

15 October 2020



Rising rates of child poverty loom in wake of pandemic

As the economic effects of the COVID-19 pandemic continue to impact communities, the number of children and families living in poverty is set to escalate.

“Too many children and families in Australia are at risk of living in poverty and suffering long-term disadvantage” said UnitingCare Australia National Director, Ms Claerwen Little.

“Even before the pandemic, more than one in six children were living in poverty. Sadly, in the wake of COVID-19, that number is set to rise.

“Without government action, child poverty will get even worse, with children facing greater challenges as they grow up.”

Today UnitingCare Australia hosted an event to mark Anti-Poverty Week and shine a light on the issue of child poverty in Australia. Bringing together an expert panel, the speakers talked about key issues facing children and families, and what support these vulnerable Australians need to ensure they have the best chance at a future full of hope.

In his address today former Deputy Prime Minister, Brian Howe, said

“Why do we treat the poorest people as if they lack the same values as others in society? Why are we treating them as if they are less than human? It seems to me that we have an opportunity to reaffirm our values as a society and we must not let that opportunity pass us by.”

Professor Miranda Stewart from Melbourne University Law School said that we need to think more creatively about solutions.

“This is a systemic issue and we need to think more broadly about the solutions. We have to ask ourselves, what is the best mix of family, welfare and public provision to alleviate child poverty, and most importantly, what is the fairest approach?”

Speaking more directly to the lived reality experienced by thousands of single parents in Australia, Ms Terese Edwards spoke about the incredible impact of the Coronavirus Supplement for families.

“A powerful transformation occurred and for the first time, families could afford the basics. They could afford prescribed medication, buy winter boots for the kids, or even put the heater on in the cold of winter. We cannot allow the old JobSeeker rate to return – condemning children to hardship, missing out, and a grim Christmas.

Victorian Co-Chair of Anti-Poverty Week, and CEO of Uniting Vic.Tas, Bronwyn Pike, concluded the event by saying the time for change is now.

“We have a once in a lifetime opportunity to reset. In response to the pandemic, governments have proven that they can be nimble and bold and step up to support those who need it most. So today we call on both state and federal governments to ensure adequate support for children, and a fair safety net for all. We must do better because so many children and families are counting on us.”

UnitingCare Australia is the national body for the Uniting Church’s community services network and an agency of the Assembly of the Uniting Church in Australia. We give voice to the Uniting Church’s commitment to social justice through advocacy and by strengthening community service provision. We are one of the largest networks of social service providers in Australia supporting 1.4 million people every year across urban, rural and remote communities, supported by 50,000 staff and 30,000 volunteers.

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