

MEDIA RELEASE**EMBARGOED****14 October 2018****POVERTY DIVIDES COMMUNITIES: ANTI-POVERTY WEEK**

The St Vincent de Paul Society Victoria (Vinnies Victoria) is raising awareness of the lived experiences and social isolation associated with extreme financial hardship, and the vital role of volunteerism in promoting inclusion, as part of today's national launch of Anti-Poverty Week (14-20 October 2018).

Vinnies Victoria has over 12,000 volunteers across the state, who comprise 97 percent of the organisation's total workforce, and offer face-to-face support for people in times of crisis.

According to St Vincent de Paul Society CEO, Sue Cattermole, Vinnies volunteers provide a voice and point of connection for people who would otherwise remain isolated.

"Through our programs, our volunteers are called to connect with people who find the strength to ask for help; but what's truly devastating, is that this often materialises out of pure desperation," said Ms Cattermole.

"Mothers who are unable to feed their children. Elderly people who can't keep up with the rent. Parents whose children are missing out on school camp, or essential education resources at the beginning of the school year. People who can't afford petrol to get to work. Mental illness, in its many shades, is also something we regularly encounter."

Vinnies Victoria is seeking to raise awareness of the fact that poverty means people miss out – and it's only getting worse. With over 725,00 Victorians living below the poverty line, stress is mounting for a significant portion of the community who simply cannot afford the basics – and many other things that contribute to quality of life and social inclusion too.

Often, volunteers are the ones taking the time to listen, offer a hand up, and respond to their needs.

"Vinnies welfare assistance is primarily delivered face to face, via Vinnies home visitation, assistance centres and soup vans. Whilst this is an important network of people, personally dedicated to creating a sense of inclusion and cohesiveness for communities impacted by poverty, we really do need more leaders and more voices to join this conversation," said Ms Cattermole.

Vinnies Victoria is urging people from all walks of life, together with welfare, business and government leaders, to work collectively to create sustainable, long-term solutions for people living below the poverty line. That means, in a very basic sense, caring for our neighbours.

Vinnies relies on less than 1 percent government funding to answer calls for help, so major annual events like the [Vinnies CEO Sleepout](#) are an important part of the charity's efforts to encourage coordinated advocacy and raise vital funds to sustain its services – which are under increasing pressure.

"As part of our efforts to measure the impact of our volunteer-run services during Anti-Poverty Week, we have undertaken a comprehensive review of five key areas of financial assistance provided by Vinnies volunteers, over the past five years. We have specifically measured our investment in food, utilities, accommodation and transport – the basics," said Ms Cattermole.

Over the past five years, Vinnies Victoria has recorded an overall rise in demand for financial welfare support by 41 percent. This includes a rise in demand for transport support by 185 percent; a rise in utilities support by 69 percent; a rise in food support by 32 percent; and a rise accommodation support by 32 percent.

“What’s distressing about this snapshot of time, is that the overall demand for Vinnies’ financial welfare assistance has drastically increased – proof that Victorians are relying more heavily on the generosity of charities and volunteers to survive. In a country as privileged as Australia, this is alarming and unsustainable,” said Ms Cattermole.

“I urge everyone to show compassion and to advocate on behalf of those who need our support. We need sustained action and solidarity to ensure everyone is included and empowered to live an active and fulfilling life.”

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- For more information about Anti-Poverty Week, visit www.antipovertyweek.org.au.
- To donate to Vinnies Victoria visit www.vinnies.org.au or phone 03 9895 5959.

ABOUT THE ST VINCENT DE PAUL SOCIETY VICTORIA (VINNIES):

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 vinnies.org.au.