

MEDIA RELEASE

There's more to unemployment than carrots and sticks

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Claire Victory, National President of the St Vincent de Paul Society in Australia has repeated the call for an independent agency to monitor and advise the Federal Government on the levels of social security payments, including unemployment benefits, needed to keep people out of poverty.

Speaking shortly after the release of employment figures for the final quarter this year, Ms Victory encouraged the Federal Government to establish an independent agency as soon as possible to provide advice on an appropriate, permanent increase to the base rate of JobSeeker.

'We know that increased benefits during the pandemic have provided financial respite for many people who previously struggled to survive on \$40 a day.

'This successful economic stimulus measure enabled some of the most vulnerable people to buy fresh fruit and vegetables, save for household appliances, cover medical costs and pay outstanding bills.

'The Federal Government provided a fortnightly supplement of \$550 on top of the \$565.70 paid as the base rate for a single person. The supplement was reduced to \$250 from September and will drop to \$150 a fortnight next year.

'The pandemic has been tough. Research is telling us what we already know – that, on average, over seven months, about one in four Australians have reported difficulties paying for essential goods and services. And despite the easing of restrictions, almost 60 per cent of Australians still expect the pandemic to affect their normal activities for longer than six months.

'In this environment, the pressure is on to find jobs and yet there are few available.

'We know that there is one job for every 12 people looking for work, and there is no neat 'fit' between available jobs and available workers, skills and geography.

'Not every job is suitable for every worker and unemployed people in the city are not necessarily qualified to take up jobs in the regions.

'We are also concerned that more than 234,000 jobseekers have had their payments suspended for breaching rules since mutual obligation was reinstated.

'Some employers are finding it difficult to fill vacant positions, but its simplistic to suggest that a dignified level of unemployment benefits somehow provides a disincentive for people to work.

'Evidence, not anecdote should inform the Government's processes as it sets the base rate of essential payments.

'These issues are complex and finding the balance is not easy. But one thing is clear. No one should be expected to live on \$40 a day, ever again.

The Melbourne Institute's Survey of the Impact of COVID-19 in Australia is accessible [here](#).

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

Media contact: Judith Tokley 0408 824 306

Media phone: 0475 068 209 / media@svdp.org.au