



# PRE-BUDGET SUBMISSION 2024-25



SUBMISSION TO:  
**THE TREASURY**

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## 2024-25 Pre-Budget Submission

The Academy of the Social Sciences in Australia (the Academy) is an independent, not-for-profit organisation that brings together the multidisciplinary expertise of our nation's leading thinkers to provide practical, evidence-based advice on important social issues facing society.

As the pre-eminent organisation in Australia representing excellence across the social science disciplines, we welcome the opportunity to put forward our priorities for consideration in the 2024-25 Federal Budget.

The social sciences are key to understanding humanity, society and the institutions that govern our daily lives. Our submission makes eight recommendations to support a world-class social science system and to deploy social science research to address key challenges facing Australia.

### Strengthen Australia's research ecosystem

**Recommendation 1:** Increase research and development funding towards 3% of GDP as part of a whole-of-government research funding strategy across knowledge creation, diffusion and commercialisation.

**Recommendation 2:** Invest in the *Boosting Social Sciences and their Contribution to Better Lives across the Indo-Pacific* program. *Investment required: \$1.34 million over two years.*

### Improve learning and education outcomes for all Australians

**Recommendation 3:** Continue to improve equity, access and affordability of early childhood education and care, prioritising action to address critical labour supply issues.

**Recommendation 4:** Invest in the Academy's school education program to provide classroom teachers with evidence-based, curriculum-aligned resources to support student learning in social science subject areas. *Investment required: \$600,000 over three years.*

**Recommendation 5:** Improve integration between vocational education and training and higher education systems, and actively involve young people in co-designing their transition from senior secondary education.

**Recommendation 6:** Invest in the expansion of Social Sciences Week to promote and celebrate social science thinking and expertise throughout Australia. *Investment required: \$250,000 over two years.*

### Address key challenges facing Australia

**Recommendation 7:** Undertake urgent reform of the youth mental health system to address service access, social determinants and youth participation.

**Recommendation 8:** Increase funding to the Australian Bureau of Statistics to maintain key social surveys and to build further wellbeing measurement capability.

To discuss any matters raised in this submission, please contact Andrea Verdich, Policy Director on 0438 218 352 or [andrea.verdich@socialsciences.org.au](mailto:andrea.verdich@socialsciences.org.au).

## Strengthen Australia's research ecosystem

### Drive economic prosperity and social wellbeing through increased investment in research and development

Funding for research and development (R&D) is a critical component of any economic plan that seeks to invest in the foundations of future growth. R&D drives innovation and productivity and improves our quality of life. Every dollar spent on R&D brings returns of \$3.50 to the economy and research shows that there are significant spillovers to productivity from public R&D spending on research agencies and higher education.<sup>1,2</sup>

Despite this, Australian government investment in R&D has been neglected and currently sits at 1.68% of GDP—well below the OECD average. Many of Australia's international partners, such as the United States, Japan and Germany, have all powered ahead with investments of around 3% on R&D, consistent with the Australian Government's long-term policy aspiration.

Research funding is dispersed across programs and portfolios. No whole-of-government policy exists for research investment and no central agency oversees or administers research funding. Without a coordinated and properly funded national strategy research investment lacks the scale to provide the game-changing breakthroughs that Australia needs. To remain resilient and competitive Australian needs a comprehensive research funding plan which sets a path to uplift R&D investment to internationally competitive levels.

**Recommendation 1:** Increase research and development funding towards 3% of GDP as part of a whole-of-government research funding strategy across knowledge creation, diffusion and commercialisation.

### Deepen ties with the Indo-Pacific by investing in social science research exchange and collaboration

With human society facing several wide ranging and interlinked grand challenges such as climate change, digital transitions and geopolitical shifts, research collaboration has never been more important. Deepening social and cultural connections through active researcher exchange and collaboration is vital to strengthen Australia's diplomatic ties with its neighbours and allies in the Indo-Pacific region.

[\*Boosting Social Sciences and their Contribution to Better Lives across the Indo-Pacific\*](#) is a coordinated program of activity focused on:

- mapping and understanding the current state and opportunities for social science
- supporting high-priority research initiatives through strategic research grants
- connecting and empowering social science research organisations and funders across the region to enhance research impact and improve lives.

The program is a collaborative partnership between the Association of Asian Social Science Research Councils (including the Academy) and the Global Development Network, generously

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<sup>1</sup> CSIRO Futures (2021) [\*Quantifying Australia's returns to innovation.\*](#)

<sup>2</sup> Elnasri and Fox (2014) *The Contribution of Research and Innovation to Productivity and Economic Growth*. Available: <http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.2398732>

funded by Canada's International Development Research Centre, through an investment of \$1.34M over two years. A matched Australian Government investment in this initiative would allow the partners to significantly expand the scope and nature of the program and signal Australia's renewed commitment to strong relationships within the region.

**Recommendation 2:** Invest in the *Boosting Social Sciences and their Contribution to Better Lives across the Indo-Pacific* program. Investment required: \$1.34 million over two years.

## Improve learning and education outcomes for all Australians

Support the education pipeline, recognising that learning begins at birth and continues throughout a person's life

Social scientists work across all industries and sectors, deploying a range of skills to the benefit of society. They are valued not only for their discipline-specific knowledge, but also for their critical analysis, problem-solving and people skills and their ability to see the 'big picture'.

The foundations for a social science education start in the early childhood education and care system (ECEC) and continue throughout school to tertiary education and lifelong learning. Ensuring each stage of the pipeline is connected and encourages equity and quality is critical to foster the next generation of social scientists.

### Early childhood education and care

High quality ECEC can have positive effects on education outcomes later in life, particularly for children experiencing disadvantage. Realising these benefits will require increased Australian Government funding and policy coordination to address the availability, affordability and inclusion gaps that persist in the system. This includes urgently prioritising longstanding concerns about pay, conditions, career opportunities and qualification pathways for the ECEC workforce.

**Recommendation 3:** Continue to improve equity, access and affordability of early childhood education and care, prioritising urgent action to address labour supply issues.

### Social science thinking and knowledge in Australian schools

The delivery of social science education—covering subject areas such as history, geography, civics, business and economics, and studies of society and environment—varies significantly across schools and there is no guarantee that all Australians will leave school with the high-quality foundation in these important knowledge domains. School staffing models often result in teachers being asked to teach outside their expertise, as well as to change subjects' year-to-year.

The final report of the Expert Panels Review to Inform a Better and Fairer Education System [\*Improving Outcomes for All\*](#) highlighted the lack of high-quality teaching and learning resources to support teachers and student outcomes in social science subject areas and recommended 'investing in and promoting evidence-based and quality assured curriculum resources...' (*recommendation 1c iv*).

The Academy is currently piloting a social sciences school education program consistent with this recommendation and has invested \$100,000 to develop a suite of curriculum resources for secondary schools focussed initially on civil discourse, geography and history. The resources are written by teachers, reviewed by social science research experts, and tested with a broad range of stakeholders in government, schools and other community and public institutions.

Additional Australian Government funding of \$600,000 over three years would enable the program to be rolled out nationally, expanded to cover a range of subject areas and year levels and ensure resources are freely available to teachers in all Australian schools, as well as to those in home-schooling contexts.

**Recommendation 4:** Invest in the Academy's school education program to provide classroom teachers with evidence-based, curriculum-aligned resources to support student learning in social science subject areas. *Investment required: \$600,000 over three years.*

### Tertiary education system

Better integrating vocational education and training and higher education will modernise the tertiary education system and allow it to respond to evolving demands for skills, knowledge and capabilities. The Australia Universities Accord Interim Report foreshadows the funding, leadership and policy coordination efforts that will be required to deliver a more cohesive system.

Interactions between the tertiary system and senior secondary is also critically important to improve current career education and awareness of the education pathways into new fields of work, such as the digital economy. Updated approaches to career education should be co-designed with young people to ensure policy interventions are appropriately directed.

**Recommendation 5:** Improve integration between vocational education and training and higher education systems, and actively involve young people in co-designing their transition from senior secondary education.

### Champion the social sciences by investing in Social Sciences Week

Sparkling interest and understanding of the social sciences and their contribution to the world is critical to inspiring future generations. [Social Sciences Week](#), a week-long program of events and activities each September, has become the key platform for celebrating the social sciences and deepening engagement and interaction between researchers, schools, teachers and the public.

An initiative of several Australian social science associations, coordinated by the Academy, the week has rapidly expanded over six years to include close to 100 in-person and online events each year with thousands of participants from across Australia and abroad. The 2023 program was launched at Parliament House and included [The Great Debate: does sport unite or divide us?](#) featuring The Hon Andrew Leigh MP and Emeritus Professor David Rowe.

Social Sciences Week has strong support from the social sciences sector, and we invite the Australian Government to partner with us on this initiative. Additional investment would deliver an expanded program exceeding 200 national events and a national schools program engaging at least 50 teachers and classrooms across the country as well as creating an online educational Community of Practice to grow capacity in social sciences teaching. Consistent with the

Australian Government's investment in National Science Week, investment would be directed towards:

- grants to local organisers to support Social Sciences Week events (50-80 x \$500-\$1,000 grants p.a.; \$100,000 over two years)
- a part-time program coordinator with responsibility for engaging with schools and teachers to increase the scope and reach of the national school's program.

**Recommendation 6:** Invest in the expansion of Social Sciences Week to promote and celebrate social science thinking and expertise throughout Australia. *Investment required: \$250,000 over two years.*

## Addressing key challenges facing Australia

### Take a systems approach to addressing youth mental health and wellbeing

The mental health of young Australians is rapidly declining, matched by evidence from around the world. Nearly 40 per cent of young people aged 16 to 24 experienced a mental disorder within the last 12 months, almost double the rate of mental ill-health in the general population.<sup>3</sup>

Complex and multiple factors are likely contributing to the decline in youth mental health, including social media exposure, increased concerns about climate change, financial stress, pressure to achieve, better health literacy and reduced stigma.

While young people are broadly aware of strategies to support their mental health, many do not have access to the timely and affordable services they need or the level of care they require in more serious and complex cases. There is an urgent need for comprehensive reform of the mental health system and significant investment to address key issues of early intervention, service access, social determinants and youth participation.

**Recommendation 7:** Undertake urgent reform of the youth mental health system to address service access, social determinants and youth participation.

### Restructure the social survey program to support annual wellbeing reporting

The Australian Government initiative to develop a stand-alone Measuring What Matters Statement provides a welcomed opportunity to improve policy design, transparency and accountability based on a clear and contemporary understanding of what progress means to Australian society.

However, meaningful annual wellbeing reporting will require a significant shift in our national data infrastructure. Many key economic, health, social and environmental data which underpin the framework indicators are currently collected at different time intervals which presents a major challenge for constructing and reporting a set of useful wellbeing indicators. Further,

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<sup>3</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics (2020-2022), [National Study of Mental Health and Wellbeing](#).

several indicators under financial security, social connections and life satisfaction relied on the General Social Survey program which was discontinued in August 2023.

Restructuring surveys to deliver annual data within a multi-year approach, consistent with modifications to the Time Use Survey several years ago, is one model that could be adopted across the social survey program to support more frequent wellbeing reporting. Sufficient funding should also be provided to the Australian Bureau of Statistics to maintain key social surveys and to build further wellbeing measurement capability within the agency, especially to address important data gaps.

**Recommendation 8:** Increase funding to the Australian Bureau of Statistics to maintain key social surveys and to build further wellbeing measurement capability.