



FEDERAL ELECTION PRIORITIES 2022

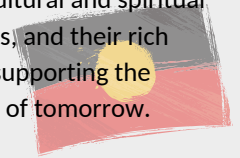
Valuing Children Initiative





ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

The Valuing Children Initiative acknowledges and gives respect to all Traditional Custodians across this vast nation, their Elders past and present. We honour Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' unique cultural and spiritual relationships to the land, water and seas, and their rich contribution to society. We commit to supporting the children of today who will be the Elders of tomorrow.



FOCUS ON KIDS

It's fair to say, these are troubling times. In recent months and years Australians have seen catastrophic fires and flooding, navigated our way through a global pandemic and shone a light on deeply troubling social issues including domestic violence, racism, and the treatment of women. We hold our collective breath as tensions between Australia and China worsen and as the war between Russia and Ukraine unfolds. These things occur in the context of accelerating climate change and add layers of complexity to longstanding issues of inequality in Australia like poverty and housing affordability.

Imagine what it's like to be a child in 2022. In an increasingly complex world, the importance of good government and government policy is clear. As we head into the 2022 election cycle, we are provided with an opportunity to pause and reflect. How are we travelling as a nation? What are our collective values? What is the legacy we will leave for our children and grandchildren?

All children deserve a safe, healthy, and happy childhood but this is not the reality for many Australian children. Children have no choice about the circumstances of their birth, or their childhood, and we know that childhood experiences shape adulthood. Therefore, it's important that we take collective responsibility for the wellbeing of all children.

The outcome of the upcoming election will impact all of us but none more so than children. The Valuing Children Initiative calls for children to be the focus of national attention and at the heart of public policy.

Australian children urgently need the Federal Government to prioritise them. Far too many children are falling through the cracks and this must change. What happens in childhood — good or bad — matters for life.

We are calling on all parties in this Federal Election to commit to children by supporting and actioning the following recommendations.

CHILDREN'S NEEDS AND VIEWS ARE REPRESENTED AND PRIORITISED BY GOVERNMENT

Children aged 0-14 make up 18.7 per cent of the Australian population and government policies and decisions have a direct impact on them, but the views, interests and needs of children and young people are inadequately represented in parliament. As citizens who cannot vote children rely on adults to advocate for them. This should include strong advocacy by the Federal Government.

Australia is a signatory to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC)[1], which means we have made a clear commitment to children. However, we do not have a dedicated Minister for Children's Interests.* Ministerial portfolios and the relative seniority of ministers reflect government priorities. The Australian Government's website states: '*At Prime Minister & Cabinet, ministers oversee areas that are important to the Prime Minister*'. Children's interests are conspicuously absent from Cabinet.

Additionally, there is no requirement, or clear process, for the Federal Government to consider how policy and legislation impact children.

This could be achieved via the introduction of a Child Impact Assessment (CIA) tool which would assist government to identify, analyse and assess the impacts of any proposed law or policy on the rights and wellbeing of children and young people. It's worth noting we do this in other areas. Much like environmental, social, and fiscal impact assessments, CIA's provide a step-by-step process for policymakers to systematically consider the effects of a proposed policy on children and incorporate the results into their decision-making.

CIA's can be used to help ensure Australia is meeting its obligations to children in accordance with the UNCRC. There are many countries already using CIA's in one form or another (Scotland, New Zealand, Sweden, Wales, Canada, Belgium, Austria, Finland) including to assist governments in these countries to ensure they are meeting UNCRC obligations.



TOP PRIORITIES FOR NEXT AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENT

- **Appoint a Minister for Children's Interests (Cabinet position)[2]**
- **Develop and implement a standardised and mandatory Child Impact Assessment process that is supported in legislation[3]**

*At the Federal level currently, there is an Assistant Minister for Children and Families, however this is not a Cabinet position and the scope of this portfolio doesn't adequately represent the interests of all children.

[1] [The UN Children's Convention and Australia \(1991\)](#) | Australian Human Rights Commission

[2] [Valuing Children Initiative Minister for Children's Interests](#)

[3] [Valuing Children Initiative Child Impact Assessments](#)



A REASONABLE STANDARD OF LIVING FOR ALL AUSTRALIAN CHILDREN AND THEIR FAMILIES

In Australia, there are 774,000 children living in poverty. One in every two children living in the most disadvantaged areas of Australia are developmentally vulnerable in at least two domains. This is unacceptable. Australia is a wealthy country with the capacity to ensure all children are given the supports and opportunities they need to reach their full potential. Every child is valuable and deserves the best start to life^[4].

To grow up healthy, happy, and strong we need to ensure that all children are provided with a reasonable standard of living.

This means that all children in Australia (and their families) should have access to life's basic necessities - food, housing, clothing, education, readily accessible healthcare and community support services.

Children should not have to experience hardship because the adults in their lives cannot afford to buy food, are unable to find affordable housing or they can't access employment. Supporting families to have enough money for life's necessities supports children to get a fair start^[5].

TOP PRIORITIES FOR NEXT AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENT

- Urgently and permanently raise the rate of income support payments to above the poverty line by lifting JobSeeker, Youth Allowance and related payments to at least \$70 a day^[6]
- Build more social and affordable housing (25,000 homes per year) and develop a National Housing Strategy^[7]

^[4] *Behind the Line: Poverty and Disadvantage in Australia 2022*. BCEC

^[5] *COVID, Inequality and Poverty in 2020 & 2021*. ACOSS & UNSW

^[6] *Raise the Rate campaign*

^[7] *Everybody's Home campaign*

ASPIRATIONAL TARGETS FOR ALL CHILDREN

We want Australia to be the best place to be a child and the best place to raise a child but right now we are a long way from achieving this. In fact, a 2020 report from UNICEF[8] shows that compared to other OECD countries, Australia ranks in the bottom 20 per cent for child wellbeing outcomes.

At a macro level there is a lack of vision for Australian children. We don't have aspirational goals for our children or consistent ways to measure progress. We need a whole of government commitment to do better for the children of today and for future generations.

TOP PRIORITIES FOR NEXT AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENT

- Following widespread stakeholder engagement (including with children and young people) develop clear and measurable child wellbeing targets. Progress towards identified targets should then be reported on annually[9]
- Develop and implement a whole of government Child and Youth Wellbeing Strategy and budget[10]

[8] [UNICEF Worlds of Influence: Understanding What Shapes Child Well-being in Rich Countries](#)

[9] [Measuring What Matters for Child Well-being and Policies | OECD](#)

[10] [Towards a National Child Wellbeing Strategy | Australian Human Rights Commission](#)



ACTION ON CLIMATE CHANGE

It is children and future generations who will face the full consequences of a heating climate and young people have made it very clear that they are extremely concerned about climate change.[11] To ensure a viable future for children we need urgent action from the Australian government to rapidly transform our economy and energy systems to be less dependent on fossil fuels.

However, despite public support for a net zero target, there is currently no national plan for transitioning to renewable energy. The Climate Change Performance Index (CCPI)[12] ranks 63 countries and the European Union on greenhouse gas emissions, renewable energy, energy use and climate policy. The CCPI releases its results every year and in 2021 Australia received a “very low” rating across the board slipping to 59th position overall. Australia ranked *last* on climate policy, the only country to receive no score in that category.[13]

Australia is a wealthy nation with extensive renewable energy resources that should be used to benefit all Australians; it has both the opportunity and the responsibility to become a world leader in addressing the climate crisis. We need a well-funded, comprehensive, and research-based emissions reduction plan, with binding annual targets and national emissions limits including reporting for all sectors with significant greenhouse emissions.

TOP PRIORITIES FOR NEXT AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENT

- **Net zero or net negative Australian greenhouse gas emissions by 2035 or sooner**[14]
- **Urgently phase out fossil fuels for export and domestic use and remove all subsidies to the fossil fuel industry**[15]

[11] *School strike for climate: why are students still striking?* - The University of Sydney

[12] *Climate Change Performance Index*

[13] *Australia scores zero on climate policy* ABC News

[14] *Half baked: net zero announcement missing rapid emission cuts* | Climate Council

[15] *Fossil fuel production must be phased out in 12 years* | Climate Council





Valuing Children

— INITIATIVE —

Every Child is Valuable campaign

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