

PROFESSOR MARIA HARRIES AM RECEIVES INAUGURAL CATHOLIC SOCIAL SERVICES AUSTRALIA LIFETIME CONTRIBUTION AWARD

17 August 2026

Catholic Social Services Australia (CSSA) proudly announced Professor Maria Harries AM as the inaugural recipient of the Catholic Social Services Australia Lifetime Contribution Award. The award was presented by former Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull at CSSA's 70th Anniversary Gala Dinner held last Wednesday evening at Parliament House, Canberra.

This new annual award recognises outstanding and sustained contributions to the mission of Catholic social services in Australia. Professor Harries' remarkable career, spanning over four decades, has been marked by dedicated leadership in social work, child protection, governance, and the not-for-profit sector, particularly within Catholic social services.

Professor Harries has been a tireless advocate for embedding Catholic Social Teaching into professional practice and governance, championing the dignity of vulnerable Australians and strengthening the sector's commitment to compassionate service.

Dr Jerry Nockles, CEO of CSSA, said: "Professor Maria Harries embodies the very heart of Catholic social service – a lifelong commitment to justice, compassion, and the dignity of every person. This award not only honours her extraordinary legacy but also reflects the enduring mission of Catholic social services across Australia, which continues to serve with faith and compassion in the face of complex social challenges."

He added: "As we celebrate 70 years of CSSA, this award marks a new chapter in recognising those whose work transforms lives and communities. Professor Harries' leadership inspires us all to uphold the Gospel values at the core of our work."

Professor Harries has held numerous leadership roles, including Chairperson of the CSSA Board from 2013 to 2020, and continues to contribute to research, governance, and advocacy in social services. Her work has been recognised nationally and internationally, including her appointment as a Member of the Order of Australia and as a lay delegate to the Vatican Synod on the Family.

On accepting the award, Professor Harries spoke of her upbringing in Africa as one of eight children. She recalled her parents, who opposed apartheid and taught her a Catholic faith expressed through action.

For them, she said, "faith was a verb, not a noun".

The Catholic Social Services Australia Lifetime Contribution Award will be presented annually to leaders whose work exemplifies the values and mission of Catholic social services in Australia.

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About CSSA

CSSA is the national peak body for Catholic social service providers. CSSA's network of forty-two member agencies runs across all Australian States and Territories with a combined total of over seven hundred sites, delivering essential services to vulnerable and disadvantaged Australians.

Media Contact

CSSA | Katie Walsh-Smith | 02 6285 1366 | katie.walsh-smith@cssa.org.au