

A History of Influence. A Future of Impact.

1993–2023
Celebrating 30 years



We are here
to speak truth
to power.

“For the past 30 years, UnitingCare Australia has given voice to the Uniting Church’s commitment to social justice through advocacy and by strengthening community service provision. From the very beginning, our commitment to service has mirrored what is stated in the Basis of Union, perpetuating the link between “service and caring with political action and witness”. Today the UnitingCare Network of community services is one of the largest in the country. Together we have significant impact and influence – and we’re just getting started.”

Claerwen Little
National Director, UnitingCare Australia



We are not fully
who we are
without each other.

“The Uniting Church is richer because UnitingCare Australia really is the face and the voice of the people that we long to serve. I hope that UnitingCare Australia and the agencies that make up the UnitingCare network really see the life of the church as part of and essential to who they are. Knowing what it means to follow Jesus Christ in this day and age really enhances the work and the well-being of UnitingCare Australia and provides the guiding principles, of what we do and why we do it.”

Rev Sharon Hollis
President, Uniting Church in Australia

A Proud Past

“What we need is a national network of community services in the Uniting Church.”

Rev Brian Whitlock

Director of Community Services, Queensland Synod
Inaugural Chairperson, National Committee, Community Services Australia

This statement from Rev Brian Whitlock in conversation with Rev Harry Herbert in 1991 sparked a movement. A movement that was to become the UnitingCare Australia of today. All in the name of the Uniting Church, driven by justice, compassion and human rights.

Now regarded the founders of UnitingCare Australia, the late Reverends Harry Herbert and Brian Whitlock understood the need for the Church's community services to have a national voice and presence in Canberra. Their vision was to create a national body which could leverage and connect the lived experience of community service providers in the pursuit of social justice and reform of government policy in Australia. Its establishment, approved by the Assembly Standing Committee in 1993, demonstrated love and faith in action underpinned by the belief that we are better together.

“If we keep a strong social justice agenda, then we will remain within the mission and vision of the Church and that will be important for us in the future.”

Rev Harry Herbert

Executive Director, UnitingCare NSW.ACT
Inaugural Secretary, National Committee, Community Services Australia

The early years of UnitingCare Australia, then called Community Services Australia, focussed on establishing a national presence. With the appointment of a National Director based in Canberra, UnitingCare Australia offered the Church's community service providers a unified point of connection for national advocacy and collaboration.

UnitingCare Australia's value as a national voice representing a large community service footprint was quickly realised with invitations to sit on many government working groups and ministerial committees. The fledgling entity, working with the Catholic and Anglican national bodies, stopped the Howard government's election commitment to introduce accommodation bonds for high needs aged care residents and instead negotiated an offer of additional funding to aged care providers with concessional residents. It also advocated to ensure that the introduction of the GST did not unfairly impact the most vulnerable in our community.

“We are a pivotal voice in Canberra. A voice that matters. A voice that cares.”

Libby Davies

National Director, UnitingCare Australia
1994–2001

The legacy of this early collaboration and unwavering courage to advocate for the common good continues to this day. Federal governments of both political parties now recognising the importance and potency of UnitingCare Australia as an adviser and advocate for better and fairer policies.

1993

Assembly Standing Committee approves mandate of Community Services Australia.

Rev Harry Herbert appointed National Committee Chair. Libby Davies appointed Executive Director.

1994

Seventh Triennial Assembly formally endorses Community Services Australia.

Secretariat established in Canberra.

2000

Community Services Australia becomes UnitingCare Australia and the UnitingCare brand is officially launched.

Catalysts of Change

By the late 2000s the federal government was becoming more sophisticated in its policy reform and development agenda. Data and impact were the new currency. It was in this environment that UnitingCare Australia's maturity and capacity as an agent of influence and strong advocacy came to the fore. A great idea was no longer the only catalyst for change, evidence now mattered.

Leveraging the lived experience and evidence of UnitingCare Australia's vast network of service providers was now the crucial ingredient for effective change and reform. While walking a well-worn path to and through Parliament House remained important, it would be the compelling evidence from the UnitingCare members that would hold sway. The expertise of the network in aged care, children and family services, employment, welfare payments, tax and transfers as well as confronting issues of inequality and service sustainability became the foundations of UnitingCare Australia's advocacy agenda.

UnitingCare Australia's participation in government and parliamentary inquiries, working groups and committees drew upon the network's extensive cache of data and evidence. Now with a seat at the table, UnitingCare Australia had positioned itself and the network it represented as credentialed partners of choice for governments interested in policy reform.

“Our role is to go after structural issues that stop people thriving.”

Lin Hatfield Dodds

National Director, UnitingCare Australia
2001–2016

Success in UnitingCare Australia's policy advocacy agenda was also based upon a continued commitment and belief in the philosophy of its founders that we are better together. Collaboration with and amongst the UnitingCare Australia members took on many forms over the years.

The establishment of working groups in areas such as aged care and children services, campaigns such as Pancake Day and the Target Christmas Appeal unified the network and provided members with opportunities to share practices and create service delivery opportunities at a national level. This served to further enhance the collective authority, power and influence of UnitingCare Australia and its network while providing strength and agility to confidently deal with the challenges ahead.

The last decade has been dominated by royal commissions, a global pandemic and significant environmental and economic challenges, all of which have tested the resilience of UnitingCare Australia, the network, and the nation.

“We must never lose sight of our Christian values and continue to find expressions of love for the people we work with through all the compliance.”

Peter Bicknell

Chair, UnitingCare Australia
2006–2016

During this period of profound challenge, UnitingCare Australia was a significant contributor to the Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety and a powerful voice for increased wages and funding for the sector. It was instrumental in creating the Aged and Community Care Providers Association, a single national peak body for aged care in Australia.

It held a seat at the table during the Government's pandemic response, helping shape the Government's policy across key community services, harnessing the expertise of service providers responding to the impacts of the pandemic.

2001

Lin Hatfield Dodds appointed National Director.

2002

Rev John Pettman appointed Chair.

2003

Richard Miller appointed Chair of National Committee.

2005

Assembly Standing Committee approves new mandate for UnitingCare Australia, and the UnitingCare National Reference Committee becomes known as the National Committee.

A Fearless Future

The strength, expertise and vast footprint of the UnitingCare Australia network of services continued to be recognised by the Government when a consortium of nine members led by Uniting Vic.Tas, was selected to deliver a \$140 million national Escaping Violence Payment pilot program. After two successful years, an additional \$38.2 million in funding extended the program until 2025, demonstrating that both advocacy and national service delivery achieves even greater impact when done together.

UnitingCare Australia has continued to engage with the Government and Parliament, in grappling with complex policy and service delivery issues. This has been done quietly, intentionally and deliberately achieving significant political capital which it now draws upon to speak truth to power. In collaboration once again with our other church provider colleagues, UnitingCare Australia would be a central player in seeing off proposed changes to the regulation of charities which, if implemented, risked their ongoing existence for simply seeking to be a voice in the public square.

“The work of community services is absolutely vital to the life of the Uniting Church – it is our expression of our Christian faith in action.”

Bronwyn Pike

CEO, Uniting Vic.Tas
Board Member, UnitingCare Australia

Australia faces an uncertain future. Geopolitical tensions in the region, concerns with climate change and an uncertain economic outlook will continue to be in the forefront of the minds of Australia’s leaders. Collaboration between governments, business, charities and broader civil society will be the only way forward in addressing some of these issues.

“Having influence and impact at the centre of power is a great privilege.”

Claerwen Little

National Director, UnitingCare Australia
2017–

UnitingCare Australia will continue to play its part in addressing the many challenges ahead as an even stronger and more influential voice of impact for justice and equality. It will do this by working with and drawing upon the collective wisdom and experience of a robust and innovative network of community service providers, willing to share and work together in the advancement of the common good.

The ongoing success of UnitingCare Australia and its members is assured because we hold true to the belief that in the pursuit of equality and justice for all, we are better together.

2006

UnitingCare Australia merges with the Uniting Missions Network. Peter Bicknell appointed Chair of National Committee.

2017

Claerwen Little appointed National Director. Bronwyn Pike appointed Chair of National Committee.

2019

UnitingCare Australia National Committee becomes UnitingCare Australia Board. Paul Linossier appointed Interim Chair.

2020

Geoff Batkin appointed Chair of UnitingCare Australia Board.

UnitingCare Australia Today

Our Mission

To give voice to the Uniting Church's commitment to social justice through advocacy and by strengthening community service provision.

Our Values



Hope



Justice



Integrity



Respect



Compassion



Innovation

Four Strategic Objectives

Impact

To position UnitingCare Australia as a high impact organisation.

Identity

Be recognised as a leading advocate with a clear profile and strong identity.

Relationships

Nurture and extend critical internal and external relationships with key stakeholders for impact and influence.

Resources and Capability

Ensure we have adequate resources and capability to deliver on our Mandate.

Three Advocacy Priorities

Justice for First Peoples

That the unique place of our First Peoples in the life of our nation is acknowledged and upheld.

Ageing to our Full Potential

That all people experience compassion and dignity as they age and exercise their rights as full members of society.

Economic Equality and Inclusion

That all people are able to fully participate across all domains of life.

Advocacy is amplified through action

Over the last few years alone, UnitingCare Australia has completed:



109 submissions to government



7 campaigns advocating for First Peoples



200+ meetings with ministers and politicians



376 media releases



1,000+ news stories



6 Royal Commission appearances



Policy changes for the people we serve



“The growth, consolidation, development, and impact of our agencies over the last thirty years has been nothing short of miraculous. We are at our best when we work collaboratively and together as a team. May we continue to be one Uniting Church family, working together as part of God's mission in the world.”

Geoff Batkin
Chair, UnitingCare Australia

We are a brave and courageous Church.

Braver, Stronger, Together

The UnitingCare Network has a proud history of serving vulnerable and disadvantaged people in urban, rural and remote communities across Australia for more than 100 years. We are the community services of the Uniting Church in Australia with an unwavering commitment to social justice and human rights.

“UnitingCare Australia has made an extraordinary contribution to the social fabric of Australia, making us a happier, more connected nation.”

Hon Dr Andrew Leigh MP

Assistant Minister for Competition, Charities and Treasury
Assistant Minister for Employment

Today, we are 19 organisations working together serving more than 1.4 million people every year, powered by 50,000 staff and 30,000 volunteers. Our services include aged care, disability, children’s services, mental health, youth and family, homelessness, disaster relief, health care, and employment.

We have grown to become a cohesive, collaborative and diverse collective of community services with a reputation for being innovative, ambitious and passionate about inspiring a better world for all Australians.

- 50,000** staff
- 1,600** locations
- 19** community service organisations
- 30,000** volunteers
- 1.4 million** people supported across Australia
- 100+** years of service

Our Network

