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MEDIA RELEASE

JobSeeker decision condemns thousands to poverty

The National Council of the St Vincent de Paul Society in Australia has condemned the Federal Government's decision today to slash unemployment benefits to a rate barely more than the old Newstart.

National President, Claire Victory said the Society is dumbfounded by the Government's continued inability to increase a rate that has been condemned by business leaders, social services groups, union leaders and indeed members of its own government.

'Twenty-five dollars a week is an inadequate response to the poverty experienced by the people forced survive on unemployment benefits. It's an affront to human dignity,' Ms Victory said.

'Twenty-five dollars a day would have been closer to the mark and would have brought income support in line with other pensions.

'The rhetoric that the best form of income support is a job is unpalatable, especially when there remain nine applicants looking for a job or increased hours for every job advertised.

'Vinnies steps in to help people who are finding it hard to make ends meet from time-to-time.

'But to expect charities such as ours to meet people's needs as a matter of course is very poor public policy and points to a government that is out of touch with the lived experience of many of its constituents.

'We saw a drop in calls on our services when the significantly higher JobSeeker was introduced, but those demands have increased as the rate of JobSeeker has decreased.

'I repeat the call for the establishment of a Social Security Expert Group to advise on payment levels that keep people out of poverty.

'Such a move would take the politics out of the decision-making process and would come closer to delivering in line with expectations for the common good of our community.

'All pensions and income support payments must now be brought into line until such an expert group is established.

'This would require an increase to Newstart of around \$370 a fortnight, not the \$50 announced today,' 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 groups located in local communities across the country.

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