



ECONOMIC JUSTICE



Achieving economic justice means creating a society where power, wealth and income are shared more fairly, and where everyone has real opportunities to live secure and dignified lives. It also means building a sustainable economy – one that protects the environment, uses resources wisely, and ensures that future generations can thrive.

FOCUS ON ECONOMIC JUSTICE

Despite boasting one of the highest standards of living in the world¹ and almost 30 years of uninterrupted growth², the Australian economy is increasingly unjust and unsustainable.

63% 

of Australians agree the economy is rigged to the advantage of the rich and powerful.³

As one of Australia's largest and most productive urban centres, Greater Melbourne experiences the social and ecological effects of economic injustice and inequality across postcodes and populations.

Growing the economy has become a goal in its own right and is driving ecological breakdown and rising social, health and economic inequalities. These challenges are the result of decades of economic theories and policies that direct what we collectively prioritise. Many current solutions are shaped by these ideas and approaches, which can unintentionally reinforce the very issues they are working so hard to resolve.

The economy exists to serve society, not the other way around. We aspire to create an economy that works for the good of everyone within planetary boundaries.

76% 

of Australians agree that the wellbeing of the population should be the top priority in government decision-making.⁴

THE SOCIAL COSTS

Economic stability through a secure income and/ or quality work are vital for people's health and wellbeing⁵ but in recent years Australians have experienced a widening gap between rich and poor that undermines collective health, wellbeing and trust.

Poverty and inequality:

- Income inequality in Australia is at its highest level in **20 years**⁶
- The top **20% of households earn 48% of all income**, while the bottom 20% receive just 4%⁷
- **Wealth inequality is growing faster than income inequality**. The average household wealth of the top 10% grew from \$2.8 million to \$5.2 million (an 84% increase) over the past 20 years⁸
- The bottom **90% of Australians** receive just **7% of economic growth per person** since 2009, while the top 10% of income earners reap 93% of the benefits.⁹

Work and wage insecurity:

- **Less than half of employed Australians** now **hold permanent full-time positions** with basic entitlements like sick pay and paid holidays¹⁰
- Australia has experienced the **slowest pace of wage increases in decades** since 2012, contributing to widespread insecurity and financial stress¹¹
- Economic disparity experienced by First Nations peoples in Australia is even more pronounced. Their median personal income is **60% lower** than that of non-Indigenous Australians, a gap that widens to **85% in remote regions**.



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THE SOCIAL COSTS (continued)

Mental and physical health:



- **1 in 3** low-income households delay medical care due to cost, worsening preventable conditions¹²
- **Over half** of Australians say rising cost of living is having a big impact on their mental health¹³

Erosion of trust and democracy



- Cross-national studies show income inequality is a robust predictor of democratic backsliding, even in wealthy democracies. **A 1% rise in the Gini coefficient increases the risk of democratic erosion by 2.5%**¹⁴
- GDP-focused policies often neglect wellbeing, exacerbating stressors like long work¹⁵

THE ECOLOGICAL COSTS

Focusing only on GDP growth has played a big role in driving environmental crises like climate change. As the economy grows, so does our use of energy and materials – highlighting the need for new ways to measure progress that reflect what truly matters for people and the planet.



Australia is close to transgressing at least five of nine planetary boundaries¹⁶ and is experiencing the collapse of 19 ecosystems¹⁷

Climate change impacts—such as extreme heat, rising insurance and energy costs, and food insecurity—are **FELT EARLIEST, WORST, AND LONGEST** by people experiencing financial or social disadvantage¹⁸



Wealthy Australian's live highly carbon intensive lifestyles, with the Top 1% (by income) emitting 22 times as much CO₂ per person as the bottom 50% of Australians¹⁹



The global economy could face a 50% loss in GDP between 2070 and 2090, unless immediate policy action on risks posed by the climate crisis is taken²⁰

OUR ROLE



As a Community Foundation that is focussed on the big challenges of our time, we recognise that there is a need to support long term change as well as immediate needs. We are ideally placed to link community responses to injustice with the structural transformation that needs to happen if we are to move to a wellbeing economy. We work with communities and enterprises that are ensuring justice whilst working on the policy solutions that will shift wealth and power and collaborating to tell a different economic story.

References

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⁶ University of Melbourne (2025) [HILDA shows inequality rises to a high](#)

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⁸ ACOSS (2024) [New data shows wealth gap widening](#)

⁹ The Australia Institute (2023) [Inequality on Steroids as Bottom 90% get just 7% of Economic Growth Since 2009](#)

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¹¹ Dep. Prime Minister & Cabinet, OIA (2023) [Job Security Report](#)

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¹³ Mental Health Australia (2023) [Report to the Nation](#)

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¹⁹ Oxfam (2023) [Climate Equality a Planet for the 99](#)

²⁰ Institute and Faculty of Actuaries (2025) [Planetary Solvency – finding our balance with nature](#)