

Analysis of the 2023-24 Federal Budget Measures

Highlights

- The 'Volunteering and Community Connectedness' funding stream which includes funding for various programs including the Volunteer Management Activity and Volunteer Grants continues into the forward estimates.
- A \$14.6 billion cost of living relief package is the centrepiece of the Budget.
- The Government is also providing \$199.8 million over 6 years from 2023–24 to target entrenched community disadvantage, including through “place-based approaches, engaging with philanthropy and promoting social impact investment”.
- The Government has postponed the commencement of the Support at Home Program to 1 July 2025 in response to sector feedback that a longer lead time is needed and will extend grant arrangements for the Commonwealth Home Support Programme for a further 12 months to 30 June 2025.
- ParentsNext is being abolished from 1 July 2024.
- The Government will deliver on an election commitment by providing \$15.2 million to support the establishment of Y Careers, a new agency to support young people “to pursue meaningful careers and help employers to fill skills shortages in priority industries, with a focus on the care economy”.
- The Women’s Budget Statement includes a range of measures to support gender equality and \$590 million to implement the National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children.

The Treasurer’s speech

The centrepiece of the Treasurer’s speech¹ was the \$14.6 billion cost-of-living relief package. The Treasurer also highlighted measures to tackle ‘entrenched disadvantage’ and talked about the power of local knowledge and action:

“I see it in my own community: library programs unlocking the world of learning, sporting clubs building pride, community groups mentoring young people into apprenticeships. Breakthroughs and progress, driven by locals and leaders. Tonight, we back their hard work with a \$200 million plan, which includes: Funding place-based partnerships; Encouraging evidence-based policy, directed at a local level; Investment in projects that are delivering measurable success. A new partnership that will help government and philanthropy to co-ordinate their efforts – Plus, more funding for community organisations so that they can pay their bills, pay their workers – and keep delivering for people in need.”

Volunteering and Community Connectedness

The ‘Volunteering and Community Connectedness’ funding stream contains funding for various programs including the Volunteer Management Activity and Volunteer Grants. Allocated funds For

¹ The Treasurer’s Speech

Volunteering and Community Connectedness are \$100,297,000 (2023-24), \$59,567,000 (2024-25), and \$59,567,000 (2025-26) and 60,085,000 (2026-27)².

Cost of living relief

The main elements of the cost-of-living relief package are:

- \$4.9 billion over 5 years to increase rates of JobSeeker and other working-age and student payments.
- \$3 billion for energy bill relief in partnership with state and territory governments.
- \$2.7 billion to increase the maximum rates of Commonwealth Rent Assistance.
- \$1.9 billion over 5 years to expand eligibility for the Parenting Payment (Single) to single principal carers whose youngest child is under 14.

The Government is providing \$11.3 billion to support a wage increase for many aged care workers.

Entrenched disadvantage

The Government will provide \$199.8 million³ over 6 years from 2023–24 to target entrenched community disadvantage, including through “place-based approaches, engaging with philanthropy and promoting social impact investment”. Funding includes:

- \$100.0 million over 5 years from 2024–25 to establish a social impact investment Outcomes Fund to make contractual payments to states, territories and service providers based on delivering agreed, measurable outcomes through specific projects.
- \$64.0 million over 6 years from 2023–24 to extend the Stronger Places, Stronger People program to deliver place-based initiatives in partnership with 10 local communities and state and territory governments to improve outcomes for disadvantaged children and their families, and to enhance place-based initiatives in 6 of these communities.
- \$16.4 million over 4 years from 2023–24 to the Australian Bureau of Statistics to implement the Life Course Data Initiative to capture data insights to inform long term policy responses aimed at interrupting cycles of intergenerational disadvantage.
- \$11.6 million over 3 years from 2023–24 for a Social Enterprise Development Initiative to provide grants, online education and mentoring for eligible organisations to build capability to access capital, better participate in the social impact investing market and support improved social outcomes.
- \$7.8 million over two years from 2023–24 to develop a whole-of-government Framework to Address Community Disadvantage that will identify strategic objectives and key principles to guide how the Commonwealth will work in partnership with communities to enable them to build their capability to address cycles of disadvantage.

The Government will also provide \$8.7 million over 4 years from 2023–24 (and \$2.2 million per year ongoing) to support the Economic Inclusion Advisory Committee on an ongoing basis with secretariat and research support.

² DSS Portfolio Budget Statement

³ Budget Paper no. 2

Gender Equality

The Women's Budget Statement⁴ includes:

- \$1.9 billion to expand the eligibility for the Parenting Payment (Single) to single principal carers, the majority of whom are women, with a youngest dependent child aged 8 to under 14 years of age;
- \$2.7 billion to increase the maximum payment rates of Commonwealth Rent Assistance by 15 per cent for all recipients, with single women making up almost half of recipients;
- \$4.9 billion to increase support for people receiving working age and student payments, including JobSeeker;
- Abolishing the ParentsNext Program from 1 July 2024 (woo hoo!) and immediately pausing all compulsory requirements for participants as a new voluntary program is designed.
- Further investments to support highly feminised workforces, including:
 - Backing a 15 per cent increase to the minimum wages for aged care workers, over 85 per cent of whom are women;
 - Increased funding for community services, many with highly feminised workforces – including for organisations delivering women's safety initiatives;
 - \$8.6 million for the Australian Skills Guarantee, which includes national targets for women in apprenticeships, traineeships and cadetships on major government projects;
 - \$91.3 million to boost the mental health care workforce through additional psychology placements, the majority of which are women;
 - \$72.4 million to build and retain the early childhood education and care workforce, 92 per cent of whom are women; and
 - \$67.5 million to support homelessness services during the transition to the National Housing and Homelessness Agreement, supporting jobs that are overwhelmingly done by women, including to assist women and children experiencing domestic and family violence.

The Government committed \$590 million to implement the National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children.

The data snapshot in the Statement states that the average daily hours spent on unpaid domestic work, caring responsibilities and voluntary work are as follows - Women: 4 hours, 31 minutes Men: 3 hours, 12 minutes. No reference is made to the gendered nature of volunteering in the Women's Budget Statement.

First Nations

A \$1.9 billion package of measures was announced for First Nations' health, housing, education, employment and other essential services and a further \$250 million for a new Central Australia

⁴ Women's Budget Statement

package (Better, Safer Future for Central Australia⁵) to improve safety and provide more opportunities for young people in their communities.

The Budget delivers the next stage of investments aimed at strengthening local communities across Central Australia, including Alice Springs. The Budget announced the next stage of the plan, including:

- \$50 million for Community and Regional Infrastructure.
- \$40.4 million for On-Country Learning to Improve School Engagement.
- \$23.5 million for Improving First Nations Health Outcomes.
- \$10 million to enhance digital connectivity.
- \$10 million for Justice Reinvestment.
- \$9.2 million for strengthening community safety.
- \$3.9 million for a Youth Services Action Plan.
- \$1.2 million for up to 5 new Junior Ranger sites in Central Australia.
- \$7.5 million for effective governance to ensure successful delivery.

In relation to family safety, a dedicated Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Action Plan and early investment in a standalone First Nations National Plan for Family Safety has received targeted funding aiming to end violence against First Nations women and children.

The Care and Support Economy

The Government is developing a National Strategy for the Care and Support Economy which aims to set out a road map to a sustainable and productive care and support economy that delivers quality care and decent jobs. The strategy aims to set a long-term vision across the care and support economy sectors, including aged care, disability care and support, veterans' care and early childhood education and care.

Early Years and ECE

The Government is investing \$72.4 million to support, build and retain the early childhood education and care workforce. The investment will improve access to professional development opportunities for early childhood educators and teachers and provide financial assistance to educators to complete the practicum required for a Bachelor or Master's degree in Early Childhood Education.

Reference was made to developing the Early Years Strategy "to shape a vision for the future of Australia's children and their families and to deliver the best possible outcomes for Australian children".

Aged care

The Government announced it will postpone the commencement of the Support at Home Program to 1 July 2025 in response to sector feedback that a longer lead time is needed, and extend grant arrangements for the Commonwealth Home Support Programme for a further 12 months to 30 June 2025.

⁵ King, Burney et al media release

The Government will provide \$827.2 million over 5 years from 2022–23 to continue to improve the delivery of aged care services and respond to the Final Report of the Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety. Funding includes:

- \$487.0 million over 4 years from 2023–24 (and \$133.6 million ongoing) to extend, and make ongoing, the Disability Support for Older Australians Program
- \$112.0 million over 4 years from 2023–24 to introduce a new General Practice in Aged Care incentive payment to improve general practitioner attendance and continuity of care in residential aged care homes, and to reduce avoidable hospitalisations.
- \$98.7 million over two years from 2023–24 for a new Market Adjustment Program and to provide business advisory services to improve the viability of the residential aged care sector.
- \$81.9 million over 3 years from 2023–24 to develop and implement a new Aged Care Act to support aged care sector reform and undertake discovery and design of associated ICT system changes.

Sport

The Government will provide \$39.8 million over 7 years from 2023–24 to support major sporting events, sports diplomacy, and sport and physical activity in Australia. Funding includes:

- \$16.3 million over 6 years from 2024–25 to support the Confederation of Australian Sport to host the World Masters Games 2029 in Perth, Western Australia, with funding subject to confirmation of a successful bid for Australia to host this event.
- \$8.3 million in 2023–24 for the extension of the Local Sporting Champions program, which supports young Australians to participate in state, national and international sporting competitions.
- \$3.8 million in 2023–24 to the Australian Sports Foundation to enhance the organisation’s information technology network to address emerging cyber security risks.
- \$3.3 million in 2023–24 to continue Surf Life Saving Australia’s vocational education and training support for Australia’s surf lifesaving volunteers.
- \$3.3 million over two years from 2023–24 to continue and expand The Big Issue’s Community Street Soccer Program.
- \$2.1 million over two years from 2023–24 to the Department of Health and Aged Care and the Australian Sports Commission to support women and girls participation in talent and development programs to increase female representations in coaching, officiating and sports administration.
- \$1.6 million over 3 years from 2023–24 to ‘Reconnect Australia’ to expand sport and recreation programs for disadvantaged Australians in the Northern Territory and the Australian Capital Territory.
- \$0.8 million in 2023–24 to develop a new National Sport Plan and undertake a review of the Australian Sports Commission Act 1989.
- \$0.2 million in 2023–24 to support development of the Government’s Major Sporting Events Strategic Investment Model to better quantify the broader social and economic impacts of major sporting events.

Emergency and disaster response

New initiatives established in the 2023-24 Budget include:

- safeguarding communities through the Rollout of a Cell Broadcast National Capability.

- equipping public safety agencies with appropriate technology through the Government Response to the Public Safety Mobile Broadband (PSMB) Review.
- additional funding for the whole-of-government capability through the National Emergency Management Stockpile (NEMS).

These initiatives are designed to complement the National Emergency Management Agency's ongoing emergency management⁶, risk reduction and national operational building capabilities, such as:

- the Disaster Ready Fund (announced in the previous Budget).
- implementing the National Crisis Exercising and Lessons Strategy.
- supporting Disaster Relief Australia (DRA) to upscale its operations (and recruit 1000s more volunteers).

The Government sets out how enhanced NEMA capability aims to reduce pressures on the Australian Defence Force, support long-term mental health outcomes across the nation through the National Disaster Mental Health and Wellbeing Framework and reduce risks to Australia's most vulnerable communities.

The Government stated it will roll-out a cell broadcast National Messaging System (NMS) to help keep Australians safe, which aims to significantly improve the way the States, Territories and the Australian Government are able to send emergency messages, alerts and warnings at-scale to mobile handsets during a crisis or emergency event, in near real time. In addition, \$10.1 million will establish a central Taskforce to drive the delivery of a Public Safety Mobile Broadband (PSMB) capability. The Taskforce will establish the framework for delivering a mobile broadband service that provides Public Safety Agencies with fast and secure voice, video and data communications and instant access to data, images and information in critical situations.

Employment, skills and transitions

New measures to boost employment support included that:

- The Government will abolish the ParentsNext program from 1 July 2024 and develop a replacement voluntary program, with interim changes to be considered as soon as possible to move ParentsNext to voluntary participation. This will respond to the Economic Inclusion Advisory Committee, the Women's Economic Equality Taskforce and the House of Representatives Select Committee on Workforce Australia Employment Services which have all recommended replacing ParentsNext with a more supportive service that better meets the needs of parents with young children.
- The Government will deliver on its election commitment by providing \$15.2 million to support the establishment of Y Careers. The Agency will support young people to pursue meaningful careers and help employers to fill skills shortages in priority industries, with a focus on the care economy.

The Government is also Investing \$3.7 billion in a new 5-year national skills agreement with the states and territories. This will involve creating 300,000 fee-free TAFE places to train Australians in

⁶ National Emergency Management Agency | Page 103 Budget 2023-24 | Portfolio Budget Statements

critical and emerging sectors and expanding access to foundational skills and establishing a new Australian Skills Guarantee.

The Government committed to continue support for vulnerable young refugees and migrants, with \$9.1 million⁷ over 12 months to ensure the continued delivery of Youth Transition Support services, which improve employment, education and social connections for refugees and vulnerable migrants aged 15 to 25.

Supporting the regions

The Budget invests \$355.1 million over four years to support Commonwealth National Parks and \$439.2 million over five years to support programs that repair World Heritage properties, restore Ramsar wetlands and conserve threatened species and ecosystems.

Dedicated funding of \$286 million has been allocated to the new National Cultural Policy: Revive. This includes targeted initiatives in regional arts, including protecting First Nations knowledge and cultural expressions.

The Government recommitted to supporting the Brisbane 2032 Olympic and Paralympic Games – including \$935 million over 10 years towards 16 new or upgraded Games venues, which they identify will benefit regional locations including Barlow Park in Cairns and the Toowoomba Sports Ground.

An investment of \$3.3 million in 2023–24 is being made to support surf lifesaving training. The funding will provide vocational education and training to surf lifesaving volunteers, trainers and assessors at clubs across the country, including regional coastal areas, and aims to make enhancements to systems and administration to free up volunteers to deliver front line services and save lives.

Veterans' affairs

The Government is providing additional funding of \$2.0 million over two years from 2023–24 to continue important mental health awareness and suicide intervention training for volunteers supporting veterans.

This will continue the Department of Veterans' Affairs' mental health literacy and suicide intervention training program for the ex-service community and supports the Australian Government Response to the Interim Report of the Royal Commission into Defence and Veteran Suicide.

Urban development

A new National Approach for Sustainable Urban Development in Australia was announced which involves \$687.4 million over 6 years from 2022–23. This funding includes:

- \$305.0 million over 5 years from 2023–24 for the Macquarie Point Precinct and University of Tasmania Stadium, to deliver urban renewal projects in Hobart and Launceston.

⁷ Security Media Release

- \$211.7 million over 3 years from 2023–24 to establish the Thriving Suburbs Program to provide grants for community infrastructure in urban and suburban communities through a competitive grants program.
- \$159.7 million over 4 years from 2023–24 to establish the Urban Precincts and Partnerships Program to support investment in place-based priorities of local urban communities through a collaborative partnerships approach with state, territory and local governments and communities.
- \$11.0 million over 4 years from 2023–24 to establish the Cities and Suburbs Unit within the Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, Communications and the Arts to deliver the National Urban Policy and the regular State of Cities report.

People with disability, NDIS and the disability workforce

The Budget invests \$41 million⁸ through to 2025-26 to help strengthen the supported employment sector to provide people with disability and high support needs access a wider range of employment opportunities. Around 160 supported employment organisations will have the opportunity to apply for grants to assist them in upskilling supported employees, building the capacity of their support workforce or implementing innovative business models.

A National Disability Data Asset (NDDA) will also be formally established in collaboration with states and territories, being supported by a total of \$31.4 million over four years. When established, the Government says the NDDA will improve research, policy development, service delivery and ensure Government funding is best targeted.

The Government renewed its commitment to address the gap in workforce participation between people with and without disability, assist the supported employment sector to evolve and develop the National Autism Strategy to improve outcomes for autistic people.

The Government highlighted that it is committed to getting the National Disability Insurance Scheme ‘back on track’ by introducing a range of measures to rebuild trust with participants, their families and the community, while “ensuring the scheme is affordable so future generations receive the benefits of the NDIS”. Measures include: trialling new and innovative approaches to delivering services, addressing thin markets in remote and very remote communities, continuing to move young people out of residential aged care into more appropriate accommodation and promoting competition on price, quality and service innovation.

The Government has committed to develop a comprehensive NDIS workforce strategy to ensure NDIS participants can access the supports they need. An independent NDIS Review is underway and is examining ways to build a sustainable workforce, consulting widely with participants, providers and the community. The Review will provide a report to Disability Reform Ministers by October 2023.

The Arts

⁸ Rishworth media release

The Government states it is delivering record new investment in Australia's arts sector in the 2023-24 Budget, with almost \$950 million in additional spending over four years for national institutions, to train and support creators, and to deliver on the vision of our new national cultural policy, Revive. This funding will include:

- \$535.3 million to for cultural and historical institutions, including \$33 million to secure the long-term viability of the National Library's Trove database (hurrah!)
- \$286 million to deliver on Revive including through; restoring core arts funding; establishing Creative Australia, Music Australia, Writers Australia and a Creative Workplaces centre to support arts workers; establishing a First Nations-led body dedicated to First Nations work; sharing the National Gallery of Australia's collection with regional and suburban galleries; and improving incomes for authors.

Creative Partnerships Australia which aimed to create a culture of private sector support for the arts will cease and its functions transferred to Australia Council (Creative Australia), from 1 July 2023.

Media & communications

The ABC and SBS will receive an additional \$72 million over four years to extend and roll three previously terminating programs into ongoing funding:

- ABC Enhanced News Gathering, which supports regional journalist positions in regional bureaus throughout Australia;
- SBS Media Sector Support, which provides news, content, subtitling and English learning resources to Australians who speak languages other than English, with a focus on Chinese and Arabic communities; and
- ABC and SBS Audio Description, to make screen content more accessible to audiences who are blind or vision impaired.

The Government will also provide \$2.5 million for the Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, Communications and the Arts to partner with the Federation of Ethnic Communities' Council of Australia (FECCA) to support media literacy in culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) communities. This partnership aims to empower multicultural communities to combat harms associated with the proliferation of deceptive information including mis- and disinformation, and support improved economic and civic participation.

Mental health

\$586.9 million⁹ for improved mental health to extend critical services, address urgent gaps and workforce shortages, including:

- 500 additional postgraduate psychology places.
- 500 one-year internships for provisional psychologists.
- 2,000 supervisor training sessions.
- Upskilling the broader health workforce to better recognise and respond to mental health issues.

⁹ Minister Butler's Media Release

- Expanded supports for workplaces, children and young people, people with eating disorders, those bereaved by a suicide loss and individuals and communities impacted by natural disasters.
- Expanded services for more than 18,000 people with severe mental illness who are not in the NDIS and need psychosocial support.
- Boosting mental health support for First Nations people in the lead up to, during and following the Voice referendum.
- Further protection for vulnerable members of the community, including refugees and migrants who have experienced torture and trauma, and culturally and linguistically diverse communities.

Reference is made to NEMA and Department of Health and Aged Care continuing to work together to implement the National Disaster Mental Health and Wellbeing Framework, which articulates national principles for effective and coordinated mental health support and services for communities at risk of, and affected by, disasters, including emergency services workers.

The environment

The Government committed new investment to its 'nature positive plan' with the centrepiece being \$121 million to establish Environment Protection Australia.

The Budget also provided the following funding:

- \$262.3 million to support our Commonwealth national parks for upgrading or replacing outdated infrastructure, ensuring staff can carry out threatened species protection, and increasing opportunities for First Nations employment and businesses.
- \$92.8 million for urgent upgrades in the town of Mutitjulu within Uluru-Kata Tjuta National Park, to provide critical infrastructure like water, sewerage and electricity, and help deliver better health and housing outcomes.
- \$163.4 million to ensure the Australian Institute of Marine Science can continue to provide world-leading scientific marine research and protect our oceans, including the Great Barrier Reef.
- \$45.2 million for the Sydney Harbour Federation Trust, to address a critical backlog of repairs.
- \$236 million to establish a national and reliable flood warning system.
- \$439.2 million to support programs that repair World Heritage properties, restore Ramsar wetlands, and conserve threatened species and ecosystems.

A further \$118.5 million was allocated to help community groups, NGOs, councils, and First Nations groups carry out projects to clean up and restore local urban rivers and waterways. These include activities like planting native species along creeks and building small-scale wetlands to filter pollution and improve water quality.

The Government allocated \$741.3 million over 5 years from 2023–24 from the Natural Heritage Trust special account to support local and long-term environmental and agricultural outcomes. The funding includes \$341.2 million over 5 years from 2023–24 to protect nature, threatened species and habitats and to maintain delivery capability through activities like the BushBlitz, Natural Resource Management (NRM) partnerships and on-ground conservation and recovery activities.

Housing & homelessness

The Government will provide additional funding of \$67.5 million in 2023-24 to boost homelessness funding to states and territories. The funding will be used to support the provision of homelessness services through the National Housing and Homelessness Agreement in 2023-24.

The current National Housing and Homelessness Agreement provides over \$1.6 billion to states and territories, with Government committing to a one-year extension for the National Housing and Homelessness Agreement to 30 June 2024 in the 2022-23 October Budget, while negotiations are underway with states and territories.