

MEDIA RELEASE – FEBRUARY 17, 2020

## **Federal Government must #RaiseTheRate to avoid returning people to poverty: Jesuit Social Services**

Jesuit Social Services has urged political leaders to commit to a permanent raising of the Jobseeker rate ahead of an expected announcement from the Federal Government later this month.

Jesuit Social Services CEO Julie Edwards says a permanent rise is needed to avoid vulnerable Australians returning to poverty.

“The COVID-19 pandemic has impacted all Australians, but as is often the case in crises, people and communities already on the margins have been disproportionately impacted. People who are unemployed or in insecure work and people without stable housing have been among those who have faced even more barriers to participating in society,” says Ms Edwards.

The Coronavirus Supplement, which has been paid to recipients of the Jobseeker payment since April 2020, has been a recognition that the previous payment of \$40 a day is not enough to live on.

“This Supplement has been a life-changer for many Australians, including the marginalised people Jesuit Social Services works with every day. For some, this has been the difference between being able to put food on the table and afford essential medication and a roof over their head. Evidence has shown it has reduced measures of poverty and housing stress, and that the number of people living in poverty has been lowered by around 32 per cent.

“We know that the pre-pandemic Jobseeker rate was below the poverty line and did not allow recipients to lead a dignified life. The ending of the Coronavirus Supplement cannot be an excuse to relegate vulnerable Australians back into poverty – the Federal Government must create a fair social safety net that ensures recipients can afford an adequate standard of living”.

This is demonstrated in the case of a 24-year old female participant of one of Jesuit Social Services’ programs, who says the Coronavirus Supplement allowed her to purchase a proper winter jacket, and that she no longer had to choose between paying for groceries or medication.

Jesuit Social Services supports ACOSS’s #RaiseTheRate campaign, which advocates for the Coronavirus Supplement to be maintained until Australia’s social security system is fixed for good, ongoing indexation of payments and the establishment of a Social Security Commission to advise the Parliament on the ongoing adequacy of income support payments.

“A recent media report canvassed one option for the Jobseeker payment, which would mean that people unemployed for six months or longer may only have access to the pre-pandemic Jobseeker payment. Options like this are unfair and out of touch with the realities of trying to navigate the employment market, particularly for already marginalised people, let alone while the pandemic is still impacting most facets of life. We would oppose such a plan in the strongest way possible.”

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