

# UnitingCare Australia

*The Uniting Church in Australia proudly shares the tradition of the Christian Church. It traces its origins to the call by the God of Abraham and Sarah, honours the Hebrew Scriptures and bases its confessions in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ as recorded in the documents of the New Testament. The church exists to share the Good News of Jesus Christ.*

*The Uniting Church believes that God's action in Christ is the declaration of a new creation and involves the transformation of humanity, within a restored natural world.*

*The Church seeks to make known the meaning and claim of this decisive action of God, and challenges us to be a fellowship of reconciliation.*

*In the Gospels and through the work and teachings of Jesus Christ, the foundations are laid for the Church's understanding of its mission in community services. Jesus' ministry challenged people to give more serious attention to the nature of service to one another.*

*We witness God's love extended to all people, with no discrimination on the grounds of age, gender, sexuality, ability, class, colour, creed or cultural origin.*

*Engaging the church with the world through community services provides us with opportunity to live out the Christian vision. The Christian vision is inclusive, all encompassing, and looks for the equality of opportunity for individuals, communities and peoples.*

*UnitingCare Australia, Faith Foundations*

## SUMMARY

UnitingCare Australia's mission is to express God's love for all people through the Uniting Church's commitment to supporting individuals, families and communities through advocacy and the enhancement of community service provision.

Key achievements over the past three years that have delivered outcomes against the agency mandate have included:

- the further development of strategic government relations at the federal level to enhance the effectiveness of advocacy work and thus contribute to social policy and major initiatives in support of the most vulnerable Australians, including in response to the Global Financial Crisis;
- effective advocacy in a wide range of specific areas, such as helping to drive the shift in mental health away from reinstitutionalisation to community care in government thinking and action;
- greatly increased collaboration (within the Uniting Church via the merger of UnitingCare Australia with the Uniting Missions Network; ecumenically with other Major Church Providers; and with community service peak bodies) to increase our national impact; and
- strengthening of our communication with the UnitingCare network via working groups,

networks, our live website [www.unitingcare.org.au](http://www.unitingcare.org.au) and weekly e-news.

Future strategic directions for UnitingCare Australia will be shaped by the external environment in which the agency operates. The strategic focus of UnitingCare Australia will continue to reflect its mission and mandate, its identity as a national agency of the Uniting Church, the expertise of UnitingCare service providers, and the lived experience of our service users.

In this period of Australian history, with economic challenges threatening to embed long-term social and economic disadvantage amongst the most vulnerable in our society, there is an opportunity for the Uniting Church, through UnitingCare Australia, to bring our story of hope and transformation to bear on social policy and practice, and so to shape our shared lives together.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Agency parameters

UnitingCare Australia is an Assembly agency, operating under a mandate approved by the Assembly Standing Committee (ASC) in July 2008 ([Appendix A](#)). UnitingCare Australia's original mandate was first approved by the ASC in September 1993; amended and approved by the Ninth Assembly in Perth in 2000; and renewed again in March 2005 to ensure good governance embedded in the vision and values of the Uniting Church.

The July 2008 changes to the mandate and governance arrangements reflect the merger of UnitingCare Australia with the Uniting Missions Network (UMN) to carry out the national work of the Uniting Church's agencies and missions engaged in community services. Bringing the national functions together in one body builds on the already significant achievements of the two entities, their shared vision and purpose, and the strength of their structures. It is also a strong and public statement of our shared identity in the Uniting Church and our genuine commitment to working together for the common good. Before the merger, UnitingCare had a focus on government relations, social policy and advocacy, while the UMN focused on organisational, business, service and program development. The merged entity's national functions are now:

- influencing social policy and engaging in advocacy;
- developing and maintaining Government and other stakeholder relations;
- developing the Church's network of, and capacity to deliver, community services; and
- strengthening relationships across the life of the church.

UnitingCare Australia has a National Committee of fourteen people. The agency has 6 full time staff and is located in

Canberra, in close proximity to Parliament House.

Peter Bicknell has chaired the UnitingCare Australia National Committee since the Eleventh Assembly. The National Director of UnitingCare Australia is Lin Hatfield Dodds.

UnitingCare Australia is guided in its work by twelve commitments articulated in the agency's *Faith Foundations* document (<http://www.unitingcare.org.au/about-us/our-faith-foundations.html>). The commitments are grouped into three categories:

1. *Foundational concerns*, including responsibilities to contribute to the common good; to hold up in the public domain a vision of a united Australia; to work towards a just, participatory and sustainable society; and to celebrate one humanity, living out our hope for one world under God.
2. *Defining characteristics*, including working within a human rights framework, a concern for the nurture and restoration of the natural world, affirmation of pluralism, and a commitment to work towards the restoration of broken relationships.
3. *Specific roles*, including advocacy, offering a prophetic voice, and engendering a culture of shared responsibility in Australia.

Strategic activity called for by the Assembly's mandate falls into four broadly defined areas:

- Theological reflection
- Advocacy
- Policy analysis and development; and
- Communication and collaboration.

## 1.2 Agency goals and objectives

UnitingCare Australia's mission is to express God's love for all people through the Uniting Church's commitment to supporting individuals, families and communities through advocacy and the enhancement of community service provision.

The agency's mandate is to take up community service issues within the theological framework of the Uniting Church, particularly the Church's social justice perspectives; to develop and reflect on the policies and practices of the Uniting Church in community services; and to pursue appropriate issues within the Uniting Church, with Government and the community sector, with the Australian community and with other parts of the church.

Over the past triennium, UnitingCare Australia has been guided by its Strategic Directions 2006-2009 (<http://www.unitingcare.org.au/about-us/our-strategic-decision.html>):

1. *Speaking out, empowering those disadvantaged and vulnerable* - advocating for policies and practices that build opportunities for all people to live

hope-filled lives in an environment that promotes wellbeing by

- using our mission, size, scope and diversity
- working in partnership with other bodies and as participants in a national campaign

2. *Developing sustainable policies and positions* -drawing on the knowledge and experience of the UnitingCare network and its communities to develop policies and positions in order to:
  - speak out
  - contribute to the development of innovative responses, and
  - affirm existing effective programs
3. *Building the capacity of UnitingCare Australia*

## 1.3 Agency identity and approach

The agency's approach to advocacy is to bring together theology (the values on which we stand), with a story of a good society (our vision), in a way that can be heard and makes a difference. This work is grounded in the daily experience of the 400 agencies that make up the UnitingCare network. It is the coming together of these three strands of values, vision and experience that gives strength and integrity to our activity.

Together with other agencies of the church, UnitingCare Australia works to promote a just and participatory society, a united humanity, respect for all, and investment in the common good, in relation to policy and practice associated with the provision of community services. Our task is to make explicit the connections between faith, social policy, and outcomes on the ground for people; to government, to the church, and into the public domain.

UnitingCare, as the network of community services and activities within the Uniting Church, gives concrete expression to God's love for the world, and to a church that cares and works together for justice. The UnitingCare network enables cooperation and support across agencies, institutions and missions, and Synods. It represents a nurturing, healing and caring church, integrated, open to diversity, and committed to collaboration and creative change.

UnitingCare Australia is a powerful vehicle for a unified public voice, and plays a significant role in promoting the Uniting Church's social justice perspectives to government and the wider community; developing social policy; gathering and disseminating information; facilitating research; networking with other church and community bodies; and liaising with and lobbying government.

We have continued to work on articulating UnitingCare's particular and distinctive value

add to Australian communities as a faith based service provider, including unpacking why and how we do our work.

UnitingCare Australia operates with a number of national networks (Aged Care; Children, Youth and Family; Energy Efficiency and Climate Change) and time-limited working groups (currently Mental Health Advocacy; Affordable Housing and Homelessness; Employment Services). Their composition is inclusive: anyone with a relevant interest from the network is welcome as a participant. Advisory Committees (Aged Care; Children, Youth and Family) operated until the 2008 change of mandate and governance arrangements.

#### 1.4 Agency funding

UnitingCare Australia is primarily funded by contributions from the UnitingCare network, from the agencies and missions and Synods who are involved in the Uniting Church's provision of community services across Australia. This is supplemented occasionally by small grants.

## 2. REPORTS AGAINST UNITINGCARE AUSTRALIA MANDATE

This report uses the four core areas of responsibility to group reporting of UnitingCare Australia's activities and strategic outcomes. These core areas are theological reflection, advocacy, policy analysis and development, and communication and collaboration.

#### 2.1 Theological reflection

The value and distinctive contribution of UnitingCare Australia stems from its faith foundations, and the continuing process of theological reflection and discernment that guides the work of the agency and the wider UnitingCare network.

UnitingCare Australia invites theological reflection on its policy and advocacy work, and actively networks with relevant individuals and agencies, including theologians and justice workers within the UnitingCare network, the Synods, the Assembly, and with other churches.

The document *Faith Foundations* has continued to provide a theological basis for the work of UnitingCare Australia. Frequent requests for copies of the *Faith Foundations* document from across the network attest to its usefulness. The theological underpinnings outlined in *Faith Foundations* provide the framework for UnitingCare Australia's policy analysis and development, and advocacy activity.

UnitingCare Australia has actively participated in wider Uniting Church theological initiatives, and has promoted links

for theological reflection with other Uniting Church agencies.

#### 2.2 Advocacy

Using our size, scope and diversity as a national network, we continue to advocate for policies and positions that build opportunity for all people to live hope-filled lives in an environment that promotes wellbeing.<sup>1</sup>

UnitingCare Australia engages in advocacy to three major sets of stakeholders:

- To government, representing the views of UnitingCare community service providers and advocating for better quality of life outcomes for individuals, families and communities;
- Across the Uniting Church and wider Australian community, advocating policies and practices that enhance human dignity; and
- Within the UnitingCare network, seeking the enhancement of the quality of advocacy and community service provision.

UnitingCare Australia has a focus on evidence based advocacy on issues of national social policy. This evidence base has two sources: the experience of UnitingCare agencies and missions across Australia, and research that develops an evidence base for policy analysis and development across identified national priorities.

UnitingCare Australia discerns advocacy needs and opportunities, with a particular focus on issues that are unlikely to be adequately addressed by other national bodies and coalitions. A key role for us is to find our distinctive Uniting Church voice, to determine what it is that we bring that is different, that adds value, to the public domain.<sup>2</sup>

##### 2.2.1 Advocacy to government

UnitingCare Australia aims to produce sound, well researched and powerful policy and position statements, and to proactively use these to influence political, policy and legislative agendas. The agency gives priority to establishing and maintaining relationships with key government stakeholders, including politicians, political advisors and government officials. Regular meetings have been held over the past three years with Ministers and Shadow Ministers and their advisors, other politicians, and senior departmental officers on a range of issues.

Highlights over the last three years include:

- submissions to inquiries and reviews in a wide range of areas, including on fair

<sup>1</sup> Assembly Key Directions a(ii), b(vi), b(vii) and b(ix)

<sup>2</sup> Assembly Key Directions d(ii)

- pay, disability, housing, employment services, charity tax, job capacity assessments, bank and credit charges, disclosure regimes for charities and not-for-profits, climate change impacts and carbon pollution reduction, mental health and disability employment, child protection, the Northern Territory intervention, pensions, early childhood education and care, residential and community aged care, and tax;
- working with experts across the UnitingCare network to facilitate their advocacy on issues of critical importance to their agencies, including advocacy on energy poverty and impacts of gambling;
  - the influence of UnitingCare's mental health national working group in driving the shift away from reinstitutionalisation to community care in government thinking and action;
  - actively participating in the 2006-08 Australia Fair campaign, which sought to involve all Australians in discussion, learning and action to make their community and the nation fair and to ensure that governments commit to acting to help those Australians left behind by economic growth; and in National Anti-Poverty Week;
  - a wide range of parliamentary activities to influence national politics and policy during the 2007 election year, including an aged care forum (enabling our network to discuss the sustainability and fragility of the aged care sector with the Minister, Shadow Ministers and senior public servants);
  - developing election resources including position papers designed to resource executive staff and agencies in their advocacy work;
  - contributing to development of the policy reform agenda related to services sustainability, including advocacy regarding development of a Compact with the Community Services sector which culminated in being invited by the Deputy Prime Minister to help develop the Community Response Taskforce role and agenda;
  - meetings with the Prime Minister, Opposition Leader, all relevant Ministers and Shadow Ministers, members of the cross benches, and all relevant Department Secretaries, which helped to deepen our relationships with key players;
  - actively participating in activities related to the Federal Budget (preparation of media kits for the UnitingCare network, media releases and interviews, Budget Fast Facts);
  - advocacy for better, fairer and more effective employment services including both mainstream and disability employment;
  - establishing a program of parliamentary briefing and advocacy activities and

associated lobbying to highlight and address several priority national issues each year. For example, in 2007 and 2008 we convened Parliamentary Forums in which Aged Care CEOs met with the Prime Minister's Office, key Ministers, Shadow Ministers and Departmental officers;

- working in solidarity with Indigenous advocacy groups in response to the Northern Territory Emergency Intervention;
- influencing the National Social Inclusion agenda via engagement with the Australian Social Inclusion Board and the Deputy Prime Minister's Office; and
- being recognised for both the quality of our input and our collaborative approach, and establishing a reputation for being able to connect government policy makers with leading on-ground practitioners.

This advocacy is making a difference.

Since the election of the Rudd Labor Government, UnitingCare Australia has worked closely with Government Ministers and their advisers, often at the request of Ministers, and the cross benches. We have been particularly influential in helping the Government to shape the social service dimensions of economic stimulus measures, focussing on the impacts of the Global Financial Crisis (GFC) on disadvantaged and vulnerable Australians and the social services that support them. The foundation for this activity was a national summit at Parliament House in Canberra in late 2008, at which the Major Church Providers called for a recovery fund from the Federal Government of \$300m a year for three years to ensure that vulnerable Australians are not further disadvantaged by the GFC. Access Economics was commissioned to identify likely impacts in a paper launched on the day – "The impact of the global financial crisis on social services". Several key Government Ministers attended and addressed the Summit. The subsequent early 2009 Government measures such as a \$300m fund to provide one-off grants "to church, charitable, community organisations and local councils" that create jobs, a doubling of the funding for emergency relief (an additional \$81m over three years), the decision to expand social housing (20,000 additional houses), and other stimulus measures were in direct response to this advocacy.

Other results from advocacy include \$500k for UnitingCare out of Minister Elliot's national initiative to reduce social isolation for older people, and reinstatement of Disability Support Pension entitlements when people are seeking employment.

### **2.2.2 Advocating within the church and community those policies and practices which enhance the dignity of people**

UnitingCare Australia's participation in social policy forums and political processes over the last three years has included involvement with other key church and peak industry bodies to discuss and act on aged care reform and ageing more generally, homelessness and housing affordability for low income households, welfare and income support reform, taxation reform, issues related to children's services including child care, disability and promoting the right of all Australians to live a life of dignity free from poverty and exclusion.

The agency has recognised expertise on social policy and practice as it relates to community services. UnitingCare Australia has appeared at parliamentary inquiries, and attended and presented to national conferences, seminars and roundtables, and national strategy meetings with the other churches and community service peaks concerning a wide range of issues. The agency also contributes via its involvement in forums such as the National Aged Care Alliance, which it has sponsored.

UnitingCare Australia encourages its wider networks to utilise UnitingCare policy materials, developed with extensive input from the agencies, to enhance their own advocacy work in their own context, and uses stories from UnitingCare agencies to support the national advocacy and policy work. Policy materials, position papers and other documents are posted onto the UnitingCare Australia website to support this approach.

### **2.2.3 Seeking to enhance the quality of advocacy and community service provision by the Uniting Church**

We continue to build the capacity of UnitingCare Australia and its network by focussing on and strengthening a range of enablers, including: better articulation of our identity; strengthening relationships and a culture of trust and collegiality across the network, wider Uniting Church, and other organisations; improving our communications with and engagement of the network in the national work; and developing a rational and sustainable approach to funding.

UnitingCare Australia has a strong collaborative focus in this domain. Our expertise in networking, promoting deeper engagement with issues, facilitating communication and the exchange of information, results in the creation and nurturing of environments that enable the expertise of UnitingCare service providers to speak into and shape political and public processes.

The integrity of the UnitingCare network and its community services requires continuous

commitment to providing the best possible quality of care and service provision, living out our mission and the love of God for all people.

UnitingCare Australia's work in support of this area of its mandate includes:

- an agreement to form a Community Services Industry Group to advocate for the sustainability of social service provision;
- supporting reflection and research on service provision issues;
- communication of good practice across the network; and leadership in key areas such as services sustainability;
- actively promoting policies and practices which enhance the dignity of people;
- representation and liaison with the Commonwealth Government on specific resourcing, compliance and accreditation issues;
- increasing the capacity of the National Office to advocate directly and to support the wider UnitingCare network to advocate for enhanced social services and better outcomes for people who are disadvantaged and vulnerable; and
- engaging with the Government and other major providers in a regulatory reform agenda to reduce red tape which diverts resources from service delivery.

The merger of UnitingCare Australia and the Uniting Missions Network in 2008 is already strengthening both advocacy and community service provision.

UnitingCare Australia developed a protocol for cross-Synod activity to enable UnitingCare agencies and missions to more effectively meet community need. The Employment Services Network has utilised a joint tendering approach on one occasion and is currently working on another opportunity to jointly tender for a major national service contract. The National Office has also supported information and evidence-sharing across the network, thus supporting agencies to work collaboratively and develop a greater capacity to provide services that are most effective and where they are most needed.

## **2.3 Policy analysis and development**

Effective and proactive advocacy requires a solid knowledge base and understanding of the leading social policy and service delivery practices – and challenges – across Australia and around the world, and established policy positions on identified priority areas (<http://www.unitingcare.org.au/policies-a-publications.html>).

National working groups have been established, across a range of identified national policy and service delivery issues, linked to UnitingCare Australia's strategic

plan and objectives. These working groups enable a much wider participation in national research and policy processes than was previously possible.

UnitingCare Australia draws on the research activity of the wider community sector, the experience of its 400 member agencies, its faith foundations and the theological wisdom of the wider Uniting Church, and the policy expertise of its national office, to analyse current directions and initiatives in social policy and in the development of its own policy positions.

Drawing on the knowledge and experience of the UnitingCare network and its communities, we have continued to develop policies and positions in order to speak out, contribute to the development of innovative responses, and affirm existing effective programs.

The areas focused on in the first year of the triennium were: ageing and aged care; children; disability; mental health and illness; and impacts of the Welfare to Work 2005 legislation. In the second year, the focus on aged care continued, along with the new priority areas of affordable housing and employment services. In the third year, it has focused on issues related to the Government's National Reform Agenda: housing and homelessness; enhanced and co-ordinated early childhood services; improving the child protection system; a better and more sustainable aged care system; climate change impacts, addressing inequities in the tax/transfer system; reforms to income support entitlements; and overall services sustainability. Position statements were developed on affordable housing, social inclusion and valuing aged care (2007), and on climate change impacts (2008).

#### **2.4 Communication and collaboration**

UnitingCare Australia works at the interfaces between government policy, funding, and regulation of service provision; the UnitingCare network; and the wider life of the Uniting Church.

We work cooperatively wherever possible with other UnitingCare and Uniting Church agencies, other church and non-church community service agencies and peak bodies, and related groups. This approach has been facilitated by UnitingCare Australia representing primarily the interests of our service users even as we advocate about services sustainability through attention to industry issues. This approach allows us to focus more effectively on issues of justice and social policy.

The Major Church Providers group (Anglicare Australia, Catholic Social Services Australia, the Salvation Army and UnitingCare Australia), together representing the vast majority of social service provision across Australia, came together in a public

way at the end of 2008 and has developed a clear and prominent identity amongst political leaders and the media. Its advice has been influential in helping to shape the social services aspects of economic stimulus measures. The group meets formally four times a year, with the three Canberra-based participants meeting monthly. These collegiate relationships are strong, supportive and productive.<sup>3</sup>

We continue to enjoy other effective linkages and collaborations with a range of sector bodies including with ACOSS (the Australian Council of Social Services), and ACSA (Aged and Community Services Australia).

The Communications Strategy developed for UnitingCare Australia in the past triennium has been implemented. This strategy has enabled us to more actively share information across the UnitingCare network through our weekly E-News, our live, dynamic website which under our "drive to web" strategy is constantly populated with new materials, regular email updates to the UnitingCare Australia National Committee, UnitingCare CEOs, working groups, and through a number of specific networks of people with interests and expertise.

Highlights in these areas include:

- Working closely with members of the National Committee and CEOs to facilitate information flowing out to the network and back via members;
- Facilitating greater coordination and cooperation across the UnitingCare network through development of clear governance protocols for the national work;
- Continuing the close collaboration and working relationships with other Assembly agencies, reflected in joint projects and policy inputs to government. An example of this is our contribution to the joint UCA submission to the review of the Architecture of Australia's Tax System;

### **3. ACTION ON ELEVENTH ASSEMBLY RESOLUTIONS**

The Eleventh Assembly resolved to request UnitingCare Australia to organise a covenanting summit with the UAICC, with a view to establishing an Indigenous Community Service arm of the UAICC and strengthening the partnership between the UAICC and UnitingCare agencies (Assembly minute 06.19.02).

The Assembly's request was fulfilled in August 2007 through a substantial meeting of General Secretaries, UnitingCare Australia and UnitingCare Agency representatives

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<sup>3</sup> Assembly Key Directions b(ii)

including the National Director of Frontier Services, and the National Executive of Congress. The meeting focused on the strengthening of Congress's work on the ground across Australia and also on the Federal Government's Northern Territory interventions.

Following on from the development of a project proposal to establish coordination resources to develop a national Indigecare network at the August 2007 meeting, in 2008 the General Secretary of the Assembly wrote to Synod General Secretaries and UnitingCare Synod Directors seeking funding commitments to fund a project officer for three years to facilitate communication and build relationships between Uniting Church service providers and service users within Indigenous communities where Congress is present. Insufficient funding could be found to fund the project officer and necessary on costs (primarily travel and a small administrative component). Regrettably to all parties, the project has had to lapse for the time being. UnitingCare Agencies and Missions continue to actively engage in partnership with Congress in support of their ministries to deliver community services to their local communities.

#### 4. FUTURE DIRECTIONS

UnitingCare Australia, like the church generally, faces a number of significant challenges and issues that impact on our agenda and mission priorities and shape how we engage with our key stakeholder communities. A range of social policy issues must be addressed this coming triennium as a matter of priority, including: services sustainability; equity and sufficiency of income support; and working with people and communities experiencing multiple, complex and sometimes multi-generational disadvantage and vulnerabilities. A set of demographic challenges confront us in the effective delivery of social services, including: structural ageing; locational disadvantage; increasing unemployment in the economic downturn; and an increasing gap between people who are managing and people who are marginalised both economically and socially.

In addressing these challenges, UnitingCare Australia will continue to be grounded in:

- the life and mission of the Uniting Church;
- the considerable expertise of our service providers; and
- the lived experience of those who use our services.

UnitingCare Australia aims to lead a strong, united, effective, compassionate and creative national network to influence for better quality of life outcomes for those most disadvantaged and deliver social services that make a difference. We will further embed and strengthen the 2008 coming

together of the Uniting Church's community service agencies with one voice and presence, which will enhance our capacity to influence and interface with government, business and the wider Australian community to ensure that more Australians have the means and opportunity for a decent life. We aim to give the Uniting Church a united voice in advocating for and supporting the most disadvantaged citizens. Because of God's preferential option for the poor, we will advocate with and for, and deliver services first, to those who need them most.

UnitingCare Australia will continue to adopt a strongly ecumenical approach, and will continue and deepen its partnership with other community service bodies who operate with shared values in championing the interests of and working with disadvantaged and vulnerable Australians. In doing so, we will give expression to God's inclusive love.

UnitingCare Australia aims to be one of the key organisations that government is influenced by, and to be seen by key stakeholders (government, media, the community, the UnitingCare network, and Uniting Church members and leaders) as a thought leader and key influencer of public policy and system change. Our network's direct engagement in the national advocacy work is to be deepened, including the introduction of annual CEOs' Forums at Parliament House. We aim to further develop our capacity to engage, empower and activate individuals and communities in our advocacy work, through a "drive to web" approach and other communication strategies.

A clear and agreed national agenda for the organisational development of the UnitingCare network is under development.

It is expected that a transparent and equitable funding base for UnitingCare Australia will be determined, agreed and in place by the beginning of 2010, sufficient to support the national functions of UnitingCare Australia following the 2008 merger with the Uniting Missions Network. This funding base will require the development of additional funding streams.

UnitingCare Australia will continue to play a significant part in our shared story as the Uniting Church hope and works for a nation and world shaped by love, justice and grace.

#### 5. AGENCY CONTACTS AND FURTHER INFORMATION

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*National Director* Lin Hatfield Dodds  
*Director, Services Development* Susan Helyar  
*Director, Organisational Development* Joe Zabar  
*Director, Government Relations* Michael Brown  
*Communication and Policy Support Officer* Hannah Cormick  
*Office Manager and EA to National Director* Nikki Roberts

**Mrs Lin Hatfield Dodds**  
**National Director**

**Mr Peter Bicknell**  
**Chairperson**

## UNITINGCARE AUSTRALIA MANDATE

<b>Agency/Committee</b>	UnitingCare Australia
<b>Responsible To</b>	Assembly
<b>Reporting Arrangements</b>	To Assembly Standing Committee and the Assembly
<b>Mission Statement</b>	UnitingCare Australia's Mission is to express God's love for all people through the Uniting Church's commitment to supporting individuals, families and communities through advocacy and the enhancement of community service provision.
<b>Mandate</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To take up community service issues within the theological framework of the Uniting Church, particularly the Church's social justice perspectives.</li> <li>• To develop and reflect on the policies and practices of the Uniting Church in community services.</li> <li>• To pursue appropriate issues within the Uniting Church, with Government and the community sector, with the Australian community and with other parts of the church</li> </ul>
<b>Guiding principles and values</b>	<p>Jesus' ministry challenges us to give more serious attention to the nature of service to one another. Engaging with the world through community services provides the opportunity to live out a Christian vision which is inclusive, all encompassing and which looks for equality of opportunity for individuals, communities and peoples. UnitingCare Australia will bring to all aspects of its work and ministry the theological framework that God's love is extended to all people, with no discrimination on the grounds of age, gender, sexuality, ability, class colour, creed or cultural origin.</p> <p>UnitingCare Australia will work co-operatively and ecumenically, giving expression to the unity of God's love for the world, and the church as a loving agency.</p> <p>UnitingCare Australia will constantly seek to develop national best practice supporting and giving focus to its work in the areas of policy and practical outcomes.</p>
<b>Key Responsibilities</b>	<p>Therefore, acting within guidelines set by the Assembly or the Assembly Standing Committee, and grounded in the experience of UnitingCare service providers, UnitingCare Australia will:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Encourage theological reflection on the Church's community services work.</li> <li>2. Advocate to Government and within the Church and community those policies and practices which enhance the dignity of people, especially those who are most disadvantaged and marginalised.</li> <li>3. Enable exchange of information across Synods and Uniting Church service providers.</li> <li>4. Seek to enhance the quality of community service provision by the Uniting Church.</li> <li>5. Represent the views of Uniting Church service providers</li> </ol>

to governments.

6. Work as appropriate with other churches and peak organisations in the community services field.
7. Act on requests and referrals from Synods and the Assembly.

The responsibilities include:

1. Focusing the activities of the agency on the vision of the Assembly as a whole.
2. Advising the Assembly and/or the Assembly Standing Committee on policy matters within their areas of responsibility.
3. Making policy decisions where the Assembly or the Assembly Standing Committee has delegated authority, either through UnitingCare Australia's Mandate or by resolution.

**Relation with other agencies**

UnitingCare Australia will maintain regular contact with other Assembly bodies, to ensure coordination of the Church's actions and advocacy in community service matters.

**Power to delegate**

UnitingCare Australia has the power to delegate responsibilities.

**Organisational Structure**

UnitingCare Australia will operate through the National Committee, its Executive, the National Office, and its national working groups and networks as determined by the National Committee and the UnitingCare network.

**National Committee**

The National Committee is the key governance body of UnitingCare Australia and is appointed by the Assembly Standing Committee.

***Role and Responsibilities***

The role and responsibilities of the National Committee as delegated by the Assembly are to:

- develop and ensure the implementation of strategic directions for UnitingCare Australia
- discern and determine key priorities
- give oversight to the work of UnitingCare Australia, including the National Office and national working groups and networks

***Membership***

It comprises up to nine ex-officio members as follows:

- the Chairperson, appointed by the Assembly
- the National Director of UnitingCare Australia
- the Assembly General Secretary or nominee
- the Director of UnitingCare or equivalent in each Synod
- five (5) additional persons appointed by the Assembly Standing Committee with advice provided by a nominating group comprised of the Chair, the National Director and the Assembly General Secretary or their nominee. These persons will be appointed so that the overall skills mix and composition of the Committee reflects the following experience/competencies:
  - strategic thinking across the wide range of the Church's community services;
  - research and evaluation;
  - senior executive management experience;
  - policy development and advocacy;
  - business development; and

		- theological reflection.
		<b><i>Tenure of membership is for the Assembly triennium.</i></b>
<b>Executive</b>	<b><i>Frequency of Meetings</i></b>	The National Committee will meet at least four times each year.
	<b><i>Role</i></b>	The Executive of the National Committee shall be appointed by the National Committee and is empowered to act on its behalf between meetings of the National Committee in respect of any of the responsibilities of the National Committee except such as the National Committee may determine.
	<b><i>Membership</i></b>	The Executive comprises: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• the Chair of the National Committee</li> <li>• the National Director of UnitingCare Australia</li> <li>• the Assembly General Secretary or their nominee</li> <li>• two (2) other members of the National Committee, one of whom shall not be in an ex-officio position</li> </ul>
<b>National Office</b>	<b><i>Role</i></b>	The National Office is the staff team of UnitingCare Australia. Its role is to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• provide strategic leadership in the operations of UnitingCare Australia</li> <li>• to provide a range of executive, administrative and management services to the National Committee</li> <li>• to implement decisions made by the National Committee</li> </ul>
	<b><i>Membership</i></b>	The National Office comprises <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The National Director of UnitingCare Australia, appointed by the Assembly</li> <li>• Such other staff as determined by the National Director to be necessary or appropriate to further the work of UnitingCare Australia</li> </ul>
	<b><i>Accountability</i></b>	The National Director is accountable to the National Committee in respect of the responsibilities delegated to the National Committee by the Assembly and is accountable to the Assembly and General Secretary in all other matters.
<b>Working Groups and Networks</b>		The National Committee may establish or endorse such working groups and networks as required.
	<b><i>Role</i></b>	The role of working groups and networks is to <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• develop, review and reflect upon the policies and practices of the Uniting Church in its community services ministry with people;</li> <li>• contribute to the advocacy of UnitingCare Australia;</li> <li>• assist in the development of national positions within the area of focus of the particular working group or network; and</li> <li>• provide a means at a national level through which the agencies that form the UnitingCare network can network, support, grow and develop their community services work.</li> </ul>
	<b><i>Membership</i></b>	The membership of working groups and networks shall be open to UnitingCare members with relevant expertise.

**Nature of Agency**

Permanent

*Original approved by Community Services Australia November 1992*

*Submitted to and approved by the Assembly Standing Committee September 1993*

*Amended and approved by UnitingCare Australia  
March 2000*

*Approved by Ninth Assembly July 2000*

*Amended and approved by UnitingCare Australia  
February 2005*

*Submitted and approved by the Assembly Standing Committee March 2005*

*Amended and approved by the Assembly Standing Committee July 2008*

*Approved by the UnitingCare Australia National Committee September 2008*