



# ICV

ISLAMIC COUNCIL OF VICTORIA

# 2025-2026 Commonwealth Pre-Budget Submission

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Australian Government Treasury

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West Melbourne  
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## **Acknowledgements**

The Islamic Council of Victoria (ICV) acknowledges the Traditional Owners of the land on which we work and on which this document was produced, the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung and Bunurong peoples of the Kulin Nation. We pay our respects to their Elders, past, present and emerging.

We acknowledge that sovereignty has never been ceded, and this land will always be Aboriginal land. We recognise Australia's past atrocities against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, and acknowledge that this nation was founded on the genocide and dispossession of Aboriginal people. We acknowledge that the impacts of colonisation continue to harm First Nations people and communities, and we support First Nations people in their struggle for truth, justice and equality.

## Introduction

The Islamic Council of Victoria (ICV) is the peak representative body for Muslims in Victoria, representing over 300,000 Muslims via 76 member societies comprised of over 100 diverse ethnic communities. The ICV is thus uniquely positioned to engage with Victoria's Muslim community at large, including observing and addressing key challenges faced by the community. We strive to understand the unique needs, interests and concerns of our member societies and their respective communities, and to support their wellbeing, human rights and social welfare.

The ICV operates on two key platforms: providing welfare services to support the livelihood and wellbeing of disadvantaged and vulnerable groups, and advocacy on matters of concern to the Australian Muslim community. Our mission is to protect and advance the rights of Muslims in Victoria and across Australia, and ensure that the voice of Australia's Muslim community is heard and respected in policymaking, particularly in laws and policies that directly impact our community.

The ICV welcomes the opportunity to make a submission regarding the priorities of the 2025-2026 Commonwealth Budget. Our submission seeks to highlight the key areas of concern and policy priorities of our member societies and Victoria's Muslim community. We urge the government to take decisive action in addressing these issues through targeted and equitable budget allocations. By investing in policies that promote economic security, social cohesion, and equal opportunities for all Australians, the federal budget can play a transformative role in alleviating hardship and building a fairer, more inclusive Australian society.

This submission addresses eleven key funding areas identified as priorities by the ICV, explaining the impacts of these issues on our community and making recommendations for budget allocations in each area.

## 1. Food Insecurity

The ICV's core programs aim to directly support social welfare among the local Muslim community and the broader Victorian community. Between 2021 and 2024, the ICV ran a Food Bank Program which provided halal (religiously permissible) food hampers to the public upon request. This program commenced in 2021 during COVID-19 lockdowns, as COVID-19 restrictions, business closures and increased unemployment made it increasingly difficult for many in the community to afford and access essential food supplies. This program was primarily funded by the Victorian Government's Priority Response to Multicultural Communities Grant, and supported by Halal Food Bank, a local volunteer-run food bank that provided regular halal nutritious food hampers to those in need. The ICV's Food Bank Program distributed prepackaged food hampers provided by Halal Food Bank, supporting Halal Food Bank's operations and extending them to the ICV's own community.

Over the course of the Food Bank Program from 2021-2023, the ICV provided food aid to 82 individuals and 439 families comprising 2,074 people. This included supporting several priority communities, including refugees and asylum seekers, new and emerging communities, regional and rural Victorians, international students, youth, seniors, women, and socially isolated groups. Many beneficiaries of the program reported severe food insecurity, having completely or almost run out of food at the time the packages were delivered. The ICV continued to run the Food Bank Program on an ad-hoc basis between 2023 and 2024, supported by additional in-kind donations provided by Halal Food Bank. The program ended in 2024, as our stock of donated food hampers was depleted.

Through running our Food Bank Program, the ICV made a number of crucial observations on the state of food security in Victoria, particularly among Muslim and other culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) communities.

### 1.1 Increasing prevalence of food insecurity.

The cost-of-living crisis, marked by high inflation, slow wage growth, and rising prices for essentials, has worsened food insecurity in Victoria, especially since the end of COVID-19 lockdowns. The ICV acknowledges the state government's increased food relief funding during the pandemic but highlights that since 2022, the skyrocketing prices of essentials have led to greater financial strain without sufficient government support. Data from the Melbourne Institute and annual Foodbank Hunger Report shows a sharp rise in food insecurity in Australia, with the percentage of adults affected increasing 13% of adults in 2020, to 16% in 2021, to 22% in 2022 and a staggering 36% in 2023.<sup>1</sup>

The ICV also observes that low-income households tend to prioritise other expenses, such as rent, utilities, and transport, over food, leading to deprioritising adequate, nutritious meals. Students, particularly international students, often prioritise education-related expenses over food. As household expenses continue to rise, more families and individuals are forced to forgo basic nutritious meals. Access to food is a fundamental human right, and it is the responsibility of both federal and state governments to ensure this right is upheld for all Australians.

### 1.2 Need for culturally-appropriate food aid.

CALD communities in Victoria face unique challenges related to food insecurity, requiring tailored support. For example, access to halal food, which adheres to Islamic dietary laws, is essential for

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<sup>1</sup> Foodbank, *Foodbank Hunger Report 2023*, <https://reports.foodbank.org.au/foodbank-hunger-report-2023/?state=au>; Melbourne Institute, *What explains high levels of food insecurity in Australia?* [https://melbourneinstitute.unimelb.edu.au/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0005/4348247/ri2022n04.pdf](https://melbourneinstitute.unimelb.edu.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0005/4348247/ri2022n04.pdf).

practicing Muslims. For those experiencing food insecurity, halal-compliant food aid is limited. Organisations providing halal food aid are struggling to meet demand, and those providing general food aid largely do not have the staffing, time and resources to facilitate halal-compliant options. Many Muslims in need of food aid thus go without food rather than consume items that do not meet religious requirements, creating an added barrier to food security.

### 1.3 Disproportionate impacts on minority communities

Food insecurity is particularly prevalent, and has particularly detrimental impacts, among migrant communities in Victoria. This includes humanitarian migrants, refugees and asylum seekers, individuals on bridging visas and international students. Migrants from non-English speaking backgrounds in Australia experience higher rates of poverty than those from English-speaking countries and those born in Australia.<sup>2</sup> Furthermore, amid the rising cost of living, Australians who are not citizens or permanent residents are generally unable to access income support or government benefits and rely wholly on non-governmental charities when experiencing food insecurity or inability to meet their other basic needs.

Language barriers and cultural differences further hinder CALD communities from accessing food aid, as information on resources, eligibility, and processes is often unavailable in languages other than English. This prevents many non-English speakers from seeking assistance, even in critical situations.

The ICV has also observed that among Muslim and other CALD communities, large family households and multiple dependents exacerbate the difficulty of accessing adequate and nutritious food, particularly when combined with low household income and other socio-economic disadvantages. It is common among Muslims and many other CALD families to live in large families and households, including inter-generational households where both children/youth and elderly relatives are dependent on the main income earners. For example, the average size of families who benefited from the ICV's Food Bank Program in 2021-2022 and 2022-2023 was 4.72 people (2,074 individuals among 439 families), which is significantly larger than the average Australian family household size of 2.5 people.<sup>3</sup>

### 1.4 Decline in government funding

State government funding to address food insecurity has significantly declined despite increasing demand. During the COVID-19 pandemic, initiatives like the Priority Response to Multicultural Communities (PRMC) grants provided essential support for food relief programs. However, as the pandemic subsided, so did financial assistance, leaving food banks and organisations like the ICV struggling to sustain their programs amid an escalating cost-of-living crisis.

## Recommendations

### 1. Policies to address inequality and prevent food insecurity.

The ICV emphasises that in addressing the growing problem of food insecurity in Australia, prevention, rather than cure, is the key. Targeted policies are needed to curb the cost-of-living crisis and ensure that all Australians can afford basic necessities, including housing, clothing, healthcare, transport, education, and above all, adequate and nutritious food. This includes legislation to outlaw and prevent supermarket price gouging, as recommended by the Senate

<sup>2</sup> UNSW and Australian Council of Social Services, *Poverty In Australia 2023: Who is Affected?* (Report, 2023) p 57.

<sup>3</sup> Australian Government Institute of Family Studies, 'Populations, households and families,' *AFIS*, <https://aifs.gov.au/research/facts-and-figures/population-households-and-families>.

Select Committee on Supermarket Prices in 2024, capping rental increases and ensuring that minimum wages and income support payments adequately reflect inflation and the rising cost of living.

**2. Increased and sustainable funding for food aid providers.**

The ICV calls on the Commonwealth government to provide increased and sustained funding for food aid to support and expand current programs and develop new ones. Funding should prioritise non-governmental organisations, community groups, and cultural or religious centres with proven success in addressing food insecurity. Adequate resourcing of food aid programs will address immediate needs and improve the wellbeing of vulnerable populations. Additionally, financial support should include provisions for staff wages to address challenges in volunteer retention and ensure the continued operation of food banks.

**3. Improve financial support for community-led food aid organisations, particularly those addressing the needs of CALD communities.**

The ICV urges the Victorian government to enhance financial support for community-led aid initiatives run by local groups, cultural centres, and religious organisations. These organisations are well-positioned to address the specific needs of their communities, including catering to non-English speakers and ensuring food aid meets cultural and religious dietary requirements. Government support should include funding, capacity-building resources, and partnerships to help these organisations expand or establish new food aid programs. Empowering community-led initiatives will ensure food aid is effective and accessible to those in need.

## 2. Homelessness & Housing Insecurity

The current cost of living crisis has also exacerbated the prevalence and impacts of homelessness and housing insecurity. The Australian Homelessness Monitor reported in 2024 that people experiencing rough sleeping increased by 22 per cent in the previous three years, and those experiencing homelessness in New South Wales had increased a staggering 51 per cent since 2020.<sup>4</sup>

### 2.1 Lack of affordable and accessible housing

Lack of affordable housing options across Australia is a key driver of rising homelessness and housing insecurity, exacerbated by the decline of rental vacancy rates.<sup>5</sup> The 2024-2025 Federal budget aptly noted “a growing supply deficit, resulting in worsening affordability for both renters and first-home buyers,” and that “low vacancy rates and falling numbers of rental properties have placed pressure on rental prices over time; while lower income earners have less capacity to absorb higher prices.”<sup>6</sup> However, beyond insufficient supply, targeted policies and budget allocations are needed to ensure housing accessibility and affordability. Structural inequalities, tax concessions and housing market dynamics further compound the crisis of homelessness and housing insecurity. Research indicates an increase in vacant or underused housing in Australia, with almost 100,000 homes—or 5.2% of dwellings—in metropolitan Melbourne found to be either empty or underused in 2023, up from less than

<sup>4</sup> Pawson, H., Parsell, C., Clarke, A., Moore, J., Hartley, C., Aminpour, F. and Eagles, K. (2024) *Australian Homelessness Monitor 2024*; Sydney: UNSW City Futures Research Centre, p.7.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid; Anglicare Australia, *Rental Affordability Snapshot: National Report 2024 (Fifteenth Edition)*, p.13-14.

<sup>6</sup> Commonwealth Government, *Budget Statement No.4: Meeting Australia’s Housing Challenge (2024)*, 122.

70,000 in 2019.<sup>7</sup> Such figures underscore the disparity between housing supply and its actual utilisation, as properties are often left vacant due to speculative investment, short-term rental conversions, or restrictive taxation policies that fail to incentivise investors to lease out their properties. Without stronger regulations or incentives to bring these properties to market, the housing crisis will continue to worsen.

Additionally, as the Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute and Ethnic Communities Council of Victoria highlight, immigrant and CALD communities face additional barriers to housing access, including ‘rental racism,’ power imbalances between renters and rental providers, and limited support networks.<sup>8</sup>

## 2.2 Underfunding of social and public housing

Australia’s investment in social housing has also declined dramatically, from 52,000 new lettings from social housing providers in 1991 to 32,000 in 2023, a decline of 38%, or 60% in proportion to Australia’s population.<sup>9</sup> The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare reports that Australia lost 43,800 public dwellings between 2006 and 2022, and current estimates show that 640,000 new social homes are needed in Australia.<sup>10</sup> Meanwhile, existing public housing continues to be privatised at unprecedented rates.<sup>11</sup>

## 2.3 Under-resourced homelessness services

Government expenditure to address homelessness and support homelessness services remains insufficient to meet the growing demand for these services. According to the Australian Homelessness Monitor, more than 95 per cent of homelessness services reported finding it ‘somewhat harder’ or ‘much harder’ to address the basic housing needs of clients in 2024 compared to previous years.<sup>12</sup>

Akin to food aid services, Muslim and CALD communities in Australia also face unique barriers to accessing support when experiencing homelessness. Support services, particularly crisis accommodation facilities, are often not linguistically accessible or culturally safe environments, being unable to provide religious and cultural accommodations such as halal food, privacy and gender-specific support staff. To adequately meet the needs of all Australians experiencing homelessness, support services must be adequately resourced and equipped to provide culturally safe environments with interpreters, caseworkers and support staff trained in cultural competence.

<sup>7</sup> Prosper Australia, *Speculative Vacancies 11: Empty Homes in Melbourne in 2019-2023* (Report, 2023) 4.

<sup>8</sup> Maalsen, S., Wolifson, P., Rogers, D., Nelson, J. and Buckle, C., ‘Understanding discrimination effects in private rental housing,’ *AHURI Final Report No. 363, Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute Limited*, (2021), p.38; Ethnic Communities Council of Victoria, *Pre-Budget Submission 2024-2025*, <https://eccv.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2024/01/ECCV-Pre-budget-Submission-2024-2025.pdf>, p 9.

<sup>9</sup> Pawson, H., Parsell, C., Clarke, A., Moore, J., Hartley, C., Aminpour, F. and Eagles, K. (2024) *Australian Homelessness Monitor 2024*; Sydney: UNSW City Futures Research Centre, p.9.

<sup>10</sup> Van den Nouwelant, R., Troy, L. and Soundararaj, B., *Quantifying Australia’s unmet housing need A national snapshot* (Report for the Community Housing Industry Association, 2022) p.2; Everybody’s Home, *Report shows Australia needs a plan for social housing* (Media Release, 2023) <https://everybodyshome.com.au/report-shows-australia-needs-a-plan-for-social-housing/>.

<sup>11</sup> Rachael Eddie, ‘Land set aside for social housing to be sold off for private development,’ *The Age*, 11 August 2024, <https://www.theage.com.au/politics/victoria/land-set-aside-for-social-housing-to-be-sold-off-for-private-development-20240807-p5k0iw.html>.

<sup>12</sup> Pawson, H., Parsell, C., Clarke, A., Moore, J., Hartley, C., Aminpour, F. and Eagles, K. (2024) *Australian Homelessness Monitor 2024*; Sydney: UNSW City Futures Research Centre, p.7.

## 2.4 Resultant social and economic hardships

In addition to the risk of homelessness, lack of affordable housing contributes to a plethora of economic, social and emotional hardships for everyday Australians. Mental health stressors, social and physical isolation, and disconnection from family, community and cultural groups commonly stem from housing insecurity, as lack of access to housing drives individuals and families away from their communities and undermines social cohesion.<sup>13</sup>

## Recommendations

### 1. Appropriately recognise housing as a human right.

The ICV acknowledges and appreciates the Federal Government's focus on housing and homelessness in the 2024-2025 and previous federal budgets. We support the government's commitments to new investments in social housing, National Housing Infrastructure Facility, and Commonwealth Rent Assistance, and urge the government to build upon these measures.

Comprehensive reforms to Australia's housing market are needed to ensure the basic needs of Australians are met, including low-income, marginalised and vulnerable individuals. The ICV calls on the government to acknowledge adequate housing as a basic human right, as codified in the International Covenant of Economic, Social and Cultural Rights<sup>14</sup>, and fulfill its responsibility to ensure this right is met for all in Australia.

### 2. Increase budgetary investment in social and public housing to meet the current shortfall.

Research shows that current government investments in social and public housing are insufficient to meet the current demand for subsidised housing, let alone to minimise social housing waiting lists or address the current housing crisis.<sup>15</sup> The ICV calls on the Federal government to increase its investment in social housing in the 2025-2026 federal budget, focussing on sufficient, sustainable and long-term commitments. This should include substantially increasing investment in the Housing Australia Future Fund and extending the duration of the fund, with a view to fully meeting Australia's social housing shortfall.

### 3. Limit tax concessions on high-income earners and property investors and incentivise long-term rentals and affordable housing.

Australia's current taxation system contributes to the crisis of homelessness and housing insecurity, favouring tax concessions for high-income earners and property owners and incentivising the use of housing to generate wealth, as opposed to recognising housing as a basic human right. Massive privatisation and rising investment properties exacerbate housing affordability and scarcity.

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<sup>13</sup> Daisy Dumas, 'Forced to move by the Australian housing crisis: three-hour commutes and 'never mind seeing your family,' *The Guardian*, 9 December 2024, <https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2024/dec/09/forced-to-move-by-the-australian-housing-crisis-three-hour-commutes-and-never-mind-seeing-your-family>.

<sup>14</sup> *International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights*, UNTS vol. 999, 1966, art 11.

<sup>15</sup> Van den Nouwelant, R., Troy, L. and Soundararaj, B., *Quantifying Australia's unmet housing need A national snapshot* (Report for the Community Housing Industry Association, 2022) p.2; Everybody's Home, *Report shows Australia needs a plan for social housing* (Media Release, 2023) <https://everybodyshome.com.au/report-shows-australia-needs-a-plan-for-social-housing/>.



A 2024 Report by Everybody's Home highlighted \$8.5 billion in government spending on negative gearing and capital gains tax exemptions in 2021 – 2022, compared to only \$1.6 billion invested in homelessness services.<sup>16</sup> These tax cuts primarily benefited the highest 20 per cent of earners, offering very little benefit to low-income Australians.<sup>17</sup> The ICV acknowledges the current government's increased investment in housing affordability, but emphasises the ongoing need for a more accessible housing market that meets the human rights of Australians, underpinned by an equitable taxation system.

**4. Invest in homelessness support services, including those lead by CALD communities and catering to diverse individuals.**

Although systemic reforms are needed to address the increasing prevalence of homelessness, support is also needed for short-term solutions including community support services. The ICV calls on the government to increase its investment in homelessness support services, including those specifically addressing the needs of vulnerable groups such as women and children, Muslim and CALD communities, First Nations communities, and those with disabilities. Investment in homelessness and crisis support services should include funding to provide culturally and religiously appropriate resources, staff and support.

**5. Ensure that income support payments and minimum wages adequately reflect inflation and the rising cost-of-living.**

Alongside increased investment in affordable and accessible housing, targeted measures are needed to curb cost-of-living pressures and ensure that low-income earners have access to adequate housing as well as basic necessities. As noted by the Australian Council of Social Services, households currently relying on Youth Allowance, Job Seeker and Parenting Payments earn an income below the poverty line, and 60 per cent of Australians receiving Job Seeker and 72% of those receiving Parenting Payments live in poverty, compared with 13 per cent of the overall Australian population.<sup>18</sup> The ICV supports calls by the Australian Council of Social Services to raise the rate of job seeker and other income support payments to at least \$82 per day.<sup>19</sup>

### 3. Islamophobia, Discrimination and Multiculturalism

For several years, the ICV has run an Islamophobia Support Service, providing case-management and referral services to victims of Islamophobia and associated racial, national, ethnic, gender-based and other forms of discrimination, as well as delivering community education on Islamophobia. As observed in our case-management service, and a plethora of recent research, Islamophobia unfortunately

<sup>16</sup> Everybody's Home, *Written Off: The high cost of Australia's unfair tax system* (Report, 2024), p.11; Everybody's Home, *Pre-Budget Submission 2024-2025* (Report, 2024) p.4.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Australian Council of Social Services, *Woefully low' JobSeeker payment just 20% of average wage. The solutions to poverty are clear* (Media Release, 2024) [https://www.acoss.org.au/media\\_release/woefully-low-jobseeker-payment-just-20-of-average-wage-the-solutions-to-poverty-are-clear/](https://www.acoss.org.au/media_release/woefully-low-jobseeker-payment-just-20-of-average-wage-the-solutions-to-poverty-are-clear/).

<sup>19</sup> Australian Council of Social Services, *Income support needs a real increase, not just indexation* (Media Release, 2024) [https://www.acoss.org.au/media\\_release/income-support-needs-a-real-increase-not-just-indexation/](https://www.acoss.org.au/media_release/income-support-needs-a-real-increase-not-just-indexation/).

remains a pervasive and harmful challenge for Australian Muslims.<sup>20</sup> According to the 2024 Scanlon Institute report on Mapping Social Cohesion, 34 per cent of Australian adults surveyed reported having a somewhat or very negative attitude towards Muslims, rising from 27 per cent of respondents in July 2023.<sup>21</sup> Incidents of Islamophobia continue to be reported consistently, and have tended to spike at alarming rates following significant global events and inflammatory media coverage. The Islamophobia Register Australia reported that in the month following Israel's invasion of Gaza in 2023, the organisation saw a thirteen-fold increase in reports of Islamophobic incidents.<sup>22</sup> The Islamophobia Register noted "a direct correlation" between overseas conflicts and "divisive political rhetoric surrounding them" and incidents of Islamophobia locally.<sup>23</sup> The Executive Director of the Register stated "the staggering rate at which reports of offline Islamophobia have increased in the last week is unprecedented in the Register's 9-year history of operation and is deeply troubling. What makes it even more concerning is that we know that the majority of incidents of Islamophobia are never reported."<sup>24</sup> Furthermore, the Islamophobia Register noted that in the weeks following the Bondi Junction attack, a mass murder committed by an individual with no affiliation to Islam but suggested in early media reports to be an 'Islamist terrorist,' reports of Islamophobia had risen by 720% compared to the average week in 2024.<sup>25</sup> Between 2023 and 2024, the Register recorded a 39-fold increase in Islamophobic incidents on university campuses.<sup>26</sup>

The Fourth Report on Islamophobia in Australia examined over 930 reported Islamophobic incidents occurring before 2021, noting that verbal intimidation, graffiti and vandalism, and discrimination from authorities in official buildings, schools and workplaces were the most common forms of offline Islamophobia.<sup>27</sup> 78 per cent of victims were women, 25 per cent of whom were accompanied by children at the time of the incident.<sup>28</sup> In late 2024, an Islamic school bus in Adelaide was the target of an arson attack, and van in Melbourne was set alight by a perpetrator shouting Islamophobic statements.<sup>29</sup>

Numerous other forms of racial, ethnic, religious and gender-based discrimination remain pertinent, and discrimination against Muslims in Australia most often occurs on the basis of multiple factors, such as gender, age and race.<sup>30</sup> According to the 2024 Scanlon Institute report, 35 per cent of overseas-born or

<sup>20</sup> Ibid; Faith Housing Alliance, *2024-2025 Pre-Budget Submission* (Report, 2024).

<sup>21</sup> O'Donnel, J., Guan, Q., and Prentice, T., *Mapping Social Cohesion* (Report, 2024), p. 8.

<sup>22</sup> 1 Menchie Khairuddin, 'Islamophobic reports up thirteen-fold since October,' *The Third Sector*, 30 November 2023, <https://www.thirdsector.com.au/islamophobic-reports-up-thirteen-fold-since-october-7th/>.

<sup>23</sup> Islamophobia Register Australia, *Reports of Islamophobia continuing to increase at staggering rate - now ten-fold post Israel/Palestine escalations* (Press Release), 23 October 2023, [https://islamophobia.com.au/wpcontent/uploads/2023/10/Islamophobia-Register\\_23-OCT-Press-Release.docx-1.pdf](https://islamophobia.com.au/wpcontent/uploads/2023/10/Islamophobia-Register_23-OCT-Press-Release.docx-1.pdf).

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Islamophobia Register Australia, *720% Increase in Incidents Reported* (Social Media Post, 24 April 2024) [https://www.instagram.com/p/C6lrND0yb\\_e/](https://www.instagram.com/p/C6lrND0yb_e/).

<sup>26</sup> Islamophobia Register Australia, *Increase in Islamophobic incidents on Australian University Campuses* (Press Release) 24 May 2024, [https://islamophobia.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/Islamophobia-RegisterAustralia\\_24-MAY-Press-Release.pdf](https://islamophobia.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/Islamophobia-RegisterAustralia_24-MAY-Press-Release.pdf).

<sup>27</sup> Iner, D., Mason, R., and Smith, C. *Islamophobia in Australia – IV (2014-2021)* (Report, 2023), p. 2-5.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid, 1.

<sup>29</sup> Islamic Council of Victoria, *Authorities must take appropriate action against recent Islamophobic crimes* (Media Release, 20 December 2024) <https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=906835604900101&set=pb.100067210103341.-2207520000&type=3>.

<sup>30</sup> Mason G., and Asquith N., 'Islamophobia within the Hate Crime Framework' in Iner, Derya, ed. *Islamophobia in Australia Report II (2017-2018)* (Report, 2019) Charles Sturt University and ISRA, 20.

non-English speakers surveyed reported experiencing discrimination within the last 12 months based on skin colour, ethnicity or religion.<sup>31</sup>

## Recommendations

### 1. Equitable treatment across anti-discrimination initiatives.

The ICV calls on the federal government to address Islamophobia and other forms of racial, ethnic and religious discrimination with the same urgency and funding as the current government has provided towards antisemitism, including funding the development of a federal taskforce. Funding should also be provided for further research on Islamophobia to ensure policies are informed by comprehensive data.

### 2. Sustained and increased funding for Islamophobia support services.

We urge the government to expand funding for the ICV's Islamophobia Support Service, to allow for growth in case management capacity, legal advocacy and mental health support for victims. We also encourage funding for a national Islamophobia response framework to ensure state and federal support for reporting, tracking and responding to incidents.

### 3. Expanding community education and awareness initiatives.

The ICV requests additional funding for the development of educational resources and awareness campaigns to promote understandings of Islam and counter harmful stereotypes, as well as to support programs that train educators, frontline workers and law enforcement on recognising and addressing Islamophobia.

### 4. Security and safety enhancements.

The ICV appreciates the current government's investment in improving security at diverse places of worship, and supports increasing funding for security infrastructure at mosques, Islamic schools and community centres to protect against Islamophobic attacks, as well as introducing grants for security training and emergency preparedness for Muslim and CALD community organisations.

### 5. Support for Muslim students.

Provide funding for programs that combat Islamophobia in universities and ensure safer environments for Muslim students, and to establish dedicated support services for Muslim students facing discrimination, including legal aid and mental health resources

## 4. Divestment from Harmful and Discriminatory CVE programs

For many years, the ICV has advocated to the Commonwealth government against the proliferation of early intervention programs in the field of counter-terrorism and countering violent extremism, namely those that target and criminalise communities based on broad demographic factors. Programs aiming to counter violent extremism under the guise of multiculturalism, community cohesion or social harmony have historically increased Islamophobia, demonised young and vulnerable Muslims in public spheres, and lead to concerning false reports of extremism and risks of criminal activity, while yielding no

<sup>31</sup> O'Donnel, J., Guan, Q., and Prentice, T., *Mapping Social Cohesion* (Report, 2024), p. 7.

empirical positive outcomes.<sup>32</sup> Countless researchers have highlighted the lack of empirical evidence to support the effectiveness of intervention when there is no actual indication that an individual is heading towards violent extremism.<sup>33</sup> For example, a 2013 report co-published by the Canadian Federal Government emphasised that the causal link between broad social cohesion initiatives and the prevention of violent extremism essentially cannot be measured, since “the desired outcome is a non-event.”<sup>34</sup>

This approach irreparably damages the relationship between the Australian government and Muslim communities by approaching all aspects of this relationship from a security and intelligence-gathering angle, and entrenching suspicion of Muslims as the default state of government and public engagement. The prevalence of CVE subjects Muslims to structural Islamophobia, and securitises identity rather than addressing actual threats. Indeed, the early identification of individuals as potential risks, before they have committed any concerning acts, can drive them further toward radicalisation by alienating them from their communities and creating a distrust of government and authorities.

Despite its harmful impacts, countering violent extremism regularly drains record amounts of federal funding. As recently as 2025, the Labour government celebrated a new funding package channelling \$106.2 million over four years into CVE initiatives.<sup>35</sup> Federal funding in CVE has more than doubled in the last decade.<sup>36</sup>

## Recommendations

### 1. Divert funding from securitised CVE initiatives into genuine community wellbeing and cohesion programs.

The ICV urges the government to redirect funding from early intervention CVE programs, that lack empirical evidence of success, to community-driven initiatives that genuinely address social, economic, mental and emotional challenges of marginalised communities.

### 2. Support culturally and religiously responsive social services.

We recommend the government increase funding to welfare services that provide targeted support for vulnerable individuals, including trauma-informed mental health support, and

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<sup>32</sup> Islamic Council of Victoria, *Position Statement on Counter Terrorism and Countering-Violent Extremism* (2024) <https://icv.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2024/12/CT-CVE-Position-Statement.pdf>, 14; CAGE International, *Commission for Countering Extremism (CCE) Exposed: The Islamophobia Industry Policing Thought and Belief* (2019) 25-26; 7 Islamic Council of Victoria (ICV), *Submission to the Review into Division 105A of the Criminal Code Act*, (2022) 7-9.

<sup>33</sup> Shandon Harris-Hogan, Kate Barrelle and Andrew Zammit, ‘What is countering violent extremism? Exploring CVE policy and practice in Australia,’ *Behavioral Sciences of Terrorism and Political Aggression*, 8(1), p.21.

<sup>34</sup> Naureen Chowdhury Fink, Peter Romaniuk and Rafia Barakat, ‘Evaluating Countering Violent Extremism Programming’, *Practice and Progress Center on Global Counterterrorism Cooperation* (September 2013), p.1-2.

<sup>35</sup> Tony Bourke MP, Senator Katy Callaghan, Anne Aly MP, *A Safer Australia: Australia’s Counter-Terrorism and Violent Extremism Strategy launched* (Joint Media Release, 2025) <https://ministers.education.gov.au/burke/safer-australia-australias-counter-terrorism-and-violent-extremism-strategy-launched>.

<sup>36</sup> Karen Andrews MP, *Significant new investment to counter all forms of violent extremism in Australia* (Media Statement, 2022) <https://minister.homeaffairs.gov.au/KarenAndrews/Pages/significant-investment-counters-violent-extremism-in-australia>.

education and employment pathways. We encourage consultation and participation from community leaders and organisations, particularly from Muslim communities, to ensure that social cohesion initiatives are genuine, effective and guided by empirical experience rather than assumptions that reinforce structural Islamophobia.

## 5. Domestic and Gender-Based Violence Support

Domestic and gender-based violence remain prevalent and intractable in Australian society, with data from the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare indicating that 20 per cent of the population have experienced physical and/or sexual domestic violence since the age of 15.<sup>37</sup> This includes one in every six women and one in every 18 men having experience violence from an intimate partner, and one in five women experiencing sexual violence since the age of 15.<sup>38</sup> The prevalence of domestic violence within Muslim families remains significantly under-researched, but as the Australian Muslim Women’s Centre for Human Rights (AMWCHR) has observed, systemic inequalities faced by Muslim and other CALD women “present a clear barrier to help-seeking that can be weaponised by the person using violence to further the abuse. The intersection of factors including gender, migration status, socioeconomic status, religion, and language affect the vulnerability of victims and their experience in seeking help.<sup>39</sup> Particularly among CALD communities and faith communities, religious and cultural traditions can often be misused to justify violence and reinforce sexist frameworks. Cultural or family traditions rooted in sexism and control can also become falsely conflated with religious rules and traditions, creating additional barriers for victims seeking support and redress.

### 5.1 Underfunding of domestic violence support services

Existing support services for domestic violence are currently under-resourced and under immense strain, and demand is only increasing. For instance, community legal centres in Western Australia turn away around 100 domestic violence victims each week due to underfunding.<sup>40</sup> In 2022, major sexual assault clinics in Queensland and New South Wales reported waitlists of up to 18 months.<sup>41</sup> Key Australian support services have been struggling to meet demand, often recording severe funding deficits.<sup>42</sup> Services catering specifically to First Nations women are inordinately affected, despite First

<sup>37</sup> Australian Government Institute of Health and Welfare, ‘FDSV Summary,’ *Family, Domestic and Sexual Violence*, <https://www.aihw.gov.au/family-domestic-and-sexual-violence/resources/fdsv-summary>.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> Tambasco, C., Hammond, K., Smith, J., Bottriell, N., McKenna, T., Burdon-Smith, L., & Fahmy, M. (2024). *Barriers to Access: Migrant and refugee women’s experiences of the online family violence intervention order process*. Northern Community Legal Centre and the Australian Muslim Women’s Centre for Human Rights, p.11; Australian Muslim Women’s Centre for Human Rights, *Submission to the National Plan* (2021), p.2.

<sup>40</sup> Daryna Zadvirna, ‘WA community legal services forced to turn away women experiencing domestic violence,’ *ABC News*, 16 May 2024, <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2024-05-16/wa-community-legal-services-forced-to-turnaway-dv-victims/103847122>.

<sup>41</sup> Hagar Cohen, ‘Sexual assault support services struggling to cope with record demand,’ *ABC News*, 18 May 2022, <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2022-05-18/sexual-assault-support-services-struggling-with-demand/101050998>.

<sup>42</sup> Josh Butler & Adam Morton, ‘Australia’s budget has ‘gaping hole’ in funds for DV victims, environment and housing, advocates say,’ *The Guardian*, 16 May 2024, <https://www.theguardian.com/australianews/article/2024/may/16/australia-federal-budget-2024-violence-against-women-dv-funding-gap-housingenvironment>; Full Stop Australia, *Federal Budget must commit \$1 billion per year to fill urgent gaps in frontline sexual, domestic and family violence services* (Media Release, 25 October 2022).

Nations women in Australia being thirty-three times more likely to be hospitalised from domestic violence than the national average.<sup>43</sup> Although the government has renewed funding for family violence responses through the National Partnership Agreement, it remains insufficient to meet the growing demand. Frontline support services have highlighted that the renewed Agreement will result in countless more victims being denied support.<sup>44</sup> Moreover, proposed legislative reforms to address family violence, such the Attorney General’s Department’s proposal in 2024 to recognise forced marriage as a form of domestic violence, will increase demand for frontline domestic violence services from victims.<sup>45</sup> Legislative and policy developments, while welcome, must be matched with appropriate funding and resources for frontline support services.

## 5.2 Unique barriers facing migrant, Muslim and CALD victims

Research, including first-hand interviews and focus groups with CALD, Muslim, refugee and migrant women, has consistently shown increased difficulties in seeking support and intervention for domestic violence.<sup>46</sup> Information, resources and support is often not available in languages other than English, and social isolation, dependency and concerns about migration status will often deter migrant women from seeking support from police or external services, and allow perpetrators of family violence to strengthen their control over victims. In their 2023 review of Migrant and refugee women’s experiences of the online family violence intervention order process, AMWCHR reported that “victim/survivors were routinely refused support from various services including police, family violence services, and the court services,” and that these services were consistently “reluctant to provide the necessary time-intensive language supports” and interpreters required for victims to access family violence intervention orders.<sup>47</sup>

Regrettably, domestic violence services such as crisis accommodation and case management services catering specifically to Muslim and other CALD communities are limited. Victims often report that existing support services are not linguistically accessible or culturally safe environments, being unable to provide religious and cultural accommodations such as halal food, privacy and gender-specific support staff. To adequately meet the needs of forced marriage victims, services must be equipped to provide culturally safe environments with interpreters, counsellors, and caseworkers trained in cultural competence.

## 5.3 The need for increased community-led and non-criminal interventions

The current framework of protection, prevention and punishment for domestic violence relies on the effective engagement of law enforcement. Not only might victims be reluctant to seek the help of police,

<sup>43</sup> Marlene Longbottom, Hannah McGlade, Kyllie Cripps, ‘Indigenous women are most affected by domestic violence but have struggled to be heard. It’s time we listened,’ *The Conversation*, 11 May 2024, <https://theconversation.com/indigenous-women-are-most-affected-by-domestic-violence-but-have-struggled-to-beheard-its-time-we-listened-229720>; Anthony Furci, ‘First Nations experts say Closing the Gap family violence target will not be met without more funding,’ *ABC News*, 21 May 2024, <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2024-05-21/firstnations-experts-say-closing-the-gap-family-violence-target/103874672>.

<sup>44</sup> Kristine Ziwica, ‘Albanese’s promise on family violence conceals multimillion-dollar cuts,’ *The Saturday Paper*, 14 September 2024, <https://www.thesaturdaypaper.com.au/news/health/2024/09/14/albaneses-promise-familyviolence-conceals-multimillion-dollar-cuts#hrd>.

<sup>45</sup> Islamic Council of Victoria, *Submission on the Attorney-General’s Department’s Enhancing Civil Protections and Remedies for Forced Marriage Consultation Paper* (2024) p.16.

<sup>46</sup> Tambasco, C., Hammond, K., Smith, J., Bottrill, N., McKenna, T., Burdon-Smith, L., & Fahmy, M. (2024). *Barriers to Access: Migrant and refugee women’s experiences of the online family violence intervention order process*. Northern Community Legal Centre and the Australian Muslim Women’s Centre for Human Rights, p.11.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid*, p.7.

but police forces across Australia have shown significant and concerning patterns of failure in responding to various forms of family violence. In 2015, the report of the Victorian Royal Commission into Family Violence stated that police responses to family violence victims seeking intervention were “inconsistent,” and despite standardised codes of practice, victims could not rely on police for an appropriate response.<sup>48</sup> Dismissive attitudes, sexist workplace culture, ineffective training, inattentive judgment and even the type of violence experienced weigh into whether victims are supported and protected, or dismissed by police.<sup>49</sup> A 2022 Report from the Women’s Safety and Justice Taskforce highlighted similar patterns of victim-blaming, and of police discouraging victims from pursuing intervention or other court orders due to a supposed lack of evidence, even where evidence was readily available or victims displayed visible physical injuries.<sup>50</sup> Both reports noted that victims’ initial dismissive response from police often deterred them from making future reports, placing them in increasing danger without means of protection. Additionally, as of 2021, the Victorian Family Violence Reform Implementation Monitor estimates that police responding to domestic violence reports in Victoria wrongfully identify the victim as a greater or equal aggressor in no less than 10 per cent of cases, thus wrongfully subjecting the victim to criminalisation, arrest and further trauma.<sup>51</sup>

It is also crucial to note that Australian police forces have an even more regrettable record of response in CALD communities. Not only do issues such as language barriers and cultural stigmas present additional barriers to victims seeking support, but these victims often face additional discrimination and dismissal from police, including lack of cultural sensitivity, outright discrimination, or refusal to provide essential services such as translators.<sup>52</sup> CALD communities, particularly First Nations communities, are also subject to wrongful criminalisation at far higher rates. Compared to the above misidentification rate of 10 per cent, a report by the Queensland Government found that 50 per cent of First Nations women killed by domestic violence had previously sought police assistance and been misidentified as the perpetrator.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Victorian Government, *Royal Commission into Family Violence Summary and Recommendations*, Chapter 14: Police: front-line operations and workforce, p. 8.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid, Lorraine Mazerolle, Janet Ransley, Elena Marchetti & Lincoln Crowley QC, Independent review into investigations of police-related deaths, and domestic and family violence deaths in Queensland (Report, 2022) p. 81; Women’s Safety and Justice Taskforce, *Hear Her Voice: Women and girls’ experiences across the criminal justice system* (Report, 2022) p.17.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

<sup>51</sup> Family Violence Reform Implementation Monitor, ‘Misidentification is a significant issue that has enormous consequences for the victim survivor,’ <https://www.fvriv.vic.gov.au/monitoring-victorias-family-violence-reformsaccurate-identification-predominant-aggressor/misidentification-significant-issue-enormous-consequences-victim-survivor>.

<sup>52</sup> Victorian Government, *Royal Commission into Family Violence Summary and Recommendations*, Chapter 14: Police: front-line operations and workforce, 34. Ben Smee, ‘Denied a voice’: how Australia fails migrant victims of domestic violence,’ *The Guardian*, 20 September 2021, <https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2021/sep/20/denied-a-voice-how-australia-fails-migrantvictims-of-domestic-violence>.

<sup>53</sup> Ben Smee, ‘Queensland police misidentified women murdered by husbands as perpetrators of domestic violence,’ *The Guardian*, 3 May 2024, <https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2021/may/03/women-murdered-byhusbands-labelled-perpetrators-of-domestic-violence-by-queensland-police>.

## Recommendations

**1. Increase funding for frontline support services, including case management services, crisis accommodation and material aid providers.**

The ICV advocates for a significant increase in core funding for frontline domestic violence services, including crisis accommodation, case management, counselling, and legal assistance, to reduce wait times and meet growing demand. Funding must also be provided to facilitate the development of culturally and linguistically appropriate domestic violence services, including safe housing, interpreters, and caseworkers trained in cultural competence.

**2. Ensure adequate and sustainable funding for community legal centres, especially those catering to women and their children.**

We call on the federal government to ensure sustained funding for Community Legal Centres to ensure victims can access legal protection, including intervention orders, migration advice, and family law assistance.

**3. Allocate funding to courts and justice services specifically to ensure the accessibility of family violence interventions, particularly to migrant and linguistically diverse communities.**

The ICV recommends that funding be allocated to courts and justice services, specifically designated for the purpose of cultural competence and linguistic accessibility, with a focus on family violence services. This may include funding the translation of online and paper forms into multiple languages, funding the development of information on court services in multiple languages, and funding interpreters and support staff available to assist applicants with limited English skills or limited knowledge of Australian justice systems.

**4. Invest in the development of community-led domestic violence services, particularly those run by and for CALD communities, to deliver tailored prevention and intervention programs addressing the needs and challenges of their respective cultural and religious communities.**

Invest in community-led programs, particularly in Muslim and CALD communities, to ensure culturally and linguistically appropriate prevention initiatives and access to intervention. These services, run by and for their respective communities, provide culturally safe crisis support, multilingual case management, and faith-informed counselling while addressing unique barriers like social stigma, migration concerns, and lack of trust in mainstream institutions. Funding these initiatives strengthens early intervention, empowers survivors, and fosters community-driven solutions to domestic violence.

**5. Expand non-criminal responses and interventions.**

The ICV recommends funding to expand non-criminal, community-based interventions, such as culturally appropriate mediation and restorative justice programs, to provide alternatives for victims reluctant to engage with law enforcement.

**6. Allocate funding to improve responses from law enforcement and justice services to family and domestic violence.**

The ICV recommends funding for mandatory cultural competency and gender-sensitive training for police to address biases, improve victim identification, and ensure language accessibility in domestic violence cases. The ICV also recommends an increase in funding for police oversight



and review, including independent oversight mechanisms to monitor wrongful victim criminalisation and hold police accountable for misidentification and poor responses to family violence.

## 6. Refugee Support

The ICV acknowledges the government's stated commitment to maintaining a generous and flexible humanitarian program, meeting Australia's international protection obligations, and acting as a global leader in resettlement efforts.<sup>54</sup> We urge the government to expand Australia's humanitarian program in 2025-2026 in order to uphold this commitment. We emphasise that according to the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, 122.6 million people are currently forcibly displaced worldwide,<sup>55</sup> and this number risks substantially increasing with the deterioration of many humanitarian crises globally, including in Palestine, Sudan, Congo and more. At least 37.9 million of these displaced people are refugees.<sup>56</sup> The increased demand for resettlement support is currently not being met, and it is regrettable that Australia failed to increase its offshore humanitarian intake in 2024, despite the Labour government's previous commitment to reach an intake of 27,000 places annually, with an additional 10,000 for complementary pathways.

### 6.1 Extension of skilled labour pathways

In 2024, the ICV commended the government's extension of the Skilled Refugee Labour Agreement Pilot, and we encourage the Department to expand this program in order to relieve pressure on the demand for visas under the Refugee Intake and Humanitarian Program.<sup>57</sup> We emphasise that asylum seekers and refugees are often learned, skilled and capable individuals who are able to make a positive contribution to Australia's society and economy. Those able to gain protection through alternative pathways, such as skilled labour, should be given the opportunity wherever possible. However, we urge the Department to remain cognisant of the fact that Australia's obligations of protecting refugees, non-refoulement and respecting the right to seek asylum remain immutable under international law regardless of the benefits provided by refugees and those seeking protection. Alternative pathways have their place as alternatives that relieve pressure on the standard Refugee and Humanitarian Program, but conditions such as skilled labour should never be a determining factor between those offered protection and those denied.

### 6.2 The need for permanent resettlement of Palestinian refugees

The ICV also appreciates the introduction of temporary humanitarian visas in 2024 for individuals fleeing the Occupied Palestinian Territories, as we recommended in our submission on the 2024-2025 Humanitarian Program. However, while these visas provide some temporary relief, a pathway to permanent resettlement is now needed for those fleeing dire humanitarian crises in Palestine and elsewhere. After 15 months of genocide in Gaza committed by the Israeli state, over 46,707 people including 17,492 children, have been killed and more than 110,265 injured.<sup>58</sup> The United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UN OCHA) has reported that 90 per cent of homes in Gaza

<sup>54</sup> Australian Government Department of Home Affairs, *Australia's Humanitarian Program 2024-25 Discussion Paper* (2024) p.1.

<sup>55</sup> 'Figures at a glance,' UNHCR, <https://www.unhcr.org/au/about-unhcr/who-we-are/figures-glance>.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

<sup>57</sup> Islamic Council of Victoria, *Submission to the Department of Home Affairs on the 2024-2025 Humanitarian Program* (2024), p.3.

<sup>58</sup> 'Israel-Gaza war in maps and charts: Live tracker,' Al Jazeera, updated 16 January 2025, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/longform/2023/10/9/israel-hamas-war-inmaps-and-charts-live-tracker>.

are completely destroyed or damaged, along with more than 80 per cent of commercial facilities, 68 per cent of cropland and 88 per cent of schools.<sup>59</sup> More than 1.9 million, 90 per cent of Gaza's population, have been forcibly displaced.<sup>60</sup> Although the recent announcement of a ceasefire has allowed some Palestinians to return to their homes, Gaza's homes and civilian infrastructure have been almost completely destroyed, leaving much of the region uninhabitable. Even with a sustainable peace, reconstruction efforts will be protracted and extensive, meaning many will remain displaced both internally and offshore. Effective and accessible pathways to permanent resettlement must be provided for those Palestinians unable to return home.

### 6.3 Offshore processing

The ICV also expresses our grave concern for the 40+ asylum seekers currently placed offshore in Papua New Guinea, many having been stranded in offshore processing for more than a decade. Recent civil unrest in Papua New Guinea has created increased risks to the safety, livelihood and stability of those refugees remaining in the country, and support from the government is regrettably decreasing.<sup>61</sup> Australia's shameful history of offshore processing and detention has resulted in countless cases of human rights abuses, inhumane treatment, medical neglect and international law violations. Yet, between the 2023-2024 and 2026-2027 financial years, it is estimated that Australia will spend over \$1 billion on continuing to detain refugees offshore.<sup>62</sup>

## Recommendations

### 1. Honour the Labour Party's 2021 promise to increase humanitarian places to 27,000 places annually, with an additional 10,000 for complementary pathways.

The ICV fully endorses calls from leading refugee advocacy groups, including the Refugee Council of Australia and Asylum Seeker Resource Centre, to honour the Labour Party's 2021 election promise of increasing Australia's humanitarian intake to 27,000 places annually, with an additional 10,000 places for complementary pathways. Australia cannot fully uphold its role as a global leader in resettlement, or meet its international law obligations while places for humanitarian visas remain in short supply.

### 2. Maintain flexible intake quotas to account for the impact of sudden humanitarian crises.

Refugee and Special Humanitarian Program intake quotas should remain flexible and be adapted to accommodate sudden increases in displacement due to rapidly deteriorating humanitarian catastrophes, such as those currently unfolding in Gaza, Sudan and Congo. Temporary Humanitarian Concern visas should also be made readily available to individuals needing to temporarily escape from areas of acute violence.

<sup>59</sup> United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs 'Reported impact snapshot | Gaza Strip, 8 January 2025,' <https://www.ochaopt.org/content/reported-impact-snapshot-gaza-strip-8-january-2025>.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

<sup>61</sup> Amy Nethery and Jemima McKenna, 'Dozens of refugees are still stranded in precarious situations in PNG – and support from Australia is dwindling,' *The Conversation*, 18 November 2024, <https://theconversation.com/dozens-of-refugees-are-still-stranded-in-precarious-situations-in-png-and-support-from-australia-is-dwindling-241676>.

<sup>62</sup> Asylum Seeker Resource Centre, *Pre-Budget Submission 2024-2025* (2024), p.4

### 3. **Extend and Expand the Skilled Refugee Labour Agreement Pilot.**

We support the extension of the Skilled Refugee Labour Agreement Pilot, and encourage the government to allocate funding and places for additional alternative pathways to humanitarian protection, such as an education pathway.

### 4. **Commit to ending Australia’s immigration detention regime.**

We urge the government to commit to ending Australia’s cruel and inhumane immigration detention regime, and redirect funding from onshore detention centres to urgently evacuate refugees and their families from offshore processing in states such as Papua New Guinea. As opposed to arbitrary detention, funding should be allocated to support the welfare and livelihood of refugees and asylum seekers granted protection or being processed.

## 7. **First Nations Justice**

The ICV is committed to supporting Australia’s First Nations people in their struggle for truth, justice and equality. We recognise the ongoing harmful impacts of colonisation, and are concerned about the continued over-representation of First Nations people in many socio-economic disadvantages. Most notably, this includes imprisonment, deaths in custody, police violence, family and gender-based violence, suicide, low health outcomes and low educational attainment. The ICV supports initiatives by the Labour government to address these issues, such as the First Nations Justice Package and National Justice Reinvestment Program. However, current commitments remain insufficient.

The latest report from the National Productivity Commission on Closing the Gap Targets reveals that of 19 assessed targets, only five are on track to be achieved, and progress on four targets is worsening as of 2024.<sup>63</sup> The report notes that “Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander adults are being incarcerated at an increased rate,” despite the goal of a 15 per cent reduction by 2031.<sup>64</sup> The proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children assessed to be “developmentally on track” has also declined, and the rate of children in out-of-home care is increasing.<sup>65</sup>

Furthermore, the ICV believes that the foundations of a strong multicultural society must include a strong understanding among CALD communities of the ongoing impacts of colonisation against First Nations people, and increased support for First Nations justice and reconciliation from Muslim, migrant and CALD communities. The ICV remains committed to educating our community and improving understanding about the unique challenges, discrimination and systemic disadvantages faced by Australia’s Aboriginal population, and we request support from the government in doing so.

## **Recommendations**

### 1. **Expand investment in community justice initiatives and Aboriginal community legal services.**

We support the Labour government’s investment in the Justice Reinvestment Program, and encourage the continuation and expansion of such programs. Further funding must also be

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<sup>63</sup> Australian Government Productivity Commission, *Closing the Gap Annual Data Compilation Report* (Report 2024) p. 7.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid*, p. 4.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid*.

allocated to community legal centres catering to Aboriginal people, ensuring that they are able to meet demand and effectively advocate for Aboriginal people within the justice system.

**2. Increase funding to government departments and civil services with the object of full achievement of key government objectives, including the Close the Gap targets and the recommendations of the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody.**

The ICV recommends the government maintain and expand funding allocations to all State and Territory governments and public services to promote the full realisation of key commitments on First Nations justice, equality and wellbeing, chiefly the Close the Gap Targets and recommendations of the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody.

**3. Fund community-led programs to strengthen ties between First Nations and CALD communities.**

The ICV calls on the government to support multicultural organisations and peak bodies to design and implement programs aiming to strengthen relationships and understanding between First Nations people and CALD communities, educate diverse communities about the struggles of Aboriginal communities, and promote a shared responsibility within CALD communities to work towards justice and reconciliation.

## 8. Healthcare and Aged Care

The ICV supports the Labour government's historic investments in primary healthcare, Medicare and public health in recent budgets, particularly in 2023-2024. We encourage sustained investment in the public health system, with the objective of ensuring that essential healthcare services remain accessible and affordable for all Australians. The ICV also supports the government's recent investments in improving the quality and accessibility of aged care.

For almost 30 years, the ICV has supported patients in both public and private hospitals, as well as aged care centres, through our Hospital Chaplaincy Program. This program provides essential care and emotional support to Muslim hospital patients and their families. The program supports patients through a variety of health issues, including in-patient and regular treatments as well as during end-of-life care. The ICV trains 30-40 new volunteers each year, who then make regular visits to patients to provide emotional support throughout the hospitalisation period. Volunteers also provide assistance with religious practices, such as prayer, and facilitate communication and health advocacy with medical staff to ensure that patients' religious and cultural needs are respected. The program also aims to foster cultural awareness among healthcare providers and thus improve outcomes for Muslim patients and their families, including through community education and developing and disseminating resources. The Hospital Chaplaincy program has an ongoing presence at ten of the major hospitals and cancer centres across Victoria, and provides free education and resources to many more healthcare providers.

Our Hospital Chaplaincy program has historically been funded through the Spiritual Health Association. However, as of July 2024, the Victorian government has cut all funding to the Spiritual Health Association, undermining the provision of chaplaincy and emotional support to thousands of patients from 10 faith groups across 40 Victorian hospitals.<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> Spiritual Health Association, *Priorities for Investment and Impact Statement Loss of Faith Community Funding in Victoria* (Media Release, 2024) <https://spiritualhealth.org.au/wp->

There is growing recognition in research that holistic healthcare, aligned with contemporary best practice, must include spiritual care.<sup>67</sup> Even in secular societies like Australia, research has underscored the vital role of spiritual and religious frameworks in addressing emotional and mental distress, emphasising the need for pastoral care. Spiritual care remains just one aspect of the comprehensive support provided by faith-based chaplains, whose contributions extend beyond religious guidance to encompass emotional and existential wellbeing.

## Recommendations

### 1. **Maintain a strong and sustainable public healthcare system, addressing the primary health needs of all Australians.**

We call upon the federal government to increase and sustain investments in the public health system and aged care, maintaining a focus on accessibility and affordability and reducing wait times for essential healthcare services.

### 2. **Support holistic care for hospital and aged-care in-patients, including ensuring access to spiritual care and emotional support.**

The ICV calls upon all levels of government to allocate sufficient funding towards holistic healthcare, including ensuring that patients can access suitable spiritual and pastoral care where needed. We recommend funding be allocated to umbrella organisations like the Spiritual Health Association, which channel funds for chaplaincy and support into diverse faith communities.

### 3. **Improve and expand aged-care services, holistically addressing the physical, mental and emotional needs of elderly Australians.**

We commend the Labour government's investments in aged care, and encourage investments to improve and expand aged-care services to support Australia's aging population. This should include expanding culturally and religiously appropriate aged-care facilities, support networks and in-home care opportunities for CALD communities.

## 9. International Development and Humanitarian Assistance

Organisations such as the Australian Council for International Development have highlighted that Australia's 2024-2025 budget allocations saw only a relatively small increase in foreign aid allocations.<sup>68</sup> The proliferation of conflicts, humanitarian crises, displacement and natural disasters fuelled by climate change across the world in recent years has been staggering, exemplified by ongoing catastrophes including the genocide in Gaza, the ethnic cleansing of Uyghurs and Rohingya, civil conflict in Sudan and Congo and many more. Despite a marginal increase in official development assistance (ODA) last year, data released by the OECD ranked Australia at 26 out of 31 for annual ODA provided by its member

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[content/uploads/2024/06/Priorities-for-Investment\\_Impact-Statement\\_Loss-of-Faith-Community-Funding\\_September-2023\\_signed-1.pdf](https://www.austlii.edu.au/au/other/dfat/content/uploads/2024/06/Priorities-for-Investment_Impact-Statement_Loss-of-Faith-Community-Funding_September-2023_signed-1.pdf).

<sup>67</sup> Layson, M., Carey, L., Best, M. 'The impact of faith-based pastoral care in decreasingly religious contexts: The Australian chaplaincy advantage in critical environments, *Journal of Religious Health* 62:3 (2023), p.1494-1495.

<sup>68</sup> Australian Council for International Development, 'ACFID's Analysis of the 2024-2025 Federal Budget,' (Blog, 16 May 2024) <https://acfid.asn.au/acfids-analysis-of-the-2024-2025-federal-budget/>.

states.<sup>69</sup> Proportional to our gross national income (GNI), Australia's aid contributions currently equal just 0.19% of GNI despite the Labour Party's stated objective of reaching 0.5% GNI.<sup>70</sup>

The ICV also notes that the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade estimates that Australia's ODA to Palestine totalled \$32.2 million in 2024-2025, remaining the same as the previous financial year.<sup>71</sup> Despite marginal increases in recent years, this total remains comparatively low, compared to allocations of \$43.8 million in 2017 and \$56.7 million in 2012.<sup>72</sup> In 2019, Senator Wong as Shadow Minister for Foreign Affairs committed to increasing Australia's funding to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) to \$40 million per year, but in 2020 cut this funding in half to \$10 million.<sup>73</sup> As of the last financial year, Australian funding to UNRWA has only rebounded to \$20 million, the same level as prior to the Labour Party's election. After 15 months of genocide in Gaza, Palestinians are in urgent need of humanitarian aid, and are more reliant than ever on services such as UNRWA. Australia's ODA allocations must reflect this growing need.

## Recommendations

### 1. Increase foreign aid allocations in the 2025-2026 budget to 0.37% GNI, with a view to increase this allocation to 0.7% within a decade.

Australia must immediately increase its foreign aid allocations to 0.37% GNI, aligning with the average among OECD states.<sup>74</sup> The 2025-2026 budget should also establish a clear pathway for increasing this allocation to the Labour government's stated target of 0.5% GNI, with a view to promoting an increase to the UN General Assembly target of 0.7 per cent over the next ten years.

### 2. Increase humanitarian aid funding to Palestine, including honouring the Labour's stated objective of providing \$40 million annually to UNRWA.

The ICV calls on the Australian government to immediately increase its allocations of humanitarian aid funding to Palestine, contributing to immediate assistance and permanent repatriation of more than 1.9 million displaced Palestinians in Gaza. This is particularly necessary as Israel continues to inhibit the provision of basic humanitarian assistance to Palestinians, and major foreign aid providers such as the United States have drastically reduced their funding.

### 3. Strengthen protections for displaced and stateless persons.

Australia should increase funding for the resettlement, education and welfare support of nations affected by mass displacement, including Palestinians, Rohingya, Uyghurs and Afghans. This should be complemented by diplomatic policies and strategies supporting peacebuilding and

<sup>69</sup> Ibid.

<sup>70</sup> Australian Council for International Development, 'ACFID's Analysis of the 2024-2025 Federal Budget,' (Blog, 16 May 2024) <https://acfid.asn.au/acfids-analysis-of-the-2024-2025-federal-budget/>.

<sup>71</sup> Australian Government Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, 'Development assistance in the Occupied Palestinian Territories,' DFAT, <https://www.dfat.gov.au/geo/palestinian-territories/development-assistance-in-occupied-palestinian-territories>.

<sup>72</sup> Australian Government Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, *Aid Program Performance Report 2017-2018: Palestinian Territories* (Report, 2018) 3; Australia Palestine Advocacy Network, *Factsheet: Australian Aid to Palestine*, <https://apan.org.au/factsheet-aid-to-palestine/>.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

<sup>74</sup> Australian Government Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, 'Development assistance in the Occupied Palestinian Territories,' DFAT, <https://www.dfat.gov.au/geo/palestinian-territories/development-assistance-in-occupied-palestinian-territories>.

long-term stability in regions affected by conflict, emphasising justice, accountability, and long-term recovery.

## 10. Mental Health

The ICV advocates for affordable, accessible mental health services as part of a holistic and effective public healthcare system. We also call for mental health support that is culturally responsive and accessible to Muslim and other CALD communities, particularly those who have faced displacement, trauma, systemic discrimination, and other unique mental health stressors which can undermine their productive engagement in society. Unfortunately, mainstream mental health programs often fail to address the unique cultural, religious, and social needs of Muslims, leaving many feeling disconnected from available services.

Moreover, the stigma surrounding mental health within some elements of Muslim and CALD communities, combined with fears of discrimination and mistrust of healthcare systems, often results in underutilisation of services, which can lead to worsening mental health outcomes. There is an urgent need for targeted mental health initiatives that focus on early intervention, accessibility, and community-led care.

## Recommendations

### 1. Increase funding culturally competent mental health services.

Invest in mental health services that are tailored to the cultural and religious needs of CALD communities, including increasing the availability of affordable mental healthcare, supporting the provision of community education and awareness in a variety of languages and supporting cultural competency training for mental health services and practitioners.

### 2. Support community-led mental health practice and education.

Provide funding to Muslim and other CALD organisations and grassroots initiatives that are already trusted within the community, to promote and provide effective mental healthcare within their communities. These organisations are better positioned to offer or refer services that resonate with the specific needs of their communities, including support groups, trauma care, and culturally appropriate mental health resources.

### 3. Expand access to trauma-informed care for refugees and displaced individuals.

Ensure that mental health funding is directed toward refugees and individuals affected by conflict, including those from Palestine and other regions experiencing displacement. Programs should integrate trauma-informed care to support the healing process and address issues related to displacement, loss, and resettlement.

## 11. Disability Support

The Islamic Council of Victoria (ICV) emphasises the need for inclusive and accessible community, cultural, and religious spaces to ensure that people with disabilities can fully participate in community life. Many religious centres, and cultural organisations lack the resources and infrastructure to accommodate individuals with disabilities, leading to exclusion from spiritual, social, and cultural activities.

Additionally, people with disabilities from migrant and refugee backgrounds often face systemic barriers to accessing disability services, including language barriers, stigma, and a lack of culturally competent support. Particularly, children from Muslim and CALD backgrounds with physical or intellectual disabilities often face additional barriers to identification, diagnosis and support, due to stigmas and other cultural and linguistic barriers. This has concerning long-term effects on education and development outcomes for Muslim and CALD children living with disabilities.

To address these challenges, the federal government must invest in policies and programs that improve disability inclusion within public life and community organisations.

## Recommendations

### 1. Implement commitments in the State Disability Plan.

We urge the government to ensure that federal funding supports the commitments outlined in the State Disability Plan, particularly in improving service coordination between disability support services and other critical areas such as family violence and mental health services.

### 2. Provide funding for accessibility upgrades to religious and community spaces.

The ICV recommends the government establish dedicated grants to upgrade community, cultural and religious hubs to be fully accessible. This includes funding for wheelchair ramps, accessible bathrooms, visual and auditory aids, sensory-friendly spaces, and other necessary modifications.

### 3. Increase funding in public education to support students with disabilities from CALD backgrounds.

The ICV advocates for additional funding allocations towards public education, specifically to remove barriers to education and development faced by children from CALD communities with disabilities. This should include supporting additional English language support, developmental assessment, speech therapy and more, as well as tailored supports in education and digital literacy.

### 4. Invest in cultural competence for disability support workers.

Allocate resources for the professional development and training of disability workers from diverse cultural backgrounds to improve service quality. Additionally, increase investment in cultural competence training for disability service providers to ensure that support services are respectful and effective for Muslim and multicultural communities.