



NATIONAL OVERVIEW

2023-24



St Vincent de Paul Society
 NATIONAL COUNCIL of AUSTRALIA Inc. *good works*

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In the spirit of reconciliation, the St Vincent de Paul Society National Council of Australia acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of country throughout Australia and their connections to land, sea and community. We pay our respect to Elders past, present and emerging, and extend that respect to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people today.

While St Vincent de Paul Society is not a First Nations organisation, we have a long history of working with and assisting Indigenous communities and individuals. We are acutely aware of the disadvantage and pain so many First Nations people have experienced, and how their pleas for social justice have been ignored.

Front cover

Prior to the 2022 Federal Election, St Vincent de Paul Society National Council released a comprehensive policy statement A Fairer Australia, which outlined advocacy priorities and calls for change, and included policy papers, source documents and a report card.

In 2023-24, these advocacy priorities were updated, covering the areas of:

- Poverty and Inequity
- Housing and Homelessness
- People Seeking Asylum
- Secure Work
- First Nations
- Welfare and Tax Reform

This material has been brought together in the A4-sized [brochure](#) depicted as well as in a smaller [brochure](#).

Also pictured are the year's copies of the Society's quarterly magazine, *The Record*, published [online](#) and printed in limited numbers.

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OUR VISION AND PURPOSE

Our Mission

The St Vincent de Paul Society (the Society) is a lay Catholic organisation that aspires to live the gospel message by serving Christ in the poor with love, respect, justice, hope and joy and by working to shape a more just and compassionate society.

Our Vision

The Society aspires to be recognised as a caring Catholic charity offering ‘a hand up’ to people in need. We do this by respecting their dignity, sharing our hope, and encouraging them to take control of their own destiny.

Our Aspiration

An Australia transformed by compassion and built on justice. The Society advocates on several pressing social justice issues such as homelessness, poverty and asylum seekers. To read more about the Society’s work in these areas and others, please visit the ‘Our Impact’ section of our website.

Our Key Values

We have identified seven key values to which we are aligned. They include commitment, compassion, respect, integrity, empathy, advocacy and courage. We are proud of the key values for which we stand and invite you to find out more through the ‘Get Involved’ section of our website.



Commitment

Loyalty in service to our mission, vision and values.



Compassion

Welcoming and serving all with understanding and without judgement.



Respect

Service to all regardless of creed, ethnic or social background, health, gender, or political opinions.



Integrity

Promoting, maintaining, and adhering to our mission, vision and values.



Empathy

Establishing relationships based on respect, trust, friendship, and perception.



Advocacy

Working to transform the causes of poverty and challenging the causes of human injustice.



Courage

Encouraging spiritual growth, welcoming innovation and giving hope for the future.

St Vincent de Paul Society Australia is a lay Catholic Organisation

The Society is a global lay Catholic Organisation. A lay Catholic organisation is a group or an association of laypeople—individuals who are not ordained clergy but are united by their shared commitment to live out the Catholic faith tradition through their good works and advocacy for a fairer Australia. The Society is committed to Catholic Social Teaching principles such as human dignity, solidarity, and the preferential option for those in need and embraces inclusivity and collaboration with people of all faiths and backgrounds.

With Thanks

St Vincent de Paul Society in Australia wishes to acknowledge and sincerely thank those Foundations and individuals that have made generous bequests and donations to support the Society’s work over the past year. As a voluntary, not-for-profit organisation the Society is immensely grateful for the financial support we receive.



MARK GAETANI
National President

A year ago, just a few months into my term as National President, I was becoming aware of how busy this role would be... but how little I knew! However, the old saying about time flying was never truer, and it is a most apt description of my non-stop journey in this privileged position.

Chairing my first National Council meeting on 5 March last year seems like yesterday. During this meeting, and as I reported last year, I committed to pursuing a Member-centric Society, motivated by strong and consistent advocacy for our companions and underpinned by a focus on the importance of Catholic Social Teaching Principles in the life of the Society.

There were many highlights for me during the past year in review, the standout being Congress 2023⁺ in Sydney last October. This event was a wonderful opportunity to bring together Society leaders from across Australia and overseas to reflect on our strategic vision and on critical issues relating to the Society's membership, mission and spirituality, with a focus on guiding the direction of the Society in an increasingly challenging and everchanging world.

The theme for the gathering - 'Journeying Together, Revitalising our Mission' - asked us to reflect on our purpose, share best practices and success stories, think creatively and find innovative ways to attract, welcome and support new Members and volunteers, and contribute to a culture of community and collaboration that aims for continuous improvement.

As I write, we have just reached the first anniversary of the face-to-face element of our Congress 2023⁺ work, with further stakeholder engagement activities planned to occur over the following months and into 2025.

I would like to acknowledge the hard work and dedication of the many Members and staff who continue to contribute greatly to the revitalisation and consolidation of the Society in Australia.

As a direct result of John Berry, the USA National President's attendance at Congress 2023⁺, the National Council of USA invited me to attend their mid-2024 meeting. I shared with the USA leadership team the journey

we commenced with Congress 2023⁺, noting how we are adapting to a changing world. It was an honour to join this event and hear from fellow Vincentians the challenges, not greatly different to ours, that they and other English-speaking countries such as Canada, Ireland, England, Wales and Scotland are experiencing on their own journeys towards a revitalised Society presence.

National Council's advocacy for the marginalised in our communities continues to be a major focus of our work. During these last 12 months we have prioritised the five key policy areas outlined in our Let's Build a Fairer Australia statement. These are Poverty and Inequity, Housing and Homelessness, People Seeking Asylum, Secure Work, and First Nations People. Whilst there has been some relief in certain areas provided by the Government, much more needs to be done as our companions are faced with cost-of-living pressures and a housing crisis placing them under further financial stress.

A profound disappointment for many in our community was the failure of the 2023 referendum in enshrining an advisory First Nations voice in our Constitution. National Council resolved to adopt a 'Yes' position on this poll, consistent with the stance of the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Catholic Council, and we advocated accordingly. It is now incumbent on both sides of the Federal Parliament to work together in providing innovative policy, direction and support to ensure we are closing the disparities gap and prioritising much needed reforms.

Members would be aware of the Society's founding father in Australia - Fr Gerald Ward, who was born in England and was very familiar with the Society and its workings. He established the first Conference in Australia in Melbourne on 5 March 1854 – 170 years ago. As covered in our magazine *The Record*, I warmly welcomed the opportunity to join members of the Vincentian family from Victoria and across Australia in celebrating this milestone anniversary of our *good works* in Victoria, and hence Australia at large.

I would like to acknowledge the 130th year of the commencement of the Society in Queensland. A celebratory Mass was held on 5 May 2024 at the Red Hills Conference, the first Conference in Queensland. I would like to thank all Members, staff and volunteers of SVdP



Among the group celebrating the unveiling of the restored statue of Saint Vincent de Paul were (l-r) Victoria's Group CEO, Dr Jennifer Fitzgerald AM, National Council CEO Toby oConnor, National President Mark Gaetani and Victoria State Council President Michael Quinn.

Queensland for the dedicated support they provided to those in need in Queensland over the past 130 years.

In tune with celebrating milestones, Frank Brassil - Oceania International Territorial Vice President and myself were invited by the National President of Tonga to attend and participate in a Mass of Celebration on 30 September 2023 to recognise the Golden Jubilee of the Society's work in this Pacific Kingdom. As a first-time visitor to Tonga, I found it wonderful to experience the culture, the warmth and the friendship of this Christian nation. Tonga is indeed blessed to have such a wonderfully vibrant and energetic group of Vincentians attending to the needs of their community.

The Society was saddened by the passing of our beloved Paul Burton, NSW State President, on 12 May 2024 following a long illness. Paul dedicated most of his life to serving the St Vincent de Paul Society and even in his term as State President, struggling with health

issues, he never forgot the vulnerable, marginalised and disadvantaged. Paul put the people we assist before his wellbeing and was selfless in his dedication to others.

Finally, I would like to take this opportunity to express my thanks to everyone who has served the Society over the past twelve months in whatever capacity – as a Member, volunteer or employee.

Additionally, our infinite *good works* rely to a significant extent on the support of our donors, and along with my fellow members of National Council, I am deeply appreciative of their confidence in our efforts to offer a hand-up to families and individuals in need as well as to ceaselessly advocate for social justice in the spirit of our founder, Blessed Frédéric Ozanam.

Mark Gaetani
NATIONAL COUNCIL PRESIDENT

St Vincent de Paul Society National Redress Scheme Ltd was established by National Council in 2020 as the Society's single point of contact for the Commonwealth National Redress Scheme. The Society's State and Territory Councils are joined through the Company as Participating Institutions within the National Redress Scheme.

The Company has registered over 700 institutions across all jurisdictions that fall under the aegis of the Scheme. The Society's many special works, charitable activities and other local operational initiatives offer a significant challenge to a person who is wanting to make a claim of child sexual abuse involving the Society. Having a single point of contact for a person making a claim involving any part of the Society in Australia makes the process easier than if the person had to navigate their own way to identify the correct institution.

The National Redress Scheme is governed in accordance with the **National Redress Scheme for Institutional Child Sexual Abuse Act 2018**.

National Council has appointed the following Society Members to the Company Board of Directors:

- Mr Dennis Innes (Chair) (SVdP-Qld)
- Mr Tony Brennan (SVdP-Tas)
- Mr Philip Cranny (SVdP-Qld)
- Ms Anne Stanfield AM (SVdP-NSW)
- Ms Claire Victory (SVdP-SA)

National Council's Secretariate provides administrative and support services to the Board of Directors and is the point of contact for the Scheme Operator in regard to Requests for Information and Direct Person Responses; the latter are passed on to the Society's Participating Institutions to respond to victims seeking a response in regard to the sexual abuse they experienced.

Reports from the Scheme Operator on how it is progressing with outstanding claims and amendments to the Act that provide longer periods of time for requests to review decisions made by an Independent Decision Maker on behalf of the Scheme suggest the lifetime of the Scheme will extend beyond the presented sunset time of 30 June 2027.

P Toby oConnor
COMPANY SECRETARY





SR THERESE HAYWOOD DC

Spiritual Adviser

God and the poor will bless you, and we whom you have surpassed will be eager and happy to count such brothers. The wish that we had is, then, fulfilled: you are the first echo to answer our feeble voice. Others, perhaps, will be raised soon. Thus the greatest merit of our little Parisian society will be to have given the idea of forming like ones. A thread suffices to begin a weave; often a stone cast into the water becomes the foundation of a great island.

- Blessed Frédéric Ozanam

As I reflect on this year in the life of the Society in Australia these words of Blessed Frédéric are relevant. We could imagine Frédéric writing those words to his friend who was founding a new conference, to us. I think of this particularly in the light of the Congress 2023+, which brought us together to reflect on who we are and what we share together.

The work that is being done following the Congress is exciting as we develop ways to express our magnificent tradition that speaks today and to address the challenges we are facing.

National Council held its first retreat in a number of years and it was a wonderful opportunity for us to gather and work together. A significant part of the retreat was thinking about what it means to be a lay Catholic organisation today.

We have a rich heritage that is built on the foundations of Jesus' gospel message and the Vincentian Way. We have a shared story that everyone who is part of the Vincentian family can connect with. We are working together to ensure that everyone who joins the Vincentian family connects to our shared story and is supported in their journey of putting our mission into practice.

Let us together pray the words of Saint Vincent as we build community on the foundations of our heritage and serve our companions.

O Savior of our souls, by Your love You willed to die for us, and in a certain sense departed from Your glory to give it to us and, by this means, to make us like gods, by making us like You yourself, as far as that is possible. Imprint charity on our hearts so that we may one day be able to go to join this beautiful Company of Charity that's in heaven. This is the prayer I offer You, O Savior of our souls. ... Grant then, O Lord, that they may be filled with love of You, for their neighbour, and for one another.

- Saint Vincent de Paul



TOBY oCONNOR
Chief Executive Officer

National Council is the steward of the mission of the Society in Australia. In its stewardship role, it is responsible for ensuring Vincentian spirituality, Catholic Social Teaching Principles and *The Rule* are central to fulfilling the Mission of the Society and to the governance of the Society in Australia. It fulfils this stewardship role in solidarity with the members of State and Territory Councils.

In a conversation with Archbishop Christopher Prowse in November 2023, it was recognised that not losing sight of and promoting the foundations of the Society ensures we are clear about what makes the Society unique and differentiates our good works from other not-for-profit organisations in Australia and across the globe.

The 2023-24 period saw National Council continue to implement a number of important nationally-focused initiatives and to develop a range of new initiatives that sought to deliver National Council's 2023-27 Strategic Plan, and to be mindful of those risk areas relating to the wellbeing of the Society, such as reputation and sustainability.

When National Council seeks to work towards building a stronger Society in Australia, it partners in solidarity and collaboratively with State and Territory Councils, and their related bodies corporate where relevant, to facilitate and to support the work of Members and local Conferences. A prime example of these works was the continuation of revitalisation projects flowing from Congress 2023+. More detail on these Member driven proposals initiatives is below.

The role of National Council's Secretariate is to support National Council and to implement its decisions. The St Vincent de Paul Society has a governance environment that is quite unique in the world of charitable organisations. This uniqueness arises from the Society



SVdP National Council Secretariate CEO Toby oConnor and members of the National Coordination Group in November 2023.

being a Member-driven, internationally confederated organisation where decision-making is situated at the level of competence as outlined in *The Rule*.

A significant area of attention for the Secretariate, working closely with National Council, is promoting the Society's role as an advocate for a fairer Australia. I want to acknowledge the work of our Members who give a hand up to an increasing number of individuals and families who are finding life is getting tougher due to the cost-of-living crisis.

We collect their first-hand impressions of where systems are failing people in need and we relay these direct to the Parliament and to the Federal Government. We also value the contributions and information we receive from State and Territory Councils. Together, this information becomes a conduit conveying a powerful and salient reality that reflects the impact of poorly designed or inadequate public policy.

The extent of the current crisis was brought home to me on a night in March in Canberra on the Vinnies Night Patrol van. One of those seeking support and a ray of hope indicated



The Minister for Indigenous Australians, Linda Burney, met with major Church providers – Anglicare Australia, Catholic Social Services Australia, St Vincent de Paul Society (National Council CEO Toby oConnor pictured 2nd from right), The Salvation Army, and UnitingCare Australia - in early September 2023 to discuss their unanimous support for the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Voice.

she had no option left to feed her young child but to steal food from a supermarket. It's very hard to acknowledge the state of affairs for some of our neighbours.

Reference to the submissions prepared over the past year demonstrates the reach of National Council into the national policy environment. Our National President wrote a significant number of 'op-ed' pieces that appeared in newspapers and Church publications.

The Oceania Partnership Program involving the twinned National Councils in the Pacific moved into the first stage of this 10-year initiative to facilitate the self sustainability of our fellow Vincentians across the Region. I want to thank Frank Brassil, Oceania International Territorial Vice President, for his vision in bringing about this program.

During the period, the Society had a seat at a number of policy-making tables. Most importantly, we are part of the Blueprint Expert Reference Group commissioned by the Government to develop a 10-year plan to strengthen and to increase the sustainability of the Not-for-Profit Sector. This sector includes approximately 60,000 charities.

We also continued to sit on the Department of Social Services Community Sector Advisory Group to provide advice on funding and grant arrangements involving those charities that receive grant monies from the Department. Seeking to get clarity on a number of administrative issues,

such as length of grants, indexation and options for better working relationships with grant and policy makers, has been slow but progress is being made.

This report presents information that covers the Secretariate's ongoing role in supporting the National Coordination Group and in providing advice to the Minister of Social Services on the Financial Wellbeing and Capability Activity programs for emergency relief, food relief and financial counselling.

It has been another productive year for the Secretariate and I take his opportunity to thank everyone in the team for their strong commitment to delivering the Strategic Plan and for their enthusiasm and the thoughtfulness they brought to our operational environment.

I want to thank members of National Council for the vision they have shown and for the confidence they have displayed when exploring a range of revitalisation proposals to assist the Society moving into the future

Finally, I wish to recognise Mark Gaetani, our National President, for his vision for the Society in Australia, his leadership of the National Council and his role in the Society's international governance.

P Toby oConnor
CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER

MEMBERS OF THE 18TH NATIONAL COUNCIL OF THE ST VINCENT DE PAUL SOCIETY IN AUSTRALIA – 30 JUNE 2024



Member	Position	Dates
Mark Gaetani	National President	<i>Elected 5 March 2023</i>
	State Council President Tas	<i>1 January 2019</i>
Warwick Fulton	Deputy President	<i>Appointed 5 March 2023</i>
	Deputy President	<i>Appointed 17 March 2019</i>
	Territory Council President Canberra-Goulburn	<i>Elected 4 March 2016</i>
Sr Therese Haywood DC	Spiritual Adviser	<i>Appointed 5 March 2023</i>
		<i>Appointed 22 March 2019</i>
Ryan Erlandson	Secretary	<i>Appointed 5 March 2023</i>
		<i>Appointed 22 March 2019</i>
Bernard Meadley	National Treasurer	<i>Appointed 5 March 2023</i>
Maurice Ryan	Vice President	<i>Term completed December 2023</i>
		<i>Appointed March 2023</i>
		<i>Appointed June 2019</i>
Patrick Wallis	Vice President	<i>Appointed March 2023</i>
Matt Nunan	Vice President	<i>Appointed March 2023</i>
Paul Burton	State Council President NSW	<i>Elected 19 February 2022 Passed away 12 May 2024</i>
Jocelyn Cull	Territory Council President NT	<i>Elected effective August 2020</i>
John Feint	Territory Council President Canberra-Goulburn	<i>Term completed December 2023</i>
		<i>Elected effective June 2019</i>
Brad Hocking	State Council President SA	<i>Elected effective October 2020</i>
David Kennedy	State Council President WA	<i>Elected effective July 2022</i>
Corey McGrath	State Council President Tas	<i>Elected effective January 2023</i>
Patricia McMahon	State Council President Qld	<i>Elected effective June 2022</i>
Michael Quinn	State Council President Vic	<i>Elected effective March 2022</i>
Brian Stacey	Territory Council President Canberra-Goulburn	<i>Elected effective March 2024</i>

St Vincent de Paul Society National Council of Australia Inc. Board of Directors Meetings Attendance 2023-24

Director	Description	A	B	C
Mark Gaetani	National President	8	8	
Warwick Fulton	Deputy President	8	8	
Sr Therese Haywood DC	Spiritual Adviser	8	6	
Ryan Erlandson	Secretary	8	8	
Bernard Meadley	Treasurer	8	7	
Maurice Ryan	Vice President	5	5	
Patrick Wallis	Vice President	8	5	
Matt Nunan	Vice President	8	8	
Paul Burton	State Council President NSW	7	5	2
Jocelyn Cull	Territory Council President NT	8	7	
John Feint	Territory Council President Canberra-Goulburn	5	4	1
Brad Hocking	State Council President SA	8	5	
David Kennedy	State Council President WA	8	1	4
Corey McGrath	State Council President Tas	8	8	
Patricia McMahon	State Council President Qld	8	7	
Michael Quinn	State Council President Vic	8	8	
Brian Stacey	Territory Council President Canberra-Goulburn	2	2	

Legend

A = Meetings held during the period

B = Meetings attended by Director

C = Meetings attended by Representative of State/Territory Council President

Board Standing Committees

Standing Committee	Chair
Audit, Risk and Finance	Bernard Meadley
Brand Stewardship	Patricia McMahon
Data Integrity & Cyber Security	Ryan Erlandsen
International	Mark Gaetani
Legal and Governance	Warwick Fulton
Membership, Mission & Vincentian Spirituality	Matt Nunan
National Disaster Appeals	John Feint
Overseas Partnerships	Kevin McMahon
Safeguarding	Corey McGrath
Spirit of Youth	Patrick Wallis

Advisory Committees

Committee	Chair
Social Justice	Matt Nunan (to January 2024)
	Toby oConnor (interim)
	Margaret Gearon (from May 2024)
The Rule Part III Review	Warwick Fulton
States & Territories Youth Representatives	Patrick Wallis
State & Territory Council CEOs Group	Kevin Mercer
Society CEOs Group	Toby oConnor
Vinnies Refugee Network	Tim McKenna
Website Governance	Toby oConnor

St Vincent de Paul Society National Redress Scheme Ltd Board Of Directors Meetings

Director	Appointed	A	B
Denis Walsh (Chair Nov 2019 - 4 Jul 2023)	25 Nov 2019	1	1
Anne Stanfield AM	16 Nov 2021	5	4
Dennis Innes (Chair 4 Jul 2023)	1 June 2022	5	3
Tony Brennan	27 Jan 2023	5	3
Philip Cranny	27 Feb 2023	5	5
Claire Victory	20 Mar 2023	5	5

Legend

A = Meetings held during the period
B = Meetings attended by Director

Meetings Held

Meeting	Date	Via
National Council	8 July 2023	Video conference
	28 August 2023	Video conference
	07 October 2023	Video conference
	11 November 2023	Video conference
	02-03 December 2023	<i>in situ</i> (Canberra)
	24-25 February 2024	<i>in situ</i> (Canberra)
	06 April 2024	Video conference
	15 June 2024	Video conference
Company Meetings	04 July 2023	Video conference
	24 October 2023	Video conference
	11 November 2023 - AGM	Video conference
	24 January 2024	Video conference
	23 April 2024	Video conference

NATIONAL COUNCIL SECRETARIATE STAFF – 30 JUNE 2024

Toby oConnor
Chief Executive Officer

Karen Hutchinson
Executive Assistant

Cassandra Bull
National Manager - Membership, Mission & Youth

Stephanie Reed
Safeguarding Policy Officer
(to September 2023)

Julie Goodchap
National Strategy and Projects Manager

Amanda Perry
Overseas Partnerships Program Facilitator

Robin Osborne
National Director, Communications & Media
(August 2023)

Cleo Fleming
National Coordination Group Secretariate /
Governance & Partnerships

Adam Henry
Senior Policy Officer
(to March 2024)

Donna Scheerlinck
Executive Officer

Rose Beynon
National Policy & Research Director

Vincent Nguyen
Director of IT & Digital Services

Kerry Mulligan
Safeguarding Officer
(September 2023)

Tricia Wilden
Overseas Partnerships Program Director

Ryhannon Robinson
Overseas Partnerships Program Administrator

Nodi Karimova
Digital Social Media Officer

Phillip Adams
National Communications Director
(to August 2023)

Diep Le
Digital Platform Administrator
(March 2023 – April 2024)

NATIONAL STATISTICS

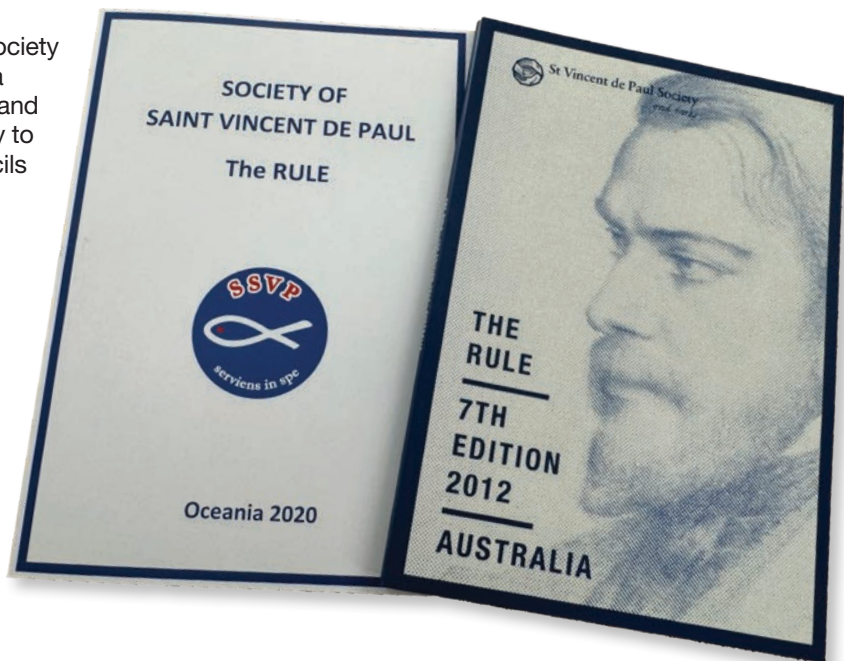
	Canberra-Goulburn	NSW	NT	Qld	SA	Tas	Vic	WA	Total
Number of Members	547	4,331	55	2,570	729	250	3,617	951	13,050
Number of Conferences	50	420	5	206	57	27	232	69	1,066
Number of Volunteers	1,317	7,842	102	5,237	1,563	841	6,812	3,255	26,969
Number of Employees (F/T & P/T)	234	1,078	48	4,936	122	239	652	291	7,600
Number of Retail Centres	28	221	10	141	35	26	121	52	634

THE RULE

The International Statutes of the St Vincent de Paul Society are to be read together with *The Rule* (Parts I – III) as a single legal document that applies to all Conferences and Councils of the Society across Australia, and indirectly to the various incorporated bodies established by Councils to represent the Society in its relationships with the broader Australian community.

The Society’s various incorporated bodies each have their own constitution that provide for the governance of the body and include a clause providing that the body is subject to *The Rule*. This means that the governance of the body will not be inconsistent with *The Rule* subject of course to any legal requirements that may be in conflict with *The Rule*. In the latter event the legal requirements will take precedence.

The Rule applies directly to the relationships between Members of the St Vincent de Paul Society as part of an international unincorporated association. *The Rule* Part III provides specific rules for Australia. As such, it applies to all Members of Australian Conferences and Councils.



CATHOLIC SOCIAL TEACHING

Catholic Social Teaching (CST) principles are a core underpinning of the mission and work of all Councils in Australia. The role of Catholic Social Teaching in guiding our actions, decisions and organisational ethos is central to how the Society expresses its commitment to serving the vulnerable, our Companions, with inclusivity, respectful accompaniment, restoration and renewal.

<p>Catholic Social Teaching Principles</p>	 <p>Dignity of the Human Person Every person is created in the image and likeness of God.</p>	 <p>The Common Good The conditions that allow all people to reach their full potential and to thrive.</p>	 <p>The Preferential Option for the Poor Special concern and priority for the needs of people experiencing poverty and vulnerability (people at risk).</p>
 <p>Participation and Community People to take an active role in the social, economic, and political processes that impact them.</p>	 <p>Solidarity Commitment to stand with and for others, particularly those who are suffering or oppressed.</p>	 <p>Subsidiarity Matters should be handled at the level closest to people most affected by decisions and policies.</p>	 <p>Stewardship of Creation: Care for our Common Home Care for the earth and to use the resources entrusted to us responsibly.</p>

Key Governance Documents

- [The Rule](#)
- [National Council Strategic Plan](#)
- [National Council Constitution](#)
- [National Council Governance Framework](#)

Other Key Documents

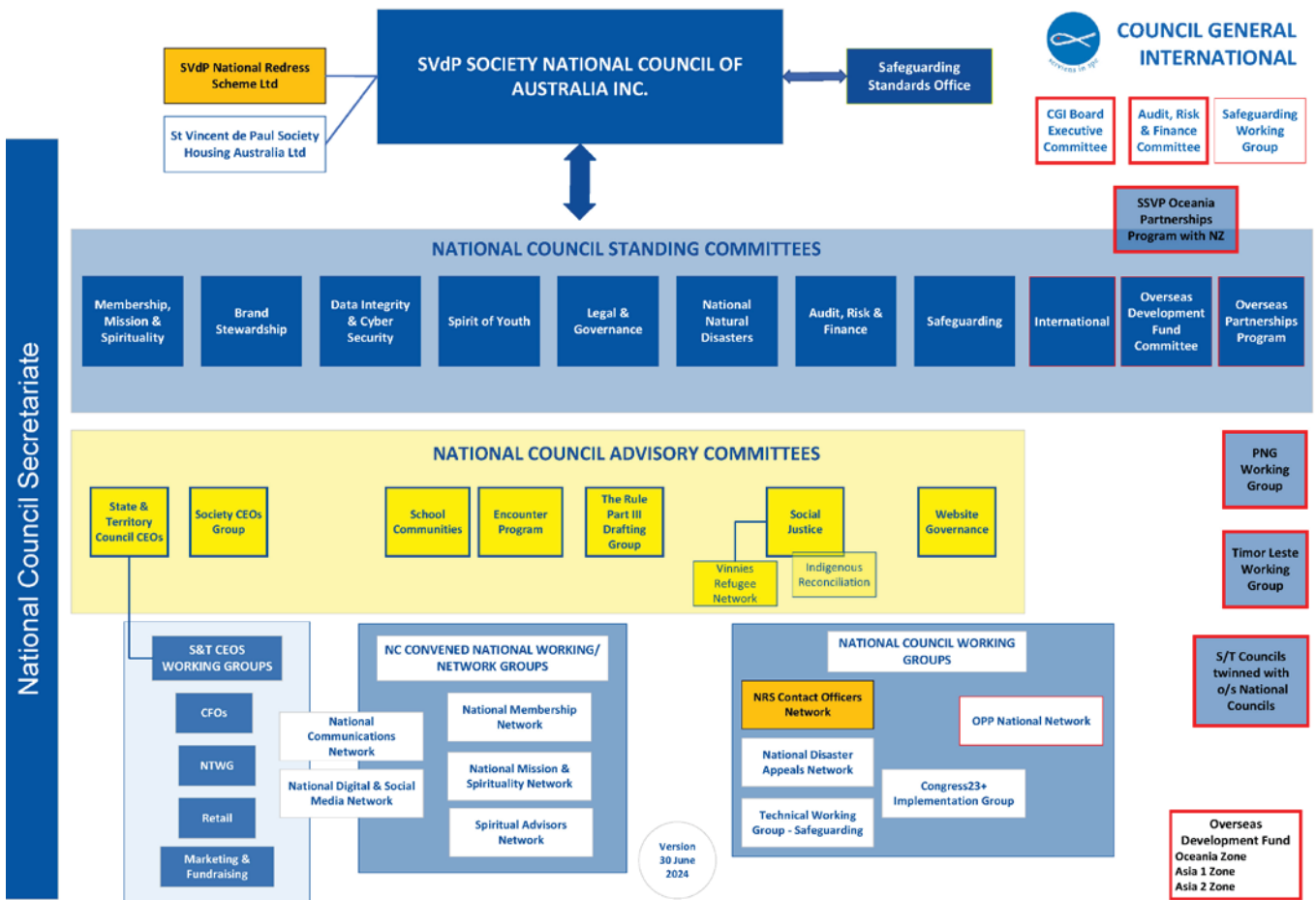
- [Catholic Social Teachings](#)
- [National Council Privacy Policy](#)
- [Safeguarding Policy](#)
- [Whistleblower Policy](#)
- [Working Together Guidelines](#)

Our Structure in Australia

In Australia, the Society governs itself using a federated model through a National Council, six state councils and two territory councils. The federation is governed by *The Rule* Part III. In accordance with *The Rule*, National Council is the Society's superior council in Australia.

Each of the Society's nine councils in Australia is established as an incorporated body and each is registered as a charity with the [Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission \(ACNC\)](#).

NATIONAL COUNCIL GOVERNANCE FRAMEWORK



The National Council of Australia is the steward of the mission of the Society in Australia. It is responsible for ensuring Vincentian spirituality and principles and *The Rule* are central to fulfilling the Mission of the Society and the governance of the Society.

National Council works in solidarity and collaboratively with State and Territory Councils to facilitate and support, the work of Members and local Conferences. The offering of good works is founded on the principle of subsidiarity, allowing decisions to be made by the competent authority at the level closest to the point of effect.

The principal instance of subsidiarity is the autonomy given to Conferences. All Councils, Conferences and Members are bound together in solidarity to the world-wide confederation of the Society. In this manner, Members, Conferences and Councils are always “One Society”

The National Council Strategic Plan 2020-23 outlined the purpose and mission of the National Council and provided a roadmap for building Conferences of well-informed and spiritually enriched Members to undertake Good Works in a safe and sustainable manner, and to influence law and policy through example and tenacious advocacy.

In early 2023, work commenced on the preparation of the Strategic Plan 2023-2027 under the leadership of the 18th National President and Members of the National Council.

Good Works Together is the title of National Council’s 2023 - 2027 Strategic Plan, which was released in July 2023, and distributed to State and Territory Councils and made available to the broader community through the Society’s website. There are five core pillars, each with a Vision statement, for National Council’s leadership to strive to achieve over the four-year period.

Each pillar lists a series of Objectives that identify key outcomes to reflect what success looks like. They are listed [here](#).

Vincentian Spirituality

Vision: Our Vincentian Spirituality teaches us to respect the dignity of all people and to see Christ in them.



Our People

Vision: A welcoming and inclusive Society that nurtures collaborative engagement in the *good works* by Members, staff and volunteers.

Good Works

Vision: The Society is responsive to the individual needs of people facing poverty and significant events in Australia and our region.

Leadership, Governance and Sustainability

Vision: National Council promotes collaborative, contemporary leadership and governance frameworks as guided by *The Rule*, and ensures the sustainability of its work as a member-based organisation.

Advocacy

Vision: The Society is a leading and trusted advocate for those in need in our community.

Implementing the Strategic Plan

The National Council Secretariate is responsible for providing half yearly reports to National Council on the progress of *Good Works Together* with special attention to highlighting the outcomes that derive from activities undertaken.

The Secretariate has made steady progress against the five pillars of the Strategic Plan for the reporting period 30 June 2023 to 1 July 2024. Key highlights are shown below.

Pillar	Key achievements	Gains in stakeholder engagement	Focus in next six months
Vincentian Spirituality	Good progress has been achieved across all reporting milestones. A key achievement in the reporting period is the increased sharing of resources to support Vincentian Spirituality across the Society.	The NMMS SC is meeting regularly and progressing its agenda.	A National Council Briefing Paper on what it means for the Society to be a lay Catholic organisation is the key focus for the next reporting period of 1 July to 31 December 2024.
Our People	Planning for Revitalisation month is well-progressed, following the successful pilot of this initiative in September 2023.	The national networks have maintained momentum and direction because a nationally appointed resource has assisted with facilitation and coordination. Congress Project Teams are now gaining momentum due to a nationally appointed resource.	Continuing focus on the implementation of the Congress Projects via the Congress Project Teams.
Good Works	Government funding for Emergency Relief and Food Relief increased, and the draft Not-for-profit Sector Development Blueprint was prepared.	Better relationships with Government departments and within the community services sector are helping to contribute to policy reforms.	Continue to build and strengthen relationships to deliver between outcomes for Australian communities.
Leadership, Governance and Sustainability	<i>The Rule</i> Review is currently with State and Territory Councils for their consideration and feedback. Significant progress in Safeguarding support and compliance, including advancing the Safeguarding Program Plan of Action and development of an audit paradigm. A reduced risk of security breaches in the online donation platform has been achieved following a privacy and security review.	Significant effort has been invested in engagement to support the Overseas Partnerships Program with domestic and international stakeholders. This is building a stronger foundation for the OPP and increasing the efficiency and effectiveness of National Councils in the Oceania region.	The establishment of a Safeguarding Standards Office and further implementation of the Digital Assets Management System will be the key focus in the next six months.
Advocacy	The Society is considered a significant voice on federal advocacy matters concerning poverty and social justice, and its views are sought by media and Government. Influence on federal policy direction is achieved via engagement with key Government agencies and bodies.	Members have a better understanding of the importance of the Society's federal advocacy work and know how to access information on the Society's position on specific issues.	Continue to ensure Members are familiar with the Society's advocacy position on federal policy matters. Maintain all federal advocacy materials. Work with the ANU to develop papers on tax, welfare reform, poverty and the GST.



National Membership, Mission & Spirituality Standing Committee

Members: Matt Nunan (NC) (Chair); Lachlan Dent (QLD); Geraldine Hawkes (SA); Sr Therese Haywood (NC); Keenan Klassen (WA); Brendan Podbury (Vic).

The National Member, Mission, and Spirituality Standing Committee (NMMS SC) was formed in January 2024 with Members drawn from diverse membership backgrounds around the country. They bring rich knowledge and insights into the work being undertaken to facilitate national frameworks, approaches and initiatives that align with and advance the revitalisation of Membership, Mission and Spirituality across the Society.

Over the course of near-monthly meetings since January 2024, the NMMS SC has guided the work being undertaken by Members and staff engaged in progressing the outcomes of Congress 2023+ through the Champions Network and Congress Projects. Early work has involved advice and support for the formation of Project Groups, the development of platforms for information sharing and communication, and a process for tracking and communicating the deliverables and progress of the Congress Projects.

In June, the Standing Committee turned its attention to the work initiated by National Council on defining what it means to be a lay Catholic organisation and integrating this into the language, relationships and work of the Society. This will continue to be a focus for the Standing Committee, which will draw on its connections and involvement with Society Networks, advisory committees, and other standing committees to steward this important undertaking through to its completion.

The Standing Committee is supported by the National Council Secretariate.

National Membership Network

Members: Brendan Podbury (Vic) (Co-Chair); Cassandra Bull (NCS) (Co-Chair); Matt Nunan (NC); Louis Hearnden (NSW); Samantha Hill (QLD); Tony Roach (SA); Andrew York (WA); Melissa White (Tas); Bree Harding (NSW); Damian Legg (NT); Nadia Litsos (Vic); Carla Leversedge (SA); Patick McGrath (C-G); Patricia McMahon (NC); Rob Nash (Vic); Toby oConnor (NC); Siobhan Sweeney (C-G); Kerry-Lee Daniell (NT); Stephen Sykes (Tas); Peter Houweling (NSW); Joy Kyriaciou (NSW); Maree Harmon (QLD); Paula Bounds (C-G); Jenny Papps (SA).

Note: This is all representatives who have attended meetings during 2023-24, as people have moved within roles.

The National Membership Network is made up of a mixture of Members and key State and Territory membership staff. They have met monthly online and held an in-person gathering in Brisbane in March 2024.

Membership support and sharing ideas and resources has been a significant focus, as well as providing vital guidance and strategic support for National Council's work on Membership revitalisation. The Network worked collaboratively towards a month of Revitalisation in September 2023, with a theme of 'Who's on our street: the hands behind the help'. There was a focus on sharing Member stories, increasing our presence on social media, and taking the opportunity to celebrate all the good that happens behind the scenes to help those in need across our rich network of Conferences. This complemented a focus on generating ideas on how to recruit and retain active Members across the country.

The Membership Network was also a guiding influence on the agenda setting and development of Congress 2023+.

International Network

The SVdP National Council of Australia has created an International Membership Network that meets online quarterly. These meetings are hosted by Australia and include a mixture of Members and staff from USA, Canada, England, Wales, Ireland, and New Zealand. The Network prays together, shares resources, discusses diverse ways to address shared challenges and offers great insight for National Council into how other English-speaking countries are supporting their Conferences.

Australian Representatives: Matt Nunan, Toby oConnor, Cassandra Bull (Secretariate support).

Spirit of Youth

Members (Executive): Patrick Wallis (WA) (Chair); Lachlan Dent (Qld); Stephanie Veitch (Qld); Alex Vardanega (Qld); Tim Wallis (WA); Madeleine Sirris (NSW); Ashley Carvalho (Qld). Supported by Cassandra Bull (NCS).

State and Territory Youth Representatives: Stephanie Veitch (Qld); Laura Condon (C-G); Josh Mcleod (Vic); Louisa Selvadurai (Vic); Melodee Ruth Estcourt (Tas); Hannah Yates (SA); Madeleine Sirris (NSW); Keenan Klassen (WA); Tamara Schaefer (NT).

State and Territory Youth Staff: Ben Knight (Qld); Travis Ngatuere (C-G); Ann Guns (Vic); Elle Bates (Tas); Leah Dann-White (Tas); Bronte Hughes (Tas); Christina Gilio (NSW); Carla Leversedge (SA).

The 2023-24 year has seen a real focus on bringing youth representatives together to support each other and to share ideas.

With the impacts of COVID-19 still being deeply felt by many youth Conferences across the Society, the Spirit of Youth (SoY) Standing Committee focussed on rebuilding the network of young people and creating systems to share information.

Internationally, World Youth Day was held in Portugal in 2023. Prior to World Youth Day, an international gathering of the Vincentian Youth Family took place in Felgueiras, Portugal, 29 July – 1 August 2023.

A group of young Vincentians from Queensland attended the event and were met by two representatives of National Council. The event was a great opportunity to see the incredible impact our young members are making on a global scale, and a great chance to create connections with other national youth leaders.

As a way of reforming the communication and connection, the SoY Standing Committee met online throughout the year and convened in person from 10 – 11 February 2024 in Brisbane. There has been a strong focus on rebuilding support structures for the local and regional youth programs.

The Committee also planned a Levelled-Up Leadership training and networking event, designed to support Youth leaders in the Society to learn new skills, learn from each other, and to further contribute to the desire of growing a strong youth network within Australia.

The National Immersion Committee has been rebranded the National Encounter Committee after a program review. This name change highlights a slightly different approach to this work moving forward. The committee members, all with significant expertise working alongside First Nations communities, and the previous National Immersion program, continue to work in close partnership with the Northern Territory Council to re-establish this important program.

As always, our young members continue to make a difference, not just in their own programs and youth communities, but by continually looking at new ways to express the Vincentian charism to respond to the emerging needs of today. The year saw a continuation of Frédéric Ozanam's innovative spirit being expressed across the country in the many youth activities, conference meetings and school-based programs led by our youth Members.

National Mission and Spirituality Network

In 2023-24 the Society sought to bring together our Spiritual Advisors to form a network that can share resources, be connected to the broader organisation, and continue to support the growth and nurturing of our Vincentian Spirituality.

The National Mission and Spirituality Network is made up of the Mission and Spirituality leaders across the Society in Australia. The Network meets quarterly online with one in-person meeting per year, and works collaboratively to share resources, ideas and provide ongoing formation and support to each other.

The work of the Network is focussed on National Council's desire to have a national commitment and approach to enhancing our understanding of our Vincentian Mission. The network works collaboratively in this space and is responsible for:

- Developing and sharing resources.
- Holding, sharing, influencing and inspiring collective wisdom of the Society's mission, the founding story, contemporary expression of Catholic identity, reflections and Catholic Social Teaching Principles.
- Supporting each other as peers and leaders.
- Supporting the National Council in its mission and strategy.

The Network worked on key parts of the Congress 2023+ agenda, also sharing reflections and resources to assist at key moments in the life of the Society in Australia.

The Society in Australia has a history of strong engagement with Members, with previous Congress meetings and Member surveys happening periodically throughout our history. This engagement builds on the spirit of fraternity that Blessed Frédéric Ozanam and his friends established in founding the Society over 175 years ago.

National Council organised a national gathering of leaders and emerging leaders of the Society (who numbered 202) in Sydney from 27-29 October 2023 under the banner of Congress 2023⁺.

The aim was to prepare the Society for the challenges that lie ahead and to revitalise our mission through serving our Companions. The theme of 'Journeying Together, Revitalising our Mission' highlighted the purpose of delegates coming together to agree on how best we can offer our Good Works into the future.

This was a rare opportunity to connect people from across the Society for deep inquiry about revitalising the Society and formulating and driving agreed actions to explore how people interested in joining with us to deliver good works could be encouraged.

Congress 2023⁺ included three key elements:

- Pre-Congress conversations in preparation for the bringing together of Members.
- Congress 2023⁺ as an event of coming together.
- Identification by Members of post-Congress activities that would continue the momentum to explore how we can revitalise our Mission.

Pre-congress conversations

Workbook 1

In order for the face-to-face event to be constructive, early engagement commenced with the development and distribution of a Workbook that sought to capture the diversity of discourse across the Society.

Workbook 1 posed questions and canvassed views on a range of topics, including:

- **OUR CONTEXT:** what is happening with us, our Companions, and the community around us? Where do we need to adapt?
- **IDENTITY:** who are we in 2023? What is enduring and what is changing?
- **PURPOSE:** what drives us to do what we do? What is the change in the world that we seek to create together?
- **IMPACT:** what impact are we having in the world? How could we achieve more impact?
- **CHALLENGES:** specific challenges that were identified in the workbook were membership, leadership, collaboration and change.



Listening forums

Four Listening Forums were convened in late August and early September 2023 to hear the views of interested stakeholders. These were 90-minute virtual sessions which attracted 148 Members and staff from around Australia. Small group sessions (27 in all) were facilitated in the Listening Forums, as breakout sessions were used to focus on specific areas of interest for participants.

Workbook 2

Workbook 2 provided an opportunity for delegates to delve into the insights and ideas gathered through the feedback received in relation to Workbook 1 and through the rich discussions at the Listening Forums. This workbook summarised all feedback that had been received and posed questions for delegates to consider ahead of their attendance at the face-to-face Congress 2023⁺ event.

Congress 2023⁺

The commitment to including emerging leaders and the voices and ideas from our youth members was realised with nearly one-in-five of the 202 Delegates being aged under 35 years.

Key achievements included the Vision and Roadmap for change, identifying 15 project action areas across three core pillars: growth and revitalisation, diverse Conference models, and readiness for change. These action areas emphasised inclusivity, leadership development, flexible formats, enhanced communications and collective engagement. These are represented in the Congress Framework (see page 19).

CONGRESS FRAMEWORK

VISION	JOURNEYING TOGETHER			REVITALISING MISSION		
	We are highly supportive of new forms of more flexible Conferences, which can exist alongside more traditional forms that suit existing Members.	We need to shift from hierarchical communication to models that allow Conferences and Members to connect directly, across borders, for mutual interests, knowledge sharing and support.	Every Member is involved in making the change, through reflection, action and interactions with the people around them.	As a Catholic organisation, we are open to anyone that shares our social justice mission, and seek to make them welcome.	The Society seeks to help all belong first, with pathways to believing and becoming Catholic for those open to it.	A top priority for the Society in Australia is a national recruitment campaign targeting diverse audiences.
	Owned and driven by the St Vincent de Paul Society Members in Australia, and their respective Conferences and Higher Councils					

		GROWTH AND REVITALISATION		DIVERSE, FLEXIBLE CONFERENCES FOR IMPACT		READY FOR CHANGE			
		Purpose - To address the decline in membership and to build the pool of emerging leaders by attracting and retaining a more diverse group of people who share our values.		Purpose - To ensure that new Members can find Conferences suited to their needs, motivations and availability, from traditional Conference models to emerging ones, to support a more diverse membership base.		Purpose - To create the necessary conditions to drive change. In creating this, Congress reflected on where change had been hard, and what we need to do differently this time.			
THE NEW MEMBER JOURNEY	1.1 A diverse base for recruitment	Research and insight to better understand and attract increasingly diverse Members (and what they need).	CONFERENCES FOR THE FUTURE	2.1 Vision for future conference experiences	Develop examples of different forms of Conferences that we could support, alongside the more familiar, traditional models, to serve as our vision.	DRIVING CHANGE WELL	3.1 Clarity on the pressures to adapt	Our common view of what's happening in the world around us, and where that is creating pressure to change. This is our shared 'burning platform'.	
	1.2 Our compelling, shared story	A shared story that reflects our identity and values, to attract new Members.		2.2 Simplified Conference 'Starter Pack'	Establishing Conferences can be hard work, so how do we streamline that with a 'minimum viable Conference' model and tools and templates to get started.		3.2 The human interactions that support change	The deeply human part of change – and the shifts that each and every one of us may need to make, through reflection and action, to change the way we interact with others in our Society.	
	1.3 The new Vincentian experience	When we successfully attract a new Member, how do we ensure they quickly have a good experience that encourages them to stay with us?		2.3 Support systems for new Conferences	Where do new Conferences 'belong' in our Society, particularly if they are novel or experimental? Where do they go for support, if they don't fit the usual mould?		3.3 Promoting and sustaining experimentation	The structures and tools that can support experimentation within the Society, as new forms of Conferences are tried or expanded, including comfort with failure along the way.	
	1.4 Identifying and encouraging new leaders	Encouraging newer Members to take initiative and take on leadership roles – and when they do, ensuring their voice feels welcome.		IMPROVING COMMUNICATION	2.4 Sharing info and resources between Conferences		How can Conferences support one another with peer-to-peer support, particularly if they are trying to do similar things? Sharing of resources, knowledge and inspiration.	3.4 Accountability and following through	The means to ensure we maintain momentum and take action across the Society to give life the vision and recommendations we have created.
	1.5 Leadership skills and training	Giving new leaders training, mentorship and development in the skills they need to succeed.			2.5 Whole-of-Society Communication		How do we ensure that key messages can be created, shared and heard across all our Members quickly, to promote belonging and One Society?		
	INTO LEADERSHIP	1.6 Belong, believe, become			Our commitment ensures all Members must first feel they belong regardless of their individual beliefs; then, we help Members share in the mission of the Society (believe), and lastly, we support those Members who want to explore their involvement in our Catholic traditions (become).				

Champions of projects working with Congress delegates and Society Members

States and Territories will provide support and resourcing as part of their ongoing commitment to supporting Membership Revitalisation. Some States and Territories will also have a particular focus to assist Champion groups. State and Territory support is also available on a project-by-project basis.

National Council and its Secretariate will continue to support Membership Revitalisation across the Country. Specifically, the National Mission and Spirituality Network and National Membership Network will continue to provide leadership and guidance, and resources to support implementation. A Champions Network will be established, and digital platforms will be delivered to support the implementation of this body of work. National Council Membership, Mission & Spirituality Standing Committee will act as the link between Congress 2023+ projects and National Council.



Post-Congress activities

With the Congress framework becoming a blueprint for how the Society could move forward on a revitalisation program, the focus from November 2023 turned to how the blueprint could be implemented.

Congress Project Teams were established to implement the Congress Delegates' initiatives. To support the Congress Project Teams in implementing the blueprint, a 'Champion' was nominated to lead the project, with support provided by the National Council Secretariate.

The Congress Project Teams are working hard to deliver on their respective initiatives, with Members able to keep up-

to-date on their progress via the delegates' content on the national website.

In addition to the Congress Project Teams, a comprehensive summary of what was produced and decided at the face-to-face event was prepared. This summary, as well as details on steps that each Member and Conference can take to get involved and contribute to the revitalisation agenda, were contained in Workbook 3.

Every level of the Society is encouraged to commit to small, frequent actions of doing things differently. These small, frequent actions will be the building blocks towards our larger revitalisation goals.

As noted in our vision pillar, the Society aims to be a leading and trusted advocate for those in need in our community. This is in keeping with the spirit of our founder Blessed Frédéric Ozanam, and the words of our founding document *The Rule*, which commits us to “identifying the root causes of poverty and to contributing to their elimination. In all [our] charitable actions there should be a search for justice...”

Effective, long-term change that empowers people to reach their full potential will only occur if we tackle the root causes of poverty and inequity in Australia. This is why advocacy is one of the Society’s key values.

Our federal advocacy positions are qualified by the experiences of those we assist and by our Members and volunteers and draw on Australia’s evidence-base in social policy, research commissioned by the Society and, most importantly, by Catholic Social Teaching Principles.

National Council is advised by its Social Justice Advisory Committee and the Vincentian Refugee Network, both comprising representation from Members across the country.

Our federal policy papers and calls for action are contained in the [Let’s Build a Fairer Australia!](#) suite of material that is accessible on our website.

Background

In 2023-24, the Australian Government reported a second Federal Budget surplus of around \$15.8 billion, yet the cost-of-living and housing crises continued to bite, especially for low to middle income households.

Although inflation began to steady, employment numbers were healthier and real minimum wages increased. Minimum wage levels remain 4.8 per cent lower than they were pre-pandemic. Concurrently, rents and mortgage repayments continued to rise.

Our Members and volunteers are well aware of the disproportionate impact these conditions have on the most vulnerable in our communities, especially households relying on working age payments, many comprising single parents, lone persons and renters. Our experience is borne out by research showing that these households are more likely to be experiencing financial stress and even living in poverty.



St Vincent de Paul Society National President Mark Gaetani addressed the Parliament House launch of A Fairer Tax and Welfare System for Australia, a report developed for the Society by the Australian National University’s Centre for Social Research and Methods.

Pictured at the launch on 3 September are Bridget Archer MP and Alicia Payne MP, co-Chairs of Parliamentary Friends of Ending Poverty, Mark Gaetani and ANU Associate Professor Ben Phillips.

◀ The Society's advocacy priorities

Top priority for the Society is advocating for change at the federal level in the areas of income support and poverty, housing and homelessness, people seeking asylum, secure work and First Nations people.

The first half of 2024 saw the addition of gambling reform to these priorities. Advocacy in this area is not new to the Society. In 2010, we prepared a policy position and submission in response to the Productivity Commission's inquiry into gambling and we were previously a member of the Australian Churches Gambling Taskforce.

Other key advocacy areas included support for The Voice in the October 2023 referendum, taxation and welfare reform, energy efficiency for low-income households, disaster relief, and community and charitable sector reform.

The Voice referendum

The Society first supported constitutional recognition of First Nations people back in 2012 and this position was maintained in the lead up to the 2023 referendum on The Voice.

Our position was also shared by the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Catholic Council and church-based charities, including Anglicare Australia, Catholic Social Services Australia, The Salvation Army and Uniting Care Australia. While disappointed, we respect the outcome of the referendum and remain committed to supporting the Uluru Statement from the Heart in full. We will continue to work with First Nations peoples towards recognition, reconciliation and justice.

Welcome outcomes

The second year of the ALP Government has seen activity in certain areas but less in others. Key areas of reform relevant to our advocacy priorities include housing, income support, and workers' rights and wages.

Housing

Welcome changes in the housing area include establishment of the \$10 billion Housing Australia Future Fund, the National Housing Supply and Affordability Council and the National Housing Accord.

Work continues on developing the National Housing and Homelessness Plan, which we hope to see legislated when finalised. We remain committed to housing being treated as a human right, which we first called for in 2016. The remit of the National Housing Infrastructure

Facility has also been widened to unlock funding for social and affordable housing.

While Commonwealth Rent Assistance was increased by 15 per cent in the 2023 Federal Budget, we continue to advocate for further increases and a review of the program.

The 2023 Budget also saw \$300 million committed to the Household Energy Upgrades Fund and around \$850 million over five years to address overcrowding in remote housing in the Northern Territory. While a solid start, more is needed to improve energy performance as the funding will reach only 60,000 of the 440,000 social housing properties.

National Cabinet agreed to a National Planning Reform Blueprint and A Better Deal for Renters (August 2023). The Commonwealth also committed to performance-based funding of \$3 billion under the New Home Bonus to states and territories when they exceed their targets under the National Housing Accord. Local and state governments can also apply to a Housing Support Program (\$500 million) for funding to cover associated costs, such as connecting to essential services or building planning capability.

While Equal Remuneration Order funding for homelessness services has been made available, we continue to call for increased funding of specialist homelessness services, including the delivery of wrap-around support.

Income Support

The 2023 Federal Budget saw a small increase to the base rate of working age payments. While commendable, this was nowhere near enough to lift people out of poverty.

We welcomed help for single parents by extending eligibility for Parenting Payment (Single) to single principal carers with a youngest dependent child under 14 years. Similarly, allowing new pensioners to earn more money (up to \$11,800) before their pension is cut was welcome. And providing the same payment to JobSeeker recipients aged 55 to 59 years (who have been on the payment for at least nine continuous months), to the payment received by those aged 60 years and over, seemed only fair.

The Economic Inclusion Advisory Committee (EIAC), established to advise Government on tackling disadvantage, has produced two comprehensive reports on the changes needed to improve economic inclusion. These include significant increases to JobSeeker and related payments, and improvements to the adequacy of indexation of working-age payments. We commend the EIAC's work and look forward to the Australian Government addressing its recommendations.

Workers' right and wages

Increases to award rates, particularly for those in the care industries (childcare, aged care), and the payment of superannuation on paid parental leave were most welcome.

Other welcome changes included the establishment of two new Expert Panels in the Fair Work Commission – one for Pay Equity, the other for the Care and Community Sector – to hear wage-related matters and to help address low wages and challenging workplace conditions. The Society also supports the Australian Government's White Paper on Jobs and Opportunities (September 2023).

We believe that the current system has a disproportionate impact on already disadvantaged communities and vulnerable people. Continued and improved protections are needed, particularly around insecure work. They are also needed to ensure that wages keep up with the cost of living. For these reasons, we supported the passage of seven Bills aimed primarily at improving job security and workers' rights.

In November 2023, the Select Committee's Final Report on Workforce Australia Employment Services (*Rebuilding Employment Services*) was tabled. It contained 75 recommendations to address the fact that "Australia no longer has an effective coherent national employment services system." The Society supported the Select Committee's recommendations and has called for resources to expedite their implementation.

We support the EIAC's recommendations that a full employment objective is critical to maximising economic inclusion and look forward to the EIAC's annual process for evaluating whether the full employment objective is being met.

The need for debate on taxation and welfare reform

The cost-of-living and housing crises have brought to a head the growing inequity that exists in Australia. These crises also highlight the inequity of the original stage three tax cuts.

Changes to income taxation rates that benefit middle income earners were most welcome. So too was the Government's increase in the concessional tax rate to 30 per cent to be applied to future earnings for superannuation balances above \$3 million.

However, Treasury estimates that revenue foregone from superannuation tax concessions amounts to about \$50 billion a year; and that the cost of these concessions is projected to exceed the cost of the Age Pension by 2050.

Parliamentary Budget Office figures have also found that total tax revenue foregone in the 2023-24 year due to negative gearing deductions and the capital gains

tax discount on residential investment properties was \$10.92 billion. It is projected to increase to \$165 billion by 2034-35.

Against this backdrop, in September 2023 the Society was sponsored by the Parliamentary Friendship Group on Ending Poverty to launch our commissioned report, *A Fairer Tax and Welfare System*. The report (by EIAC member, Associate Professor Ben Phillips, ANU) analysed three models of taxation and welfare reform aimed at reducing poverty.

Subsequent and independent to this work, research conducted by UNSW also found that reducing tax concessions for negative gearing and capital gains, as well as superannuation, which speed wealth creation for the highest 10 per cent and increase housing prices, would help stem growth in wealth inequality.

For these reasons, the Society has called on major parties to develop and disclose policy statements on taxation reform in the lead up to the next federal election. We cannot sustain our service system, much less address growing inequity, without reform in this area.

Deliverables

With input and advice from National Council's Social Justice Advisory Committee, the Vincentian Refugee Network and states and territories, 18 submissions were prepared. These covered:

- [Financial Services Regulatory Framework in Relation to Financial Abuse \(June 2024\)](#)
- [People's Commission](#) into the Housing Crisis (March 2024)
- [Productivity Commission's](#) draft final report on Philanthropy (February 2024)
- [Department of Social Services'](#) review of the Financial Wellbeing and Capability Activity (January 2024)
- [2024 Pre-Budget Submission](#) (December 2023)
- [Department of Social Services' Blueprint Expert Reference Group Paper \(December 2023\)](#)
- [Prime Minister and Cabinet's inquiry into COVID-19](#) (December 2023)
- [Parliamentary inquiry into the Cost-of-Living crisis](#), questions on notice (December 2023)
- [Department of Social Services' Issues Paper, A stronger, more diverse and independent community sector](#) (November 2023)
- [National Housing and Homelessness Plan](#) (November 2023)
- [Treasury Laws Amendment \(Better Targeted Superannuation Concessions\) Bill 2023](#) (October 2023)
- [Fair Work Legislation Amendment \(Closing Loopholes\) Bill](#) (October 2023)

SOCIAL ADVOCACY REPORT



- [ACNC's secrecy provisions](#) (October 2023)
- [ACTU inquiry into price gouging](#) (September 2023)
- [Home Affairs' Discussion Paper on Alternative Commonwealth Capabilities for Crisis Response](#) (September 2023).
- [Parliamentary inquiry into the worsening rental crisis](#) (August 2023)
- [Commonwealth Disaster Funding](#) (August 2023)
- [Social Services and Other Legislation Amendment \(Strengthening the Safety Net\) Bill 2023](#) (July 2023)

Additionally, the Society:

- endorsed the Stronger Charities Alliance's [Charities Amendment Bill](#) to legislate charities' right to advocate in line with their charitable purpose (June 2024), attending a launch at Australian Parliament House and lobbying MPs
- sent letters to Coalition, Independent and Greens Senators calling on them not to pass the Migration Amendment (Removal and Other Measures) Bill 2024 (May 2024)
- endorsed an open letter to the Minister for Housing calling for the National Housing and Homelessness Plan to be legislated (May 2024)
- endorsed a joint charities' letter calling on the Australian Government to urgently increase income support (May 2024)
- sent letters to members of the parliamentary committee, *You Win Some, You Lose More*, calling for an Australian Government response and a ban on gambling advertising (April 2024)
- supported Volunteering Australia's National Strategy for Volunteering Support
- sent letters to the Ministers for Social Services, Housing and Home Affairs calling for action to address priorities outlined in our 2024 Pre-Budget Submission (February 2024)
- endorsed ACOSS, FECCA and Settlement Services Australia's submission on the need for a Multicultural Framework (October 2023)
- endorsed ACOSS' submission to the Parliamentary Inquiry Into Residential Electrification (October 2023)

- endorsed [ACOSS' community sector joint statement of support for The Voice \(September 2023\)](#)
- endorsed a joint churches' letter urging Australians to support the Voice and one another (September 2023)
- endorsed ACOSS' submission on Commonwealth Disaster Funding (August 2023)
- endorsed an [open letter from people of faith requesting the transfer of refugees and people seeking asylum held in PNG to Australia \(July 2023\)](#)
- met with Independent MP Allegra Spender to discuss our federal advocacy priorities and the need for taxation reform (May 2024), and
- appeared before the Reserve Bank of Australia to discuss the cost-of-living crisis (February 2024)

The Society also signed on to the following campaigns:

- Alliance for Gambling Reform (April 2024)
- Ending Child Poverty (April 2024)
- Coalition of Support, Volunteering Australia's National Strategy for Volunteering Support (March 2024)
- Everybody's Home (December 2023)

Society representation

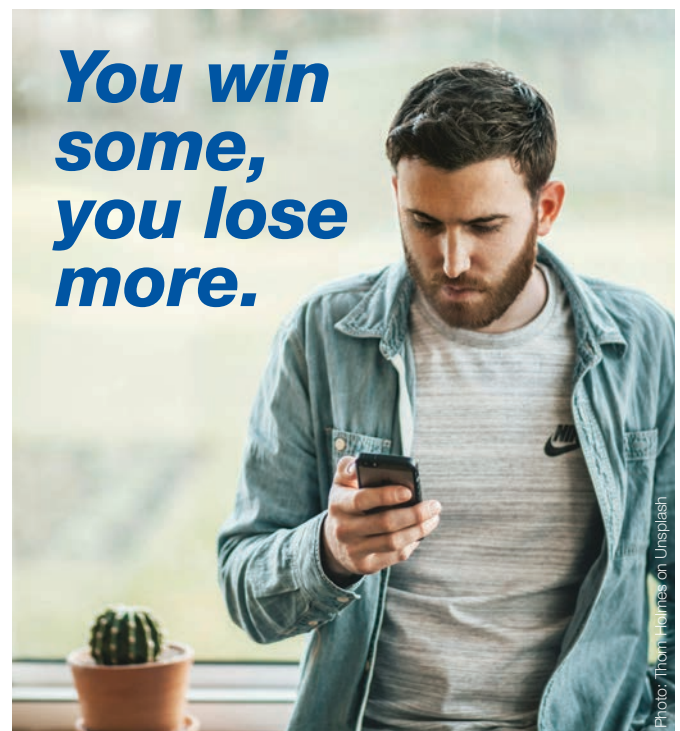
The Society has representation on key government and non-government advisory groups and boards, which enables us to contribute to the shape and form of social justice policy and programs. We have representation on the Department of Social Services' Community Services Advisory Group, Blueprint Expert Reference Group (community sector reform), National Coordination Group (emergency relief), National Shelter Australia's board, and the National Emergency Management Australia's Charitable and Not-for-profit Roundtable.

Our advocacy voice is strengthened by joining forces with other major charities and not-for-profit organisations that hold similar positions on social justice issues. This range of organisations includes Anglicare Australia, Australian Catholic Bishops Conference, ACOSS, Catholics for People Seeking Asylum, Catholic Social Services Australia, Community Housing Industry Association, Jesuit Refugee Service, Jesuit Social Service, National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Catholic Council, National Shelter Australia, Refugee Council of Australia, Salvation Army and UnitingCare Australia.

Our goals for the upcoming year

In all, the Society has 30 calls for action and will be prioritising the following in the coming year:

- Increase base rates of working age payments equivalent to 90 per cent of the Age Pension and index them biannually in line with wage growth or CPI.
- Double the funding of the Housing Australia Future Fund (to \$20 billion), increase funding of homelessness services, fund A Better Deal for Renters, and review and further fund Commonwealth Rent Assistance.
- Increase funding of community-led programs to meet Closing the Gap targets.
- Provide an adequate safety net for people seeking asylum, including work rights and access to Medicare.
- Fund the 75 recommendations to improve Workforce Australia Employment Services and expedite their implementation, particularly with respect to addressing the needs of the long-term unemployed.
- Halve child poverty by 2030, appoint a Cabinet Minister for Children, establish a Ministerial Council for Child Wellbeing and enact a National Children's Act and a federal Human Rights Act.
- Call on major parties to develop clear, evidence-based policies on taxation reform in the lead-up to the next federal election.
- Fund and implement the 31 recommendations in the *You win some, you lose more* report and prioritise the ban on online gambling.



SAFEGUARDING IS EVERYONE'S RESPONSIBILITY

The St Vincent de Paul Society National Council of Australia is committed to building a more just and compassionate society. A key element of our strategic vision and advocacy work is to be a leading and trusted advocate for those in need in our community.

Respecting the dignity of others is at the core of what we do. At every level of the Society in Australia, all people, regardless of their age, gender, race, religious beliefs, disability, sexual orientation or family or social background, have equal rights to protection from abuse, neglect and exploitation.

While protecting the safety and wellbeing of others has always underpinned our work, we've taken the opportunity over the past 12 months to reflect on the Society's safeguarding practice and to redefine the fundamentals that will keep safe all children and adults who are at risk.

Our message remains the same. Safeguarding is everyone's responsibility.

We understand that safeguarding is a broad and complex space. We recognise that the National Council's impact can be felt most when we collaborate closely with all of our State and Territory Councils (and their corporate entities) to advance the Society's safeguarding culture and bring a unified approach to safeguarding practice.

Safeguarding is always our priority. Our commitment is to remain responsive to the needs of the most vulnerable in our community. Ultimately, good safeguarding practice creates the conditions that reduce the likelihood of harm, and increases our ability to identify potential harm and to respond appropriately.

National Catholic Safeguarding Standards

In August 2020, the National Council committed the Society in Australia to adopting the National Catholic Safeguarding Standards (the Standards). Each of the Society's bodies corporate is working towards baseline compliance with the Standards by 30 June 2025.

The 10 Standards are wide-ranging and interrelated. They outline key activities designed to build an organisation's safeguarding capability, with a focus on activities to prevent and respond to abuse. The Standards assist the Society to place the safety of children and adults at risk at the centre of how we plan, think and act. The Standards cover matters that are over and above the various and differing jurisdictional safeguarding requirements.

The Society continues to work closely with Australian Catholic Safeguarding Limited (ACSL), which provides



services to assist organisations to implement the Standards and to build their safeguarding capacity. ACSL will be engaged by the National Council in 2025 to complete an independent, external safeguarding audit as part of an assessment of the Society's compliance with the Standards.

Getting the fundamentals right

This year, National Council has focused on getting the fundamentals right. This has involved a significant review of the external safeguarding environment in order to understand the challenges and opportunities the Society faces, and scaling our work to embed a sustainable safeguarding culture in everything that we do. One of the challenges for our bodies corporate is to incorporate the Standards into existing policies and procedures and into induction training regimes for Members, volunteers and employees alongside statutory requirements.

Safeguarding Governance

The past year has been characterised by rich policy discussions and the initiation of significant Society-wide safeguarding reforms that will have an ongoing legacy beyond this financial year.

In 2023–24, the National Council published a new safeguarding policy that focuses on children and



adults at risk, and also reviewed and updated its Code of Conduct and complaints management policy. A Safeguarding flyer (fact sheet) was published on the National Council's website to provide an overview of safeguarding responsibilities and to reflect the Society's commitment to the Standards. Work continues to review and update National Council's safeguarding resources to ensure easy accessibility (particularly through our website) given the diverse communities that we serve.

National Council also reviewed its safeguarding screening processes this year for its members and for staff within the National Council Secretariate. A range of recommendations are now being implemented to ensure a consistent approach to National Police checks for all National Council Members and Secretariate employees, and Working with Vulnerable People screening for Secretariate employees, applicable in the Australian Capital Territory.

With guidance from National Council, consultation occurred with key stakeholders across the Society to consider the establishment of an independent Safeguarding Standards Office, and to determine an appropriate governance structure and operating model to support its functions.

This Office will sit within the National Council's structure and focus on the Standards. National Council is scheduled to consider the governance arrangements and functions of the Safeguarding Standards Office at its Council meeting in July 2024.

National Council's safeguarding working group and standing committee have been instrumental in promoting the Society's safeguarding agenda and bringing together expertise from across different parts of the Society. They met regularly this financial year to consider a range of safeguarding initiatives, including safeguarding training for Society leaders, the development of a self-assessment compliance tool to monitor progress against the NCSS, and an audit paradigm that will underpin the safeguarding audit function of the proposed Safeguarding Standards Office.

Effective leadership and advocacy

Working with risk and uncertainty is inherent in safeguarding practice. Society leaders have a responsibility to foster and sustain a culture and an environment that addresses risk and supports good safeguarding practice to protect the most vulnerable.

That is one of the reasons we have worked closely with ACSL this year to develop a targeted safeguarding learning program for our leaders. The Society will commence the rollout of safeguarding leadership training in the second half of 2024. We recognise that a comprehensive induction program and ongoing training is integral to building safeguarding capability across the Society, and in the coming year we will look at ways to improve and streamline the safeguarding induction process for all Members, volunteers and staff.

National Council has also supported a range of activities this year to raise the profile of safeguarding and to share key messages across all levels of the Society. This has included safeguarding presentations to Society CEOs, the Overseas Partnership Program and other forums where Members and volunteers had the opportunity to hear more about the Society's safeguarding initiatives. Our focus in 2024-25 will be on strengthening our communities of practice and sharing tools and resources more effectively across different parts of the Society.

Identifying areas for further improvement

This year, our State and Territory bodies corporate began their initial self-assessment to evaluate how well their current safeguarding practices align with the Standards. Regular reports provided to National Council help identify areas where additional support or guidance is required to ensure compliance with the Standards.

The Society also collaborated with ACSL to develop an online self-assessment tool to streamline the assessment process in preparation for the external audit of the National Council by ACSL in 2025. The online tool is scheduled to be released in July 2024.

NATIONAL COORDINATION GROUP

The Society continued to be represented on the National Coordination Group (NCG) by the National Council's CEO. This ministerial advisory body is an important mechanism for engagement with the Minister for Social Services and the Department of Social Services, and for collaboration, information sharing and joint advocacy with senior representatives of the emergency relief (ER), food relief (FR), financial counselling (FC) and volunteering sectors nationally.

Since being established in April 2020 in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the NCG has provided detailed advice, on-the-ground intelligence and funding recommendations on economic crises, including the pandemic, natural disasters and cost-of-living pressures. As at 30 June 2024, the Group had met 87 times.

This year, the NCG developed advice for the Minister on improvements to the Commonwealth-funded ER, FR and FC program arrangements, including building the evidence base for improved responses to demand. This expanded on previous work commissioned by the NCG that examined the issues and challenges faced by ER and FR providers, and recipients of these supports across Australia.

Funding recommendations made by the Group based on shared intelligence and data on areas of need and unmet demand led to the allocation in FY 2023-24 of \$14.4 million in additional funding to Commonwealth ER providers

nationally and to the three Commonwealth-funded FR providers. NCG advice on long term funding gaps and the pressures created by the cost-of-living crisis also helped inform the Minister's decision to allocate \$114.8 million in additional and ongoing funding over five years for ER, FR and FC programs. This funding included an additional \$7.8 million in funding for FY 2023-24. These are significant improvements for those in need. Some of these funds can be used to ease increased administrative costs incurred by providers.

Pivoting on recommendations made over recent years, the Group provided advice to the Minister and to the Department on elements that might build a stronger future emergency relief partnership involving the Government and a diversity of community providers. The place and the role of larger charities that contribute significant additional financial supports across this space continued to be highlighted.

The Society's eight State and Territory Councils are among the 192 Commonwealth-funded ER providers that benefit from the collaborative and coordinated approach to funding and program design that the NCG contributes to. This model strengthens the sector as a whole and our ability to serve those in need, and it ensures that the voices and needs of our Companions are presented at the highest levels of decision-making.

National Council was asked by the Department and the members of the Group to continue to administer the NCG Secretariate during the period.

COMMUNITY SECTOR ADVISORY GROUP

The Community Sector Advisory Group (CSAG) is a long-running advisory group established by the Department of Social Services for the purposes of growing a strong partnership between the Department and not-for-profit providers that receive government grants. The Society's Councils receive a variety of government grants from the Department. During the course of the year, CSAG explored how the Departments of Treasury and Finance allocate annual CPI increases to grants and how this allocation is delivered across portfolios with the aim of ensuring providers receive the full indexation outlined in the annual Federal Budget.

CSAG also explored how the Commonwealth could adopt a 'co-design' approach with local communities and providers in order to deliver stronger communities. This approach saw an extension of funding arrangements

across other Commonwealth departments that came into scope. An Issues Paper was released seeking input from the wider not-for-profit sector of funded providers about the challenges being faced by the providers since the COVID pandemic and the additional costs of delivering services on behalf of the Government in the cost-of-living crisis environment.

There is agreement that a commitment to 'working together' could provide a foundation upon which stronger relationships between government, its departments and funded providers could advance. An important and essential goal of any future partnership will be acknowledgement of the true cost of delivering services and outcomes for the Government and that decisions need to be made with, and implemented via, the involvement of local communities.



Photo: solator/Jinsplash

BLUEPRINT EXPERT REFERENCE GROUP

Australia has more than 300,000 not-for-profit organisations that touch every aspect of Australian life. As of 2024, there are approximately 60,000 registered charities. More than 50 per cent are very small or small organisations and more than 50 per cent are run solely by volunteers. The not-for-profit sector reflects Australia's rich diversity and it plays an important role in achieving a fairer and better Australia.

Reforms to enable a healthy and thriving not-for-profit sector have been a matter of concern for the sector and for Australian governments for over 30 years. Past multiple inquiries have resulted in limited action.

When announcing support for a Blueprint for the sector in opposition, the Government recognised that 'the future of the charity sector is too important to our economy and our communities to grow and develop without planning or strategic investment'.

The 2022-23 October budget contained the provision for developing the Not-for-Profit Sector Development Blueprint (the Blueprint) and doubling philanthropic giving by 2030. The Minister for Social Services and the Assistant Treasurer and Minister for Charities established the Expert Reference Group (BERG) to prepare a 10-year blueprint.

National Council's CEO is a member of the BERG, which has been preparing the 10-year blueprint for the sector. An Issues Paper was released for public discussion in November 2023. The government is scheduled to release the Blueprint in late 2024.

SCHOOL STUDENT BROADBAND INITIATIVE

The Society is a Nominating Organisation with the National Broadband Network (nbn co), which delivers the School Student Broadband Initiative (SSBI).

The SSBI is an Australian Government program that offers eligible students free internet at home until 31 December 2025. The aim is to boost educational opportunities and narrow the digital divide for a total of 30,000 households with school-aged students. In addition to referring households without a broadband connection to the program, the Society has engaged in consultations on the program to find ways of improving the reach and effectiveness of the initiative.

NATIONAL EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT AGENCY – CHARITIES ADVISORY GROUP

The Society has representation on the Charities Advisory Group established by the National Emergency Management Agency to support the Agency with national coordination to better manage national emergencies and to share situational awareness of an emergency in real-time.



Two short words and two initials mark the most significant development in the communications and media field for many years. 'Social media' and 'AI', or artificial intelligence, cannot be ignored or their use delayed if a socially active organisation such as St Vincent de Paul Society wishes to engage with its prime audiences, especially younger people.

While the uptake of AI within the Society is still in its relative infancy, it will have undoubted value for our communications work, and is being evaluated by our IT team.

Our use of social media experienced a notable upswing over the past year, with a dedicated member of the Communications and Media Team consolidating our social media channels as an important first point of contact with our target audiences. There has been significant growth in activity on national social media channels, with an average of 20 posts a month across the following areas - advocacy, fundraising, membership and volunteering, special works, retail, faith and Vincentian spirituality. Growth was seen in content reach and audience engagement.

The Communications and Media Team is responsible for the management of the social media accounts, including curating and producing content, reviewing content prepared by States and Territories, moderation of comments in response to posts and maintaining national social media policies and procedures.

In FY 2023-24, there were 10.3 million views across our social media channels and 5.6 million views of the Society's website pages.

Our work on social media goes hand-in-hand with the websites (National Council and States/Territories) in order to enhance users' knowledge of our Good Works, Appeals, retail activities and advocacy positions, and access to further information about them.

The media releases issued by National Council totalled 21 over the year and reflected the diversity of the Society's activities as well as highlighting our advocacy positions. Topics ranged from our opposition to the promotion of online gambling to our concerns about violence against women and our commitment to fair treatment for asylum seekers and refugees.



Topics aligned with our continuing call to *Let's Build a Fairer Australia* and included:

- First Nations equality
- Housing and homelessness
- The management of employment services
- The hardship facing renters
- Anti-Poverty Week
- The minimum age of criminal responsibility
- The Housing Australia Future Fund (HAFF).

Mention should be made of our public support for a 'Yes' vote in the October 2023 referendum on enshrining an advisory First Nations voice in the Australian Constitution.

The Society's position on this issue was explained on the basis of our Catholic faith, Catholic Social Teaching, the inspiration of Blessed Frédéric Ozanam and the words of the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Catholic Council, the peak advisory body to the Australian Catholic Bishops.

After National Council resolved to take this position, the Secretariate issued media releases and commentary that supported this stance. This included articles in *The Record*, and a prominent opinion article in *The Canberra Times* (26 Sept 2023), arguing that, 'Regardless of the result, the Voice referendum should provide a strong incentive for the Australian Government to better develop and enact policies informed by what First Nations people believe will benefit them most'.

The defeat of the referendum was greeted by the Society with concern about the risk of further disempowering First Nations families and communities.

During the year, we focused closely on communicating our policies in the key areas endorsed by National

Council. These were: Poverty and Inequity, Housing and Homelessness, People Seeking Asylum, Secure Work, and First Nations people. The Communications and Media team worked closely with our Policy and Advocacy Team to ensure our submissions to government and our liaison with partner organisations reflected our agreed policy positions.

Our quarterly magazine *The Record*, with a subscriber list of around 1,000 and consistent readership on our website, continued to have a central role in our national communications strategy. This journal showcases the activities of the Society and the reflections of our elected and executive leadership, as well as the many achievements of our Members and volunteers from across Australia.

The Record is distributed to all Federal parliamentarians and to Australian Bishops.

The Communications and Media Team was especially successful in placing editorial opinion articles (op-eds), totalling 13, in various publications of influence, including *The Canberra Times* and the Catholic press, and the award-winning *Eureka Street*.

The functioning of the Secretariate-led National Communications Network, involving SVdP Communications units across Australia, was again a valuable mechanism for information sharing and fostering consistency of messaging across the Society. Monthly meetings of this collegiate group were hosted by the Director of Communications and Media.

A contracted media monitoring service was again used to provide a daily collation of media reports relating to the Society and these were shared throughout the Society.

The communications team plays a vital role in helping to maintain and foster the strong reputation of the St Vincent de Paul Society in Australia.

OVERSEAS PARTNERSHIPS PROGRAM

The St Vincent de Paul Society in Australia continues to support fellow Vincentians to undertake *good works* helping people in need in our partnered countries in the Asia-Pacific region through its **Overseas Partnerships Program (OPP)** comprising Twinning, Project Support, Assist-A-Student and Emergency Relief.

The OPP is overseen and facilitated by the National Council of Australia on behalf of the Society. National Council's **Overseas Partnerships Program Standing Committee (OPP SC)** and Secretariate work with State and Territory Council **Overseas Partnership Committees** and their support teams who implement the program across their Councils and Conferences.

Conference to Conference and Council to Council relationships are supported through partnerships between the National Council of Australia and the Superior

Councils of our overseas partner countries in Cambodia, Federated States of Micronesia, Fiji, India, Indonesia, Kiribati, Lao PDR, Myanmar, Philippines, Solomon Islands, Sri Lanka* and Thailand.

The OPP is overseen by Council General International's (CGI) International Territorial Vice Presidents (ITVPs) for Oceania and Asia and its **Twinning Commission** representatives for Oceania and Asia.

At the request of CGI, the formation of emerging Societies in the Oceania region is also supported through the Papua New Guinea Working Group and Timor-Leste Working Group, convened by National Council and made up of Members from across the Society.

** From July 2024 Australia's few Sri Lankan twins will move to New Zealand, its main Twinning partner.*

OPP Initiatives

Several new initiatives are in progress to strengthen the OPP within Australia and overseas.

OPP National Network

To help increase awareness of and engagement in the OPP within Australia, an OPP National Network has been established. The OPP National Network brings together both members and staff from National and State and Territory Councils to work together to identify and implement initiatives that to date have included the creation of:

- new OPP resources such as PowerPoint presentations, brochures, posters and promotional videos for use by Council and Conference Members
- a new webpage to provide our Conferences and Councils easy access to OPP resources
- a quarterly OPP Newsletter and regular articles in *The Record*.

Twinning relationships between overseas National Councils and our State Councils

To further strengthen Twinning relationships between the Society in Australia and our overseas partners, special Twinning relationships between overseas National Councils and our State Councils are in formation. These relationships sit under GCI's ITVP and Twinning Arrangements between the Australian and overseas National Councils. They are being created to provide additional support for the strengthening of the overseas National Council.

To date, this includes forming a Twinning relationship between the:

- National Council of Fiji and New South Wales State Council through a relationship building visit by representatives from NSW Council, National Council and the ITVP-Oceania team undertaken in February 2024
- National Council of Solomon Islands and Queensland State Council through a relationship building visit by representatives from Queensland State Council, National Council and the ITVP-Oceania team to be undertaken in September 2024.



Overseas Partnerships Training

The OPP follows a strengths-based approach that includes supporting capacity building to identify and develop the skills necessary to work respectfully and effectively alongside the Society’s partners in other countries. National Council has conducted the following trainings:

- Supporting the Fiji/NSW Twinning, a NSW training session was held in Sydney on 6-7 November 2023 and a Fiji training was held in Nadi on 23-24 January 2024.
- Supporting the Solomon Islands/Queensland Twinning, a Queensland training session was held in Brisbane on 13-14 November 2023 and a Solomon Islands training was held in Honiara 26-28 April 2024.
- Training held in Canberra 20-21 July 2024 included participants from National Council’s Timor-Leste and Papua New Guinea Working Groups and the ITVP-Oceania team.

Society of St Vincent de Paul (SSVP) Oceania Partnership

To support the strengthening, growth and self-sufficiency of the Society in the Oceania region, the Society of St Vincent de Paul (SSVP) Oceania Partnership is being established through the support of the National Councils of Australia and New Zealand.

This is the first year in a 10-year project that brings together CGI personnel, the National Councils of Australia and New Zealand, and National Councils in Oceania. They will work collaboratively to support their move towards self-sustaining futures by increasing capabilities through building on current knowledge, expertise and partnership arrangements across multiple domains.

The governance, strategic and operational arrangements for the partnership are in development and priorities for each of the participating countries will be identified through collaborative processes. An SSVP Oceania Partnership Meeting is being planned

for November 2024 in Canberra to bring together the stakeholders to progress this initiative.

The parties below are the initial Members of the SSVP Oceania Partnership:

- CGI through its ITVP-Oceania Team, Twinning and CIAD representatives
- Superior Councils of the Societies in Australia and New Zealand
- Superior Councils of the Societies in the Pacific including Tonga, Samoa, Fiji, Solomon Islands, Kiribati, Federated States of Micronesia - CHUUK and Timor Leste.

Further updates will be provided as the SSVP Oceania Partnership is established.

National Council’s Secretariate provides the secretariate to the SSVP Oceania Partnership.

OVERSEAS PARTNERSHIPS PROGRAM

Twining

Twining is the direct link between an Australian and an overseas Conference or Council. Promoting spirituality, friendship and an understanding between cultures, Twining consists of prayer, regular communication and financial support via quarterly remittances for twinning, optional twice-yearly grants and occasional projects.

At the end of the financial year (FY) 2023-24, there were a total of 1,854 twinning relationships between Australian and Overseas Conferences and Councils as summarised below.

The breakdown by country was: Cambodia (24), Federated States of Micronesia (1), Fiji (15), India (1,132), Indonesia (210), Kiribati (1), Lao PDR (1), Myanmar (113), Philippines (224), Solomon Islands (7), Sri Lanka (7) and Thailand (126).

The State and Territory Council breakdown of Twinings was: Canberra/Goulburn (61), New South Wales (684), Queensland (298), South Australia (122), Tasmania (25), Victoria (538), Western Australia (108) and National Council (18).

Twining relationships supported through the Overseas Partnerships Program in 2023-24

	Conference to Conference twins	Council to Council twins	Total Twins	% Twins by Country	No. Grants Given	% Grants Given
Cambodia	24	0	24	1%	22	2%
FSM (Chuuk)	1	0	1	0%	2	0%
Fiji	15	0	15	1%	7	1%
India	1000	23	1023	55%	692	59%
India (non-financial)	107	2	109	6%	0	0%
Indonesia	205	5	210	11%	128	11%
Kiribati	1	0	1	0%	1	0%
Laos	1	0	1	0%	1	0%
Myanmar	103	10	113	6%	132	11%
Philippines	217	7	224	12%	147	13%
Solomon Islands	7	0	7	0%	2	0%
Sri Lanka	0	0	0	0%	2	0%
Thailand	122	4	126	7%	40	3%
Total	1803	51	1854	100%	1176	100%



This included funding for:

- The Solomon Islands National Council to improve communications and visit its conferences in outer islands.
- The National Council of Kiribati to establish an office (including furniture and equipment).

Assist-A-Student Program

Unique to Australia and New Zealand, the Assist-A-Student (AAS) Program recognises the importance of education as a key lever to help break the cycle of poverty. The program relies on kind donations from Vincentians, members of the public and other groups and organisations.

The AAS Program currently runs over a calendar year.

Project Support

The OPP also facilitates support for projects identified by Conferences and Councils in our overseas partner countries according to specific criteria. These requests are supported through generous contributions by Conferences and Councils in Australia.

During the period, projects were supported in India (24) (\$41,180), Kiribati (1) (\$9,726) Myanmar (8) (\$19,381), Philippines (1) (\$22,100) and Solomon Islands (4) (\$4,850).

Community Development projects improve the circumstances of people and communities in need in a local area. They can be requested by overseas Conferences and Councils through their National Council. These included:

- A project in the Philippines that supported the fit-out of a Community Centre for the Mangyan indigenous people. This followed previous funding for the building of the Community Centre.
- Projects in India that provided for the purchase of milk cows or buffalo. The beneficiaries sell their milk to receive income. They can also use it for their families, improving their health and nutrition.
- Projects in Solomon Islands that supported the provision of sewing machines and small-scale piggeries in remote communities.

Special Vincentian Support projects support the efficient and effective operations of an overseas National Council. They can only be requested by our partner overseas National Councils. In 2023-24, three Special Vincentian Support projects to the total value of \$11,906 were supported.

Notably, countries engaged in the program run different school years, so payments are made at different times in the year. This makes financial year reporting a challenge.

Over calendar year 2023, 1,520 students were supported with \$100 allocated for each student for a total amount of \$152,000. These students came from Cambodia (270), Indonesia (380), Philippines (370), Sri Lanka (200) and Thailand (300).

Over calendar year 2024, it is envisaged that 2,070 students will be supported, with \$100 allocated for each student for a total amount of \$207,000. These students will be from Cambodia (300), Indonesia (380), Kiribati (200), Myanmar (430), Philippines (360), Sri Lanka (100) and Thailand (300).

While fundraising for distribution in the 2025 calendar year will continue until the end of December 2024, \$83,789 has been raised as at the end of June 2024.

Assistance to other partner countries is reviewed each calendar year. Unfortunately, AAS funds were unable to be sent to Myanmar in 2023 due to the political situation there.

Emergency Relief

No emergency relief funds were sent overseas during the period as the need for COVID-19 support ceased and no emergency relief was requested for any of the three regions.

As such, the funds allocated for FY 2023-24 have been held and are available for the FY 2024-25. They are available for immediate allocation upon receipt of an Emergency Relief Application from our overseas partner countries and approval by National Council's Overseas Partnership Program Standing Committee.

OVERSEAS PARTNERSHIPS PROGRAM

Total Funds Provided by Country

The Twinning, Council to Council, Grants, Project and AAS funds provided to, or held on behalf of, overseas National Councils through the OPP in FY 2023-24 is summarised in the table below

Funds remitted (and held) by the Overseas Partnerships Program in 2023-24

	Twinning (\$)	Grants Christmas / Easter / COVID (\$)	Council- to- Council (\$)	Projects, Emergency Relief (\$)	Assist-a- Student (\$)	Total (\$)
Cambodia	7,760	4,450	-	-	27,000	39,210
Fiji	4,640	1,400	-	-	-	6,040
FSM (Chuuk)	320	400	-	-	-	720
India	334,400	130,890	16,040	41,180	-	522,510
Indonesia	65,360	22,680	4,020	-	38,100	130,160
Kiribati	160	1,520	9,726	-	600	12,006
Lao PDR	320	200	-	-	-	520
Myanmar	24,480	25,617	10,700	19,381	-	80,178
Philippines	70,320	34,650	7,480	22,100	37,000	171,550
Solomon Islands	2,080	600	-	4,850	-	7,530
Sri Lanka	640	400	1,200	-	30,000	32,240
Thailand	39,280	6,900	4,175	-	30,000	80,355
Total remitted	549,760	229,707	53,341	87,511	162,700	1,083,019

NATIONAL STATEMENT OF COMPREHENSIVE INCOME 2023-24

The Society's financial accounting is done primarily at the State and Territory level, where the various incorporated entities function. This statement presents an amalgamated financial view of these entities.

	AGGREGATED	
	2024 \$	2023 \$
OPERATING REVENUE		
Grants	431,131,208	384,980,452
Sale of Goods	244,173,355	247,586,031
Contribution / Fee for Services	200,478,403	179,168,159
Fundraising	49,612,255	51,957,928
Other income	60,850,719	67,124,819
Total Revenue from Operating Activities	986,245,942	930,817,389
OPERATING EXPENSES		
Costs of Goods Sold	10,840,808	9,714,078
Personnel Costs	593,853,558	530,334,955
Property Costs (excl Dep)	87,799,716	83,859,798
Transport Costs (excl Dep)	11,319,006	10,956,867
Material Assistance Provided	105,945,539	102,832,024
Disaster Assistance Provided	899,967	3,455,415
Other Operating Expenses (excl Dep)	105,795,794	90,515,322
Depreciation	61,173,986	60,488,410
Total Expenses	977,628,375	892,156,870
Operating Surplus/(Deficit) for the period	8,617,567	38,660,519
NON-OPERATIONAL REVENUE		
Special Grants / Appeals	-	225,284
Capital Grants	24,341,498	5,257,312
Revaluation of Property, Plant and Equipment / Rent Relief / Discounts	4,189,344	-
Bequests	23,478,474	16,435,209
Profit on Asset Sales	9,398,828	8,548,142
Changes in Fair Value of Fin Assets	29,220,517	7,652,067
Transfers from Related Entities	6,095,738	4,543,231
Drought Funding Received from other jurisdictions	-	-
Other Disaster Funds received from other jurisdictions	-	-
NON-OPERATIONAL EXPENSES		
Special Grants / Appeals	-	-
Loss on Asset Sales	12,274	90,126
Transfers to Related Entities	3,146,662	2,781,148
Impairment of Assets	11,972,956	11,940,786
Disaster Funds transferred to other jurisdictions	-	-
Other Non-Operational Expenses	-	316,257
Surplus/(Deficit) for the period	90,210,075	66,193,446



St Vincent de Paul Society

NATIONAL COUNCIL of AUSTRALIA Inc.

good works

Responsibility for this document rests with the
St Vincent de Paul Society National Council of Australia Inc.

PRIVACY STATEMENT

The St Vincent de Paul Society of Australia respects the privacy of the people it assists, our Members, volunteers and employees. As a result, the names of clients, Members, volunteers or employees featured in this report may have been changed and pictorial models used.

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