



BUDGET LEAVES MANY ASKING 'WHAT HOPE FOR ME?'

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Catholic Social Services Australia says while the 2020-21 Commonwealth Budget delivers a financial boost for some, the country's most vulnerable will again find themselves asking "What hope for me?"

"With hundreds of thousands of Australians struggling to find work or not able to access enough hours of work, they'll be left to ponder how they will walk their individual path through the pandemic's aftermath," said CSSA chief executive officer Ursula Stephens.

"Billions of dollars in tax cuts will help some people, but those cuts won't help those who can't find work and who appear destined to return to unsustainably low welfare payments.

"We're particularly concerned about workers aged 55 and over – some of whom may never work again."

Dr Stephens said Pope Francis, in his encyclical released last weekend, called for political, economic and social decisions to be assessed based on how they support vulnerable people.

"Using that yardstick, we can't give the Government a passing grade based on the Budget the Treasurer delivered tonight," she said.

Dr Stephens said there were some modest measures to support affordable housing, but much-needed funding for social housing projects was absent.

"In a similar way, 23,000 additional home care packages delivered in aged care helps, but with tens of thousands more older Australians on the waiting list, this is placing a band aid on a gaping wound. The pandemic has shone an even brighter spotlight on the issues facing the aged care sector," she said.

Dr Stephens said the news of \$2 billion in additional concessional loans for drought-stricken farmers will be welcomed – although that assumes those living on the land will be able to repay the loans.

"A years-long drought exacerbated by fires and floods has left many people on their knees, so these loans, along with counselling and other support services, will help people stand up again," she said.

Additional funding for mental health services, financial counselling and domestic violence support, which have been in great demand during the pandemic, will also help.

"The extension of funding for the Equal Remuneration Order to support people working in the social and community services sector in accessing fairer wages is a relief, but it's still unclear which sectors will benefit," she said.

"Those fairer wages will help women, who dominate the workforce in those areas, but many of the biggest winners in this Budget are industries with almost exclusively male workforces such as construction."

Dr Stephens said the overall sentiment from the 2020-21 Budget is one of opportunities missed.

"The Treasurer spoke in his speech about courage, commitment and compassion. Many Australians won't be feeling like they've received a great deal of compassion in this Budget," she concluded.

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The national network of Catholic social services