

ANTI-POVERTY 15-21 October 2017 WEEK



MEDIA RELEASE

EMBARGOED

15 October 2017

WELFARE ORGANISATIONS: 'STAGGERING NUMBER OF VICTORIANS ARE STRUGGLING TO SURVIVE'

Respected charities and welfare organisations in Victoria are standing together during Anti-Poverty Week (15-21 October 2017) to highlight the true cost of poverty across the state and to alert political leaders to the fact that people, in communities big and small, are often struggling to survive.

Poverty is not just caused by individual circumstances and actions, but by structural inequalities built into Australian society. Some of the main causes of this inequality and poverty are access to work and income, education, housing, health and services.

The St Vincent de Paul Society Victoria, The Salvation Army Victoria and Good Shepherd Australia New Zealand have paused to cross-examine service data collected over a three year period (2014-2017) and have found a number of concerning trends:

- **The St Vincent de Paul Society Victoria** has measured a 40 per cent increase in the total value of financial welfare support delivered across the state over the past three years.
- **The Salvation Army in Victoria** has reported that 61 per cent of people who received emergency relief from the organisation's frontline volunteers were experiencing extreme housing stress, spending more than half of their income on housing and accommodation.
- **Good Shepherd Australia New Zealand** reported that women are particularly vulnerable to poverty, noting that women aged over 55 are the fastest growing group of people experiencing homelessness; women experiencing family violence are at a heightened risk of homelessness; and single mothers and their children are at significant risk of financial hardship.

St Vincent de Paul Society Victoria CEO and Co-Chair for the Anti-Poverty Week Committee in Victoria, Ms Sue Cattermole, said there is a pressing need for all levels of government to recognise the true impact of policies that make life even harder for people living with limited means.

"As part of Anti-Poverty Week we are calling on members of the community and political leaders – at local, state and federal levels – to relook at the support given to people experiencing hardship within our community," said Ms Cattermole.

"There are over 725,000 Victorians living below the poverty line. Volunteer welfare groups are continuously stepping in to assist with providing essential basics – food, clothing, shelter and a myriad of social and emotional support services too."

Ms Cattermole said the cost of living is simply too high for people living on welfare and low incomes, and there is a desperate need to review how they can be adequately supported.

"It is vital that we start to recognise the full impact of this problem and respond in a way that is united and fully informed about how decisions at the top impact people on the ground. This is a shared problem that we need to tackle as a matter of urgency," she said.

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Good Shepherd Australia New Zealand CEO and fellow Co-Chair of the Anti-Poverty Week Committee in Victoria, Ms Dimity Fifer, said many Victorians – especially women – are being forced to choose between basics like having food on the table, buying school books and paying for bus fares to get to school or work.

“Women typically experience poorer economic security than men throughout their life. There are many reasons for this, such as lower wages and superannuation; women are more likely to take time out of work to care for children and relatives; women are more likely to be single parents; and the long-term financial impacts faced by many women who experience family violence and economic abuse,” said Ms Fifer.

“When women live in poverty their children do too, which sets up an intergenerational cycle that is very difficult to change.

“While there are many community programs that are very effective in supporting people to avoid becoming trapped in poverty, the community sector is stretched beyond its limit trying to deal with people in crisis to be able to make these programs available to everyone who needs them,” said Ms Fifer.

These three welfare groups are encouraging policy makers and community influencers to lean in during this important week of advocacy and commit to action.

“We’re calling for governments to focus on funding and policies that support people before they reach crisis point and get caught up in a cycle of disadvantage,” said Ms Fifer.

Key policy areas that the group are putting on the agenda today include:

- The organisations want the Victorian State Government to raise their voice in advocacy efforts to improve and maintain the adequacy of incomes received by low-paid workers and people on government support, and to create more focused local support measures. The goal is to increase payments for people who simply can’t afford ‘the basics’.
- The organisations want the Victorian State Government to help prevent people from facing housing crisis by increasing the supply of affordable housing and investing in programs which support people when they are at risk of homelessness.
- The organisations want the Victorian State Government to fund more evidence-based early intervention and prevention programs to support women and children from becoming entrenched in a cycle of poverty.

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

- ENDS -

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SPECIAL ANTI-POVERTY WEEK LOCAL EVENT:

The Anti-Poverty Week Victorian Working Group will be hosting a free forum event at 11:30am-3:30pm on Friday 20 October 2017 at Queen Victoria Women's Centre, 201 Lonsdale Street, Melbourne:

Picking up the Pieces The fallout of welfare reform

Attendees will be invited to discuss the consequences of increased social security conditionality and what needs to be done to 'pick up the pieces' and disrupt cycles of disadvantage. Special guest speakers include:

Mr Daniel Mulino MLC (Parliamentary Secretary for Treasury and Finance)
Dr Cassandra Goldie (CEO, ACOSS)
Ciara Sterling (Head of Community Inclusion, Yarra Valley Water)
David Tennant (CEO, FamilyCare)
Peter Dwyer (Professor of Social Policy, University of York, video conference only)

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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; 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.

ABOUT GOOD SHEPHERD AUSTRALIA NEW ZEALAND:

Good Shepherd Australia New Zealand provides community-based programs, services and research that supports women and children to build their safety and resilience, increase their access to education opportunities and improve their financial security. Good Shepherd strives to make a lasting, positive impact on the lives of women and their families through research into new and emerging social issues. It's Women's Research, Advocacy and Policy (WRAP) Centre drives innovation for programs within the organisation and shares knowledge in the wider community to advocate for systemic change. To find out more visit www.goodshep.org.au.

ABOUT THE SALVATION ARMY:

The Salvation Army is one of the world's largest Christian social welfare organisations with more than 1,650,000 members working in over 128 countries. The Salvation Army has been in Australia for more than 135 years and currently has more than 8,500 active officers and staff delivering in excess of 1,000 specifically designed social programs across Australia. The Salvation Army helps more than 1 million Australians every year - that's one person every 30 seconds. To find out more visit <https://salvos.org.au/>