



ADVOCACY STRATEGY

2026-2030

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We stand for...

HOPE.

Ending homelessness is achievable. We share practical ways to make it happen.

HEART.

We believe strongly in the inherent dignity of every person, human rights and self-determination.

HOME.

Home is more than a roof over our heads - it's safety, community and a sense of belonging.

Why advocacy?



Members of EAGLE (l-r): Cliff, Chris, Luke, Catherine, Lee, Hang (CEO), Jayke, Moana and Georgie.

Sacred Heart Mission exists to end homelessness, deep disadvantage and social exclusion.

We have a strong responsibility to be advocates. We are grounded in Catholic Social Teaching, surrounded by people with lived experience of homelessness, and founded in Boonwurrung Country, whose custodians work tirelessly to protect and nurture their enduring connection to land, waterways and culture.

Our services support people who are experiencing homelessness and disadvantage. Advocacy enables us to go deeper than that – by addressing the root causes of homelessness and working towards fairer and more inclusive communities and service systems. This is why boosting advocacy and social policy are priorities of Strategy 2030¹, our blueprint for the years ahead.

This advocacy strategy sets out how Sacred Heart Mission will work with different levels of government to influence policy, how we will join our voice with others, and how we will bring communities together to tackle homelessness and disadvantage.

Our advocacy will always be guided by the lived and living experience of our participants, volunteers and staff. They have entrusted us with their insights and stories, and it is incumbent on us to use that privilege to drive change. In particular, I am grateful to the members of our Executive Advisory Group on Lived Experience (EAGLE), whose voices have shaped this strategy from the outset.

Hang Vo
CEO

¹Sacred Heart Mission (2025). Strategy 2030: Serving more people and more communities (April 2025)

Advocacy Strategy on a Page

Strategy 2030 Outcome

Lived experience voice, practice and evidence drives policy, sector and service system reform.

We seek change in ...



**Public
policy**



**Sector
practice**



**Community
attitudes**

We seek change where...

**We have
unique
expertise**

Flexible
housing
support



Welcoming
community
spaces



Older people
and
homelessness



Intersectionality



**We can act
collectively**

More social
housing



Family violence
and
homelessness



Mental health
and
homelessness



Community
sector
sustainability



Social
inclusion



**We can
amplify other
voices**

Safe housing
for First
Nations
peoples



Fairer social
security



Climate
extremes and
poverty



We seek change **by** ...



Acting **collectively** with our sector



Offering **real solutions** backed by evidence

Structural change

Policies, practices and resource flows



Strengthening **relationships** with government and the community sector



Bringing **lived experience** into decision making

Relational change

Relationships and power dynamics



Equipping our people to be powerful advocates



Engaging our community in the issues that matter

Transformative change

People's views and attitudes

Where we seek change

Our advocacy complements our service delivery, with the shared purpose of ending homelessness, deep disadvantage and social exclusion. We focus not only on public policy, but also sector practice and the community attitudes that shape society's response to homelessness.

Public policy PP

From federal and state housing policies to local council by-laws, government decisions have a significant impact on the experience and extent of homelessness.

What will we do?	How will we know it's working?
<p>Influence and contribute to government policy, service design and planning, at federal, state and local levels</p> <p>We do this in collaboration with lived experience experts and sector partners</p>	<p>We see strong commitment to social housing in upcoming state and federal elections, reflected in policies that prioritise housing and ongoing support for people who face homelessness.</p> <p>Local councils commit to initiatives that end rough sleeping and strengthen locally led prevention and outreach services.</p>
<p>Partner with governments to expand service scope and geographic reach, ensuring services are tailored to the needs and strengths of local communities</p>	<p>There are services in target areas of Victoria that meet the needs of local populations.</p> <p>Sacred Heart Mission is closely involved in the design and delivery of these services.</p>
<p>Actively engage with parliamentarians and councillors to achieve better outcomes for our service participants</p>	<p>Parliamentarians and councillors are highly engaged and well informed on the issues that affect our participants.</p> <p>Parliamentarians and councillors have the evidence to speak truthfully about these issues, and the human stories to bring them to life.</p>

Sector practice SP

Homelessness is the outcome of multiple system failures - from family violence to healthcare and employment services. To prevent this, our sector needs to continually evolve and collaborate.

What will we do?	How will we know it's working?
Strengthen our reputation as knowledgeable and credible advocates	Sacred Heart Mission is regularly invited to speak at sector events, and our work is regularly cited in sector reports and policy submissions
Share insights and evidence from our programs to guide sector practice	Issues that we champion – such as inclusive services and flexible housing support – are increasingly prioritised by the sector
Amplify expert voices of those with lived and living experience of homelessness and disadvantage	Sector practice is informed and led by lived and living experience expertise.
Partner with other organisations to strengthen service design and delivery	Services improve through collaboration, and advocacy is strengthened through collective impact and shared evidence

Community attitudes

Society's response to homelessness would look very different if more people understood the reasons behind it, and the strength and resilience of people who experience it.

What will we do?	How will we know it's working?
Engage staff, board and volunteers in ways to make Sacred Heart Mission a diverse, equitable and inclusive place.	Diversity is proudly visible and represented in all parts of the organisation. Participants, volunteers and staff from all backgrounds feel welcome and safe.
Support people with lived experience to share their insights and stories in ethical and collaborative ways.	Our donors, op shoppers and other audiences show an increased understanding of the strength and resilience of people experiencing homelessness.
Help donors, op shoppers, students and other supporters to join our efforts to end homelessness and social exclusion.	We see a rise in community-driven fundraising and advocacy activities, inspired by our work. Major donors and philanthropic partners support and amplify our advocacy messages.

What guides us?

Lived and living experience

We cannot end homelessness, marginalisation and deep disadvantage without listening to and acting on the advice of people with lived and living experience. They have entrusted us with their stories, and we have a deep responsibility to amplify their voices to drive change.

Diversity, equity and inclusion

When we can participate in the world safely and meaningfully, our work has greater impact, and our lives are richer and more fulfilling. Strong communities recognise and value difference, proudly embrace their diversity, respond to different needs in different ways, and foster a sense of belonging.

Intersectionality

We see each person for who they are, and all they are. We recognise that our identities intersect in powerful ways, and we honour that complexity as a strength. We work to change systems and policies that get in the way of people being safe, seen and fully themselves.

Trauma-informed practice

Individual, intergenerational, systemic and collective trauma is part of many people's experience. We champion practices that prioritise people's safety and dignity, offer real choice and control, and share power and decision-making.

First Nations self-determination

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have survived more than two centuries of systematic dispossession, dislocation and racism. We recognise their fundamental right to make decisions about matters that affect their lives and communities. Guided by First Nations peoples, we seek to embed cultural safety and self-determination across our work.

Catholic Social Teaching

At the heart of all we do is a strong belief in the inherent dignity of every person, as well as human rights, solidarity and participation. These principles are embedded in Catholic Social Teaching and form the foundations of our work.

OUR ADVOCACY PRIORITIES

Sacred Heart Mission advocates on issues that directly impact the lives of people we support.

A number of issues were identified through a year-long consultation process that engaged our Executive Advisory Group on Lived Experience (EAGLE), staff, board members, and the wider community sector.

A final set of consultations from October-December 2025 helped prioritise issues based on their relevance to our work and participants (see Fig 1 below) and determine the right course of action for each issue.

Advocacy priorities are listed on the following pages. For some issues, we will **act collectively** with other organisations, speaking in one voice for maximum impact. For others, we will **give the microphone** to organisations that have greater expertise, to amplify their voices. But for a few issues, Sacred Heart Mission brings **unique expertise** and can lead change.

Fig 1: Prioritisation criteria for advocacy issues



Where we bring unique expertise

For these issues, Sacred Heart Mission will identify and call for specific changes in policy and sector practice, informed by evidence from our frontline services. We will act with others where appropriate, and engage our community of volunteers, supporters and shoppers in practical, human ways to make a difference.

Flexible housing support

Housing is just the start of a person's journey out of homelessness.

It takes time for people who have lived with intense or long-term trauma to heal, rebuild and re-learn to navigate life. So simply putting them into a rooming house or rental property, and leaving them without further support, is setting them up to fail.

When people have housing, they should also have the support to live in safety and rebuild their lives. For some people, it's how to navigate rent and social security systems or be good neighbours. For others, it's access to treatment for mental health issues or substance abuse. Often, it's someone who'll check in regularly and help them feel part of a community again.

There are proven approaches to breaking a chronic cycle of homelessness. It's time to expand them.

The change we seek

- PP** Fund and scale Housing First approaches with wraparound support that addresses tenancy support, mental health, substance use and family services
- SP** Provide services through a lens of trauma-informed care, informed by people with lived experience



Here's the heart of the matter: short-term support doesn't work for long-term trauma. You can't slap a Band-Aid on a bullet wound. What I need - and what many others need - is consistent, ongoing support, tailored to the realities we face: instability, social isolation and daily battles just to function."

- Chris, EAGLE member

Welcoming community spaces

Many people who genuinely need health, disability or social services can find them impossible to access. Some struggle to meet complex eligibility criteria, others lack identity documents, and others have built up distrust from past experiences of trauma and exclusion.

Engagement hubs – where no questions are asked and no assessments are required – are essential for bridging the gap. People have a place to go to get nutritious meals, essentials like haircuts and showers, and opportunities to connect through art, music and recreation. Social workers can use those spaces to help people rebuild trust, access services they need, and re-engage with the community.

But many engagement hubs are being defunded in the push towards self-managed and individualised services – which has further marginalised many people who need community connection.

The change we seek

- PP Recognise the value of engagement hubs and other centre-based services that combat isolation and keep people connected to their communities
- PP Provide appropriate national, state and local mechanisms to fund these services
- SP Partner with engagement hub providers to connect people to services they need

Older people and homelessness

We expect our communities to support us as we age. But the shocking increase in older Australians seeking help from homelessness services – up nearly 70% in 10 years² – shows that our governments are failing people who have already endured a lifetime of adversity.

People without a fixed address are being locked out of the aged care system. People who need extra case management are facing higher costs under the Support at Home packages. Meanwhile, community services that provide free meals and essentials are being defunded in the move towards self-managed aged care and disability supports.

Every one of us deserves to age with dignity, choice and community support, regardless of wealth or social status.

² Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. (2025). Specialist homelessness services annual report 2023–24.

The change we seek

- PP Ensure changes to the Aged Care Act do not leave people worse off or without care, especially those not registered with My Aged Care
- PP Ensure community and aged care services can support people with premature ageing and complex needs
- CA Recognise the strength, resilience and contributions of older people who have endured adversity and homelessness

Intersectionality

We want a society where everyone has a fair chance to build a good life for themselves

But fairness doesn't come from treating everyone the same. It comes from recognising that people start from different places – and some face barriers that others never have to think about.

Intersectionality explores how people's lives are shaped by overlapping or intersecting factors – like gender, culture, health, disability, wealth, dispossession, migration or trauma. These factors create unique strengths but can also cause disadvantage to stack up – which is why people from First Nations, Rainbow communities and other minority groups can face higher barriers to housing, healthcare and employment.

Recognising intersectionality helps us pay attention to who is most affected, whose needs are unmet, and whose voices are least heard. It means we can design services that work for those facing the greatest barriers, not just those with the simplest needs.

The change we seek

- PP Ensure housing and homelessness policies, programs and funding streams respond to intersectionality
- SP Fund specialist services and ensure mainstream services have the training and resources to work effectively with different groups



Sacred Heart Mission's staff, volunteers, participants and families joined forces to march at Midsumma Pride - celebrating the joy, diversity and strength in Rainbow communities.

- SP Work towards genuinely welcoming, inclusive and culturally safe services
- SP Build partnerships and connections between services to give people clear pathways to the support they need

Where we act collectively

For some issues, it's best to act collectively with our sector. We will agree on policy priorities, join sector-wide campaigns, and bring our experience to the table.

More social housing

Australia can never end homelessness without providing homes that people can safely live in.

Constant price hikes have left a growing number of Australians unable to afford rent, and even community housing has become unaffordable for people on government payments. Meanwhile, public housing – once a safety net – is being stripped away, leaving people without a home for years at a time.

A growing number of Australians are couch-surfing, living in unsafe shared properties, or sleeping rough. Families and older women are now among them.

It's time for fairer housing policy. Australia needs far more social housing, with costs kept low and options to suit different needs. Public housing remains a necessity and must continue.

The change we seek

- PP Prioritise social housing, including repurposing vacant properties
- PP Ensure community housing is genuinely affordable for people on the lowest incomes
- PP Ensure public housing redevelopments do not put further strain on social housing

- PP Ensure all social housing is safe and appropriate, especially for women and families
- PP Ensure the community housing sector is sustainably funded
- CA Understand the critical need for more and safer social housing

“The system needs to change’ – no! Systems can’t change, people change, and their views drive change.”

- Luke, EAGLE member

Family violence and housing

No one should have to make the choice between homelessness and a violent home. But housing and crisis response services are failing women and children who experience violence.

Crisis accommodation is far too scarce, and people may be discharged back into homelessness once maximum stay limits have been reached. Wait times for long-term housing may be 18 months or more, and child-safe housing is even harder to secure.

Family violence is a problem that needs to be addressed at many levels. But people trying to escape it cannot wait. The solution is rapid access to a safe refuge, then timely transition to stable and child-friendly housing, alongside support to heal and rebuild.

The change we seek

- PP Make safe and child-friendly housing a system-wide priority, with no gaps that leave women and children at risk of homelessness
- PP Fund wraparound support that gives women and children the time and space to rebuild their lives
- PP Fund prevention and early intervention programs that support at-risk families
- SP Ensure people can access timely support without having to continually recount their experiences of trauma
- SP Apply a gender equity lens to family violence responses

Mental health and homelessness

Good mental health care can help someone break a cycle of homelessness or prevent it occurring in the first place.

Public mental health services are hard to access if you don't have a fixed address, identity documents or the ability to attend external appointments without support. And a growing cohort of people with psychosocial disabilities are being excluded from NDIS-funded support.³

There are proven ways to help people bridge the gap between no care and mainstream care – from street outreach teams and early intervention psychosocial support to engagement hubs that connect people with services they need. Unless these services are funded and expanded, mental health care will be denied to those who most urgently need it.

³ Australian Psychosocial Alliance (2025). Access Denied: Psychosocial Disability and the NDIS.

The change we seek

- PP Respond to mental health issues with accessible services rather than punitive measures
- PP Provide ongoing mental health support for people who have been housed
- SP Co-locate services to enable easy access for participants
- SP Strengthen support for people with undiagnosed conditions and dual diagnoses

Community sector sustainability

At a time when trust in governments and institutions is at all-time low, 86% of Australians still trust the charity sector to help those affected most by disasters, health issues, poverty and disadvantage.⁴ But right now, charities are being made to do far more with much less.

The community sector keeps being told to be more efficient – while also being expected to meet high standards of care and absorb the rising costs of running effective organisations. It's no wonder that technology is antiquated or that great people struggle to keep working in the sector.

It's time to fairly fund the community sector and plan its future – just as we do with industries like construction or energy.

⁴Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission. (2017). Public trust and confidence in Australian charities report 2017.

The change we seek

- PP Adopt and properly fund the recommendations of the Not-for-Profit Sector Blueprint (2024)⁵
- PP Fairly fund community services to cope with rising costs and retain skilled staff with indexation built into all contracts
- SP Provide services and resources to help support workers stay safe and cope with difficult and traumatic situations

⁵Blueprint Expert Reference Group. (2024, November 27). Not-for-profit sector development blueprint. Department of Social Services.

Social inclusion

A caring community welcomes people for who they are, and rallies around them when they need support.

But too many people get judgement and stigma instead – because of where they came from, how they look, who they love, or how much money they have. People in need of a home experience this on a daily basis. Being made to feel unwelcome reduces their ability to seek help and build the connections they need to make life better.

We can make better choices for our communities, and practise inclusion in our own lives and workplaces.

The change we seek

- CA Greater empathy and understanding for people experiencing homelessness
- CA Practising inclusion in our own lives and workplaces
- CA Saying yes to policies that support inclusion and belonging; and saying no when people try to stoke fear and prejudice to serve their own ends

Where we amplify other voices

On these issues, we will give the microphone to those with greater expertise. We will amplify their messages as opportunities arise and bring their recommendations into our practice.

Safe housing for First Nations peoples

The First Peoples of this land have the right to safe, secure and culturally appropriate homes.

First Nations people have been denied this right for far too long. Almost one in five Aboriginal people in Victoria have sought assistance from a homelessness service. Too many have experienced the homelessness system “as a series of closed doors and waiting rooms”.⁶

The solutions are clear, and they are outlined in the Victorian Aboriginal Housing and Homelessness Framework, *Mana-na woorrn-tyeen maar-takoort* (Every Aboriginal Person Has a Home). Victoria needs housing that is built and owned by Aboriginal people and communities, culturally safe housing and support services for First Nations peoples, wraparound and crisis interventions, and real pathways to stable housing and home ownership.

⁶Aboriginal Housing Victoria (2020). *Mana-na woorrn-tyeen maar-takoort* (Every Aboriginal Person has a Home). The Victorian Aboriginal Housing and Homelessness Framework. www.vahhf.org.au

The change we seek

- SP Support self-determination and ensure cultural safety for First Nations participants
- SP Form respectful and equitable partnerships with Aboriginal housing providers
- SP Increase accountability for First Nations housing and homelessness outcomes

Fairer social security

Social security is supposed to help us get back on our feet after a crisis. But the system is currently acting to keep people trapped in poverty.

The Jobseeker payment – meant to help unemployed people make ends meet – is less than half the minimum wage. This is entirely too low to cover groceries and rent, even the reduced rents charged by community housing providers. Payments are cut in half as soon as someone starts to earn the equivalent of a week's grocery bill in a fortnight. No one in the system has a fair chance to lift their head above the poverty line anymore.

Yet studies now show that it's more expensive to keep people trapped in poverty than it would be to increase social security payments.⁵

The solution is a system with support at its heart, not punishment.

⁵ [Is it cheaper to end poverty than to maintain it? Research says yes - ABC News](#)

The change we seek

- PP Ensure Jobseeker payments are equal to the aged care pension
- PP Make the disability support pension accessible to people with significant barriers to employment

Climate extremes and poverty

As weather-related events worsen, the people most impacted will have the least opportunity to cope.

Floods and fires have forced many Victorians into homelessness. Extreme heat waves and cold snaps can be harmful or fatal for people sleeping rough, and so can untreated respiratory infections from pollen and bushfire smoke.

Reducing energy consumption is good for our wallets as well as the environment. But home insulation and energy-saving appliances are out of reach for people in social housing – leaving them with energy bills they cannot afford.

The change we seek

- PP Insulation and energy-efficient improvements for social and public housing
- SP Targeted outreach to ensure the safety of people most at risk in extreme weather
- SP Improved facilities to accommodate weather extremes

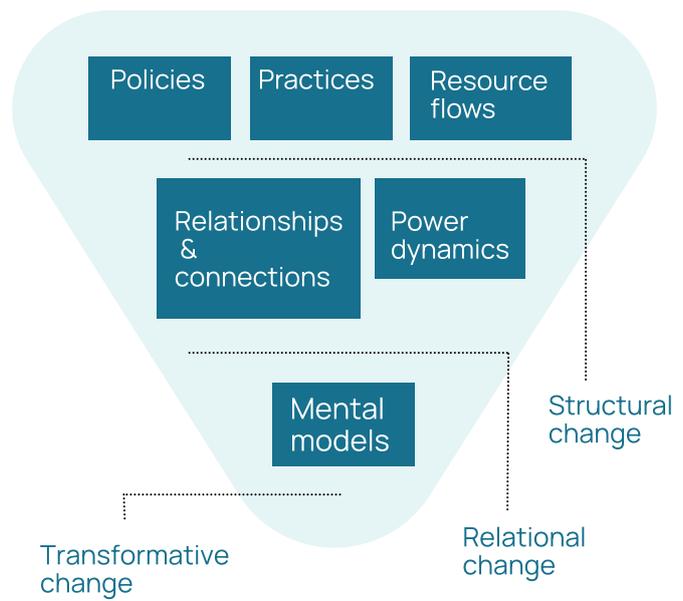
OUR ADVOCACY ROADMAP

This roadmap outlines the key steps we will take to achieve change.

Each step is mapped to one of six conditions that influence change within complex adaptive systems such as health or social services.⁷ These begin with the mental models (or attitudes) that underpin the system; move up into the relationships and power dynamics that influence decision making; and ultimately the policies, practices and resource flows where change becomes explicit.

The steps include actions that build our advocacy capability and extend our influence.

⁷Kania, J., Kramer, M., & Senge, P. (2018, May 15). The Water of Systems Change. FSG. https://www.fsg.org/resource/water_of_systems_change/



What will we do?

Mental models



Equip our people

Actions

- Bring key people together from across Sacred Heart Mission to identify, plan and resource advocacy opportunities.
- Craft compelling and repeatable messages and use powerful human stories to bring them to life.
- Provide media and communications training to help key spokespeople hone their messaging skills.
- Support our people to have conversations that mobilise their families, friends and networks



Engage our community

Actions

- Hold an annual advocacy forum to help our supporters understand and act on key issues.
- Develop a content strategy to share our insights and advocacy positions through our website, email, direct mail and social media channels.
- Explore strategic media engagement to strengthen our advocacy asks and inform community attitudes.
- Connect advocacy and fundraising asks, with a key focus on major donors, bequests and philanthropic foundations.
- Explore simple and engaging ways for op shops to support key advocacy initiatives.
- Engage staff, volunteers and supporters in significant community-led events such as Pride March, NAIDOC Week, Refugee Week and the Walk Against Family Violence.
- Work with schools involved in the Social Justice Hub to engage students in key advocacy issues.

Relationships and power dynamics



Build and strengthen relationships

Actions

- Build relationships with Victorian and Federal MPs with responsibility for housing, homelessness and community services, as well as those with electorates in target areas.
- Deepen engagement with relevant Victorian and Federal government departments, to identify opportunities to influence policy and planning.
- Build relationships with local councillors in the City of Port Phillip and other LGAs of relevance.
- Connect at multiple levels (e.g. CEO, leadership, service design, communications) with key organisations and peak bodies in the Victorian community sector.



Bring lived experience into decision making

Actions

- Support EAGLE members and other participants to use their lived and living experience to influence sector practice and policy change.
- Create opportunities for EAGLE and other lived experience experts to influence decision makers in government and the community sector.
- Use ethical storytelling methods to empower participants and staff to share their stories.
- Embed lived experience voice within all advocacy activities, from events to position papers.

Policies, practices and resource flows



Act collectively

Actions

- Collaborate with services that have a direct impact on our participants – including family violence, mental health, alcohol and other drugs, and legal services.
- Seek opportunities for joint policy submissions and advocacy in budget and election cycles.
- Actively contribute to sector-wide campaigns for fairer housing, family violence responses, improved mental health care, and sector sustainability.
- Amplify the voices of Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations on cultural safety and self-determination.



Offer real solutions

Actions

- Work with SHM services and sector partners to identify and agree on practical solutions to issues we raise.
- Collect evidence – from service reviews, evaluations data collection and sector partners – to demonstrate the impact of these solutions.
- Build research partnerships that demonstrate the rigour and value of our solutions.
- Use economic evaluations to show how investment in our solutions achieves tangible budget and community safety outcomes.



Our lived experience is our professional expertise, and it must be valued as such.

For our participation to be truly meaningful, it requires a fundamental shift in culture.

First, we need to move from consultation to co-creation.

Don't bring us in to validate a program that's already been designed. Bring us in at the start, when the first ideas are being discussed.

We are not just service recipients; we are innovators with first-hand knowledge of what works and what doesn't.

- Lee, EAGLE member

Speech delivered at Sacred Heart Mission's inaugural Advocacy Forum, August 2025



LET'S TALK.

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