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## **CATHOLIC HEALTH AUSTRALIA OUTLINES SOCIAL JUSTICE PRIORITIES FOR THE YEAR AHEAD**

Catholic Health Australia has outlined four key areas it will build its focus and efforts on in social justice efforts for the next year.

The work reflects an endorsed strategic plan for the next year that spans the gamut of social justice in health and aged care.

Work will focus on addressing advocacy gaps in the experience of prisoners, the development of a reconciliation action plan, a mental health project focused on youth and maintaining a close monitoring of assisted suicide schemes as they roll out across the country.

CHA Strategy & Mission Director Brigid Meney said 2023's program of activity builds on an already well-established foundation of programs.

"Between them CHA members give back to the community an estimated \$66 million in services through more than 100 different programs helping around 150,000 people a year. We can always do more, but we must identify those cohorts of the population where the need is greatest.

"Our mission tells us to look for the most marginalised and that is why we will be concentrating on efforts to help improve the health and social outcomes of those people in or transitioning from prisons including people who are nearing death in incarceration."

"Another challenge for the coming year will be to focus on what Catholic entities can do to help alleviate the mental health crisis, particularly in our young. We are exploring ways in which we can reach at risk demographics who are increasingly susceptible to mental health deterioration."

Ms Meney said CHA will also address our own role in furthering reconciliation with our First Nations peoples by developing a reconciliation action plan that seeks to amplify and support the work of our members in this critical area.

"Many of the injustices that continue to be faced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People's manifest in the health outcomes our members witness through the provision of care every day. CHA will be working to examine our role in supporting our members RAPS's, and amplifying the experiences, stories and needs of First Nation's communities through our unique position as a peak body."

Finally, assisted suicide continues to be a major focus for CHA and its members who will have to deal with the consequences of the fact that every state in Australia is or soon will offer its citizens euthanasia or assisted suicide.

"We are at a critical juncture. We have spent the past few years leading campaigns against these deeply troubling laws across the entire country. With the passing of these laws, now our mission calls us to be eternally vigilant about its implementation.

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“We campaigned against the introduction of these laws on the basis that they violated the sanctity of human life, and that they posed a threat to the vulnerable among us. In that regard nothing has changed, and we still have a job to do, namely, to push back against any attempts to widen their applicability, and to protect those who might feel pressured to avail themselves of these laws.”

**Notes to editors:** Catholic Health Australia (CHA) is Australia’s largest non-government grouping of health and aged care services accounting for approximately 10 per cent of hospital-based healthcare in Australia. Our members also provide around 25 percent of private hospital care, 5 percent of public hospital care, 12 percent of aged care facilities, and 20 percent of home care and support for the elderly.