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It's time to create a new normal

With less than 90 days until the September economic cliff, UnitingCare Australia warns that people in vulnerable circumstances are once again at significant risk.

Appearing before the Senate Select Committee on COVID-19 this morning, National Director, Claerwen Little, voiced concerns about the ongoing social and economic impact of the coronavirus crisis.

"As we fast approach the 'September cliff' we are deeply concerned about the risk of deepening disadvantage.

"We don't want to be the fleet of ambulances waiting at the bottom of the cliff. We want to be part of the team of construction workers building a strong, robust fence at the top" Ms Little said.

Uniting Vic.Tas CEO, Bronwyn Pike, also gave evidence to the Committee, speaking about the experience of providers on the ground.

Ms Pike said significant investment was needed in new social and affordable housing, boosting the JobSeeker payment by at least \$185 per week and extending the payment to over one million people on temporary and bridging visas.

"We have a once-in-a-generation opportunity to create a new normal – a chance to hit the reset button and create a fairer and more equitable society," Ms Pike said.

"We cannot return to the unacceptably low, pre-JobSeeker rate. We need to ensure there's an adequate social safety net so everyone can live with dignity.

"During this pandemic we have seen people who have never before asked for emergency relief or housing support ask for our help. In some communities, homeless numbers have doubled, but we fear this is just scratching the surface.

"We have to all work together to ensure everyone in our society has housing security – a safe and secure roof over their heads. We can't allow the gap between the rich and the poor to widen, so we must work together to address inequality to create a better society, a fairer society and one which puts the wellbeing of its most vulnerable at its core."

In a [submission](#) to the inquiry UnitingCare Australia outlines specific concerns and number of overarching principles.

"UnitingCare Australia is committed to continuing its collaboration with the Government and others as we navigate the challenges ahead," said Ms Little.

Media Contact
Anna Minson | 0437 276 834 | annam@nat.unitingcare.org.au