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MEDIA RELEASE

National Women's Safety Summit

National Council President, Claire Victory said entrenched, long-term structural changes in housing and income support are essential to improve the safety of single women, including older women, and women and their children who experience family, domestic and/or sexual violence.

Speaking during the first day of the National Women's Safety Summit, Ms Victory said women trying to leave a violent relationship must have immediate access to safe, emergency accommodation and access to long-term, appropriate and affordable accommodation. But there is a well-documented, chronic and growing shortfall in crisis, transitional and long-term accommodation options.

'Staying in the family home, if the perpetrator has been removed, is not an option for many women, regardless of the security measures that may have been put in place.

'As we all work towards the second National Plan to Reduce Violence Against Women and Their Children, proper income support must also be available, free of red tape, and not predicated upon a partner's income. The current base rate of \$44 a day is so inadequate that women are forced to remain in violent relationships.

'Emergency income support is also essential, including payment and emergency relief supports of up to \$5,000 which could be used as a bond to help women secure long-term rentals.

'We know that women are most at risk when trying to leave a violent relationship. They need the right supports in place to do this safely. Being able to access appropriate accommodation and having economic security are essential, especially as they start the difficult job of rebuilding their lives.

'It's important that women fleeing violence should not be forced to meet mutual obligation demands, including Parents Next.

'The Society has previously supported calls to suspend mutual obligation requirements during these high-risk times, as well as other measures such as domestic violence leave.

'While the second plan will map a way forward for the next ten years, there is plenty that can, and should, be done now.

'The Prime Minister previously committed to implementing the recommendations from the Respect At Work Report from the Sex Discrimination Commissioner, but the legislation that passed the parliament last week included just six of the recommendations.

'Last year, the Society assisted approximately 4,800 women and children through 23 refuges.

'However, the real figure is much higher, given family and domestic violence is often not disclosed as the reason for seeking assistance, even though it may be evident.

'Also important are more services for children and young people affected by family violence, and funding to support trauma-informed, child-centred and child-inclusive practice, as well as improved coordination with other relevant national plans such as the National Framework for Protecting Australia's children, and with other government agencies,' 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.

MEDIA CONTACT

0475 068 209 or media@svdp.org.au

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