



Uniting Church in Australia  
SYNOD OF VICTORIA AND TASMANIA

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23 March 2020

Victorian Local Government Rating System Review Ministerial Panel  
C/- Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning  
Level 35  
2 Lonsdale St  
MELBOURNE VIC 3000  
[Rating.review@delwp.vic.gov.au](mailto:Rating.review@delwp.vic.gov.au)

Dear Panel

**RE: Local Government Rating System Review**

Thank you for allowing the Uniting Church in Australia Synod of Victoria and Tasmania (the “**Uniting Church**”) an opportunity to participate in the review into local government rating systems.

The Uniting Church is writing in response to issues that arose during the Local Government Rating System Review in late 2019. The Uniting Church apologises for not submitting during the official consultation period as there was a lack of awareness of the Review within the faith and not-for-profit sector.

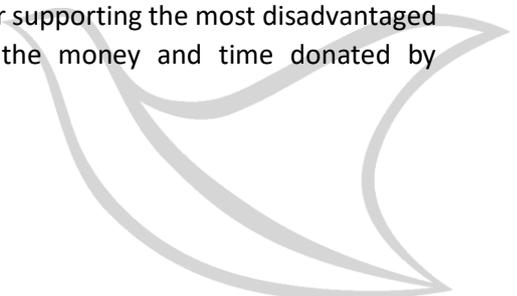
The Uniting Church has long been recognised for our proactive, widespread and wide-ranging support of communities across Victoria, with a specific emphasis on the disadvantaged and marginalised.

This support is provided extensively through our agencies, including Uniting VicTas and Uniting AgeWell, and also at a grassroots level through congregations and faith communities.

**Our Congregations**

In many areas of community support, the work of the Uniting Church and that of our agencies is made possible, both financially and through human resources, by an extensive volunteer network sourced from our congregations. As with many faith-based organisations, the average age of our members is increasing, whilst the total number of members is decreasing. This is already adding to the pressures and long-term sustainability of many of our local congregations and of the active role they play within their local communities.

In many rural and metropolitan regions, church facilities are enjoyed by the entire community for functions, events, festivals, community markets, fetes and numerous other gatherings, for providing playgroup and services for isolated parents, emergency relief and for supporting the most disadvantaged members of our society. Those facilities are maintained with the money and time donated by congregations.



## **Our Agencies**

Uniting AgeWell has a long history, well in excess of 60 years (taking account of predecessor Church aged care facilities), of providing residential aged care, in-home support and associated services to older persons in need. Uniting AgeWell is one of the largest not-for-profit aged care providers in Victoria.

Uniting AgeWell is a registered charity with additional PBI sub-type charity status. This means that they are a type of charity whose main purpose is to provide residential aged care, community care and retirement living services to older persons in need, explicitly for the relief of sickness, suffering, helplessness, disability and disadvantage.

The introduction in recent years of Consumer Directed Care has restricted revenue streams of aged care providers. Any increase to the overhead cost base must inevitably lead to reductions in corresponding services to already vulnerable clients.

Uniting VicTas undertakes and delivers in excess of 700 community services including Mental Health, Drug and Alcohol Dependency, Early Learning, Domestic Violence, Community Wellbeing and capacity building.

Any imposition of council rates would have to be funded by equivalent cuts to service delivery budgets which will inevitably result in reduced services being offered.

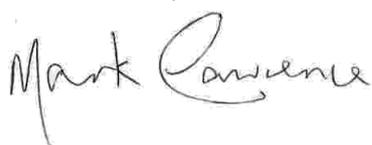
By the very nature of the services delivered, Uniting's work is concentrated in geographic areas with the greatest need. Therefore, any reduction in services will result in further stress on government services in those areas. As mentioned previously, Uniting relies heavily on a network of unpaid volunteers to deliver these services, with almost 50% of their human resources being volunteers, sourced largely from Uniting Church congregations.

## **Conclusion**

The Uniting Church strongly opposes any change to the rating system for the not-for-profit sector. Doing so would reduce the services currently provided to those in most need and push the cost of these services back to Local Governments to support.

Any questions about this submission should be addressed to Sam Nicholas (Executive Officer - Mission Resourcing Unit), by e-mail to [Sam.Nicholas@victas.uca.org.au](mailto:Sam.Nicholas@victas.uca.org.au) or by telephone on (03) 9251 5431.

Yours sincerely,



**Rev Dr Mark Lawrence**  
**General Secretary**  
**Synod of Victoria and Tasmania**



**Ms Bronwyn Pike**  
**Chief Executive Officer**  
**Uniting VicTas**



**Mr Andrew Kinnersly**  
**Chief Executive Officer**  
**Uniting AgeWell**