

2019

FEDERAL ELECTION MESSAGING GUIDE

ABOUT THIS MESSAGING GUIDE

ACOSS plays a major role in public debates about issues affecting people on low and modest incomes and facing disadvantage in the Australian community. In the lead up to the 2019 Federal Election, ACOSS will continue to perform this role, advocating for political parties and candidates to adopt policies and solutions that will help tackle poverty, inequality and disadvantage. This Messaging Guide will inform that work.

ACOSS has a strong commitment to informing its advocacy and communications with the experiences of people affected by poverty and inequality. In preparing this Messaging Guide, ACOSS has drawn on the Raise the Rate Messaging Guide which includes insights of people who participated in focus groups carried out for the Raise the Rate campaign. The Messaging Guide also draws on the Australian Progress Economic Messaging Project, which is also based on focus groups, and the Australia reMADE Vision, which was prepared through a wide range of community conversations. We thank all those who have helped to make this Messaging Guide possible.

The Messaging Guide will be shared with State and Territory Councils of Social Service, ACOSS members, ACOSS partners and other individuals or organisations working to reduce poverty and inequality. ACOSS invites these organisations and individuals to draw on this guide in their advocacy and communications for a fair, inclusive and sustainable Australia.

MESSAGING GUIDE

We need government to reduce poverty and inequality in our society so that everyone can live a fulfilling life. This election is an opportunity for political leaders to show that they will do this by committing to:

- Income support to get through tough times and real help to find employment
- A secure, affordable home for everybody
- Action on climate change and affordable, clean energy
- Quality health and community services

In order to meet these commitments, government must guarantee:

- Funding for our future
- A strong community voice and a thriving democracy



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INCOME SUPPORT TO GET THROUGH TOUGH TIMES

Australia's income support system should help people to get through tough times and provide support to find suitable employment. The income support payment for people looking for employment, **Newstart**, should be enough to cover the basics so that people can focus on getting a job, rather than dealing with financial crisis. Similarly, the payment for young people looking for work, studying or both, **Youth Allowance**, needs to be enough for young people to study and find employment **without worrying about where their next meal will come from or how they will pay for rent**. Nearly one million Australians receive income support through **Newstart** or **Youth Allowance**. They include young people making the transition from study to employment, single parents of school-age children and older Australians struggling to find a job while they confront technological change.

Currently, our income support system is not working because **the rates of Newstart and Youth Allowance have not been increased in real terms for 25 years**, while the cost of living, especially housing, has risen dramatically. **\$40 a day, the equivalent of less than \$15,000 a year**, is not enough to survive on while working to get into employment. For **Newstart** to work, **the rate needs to be enough to cover the basics so people can successfully look for paid work, without having to juggle debts and lose sleep worrying about how to put food on the table and keep a roof over their head**.

Raising the rate will get Newstart and Youth Allowance working. It will deliver the support people need to get through tough times and into suitable employment. If people don't have enough to cover the basics, **Newstart** won't work because people will be dealing with financial stress rather than working to build a future. Raising the rate by about \$10 per day will strengthen the income support system by easing financial stress so people looking for employment have best chance to get into the workforce.

Our income support system needs to recognise that **the cost of living is higher for people living with disability and people with children**. Currently, **our income support system is not working** because people

with disability and single parents are receiving the low **Newstart** payment or other payments that don't cover their basic costs of living. **A good government would make sure people who are struggling financially while they care for children or others, suffer an illness, look for paid work or study, have enough to cover the basics and live with dignity**.



REAL HELP TO FIND EMPLOYMENT

People looking for employment should get the support and training they need to find a job in today's competitive job market. **With changes, such as automation, offshoring and the casualisation of work, many workers face an uncertain future**. Many people don't have enough hours of paid work to support themselves or their families. There is **one job available for every eight people looking for paid work** and often jobs require specific skills or knowledge about new technologies.

Currently, people looking for paid work are not getting the support or training they need. **Each individual employment consultant in the government-funded employment service ('jobactive') assists 150 people at any one time and there are only small subsidies available to fund the training people need**. As a result, many people struggle to find employment for over a year. Instead of getting real help to strengthen their skills and find a job, people looking for paid work face a bureaucratic, box-ticking exercise that threatens to cut off their income support payments and floods employers with unsuitable applications.

A good government would fix the employment services system so that job agencies have enough resources to effectively work with people to find training and properly paid work experience that will help them into jobs. Government should also to work with employers to provide secure, decent jobs, including in regional areas, and to overcome the discrimination many older people, people with disability and people with caring responsibilities face when looking for jobs.



A SECURE, AFFORDABLE HOME FOR EVERYBODY

We all need a home. None of us can go about our lives, raise a family, go to work or stay healthy, without a stable and safe place to call home. Our housing system should make sure **everyone has a secure, safe roof over their head.**

A good government would make sure everybody has a secure home. We need government to provide better protection for those of us who rent, to make homes more affordable, accessible and permanent. **We need a strong safety net of social and public housing for people who can't afford private rent so that they are not forced on to the streets.**

We need government to end unfair tax breaks for wealthy housing investors and to put that money into fixing our broken housing system. **Currently, people get tax deductions when they borrow a lot of money to invest in homes to rent. This drives up the price of housing for everyone.** The tax system contributes to Australia having among the highest housing costs and highest household debt in the world. Government should invest directly in more housing for people on the lowest incomes, and encourage super funds and individuals to invest in new affordable homes, instead of driving up the price of existing homes.



ACTION ON CLIMATE CHANGE AND AFFORDABLE, CLEAN ENERGY

We need to reduce extreme weather events by acting on climate change and when heatwaves, fires, floods and storms hit, we should work together to help each other recover. **Climate change is threatening people's homes, livelihoods, health, quality of life, employment, and the cost of living.** The current federal government is not doing enough to cut carbon pollution, and fossil fuel companies are continuing to profit with the help of subsidies from governments and tax avoidance. We need governments to take effective action on climate change and to support people, communities and community sector organisations to become more resilient to extreme weather and natural disasters.

No one should have to suffer extreme heat without escape or have to go to bed freezing cold. While some home owners can afford solar panels and to make their homes more energy efficient, people on low incomes are struggling with electricity bills, going cold

in winter and sweltering through summer heatwaves. **Government should provide more support to people on low incomes, who pay disproportionately more for their energy, including access to solar, battery storage and more efficient homes so they can reduce their electricity bills and cope in extreme weather.**



QUALITY HEALTH AND COMMUNITY SERVICES FOR ALL IN NEED

No matter what our financial situation is, we should all be able to access quality services, including health, education, childcare, and aged care, when we or our loved ones need them. Many people, including people on low incomes, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds and people in regional communities, face barriers to accessing services that are readily available to others.

For people who have to watch every cent, it's difficult to cover basic health costs, let alone to pay for specialist care. The cost of going to the dentist often keeps people on low incomes from getting check-ups, which can lead to dental problems down the track. We need government to make sure everyone can get the healthcare they need, including dental care, mental health care and specialist care. **Our health is so important and nobody's health should be put at risk because they can't afford care.**

Community services help people experiencing poverty, hardship, discrimination and disadvantage. Community services include crisis accommodation for women and children escaping domestic violence, emergency relief to help people address basic needs in times of crisis, and food relief for people who are struggling to make ends meet. **Community services provide early childhood education, health clinics, aged care and help develop vibrant, multicultural communities.** Community services are an investment in local communities. Funding processes should place people at the centre, give communities control, and empower them to lead changes that improve lives. Community services have experienced deep funding cuts and are struggling to help everyone who needs their support. **We need government to provide a secure future for these much-needed services.**

In order to meet these commitments, government must guarantee:



FUNDING FOR OUR FUTURE

We should be able to enjoy the collective peace of mind that there is enough funding for the services we need, such as quality education, health, aged care, childcare and a decent income support system. A good government would make sure our tax system is up to the task by **removing loopholes so that the wealthy and corporations give back fairly to our society.**

One of the big worries for older people is whether they can afford health and aged care. Instead of relying on user charges such as hefty aged care deposits, **governments should raise the revenue they need fairly in order to guarantee those services to all who need them**, including by reducing unaffordable tax breaks for wealthy retirees.



A STRONG COMMUNITY VOICE AND A THRIVING DEMOCRACY

Strong community voices are vital to a thriving democracy. The community needs free speech to advocate for positive social change and to hold those in power accountable. **The community sector must be free to advocate for social justice, even when this means criticising government decisions.** We've seen community representatives be locked out of decision-making and community voices face intimidation, harassment, funding cuts, and unnecessary regulations. A good government would make sure that community representatives are included in major decisions and that community voices are supported.



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