CIVIL SOCIETY AFTER COVID
On re-building a virtuous civic culture

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Can Australia return from pandemic to prosperity?

Australia has begun a new decade faced with an unprecedented economic and social challenge. Estimates of costs incurred fighting the covid-19 pandemic are revised weekly — as are estimates of the challenge now confronting governments faced with rebuilding prosperity.

At the end of March 2020, federal government debt had already climbed to $430 billion, some $37 billion higher than forecast before the pandemic. Many billions more are likely to be added to that debt. Those born after 1980 have already been dubbed, 'Generation Debt', and, in the editorial view of *The Australian*, that generation "has a major stake in how political leaders, business, and unions manage the economic transition out of the coronavirus."[1] Generation Debt will also have a stake in the equally crucial work of civic repair that needs to be undertaken as part of the social transition out of the pandemic. It is, of course, a matter in which every citizen, regardless of age, has a stake.

Civic repair entails attending with care to obligations arising between citizens and to strengthening bonds of community strained during the period of lockdown. Community, informed by recognition and acceptance of mutual obligation, lies at the heart of civil society, a key mediating component of the compact between state and citizen.

Classical liberalism appropriately affords great importance to the liberty of the individual. However, that liberty finds its fullest expression in a society characterised by a spirit of reciprocity and respect for the wellbeing of others. A strong civic culture will be integral to the return to prosperity from the scourge of pandemic.

Culture refers to a whole way of ordering life and, as such, cannot be adjusted or corrected quickly.[2] It can, however, be influenced, encouraged, and shaped by actions of government. This report will examine the scope for such action and, in particular, the importance to a healthy civic culture of striking an appropriate balance between individual liberty and community well-being.

The strain of lockdown

Covid-19 lockdowns began lifting in late April and early May as governments across Australia staged an easing of the social restrictions that have kept millions at home, cost up to one million people their jobs, and forced countless businesses to close — some of them for good. On 8 May 2020, Prime Minister Scott Morrison set out a long-awaited three-step plan for re-opening the country. States and territories were given responsibility for adopting the plan as local conditions allowed.[3] However the path from pandemic to prosperity entails more than restoring economic vitality; a virtuous civic culture, the basis of a dynamic and engaged society, must also be renewed.

Policing lockdown

Life in lockdown has not been easy. Restrictions on movement, travel, association, and recreation — inconceivable at the beginning of the year — imposed unprecedented strain on our society, even with widespread public acceptance. Neighbourhood spirit has not been extinguished, but participation in community and religious activities ceased entirely, family visits were severely restricted, aged care facilities were out of bounds to visitors, and forced self-isolation was expected to have had a serious impact on mental health and well-being.[4]

This social strain was compounded by the unseemly enthusiasm with which police embarked upon early enforcement of the lockdown restrictions. Some officers rounded on people in parks and at beaches to stop parents pushing strollers or playing with their children. At the time, police efforts appeared to be directed at citizens already facing massive disruptions to daily life while trying to establish modest routines to help see them through the crisis. But this conduct was quickly called out as the media held police to account for their actions; in a small number of cases, imposed fines were overturned.[5] Effective policing depends on an unspoken contract between police and citizen, founded on trust. Indeed, trust and a spirit of cooperation are hallmarks of a virtuous civic culture. Yet police behaviour tested this trust.

For the most part, Australians accepted that government had to act. However, the restrictions — especially when accompanied by zealous police enforcement — raised concerns about the status of civil liberties long taken for granted in this country. They also fuelled fears in some quarters about first shoots of an emergent police state.[6]

An intolerable imposition?

Measures imposing social restrictions to combat infection from covid-19 have heightened awareness of the extensive powers the state can exercise in its relationship with the citizen. Yet exercise of state authority is not always driven by politicians keen to seize more power. Sometimes, as English lawyer and historian Jonathan Sumption has observed, it is driven by popular demand: "As the technical and administrative capacities of the state expand, so people demand more of it in their constant pursuit of security. The state must, if it can. Sometimes the state must, even if it cannot."[7]

One of Sumption's concerns in the time of the virus was that the assault on human sociability caused great distress without an adequate weighing of the efficacy of government measures. He worried about absence of popular demand and considered introduction of the measures to represent "an interference with our lives and personal autonomy that is intolerable in a free society."[8] Yet imposition would only be intolerable if imposed by force, without popular consent, and in the face of vociferous dissent. This is not what happened. Indeed, in Australia, implementation of such measures did not harm but actually boosted the Prime Minister's popularity.

According to a *Guardian Essential* poll released on 7 April, Morrison's popularity jumped from 41 per cent in March to 59 per cent in April, drawing support from Labor and the Australian Greens. Satisfaction with the government's response to the crisis was probably reflected in the same polling which showed that 88 per cent of those surveyed remained "very concerned" or "quite concerned" about the coronavirus threat.[9] On the day the contact tracing app was released (27 April), it was downloaded one million times.[10] More than 50 per cent of Australians are expected to accept voluntary tracing by using the tracing app promoted by government to track progression of the virus.[11] An *Essential* poll released in mid-May showed that 55 per cent of people surveyed thought the app would help control the spread of covid-19.[12] This is despite concerns how to strike an appropriate balance between protection of public health and protection of privacy.[13]

Support for the government, as recorded by the *Guardian Essential* poll, translates directly into elevated levels of trust between government and governed.[14] This increase in trust can be accounted for by the extraordinary circumstances of the pandemic, which is generating both economic turmoil and social uncertainty. *Essential Research* polling also indicated increased trust in the media to be honest and objective.[15]

Where measures are implemented in response to the 'popular demand' of citizens of a free society, what sense does it make to describe them as 'intolerable'? A basic premise of liberal democracy is that governments bear an obligation to protect both the liberty and the safety of citizens. But there are bound to be tensions between the demands of security and the commitment to liberty. When safety is threatened by a crisis such as a pandemic, governments bear a responsibility for explaining clearly the reasons for imposing restrictions and constraints on citizens. Citizens, for the most part, trust that governments will discharge that responsibility in reasonable ways. As Dara Macdonald, a commentator with the Institute of Public Affairs, remarked: "For Australians, authoritarianism and tyranny is [sic] so outside the realm of experience that we trust that our government has our best interests at heart."[16]

Rising levels of trust during the pandemic suggest that citizens are, for the most part, much more willing to do voluntarily whatever needs to be done. Not only are they disposed to believe that governments are communicating truthfully about policies imposed to contain the spread of contagion; they are also confident that the rule of law remains to check any excess of power.

However, Sumption's warning about intolerable imposition remains important because it draws attention to the exceptional circumstances in which civil freedoms have been circumscribed by government, albeit with popular consent. As Eileen Donahoe, an American expert in cyber policy who has monitored government responses to the covid pandemic, has observed: "The task for democracies is to combat the public health threat vigorously without *unnecessarily* undermining such core civil and political rights as freedom of movement." [Italics in original][17] When levels of trust in government enjoy a temporary boost, the citizen must nonetheless remain vigilant whenever limits are imposed upon liberty.

The state, the citizen, and civil society

The state's efforts to strike an appropriate balance between security and liberty in recent weeks made very apparent the expansive powers the state enjoys. As a result, political obligations arising between state, citizen, and community have come under close scrutiny.

There is a compact (in the sense of a *bond* rather than a *contract*) between the state, the citizen, and the community that comprises a web of mutually owed duties and responsibilities. The compact comprises three distinct, yet overlapping, components. Failure on the part of any component to fulfil its duties and responsibilities may give rise to considerable and troubling strain.

Three components of the compact

1. Authority of the state

The first component of the compact is the extensive authority the state has to regulate the lives of its citizens. It is an authority the state is prepared to exercise when deemed necessary. Although the coercive power of the state can, at times, be oppressive, in a liberal democracy it is also what enables citizens to live in law-governed — and law-abiding — association with one another.

It is the function of law to impose a degree of order on relationships between individuals and obligations owed one another. Law also sets constraints on the affairs of the civic organisations that comprise civil society. Such constraints are bound to impact upon individual freedoms. For as Jonathan Sumption has observed, pithily: "All mandatory rules of law interfere with the personal autonomy of individuals. That is what they are for."[18] At the same time, legal constraints upon actions of the state also serve to offer effective protections to individuals, and the associations they may form, from arbitrary and capricious government.

2. Obligations of citizenship

The second component is the obligations to which citizenship give rise. The state generates obligation by issuing directives and promulgating laws. Compliance with these directives is then enforced by means of the coercive authority of the police force and judicial system. However, even though citizens may be under a moral obligation to obey, the existence of this obligation fails to account for the *binding* nature of the state's authority.

The reason for this failure to account for the binding authority of the state, according to philosopher Nicholas Wolterstorff, is that the relationship of the citizen to the state is usually framed in terms of duties owed by the citizen to the state rather than in terms of rights owed by the state to the citizen. Wolterstorff proposes a reversal of those conventional pairings:

> Instead of beginning with the authority of the state with respect to its citizens, let's begin with the rights of citizens with respect to the state. And instead of beginning with the duties of citizens toward the state, let's begin with the duties of the state towards its citizens.[19]

In the first place, Wolterstorff argues that citizens and social entities have "protection rights" against the state; it doing what it can to uphold the liberties enjoyed by citizens and entities (for example, freedom from criminal interference by others). Correlative to these protection rights held against the state are four "protection duties" owed by the state; to do what it reasonably can to protect citizens and social entities from, for example, such criminal interference.[20] The exercise by the state of these protection duties owed to the citizen is correlative to the exercise by the citizen of protection rights against the state. Given that the state owes this series of protection duties to citizens and social entities, Wolterstorff argues that the state not only has the right but also the *authority* to act. This authority arises from the moral obligation the state bears to discharge the duties it owes to the citizen.

Furthermore, Wolterstorff holds that where it is morally permissible for the citizen to comply with directives (that is to say, where no one is wronged), *and* the directives are effective in securing citizens' rights, they are *binding* upon the citizen who is thereby under a moral obligation to obey. Refusal by the citizen to comply with the directives of the state intended for the well-being of citizens is "to hinder the attempt of the state to carry out its obligations to protect us against each other."[21]

3. Civil society: between citizen and state

The third component of the compact in which the state and the citizen are joined is civil society, sometimes referred to as the 'third sector'. Relationships with others and with wider society are mediated through the network of voluntary, civic associations — Edmund Burke's "little platoons" — that are important components of civil society. These associations include, primarily, the family, but also community organisations, religious institutions, charities, sports teams, trades unions, and schools. Each plays a role in building civic trust, in cultivating appropriate habits of living, and in holding to account those who exercise political and economic power in the state and society.

Alexis de Tocqueville's theory of civil society as a series of intermediary associations has been foundational for all contemporary theories of civil society. According to Tocqueville, the third sector

arises from the fusion of local association and local political interest, and connects individual concerns with the welfare of the community.[22] As political scientist, John Ehrenberg, notes, it was Tocqueville's view that: "Civil society is populated by voluntary associations that are oriented to the pursuit of private matters and are generally unconcerned with broad political or economic affairs."[23] According to Tocqueville, the greater the strength of civil society, the more effective it could be in limiting the power and the reach of the state.

These three components of the web of obligations and duties owed to, and between, state, citizen, and civil society combine to make the role of citizen more complex than a purely transactional account by which

the citizen has certain rights it is the duty of the state to protect. As political scientist Richard Bellamy, notes, citizenship is a mark of civic equality:

> Membership, rights, and participation go together. It is through being a member of a political community and participating on equal terms in the framing of its collective life that we enjoy rights to pursue our individual lives on fair terms with others.[24]

When circumstances are such that the institutions and relationships comprising civil society are either unable to fulfil their role or begin to fail, nothing remains to mediate the relationship between the individual citizen and the state. And where community withers, social, cultural, and economic prosperity decline, too.

Civil society and civic virtue

Government action in response to the pandemic has strained the bonds of civil society and possibly weakened obligations and commitments that are defining elements of community life. Public gatherings of associations such as churches, synagogues, and mosques — as well as secular community groups — were forbidden. Strict limits were also enforced upon gatherings of family, neighbours, and friends. People bound by common interests, affections, and principles were unable to enjoy physical meetings that are important for free exchange of ideas, opinions, and experiences.

As recovery from covid-19 begins, economic assistance alone will not be sufficient to restore the social and civic culture of the country; for one thing, it will simply cost too much and, if prolonged, will be unaffordable. In addition to supplying economic aid, political leaders must market what journalist Paul Kelly has described as "the psychology of hope." Kelly foresees a fundamental social change occurring: "The public's mood will shift from a premium on beating the virus to a premium on restoration of economic and social life."[25]

If Kelly is correct, as governments now turn their attention to rebuilding prosperity, they will need to take note of this shift in public mood, and give full attention both to securing the strength of institutions of civil society and to encouraging cultivation of key habits of life essential for the success of civil society. These habits of life, which include neighbourliness, trust, and mutual support, help bind citizens in pursuit of a common well-being. Together they form the bundle of traits known as civic virtue. Social institutions are foundational for the cultivation of civic virtue, the family and the school being the foremost of these institutions. Forged in a common life, civic

virtue transcends subjective desires and concerns and holds members of the community to standards of behaviour that are independent of individual taste or preference.[26]

However, there is no simple prescription of policies by which governments can strengthen civil society and cultivate civic virtue, As the immediate emergency of the pandemic retreats, governments can perhaps be most effective not so much by taking action as by *not* taking action — or, at least, not *more* action. Temporary programs and regulations introduced to address the coronavirus pandemic need to be rescinded as quickly as possible rather than succumb to pressure either to leave them in place or add to them.

Measures introduced to address emergencies may have been popular, as noted early in this paper; but that does not mean that popularity should be the sole guide of government action now that the emergency has passed. Restrictions upon freedom of movement and freedom of association are obvious examples of measures that need to be rescinded. Freedom to travel, both within the country and overseas, must also be restored in order to encourage economic activity and rebuild prosperity. Measures introduced in early 2020 as 'temporary' to address the coronavirus crisis need to be just that: temporary.

The danger, however, is that in evaluating policy, governments persistently equate what is popular with what is good; and continued popular support for 'emergency' policies may serve to convince governments these are the same policies to be pursued once the emergency has passed. One commentator alert to the difficulty of discontinuing programs introduced to address an emergency is American economist Robert Higgs, who warned:

A crisis alters the fundamental conditions of political life. Like a river suddenly swollen by the collapse of an upstream dam, the ideological current becomes bloated by the public's fear and apprehension of impending dangers and its heightened uncertainty about future developments.[27]

Higgs warned that crisis-driven growth of government must be thought of in terms of a "ratchet effect" which describes the failure of each phase of retrenchment of measures to return government to the period of "pre-crisis normality."[28] Public accommodation to the newly enlarged role of government, even as significant economic and social burdens continue to be borne, can make effective retrenchment of measures difficult.

Some business leaders share this concern and expect emergency support offered by government to remain even though no longer needed: "I think we will have greater government involvement in our society than previously," senior business leader Charles Goode has warned. "That may move the political needle to the left. That may lead to slower growth and a more welfarist [sic] society."[29] Another senior business figure, Farrel Meltzer, is hopeful the covid crisis will help Australia to become stronger as a society and an economy: "It is part of a journey that is going to make the world a better place."[30]

Governments in Australia now need to build on such hope in a post-covid period of recovery. Their task is to cultivate civic virtue and strengthen the institutions of our civil society while remaining alert to the dangers identified by Higgs, and the warnings of business leaders such as Goode. At the same time, all leaders of government need to be mindful of styles of political discourse; the spirit in which government governs inevitably sets the tone of broader civic discourse in society.

Prime Minister Morrison's creation of a National Unity Cabinet, for example, has impressed many for its willingness to set aside political difference in pursuit of a common and urgent national objective. On the other hand, perceptions that state and territory leaders have been excessively timid — both in maintaining closure of their borders and in abdicating responsibility for managing pandemic responses to medical advisors — has provoked widespread frustration.

The state can do more to stimulate civil society by doing less — that is to say, by getting out of the way — as the associations and institutions of civil society resume their functions, restore balance to the three-fold compact, and mediate effectively between the individual and the state. Higgs's advice is unequivocal: "All emergency measures should have sunset provisions, lest special interests and other opportunists use the pretext of crisis to get a permanent foot in the door."[31]

Social cohesion in Australia

On closer analysis, this task of restoration, about which it is not easy to be specific in prescriptive terms, may not be as daunting as might first appear. The Scanlon Foundation's *Mapping Social Cohesion* surveys, conducted annually since 2007 by Professor Andrew Markus, show that levels of social stability and social cohesion in Australia were already high, and have remained consistently high during the past decade, notwithstanding periodic fluctuations in some indicators.

When the 2019 survey measured levels of trust between individuals, it found that, at 49 per cent, trust was close to the mid-point of the range 45-55 per cent established over the series of surveys between 2007 and 2018. Levels of voluntary work (defined as any unpaid work given to the local community) had also remained consistent, with 45 per cent of those surveyed having participated in voluntary work over the past 12 months. When asked about standards of relations in local areas, 80 per cent of respondents agreed that people were willing to help their neighbours, and 76 per cent agreed that people from different national or ethnic groups get on well together. The 2019 Scanlon Monash Index (SMI) of social cohesion aggregated responses to all the survey questions and found the SMI to be 89.6, almost identical with 2018 and close to the level of six of the past seven surveys.[32]

Although Markus has yet to examine the period of the virus, the *Mapping Social Cohesion* survey suggests that as governments work to of re-build civic virtue after covid-19, they will begin from a high base rather than a low one. Good levels of social stability mean that Australia is well-placed for an effective civic recovery.

Citizenship and habits of life

Sunset provisions for emergency measures are, as Robert Higgs has argued, essential in a period of post-covid renewal. However, complete and immediate removal of all social and legal restrictions may not yet be warranted in view of remaining public health concerns. In any case, constraint is not, in itself, inimical to the cultivation of civic virtue. Even in normal times, no one lives with unconstrained freedom. It is the function of law to impose a degree of order on relationships between individuals and the obligations owed to one another and, where necessary, to set constraints.

Such constraints are bound, inevitably, to have an impact on individual freedoms; and appropriate restraints upon individual liberty have been needed to preserve public health during the covid crisis. However, even in less unusual times than these, restraints upon liberty are not invariably bad. Far from being inimical to the health of civil society, constraint

creates strength; and a strong civil society is one capable of enduring crisis, hardship, and social strain, as noted by Nick Timothy:

> Freedom is only possible when freedom itself is constrained. Our individualism is most endangered when the customs, institutions, and obligations of community life are eroded.[33]

Failure of the institutions of civil society would, soon enough, threaten the liberty enjoyed by all citizens for, as Richard Bellamy observed, responsible citizenship must embrace the importance of community to the health of society.

As society begins to open up following the pandemic, all members of society bear a responsibility for affirming the norms of solidarity and mutual assistance that characterise civil society. Notwithstanding the value of opportunities for some connection afforded by online platforms such as Skype or Zoom, it is imperative to forge anew bonds formed by physical and social engagement. Complementarity, custom, and compatibility comprise the basis upon which a healthy civil society is built.

If not damaged altogether, cultivation of civic virtue has been suppressed during the period of lockdown because the function of those social institutions that help foster civic virtue has also been suppressed. With families unable to meet and pupils removed from the disciplined arena of the classroom, individual preferences and behaviour that are, in normal times, constrained and shaped by civic virtue, have not been as effectively mediated or shaped.

This seclusion from society diminishes, in turn, the sense of mutual interdependence to which the cultivation of civic virtue inclines us. And this, in turn, is a threat to the function of a healthy civil society. As American political scientist Yuval Levin has remarked of the covid-19 pandemic:

> Rather than a sense of mutual dependence, we might walk away from this crisis as ever more capable loners. This had been the direction of our social evolution for much of this century before the virus came. A great deal of what we have thought of as the information revolution in the last two decades has amounted to novel ways of avoiding real social interaction.[34]

Civil society after covid-19

While it is certainly important to remain vigilant about the reach of the state, it is also important not to allow a concern for individual liberty to outweigh concern for the overall well-being of the community. Indeed, when the common good is at issue — especially in a major public health crisis that has serious economic consequences resulting directly from government action — it may even be necessary for the liberty of the individual to take second place. This is a position utterly consistent with the tenets of classical liberalism.

Political communitarianism, with its emphasis on the need to rebuild local communities and to counter what it perceives to be individualistic self-gratification, often sets its face against classical liberalism in the mistaken belief that the latter disparages the idea of the common good and regards the individual, alone, as the sole legitimate source of moral authority. But this is, at best, a caricature that confuses economic liberalism's commitment to market mechanisms in the production and distribution of goods with classical liberalism's commitment to individual liberty.

However, classical liberalism, in the broad terms espoused by such thinkers as Edmund Burke and Adam Smith, has always balanced the rights of the individual against the duties and obligations owed by the citizen to the wider community. At the

heart of classical liberalism lies the idea that people should be free to choose for themselves *as long as* this is consistent with concern for the respect and well-being of all other individuals. It does not entail a commitment to the selfish pursuit of one's own gratification. A commitment to personal freedom needs to be tempered by a recognition that human beings are social animals and that our relationships to one another form a complex web of dependency and mutual obligation.

Commitment to the common good

In remarks made to the International Democratic Union in April 2020, former prime minister Tony Abbott called for those on the centre right of Australian politics to worry less about the size of government once the immediate crisis of the COVID-19 pandemic has passed. Instead, he encouraged an appeal to the strength of the country and the quality of its citizens:

> Of course, you can't have healthy communities without a strong economy to sustain them, but economics is a means to that goal of human flourishing, not an end in itself. It's the strength of our commitment to those communities and to the society they make up that will be the key to political success in the new world ahead.[35]

The coronavirus pandemic will pass and the world will have learned from this crisis in preparation for the next.[36] The same is true of Australia. Public support for the government's public health measures has remained consistently high throughout the pandemic, notwithstanding the heavy economic and social costs. Indeed, editorial opinion of the *Australian Financial Review* holds that this level of public support indicates the moral calibre of Australian society:

> The ethics are consistent with Australia's core enlightened and democratic social values. All civilised nations should place the highest premium on the protection of the human rights and dignity of all citizens, including the vulnerable, old and the sick.[37]

In the exercise of duties owed to the citizen, the state acted promptly in the interests of public health to protect those deemed especially vulnerable and to assist those whose livelihoods were threatened by a mandated closing of the economy. Even so, economic and social costs imposed in the crisis have been substantial. Critics have excoriated federal and state governments for a perceived over-reaction to the public health threat posed by COVID-19 and for imposing extremely heavy financial and fiscal burdens. But the social costs have also been great.

As noted above, one million Australians are thought to have lost their jobs as a result of the pandemic. According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics, the number of jobs slumped by 7.5 per cent in one month alone between mid-March and mid-April.[38] This imposes an especially heavy burden on low-wage earners and those with little or no savings. Those with limited resources have also found it more difficult to keep children at home during extended school closures, when this has depended on the availability of IT and computing resources for effective remote learning.

Conclusions: charities as bridges to the future

As the nation begins to open up and restrictions are eased, the urgent work of social repair must begin. This work includes what Paul Kelly has referred to as resurrection of "the age of social co-operation and effective public institutions" — for which he includes the family and a spirit of community interdependence.[39] Cultivation of a virtuous civic culture will help correct what Kelly regards as an imbalance between the relationship between community and individual. The moment is one of opportunity as much as challenge.

Governments can respond to Kelly's call for correction of an imbalance by upholding the principles underlying civil society which include trust, commitment, cooperation, and obligation. These principles are embodied in charities and not-for-profit organisations committed to general pursuit of the common good, and which already provide essential services across various sectors of the Australian economy.

According to the Australian Charities Report 2018, the latest report published by the Australian Charities and Not-for-Profits Commission (ACNC), the most common activities for charities include religious activities, primary, secondary, and tertiary education, grant-making, social services, and aged care services.

In addition to serving the needs of people and groups across the wider community in provision of services, Australian charities also employ 1.3 million people. The ACNC estimates this figure to represent approximately 10 per cent of all employees in Australia: "this highlights the size and significance of Australia's charity sector to the Australian economy."[40] However, contraction of the post-covid economy now poses a serious threat to the sector.

On the basis of a modelled reduction of 20 per cent of revenue, research by Social Ventures Australia and the Centre for Social Impact estimates that 17 per cent of charities are currently at high risk of closing down before the end of 2020. This is likely to have a considerable impact on the provision of services to the community.

Charities already make an important contribution to the provision of education services across all three sectors (primary, secondary, and tertiary), as well as to the provision of aged care, mental health care, and social and welfare services. Charities are "the social glue in our communities," remarks Suzie Riddell, chief executive of SVA. "Without thriving charities our productivity and wellbeing is [sic] at risk."[41] This 'social glue' will be especially important as Australia rebuilds prosperity after covid.

Rebuilding of capacity will be challenging and will require many charities to review their business models and evaluate capacity for service delivery, staffing, and fundraising. Governments can encourage partnerships between the philanthropic and not-for-profit sectors to secure charities' long-term viability.

> For Australia to thrive, charities will need to grow, not shrink, in the recovery phase. Stronger charities will be well positioned to provide the services needed to support the community, accelerating our collective recovery.

Weakened charities, forced to cut jobs and services will compound the collective challenges we face.[42]

High levels of social cohesion in Australia mean the country can be confident of drawing upon its own social and civic reserves in re-building the strong civic culture that will underpin recovery from the crisis. As Community Council for Australia chair Tim Costello has remarked, "the charities sector is essential to create stronger communities."[43]

Work must now begin to forge those stronger communities, to ensure strong social cohesion endures, and to help provide for those whose lives have been seriously disrupted by coronavirus.

As the country pursues a return to prosperity, restoration of a virtuous civic culture must be a priority for governments so that all institutions of civil society may once again perform effectively the essential roles upon which the wellbeing of so many Australians depends.

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