

Monday 27th February 2023

Opening statement to the Senate Community Affairs References Committee inquiry into the extent and nature of poverty in Australia

National Director, Claerwen Little

I would like to start by acknowledging the traditional custodians, the Ngunnawal people, and pay my respects to their elders past, present and future, and re-commit to working for reconciliation in this land.

Thank you for the opportunity to appear before the Committee today on this important issue. I have with me Mr Mark Newton, CEO of Paramatta Mission, one of the many services within the UnitingCare network.

As that national body for the UnitingCare network, our work is grounded in the values and vision of the Uniting Church in Australia, the expertise of our services and the experience of the 1.4million people we serve each year.

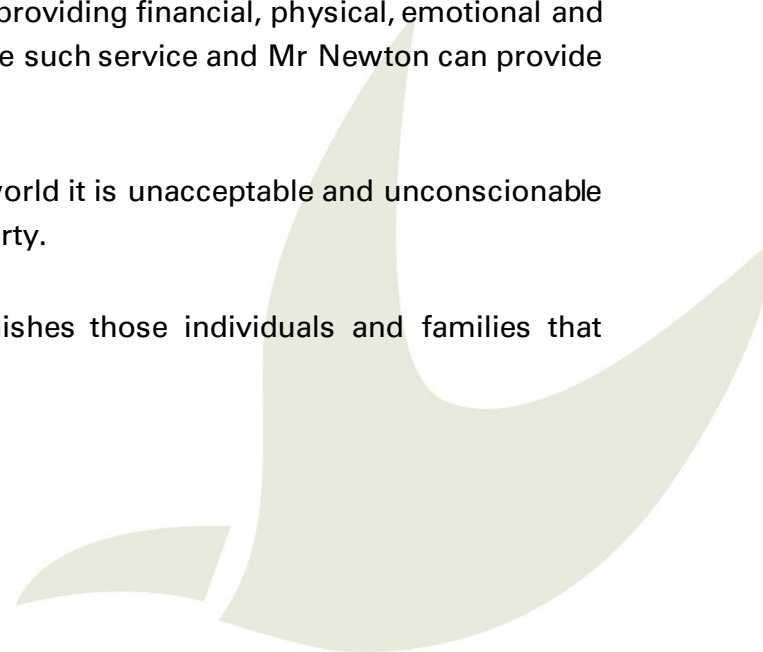
The Uniting Church pledged in 1977 to seek the correction of injustices and work for the eradication of poverty. We are here to continue that mission today.

Senators, you have heard about the deeply concerning rates and impacts of poverty in Australia. A number of UnitingCare organisations from our network of 80,000 staff and volunteers have given evidence of the lived experience of people we support and what practical solutions should be enacted to end poverty in this country.

Our services are at the frontline every day doing the best they can to ameliorate the effects of poverty, often intergenerational, providing financial, physical, emotional and spiritual support. Parramatta Mission is one such service and Mr Newton can provide testament to this work.

As one of the wealthiest countries in the world it is unacceptable and unconscionable for people in our community to live in poverty.

The existence of poverty not only diminishes those individuals and families that experience it, but it diminishes us all.



We should not allow even one member of our community to languish without adequate means of support for themselves and those they care for.

Poverty is the outcome of intentional policy decisions on issues such as taxation, social security, income support, housing, employment, education and community service provision.

This is not just a flashpoint of the current cost of living crisis. Poverty is a structural problem that needs structural solutions.

We commend to you the policies and recommendations in our submission which will enhance the dignity of people, especially those who are most vulnerable.

We hope that the recommendations of this inquiry will inform the many important legislative and policy reforms underway in the 47th Parliament, especially the focus on a national wellbeing framework and economic equality and inclusion.

And that the voices that have been heard through this process will echo through these Chambers as a timely reminder that we can and we must do better as a country to eradicate poverty and set us on a path of human rights and human dignity.

Thank you. We look forward to the discussion ahead.

