

MEDIA RELEASE

St Vincent de Paul Society Australia response to COVID-19 pandemic

19 March 2020

St Vincent de Paul Society National Council President, Claire Victory, said vulnerable people will be deeply challenged by the responses to the COVID-19 pandemic and by the economic impact of the virus.

In a statement issued today to staff and members of the Society's conferences in all states and territories, Ms Victory said social isolation is one of the most common concerns that conference members respond to in communities throughout Australia. The Society operates at the grass roots, visiting people, known as companions, in their homes or assisting them through Vinnies shops and other facilities.

'At a time of enforced self-isolation required by the response to COVID-19, the Society's model of care can continue to meet those needs. But we need to be smart about how we do this so that both the community and our members are safe.

'Many of our members are aged over 60 and most companions are living with existing health issues. Both groups are at higher risk of serious consequences should they become infected.

'As a result, all home-based visitations will cease until further notice from the National Council.

'Visitation will now occur at the discretion of the conference presidents and must take place by telephone or web-based care and support, or at a Vinnies shop or other facility.

'The rooms must have sanitisers and appropriate personal protective equipment including face masks, and the rooms must be disinfected prior to and after use.

'Visitation through hospitals and aged care facilities can only occur if the operator of the facility approves of ongoing visits and provides both sanitisers and appropriate protective equipment.

'The same rationale applies to visitation to other facilities such as prisons.

'Visitation or volunteering on Vinnies vans will continue until the relevant government authority suspends such activity due to the pandemic, and appropriate practices must be followed.

'If the relevant government authority directs the Society to cease providing visitation through attendance at a centre or vans or at another facility, the Society will provide assistance through telephone and web-based assessments.

'If the relevant government authority directs closure of schools and puts quarantine zones in place with travel restrictions then all conference and council meetings will be conducted by telephone or other use of technology.

'We will continue to monitor the impact of these changes on companions and respond as best we can', Ms Victory said.

The St Vincent de Paul Society in Australia consists of 60,000 members and volunteers who operate on the ground through over 1,000 conferences located in individual parishes across the country.

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