

FOR RELEASE - MAY 15, 2023

## **FEDERAL BUDGET 2023-24: CAPSA WELCOMES POSITIVE MEASURES, BUT URGES MORE WORK TO BE DONE**

The Catholic Alliance for People Seeking Asylum (CAPSA) welcomes the Federal Government's support of people transitioning from temporary protection to permanent visas as well as targeted support for refugees and people seeking asylum in relation to trauma, family violence and healthcare, in the Federal Budget 2023-24.

While CAPSA is pleased to see these positive measures in place, it is concerned that the Federal Government has chosen not to fund the expansion of Australia's humanitarian program despite committing to raise Australia's humanitarian intake to 27,000 places over four years at last year's election. This is the second Budget that the Federal Government has not acted on this commitment.

While it continues to allocate significant funding into Australia's inhumane offshore immigration detention regime, there is minimal support for people seeking asylum and refugees living in the community. This is despite extensive calls from front-line providers for the urgent restoration of funding in order to avert chronic destitution. The Government allocated \$37 million in support for people seeking asylum, down from \$300 million in 2015-16. The Labor Government allocated the same amount last year but spent only \$15 million because of overly restrictive eligibility criteria that leave many people in need out of the program. This has compelled many community organisations that are heavily reliant upon donations, such as CAPSA co-convenor Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS) Australia, to continue drawing upon scant funds in an effort to meet escalating needs for food security and access to essential medication and housing.

CAPSA, co-convened by Jesuit Social Services and JRS Australia, supports individuals, schools, parishes and Catholic organisations across education, health, refugee and social services in their advocacy for fair and humane treatment for people seeking asylum in Australia.

CAPSA Co-Chairs Julie Edwards, CEO of Jesuit Social Services, and Tamara Domicelj, Country Director of JRS Australia, welcomed some positive initiatives included in this Budget, but emphasised that more needs to be done to ensure that refugees and people seeking asylum are adequately supported.

"We commend the Federal Government for allocating targeted funds to support refugees and people seeking asylum who are experiencing family and domestic violence, or who need support in addressing experiences of trauma and torture. In particular, creating a culturally informed pathway to healthcare through the establishment of the Primary Health Network Multicultural Access Program, which is greatly needed and welcomed," reflected Ms Edwards.

"At a time of unprecedented forced displacement globally, we are concerned that this Budget creates uncertainty as to when Australia will meet its commitment to scale our humanitarian intake," said Ms Domicelj.

"We hope that the Federal Government will increase this number to 27,000 places, as promised, as soon as possible, to give more people a chance to rebuild their lives in Australia."

Monique Earsman, Executive Director of Catholic Social Services Australia and CAPSA Advisory Group member, emphasised that beyond the Budget, the Federal Government still has the opportunity to provide tangible, positive change to the lives of refugees and people seeking asylum in Australia: "Moving past this Budget's release, we hope the Government will work to enable the fulfilment of all welcomed election promises, seek to provide permanent protection where owed and crucially, prioritise the humane treatment of all refugees and people seeking asylum," she said.

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