

MEDIA RELEASE**31 May 2016****Homelessness: it's a gender issue too**

On the eve of winter, the [St Vincent de Paul Society Victoria](#) (Vinnies) is urging Victorians to rethink their perceptions of homelessness, with statistics showing women in Australia are experiencing homelessness at rates more than double those of women in the United Kingdom (UK).

To mark the launch of the 2016 Vinnies Winter Appeal tomorrow, the St Vincent de Paul Society Victoria CEO, Ms Sue Cattermole, has reminded Australians that homelessness does not discriminate and that we must take action to address the statistics playing on our national conscience.

"It is devastating that 59 per cent of Australians seeking help from specialist homelessness services are women. That's a significantly higher rate than the UK's 26 per cent and the USA's 38 per cent," said Ms Cattermole.

"What is even more chilling is the fact that the fastest growing cohort experiencing homelessness is women over 55. This totally dispels the myth that homelessness only affects younger men."

The St Vincent de Paul Society Victoria is aiming to raise \$1.2m as part of its annual Winter Appeal, which will help to support a wide range of welfare and accommodation services for families in need across Victoria.

During the coldest months of the year, it is vital that Vinnies has the resources it needs to support marginalised and vulnerable members of the community.

"Our members and volunteers regularly provide a hand-up to women experiencing disadvantage and homelessness. Their need for financial and welfare support is growing rapidly too, due to ingrained gender disparities that leave them particularly vulnerable," said Ms Cattermole.

"We are hearing more and more stories from women over 50 who are made redundant and can no longer afford to pay high private rentals. These women are often plunged into circumstances they thought were unimaginable – unable to find work or a home, and forced to live off their life savings until they run dry."

In desperate circumstances, these women are approaching the St Vincent de Paul Society Victoria for help.

"Women and girls make up 59 per cent of specialist homelessness services clients. Some 36 per cent of these women have been affected by domestic and family violence and cite this as the number one reason why they are seeking support from specialist homelessness services," said Ms Cattermole.

"The statistics don't lie. Our organisation is committed to working closely with other welfare agencies to develop frontline services that respond to the changing needs of people experiencing homelessness in Australia – including women who desperately need our collective support."

Victorians are asked to give generously this winter to support Vinnies vital homeless services and to keep women and children top of mind when considering the full impact of homelessness.

"Homelessness is part of a complex spectrum of social issues, but collectively we can help to soften the journey of women and children who find themselves experiencing intense uncertainty and upheaval in their lives. They need our support and they need it now."

Please donate to the 2016 Vinnies Winter Appeal and help us continue to rebuild lives - visit www.vinnies.org.au/winterappeal or call 13 18 12 today.

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MEDIA RESOURCES: Interviews with St Vincent de Paul Society Victoria CEO, Sue Cattermole, are available upon request.

About the St Vincent de Paul Society:

The St Vincent de Paul Society and its wide network of members and volunteers provide practical frontline support, advocacy and friendship for the most vulnerable members of our community. Key services include home visitation; youth programs; soup vans; assistance for asylum seekers and refugees; compeer programs for people experiencing mental illness; education and tutoring; and a range of professional accommodation and health services through the VincentCare network. The St Vincent de Paul Society in Australia has more than 40,000 members and volunteers. Internationally, the Society operates in 149 countries and has over 950,000 members. To find out more visit www.vinnies.org.au.