

MEDIA ALERT

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Research reveals Australia's largest poverty increase in a decade

A new research report into Australia's national minimum wage has found the poverty line has had the largest increase in a decade.

Australian Catholic University economic sociologist Associate Professor Tom Barnes said Australia's national poverty line had increased by 5.8 per cent this year.

"In this country right now, something like 3.7 million people live in poverty, in the order of 1 in every 7 people," Associate Professor Tom Barnes said.

Associate Professor Barnes said "a calamitous drop in real wages" had sparked the rapid increase in Australia's poverty line.

"People living in poverty are living hand to mouth. They're struggling to put food on the table, they're struggling to pay rent," he said.

The new research was released as part of the Australian Catholic Council for Employment Relations' [submission](#) to the Fair Work Commission's annual wage review.

The Australian Catholic Bishops Conference have called for a 5 per cent rise in the national minimum wage.

Associate Professor Barnes said a 5 per cent increase would not eliminate the poverty line but would be a step in the right direction.

"A one-off increase of the national minimum wage of over 15 per cent would be required to eliminate the poverty line for single parents and sole carers with two dependent children," Associate Professor Barnes.

"We believe the Fair Work Commission can address this by increasing the minimum wage incrementally over time, and the 5 per cent increase we're proposing for 2026 would be a positive step in the right direction."

Associate Professor Barnes said rising wages was one way to address economic instability and ensure Australia did not fall into a recession while prices were still growing.

"We had that in the 1970s when inflation was really high and unemployment was really high. We don't want to return to that situation," he said.

"One way in which government and public institutions can help to pre-emptively remedy that problem is by increasing wages for our lowest income earners."

The Catholic Church is one of the largest private sector employers in the country, employing more than 220,000 people in health, aged care, education, social services and administration among other areas.

Pre-recorded sound grabs with Associate Professor Tom Barnes are available [here](#).

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