age pension (the most generous of government payments)

## What we can do?

### AS A NATION

» **We can make a commitment to eradicate homelessness.** Making the end of homelessness a key measure of the success of governments will drive action to address the structural causes of homelessness – poverty, low income and the lack of social and affordable housing. Accountability will also encourage governments at all levels to work together.

### AS A STATE OR TERRITORY

» **We can focus on transparent population health and infrastructure planning.** One of the barriers to effective action is that there hasn't been enough focus on building evidence around the housing needs of Australians. There is more than enough evidence to get started on increasing social and affordable housing right now, but we also need to be looking at how to ensure that accommodation options meet the needs of the people who will actually live in them.

### AS A COMMUNITY

» **We can give people who are experiencing (or have experienced) homelessness a voice.** Being homeless causes such extraordinary personal stress and disengagement that survival is the individual focus, rather than advocacy for structural reform. As a community we can support groups that assist people experiencing homelessness – we can fundraise, volunteer and advocate.

### AS INDIVIDUALS

» **We can treat people experiencing homelessness or housing stress with dignity and respect.** If we see someone in the street. experiencing homelessness, we can smile and say hello. If we are in the position of owning an investment property, we can be ethical landlords.

*Housing prices in Australia have been steadily increasing since the mid-1980s, while wages and support payments have not increased at nearly the same rate. This is a significant factor driving the crisis of housing affordability.*

# Family & domestic violence

Family and domestic violence is a major health and welfare issue in Australia that can have lifelong impacts for both victim-survivors and perpetrators. It affects all people of all ages and from all backgrounds, but mainly women and children.

Family violence is not always physical. Financial abuse, verbal abuse, emotional abuse or coercive control can be less obvious but just as harmful as physical violence. All these forms of abuse cause immediate and lasting harm to victim-survivors as well as others, especially children, who witness it.

In the last year family and domestic violence has been labelled as the 'shadow pandemic'[1]

Gender inequality and inequity in Australia provide the underlying conditions for violence against women. Many of the drivers of family violence are 'societal' and how we, as a community and as individuals, respond to gender inequity and gender stereotypes can be a powerful force for change.

Almost a quarter of Australian women have **experienced violence** from a current or former partner.

On average in Australia, **one woman every week is murdered** by her current or former partner.[2]

One in three women with disability experienced **emotional abuse** from a partner.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women are **35 times more** likely to experience **family violence** than non-Indigenous women and **32 times more** likely to be **hospitalised** because of injuries caused by violence.

## What we can do?

### AS A NATION

» **We can ensure that when a victim-survivor seeks help, they receive it.** This means that there is sufficient funding for supports and also that supports allow victim-survivors to be physically safe while continuing to be employed, pursue education and be connected. When someone leaves a violent situation, they need somewhere to go.

### AS A STATE OR TERRITORY

» **We can make sure that first responders receive the training and support they need to identify family violence and provide appropriate support.** Sometimes family violence is difficult to identify. Sometimes victim-survivors are even misidentified as the perpetrators of violence. First responders have a difficult task, and they need sufficient support.

### AS A COMMUNITY

» **We can have safe but challenging conversations about family violence.** Having these conversations can equip us with the tools and resources to understand the nature of family and domestic violence as a pattern of behaviours over time. They can also demonstrate to victim-survivors that they are not alone, and they are not to blame.

### AS INDIVIDUALS

» **We can challenge our own ideas and language around family violence and question when others use language that minimises or excuses violence within the family or home.** Everyone can call out negative behaviour. It's important to do so in a manner that doesn't shame the victim, but you can always say 'that's not ok'.

# About the Social Justice Stocktake

The Salvation Army believes that the social justice issues we face in Australia can be addressed. The best way to do that is to examine and act on social justice within our own communities.

In 2021, The Salvation Army set out to find what social injustices people see in their own communities in Australia, and then explore how these prevalent issues could be addressed. We partnered with PureProfile to collect 15,514 responses – securing 100 or more responses in almost every federal electorate. We asked people to identify the five social justice issues they were seeing in their local community and invited them to tell us what could be done about them.

We used the results from the survey to focus our analysis of a range of relevant data and then produced 157 reports – one for Australia, one for each state and territory and then one for each federal electorate (with the exception of Lingiari (NT) and Solomon (NT) which due to sampling difficulties were treated as one electorate, and the newly created electorate of Hawke (VIC), where no data was available).

Our hope in producing and distributing these reports is that we can help equip and empower people to talk about social justice. The results of this survey confirmed what we already suspected - Australians want to address social injustice – but also reinforced how hard it is to know what to do to make a change.

Every Australian can make a difference – by taking direct action, supporting those on the front line of addressing disadvantage and by making it clear to governments that social justice matters to the people they represent.

More information about the Stocktake, including access to all 157 reports and references, can be found at **www.salvationarmy.org.au/socialjusticestocktake** or by e-mailing **policy.advocacy@salvationarmy.org.au**

# About The Salvation Army

The Salvation Army is an international Christian movement with a presence in over 130 countries. Operating in Australia since 1880, The Salvation Army is one of the largest providers of social services and programs for people experiencing hardship, injustice and social exclusion.

As part of fulfilling our vision and mission, The Salvation Army in Australia has a small Policy and Advocacy team who work alongside our services, corps (churches) and the community to identify social justice issues, explore social policy solutions and advocate for change.

*Wherever there is hardship or injustice Salvos will **live, love and fight**, alongside others, to **transform Australia** one life at a time, **with the love of Jesus**.*

The Salvation Army