



MEDIA RELEASE

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BUDGET FALLS SHORT OF HELPING AUSTRALIA'S BATTLERS

Despite some welcome announcements regarding social and affordable housing, a small increase in Commonwealth Rent Assistance for eligible renters, and capping PBS medicine prices, much of the social support funding in Budget 2024-25 is earmarked for capital works and programs that will not help people most in need or will take considerable time to become operational.

'There is substantial funding in the Budget that should have been allocated to assist Australians doing it tough,' said the Society's National President, Mark Gaetani.

'For example, much-needed increases to JobSeeker and other working age payments could be afforded by means testing the \$300 per household energy rebate, which should be targeted to those who really need it.

'St Vincent de Paul Society commends the Albanese Government for its commitment to social and affordable housing and some other positives. However, a large number of households continue to struggle to get by day to day, and the Budget is unlikely to significantly improve their circumstances.

'Little extra funding has been allocated to helping the many people relying on income support payments or very low wages. They continue to face a national rental crisis as well as the rising cost of essentials, especially food. Requests for the Society's assistance have risen across Australia by between 14 per cent and 40 per cent, with four-in-five people seeking assistance with food.'

Mr Gaetani noted that expert analysts, including the Government's own Economic Inclusion Advisory Committee, say a top priority is for working age payments such as JobSeeker to be substantially increased, and that doing so would not be inflationary.

'Yet this advice has been ignored, despite the level of JobSeeker being more than \$200 per week below the poverty line. We welcome the funding for people with partial capacity to work less than 14 hours a week, but this only accounts for about 4,700 people, while some 892,220 people depend on JobSeeker and Youth Allowance.

'In the past year, 3.7 million households ran out of food, and on any given day, more than half a million households struggle to put food on the table. One-in-five children are going hungry. These are not just statistics but the reality that our members are seeing every day.

'The combination of high costs of living and inadequate incomes is a perfect storm. Those relying on income support payments like JobSeeker, Youth Allowance, Parenting Payment and Disability Support Pension will see little relief from this Budget. For some time, the Society has been urging an increase in these payments, in the case of JobSeeker to 90 per cent of the Age Pension.'

Mr Gaetani said the Society is deeply disappointed by the \$20M budget cut to the Status Resolution Support Services program that helps support people while resolving their immigration status.

'We had urged increased funding for this program but now we see a cut. There is also no increased provision of work rights, study rights and access to mainstream social support for people seeking asylum. This comes at a time when \$604 million is allocated in the next year to keeping people in the discredited offshore processing centres on Nauru. The heartlessness of this budgetary priority is lamentable.'

Mr Gaetani added that, 'Across the country we are seeing rises in requests for help, including emergency relief, intended as a temporary response to a crisis but now being relied on for regular support. We welcomed a 30 per cent increase earlier this year and while this Budget has increased financial counselling and food relief, an urgent review of emergency relief funding is needed, as many people are going unassisted.

'In NSW alone, attendance at Vinnies food vans has increased by 125 per cent over the past year. Many families and individuals are in a dire situation, and they need help right now. While future initiatives are welcome, promises of social and affordable housing in the years ahead are of little comfort to people living precariously from week to week, who might even be on the verge of becoming homeless.

'We will continue to urge the Government to increase the base rate of working age payments, and to fund the [Better Deal for Renters](#). We also seek appropriate funding of the National Volunteering Strategy, and a response to, and funding of, the Parliament's gambling report, *You win some, you lose more*.

'There is much that Government still needs to do in order to make Australia a fairer society, especially for people struggling to make ends meet,' Mr Gaetani said.

The St Vincent de Paul Society in Australia consists of 45,000 members and volunteers who operate on the ground through over 1,000 groups located in local communities across the country.

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