

CSSA Meets with ACT Government to Strengthen Support for Vulnerable Communities

14 March 2026

Catholic Social Services Australia (CSSA) CEO, Dr Jerry Nockles, and Director of Policy and Advocacy, Ms Carmel Sefian, met on Thursday with ACT Chief Minister Mr Andrew Barr, the Director-General of the ACT Health and Community Services Directorate Ms Kareena Arthy, and senior government officials to strengthen collaboration in supporting the territory's most vulnerable people.

The meeting, held at the ACT Legislative Assembly, focused on shared priorities including affordable housing, cost-of-living pressures and sustainable funding for the social services sector.

Dr Nockles praised the ACT Government's leadership on key social issues.

"We had a constructive and collaborative conversation with Chief Minister Barr about how we can work together more effectively to support vulnerable Canberrans. I'm optimistic about building an ongoing, productive relationship built on our shared commitment to the common good" Dr Nockles said.

"The ACT Government is making significant advances on critical issues like providing cost-of-living relief for those doing it tough and increasing social and affordable housing as part of its commitment to build 30,000 more homes in the territory by 2030. We particularly welcome the ACT Government's ongoing commitment to social and affordable housing targets as part of its broader Housing Strategy" Ms Sefian added.

CSSA highlighted the vital work of its member agency, Marymead CatholicCare Canberra & Goulburn (MCCG), which has been serving the ACT and surrounding regions for over 60 years.

"We are immensely proud of Marymead CatholicCare and CEO Anne Kirwan's leadership" Dr Nockles said. "Marymead CatholicCare works hand-in-hand with the ACT Government and community partners to deliver vital services to over 20,000 people across the territory and beyond. Their work in out-of-home care, mental health support, disability services, homelessness support and a range of other social services is truly transformational."

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The work of CSSA members is of profound importance to Catholics and people of good will across the Canberra–Goulburn Archdiocese, which serves a diverse population across the ACT and southern and western regions of New South Wales.

The meeting also addressed growing pressures on the social services sector, with ACTCOSS highlighting that 83 per cent of ACT community organisations reported increased demand in 2024, driven primarily by cost-of-living pressures, housing affordability challenges, and increased need for mental health support.

"Whilst we recognise and support the importance of fiscal discipline, the ACT's most vulnerable people cannot be the shock absorbers for budget constraints" Dr Nockles said. "Our community organisations are stretched thin, and we need sustainable, reliable, and multi-year funding that reflects the true cost of delivering quality care."

Dr Nockles emphasised CSSA's commitment to working constructively with the ACT Government.

"We are grateful to Chief Minister Barr for his time and his genuine commitment to working collaboratively" Dr Nockles said. "I am confident that through this partnership, we can build a just, inclusive, and compassionate Canberra where no one is left behind."

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About CSSA

CSSA is the national peak body for Catholic social service providers. CSSA's network of forty-two member agencies works across all Australian States and Territories with a combined total of over seven hundred sites, delivering essential services to over 500,000 vulnerable and disadvantaged Australians. This work is of profound importance to Australia's 5.1 million Catholics.

About Marymead CatholicCare Canberra & Goulburn

Marymead CatholicCare Canberra & Goulburn is the social services agency of the Catholic Archdiocese of Canberra and Goulburn. For over 60 years, MCCG has provided comprehensive support services including children and young people's services, family and relationship services, mental health support, disability services, homelessness services, and aged care to communities across the ACT and southern and western NSW.

The national network of Catholic social services

ABN 49 061 834 197

PO Box 6067, O'Connor ACT 2602, Level 1, 3 Sargood Street, O'Connor ACT 2602. T 02 6285 1366 E admin@cssa.org.au www.cssa.org.au



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Catholic Social
Services **Australia**

Media Contact | Carmel Sefian | 02 6285 1366 | carmel.sefian@cssa.org.au

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