

MEDIA RELEASE

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A MORE FLEXIBLE APPROACH NEEDED TO NEWSTART ALLOWANCE

The St Vincent de Paul Society National Council has called on the Federal Government to put in place a more flexible approach to setting and indexing the Newstart Allowance.

In its submission to the Senate Standing Committee on Community Affairs' inquiry into the adequacy of Newstart and related payments, the Society has found that people are descending further into poverty on the current rate and that children are too often casualties of the rigid, punitive approach.

CEO Toby oConnor said every day the Society sees the severe hardships endured by individuals and families trying to survive on Newstart.

'Feedback from St Vincent de Paul Conferences in local communities demonstrates that people living on Newstart survive by foregoing one essential item over another,' he said.

'They endure precarious housing arrangements.

'Many have significant and chronic health conditions and struggle to meet medical costs but do not qualify for the Disability Support Pension.

'Most are socially isolated and have limited and costly transport options.

'And most are not competitive in the job market, as costs associated with preparing for and attending interviews or completing training programs are just unaffordable.

'The nature of work is changing. Jobs are less secure, with more part time and casual work. Young people, older people and single parents face particular barriers.

'Blaming and shaming people who cannot find work is unhelpful.

'The work-first, over life-first approach has failed.

'Intensive, long-term, client-centred services are needed. Not an insecure or casual job at any cost.

'We've seen a reduction in the overall budget available to assist people who are unemployed into jobs coupled with a more punitive approach through increased penalties for non-compliance.

'People are being shoe-horned into inappropriate training and unsuitable jobs.

'In many instances work is just not available and the inadequacy of Newstart is a disabling rather than a motivating factor.

'We encourage governments to look beyond short-term political gain to interventions that will build stronger communities in the long-term,' Mr oConnor said.

A copy of the National Council's submission is available [here](#).

The St Vincent de Paul Society is a lay Catholic charitable organisation that comprises over 60,000 volunteers and members and over 3,000 employees who provide on-the-ground assistance across Australia. The Society is underpinned by the principles of social justice and is committed to identifying the root causes of poverty in order to contribute to their elimination. We provide help to all in need by alleviating suffering and promoting human dignity and personal integrity.

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