

MEDIA RELEASE**EMBARGOED****15 October 2017****'THE BASICS' ARE OUT OF REACH: ANTI-POVERTY WEEK****ST VINCENT DE PAUL SOCIETY VICTORIA REPORTS 40 PER CENT INCREASE IN WELFARE ASSISTANCE**

The St Vincent de Paul Society Victoria (the Society) has today announced that it has measured a 40 per cent increase in the total value of financial welfare support delivered across the state over the past three years – and in some areas the rise is as high as 68 per cent.

To mark the start of Anti-Poverty Week (15-21 October 2017) leading welfare groups and charities across the state are joining with the Society to highlight the true impact of poverty on peoples' lives and urging policy makers to address the structural inequalities that drive poverty.

St Vincent de Paul Society Victoria CEO and Co-Chair of the Anti-Poverty Week Victorian Working Group, Sue Cattermole, says the numbers speak for themselves in terms of just how large the gap between available financial means (accessed through welfare payments and low wages) and the actual cost of living has grown – a gap that is being increasingly filled by charities.

"Across the state of Victoria, the St Vincent de Paul Society has recorded a 40 per cent increase in the total value of financial welfare support delivered over the past three years – that's an enormous increase in a relatively short period of time," said Ms Cattermole.

"In parts of the state the rise has been as high as 68 percent, which is an alarming trend and a sign that communities and policy makers need to work together to create sustainable models of support for delivering the very basic things people need to survive – food, school fees, transport, clothing, furniture, and more."

Poverty is described as the state of being without the means, resources, essential goods and services that are generally accepted as the standard of living enjoyed by the broader community. The causes of poverty are reinforced by inequality in the way people have access to work and income, education, housing, health and broader services.

Advocacy and research in the space of general household utilities is a large focus for the St Vincent de Paul Society. A recurring issue in its [Tariff-Tracking Project](#) – which examines changes in electricity and gas tariffs, and corresponding policy areas for review – is the shared cost of climate adaptation policies (such as solar power).

"People living on a low incomes can't easily access infrastructure, like solar power, which help to positively address climate change and keep their utility bills under control. Action is required from Victorian State Government to ensure that the cost of climate change policies on essential energy bills is shared equally across all consumer groups," said Ms Cattermole.

The St Vincent de Paul Society's service data highlights the fact that a large number Victorian households are only just scraping by, unable to afford the basics. Providing food, rent assistance, or help with essential utility bills is where charities like the Society are stepping into help.

"Our immediate goal is always to provide the basics that keep children in school, food on the table, utilities switched on and rent paid to ultimately ensure that individuals and families keep a roof over their head," said Ms Cattermole.

"There has to be an acknowledgement that the cost of living is simply too high for people living on the lowest levels of incomes, and there is a desperate need to review how they are adequately supported at a state and federal level."

The Society supports people when they are experiencing social and/or financial hardship, and helps to alleviate the impacts of social isolation and poverty. Its 12,000+ volunteers across the state spend time with people on the frontline, face to face, to rebuild lives.

“Over 725,000 Victorians are living below the poverty line. Poverty, inequality and disadvantage impose a heavy social and economic cost. When people cannot fulfil their potential, social cohesion is fragmented, their valuable skills go underutilised, and they struggle to live a fulfilling life. That is a real tragedy,” said Ms Cattermole.

This financial year, the Society has provided \$14.9 million of welfare assistance to adults and children in their local communities; food, clothing, furniture, education, and much more. The Society’s *Vinnies Shops* also provided material aid (the basics) to people in need valued at over \$2.2 million and raised a further \$15.9 million for community assistance programs.

“We are helping people in their homes, in boarding houses, on the streets – wherever the need arises. As an example, this financial year our Vinnies soup vans delivered almost 200,000 meals to people living in suburban areas in regional and metropolitan Victoria – people that can’t afford or access an evening meal,” said Ms Cattermole.

“Our collective response to poverty needs to be one of compassion and practical action. I urge anyone in a position of power or influence to use the means they have available to advocate on behalf of those who need our support.

“This is a group effort – there’s no one, single policy fix that will end poverty. We need sustained action, solidarity and we need to open our hearts.”

For more information about Anti-Poverty Week, please visit www.antipovertyweek.org.au.

To donate to the St Vincent de Paul Society visit www.vinnies.org.au or phone 13 18 12.

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MEDIA RESOURCES:

Click [HERE](#) to access a visual map of the St Vincent de Paul Society Victoria’s assistance zones in Victoria and corresponding data that shows the charity’s welfare response over the past three years.

ANTI-POVERTY WEEK EVENTS: *As part of Anti-Poverty Week (15-21 October 2017) the St Vincent de Paul Society Victoria is hosting a number of events across the state to encourage reflection, conversation and action on the issue of poverty in Victoria.*

Vinnies Soup Van heritage book launch & panel discussion

- **When:** 2:00-4:30pm, Saturday 14 October 2017.
- **What:** This special event will celebrate the launch of a heritage publication recalling the history of the Vinnies Fitzroy Soup Van, *Every Evening Without Fail*. A panel discussion will also be hosted to examine how poverty and homelessness has changed over the past four decades in Melbourne.
- **Where:** Australian Catholic University (ACU), 115 Victoria Parade Fitzroy.
- **RSVP:** Strictly invite only.

Morning tea & Q&A event at selected Vinnies Shops

- **When:** 10:00-11:30am, Wednesday 18 October 2017.
- **What:** Seven Vinnies Shops (located in regional and metropolitan areas) will host a special Anti-Poverty Week event that gives the community an opportunity to learn more about the charity's welfare work on the frontline. This will include a morning tea and Q&A with the Society's volunteers.
- **Where:** Ringwood Vinnies Shop (Shop 2, 82 Maroondah Hwy, Ringwood 3134), Traralgon Vinnies Shop (70 Argyle St, Traralgon 3844), Malvern Vinnies Shop (29-31 Glenferrie Rd, Malvern VIC 3144), Shepparton Vinnies Shop (274 Maude Street Shepparton 3630), Wendouree Vinnies Shop (1255 Howitt Street, Wendouree VIC 3355), Chelsea Heights Vinnies Shop (1/2 Hartwood Crt, Chelsea Heights 3196), Hoppers Crossing Vinnies Shop (Unit 12, 10 Costa Drv, Hoppers Crossing 3029).
- **RSVP:** Members of the public and the media are invited to attend. No RSVP is required.

Ascot Vale Vinnies Shop celebrates 90 years of supporting people experiencing hardship

- **When:** Week long sale event, 15 – 21 October. Media event 10:00-11:30am, Saturday 21 October 2017.
- **What:** The state's first Vinnies Shop in Ascot Vale is celebrating its 90th birthday in style – spring specials for the whole community. Special guest, Opposition Leader and Federal Member for Maribyrnong, the Hon. Bill Shorten, will be visiting on Saturday to mingle with volunteers, loyal customers and other invited guests during an afternoon of festivity and nostalgia.
- **Where:** Vinnies Ascot Vale Shop, 155 Maribyrnong Rd, Ascot Vale.
- **RSVP:** Members of the public and the media are invited to attend. No RSVP is required.

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; Vinnies Shops; youth programs; soup vans; assistance for asylum seekers and refugees; compeer programs for people experiencing mental illness; education and tutoring; and professional accommodation and health services through VincentCare. The St Vincent de Paul Society in Australia has more than 60,000 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.