ALP Response – Election Survey
Australian Association of Social Workers

Guarantee of workforce quality

Labor values the important work that social workers do and recognises the role they play in our health system.

As you are aware, the Australian Health Workforce Ministerial Council has responsibility for determining the professions that should enter the National Registration and Accreditation Scheme (NRAS) for health practitioners.

Labor is aware that a proposal to expand the NRAS to include social workers was considered at a meeting of Health Ministers in 2016.

If elected, Labor’s Minister for Health will engage with the Australian Association of Social Workers on this issue.

Medicare, mental health and social workers’ role

Labor has been and continues to be a strong supporter of Medicare funded mental health services including those delivered under the Better Access initiative. Not only is Better Access making a difference to the lives of millions of Australians with mental ill health, so too are other programs such as Access to Allied Psychological Services and community-based mental health services.

As part of our $1 billion investment in mental health (outlined below) Labor has announced we will invest nearly $200 million in a trial of four headspace Plus sites. As part of this trial, young people will be able to access up to 20 additional MBS Better Access sessions and have access to staff including GPs, mental health nurses, psychiatrists and addiction specialists.

Reconciliation

A Shorten Labor Government will establish a Voice for First Nations people, and seek the support of the Australian people for that Voice to be enshrined in the Constitution.

We support the Voice. We support enshrining it in the Constitution. It is our first priority for Constitutional change.

When 250 First Nations’ Leaders convened at Uluru in 2017 and called for a Voice to Parliament, Labor heard that call. In government, we will work with First Nations people at the national and regional level to make it a reality.
To respond to the unacceptably high rates of out of home care, a Shorten Labor Government will convene a national summit on First Nations Children in our first 100 days.

The summit will bring governments, experts and First Nations community leaders together to determine the different factors that lead to child removal. The summit will work with communities on solutions to reduce the rates of out-of-home care, and build a better future for First Nations children.

You can read more about our plan to address the unacceptable rates of out of home care for First Nations children here.

**Refugees and people seeking asylum**

Last year the Liberal government changed the eligibility requirements of the Status Resolution Support Services (SRSS) program – continuing their attacks on some of the most vulnerable people living in Australia.

Many of the vulnerable people who received this vital assistance have been waiting for the Department of Home Affairs to resolve their immigration status or make a decision on their visa application.

Labor did not support the arbitrary, unjustified, and haphazard way the Liberals have cut support to these people.

At the 2018 ALP National Conference, Labor committed to ensure people seeking asylum will have means-tested access to funded migration assistance, and to appropriate social services, including income, crisis housing, healthcare, mental health, community, education and English as a Second Language support during the assessment of the claim for protection.

Labor has also committed to abolishing Temporary Protection Visas (TPVs) and Safe Haven Enterprise Visas (SHEVs) which leave asylum seekers living in Australia in an unfair state of limbo. In government, Labor will place those found to be genuine refugees onto permanent protection visas.

To strengthen the integration of refugees into the Australian community, Labor will appoint a Special Envoy for Refugee and Asylum Seeker Issues who will be tasked with developing an Australian Refugee Commission and provide policy advice for Australia’s Humanitarian Program.

A Labor Government will stand up for fairness and treat asylum seekers living in Australia with dignity and humanity.
Mental health

A Shorten Labor Government will invest over $1 billion to drive vital mental health and suicide prevention reform.

As part of our commitment, Labor will provide $197 million to trial four headspace Plus community-based hubs for youth mental health.

We know that some young people with moderate to complex mental ill health cannot access the services they need. These innovative hubs will address the ‘missing middle’ and provide support to young people who need it most. Young people accessing headspace Plus will receive support from a range of mental health experts including GPs, mental health nurses, psychiatrists, addiction specialists and peer workers.

Labor will fund headspace Plus in partnership with relevant states and territories, recognising the roles they play in the provision of community-based services.

A Shorten Labor Government will also invest:

- $298 million in headspace, including for new centres across Australia.
- $114.5 million for eight adult mental health centres.
- $43.9 million for perinatal mental health.
- $20 million to create Australia’s first ever National Plan for Eating Disorders and Body Image Research, on top of $70 million for eating disorders centres and national coordination for eating disorders treatment.
- $20 million for mental health nurses to be delivered through Primary Health Networks.
- $15 million for the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare for improved data on self-harm and suicide.
- $11.5 million for the National Mental Health Commission’s National Mental Health Workplace initiative.

These initiatives are in addition to more than $300 million in investments for mental health infrastructure and services that Labor has announced for hospitals and communities across the nation.

Labor will also work with the states and territories on a nationwide ban of so-called ‘LGBTIQ Conversion Therapy.’

People living with disability and the NDIS

A Shorten Labor Government will get the NDIS back on track. We will establish a National Disability Insurance Scheme Future Fund – guaranteeing that every dollar budgeted for the NDIS, goes to the NDIS.
The $1.6 billion the Liberals are taking from the NDIS in 2019-20 will be put into the NDIS Future Fund, along with any future underspends. It will be a ‘locked box’ to protect the NDIS from Liberal cuts.

A Shorten Labor Government will also put people with disability at the centre of the NDIS once again. Labor will make the scheme more responsive, less complex and more people-focused. Our plan includes:

1. A new culture that puts people with disability first.
2. Establishing an NDIS Future Fund.
3. More, better-trained staff.
4. Better planning, more choice and easier reviews.
5. Ensuring equitable access to the NDIS.
6. Fixing the gaps between the NDIS and mainstream services.
7. Valuing a skilled disability workforce.
8. Keeping people with disability safe and boosting advocacy.
9. A strong disability services sector.
10. Improving research and evaluation.

Labor’s plan has been developed after extensive consultation with people with disability, families, carers, advocates, workers and providers across Australia.

We know that too many people are falling through the cracks between state services and the NDIS. In particular, people with mental ill-health, psychosocial disability and those from disadvantaged backgrounds.

To fix this, Labor will develop a new National Disability Strategy and Agreement. We will ask the states to sign-up to clear rules for which jurisdiction is responsible for certain services. We will also seek agreement for a person-first approach. This will mean that services are provided to meet a person’s needs first, with bureaucrats working out who is responsible for funding later.

Labor is very concerned that certain groups of people are not getting equal access to the NDIS. This includes people in rural areas, culturally and linguistically diverse communities and people from low-socio-economic backgrounds. In order to examine these issues, and identify systemic solutions, we will commission an independent review of access and equity in the NDIS.

Labor will also urgently commence work on a national workforce strategy for the NDIS and invest $40 million in developing the NDIS workforce, including providing financial support for students while they study. This is on top of providing 20,000 fee-free TAFE places for people studying to get skills for aged care and the NDIS.
The NDIS has great potential, but it needs to be managed by a Minister and a Government who truly believe in it.

You can read Labor’s Plan to Fix the NDIS at https://www.alp.org.au/media/1855/labors_plan_to_fix_the_ndis.pdf.

People with disability, their families and advocates have long been calling for a Royal Commission. It is overdue. Two years ago, Labor committed to a Royal Commission and we are relieved that one has now been established.

A Shorten Labor Government will amend the Terms of Reference for the Royal Commission to ensure that it considers redress. Consideration of redress is important to ensuring the Royal Commission leads to justice and healing, as well as change.

It is critical people with disability have confidence in the Royal Commission. For this reason, Labor will also ensure questions raised about conflicts of interest are addressed. This will include reviewing the appointment of certain Royal Commissioners in consultation with people with disability and advocates.

Labor will also ensure that there is appropriate support for people to tell their stories at the Royal Commission. Including support afterwards. Similar to the approach Labor took in ensuring people were supported before, during and after the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse.

**Income support**

Labor recognises that the rate of Newstart is too low. It simply hasn’t kept up with the cost of living for Australians that need to rely on it.

It’s so low it’s acting as a barrier to getting work; with people struggling to afford transport, clothes and essentials.

Labor will conduct a root and branch review of Newstart – as well as related payments and supports – as a matter of priority.

We need a comprehensive review to identify what parts of the system need to change, and how to pay for those changes. The review will focus on alleviating poverty and helping people into the workforce.

We also need a review because Australia’s social security system is complex. We need to make sure we consider how changes in one part interacts with other payments and services, like the Family Tax Benefit and the employment services system. Payments also interact with state government services, like housing. It is important changes to Newstart actually benefit vulnerable Australians, and don’t just get swallowed up through increased state government rents and charges.
Unlike the Liberals, we do not review payments to cut them, or to push people off them.

When Labor was last in government, we commissioned an independent and comprehensive review of the adequacy of the Age Pension, known as the Harmer Review. With that information to guide us, we delivered the single largest increase to the Age Pension, Disability Support Pension and Carer Payment, lifting 1 million Australians out of poverty.

Labor will not continue with the Liberals’ Centrelink Robo Debt program. We will ensure that the right systemic safeguards are in place to check the accuracy of any debt notices and consider people’s vulnerabilities. While social security debt that has been wrongly incurred should be repaid, we will ensure that fraud detection programs do not wrongly target people who have done nothing wrong.

Labor will scrap the discriminatory, punitive and ineffective Community Development Program (CDP). Labor will replace the CDP with a new program that will be co-designed with Indigenous Australians and restore the principle of community control and direction and create jobs with proper wages and working conditions.

Labor will not continue with the current ParentsNext approach. There’s evidence the program is hurting kids and their parents through pointless activities, red tape, and overly punitive measures.

A Shorten Labor Government will put in place new supports for parents and children. We will put the interests of children first and support parents with children under six-years-old to plan and prepare for future study or employment.

Requiring some participation in programs to improve long-term outcomes is responsible. But Labor will take an evidence-based, case-management approach to making sure that improved programs meet the needs of individual families.

**Housing**

Labor believes affordable and secure housing is essential to wellbeing, participation and social inclusion, and that all Australians have a right to safe, affordable and appropriate housing throughout their lives.

A Shorten Labor Government will immediately commence work with the states and territories on a national plan to address the issue of rising homelessness and directly invest in the supply of new affordable rental housing and transitional housing for vulnerable groups. Labor will:

- Develop and implement a national plan to reduce homelessness through the Council of Australian Governments (COAG).
• Build 250,000 new affordable rental homes over ten years – helping priority groups at-risk of experiencing homelessness to secure long-term, affordable, and stable accommodation.
• Invest $88 million over two years for a new Safe Housing Fund to increase transitional housing options for women and children escaping domestic and family violence, young people exiting out of home care and older women on low incomes who are at risk of homelessness.
• Reinstate a Minister for Housing and Homelessness and re-establish the National Housing Supply Council.
• Reform negative gearing and capital gains tax concessions, along with other reforms to improve housing supply and affordability.

Aged care

There is no question that the aged care system in Australia is in a state of national crisis and firm action is needed – the Liberals have neglected the crisis in our aged care system for too long.

Labor is the party of aged care reform and older Australians can be assured we will always do better for older Australians in residential aged care and those waiting for care at home. Only Labor will be in a position to improve aged care and adequately respond to the recommendations from the Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety.

The Liberals have failed to drive reform or take any meaningful action across the aged care sector during their time in Government. There are currently more than 128,000 older Australians waiting for a home care package and over the past six years the Liberals cut almost $2 billion from residential aged care. They failed to act on dozens of reports, reviews and inquiries about how they could improve aged care, and instead, finally, called a Royal Commission.

Labor will work with the sector, to improve aged care and respond to the Royal Commission’s recommendations once they are handed down. To further improve the quality of care and support a future aged care workforce, an elected Shorten Labor Government will:

• Immediately investigate interventions to ensure older Australians most at need are prioritised for home care.
• Provide opportunities through TAFE so that up to 20,000 aged care workers can obtain or improve their qualifications.
• Immediately speed up implementation of the Matter of Care workforce strategy to address inadequate staffing in aged care.
• Ensure that for residential aged care facilities there is a registered nurse present, on site, 24 hours a day.
• Publish the skill mix of the workforce employed at every residential aged care facility to ensure the appropriate skills-mix of properly trained staff is present at all times.
• Look at how best to improve access to home care packages and increasing staffing levels and skills.
• Further address the number of GPs working in aged care to provide proper incentives for GPs to do home visits and provide services in residential aged care.

Consistent with Labor’s commitment to support Australians with dementia and their families and carers, a Shorten Labor Government will:

• Make improving the care of Australians with dementia a national priority.
• Remove the complexity of multiple interactions between the Department of Health and Ageing, Centrelink, aged care providers, and the broader health care system for Australians with dementia and their families.
• Improve the training of aged care staff to improve the workforce’s understanding of dementia, including scholarships for nurses and carers to undertake specialist dementia care training.

Labor also recognises the unique requirements of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, culturally and linguistically diverse communities, and LGBTIQ communities, and will prioritise establishing programs that focus on improved support for these groups.

These commitments are a start to tackling the crisis in aged care. Labor is committed to working through the recommendations of the Royal Commission to make the crucial reforms needed in our aged care system and ensure the long-term sustainability of the sector.

Redress

The National Redress Scheme was a recommendation of the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse. Unfortunately, the Liberals did not follow all the recommendations of the Royal Commission, and Labor is concerned about implementation of the National Redress Scheme.

Any changes to the National Redress Scheme will need to be negotiated with the states and territories to avoid invalidating the scheme under the Constitution. A Shorten Labor Government would undertake these negotiations to deliver a better National Redress Scheme.

Specifically, Labor will ask the states and territories to agree to:
• Increasing the maximum payment that can be made under the Scheme from $150,000 to $200,000 in line with the recommendations of the Royal Commission.
• Ceasing the indexation of past payments received by survivors – so people are not left with payments worth very little, or nothing.
• Ensuring Victims and Survivors who are in prison, or who have been convicted of certain crimes receive fair access to the Scheme.
• Ensuring the counselling and support offered to Survivors is adequate and that it is available on an ongoing basis – this includes ensuring that survivors can access quality support services that do not retraumatise them.

• Extending the time Survivors have to decide whether to accept an offer of redress – bringing this in line with the recommendations of the Royal Commission. Deciding whether or not to accept an offer of redress is a significant decision that has legal consequences. People should not be rushed.

Labor will also double the number of caseworkers working in the National Redress Agency to speed up the processing and delivery of long overdue compensation.

**Family Violence**

A Shorten Labor Government will make a record Commonwealth investment of over $660 million in the Fourth Action Plan to prevent and respond to family violence, more than doubling current funding and committing to long term change. Labor’s investment includes:

• A new $90 million Family Violence Justice Fund to make sure people have experienced family violence can access legal support.

• 20,000 Flexible Support Packages to provide practical financial support to people escaping violence, with an investment of $60 million.

• Doubling new funding for crisis accommodation and refuges, with an extra $60 million investment.

• Investing an extra $62 million to provide grants to local community organisations and frontline services for community based prevention programs.

• Legislating for 10 days paid domestic violence leave.

You can find the details of our $660 million commitment [here](#).

In Government, we will take into account the recommendations of the Australian Law Reform Commission and the Victorian Royal Commission when pursuing reforms.

**Sustainability**

Labor will implement the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) process as a global blueprint to end extreme poverty. The SDGs will guide Labor’s plan for Australia’s international development program.

Only a Federal Labor Government can deliver real action to tackle climate change in Australia. The cost of inaction, to our environment and our economy, will be profound. This is not a price Labor is prepared to make the next generation of Australians pay.

Labor is committed to reducing Australia’s pollution by 45 per cent on 2005 levels by 2030 and reaching net zero pollution by 2050.
We will also deliver 50 per cent renewable energy in our electricity mix by 2030, including by:

- Setting a target of one million household battery systems by 2025 and providing a $2,000 rebate for 100,000 households to purchase and install battery systems.
- Investing up to $1 billion from the CEFC to help schools access solar panels and battery storage through a Solar Schools Program.
- Establishing a Neighbourhood Renewables Program to ensure renters and social housing residents can benefit from cheaper and cleaner renewable energy.
- Doubling capital of the Clean Energy Finance Corporation (CEFC) by $10 billion.

A Shorten Labor Government will also develop Australia’s first National Strategy on Climate Change and Health, to address the health impacts of climate change.

Labor knows that the federal government needs to lead on protecting the health and well-being of Australian communities from the impacts of climate change, and in fulfilling its international obligations under the Paris Agreement.

You can read more about Labor’s plan for real action on climate change at https://www.alp.org.au/policies/real-action-on-climate-change/.

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