



# MEDIA RELEASE

14 July 2020

## Expert Panel should set payment rates to keep people out of poverty

The St Vincent de Paul Society's National Council has called on the Federal Government to establish an expert panel to advise it on revisions to Social Security payment rates that were originally designed to keep people out of poverty.

Speaking as ACOSS launches its *Raise the Rate for Good* [national day of action](#) today, St Vincent de Paul Society's National Council CEO, Toby oConnor said the call for an independent body to set and realistically index payments is not new.

'But, now in the face of the impact of COVID-19, an independent panel of experts would provide a foundation for reflecting society's expectations that payments are fair, equitable and sufficient to meet basic needs,' Mr oConnor said.

'Vital payments must keep pace with the actual cost of living otherwise people unable to find work will continue to be left behind,' Mr oConnor said.

'The Treasurer has tipped that real unemployment could be as high as 13.5 per cent and we know there is currently only one job for every 13 people on Newstart or Youth Allowance.

'JobSeeker and JobKeeper should be maintained at least until the expert panel is established.

'The Government took swift and decisive action to lift people's incomes during the onset of the pandemic and our members have reported the success of these measures across metropolitan and regional communities.

'We now have an opportunity to convert that temporary relief into enduring reform with enormous social and economic benefits.

'People should not be forced back onto the old Newstart rates of \$40 per day.

'Until the panel is established, either the current JobSeeker rate should be retained (an additional \$560 per fortnight) or the payment should match existing aged and disability pensions (an additional \$370 per fortnight)', he said.

In its submission to the Senate Select Committee on COVID-19, the Society also called for an investment of at least \$7.7 billion into social housing.

'We see daily evidence in the turnaround in the lives of people who have received the higher level of financial support, and those who received access to accommodation and wrap around services since the advent of COVID-19.

'This highlights the ongoing chronic shortage of affordable and secure housing options for the growing number of people falling through the safety net,' Mr oConnor 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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