

CATHOLIC SOCIAL SERVICE LEADERS GATHER IN MELBOURNE TO STRENGTHEN NATIONAL COMMUNITY AND SHARED MISSION

26 July 2026

Last week, Catholic social service providers from across southeast New South Wales, Canberra, and Victoria came together in Melbourne for a two-day gathering hosted by CatholicCare Victoria CEO Agnes Sheehan. This meeting developed organically from ongoing conversations among members of the Catholic Social Services Australia (CSSA) network, reflecting a shared commitment to collaboration, mutual learning, and strengthening connections across the sector.

CSSA CEO Dr Jerry Nockles reflected on the significance of this peer-level leadership exchange:

"Across Australia, Catholic social service providers represent centres of excellence, delivering high-quality, compassionate care to vulnerable communities. This gathering provided a valuable opportunity to meet shared challenges together, learn from each other's experiences, and strengthen our collective impact. Disadvantage and need don't recognise state borders, and this spirit of mutual learning enriches our capacity to serve with justice and compassion."

Agnes Sheehan, as host and a prominent voice in the sector, reflected on the gathering's impact:

"This gathering was a powerful reminder of the strength that comes from working together across our national Catholic social services network. By sharing practical insights on integrated service models, workforce sustainability, funding reform and advocacy, we deepened our collective understanding of the challenges facing our communities and the opportunities before us. Most importantly, we reaffirmed our shared mission to walk alongside people experiencing vulnerability, and to advocate with courage, compassion and unity for a fairer and more inclusive Australia."

Other participating leaders also shared their perspectives:

Annemaree Binger, CEO of Centacare Southwest New South Wales, noted:

"The incredible services we all provide, along with the opportunity to work together for the betterment of our communities, is something truly important."

Anne Kirwan, CEO of Marymead CatholicCare Canberra & Goulburn, said:

"The visit was a fantastic opportunity to meet with sister organisations and learn from each other. Such generous support enables us to be better positioned to respond to need within our communities."

Michael Austin, CEO of CatholicCare Diocese of Wollongong, added:

"This visit provided a powerful reminder of the value of shared wisdom, practical insights and collegiality across our national network at a time when our sector faces significant challenges. I am very appreciative to Agnes and her team for their warm hospitality and for creating this opportunity for us to connect and strengthen our collective impact."

The gathering included in-depth discussions on integrated service models, workforce development, funding reform, and strategic national advocacy. These conversations strengthen the national network of Catholic social service providers and prepare them to collectively respond to emerging challenges.

Dr Nockles also noted the timing of the event as particularly important:

"As we prepare for critical state elections in Victoria and New South Wales, this gathering was invaluable. As a strictly non-partisan peak body, CSSA and its members will be an important voice in these elections, where the dynamic of the Australian body politic is in a significant state of flux and disruption. Our commitment remains to advocate for policies that uphold human dignity and the common good, regardless of political shifts."

CSSA continues to support its members across all States and Territories, advocating at Federal, State, and Territory levels to ensure Catholic social services remain a vital and unified force for a just, inclusive, and compassionate 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.

About CatholicCare Victoria

CatholicCare Victoria are committed to empowering communities and building strength and resilience, to enable everyone to reach their full potential and live life to the full. They deliver a range of child, family and youth services, family relationship services, school counselling and pastoral care services, social housing, homelessness services, employment and advocacy services across Victoria.

About Centacare Southwest NSW

Centacare Southwest NSW social service agency supports individuals, families and communities across the wider NSW Riverina and Murray regions and is committed to the wellbeing of all.

About CatholicCare Diocese of Wollongong

For more than 45 years, CatholicCare Diocese of Wollongong have walked alongside people through life's challenges and opportunities, offering care, connection and practical support when it matters most across the Illawarra, Shoalhaven, Southern Highlands and Macarthur.

About Marymead CatholicCare Canberra & Goulburn

Marymead CatholicCare Canberra & Goulburn, a well-respected, not-for-profit organisation servicing the ACT and southern and western regional areas of NSW, has been delivering a range of high quality, individual and family support services (children, young people and their families) for over 60 years.

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