



PRE-BUDGET SUBMISSION 2026-27



SUBMISSION TO:
THE TREASURY

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2026-27 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 the 2026-27 Budget.

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

Our priorities are directed towards a budget strategy that places equity at the centre of a growth agenda. Social science evidence consistently shows that fairer outcomes and stronger economic performance reinforce each other: targeted investments in human capability, research and development and institutional quality all contribute to a productive and resilient economy and societal wellbeing.

Create opportunity and equity through education

Recommendation 1: Invest in the Academy's school education program, *Seriously Social*, to provide classroom teachers with evidence-based, curriculum-aligned resources, supporting student learning in social science subject areas.

Investment required: \$1,200,000 per annum for three years.

Recommendation 2: Invest in the expansion of Social Sciences Week through Inspiring Australia to promote and celebrate social science research and informed public discourse throughout Australia.

Investment required: \$200,000 over two years.

Address key challenges facing Australia

Recommendation 3: Continue to improve the Intergenerational Report to ensure it supports long-term economic, social, and fiscal sustainability by broadening its scope, strengthening its independence and improving the technical quality.

Strengthen the research ecosystem

Recommendation 4: Increase Australia's R&D investment as a share of GDP towards the OECD average as part of a long-term, challenge-led national R&D strategy that addresses the full range of economic and societal goals.

Recommendation 5: Establish dedicated, long-term funding for research on health systems and financing to build national capacity and generate the evidence needed to deliver a system-wide transformation of health care.

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

Create opportunity and equity through education

Support social science education and critical thinking abilities in Australian schools

Research shows that many Australian schools lack qualified social sciences teachers and access to high-quality teaching and learning resources. These gaps are contributing to a concerning decline in student engagement with the social sciences.

This matters because the social sciences equip young people with the knowledge and skills needed to actively participate in democracy, understand complex social issues, and make informed decisions in a rapidly changing world.

Recommendations across multiple reports, including [Improving Outcomes for All](#), call for better teacher support and the development of engaging, evidence-based classroom resources.

In direct response, the Academy has funded a pilot program, [Seriously Social](#). Launched in 2024, the program is designed to support equity in education by providing evidence-based, curriculum aligned, modules and resources to support Australian secondary schools focusing on civil discourse, geography and history. In its first year, the pilot received a national teacher association award and over 11,000 resource downloads, demonstrating both demand and impact.

"I love these resources, their rigour, how they connect students with contemporary issues and the video explanations are top shelf." – Classroom teacher

With additional Australian Government funding, [Seriously Social](#) can expand across all social sciences subject areas and become a national, sustainable initiative in support of the great work of teachers.

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Investment required: \$1,200,000 per annum for three years.

Champion the social sciences by investing in Social Sciences Week

Sparking interest and understanding of the social sciences and their contribution to the world is critical to inspiring future generations.

Now in its ninth year, [Social Sciences Week \(SSW\)](#), is an annual showcase of the enormous breadth and impact of the social sciences in Australia. SSW brings together researchers, educators, policy makers, students and community organisations to showcase research and impact and to engage in conversations about important social issues.

In 2025, almost 8,000 people joined more than 70 events which saw people from schools, universities, and the broader community gathered to explore new ideas, engage in debates, and celebrate the social sciences. Some of the highlights included:

- A new social science showcase featuring talented emerging researchers at Australia's Parliament House
- the [Great Debate](#): An evening of compelling debate where Australia's premier academics tackle complex questions
- the [Great Student Debate](#) An exciting national competition where students in years 8, 9 and 10 engage in spirited debate and develop essential skills while exploring key issues.

Social Sciences Week has strong support across the social sciences sector, and we invite the Australian Government to partner with us on this initiative.

Consistent with the Government's commitment to National Science Week, additional funding would expand the [Spark Grants](#) program to support university, research-sector and community-based organisations to deliver public events during SSW that showcase the value and impact of the social sciences. (Approx 50 grants p.a.; \$100,000 per annum for two years).

Recommendation 2: Invest in the expansion of Social Sciences Week through Inspiring Australia to promote and celebrate social science research and informed public discourse throughout Australia.

Investment required: \$200,000 over two years

Address key challenges facing Australia

Build a better future for Australia through improved policy evidence and forecasting

The Intergenerational Report (IGR) examines the long-term sustainability of current government policies and seeks to determine how big structural trends might affect the economy and the budget in coming decades.

Six IGRs have been released to date, with the next scheduled for 2026. While the report has become an important fixture in Australia's fiscal policy debate, previous expert analysis — including the book [More than Fiscal](#) — has highlighted several significant shortcomings and calls for reform.

Although the 2023 report was a substantial improvement on past reports, further work is needed to make the IGRs more relevant and useful. Strengthening the report's independence, broadening the scope to include all levels of government and expanding the focus further to cover the broader policy choices needed to sustain wellbeing and public finances long term would help make the IGR a more effective tool to inform long-term budget and policy debate.

The technical quality of the IGR could also be enhanced if more detailed sensitivity analysis was presented around key assumptions, including migration levels, productivity and workforce participation.

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Strengthen the 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 seeking 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.^{1,2}

Despite this, Australia's investment in R&D has been neglected and in most recent figures 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 invest around 3% on R&D, consistent with the Australian Government's long-term policy aspiration.³

The government's strategic examination of research and development has opened the way to rethink the R&D landscape including efficiencies in how we support national research infrastructure, facilitate engagement between researchers and industry, and how we fund and benefit from academic and public-sector research more generally. Australia requires more public funding of basic research, as well as a better way to stimulate business investment.

Recommendation 4: Increase Australia's R&D investment as a share of GDP towards the OECD average as part of a long-term, challenge-led national R&D strategy that addresses the full range of economic and societal goals.

Invest in research on health systems and financing to deliver a system-wide transformation of health care

Research from the social sciences makes a critical contribution to the foundational aspects of Australia's health and care systems, including policy design, healthcare funding and financing and practice innovation. Medicare for example, the foundation of our health system, was founded on the groundbreaking research of health economists, John Deeble and Dick Scotton at the University of Melbourne.⁴

At the Academy's 2024 event the [Future of Medicare: Research-informed policy for better access and health](#), Minister Mark Butler's address emphasised that researchers play a critical role generating the evidence that will allow Medicare to evolve, and meet the challenges of

¹ CSIRO Futures. (2021). [Quantifying Australia's returns to innovation](#).

² Elnasri and Fox. (2014). [The Contribution of Research and Innovation to Productivity and Economic Growth](#).

³ Australian Labor Party. (2023). [National platform](#).

⁴ Williams, Ross. (2024). [Australian Pioneers in Health Economics: The Origins of Medicare](#).

today and tomorrow. Event participants echoed the challenges highlighted in the [Strengthening Medicare Taskforce Report](#) regarding the critical need to design new funding models to improve the quality of life for patients and reduce pressure on the health system.

Despite its importance, research on health systems, funding and financing remains precariously funded and difficult to support through medical research programs that are largely designed around biomedical and clinical priorities. As a result, Australia's national capability in this area is underdeveloped, with only a small number of researchers working in the field and funding typically limited to short-term, project-based cycles. This constrains the development of the sustained, programmatic research capacity needed to inform system-wide and transformative change.

Recommendation 5: Establish dedicated, long-term funding for research on health systems and financing to build national capacity and generate the evidence needed to deliver a system-wide transformation of health care.