



# Australian Christian Lobby 2025 Federal Election Questionnaire

## **1. Protection of faith-based schools**

Australians have long supported faith-based schools. Demand outstrips available places as they are known for being supportive, safe places, and for holding to more traditional values.

The continued existence of such schools is under threat due to the Australian Law Reform Commission (ALRC) Inquiry into Religious Educational Institutions and Anti-Discrimination Laws, which recommended removal of the exemptions faith-based schools rely on in the Sex Discrimination Act 1984 (SDA) when selecting and keeping staff able to exemplify the school's ethos.

The Government disengaged from progressing a Religious Discrimination Bill (RDB), which is needed to provide faith-based schools with the protection they need. Now they face untenable uncertainty.

*Will your party commit to workable discrimination law exemptions (including in the SDA) or other provisions to allow religious schools and other religious institutions to recruit staff and implement policies which reflect their ethos?*

## **2. Freedom of Speech**

The increasing incidence of state and federal legislation which undermines free speech is concerning. Changes to anti-vilification and hate speech laws, privacy laws, and threats to censor social media are eroding the free speech of ordinary Australians despite Australia's international treaty obligations. These laws place the validity of opinions at the whim of bureaucrats, provide criminal and civil sanctions based on an individual feeling 'hurt' and allow judges to scrutinise the validity of religious doctrine.

*Will your party commit to protecting free speech in Australia by not introducing laws that will further erode religious freedom and freedom of speech?*

## **3. Competing Rights**

In 2013, amendments to the Sex Discrimination Act 1984 (SDA) removed biological definitions of "man" and "woman". This included removing biological sex as the defining characteristic of a woman, introducing the fluid concept of gender identity, and adding protections for "sexual orientation", "gender identity" and "intersex status" into

Commonwealth law. The parliamentary debates surrounding these amendments characterised the changes as merely “extending protections” against discrimination to additional groups. However, as the passage of time has shown, the consequences of redefining the human person are profound and wide-reaching. For example, protections intended to preserve women’s single-sex sports have proven inadequate.

Increasingly laws and policies are being introduced which allow men who think they are women to compete in women’s sport, take opportunities designated for women, and access women’s spaces including toilets and change rooms.

Because of the differences in capabilities, some men, who may be strong but not top-tier athletes as males, identify as females and become high achievers, winning accolades, representational opportunities and precious funding. Women who have raised concerns about these issues have been subjected to costly legal actions. The considerable effort put into increasing women’s participation in sport over many years have also been undermined by these developments.

Legislation is being weaponised, and women are being dragged into court and before tribunals for affirming women’s sex-based rights and biological reality. The reality is that men who identify as women now have more rights than biological women.

*Does your party intend to restore the definition of a women in the SDA to be based on biological sex?*

#### **4. National Student Wellbeing Program (formerly National School Chaplaincy Program)**

The National School Chaplaincy Program (NSCP) has provided support to schools since its inception in 2006, enabling pastoral care chaplains to attend to the spiritual and emotional wellbeing of staff and students. It is a unique service that has proven to be of great value to school students, staff and parents, recognising the importance of spiritual care in a holistic approach to education. Chaplains offer care, help build students’ social skills, encourage responsible behaviour, and contribute to the wellbeing of school communities.

Australia’s children and young people are increasingly facing mental health and wellbeing challenges. As these challenges rise, so does unmet demand for community services. Schools have the option to engage a Chaplain. Currently school chaplains support over 2,108 school communities nationally each year.

While the Australian Government funds the program, it gives state and territory governments responsibility for the program’s delivery and management. An evaluation of the program was undertaken in 2022 by the Federal Education Minister, Jason Clare MP. This resulted in schools now being able to choose between hiring religious

chaplains or secular pastoral care workers. The program was also rebranded as the National Student Wellbeing Program (NSWP) in 2023.

The changes move away from a holistic care approach, including spiritual care, towards a therapeutic, highly psychologised focus on “wellness.” The program’s new direction raises important questions about the future of chaplaincy in schools.

*Does your party support the continuance of the current chaplaincy program in schools?*

## **5. Consent Education**

\$77.6 million of the federal budget has been allocated to support state and territory government and non-government schools in implementing the ‘Consent and Respectful Relationships Program’ from 2024-2028.

A sample teaching text from the Victoria Respectful Relationships Program, which targets 5 to 7 year-olds, includes the following excerpt:

“Some people do not want to be called a boy or a girl, but rather something that is not one or the other...One way we can be friendly and respectful is by introducing ourselves like this: Hello, I am (add name), and I use (add pronoun she/her, he/him, they/them) pronouns when you talk about me. What is your name? And how should I refer to you?”

There is increasing international and local evidence, including the recent Cass Review in the United Kingdom, that current gender dysphoria treatments used in Australia, including hormone blockers and operations to remove body parts, are dangerous and may cause irreversible damage. These treatments have now been banned in some jurisdictions, including the UK.

Material included in the Consent and Respectful Relationships Program promotes gender ideology and social contagion. It can encourage children on to the pathway of gender dysphoria and hormone blockers and other treatments, in an attempt to change their gender.

*Will your party commit to reviewing the ‘Consent and Respectful Relationships Program’ to ensure gender ideology and all references to potentially harmful practices are removed?*

## **6. National Curriculum**

There is concern about the diminishing, and in places inaccurate, representation of Australia’s Christian heritage and values in version 9 of the Australian national curriculum. There is also concern that, instead of focusing on facts and knowledge,

version 9 includes material designed to indoctrinate children with identity politics, radical race theory and radical green ideology, particularly through cross-curriculum priorities of ‘sustainability’ and ‘Indigenous and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures’.

Recent media reports have provided examples that maths teachers are expected to incorporate Indigenous dance and storytelling to teach basic maths skills, despite falling numeracy rates. The Primary Schools Principals Association has raised concern that the current curriculum is complex, too broad, and ‘impossible to teach’ and has called for a refocusing on the mastery of literacy and numeracy skills. The next review is not due until 2027.

*What steps will your party take to ensure the national curriculum does not contain matters that are not factual or evidence-based?*

## **7. Diversity, Equity & Inclusion in the Australian Public Service**

The independence and impartiality of the Australian Public Service is being improperly influenced by advocacy groups through third-party Diversity Equity and Inclusion (DEI) arrangements. For example, many Australian Government departments participate in the Aids Council of NSW’s (ACON) Workplace Equality Index (AWEI) which benchmarks organisations according to how they incorporate inclusion into their policies and practices.

ACON is the largest LGBTQI+ charity and advocacy group in Australia and receives millions of dollars per annum in government funding. Although AWEI participation itself is free, there are memberships, training and resources that are paid for. In addition, organisations are influenced to change their policies, undertake capital works, and grant funding to comply with the terms of the AWEI.

It is highly improper that any third party, let alone a lobby group, should be able to significantly impact Government processes and policies.

In Australia, ACON’s influence on the ABC has received negative public comment. In October 2022, Media Watch asked the question: “Can the ABC remain impartial when it partners with a lobby group and gets ranked in a competitive index?” The same question might be asked of any of the Australian Government departments which are participating in this program. As indicated on ACON’s ‘inclusive employers’ website, current participants include the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, the Attorney General’s Department, the Department of Health, the ABC and the Department of Defence. It has also included the Department of Education in recent years.

*Will your party commit to an audit of all Australian Government departments' DEI policies, guides, and training to ensure they are implemented based on a genuine commitment to fairness, capability and respect for all, rather than identity-based diversity policies that favour particular groups and individuals over others?*

## **8. Puberty Blockers**

Following comprehensive evidence-based reviews, an increasing number of countries internationally, including the United Kingdom, have already banned puberty blockers and other medical interventions for gender-confused children under the age of 18.

The federal Health Minister, the Hon Mark Butler, has directed the National Health and Medical Research Council to conduct a review into the Australian Standards of Care and Treatment Guidelines for Trans and Gender Diverse Children and Adolescents in Australia, and to develop new national guidelines. However, this review will not be finalised for two years, and in the meantime, these potentially irreversible, health-wrecking treatments will continue.

*Does your party consider that children and adolescents under 18 years of age should be allowed to take puberty blockers and cross-sex hormones, and undergo surgery to remove breasts and other sex organs?*

## **9. Online Gambling**

Australia has the highest per capita spend on online gambling, with total turnover in 2024 of \$244.33 billion, fuelled by \$238.63million in gambling advertising between May 2022 and April 2023. Whilst there are regulations and advertising restrictions that apply to poker machines, casinos and other types of gambling, online gambling has proliferated and is not covered by state and territory regulations. It is a significantly growing market.

A federal parliamentary 'Inquiry into online gambling and its impacts on those experiencing gambling harm' was held in 2022/23 (the Murphy Inquiry). The inquiry exposed the significant social issues that arise from gambling addiction such as suicides, domestic violence, marriage breakdown, poverty and crime. The inquiry report recommended a total ban on online gambling advertising and a ban on commission being paid to staff or any third party involved in the referral or provision of online gambling to an individual.

*Which recommendations of the "Inquiry into online gambling" (the Murphy Inquiry) does your party propose to adopt?*

## **10. Age Verification to Protect Children from Pornography Exposure**

The House of Representatives Standing Committee on Social Policy and Legal Affairs released a report 'Protecting the Age of Innocence' in 2020. The recommendations included the introduction of age verification for pornography access, and the development of a roadmap for implementing such a regime.

In May 2024, following a number of fatalities due to domestic violence, the Government announced an age assurance technology trial for pornography. The trial commenced in late 2024.

*Does your party support the introduction of age verification to restrict access to pornography by children under the age of 18?*

## **11. Family, Women, and Children**

Australia has an aging population and a falling birth rate, which is now at 1.5, well below the necessary replacement population level of 2.1. Australia is increasingly turning to immigration to meet population replacement needs.

Research by family advocate and psychoanalyst, Erica Komisar, has found a major cause of the mental illness crises in our society stems from babies being separated from their mothers too early. Children need their mothers present for the first three years in their life to build their resilience, and institutional childcare for 0 to 3 year olds leads to distressed children due to increased cortisol and stress.

*What initiatives are your party planning to implement to increase the Australian birth rate and to support parents wishing to stay at home and care for their children?*

## **12. Homelessness**

There is a housing shortage crisis in Australia, which has caused an increase in the price of rental housing, by 32% since 2020. This housing shortage has also caused a spike in the number of people experiencing homelessness. The 2021 Census found that over 122,000 people experience homelessness on any given night in Australia. 23% are between 12 and 24 years old, and one in seven is a child under 12. Nationally, over the past three years, there has been a 22% increase in people who are rough sleeping.

*What steps does your party propose to take to reduce homelessness in Australia?*

## **13. Sex Trafficking**

Research throughout Europe reveals that, in nations where the sex industry is legalised or decriminalised, human trafficking increases. However, in the Nordic countries, where buying sex is illegal, human trafficking has decreased.

Progress has been made in strengthening Australian laws, evidenced by Australia being ranked a Tier 1 country in terms of overall modern slavery action by the annual USA 2024 Trafficking in Persons Report. However, the extent of sexual slavery is a hidden issue in Australia, particularly since legalisation of the prostitution industry and the advent of mobile phones.

*Will your party push for an inquiry into the connection between a legalised or decriminalised sex industry and human sex trafficking?*

#### **14. Indigenous issues**

Historically Indigenous Australians have been significantly overrepresented in the health, welfare and justice systems in comparison to the rest of the Australian population. On average, they have had much lower outcomes in most key health and social markers than non-Indigenous Australians. This variance is known as “The Gap”. After decades of work and billions of dollars being spent trying to rectify the disparity, overall, a gap remains.

Further to this, high rates of alcohol and other drug-related (AOD) harm is resulting from and contributing to the social and health ‘gap’ between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians. They also contribute to significant social issues, including high unemployment and incarceration, violent antisocial behaviour, high rates of domestic violence and foetal alcohol spectrum disorder (FASD). Whether they use AOD or not, all Indigenous Australians are impacted by AOD in some way, and there are intergenerational impacts.

*Will your party support an inquiry into annual spending on “Closing the Gap”, including an audit of privately controlled entities and an evaluation of all funded programs, to ensure they are effective in helping vulnerable Indigenous Australians?*

#### **15. Euthanasia by Telehealth**

There are increasing calls from assisted suicide advocates to broaden access to voluntary assisted dying (VAD), including by making VAD available via Telehealth, which is a federal matter. This raises some serious concerns about safeguards, particularly for the vulnerable, ethics and the sanctity of life. High costs of ongoing care and some family members wanting to access inheritances can increase

pressure on a patient to undertake VAD. The Commonwealth Criminal Code Section 474.29A prohibits using telecommunication services to discuss or promote suicide, thus restricting Telehealth consultations for VAD.

Historically, suicide prevention efforts have been central to Australian health policy. Normalising VAD, especially via Telehealth, undermines these efforts and sends conflicting messages to society about the value of life and support systems for the terminally ill.

*What is your party's position on whether federal laws should be changed to permit VAD consultations via Telehealth?*

## **16. Legalisation of Illicit Drugs**

There is currently a push to legalise cannabis and other drugs at a federal and state level. However, there is no safe level of illicit drug use and legalising them creates the perception they are safe and increases drug use. Legalising illicit drugs will also breach Australia's treaty obligations under the United Nations International Drug Control Treaties.

Drugs do not just impact the individuals taking them, they also cause significant adverse public health costs and societal impacts. Scientific evidence has demonstrated that cannabis and other illicit drugs are causal for numerous serious physical and mental health conditions. There are also an increasing number of deaths and injuries due to drug driving annually. The KPMG Rethink Australia Report 'Understanding Addiction' found that the annual cost of addiction to illicit and other drugs in Australia in 2021 was \$12.9 billion.

Australia has a National Drug Strategy 2017-2026 which is based on a 'harm minimisation' approach rather than a 'prevention' approach. Previously, a 'prevention' approach has been proven to be effective in reducing drug taking in Australia, whilst harm minimisation approaches have resulted in increased drug taking.

*What plans does your party have for the legalisation of cannabis or other illicit drugs?*

## **17. Parental Rights**

Australia has a national electronic 'My Health Record' system. This is a secure, personally controlled online summary of a person's health information. Until age 14, a child's parent or guardian is automatically an authorised representative, which means they can access this information. As a result of legislative changes, when a child turns 14, all representatives are removed from their record. If they choose to, they can give their parent or guardian access as an authorised representative. This record allows the



child and health professionals to view and share the child's health information, but parents may now be denied access and have no knowledge of their child's health issues, challenges, treatment decisions and treatments.

This poses a serious health and safety risk for children and denies parental rights. Children are not mature enough to be managing their health decisions and treatment decisions on their own. They may be facing serious mental health issues which their parents are unaware of and are unable to support them through. Children may also be being sexually abused, may be vulnerable to others pushing particular agendas on social media or may make significant decisions without full understanding of the consequences.

Under 21's are considered dependant's according to the Australian Government, under 18's are not allowed to vote, and parents are still required to provide permission for school students up to 18 years to attend excursions.

*Does your party propose to restore parental rights to access their 14 to 17 year old children's My Health Records, except in exceptional circumstances?*

## **18. Foreign Aid**

It is important for wealthy nations like Australia to be helping poor nations with appropriate development funding. Currently 0.68% of Australia's Federal Budget goes to international aid.<sup>18</sup> This has reduced over time. At the same time, the need for humanitarian aid has risen due to significant conflicts happening in countries such as Lebanon, Yemen, Sudan, Ukraine, Gaza, as well as issues such as displacement, poverty, and resource scarcity.

Australia's aid budget is not adequate to respond to the increased needs and ACL is joining with many other organisations to call for an increase in foreign aid to 1% of the Federal Budget by FY26– 27. Whilst it is important to help those in need, it is also important that to ensure that any foreign aid goes to specific actual needs of the recipient communities, as determined by them. There is concern that some of Australia's current aid budget may be being used to promote ideological agendas internationally. The media also recently raised concern that Australian Aid to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNWRA) was being used to indirectly fund Hamas, a terrorist organisation.

*Given the current levels of poverty and humanitarian need around the world, and the concern regarding aid budget being used ideologically, does your party plan to increase foreign aid as a percentage of the Federal Budget to meet desperate international needs, targeting it where it's practically required, ensuring it's not influenced by ideology?*