

TasCOSS 2024 Tasmanian State Election Priorities

Supporting Tasmanians
now and into the future

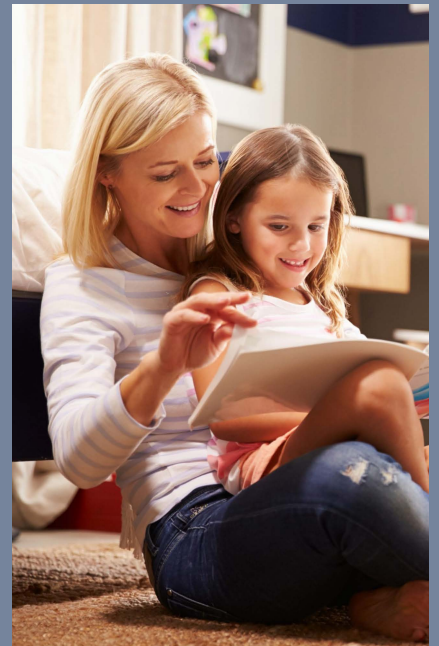


The 2024 Tasmanian State Election comes at a pivotal juncture in our state's history. Tasmanians who have been skipping meals, missing medical appointments and going into debt to afford rent, energy and other essentials, are telling us that they can't take the hits any longer.

"It's surviving, not living," said one focus group member.

Irrespective of who forms government in the next Parliament, Tasmanians expect so much more than glossy documents and one-off, band-aid solutions. We need all parties and candidates to think big with ambitious policy, grounded in evidence, which address the long-term, structural causes of poverty and inequality, and thereby enables thousands more Tasmanians to participate in employment, education and training, social and caring activities.

TasCOSS's 2024 Tasmanian State Election Priorities focusses on policy solutions and investments that address the immediate cost of living pressures Tasmanians are grappling with and ensure a well-resourced community services industry that can meet increasing levels of need and complexity in the community. These asks, if adopted, will also build our resilience to future challenges, our capacity to participate and thrive, and lay the foundations for improving our health and wellbeing.



TasCOSS's six key election priorities

TasCOSS urges all political parties and candidates to commit to the following policy solutions and investments that address poverty, inequality and ensure a well-resourced community services industry.



1. Reducing homelessness and providing better protections for renters.

- Limit rent increases and restrict whole homes being added to short-stay accommodation in local government areas where rental vacancy rates are below Homes Tasmania's 'sustainable vacancy rate' of 3%.¹
- Commit to reducing homelessness by 50% within five years and ending homelessness in ten years.
- Immediate end to no-grounds evictions and commence a review of the *Residential Tenancy Act* in 2024.

2. Bringing down energy costs by extending energy bill relief, improving access to the electricity concession and accelerating household energy efficiency.

- Lock in energy bill relief by extending the *Energy Bill Relief Fund* over the Forward Estimates, providing a minimum payment of \$250 per year (current rate) indexed to regulated price increases.
- Improve the electricity concession scheme by shifting to a more equitable, percentage-based payment and extending eligibility to households that qualify for *Energy Bill Relief Fund* payments.
- Significant investments to accelerate energy efficiency upgrades for social housing, private rentals and homeowners on low incomes.



3. Improving food security and nutrition through expanded access to emergency food relief and initiatives to increase community food resilience.

- Increased and sustainable funding for the School Lunch Program.
- Review the level of demand for emergency food relief and fund the investment required to support emergency food relief agencies to meet demand.
- Legislate minimum dietary standards for food relief.

¹ "A sustainable vacancy rate of around 3% in the private rental market will help to stabilise rents and ultimately reduce pressure on household budgets." Homes Tasmania, *Tasmania's Housing Strategy*, p. 30.

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4. Improving affordability and access to public transport across Tasmania.

- Free public transport for students, seniors, concession card holders and people on low incomes.
- Fast track public transport access and inclusion measures, including: updating Metro Tasmania's Disability Action Plan; expanding the Transport Access Scheme to rideshare companies; accessible, real-time travel information; and bus stop upgrades to comply with the *Disability Standards for Accessible Public Transport 2002* and the *Disability Discrimination Act 1992*.
- Expand the public transport network in consultation with communities, prioritising areas of high transport disadvantage.

5. Rapidly closing the digital divide in Tasmania and improving digital inclusion through a focus on access, affordability and digital ability.

- Introduce a telecommunications concession for people on low incomes.
- Double the investment in *Digital Ready for Daily Life*, prioritising digital skills and literacy programs that support priority groups.
- Ensure all government secondary school students have access to their own devices and data to enable them to do homework and online-schooling.



6. Ensuring Tasmanians have the support they need, when they need it, by investing in Tasmania's community services industry.

- Introduce an indexation formula of 70% WPI:30% CPI, plus the superannuation guarantee, commencing in 2024/25 Financial Year.
- Introduce five year funding contracts by 2025.
- Invest \$320,000 per year for five years in Tasmania's community service directory, *FindHelpTAS*.
- Support the strategic priorities of the *Community Services Industry Plan (2021-31)* over the Forward Estimates.²

² Current priority is workforce. TasCOSS proposes to recruit a Workforce Convenor to work with all industry sectors to design targeted demand, supply and/or bridging interventions to address critical workforce needs.

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**INTEGRITY
COMPASSION
INFLUENCE**

The Tasmanian Council of Social Service (TasCOSS) is the peak body for Tasmania's community services industry. We advocate to challenge and change the systems, behaviours and attitudes that create poverty, inequality and exclusion to ensure all Tasmanians can live a good life.