Caritas Australia welcomes new Chair and Board appointments

Caritas Australia has welcomed Carolyn Ireland as its new Board Chair, succeeding Robert Fitzgerald AM, and announced the appointment of two new non-executive directors, Nicki Patten and Dr Rick Brennan AO in effect as of November 30th, 2026.

Robert Fitzgerald steps down after six years as Chair, having been appointed in 2020 as Caritas Australia's first lay leader and inaugural company Chair, stewarding the organisation through new governance arrangements and a significant period of renewal. His appointment as Chair built on a longstanding connection with Caritas Australia, having previously served on its National Council in the early 1990s. His tenure encompassed the COVID-19 pandemic and significant changes in the global development and humanitarian landscape.

CEO Kirsten Sayers thanked Robert Fitzgerald for his contribution, saying: "Robert has brought wisdom, integrity and a deep commitment to human dignity and the social mission of the Church to his leadership. He has guided us through a significant period of renewal while keeping us focused on why we are here: to stand with communities facing poverty, injustice and crisis as they lead their own change."

Robert Fitzgerald reflected on his time as Chair, saying: "Caritas is a practical expression of the Church's commitment to human dignity, solidarity and justice, connecting Catholic communities in Australia with communities around the world. This work has never been more important in a world beset by rising conflict and inequality. I am proud of what we have achieved together, and I know the organisation will be in excellent hands with Carolyn as it enters its next chapter."

Incoming Chair Carolyn Ireland joined the Caritas Australia Board in 2025 and brings extensive governance and executive experience across finance, investment and organisational transformation, alongside significant Board leadership experience in faith-based organisations including Mercy Health, Melbourne Archdiocese Catholic Schools and the International Women's Development Agency.

"It is an honour to be appointed Chair and to build on the strong foundation Robert has established," **Carolyn Ireland** said. "At the heart of our mission is a belief in the dignity of every person and the capacity of communities to lead their own change. I look forward to working with Kirsten, the Board, the Bishops and the wider Catholic community to continue putting that mission into action."

The leadership transition coincides with the appointment of Nicki Patten and Dr Rick Brennan as non-executive directors, strengthening the Board's experience across governance, Catholic institutions, international development, humanitarian response and public health.

Nicki Patten is a lawyer and governance professional with extensive experience across Catholic, not-for-profit, education and international development organisations, with expertise in safeguarding and governance in faith-based organisations. Her career has included roles with World Vision Australia, the Institute of the Sisters of Mercy of Australia and Papua New Guinea, Jesuit Education Australia and Loreto Ministries.

Dr Rick Brennan is an emergency medicine and public health physician with more than three decades of humanitarian and emergency experience, including 13 years with the World Health Organization, most recently as Regional Emergency Director for the Eastern Mediterranean.

“Carolyn, Nicki and Rick each bring a different perspective, but share an understanding that strong governance exists in service of mission. Together with our continuing Directors, they will help ensure Caritas Australia remains a strong, accountable and distinctly Catholic organisation, grounded in human dignity and equipped to stand alongside communities through the world's challenges ahead” concluded **Kirsten Sayers**.

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