

2023 Report

# Responding to the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals.



**Uniting**



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Uniting promotes social justice activism and LGBTQIA+ rights in the annual Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras Parade.

# Executive introduction

Welcome to the third United Nations Sustainable Development Goals report for Uniting NSW.ACT. As the largest non-government provider of community services in NSW and the ACT, Uniting - on behalf of the Uniting Church in NSW and the ACT - continues to take real steps to make our world a better place.

This builds on our 2018 and 2021 reports, demonstrating that we're constantly evolving our services for people experiencing disadvantage and exclusion, and championing social justice for all Australians through our advocacy work.

In delivering aged care, early learning, disability, family and community services, Uniting works across all 3 pillars of sustainability - economic, social and environmental - to improve the lives of the people we serve, and the communities they live in.

By aligning with the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) initiative, Uniting supports the protection of the world's poor and vulnerable, and the safeguarding of our planet's future. These international SDGs are driving to end extreme poverty, address inequality, and take action on climate change by 2030.

We've been on our own sustainability journey since 2009. Along the way, Uniting has partnered with the NSW Government Sustainability Advantage program to understand the United Nations SDGs and their application to our work.

In 2023 we proudly received the Gold Partnership Recognition Award within the Sustainability Advantage program. As one of only 10 Gold Partners among 800 members, this award recognises Uniting as demonstrating outstanding environmental achievement and leadership.

Our 10-year strategy, developed in 2022, aims to disrupt entrenched disadvantage to create a better future for more people and communities. This strategy reflects the United Nations' 2030 Agenda and its core objective to leave no-one behind.

This report draws on our service delivery in NSW and ACT over the past 2 years, with the aim of highlighting how we're helping to reach the SDGs. I hope it offers insight into our activities and the contribution Uniting is making towards achieving these global goals.



**Tracey Burton**  
Executive Director  
Uniting NSW.ACT



# Who we are

Uniting NSW.ACT contributes to the work and mission of the Uniting Church in NSW and the ACT, through social justice advocacy, community services and spiritual care. We provide services for people through all ages and stages of life, and drive solutions to systemic issues so people experiencing disadvantage can live their best lives. Our purpose is to inspire people, enliven communities and confront injustice. We value diversity and always welcome everyone, exactly as they are.

At every stage of life, from early learning centres through to residential aged care, our dedicated team of employees and volunteers stands alongside the people we serve. Every year, our mission to serve our communities grows stronger as we work with imagination and collaboration, harnessing the strength that comes from embracing diversity and inclusion.

Uniting employs over 10,000 people, of which 362 are Aboriginal and 3,142 have a culturally and linguistically diverse background and speak a language other than English. We are supported by more than 1,000 volunteers and have 92 pastoral practitioners.

## During FY23, Uniting supported 134,588 total clients:

6,489

children enrolled in early learning services

49,731

family services clients

1,249

Uniting Medically Supervised Injecting Centre clients

7,988

aged care residents

3,711

independent living residents in our retirement villages

8,646

home and community care clients

3,905

Uniting War Memorial Hospital patients

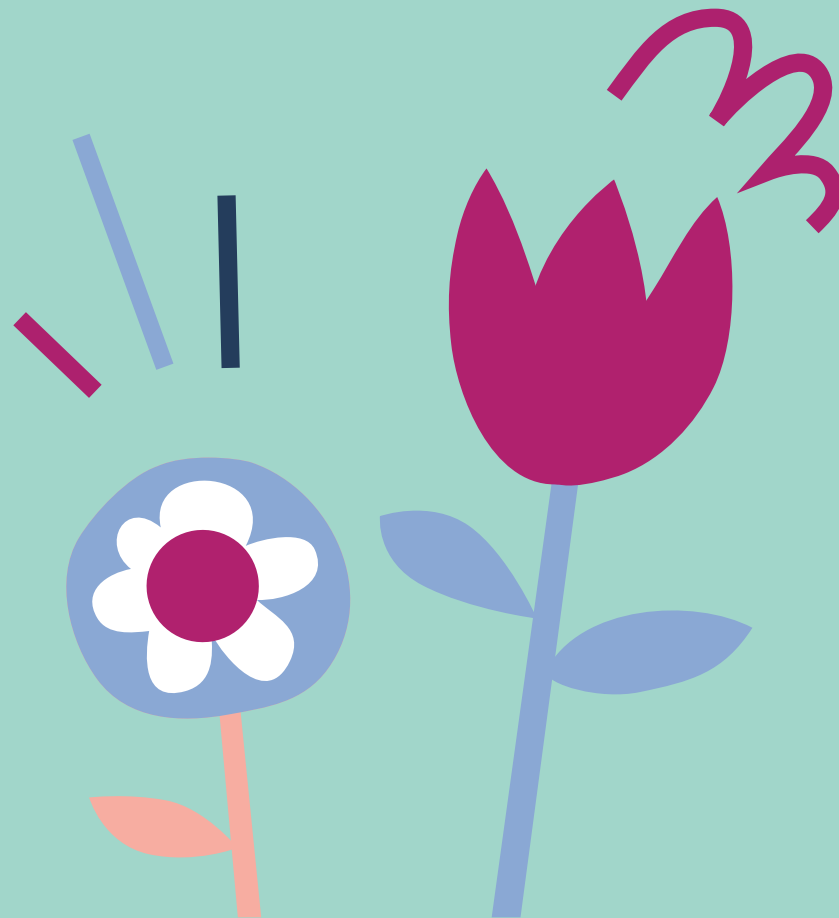
52,869

Local Area Coordination and disability services participants

## Our foundation

As part of the Uniting Church in Australia, our foundation is Christ's invitation to serve humanity by creating an inclusive, connected and just world. Formed in 1977, as a union of Presbyterian, Congregational and Methodist denominations, the Church's inaugural Statement to the Nation is just as relevant now, as it was more than 40 years ago. From the outset, the Uniting Church sought to be a loud voice for a world that's fair and equitable, to always welcome everyone exactly as they are, and to protect God's creation and the planet we all live on.

[Read our 2023 Uniting Statement of Missional Intent here.](#)



# Our values and ethical principles

## Our values guide our work every day.

### Compassionate

We are nurturing, generous and thoughtful in our words and deeds.

### Imaginative

We challenge convention, explore new possibilities and dare to dream for a better future.

### Respectful

We act with integrity, and open our hearts to all people without exception.

### Bold

We face injustice head on and stand up for what is right and true with confidence and strength.

## Our ethical principles support our decisions.

Take accountability for making the biggest positive difference for people.

Give preference to the interests of the most disadvantaged.

Listen, understand and then act with courage, empowering people through self-determination.

Adopt and apply the highest professional standards given the constraints we experience.

Give proper consideration to organisational sustainability, so that we can continue our mission for the benefit of our society and the people we serve and represent.

As much as practical, seek to be transparent in communications with stakeholders.

Acknowledge that in our decisions we will seek equity, recognising that equity and equality are not always the same.

## Our 10-year strategy

Uniting NSW. ACT is one of Australia's largest community services providers with a long history of supporting people and communities in NSW and the ACT who are experiencing disadvantage and exclusion. Our 10-year strategy will see us strive even harder to disrupt the systems that lead to entrenched disadvantage.

We will do this by increasing our investment and efforts in

- Improving access to early childhood education.
- Reducing the number of children entering out-of-home care and improving life outcomes for those in care.
- Ensuring older people have dignity and choice, and access to the care and supports they need.
- Delivering services in more places, particularly regional areas.

Our First Nations People and Place Strategy will be woven through all aspects of our 10-year strategy, so that First Nations people are strong, thriving and self-determining.

The 10-year strategy will be brought to life every day by our employees and volunteers who are at the heart of everything we do. We want Uniting to be known as the best place to work in our sectors, with a culture that is inclusive, safe and person-centred.

As part of the Uniting Church, Uniting is proud to be a catalyst for change to create a better future for more people and communities.

[To find out more, please visit our webpage.](#)



Foyer Central residents painting the onsite mural 'Realise Your Dreams'. The project was co-designed with Zoe Edema from Muralisto, and made possible by the Australian Literacy and Numeracy Foundation. Photographer: Campbell Henderson

# What are the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals?

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, adopted by all United Nations Member States in 2015, provides a shared blueprint for peace and prosperity for people and the planet, now and into the future. This includes 17 Sustainable Development Goals (or SDGs) that break down into 169 targets, acting as a framework for members to tangibly track their progress in achieving these goals.

It's a shared roadmap for governments, corporations, and organisations for achieving ambitious and transformational social, environmental, and economic objectives by 2030. As well as a strong focus on inclusive business leadership and multi-stakeholder partnerships, a fundamental guiding principle of the goals is to 'leave no-one behind' and address the most excluded first.



Find out more at [sdgs.un.org/goals](https://sdgs.un.org/goals)





## Our response

### Accessing early learning

One of Uniting's key aspirations in disrupting entrenched disadvantage is the participation of every child in early learning, so that no-one gets left behind.



Uniting early learning centres provide high-quality education and childcare in long day care, preschool, and out-of-school hours care settings, as measured by learning outcomes according to the Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority's National Quality Standards. With 51 centres across NSW and the ACT, we strongly believe children learn best when they feel a sense of belonging to their community.

In April 2023 for example, Uniting Airlie Preschool Oatlands received an excellent rating for its collaborative partnerships with professional community and research organisations, positive workplace culture and values, inclusion of families and the local community, and sustained commitment to the professional development and support of educators.

[Find out more here.](#)

Our Links to Early Learning program addresses barriers in accessing early childhood education for families experiencing disadvantage and exclusion. Hongmei, a refugee from China, is a mother to a 5-year-old daughter and a 4-year-old son. She arrived as a student ten years ago and now lives in Fairfield, but with language and financial barriers, she was unaware of the importance of early learning. Once connected with Links to Early Learning, she began to receive support through a Linker, who helps to find the right early learning service for each family's needs, assists them in completing all the enrolment and Child Care Subsidy paperwork, provides access to translation and interpretation services, and helps the children and parents settle into their early learning centre.

**“Before this program, my son didn't go to school and he wasn't learning anything. My Linker has really helped me a lot, and now my son is learning so much.”**

Hongmei, Links to Early Learning participant



## Our response

### Extending out-of-home care

In 2019, Uniting began an Extended Care Pilot (EXCP) program for young people in out-of-home care. And in 2021, Foyer Central opened to accommodate young residents as they transition to independence.

The EXCP program is an early intervention and prevention program that connects participants with a Youth Development Coach (YDC) and a guaranteed range of other supports up to the age of 21. The program provides young people with targeted support in key areas, which significantly increases their successful transition from care to independence.

Independent EXCP evaluation at the 3-year mark confirmed the continuing positive outcomes for participants, and the delivery of broader economic and social benefits for state and federal governments.

Uniting's Foyer Central, in partnership with St George Community Housing and Social Ventures Australia, is a communal complex of 53 studio apartments in Sydney's Chippendale. Youth Development Coaches are also key to Foyer Central's success, as they provide intensive on-site support and assistance with education, employment, social connection, and health and wellbeing.

In November 2022, the NSW Government approved the extension of state support for young people in out-of-home care - from 18 to the age of 21.



[Find out more here.](#)

**“I’ve grown in confidence, pretty much with everything. My YDC took me to places and showed me new things, and this helped me to socialise more. My YDC also got me out of my shell to make phone calls ... I definitely wouldn’t be having this conversation with you right now if I didn’t have that kind of support.”**

Foyer Central resident



## Our response

### Aboriginal Families Together

The Aboriginal Families Together (AFT) program is a co-design initiative in Dubbo and Nambucca, aiming to improve outcomes for Aboriginal children and families, ultimately supporting more Aboriginal families to thrive.

Our Aboriginal playgroups allow families with young children to meet and share experiences in a culturally safe and responsive environment, to help them transition into early childhood education.

We're currently working with Aboriginal Advisory Groups to co-design solutions to the problems identified in each region. Using community consultation, engagement and innovation, we aim to elevate Aboriginal voices and empower self-determination. "We walk alongside Aboriginal families with a range of complex needs including histories of trauma, domestic violence, mental health challenges and physical health issues", explains Valla Cohen, Aboriginal Families Together Coordinator for Nambucca Heads on Gumbaynggirr country.

[Read more here.](#)





## Our response

### Committing to community

Uniting's Medically Supervised Injecting Centre (MSIC) is a harm reduction service providing unwavering wraparound support beyond safe supervision of drug use.

Opened in 2001, MSIC was the first service of its kind in the English-speaking world. Over more than 2 decades, MSIC has received 1.25 million visits, and prevented deaths from more than 11,000 overdoses (without a single fatality). Most importantly, the service has provided 22,000+ referrals to clients for treatment and care.

MSIC was given the Key to the City of Sydney from the Lord Mayor, Clover Moore, on 5 May 2022 - in celebration of 21 years of service in the Kings Cross community.

[Find out more here.](#)

**“Without this place I would be dead. Simply, the MSIC saves lives.”**

Uniting MSIC client



Lord Mayor Clover Moore hands the Key to the City of Sydney to Dr Marianne Jauncey, longstanding Medical Director of MSIC.





# Our response

## Addressing the housing crisis

Access to safe, adequate and affordable housing is a fundamental human right.

According to the Australian Bureau of Statistic's 2021 Census, 1 in 7 people experiencing homelessness was aged 55 or older. Research gathered by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) indicates that major setbacks late in life - such as marriage breakdown, job loss, death of a partner, or development of an illness - can contribute to older people being at risk of homelessness. And with a lifetime of lower earnings, due to taking time out of the workforce for family caregiving duties, women are now even more at risk than men.

Our strategies in action are illustrated by investing for social impact from sustainable funding sources. We are committed to providing a range of housing options for older people, particularly in response to the recent housing crisis. This means we aim to deliver different solutions from new developments, which will enable us to generate revenue to build more housing, providing a significant number of rental properties in our independent living villages across NSW and the ACT, and being a delivery partner for the Government's Social and Affordable Housing Fund (SAHF).

Sales and rentals of homes in our independent living retirement villages reflect people's needs and means. The SAHF initiative ensures accessibility and independence for people who don't have the equity to make ingoing contributions for village residences.

Our SAHF program has so far provided 546 homes for 640 people in Uniting villages - but it's not just about bricks and mortar. While housing is essential and critical to improve someone's wellbeing, simply providing a home isn't going to guarantee success.

Our support team actively works with SAHF clients to enhance their everyday lives and provide opportunities to engage more fully with the community around them.



## Our response

### Wellbeing4Kids service

Our specialist child mental health team - Wellbeing4Kids - won the Technology in Health category for the Hunter New England and Central Coast Primary Care Quality and Innovation Awards 2023, with its Telehealth4Kids service.

Telehealth4Kids was developed to support children and families who are unable to access face-to-face therapy due to physical or financial constraints. This evidence-based therapeutic program provides free emotional, social and behavioural support online. Available in 5 key locations – Mid Coast, Mehi, Peel, Tablelands and on the Central Coast – our aim is to help families raise happier, healthier children.

Good mental health is important for every child's development – it helps them cope with changes, build healthy relationships, feel positive about themselves and enjoy life. The team explores options for mental health supports together with the child's family and works collaboratively with everyone in the child's life including carers, GP, school and their wider support network, in ways that are culturally sensitive.



**“This service is vital for children and families who live remotely and in regional areas, and for children who are experiencing school refusal, post-COVID anxiety, and mental health difficulties.”**

Susan Buxton, Wellbeing4Kids Service Manager

Susan explains, “Our clinicians give clarity and security to parents from the onset of referral, by providing them with technical supports such as test runs and troubleshooting digital access, along with tips to make each telehealth session a successful interaction.” Yet, it's not just about efficient and effective telepractice – the program also leverages electronic tools to help children engage in a way that's relevant to them.

Telehealth4Kids is a great example of how we're flexing to deliver more services to more places, by investing in new technologies and capabilities so that people and communities can be supported to thrive.

## Our response

### C2bMe@home service

Continuing to be Me at Home, known as C2bMe@Home, is a program that supports the emotional and psychological wellbeing of older people aiming to promote live with purpose and dignity.

C2bMe@home won the Community Industry Group's Above and Beyond 2023 award for delivering a high-quality innovative service.

Operating as a COVID-funded program from 2021 to 2023, it provided much-needed mental health support for isolated older people. Operations Manager Sally Roberts stated that the service came about after the devastation of fires and floods, and during the pandemic: "Older people were already socially marginalised and are often the forgotten and invisible cohort, and yet they make up a huge part of our population and this is set to increase over the coming years."

The program was created by a dedicated and passionate group of clinicians, including psychologists, mental health nurses, social workers, counsellors and registered nurses. This multidisciplinary combination strengthens the approaches used in this person-centred and dynamic program. The team connects older people with lost activities or new ones, helps clients access other needed services, and works together with clients on care plans to improve their mental wellbeing.

**"We nominated the C2bMe@home team for this award, to recognise their amazing effort and achievement. They've demonstrated innovative leadership in an ever-changing marketplace facing high-level demands from consumers, policy makers and services in Southern NSW."**

Sally Roberts, C2bMe Operations Manager



## Our response

### Improving environments

Uniting's planned Waverley and War Memorial Hospital Campus will feature a new residential aged care home, independent living retirement village, and a hospital service with an early onset dementia centre, seniors' gym and men's shed. The proposed development aims to improve the estate's heritage gardens, streetscapes, public areas, amenities and links to the surrounding neighbourhood.

Uniting is dedicated to preserving the nearby important wildlife and ecological corridors through maintaining and building on the existing landscaping. This will be achieved through retaining as many trees as possible and senescence planning to ensure the created proposal affords the best likely whole estate concept for the future. Planting designs will aim to maintain the ecological zone while acknowledging contemporary community needs - green links will be established throughout the estate to allow an accessible and pleasant walk-through to nearby amenities. Native plantings will feature proposed smaller, evergreen and deciduous trees for a cohesive landscape design all along the site boundaries facing local streets; all efforts are being made to preserve the current Morton Bay figs on the site.

Our plan for the Waverley Estate will include much-needed affordable housing and other housing options for older Australians in the area, in line with the Aged Care Royal Commission Recommendations.

[Find out more about the Uniting Waverley Estate redevelopment here.](#)





## Our response

### Valuing diversity, equity and inclusion

Our Diversity and Inclusion Strategy reflects the Uniting Church's commitment to social justice. We value diversity and always welcome everyone, exactly as they are.

This strategy was developed by a group of diverse voices and experiences across the organisation. Our 10-year vision is underpinned by 3 principles: mission, social impact and sustainability. We strive to always welcome and value diversity of ability, age, faith, gender, culture and experience.

Our partnership with the University of Technology Sydney and the Department of Health, led to the development of our Mosaic App for LGBTQI+ people in aged care. This empowers individuals and assists care teams to make informed choices for safe, inclusive and quality care. We are also a longstanding member of Pride in Diversity and a foundation member of Pride in Health and Wellbeing.

Find out more about our D&I Strategy and LGBTQI+ inclusion [here](#).



Uniting  
**CULTURAL**  
diversity  
network



Uniting  
disability  
**INCLUSION**  
network



Uniting  
**NGUMBADAL**  
network



Uniting  
**PRIDE**  
network

## Our response

### NEST Aboriginal employment initiative

Our New Employee Support Team (NEST) provides peer support for Aboriginal employees during their first 3 months at Uniting.

NEST offers culturally appropriate information and resources, and connects the new recruits with each other, and with the rest of Uniting's Ngumbadal Aboriginal Employee Network.

**“The NEST is a critical function for Uniting’s new First Nations employees. Since it’s inception, we’ve been able to assist our new people to feel warmly welcomed, part of a bigger picture, and show how they are linked to other Ngumbadal employees.”**

Pam Wells, Chair of Ngumbadal Leadership Group  
and Head of First Nations Partnerships and Cultural  
Lead for Social Impact and Advocacy



Family worker Sharna Kelly and Youth Activities Worker Dillon Lorroway support people displaced by Northern NSW flooding at the Wardell Community Village.

## Our response

### Supporting First Nations suppliers

Uniting's Aboriginal Procurement Policy commits a percentage of annual spending to invest in majority-owned First Nations companies and suppliers. This policy reflects the ambition of our First Nations People and Place Strategy - for First Nations people and communities to be strong, thriving and self-determining.

Aboriginal-owned Muru Mittigar (meaning 'pathway to friends') is the first company to sign a contract under the new policy. They seek to create a better understanding of Aboriginal culture in the wider community by providing quality contracting and consulting services in land management and conservation, parks and gardens, bush regeneration, culture and education, and tourism.

Our North Parramatta campus is one of 4 Uniting sites where Muru Mittigar maintains the outdoor areas with landscaping and gardening services. To initiate the contract, Elder Uncle Colin Locke performed the Welcome to Country and Smoking Ceremony.



On World Environment Day 2023, a smoking ceremony and simple tree planting event took place at Uniting North Parramatta. Muru Mittigar helped to plant 2 bush tucker trees – a lilly pilly and a lemon myrtle – together with children from Uniting Airlie Preschool Oatlands. As the trees grow, so will the children. The planting also symbolises growth in our understanding of First Nations culture and respect for the environment.



## Our response

# Calling for climate change action

Since the Inaugural Assembly of the Uniting Church in 1977, we've been concerned “with the basic human rights of future generations and will urge the protection of the environment, and the replenishment of the Earth's resources, for their use and enjoyment.”

Natural events brought on by climate change, such as fire, flood and drought, rob Australians of income, ultimately dramatically increasing the cost of living for Australians. The death toll from climate change is set to increase, particularly due to air pollution from fossil fuels, smoke from bushfires, and heat stress, especially in older people. Other extreme weather conditions will also cause fatalities, either directly or through increase in vector-borne diseases, like dengue fever, and increases in the risk of suicide – related to persistent droughts and extreme heat in particular. Climate change and extreme weather events have a wide range of other non-fatal but adverse impacts, including increased respiratory illnesses and mental health effects, impaired child development, rising living costs, and threats to housing, livelihoods, and food and water security.

In 2019, the Uniting Church Synod of NSW & ACT instituted a Synod-wide Climate Action Strategy. Uniting has a key role in driving this strategy, which has continued to develop over the past 2 years. The Synod Climate Action Strategy has 3 main components:

- Action to reduce emissions across all parts of the Church, including the Synod, Church schools, congregations, members and Church agencies such as Uniting
- Advocacy to government to reduce fossil fuel emissions and accelerate the transition to renewable energy
- Support for young people's action on climate change.
- Uniting and the wider church seek to progress these aims in our own right but also by acting in collaboration with other community groups and climate organisations. Clearly, climate change is an issue of such magnitude and complexity that all parties and sectors must work together to tackle it.





## Our response

### Reducing emissions in the Church

The Uniting Church in Australia National Assembly has set a net zero carbon target by 2040 to support our planet's future. Uniting has undertaken specific initiatives supporting this aim. Between 2010 and 2023, we reduced our carbon emissions by 25.4%, implementing efficiency projects and utilising our 13,000+ solar panels to generate renewable energy for aged care services and early learning centres across NSW and ACT.

Uniting Church congregations and members have committed to reducing their emissions. Uniting has hosted a series of online information forums under the theme Living the Change. These forums address ways that individuals, households and congregations in the Uniting Church community can reduce their own greenhouse gas emissions. Recent forums have discussed: solar panels; diet and climate change; electric vehicles; personal divestment; and electrifying households.



Solar panels at Uniting Lindsay Gardens Hamilton, one of our aged care homes in Newcastle.

## Our response

# Collaborating for sustainability

Uniting collaborates with, and amplifies the work of, key partner organisations and campaigns.

As members of the Sydney Alliance, Uniting helped to coordinate an Assembly of more than 900 people in February 2022, ahead of the NSW State Election. It featured candidates from all major parties – Jenny Leong MP (GRN), Shadow Treasurer Daniel Mookhey (ALP) and NSW Government Treasurer Matt Kean (LIB). Hosted in Western Sydney, the focus was spotlighting cost of living and climate concerns and secured commitments including an end to no-grounds evictions, pushing for minimum energy efficiency standards for rentals and more.

Other collaborators include the Australian Religious Response to Climate Change and the Climate Action Network of Australia. Many Uniting Church members of all ages are already involved in action through such groups. For example, in late November 2023, 97-year-old retired Uniting Church Minister, Alan Stuart, was arrested at the on-water blockade of the Newcastle coal port organised by climate group Rising Tide.

Uniting also contributes to legislative and other measures to secure action on climate change, as opportunities allow. For example, Uniting made a submission to the Inquiry into Independent Senator David Pococks' Duty of Care Bill. This Bill seeks to embed an obligation for decision makers to consider the impact of greenhouse gas emissions on the health and wellbeing of Australian children and young people when considering new fossil fuel developments in this country.



**Staff of Uniting's services for children, youth and families are warmly invited to be part of the Sydney Alliance pre-NSW election Assembly at Westmead.**

## Our response

### Advocating for communities affected by climate change

The Uniting Church's commitment to addressing environmental issues has often arisen from the concern of congregational members. The Uniting Climate Action Network is one way we're continuing our heritage of grassroots environmental care and action.

#### Uniting Climate Action Network (UCAN)

UCAN was set up in 2021 to support Church members to act on environmental and climate issues by developing leadership, campaigning and organising skills. A primary focus in 2023 was supporting the Move Beyond Coal campaign. Its initial goal was to cut funding to key fossil fuel companies and projects responsible for harmful climate change, primarily the National Australia Bank (NAB) as a key financier of Whitehaven Coal. Many Uniting staff and Church congregations got involved in actions including branch protests, public demonstrations, and writing emails and letters. In July 2023, the campaign succeeded and NAB declined to renew its contribution to a \$1 billion loan to Whitehaven Coal, along with other Australian and international banks. In November, NAB also committed to stop funding any project or corporation mining thermal coal.

#### Pasifika leadership

Uniting has collaborated Uniting Church Pasifika leaders to advocate for climate action. As members of communities disproportionately impacted by climate change both in Australia and in their home islands, amplifying their perspectives has been a priority. This included facilitating large Pasifika-led political engagements with Minister for Climate Change and Energy Chris Bowen, both in 2022 ahead of the Federal election and in 2023 as a sitting Minister. We built our relationship with the Minister and pushed for meaningful policy outcomes including stronger emissions targets, a concrete timeline for phasing out fossil fuels and increasing support for lower income households and impacted communities in Western Sydney. Minister Bowen agreed to further conversation on these matters, with Church and Uniting leaders having since been involved in ongoing climate policy discussions with him and his NSW State counterparts.





## Our response

### Engaging staff to take climate action

A recurring question in our advocacy is: “What is the strategic point of difference we can make on climate?”

One point of difference is our connection to the Church community throughout NSW and the ACT, and participation across broad socio-political systems.

Another advocacy avenue with huge potential is our workforce of 11,500+ employees and volunteers. Our staff work with clients who are often most acutely impacted by climate change - including the elderly, people with disabilities, and those with modest means. Many are also personally affected, and members of communities that are feeling the strain – from facing extreme weather, like staff in Lismore who lost their homes in the 2022 floods, to impacts of heatwaves in Western Sydney and associated rising energy bills.

In the next reporting period we intend to engage with staff more intentionally on issues of sustainability, climate adaptation and climate change. Initially, we will undertake a listening campaign to better understand how our leaders and staff think and talk about climate change and disadvantage. A listening campaign is a focused effort to build community and identify concerns. It is done through one-to-one active listening conversations or small group meetings facilitated by Uniting’s advocacy team and other interested staff.

We believe these meetings can help those involved to better understand each other’s perspectives and experiences, as well as identify issues of common concern and potential action. From this we will develop a pilot staff engagement model to test and evaluate.





## Our response

# Making ethical investments

Uniting is entrusted with our aged care residents' bonds and retirement village incoming contributions, which are invested through Uniting Financial Services.

Uniting Financial Services (UFS) has been on an ethical environmental, social and governance (ESG) journey for decades, dating back to the early 1980s when our Ethical and ESG Investment Policy was established.

Our investment choices are governed by the 14 investment principles of our Ethical and ESG Investment Policy. As our policy is aligned with the delivery of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), our investment choices are also helping to deliver on the SDGs.

We intend to allocate proceeds raised from the SDGs Bond following its issuance in 2019, in line with the Church Ethical and ESG Investment Policy and the UN SDGs. As of 30 June 2023, the overall Ethical and ESG score for the balance sheet investments was rated B, versus a benchmark score of B, while achieving an above-average alignment to the SDGs of 33.6% versus the benchmark's alignment of 18.4%.



## Our response

### A snapshot of the results across asset classes

Category	Description	Ethical and ESG score
<b>Treasury assets</b>	18% of the internally managed portion of the portfolio has a quantifiable link to the SDGs. 67% of the externally managed portion of the portfolio has a quantifiable link to the SDGs.	<b>B+</b>
<b>Lending</b>	The combined Commercial and Church lending portfolios have a 32% quantifiable link to the SDGs.	<b>B</b>
<b>Equities</b>	The combined domestic and international equities portfolios have a 46% quantifiable link to the SDGs.	<b>B+</b>
<b>Property</b>	100% of the infrastructure portfolios have quantifiable links to the SDGs. Prioritisation of carbon footprint reporting across assets and targeting Scope 1, 2 and 3 emissions reductions. Support of the regional communities surrounding the assets where they operate. Supporting biodiversity outcomes through water and wildlife conservation activities.	<b>A</b>
<b>Infrastructure</b>	100% of the property portfolios have quantifiable links to the SDGs. Initiatives throughout the portfolio for energy efficiency to lower emissions. Tenancies based on adherence to our Ethical and ESG Policy.	<b>B</b>

## Our sustainability practices

### Being better NABERS

The National Australian Built Environment Rating System (or NABERS) provides simple, reliable and comparable sustainability measurement across buildings.

A NABERS rating helps Uniting to accurately measure and understand the environmental performance of our buildings, so that we can identify areas for cost savings and improvement. In 2023 we introduced the NABERS rating system for Uniting residential aged care homes and retirement villages. On the NABERS rating scale, 5 stars is 'excellent' and 6 stars is 'market leading', so the majority of our office employees are currently working in environmentally friendly buildings that are better for the planet.

Over the next 2 years, we plan to complete NABERS energy and water assessments of all Uniting corporate offices, retirement villages and aged care homes, with a target of at least 5-star ratings.



Uniting Locke Haven, our aged care home in Petersham, has a 4 star rating (good) for energy and water usage.

## Our sustainability practices

### Sustainable design standards

We're also evolving our design guide - for new buildings, refurbishment, and leasehold fit-out - to incorporate sustainable design standards. All new developments are aiming to achieve 5-star NABERS ratings and operate in ways that are close to carbon neutral.

New Uniting independent living apartments will have embedded electricity networks where possible, to reduce energy costs for village residents and to support solar power generation. We're also continuing to roll out other sustainable initiatives including solar panels, LED lighting, heating and cooling system upgrades, and efficient water conservation measures.

Across Uniting's property portfolio, we're also actively monitoring and managing sites for resilience to climate changes, to protect the people living and working in our buildings and communities - and the biodiversity of flora and fauna - against extreme weather events such as destructive fire, flood and drought.

McRae-McMahon Place by Uniting, Leichhardt





## Our sustainability practices

### Investing in solar farming

To help propel Uniting's path to carbon neutrality, we're exploring potential solar farm investment as another way to reduce the impact of electricity consumption, which currently makes up 80% of our carbon emissions.

Uniting is contributing to the development of renewable energy farms in partnership with other organisations, to replace some of our electricity consumption with power generated from the sun and wind.

With more than 13,000+ photovoltaic solar panels on the roofs of our services across NSW and the ACT, Uniting is already one of the largest renewable energy generators in the aged care sector.

There's a compelling financial and environmental case to build and operate solar farms that can supply Uniting with renewable energy into the future. Harnessing the sun's energy this way can support us with stable energy prices and help us accelerate our goal of reaching carbon neutrality by 2040.



## Our sustainability practices

### Gold Partnership Recognition Award

In 2023, we received the Gold Partnership Recognition Award with the NSW Government's Sustainability Advantage program. Uniting is one of only 10 Gold Partners in the 800-membership program.

The award recognises Uniting as an organisation that demonstrates outstanding environmental achievement and leadership, based on:

- Being an ambitious participant in both Sustainability Advantage's Net Zero Emissions Pathway and Net Zero Emissions Leadership Accelerator
- A commitment to achieving net zero by 2040
- Our success in reducing carbon emissions by 25% since FY10, through a combination of many elements including adding renewable energy to 32 aged care sites and a commitment to employee education.

The award also recognises that sustainability is embedded into our systems and processes, such as procurement, waste management and better building design. For Uniting, this achievement acknowledges the Church's commitment to the planet, our collective advocacy and everyone's ongoing efforts to be responsible stewards while protecting disadvantaged people and communities.



Uniting Executive Director Tracey Burton accepted our gold partner sustainability advantage award from the Hon. Penny Sharpe, MLC.

**Our commitment to carbon neutrality is a long-term journey that requires dedication, innovation and collaboration. Uniting recognises that the challenges ahead are significant, yet we're confident that by working together, we can create a more sustainable future for generations to come.**

## Our next steps



**Continue the delivery of our 10-year strategy to disrupt entrenched disadvantage.** We're doing this by prioritising the people and places of greatest need, and directing our investment and energy to where we can have the most impact.



**Strengthen our advocacy, collaboration and engagement for climate change action.** We're well-positioned to provide thought leadership on the intersection between climate and disadvantage in our communities, and to start more conversations about potential solutions.



**Adopt more sustainable practices to meet our 2040 goal of carbon neutrality.** We've recently entered into a Power Purchase Agreement for green electricity. From 2024 to 2026, power generated from wind farms and solar sources will increase from 30% to 50% of Uniting's total requirements.

## About Uniting

Uniting NSW.ACT contributes to the work of the Uniting Church in NSW and the ACT, through social justice advocacy, community services and spiritual care.

We provide services for people through all ages and stages of life, and drive solutions to systemic issues so people experiencing disadvantage can live their best lives.

Our purpose is to inspire people, enliven communities and confront injustice.

We value diversity and always welcome everyone exactly as they are.

Get in touch

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# Uniting