

MEDIA RELEASE

13 May 2020

Vinnies calls for more agile approach to natural disaster response

In its submission to the Royal Commission into Natural Disaster Arrangements the St Vincent de Paul Society National Council called for a more streamlined approach to assessing and responding to need for people affected by natural disasters in the short- and medium-term.

Speaking to the Society's experience with the bushfires, flood and drought, CEO, Toby oConnor said responses to natural disasters work well when all levels of government, charities and businesses work together in the interests of local communities.

'However, processes can sometimes be unnecessarily complex, which can bring about unhelpful situations for traumatised communities and exhausted volunteers, Mr oConnor said.

'The Society has an extensive history of providing emergency assistance. It delivers services with minimal overheads due to its large volunteer base and is able to mobilise resources quickly in the aftermath of disasters,' he said.

The Society's submission provides information on the responsibilities of and coordination between all levels of governments relating to natural disasters.

It calls for:

- more flexibility for Commonwealth agencies to expedite grant arrangements and variations in times of national emergency;
- the minimum cash payment available under the Commonwealth Emergency Relief program to be increased to up to \$3,000 and greater flexibility to be built into government grant guidelines to accommodate crisis events;
- up-front cash payments to be made by the Commonwealth Government (through Services Australia) in circumstances where an immediate payment is required;
- the Commonwealth and state and territory government agencies to make relevant data available (disaster recovery allowance, number of homes damaged or destroyed) by Local Government Area through data.gov;
- investigation of how more information could be shared across government and non-government agencies once consent is obtained;
- a national data and reporting framework and portal to enable data sharing between government and non-government agencies;
- a coordinated approach to service responses developed locally and in partnership with all levels of government and other service providers;
- outreach service models for those who do not wish, or are unable, to access Recovery Centres; and
- a case-managed or team assessment approach to identify need and allocate service responses.

A copy of the St Vincent de Paul Society's submission to the Royal Commission is available [here](#).

The Society will also be preparing a submission to the Senate Finance and Public Administration Reference Committee's, *Lessons to be learned from the Australian Bushfire Season 2019-20*.

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.