

TASCOSS 2021 STATE ELECTION PRIORITIES

A good life for
all Tasmanians



The 2021 State Election sees Tasmania poised at a pivotal juncture, a time when our economic and social recovery from COVID-19 hinges on decisive actions from our government.

TasCOSS challenges the next political leaders of Tasmania to recognise and address the needs of Tasmanians in shaping this future. Tasmanians have consistently told us that in order to live a good life they need to be able to afford the basics, have a healthy body and mind and a place to call home.

This is why TasCOSS's election priorities focus squarely on jobs, affordable housing and improved health outcomes.

Throughout this election campaign, TasCOSS will give voice and agency to the hopes and aspirations of Tasmanians living on inadequate incomes. TasCOSS seeks election commitments to support our population to recover from COVID-19 and advocates on behalf of the community services industry — Tasmania's largest and fastest growing industry.



**INTEGRITY
COMPASSION
INFLUENCE**

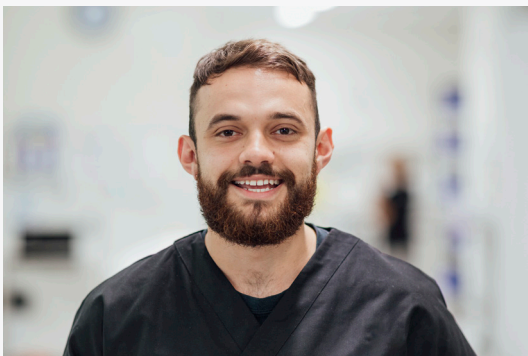
The Tasmanian Council of Social Service (TasCOSS) is the peak body for Tasmania's community services industry.

Our Mission is to challenge and change the systems, behaviours and attitudes that create poverty, inequality and exclusion.

Our Vision is of one Tasmania, free of poverty and inequality where everyone has the same opportunity.

TasCOSS's 2021 State Election Priorities reflect the expertise of our members and advocates, research and analysis, and the lived experiences of Tasmanians.

TASCOSS'S FIVE KEY ELECTION PRIORITIES



Tasmanians need a government that is committed to reducing poverty and inequality in our society so that everyone can live a good life.

TasCOSS urges all Tasmanian political leaders to commit to:

1. MEANINGFUL, SECURE JOBS FOR LOCAL PEOPLE IN THE COMMUNITY SERVICES INDUSTRY

Investing in the long-term sustainability of our workforce in the wake of COVID-19

2. A SECURE, AFFORDABLE HOME FOR ALL

Housing our population and reducing homelessness

3. ACCESSIBLE HEALTH CARE THAT IS CLOSE TO HOME

Bringing timely, affordable health care into communities

4. CLOSING THE DIGITAL DIVIDE SO NO ONE IS LEFT OFFLINE

Equipping Tasmanians with the skills and confidence to navigate the digital world

5. DELIVERING LOWER HOUSEHOLD ELECTRICITY BILLS

Reducing prices and investing in energy efficient homes

1. MEANINGFUL, SECURE JOBS FOR LOCAL PEOPLE IN THE COMMUNITY SERVICES INDUSTRY

Election Priorities

A good life for all Tasmanians requires access to meaningful, stable and ongoing work paid at decent wages. TasCOSS is calling for all political leaders to commit to:

- Creating local jobs for local people.
- Partnering with the community services industry to boost training, address workforce shortages and deliver services that best meet community needs.

Background

The employment impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic are continuing to be felt through insecure employment, higher numbers of women and young people looking for work and increased barriers to participation for our long-term unemployed.

Despite the recovery in Tasmania's economy and labour market, there remains a jobs shortage in Tasmania with 14 job seekers for every advertised job.¹

Local People into Local Jobs

Recovery will be a long road which will require targeted investment and long-term support. Social assistance jobs in the community services industry are integral to our state's social and economic recovery and the need for action to meet demand only continues to rise.

Expanding the workforce to meet this demand and providing Tasmanians with the support they need to recover from the impacts of COVID-19 also presents an opportunity to help get more Tasmanians into jobs.

There is currently a projected need of 4,000 additional community service jobs by 2024.² This presents a significant opportunity to attract, recruit and train local people to fill the projected job openings. As the Premier's Economic and Social Recovery Advisory Council's (PESRAC) Final Report suggests, without investment, the industry cannot expand its workforce to meet escalating demand.³

1 Australian Government: National Skills Commission, *Internet Vacancy Index*, February 2021 and Department of Social Services, *JobSeeker Payment and Youth Allowance recipients – monthly profile*, February 2021.

2 Department of Education 2019, Skills and Employment, employment projections for the five years to May 2024.

3 Premier's Economic and Social Recovery Council Final Report 2021, Chapter 3: Jobs and Income.

Solutions

TasCOSS calls on our political leaders to commit to policies and actions that will create local jobs to meet industry demand and community need, including:

- Partnering with the community services industry to deliver 4,000 new jobs to address workforce needs.
- Funding an industry awareness and recruitment campaign to promote diverse employment and career opportunities.
- Establishing a Workforce Development Fund to equip the industry with 120 new trainers.
- Strengthening leadership, sustainability and capacity-building through funding for governance scholarships and training.
- Funding regionally-based individualised support services that connect young people, long-term unemployed and others facing employment barriers with local community services, employers, training and mentors.

Previous TasCOSS work on jobs:

- [Budget Priorities Statement 2021/2022: Local People into Local Jobs](#)
- [Budget Priorities Statement 2019/2020: Unlocking our Potential](#)

2. A SECURE, AFFORDABLE HOME FOR ALL

Election Priorities

A good life for all Tasmanians requires access to stable, appropriate and affordable housing. TasCOSS is calling for all political leaders to commit to:

- Increased investment in social housing to deliver additional stock.
- A more affordable, secure and fair rental market.

Background

In recent years, Tasmanians have faced exceptional difficulties in finding either a home to buy or a secure, healthy, affordable rental. In October 2020, over 17,000 Tasmanian households were in rental stress.⁴

The supply of social housing has not kept up with demand, resulting in ever-growing waitlists for social housing:

- *Open applications on Housing Register*: 3,813, up 600 from June 2018.
- *Average wait time for priority applicants*: 54 weeks.⁵

Meanwhile, the number of homeless Tasmanians has grown. According to the most recent Report on Government Services, there are 1,720 homeless Tasmanians and 146 sleeping rough.⁶

PESRAC's Final Report acknowledged the level of need when it recommended action to improve housing market outcomes.⁷

Tenancy Security

Security of tenure for renters in the state has worsened notably in recent years.

Shorter leases mean less security and certainty for tenants and provides landlords the option of increasing rents more frequently. The circumstances in which the landlord can terminate the tenancy affects the tenant's housing security.

A stable location enables children to stay in the same schools and households so they can stay connected with their family, friends and community. In contrast, moving frequently is unstable, inconvenient and expensive.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the State Government put supports in place to prevent rent increases and evictions, however, these protections have expired, adding to the uncertainty of rent rise shock and tenancy insecurity.

Solutions

TasCOSS calls on our political leaders to commit to policies and actions that will improve housing stock, affordability and security, including:

Affordable Housing:

- An affordable housing target of 10% of all Tasmanian dwellings to be affordable, social rental housing, backed by meaningful actions that will deliver:
 - 1,000 additional dwellings per year over the next decade; and
 - Innovative affordable rental options such as shop-top accommodation, infill housing and retrofitting vacant offices.

Secure Housing:

- A review and modernisation of the *Residential Tenancy Act 1997* and reforms to ensure tenants are not evicted into homelessness.

Previous TasCOSS work on housing:

- [Submission to Inquiry into Housing Affordability in Tasmania](#)

4 Everybody's Home 2019, Housing myths busted as Tasmania ranks number one for households in rental stress — with 1 in 3 Tasmanian renters now struggling, media release, 1 May 2019.

5 Department of Health and Human Services dashboard 2020, figures for December 2020 quarter.

6 Estimate based on Tasmania's homelessness rate in Report on Government Services 2021, Part G: Housing and Homelessness.

7 Premier's Economic and Social Recovery Council Final Report 2021, recommendation 32.

3. ACCESSIBLE HEALTH CARE THAT IS CLOSE TO HOME

Election Priorities

A good life for all Tasmanians means having the support needed to live healthy lives. TasCOSS is calling for all political leaders to commit to:

- Proactively preventing ill-health and promoting good health and wellbeing.
- A whole-of-government approach to improving health outcomes.
- Accessing full Commonwealth health funding entitlements.

Background

Throughout our consultations, Tasmanians consistently told TasCOSS that health — physical and mental — is the most important component of a good life. PESRAC's consultations also found health to be one of Tasmanians' top three concerns.⁸

Too many Tasmanians experience poor health. In fact Tasmanians have the worst health outcomes in the nation, and Tasmanians on low incomes fare even worse.⁹

These outcomes add pressure to an already strained health and hospital system through increased demand and increased costs to government, and mean Tasmanians with poor health are unable to engage fully in economic and social activities.

Preventative and Good Health

The State Government has committed to "making Tasmania the healthiest population in Australia by 2025."¹⁰ To achieve this goal, we need significant targeted and evidence-based investment in preventative health and early intervention services which will improve health outcomes and save money on acute health responses.

In 2017-18, Tasmania had 15,848 potential preventable hospitalisations. This means that on average, one out of every 16 beds in our hospitals is occupied by someone with a potentially preventable admission, equating to a potentially avoidable cost of around \$33-\$47 million per year.¹¹

8 Premier's Economic and Social Recovery Council Final Report 2021, Chapter 2: Our Approach.

9 TasCOSS 2019, Preventing Hospitalisations in Tasmania, Budget Priorities Statement.

10 Hon Jeremy Rockliff MP 2020, Tasmanian Government committed to healthy population target, media release, 26 November 2020.

11 Department of Health 2020, Our Healthcare Future: immediate actions and consultation paper, p. 17.

A Health in All Policies Approach

In 2019, the State Government signed the *Tasmania Statement*, which included a commitment to working together across government and with communities on shared priorities.¹² This whole-of-government approach to improving health outcomes must be adopted across all agencies, with clear lines of accountability and KPIs.

Unused Commonwealth Health Funding

Tasmania does not access all of the Commonwealth health funding to which it is entitled. Each year the Federal Budget allocates funding for care plans based on Tasmania's estimated health and care needs profile, but thousands of Tasmanians are not accessing these plans. Across NDIS, mental health, diabetes and aged care home support packages, Tasmanians are missing out on the Commonwealth-funded care they need. In addition, the State Government is missing out on millions of dollars of allocated funding that could be redirected to other areas of need, while also incurring the cost of the resulting potential preventable hospitalisations.

Solutions

TasCOSS calls on our political leaders to commit to policies and actions that will improve health outcomes for all Tasmanians, particularly those living on inadequate incomes, including:

- Developing and implementing programs that significantly reduce potential preventable hospitalisations over the next three years.
- Preserving 5% of the overall health budget for direct spending on preventative-primary care.
- Adopting a Health in All Policies approach, framework and action plan.
- Accessing unused Commonwealth health funding to redirect to areas of greatest need.

Previous TasCOSS work on health:

- [Submission to Our Healthcare Future](#)
- [Budget Priorities Statement 2020/2021: Preventing Hospitalisations in Tasmania](#)

12 State Government 2019, *Tasmania Statement: working together for the health and wellbeing of Tasmanians*.

4. CLOSING THE DIGITAL DIVIDE SO NO ONE IS LEFT OFFLINE

Election Priorities

A good life for all Tasmanians requires access to adequate and affordable telecommunications together with the skills and confidence to navigate the digital world. TasCOSS is calling for all political leaders to commit to:

- Improving digital inclusion across three key dimensions of access, affordability and digital ability.
- Implementation of PESRAC Final Report recommendations 33 and 34.

Background

Tasmania is the most digitally disadvantaged state in the country, according to the Australian Digital Inclusion Index (ADII). The COVID-19 pandemic further highlighted the digital divide in our state that without urgent action is at risk of becoming even wider.

Access, Affordability and Digital Ability

Access to digital services is essential for daily life, in the same way as electricity and water. A digitally included Tasmania is one where all Tasmanians participate in our digital economy to find and maintain work, access education, health services and government services, maintain social connections and find reliable information, especially in times of crisis. PESRAC's Final Report emphasised the centrality of digital inclusion to social and economic progress.¹³

However, more than 65,000 Tasmanians are not online, with even more having limited digital skills and confidence putting them at risk of further exclusion.¹⁴ Levels of digital exclusion are higher in areas of relative socioeconomic disadvantage and particular cohorts are at greater risk of exclusion, including Tasmanians with less education, on low incomes, not in the labour force and older Tasmanians.

Solutions

TasCOSS calls on our political leaders to commit to policies and actions that will improve digital inclusion, including:

Access:

- Providing all government school students, from upper primary onwards, with devices and dongles/data where needed.
- Establish a community infrastructure fund to invest in regional and rural infrastructure, ensuring more Tasmanians have access to reliable, high speed internet.
- Introducing a grants program for community services industry organisations to enable service users to access devices.

Affordability:

- Introducing a telecommunications concession.
- Enabling unmetered access to government, emergency and essential community services websites.

Ability:

- Introducing a digital literacy program to build capacity and digital skills for communities (based on the 26TEN Communities model).
- Funding for community-based digital skills and education programs, to ensure disadvantaged cohorts are work-ready and to support Tasmanians experiencing vulnerability or disadvantage to access telehealth, essential information and safely navigate online.

Previous TasCOSS work on digital inclusion:

- [Submission to Our Digital Future](#)
- [Understanding Digital Inclusion in Tasmania](#)
- [Budget Priorities Statement 2018/2019: Connecting all Tasmanians to Digital Services](#)

¹³ Premier's Economic and Social Recovery Council Final Report 2021, recommendation 19.

¹⁴ Estimate based off Australian Bureau of Statistic 2018 data, [household use of information technology survey](#).

5. DELIVERING LOWER HOUSEHOLD ELECTRICITY BILLS

Election Priorities

A good life for all Tasmanians requires access to reliable, safe and affordable energy. TasCOSS is calling for all political leaders to commit to:

- Delivering lower electricity bills for Tasmanian households.
- Improving household energy efficiency performance and standards.

Background

Energy is an essential service. It is critical to individual, family and community health and wellbeing, as well as to overall economic activity.

TasCOSS estimates 59,000 Tasmanian households are experiencing energy poverty.¹⁵ Living in energy poverty forces low income households to restrict energy consumption by avoiding activities like showering or using heaters. It also results in spending high proportions of their income on energy and an inability to pay other bills.

Lower Electricity Bills

The State Government has committed to delivering “the lowest regulated electricity prices in Australia by 2022.”¹⁶ This target is inadequate, with TasCOSS research identifying that most customers in Australia access ‘market offers’ which result in prices that are lower than regulated prices.¹⁷

In addition to paying higher prices, Tasmanian households also use more electricity than mainland households, resulting in higher electricity bills.

Ensuring Tasmanians are paying the lowest electricity prices in Australia and investing in household energy efficiency to reduce electricity consumption will improve energy affordability and significantly help Tasmanian households to lower their electricity bills.

Minimum Standards

Landlords should be required to meet basic standards so their properties are healthy to live in. Minimum energy efficiency standards for rental properties will ensure Tasmanians who rent benefit from healthier homes and more affordable power bills. The former COAG Energy Council agreed to a national framework for minimum energy efficiency requirements for rental properties by mid-2022.

TasCOSS is seeking a commitment to implement the energy efficiency standards prescribed in the national framework. This aligns with PESRAC’s Final Report recommendations which included a call for energy efficient housing.¹⁸

Solutions

TasCOSS calls on our political leaders to commit to policies and actions that will improve energy affordability and lower electricity bills for Tasmanian households, including:

- Delivering the lowest electricity prices in the country.
- Investing in the Household Energy Efficiency Program (HEEP), that will deliver:
 - Energy efficiency upgrades for all Tasmanian social housing,
 - A grants program for homeowners to invest in energy efficiency upgrades; and
 - An incentives program targeted to landlords to improve the energy efficiency standard of rental properties.¹⁹
- Introducing mandatory minimum energy efficiency requirements for rental properties.

Previous TasCOSS work on energy:

- [2021/2022 Budget Priorities Statement: Household Energy Efficiency Initiatives](#)

15 Estimate based on Brotherhood of St. Laurence energy and poverty report.

16 Hon Guy Barnett MP 2020, [Delivering low cost, reliable clean power for Tasmanians](#), media release, 22 June 2020.

17 TasCOSS 2020, [Submission to the Draft Tasmanian Renewable Energy Action Plan 2020](#), p. 6-7.

18 Premier’s Economic and Social Recovery Council Final Report 2021, recommendation 32.

19 TasCOSS 2021, [Household Energy Efficiency Initiatives: creating jobs, stimulating our economy and lowering power bills](#), Budget Priorities Statement.