MEDIA RELEASE

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Counting on Homelessness Week

At the start of the 2016 National Homelessness Week (1st – 7th August), St Vincent de Paul Society Victoria (Vinnies) has provided recognition of the annual themed week coordinated by Homelessness Australia which aims to raise awareness of people experiencing homelessness and the surrounding issues.

St Vincent de Paul Society Victoria CEO, Ms Sue Cattermole, said it is important that we as a community, consider homelessness more broadly by recognising key issues that often create vulnerability and instability.

"Vinnies make over 100,000 visits to vulnerable Victorians every year, and financial stress is a very common theme. Through our home visits, Soup Van services and other material aid programs we see the direct impact the current cost of living has on individuals and families across the state. It's getting tougher, and the number of people turning to our services for support is growing.

The theme of this year's National Homelessness Week "Homelessness Counts" is reinforced by the upcoming National Census Night (9 August) which takes a critical snapshot of the way Australians live, the dwellings we reside in, and the pressures we face in a costly modern society.

The last Census in 2011 provided a staggering statistic that on any given night, 22,000 Victorians experience homelessness. Ms Cattermole believes this number could potentially rise with an alarming disconnect between population growth and community housing options.

"Aside from people living rough on the street, which is a visible example of homelessness, there is a limited level of awareness and public conversation about the many pathways that can leave people without stable accommodation and where they end up. This may include couch surfing, caravan parks and rooming or boarding houses" said Ms Cattermole.

In 2011, The ABS recorded 4,397 residents living in either rooming or boarding houses, which was an increase on 3,050 reported previously in 2006.

"This is a large but often unseen part of the issue. We have thousands of Victorians living in unregulated rooming or boarding accommodation where they are often forced to pay high rents for inadequate space. Quality of life for those living in rooming houses tends to be poor, with significant safety issues, negative impacts on health, and lack of basic facilities such as cooking equipment and furniture.

"St Vincent de Paul Society volunteers work hard to assist these people who struggle to meet ongoing expenses by providing food vouchers, material aid and basic household furniture which helps as most of their income goes straight to rent.

"The face of homelessness is changing, and as Homelessness Week ends with the 2016 National Census being conducted, I believe this is a time for us to reflect on how this data can better define the vulnerability of 22,000 Victorians." said Ms Cattermole.

If you would like to support the St Vincent de Paul Society Victoria to assist those in need, please visit https://www.vinnies.org.au/2016/rethinkhomelessness or phone 13 18 12 to make a donation today.

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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.