



Tasmanian Council of Social Service Inc.

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# Discussion Paper - Tasmanian Positive: our state's sustainability strategy

*October 2023*



**INTEGRITY  
COMPASSION  
INFLUENCE**

## About TasCOSS

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TasCOSS' vision is for one Tasmania, free of poverty and inequality where everyone has the same opportunity. Our mission is two-fold: to act as the peak body for the community services industry in Tasmania; and to challenge and change the systems, attitudes and behaviours that create poverty, inequality and exclusion.

Our membership includes individuals and organisations active in the provision of community services to Tasmanians on low incomes or living in vulnerable circumstances. TasCOSS represents the interests of our members and their service users to government, regulators, the media and the public. Through our advocacy and policy development, we draw attention to the causes of poverty and disadvantage, and promote the adoption of effective solutions to address these issues.

Please direct any enquiries about this submission to:

Adrienne Picone

Chief Executive Officer

*Phone Number:* (03) 6231 0755

*Email Address:* [adrienne@tascoss.org.au](mailto:adrienne@tascoss.org.au)

## Consultation Questions

### Q. What words would you use to describe an ideal Tasmania in 2050?

All Tasmanians have what they need to live a Good Life.<sup>1</sup>

### Q. What are the most important things we need to do to achieve a sustainable future for Tasmania?

- Eliminate poverty, disadvantage and inequality.
- Remove barriers to full participation in our society so that all Tasmanians have the same opportunities.
- Ensure our communities are inclusive, respect diversity and free of discrimination.
- Ensure everyone is treated with dignity and respect.
- Ensure the voices of people with lived experience of living on low incomes are captured through meaningful consultation that is accessible and inclusive.
- Ensure the different needs of priority populations experiencing vulnerability or disadvantage are recognised.
- Ensure the rights of indigenous peoples to self-determination are recognised and Aboriginal community-led engagement is undertaken in developing shared hopes for future generations and the Sustainability Strategy vision and goals.

### Q. What do you plan to do by 2030, 2040 and 2050, to contribute to the achievement of a sustainable Tasmania in 2050?

TasCOSS works to ensure that people are at the centre of policy design and development. We do this by:

- Creating strategic partnerships and coalitions of change across industry, government, business and communities to drive and influence systemic change.
- Recognising and drawing on the value of lived experience, ensuring that people who access services are key partners in service design, along with governments, communities and industry.
- Amplifying the voices of our community and people experiencing poverty and disadvantage in both - the public sphere; and in the development of goals, policies and actions to address poverty, inequality and disadvantage.
- Ensuring that all public policy reflects human rights principles and aligns with Sustainable Development Goals (SDG).
- Advocating for Tasmanians on low incomes, facing barriers to participation or experiencing vulnerability or disadvantage.

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<sup>1</sup> See Appendix.

### Q. What do you hope Tasmania looks like in 2050 - our society, economy, and natural environment?

The vision and goals of a Sustainability Strategy must reflect what Tasmanians want and need for the future prosperity of themselves, their families and their communities.

TasCOSS' vision for Tasmania is a community free of poverty and inequality where everyone has the same opportunity.

TasCOSS is the peak body for the community services industry in Tasmania. To ensure all Tasmanians have the opportunity to participate in the social and economic life of Tasmania, the Tasmanian Government has invested in the development of the *Community Services Industry Plan 2021-31*. This plan sets out a vision “for a connected community services industry that supports all Tasmanians to live a good life and enriches our state’s social cultural and economic wellbeing”.<sup>2</sup>

A connected community services industry places the needs of people at the centre ensuring that responsive, coordinated care and support is provided by organisations and communities. This will be achieved through enhanced collaboration across the industry and with governments that leads to innovative, sustainable, place-based social and community care.

### Q. What are the most important challenges we need to overcome to achieve your vision for Tasmania in 2050?

TasCOSS welcomes the development of a Sustainability Strategy that addresses factors beyond traditional economic measures such as jobs and economic activity. These traditional measures do not adequately capture social wellbeing, environmental outcomes or take into consideration what is important to individuals, communities and future prosperity.

From our consultations with Tasmanians, TasCOSS is aware of widespread community concern that economic growth or prosperity is not being fairly shared, and that the COVID-19 pandemic and resulting cost of living crisis has only widened the gap between rich and poor.

The Sustainability Strategy must be a mechanism for driving progress and not just an opportunity to describe some positive social, economic and environmental values that are not supported by action. The Strategy goals must reflect the priorities and values of the community, and achieving these should be the primary focus of government in collaboration with business, industry and the community.

The highest priority of the Sustainability Strategy must be reducing poverty and improving equity in Tasmania. Relieving poverty is a key determinant of social, economic and environmental sustainability and is consistent with SDG 1 – no poverty. The Sustainability Strategy must prioritise the needs of those experiencing vulnerability and disadvantage. It must be embedded in government, decision-making and policy making processes, so that investments, policies and activities are directed to reducing poverty and inequality, and improving the wellbeing of individuals, communities and the state.

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<sup>2</sup> [https://www.dpac.tas.gov.au/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0017/228041/Community-Services-Industry-Plan-2021-2031-web.pdf](https://www.dpac.tas.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0017/228041/Community-Services-Industry-Plan-2021-2031-web.pdf)

## Priorities of a Sustainability Strategy

To reduce poverty and inequality across Tasmania, the Sustainability Strategy needs to prioritise those population groups in our communities who have the most significant needs, or who are currently unable to access what they need to improve their economic, social and environmental sustainability.

We strongly encourage the development of a Strategy which will support all Tasmanians, but is particularly focussed on recognising and addressing the needs of priority population groups, including indigenous people and communities, and those who are currently marginalised through circumstances such as lack of sufficient income, age, race/ethnicity or social exclusion/isolation.

### ***Reduce Poverty and Inequality***

To achieve a sustainable Tasmania, the basic needs of Tasmanians and our community must be met. Freedom from poverty is a key determinant of social sustainability. Therefore, the highest priority of a Sustainability Strategy must be to reduce poverty.

According to the Australian Council of Social Service (ACOSS) *Poverty in Australia* report, 21% of the Tasmanian population is living on an inadequate income (using the 60% of median income poverty line). That equates to around 120,000 Tasmanians living in poverty.<sup>3</sup>

A person in the highest 20% income group has **six times** as much income as a person in the lowest 20% income group. And the average wealth of a household in the highest 20% wealth group has over **90 times** the wealth of the lowest 20% wealth group.<sup>4</sup>

The harsh reality for tens of thousands of Tasmanians experiencing poverty is that they are not sharing in the benefits of economic growth and feel less optimistic about the future, which by extension is trapping them in poverty.

This should not be an acceptable outcome for a wealthy and prosperous country such as Australia and the Sustainability Strategy presents an opportunity to set goals and targets that align with the United Nations (UN) first SDG - to end poverty in all its forms everywhere.<sup>5</sup>

This goal is underpinned by targets and indicators that could easily be adapted for Tasmania. For example, we could set a target of halving the number of people living in poverty by 2030. Unfortunately, despite growing inequality there is no federal or state government plan to reduce it.

Poverty is not inevitable. Governments can choose to eliminate poverty, as we saw during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic when the Australian Government temporarily lifted the incomes of millions of Australians above the poverty line, allowing them to afford shelter, food and medical care with dignity.

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<sup>3</sup> ACOSS, [Research and Insights into Poverty and Inequality in Australia](#), accessed 4 October 2023.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> United Nations, [Sustainable Development Goals](#).

The role of government is to ensure each one of us has the opportunity to live a Good Life. The Sustainability Strategy has the capacity to eliminate poverty through priorities, goals and actions that put the economic, social, financial and environmental wellbeing of Tasmanians first.

### ***A Focus on Equity and Priority Populations***

Putting social, economic and environmental sustainability at the heart of government policy making will improve whole-of-government decision-making and drive equity across different population groups.

Traditional measures of economic prosperity (such as Gross Domestic Product) do not adequately capture living standards, social outcomes, opportunity, equity or changes in individual wellbeing and that of groups experiencing disadvantage. Nor do these measures consider the flow of benefits between the wealthiest or the poorest in society, and therefore do not tell us whether economic, social or environmental benefits are being evenly experienced across the population or disproportionately by some population groups.

Similarly, access to a range of social and economic outputs — jobs, education, healthcare and social support — can reveal sharp inequalities around the state.

An important aspect of a Sustainability Strategy must be to examine differences in outcomes across different population groups, including Aboriginal, women, disability, culturally and linguistically diverse, elderly, youth, low income, less educated, long-term unemployed, single-parent households and homeless cohorts.

### ***Improve the Wellbeing of Tasmanians***

The Sustainability Strategy must be a mechanism for driving improvements in the wellbeing of Tasmanians, not just for reporting on it. This can be achieved by setting high level economic, social and environmental sustainability goals, informed by a participatory community consultation process, which reflects the priorities and values of the community.

### ***Influence Government Policy and Communities***

The Sustainability Strategy goals and Tasmanian Government programs should be aligned and developed through collaborative, place-based approaches that empower local communities to drive their own sustainability outcomes. This will ensure there is a shared commitment to outcomes, as well as shared accountability for delivering results and improving social, economic and environmental wellbeing.

**Q. If we streamline the United Nations 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) to around six sustainability topics or focus areas for Tasmania's sustainability goals, what would they be, or do you think we should simply align with the SDGs?**

TasCOSS is less concerned with the number of goals and more concerned with ensuring the right focus areas are identified and targeted.

We consider the SDGs as a starting point for understanding Tasmania's sustainability objectives. The economic, environmental and social contexts of Tasmania will influence our priorities and drive the expectations of a sustainability strategy.

TasCOSS is pleased to see the importance of the SDGs recognised by the Tasmanian Government through the development of this Strategy. The SDGs reflect the issues that matter to all of us, like reducing poverty and inequality, promoting prosperity and wellbeing for all, protecting the environment and addressing climate change, and encouraging good governance and peace and security. They provide a roadmap to a better future for Tasmanians.

**Q. In what areas of sustainability do you think Tasmania is doing well, and are there other priorities where we could do better?**

TasCOSS already seeks to embed the SDGs across relevant policies, programs and industry development work. We draw attention to the causes of poverty and disadvantage and promote the adoption of effective solutions to address these issues.

To challenge and change the systems, behaviours and attitudes that create poverty, inequality and exclusion, we advocate for the following priority outcomes for all Tasmanians:

- Having the support needed to live healthy lives.
- Having safe, affordable, stable, appropriate and sustainable housing.
- Affording the basics of life - including healthy food, household energy supply and telecommunications/digital capability.
- Living in safety, supported by a criminal justice system that promotes social justice.
- Learning what they need to thrive across their lives.
- Getting where they need and want to go, when they need and want to go.
- Being treated equally, inclusively and with respect, and having a voice in decisions that affect them, including self-determination for Tasmania's first people.
- Connecting with and receiving support from their community in ways that work for them.
- Facing the challenges of the future with confidence, including through action to address climate change and ensuring people most vulnerable to climate impacts are supported to adapt and recover.
- Ensuring quality services are funded fairly to meet diverse community needs, within a funding framework that fosters collaboration, recognises the real costs of service delivery and provides decent wages for workers.

Achieving these priority outcomes will create a sustainable society in which every Tasmanian has the basics for a Good Life and the foundations are laid for individuals, communities and the entire state to better withstand future crises, whether it be economic, health, social or environmental.

## Conclusion

TasCOSS welcomes the Tasmanian Government's commitment to developing a strategy that supports all Tasmanians by considering our long-term social, economic and environmental sustainability.

The aim of the Sustainability Strategy must be to reduce poverty and inequality in communities across Tasmania in the short-term and eliminating it in the future. The Strategy must focus on recognising and addressing the needs of priority population groups, including indigenous people and communities, and those who are currently marginalised through circumstances such as lack of sufficient income, age, race/ethnicity or social exclusion/isolation.

The Sustainability Strategy must be an effective tool to address vulnerability and disadvantage by:

- Eliminating poverty;
- Focussing on equity and priority populations;
- Improving wellbeing; and
- Influencing government and communities.

The Sustainability Strategy must be embedded into government decision-making, policy development and spending priorities to support Tasmanians with the most significant needs, or who are currently unable to access what they need to improve their economic, social and environmental sustainability.



## Appendix

### TasCOSS' A Good Life Framework

TasCOSS' vision is of one Tasmania, free of poverty and inequality where everyone has the same opportunity. But we have a long way to go to achieve this vision, with many Tasmanians telling us they are not living, they are simply existing.

TasCOSS developed our *A Good Life in Tasmania* (Good Life) framework by exploring wellbeing and sustainability frameworks in interstate and international jurisdictions - including the UN's SDGs – and drawing on the experiences and opinions of Tasmanians on low incomes. We wanted to understand what it is they need to live a good life in Tasmania, and in particular, what does a good life look like for Tasmanians on low incomes, what are the basics of a good life, and what makes a good life hard to achieve?

There is no one, single, systematic answer to these questions. Our analysis identified and grouped common themes and elements into nine key domains that emerged as the essentials for a Good Life in Tasmania:

<b>A Good Life</b>	<b>A healthy mind and body</b>	<b>A place to call home</b>	<b>Affording the basics</b>	<b>Feeling safe</b>	
<b>TasCOSS goals</b>	<i>All Tasmanians have the support they need to live healthy lives.</i>	<i>All Tasmanians have affordable, stable, appropriate housing.</i>	<i>All Tasmanians can afford the basics of life.</i>	<i>All Tasmanians live in safety, supported by a criminal justice system that promotes social justice.</i>	
<b>Related SDGs</b>	1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 7, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 17	1, 11	1, 2, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 12, 14	5, 16	
<b>A Good Life</b>	<b>Learning for Life</b>	<b>Ways of getting around</b>	<b>Feeling valued, included and heard</b>	<b>Knowing you're not alone</b>	<b>Hope for the future</b>
<b>TasCOSS goals</b>	<i>All Tasmanians can learn what they need to thrive across their lives.</i>	<i>All Tasmanians can get where they need and want to go, when they need and want to go there.</i>	<i>All Tasmanians are treated equally, inclusively, and with respect, and have a voice in decisions that affect them.</i>	<i>All Tasmanians can connect with and receive support in ways that work for them.</i>	<i>All Tasmanians can face challenges of the future with confidence.</i>
<b>Related SDGs</b>	4	11, 13	5, 16, 17	3, 16	8, 13, 15 16, 17

### **A healthy mind and body**

The COVID-19 pandemic taught us that we don't have an economy if we don't have healthy people. But Tasmanian health outcomes are poor overall and Tasmanians on low incomes struggle to get primary medical, dental and mental health care.

### **A place to call home**

Housing is a basic human right and Tasmanians reasonably expect a stable, secure place to call home. But Tasmanians are anxious as they watch rents and house prices go up, try to find an appropriate place to live in a tight housing market, people and families are crowded together and the social housing waitlist increases. Tasmanians on low incomes face extreme difficulty finding either a home to buy or a secure, affordable rental. The supply of social housing has not kept up with demand and the number of homeless Tasmanians has grown at the fastest rate in the country.

### **Affording the basics**

Financial stress is a major barrier to a Good Life, making it harder to cope with other stressors. Tasmanians have experienced massive increases in the cost of living with rising prices significantly outstripping increases in incomes. Thousands of Tasmanians struggle to get into employment that would lift their incomes above subsistence levels.

### **Feeling safe**

While women, children, older Tasmanians and Tasmanians with disability are particularly vulnerable to feeling unsafe, everyone deserves to feel safe – even people caught up in the justice system, which is short on therapeutic and culturally appropriate approaches to rehabilitation. A justice system that's focused on prevention, diversion and rehabilitation, rather than simply on punishment will result in everyone feeling safer.

### **Learning for life**

A good, broad-ranging education leads to a better life across the board: literacy, numeracy, digital competence and life skills ranging from cooking to budgeting to effective communication. Tasmanians of all ages deserve an equal chance at an education that takes their needs into account, and should be supported to understand what education is right for them across the broad range of options on offer in the Tasmanian educational system.

### **Getting where you need to go**

Tasmanians can struggle to get to employment, education, health and support services, shops, socialising and Tasmania's natural beauty, without reliable, affordable, accessible transport. Getting where you need to go extends beyond transport: the built environment can act as a significant barrier to Tasmanians with limited mobility or disability.

### **Feeling valued, included and heard**

Some Tasmanians experience feelings of being looked down on, left out, invisible and unheard. Aboriginal Tasmanians still feel the impacts of dispossession, displacement and dispersal. Behind these experiences lie attitudes of individuals and structural inequalities like racism, ableism, sexism, stigma, marginalisation and discrimination. To be more inclusive, we need to open decision-making to people

from all backgrounds and embrace the lived experience of Tasmanians facing barriers to fully participating in our economy and community.

**Knowing you're not alone**

Relationships, both intimate and social, are crucial to the wellbeing of Tasmanians and our ability to thrive. Being connected requires a strong, caring community and professional help when more support is required than what friends, family or the general community can provide.

**Hope for the future**

Tasmanians want action which is future-oriented, supports whole-of-life transitions from birth to ageing, responds to a changing economy and genuinely addresses the threat of climate change.

TasCOSS prioritises these domains in our policy and advocacy work and ensures that the voices of people with lived experience of low incomes and disadvantage are represented, in order to shape policy responses and solutions to achieve a Good Life for all Tasmanians.