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STRENGTHENING CONNECTIONS

Call to the Parties for SA election 2022

With South Australia likely to emerge well from the public health measures required to limit the spread of COVID-19, Uniting Communities is urging the political parties and candidates standing for election in 2022 to commit to a short set of measures that will support South Australians and their communities during COVID recovery and beyond. This can best be achieved by strengthening the connections that South Australians have with each other and with their communities.

The measures will reduce the barriers for groups of people more likely to be disconnected from contributing fully to SA communities, including:

- The 51% of South Australians who experienced loneliness “often” (16%) or ‘sometimes’ (35%) in April 2021¹
- The 15.4% of South Australians who have used at least one illicit drug in the last 12 months (2019)²
- The 45% of single older women (over 50 years) who rent and are spending more than 30% of their income on rent³

Uniting Communities proposes nine specific commitments for the 2022 SA election to strengthen the connections that South Australians have with each other and to further build SA communities. These commitments are summarised below. They are a targeted, affordable set of measures designed to enable South Australia to build back better over the next term of Parliament. Further details will be released later in 2021.

OVERCOMING LONELINESS

Proposed commitments

1. 1000 fetes and festivals for local communities. A program of grants of up to \$10,000 that are available to local government and community groups to increase participation in local events, the key condition being that the applicants for the grant must describe how the event will seek to involve people who are isolated.
2. Increase funding for dedicated ‘connectors’ to identify isolated people who are unable to make connections with their community, on their own, and to link them into community activities and events. Funding will be available to community service organisations, including disability,

¹ Uniting Communities survey, March / April 2021

² <https://www.aihw.gov.au/getmedia/b0cbb555-ebec-4bc1-8ca1-0d6b567e321f/aihw-phe-271-NDSHS-2019-in-brief.pdf.aspx?inline=true>. SA fact sheet <https://www.aihw.gov.au/getmedia/c8d85f8f-e90f-46e0-8bdc-12db2e8fb7b8/aihw-phe-270-fact-sheet-SA.pdf.aspx>

³ https://humanrights.gov.au/sites/default/files/document/publication/ahrc_ow_homelessness2019.pdf

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mental health, aged care and other community services, to employ 'connectors' to identify and connect people who are isolated and unable to make community connections on their own. Alt: Funding contracts for community services to recognize the value of "connectors" and their roles in providing services and to allow scope in funding contracts for "connector" functions.

Rationale

Loneliness destroys quality of life and produces significant health and mental health problems.

People struggling with loneliness and isolation have significantly worse health status, both for physical and mental health, than the rest of the population. So for the SA Government, preventing loneliness reduces costs for health services and increases labour market participation – overcoming loneliness is significant for both economic and social recovery of the State.

While most South Australians have 'bounced back' from isolation, some have struggled to remake connection with their communities while some people continue their pre-COVID loneliness. Connectors can play a crucial role in representing the community reaching out to people experiencing entrenched loneliness and isolation.

Rebuilding connections across the state will be significantly improved by activities that provide an opportunity for people to reconnect and people employed to specifically identify people who are unable to overcome their loneliness alone and connect them to their communities and any service needs will also be crucial.

The shift to consumer directed funding in recent years has also largely destroyed the capacity of many commitments and social services to effectively undertake essential community engagement and building activities with vulnerable citizens. Building back this capacity through targeted funding will re-enable an important part of this capability – one of those most important preventative health measures available.

Indicative cost

Fetes and Festivals: Maximum \$10m (1000 grants at \$10,000 each)

Connectors: \$2m (20 FTE positions at \$100,000 each)

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MENTAL HEALTH**Proposed commitment**

3. Commit to funding for volunteer support for early intervention to assist people with non-acute mental health needs.

Rationale

A non-clinical distress intervention pilot, supported by the Mental Health Commissioner, will be trialled across three main local councils, involving GPs, GP Partners and Uniting Communities. The aim is to train volunteers who will receive referrals from GP's to provide a non-clinical support to people who are experiencing distress or mental health concern. They will listen, provide referral or link people with community supports. When dealing with mental health, GP practices are confronted with many challenges including: where clinical support is not always required, short appointments, difficulty in gaining appointments with psychologists and long wait times for public services. It is expected that this early intervention support will assist people with non-acute mental health concerns. Should the trial be successful, it should be funded at least in 2 locations: southern and northern suburbs as a key element of addressing the increasing level of mental health problems in our community.

Indicative cost

\$400k per year (two locations)

ALCOHOL AND OTHER DRUGS (AOD)**Proposed commitment**

4. Appropriate resourcing to ensure that the key Regional Centres (Mount Gambier, Berri, Whyalla and Port Lincoln) are able to support alcohol and drug medically supervised (detoxification) withdrawal management both in Hospital and at home (where clinically indicated as being safe). We also urge SA Health to encourage the Royal Australian College of General Practitioners (RACGP) to make some appointments available to assist with the medical supervision of detoxification in key regional centres

Rationale

Addiction is a complex health problem that requires a considered health response. The goal of any 'detox' program is to allow the body to heal after drug and/or alcohol use and is the required first step in alcohol and drug treatment.

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The burden of disease is greatest in remote and very remote areas, which experienced 2.1 and 2.7 times respectively, the burden attributable to alcohol use, compared with Major cities⁴.

Use of cannabis and methamphetamine is much higher in remote communities than capital cities with cannabis use in 2016 being 17% of the population in remote communities compared to 10.4% in cities while methamphetamine use is by about 3.6% in remote locations compared to 1.4% in cities. Yet there are minimal 'detox' facilities outside of Adelaide. The opportunity to start the path to recovery from AoD addiction needs to be available in regional South Australia, as a priority. Each regional location has different arrangements in place so will need flexibility to apply funds to best effect.

Indicative cost

\$6m pa (\$1.5m for 4 regional centres)

OLDER WOMEN FACING POVERTY**Proposed commitment**

5. Funding to build purpose built housing for older, single, lower income women that is affordable and provides private space as well as shared facilities.

Rationale

There is a growing number of single older (over 50 years) women who have low income and very limited retirement wealth in either housing or superannuation. Some women have been left isolated after a marriage break up, others have fled violent /abusive relationships and some women struggle to thrive for much of their life. A fair and decent society recognises the contributions that have been made by those who now find themselves in such vulnerability. One of the most helpful forms of assistance is reliable, affordable housing. Innovative designs need to be developed to provide personal living space and shared space to enable connections to be made and provide long term tenure.

Indicative cost

\$20m. (Pilot 10 models, average cost \$2m per model, construction costs, with a view to near future scalability. At least three in regional communities)

⁴ <https://www.aihw.gov.au/getmedia/78ea0b3d-4478-4a1f-a02a-3e3b5175e5d8/aihw-hse-212.pdf.aspx>

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PRIVATE SECTOR RENTERS**Proposed commitment**

6. Provide modest cash incentives and active encouragement for landlords of lower value rental properties to install PV and / or heat pump hot water systems.

Rationale

The poorest people in SA society are in private sector rental housing and as such have very limited capacity to reduce their energy use. Electricity costs continue to be the most frequently raised concern by people presenting to financial counselling services and renters have very limited capacity to engage with energy markets to reduce costs. Grant incentives and active 'encouragement' for landlords to install PV and / or heat pump hot water can significantly reduce the energy costs of low income renters, with no net detriment to landlords. Cash incentives would be limited to rental properties below median house value and be conditional on an appropriate moratorium on rent increases.

Indicative cost

\$10m for modest landlord cash incentives.

PRIVATE SECTOR RENTERS**Proposed commitment**

7. Commit to legislate for improved, minimum energy efficiency standards for rental properties and new housing construction in South Australia.

Rationale

Much of South Australia's rental housing stock is not energy efficient. This forces low income private sector renters, in particular, to pay significantly more in energy costs than they need to and still leaves them more vulnerable to weather related illness.

A recent Deloitte Access Economics report shows that investment into energy efficiency for low-income homes would create more than 23,800 jobs and add \$4.9 billion dollars to the national economy (GDP). This means that about 1700 jobs and an addition \$350 million for the SA economy is achieved through improving the minimum energy efficiency standards for housing in SA.

Improved energy efficiency standards provide direct economic benefit, improves health and reduces energy costs for low income renters, uses energy more productively and there is no net cost for landlords, through taxable deductions. Improved energy efficiency standards for housing makes sense for everyone.

Indicative cost

Legislative change so no budget impacts for the SA Government.

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DV: INTERVENTION ORDERS**Proposed commitment**

8. Removal of all “filing fees” for restraining order application and a commitment to reforms of existing laws relating to intervention orders, including:
- Applying immediate consequences for breaches of Intervention Orders by varying Bail, Home Detention and Parole conditions for offenders.
 - Ensuring sufficient staffing resources to carry out the Domestic Violence Prevention Programs run as an element of Intervention Order requirements for perpetrators
 - Referring perpetrators to programs such as *Don’t become that man* (OARS) or the Specialised Family Violence Unit (Uniting Communities) to ensure insight into, and responsibility for, requisite behavioural change
 - Providing adequate staffing resources to prosecute recalcitrant perpetrators who breach their Court ordered responsibilities.

Rationale

During 2020-21, 5787 intervention orders were issued in SA, with 7238 issued during 2019-20 while the number of proved breaches were 1668 for 2020-21 and 2162 for the previous year⁵.

For South Australia, 43.9% of assault victims were victims of family and domestic violence-related assault during 2017, a total number of 7,100 victims⁶.

An effective and accessible approach to intervention orders is essential in ensuring that victims and potential victims of abuse are able to be safe. SA’s political parties can enhance intervention order effectiveness by committing to remove fees for victims and ensuring adequate resourcing for enforcement of intervention orders

Indicative cost

Removal of filing fees, reduced income: approx. \$100,000 pa.

⁵ <http://www.courts.sa.gov.au/OurCourts/CourtsAdministrationAuthority/statistics/Pages/Intervention-Order-Statistics.aspx>

⁶ <https://www.aihw.gov.au/getmedia/b0037b2d-a651-4abf-9f7b-00a85e3de528/aihw-fdv3-FDSV-in-Australia-2019.pdf.aspx?inline=true>

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JOBS AND WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

Proposed commitment

9. SA Government to support “on the job skills” development and workplace integration by funding new worker support positions with employers who employ 10 or more trainees / apprenticeships in any year working in aged care, disability and mental health support services.⁷

Rational

The Health Care and Social assistance sector employs 16.4%⁸ of all working South Australians, the largest employing ABS industry classification, (compared to 10% of jobs in retail and 8.8% of jobs in construction) and 24% of all part time jobs are in the health and social services. Employment in community and health services will be a crucial component of post COVID labour market recovery. Meeting the workforce requirements to provide high quality human services, particularly in aged care and NDIS service areas is increasingly difficult. National Royal Commissions in both aged care and disability have identified service failings and remedies. Supporting on site trainees is crucial for skills development and to improve the attractiveness of care sector employment for new staff and trainees.

Indicative cost

\$2m. Initial support for 20 positions, \$100,000 per position

ZERO CARBON EMISSIONS

Proposed commitment

10. South Australia to be Carbon Neutral by 2035

Rationale

South Australia is already a global leader in utilisation of renewable energy and has considerable opportunity to build economic growth in utilizing cheap, renewable energy and reducing climate risk. To support this, we urge a commitment to an increasingly internationally accepted target of the state achieving net zero carbon emissions by 2035. If this target was implemented globally, there is reasonable likelihood of keeping global warming below 1.5 degrees that the scientific evidence increasingly shows is the maximum temperature increase before more substantial climate change.

Uniting Communities recognizes that lower income and disadvantaged people are likely to most adversely impacted by the consequences of a warming environment. Uniting Communities has

⁷ This approach based on effective Swiss and Finnish approaches to supporting young people into their labour markets

⁸ ABS Labour Force, Australia, August 2021

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committed to being net carbon zero by 2035 and was South Australia's first certified carbon neutral organisation in 2015.

Indicative cost

No cost, but with significant net economic benefits to the state from industry growth in 'green' energy, manufacturing and beyond.

Further comment or information

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