



NSW SOCIAL JUSTICE STATEMENT

TOWARDS CLIMATE JUSTICE

OUR VISION

Our natural world, and the beauty of our common home, should be protected for our children, grandchildren and future generations.

We can avoid the worst injustices of climate change and other ecological crises if we act now. As we navigate the next critical decades, centering the needs of those people most vulnerable to the impacts of climate change will see us emerge from crisis into a more equitable state, with stronger, more resilient communities. The St Vincent de Paul Society NSW fundamentally believes in this through the social principles of dignity of the human person. This means enabling human life and flourishing, and the protection of our common home.

OUR RECOMMENDATIONS

The Society NSW calls on the NSW Government to reduce the harmful impacts of climate change on people experiencing poverty and disadvantage and support an equitable transition to a green future by:

- Building community capacity to meet the needs of groups more likely to be adversely impacted by climate disasters. This includes adequate, ongoing resourcing to the community sector for disaster preparedness and response and by investing in long-term local community-based responses that engage, develop, and empower local communities in their own recovery.
- Investing in initiatives to improve the efficiency of homes for people on low incomes, such as energy audits and upgrades, appliance replacement schemes, thermal efficiency measures and subsidised access to solar energy, to cut emissions, reduce energy bills, improve health and create thousands of local jobs.
- Mandating energy efficiency standards for rental properties that are independently certified and monitored.
- Investing in energy efficient social and affordable housing to ensure a safety net for people and communities impacted by natural disasters.

OUR CONTRIBUTION

St Vincent de Paul Society NSW is a leading provider of frontline services, with 100 services state-wide. We are on the frontline of responding to natural disasters. Amongst the first on the ground, we provide emergency financial assistance, food, clothing, household items and crisis accommodation when homes have been damaged or destroyed. The Society NSW remains alongside communities as they recover from these increasingly frequent crises.

During 2022, we raised over \$6.6 million for communities impacted by flooding, and over \$9.4 million for communities following the 2019-20 Black Summer bushfires.

Actively supporting the circular economy, we divert thousands of tonnes of clothes and household goods from landfill through our extensive network of shops. We also participate in the NSW "Return and Earn" container deposit scheme to help recycle resources within communities.¹

THE CHALLENGE

The Society NSW is on the frontline of helping communities respond to the devastating impacts of disasters² – on individual's mental and physical health, their homes, jobs, children's education, and quality of life.³ People experiencing poverty or disadvantage have access to fewer resources to cope, adapt and recover from climate disasters, which often have a 'long tail'⁴. They are also more likely to live in low quality, insecure, marginal and higher disaster-risk housing. They are not able to invest in risk-reducing measures and are less likely to have resources to aid their recovery, like affordable insurance or emergency savings to buffer losses. A climate disaster can cause deeper poverty and inequity.

Increasing extreme weather events like extreme bushfires, record breaking floods and droughts, storms and heatwaves⁵ in the past 5 years means we can no longer ignore the impact of climate change.⁶ Without strong action, the world will see more frequent and severe weather events, widening health inequities, increasing pressure on health and emergency services and loss of life. Sadly, climate disasters disproportionately affect people

THE FACTS

- As our climate changes, extreme weather-related events such as heatwaves, droughts, bushfires and floods are becoming more frequent and intense.
- People experiencing poverty or disadvantage have access to fewer resources to cope, adapt and recover from climate disasters.

and communities already experiencing poverty and disadvantage. Recent climate disasters have also been more severe in regional and rural communities.

Reducing the harmful impacts of climate change means we need to move swiftly to renewable energy sources like the wind and sun to electrify our homes. Electrifying and improving the energy efficiency of a home, such as by upgrading energy efficient appliances or installing insulation, can be costly and out of reach for many people on low incomes or experiencing poverty, particularly at a time when high cost of living and energy prices are forcing more people into financial stress.⁷ Renting a home reduces the ability to undertake energy efficiency measures due to a lack of control, fear of eviction or lack of finances. We need to work with First Nations and culturally and linguistically diverse communities to improve accessibility to energy efficient options. Information and education about energy efficiency is not targeted and tailored for communities, such as culturally and linguistically diverse or First Nations communities.

A fair, fast and inclusive plan to address climate change has the ability to improve the lives of people facing disadvantage, from the cities to the outback. It creates opportunities for more affordable, healthier and reliable energy, housing and transport suited to a changing environment and access to jobs in the new energy economy.⁸ Decarbonisation measures need to be appropriately targeted to the needs of people on low incomes or experiencing poverty or disadvantage, particularly for First Nations and culturally and linguistically diverse communities. This includes improving homes to be more resilient to extreme heat and cold and supporting people to afford energy bills and other essentials.⁹

As we transition to a green energy future, clean and affordable energy should be available for all, not just those with the means to afford it. By acting now, we can reduce the most damaging impacts of climate change and create a fairer future for all Australians now and the generations still to come.



FOR MORE INFORMATION

- [Society NSW's reports and submissions](#)
- [National Council's Natural Disasters information page](#)

CAMPAIGNS AND ALLIANCES WE SUPPORT

- [ACOSS Climate Change Declaration](#)
- [Healthy Homes for Renters](#)
- [Sydney Alliance – HEAT](#)

¹ St Vincent de Paul Society NSW, *Annual Report 2022-23*

² For example, see our *Vinnies Flood Response Report 2023* - https://cms.vinnies.org.au/media/o1rpw1d0/svdp_flood-report_final.pdf?path=o1rpw1d0%2Fsvdp_flood-report_final.pdf

³ ACOSS, (2021) *Community Sector Climate Change Declaration*, Declaration-Documents-061021.pdf (acoss.org.au) (Accessed 1 May 2024)

⁴ *ACOSS Heat Survey Report 2023*, Rec 9, p 24

⁵ *ACOSS Heat Survey Report 2023*, (Accessed 1 May 2024)

⁶ Department of Agriculture, Water and the Environment (2021) *Australia State of the Environment Report*, Australian Government, <https://soe.dcceew.gov.au/overview/pressures/climate-change-and-extreme-events>; Watts, J (2019) 'No doubt left' about scientific consensus on global warming, say experts, *The Guardian*, 25 July 2019. There is broad consensus that human activity is largely responsible for these changes.

⁷ St Vincent de Paul Society NSW, *Pre-Budget Submission Rebuilding Social Infrastructure Programs 2024-25*, https://cms.vinnies.org.au/media/321e1e14/svdpnsw_pbs_rebuilding-si-and-programs.pdf?path=321e1e14%2Fsvdpnsw_pbs_rebuilding-si-and-programs.pdf

⁸ ACOSS, (2021) *Community Sector Climate Change Declaration*, Declaration-Documents-061021.pdf (acoss.org.au)

⁹ *ACOSS Heat Survey Report 2023*, p34.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

The St Vincent de Paul Society NSW acknowledges Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the Traditional Custodians of this land, with deep respect. May Elders, past and present, be blessed and honoured. May we join together and build a future based on compassion, justice, hope, faith, and reconciliation.

St Vincent de Paul Society NSW is a lay-Catholic member and volunteer-based organisation that has been assisting people experiencing disadvantage and hardship in NSW for over 140 years. Our aspiration is an Australia transformed by compassion and built on justice.



Vinnies
good works

NSW SOCIAL JUSTICE
NETWORK

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