

Failure to act on half a century of evidence has eroded a fair go for 3 million Australians

A lack of political will spanning half a century to make a simple change around the level of income support has eroded the chance of a fair go for all Australians, according to UnitingCare Australia, the national body for the largest social service provider network in Australia.

Nearly 50 years since the Henderson report (1973-75), the most recent 2022-2024 Senate inquiry into poverty made the same recommendation – that raising income support is the way to address poverty.

“In 1973, 8% of Australia’s population lived in poverty. Today, that figure is shockingly high at 13.4% - over three million Australians,” said UnitingCare Australia National Director, Claerwen Little.

“As we mark [Anti-Poverty Week](#), we must call out that it is unconscionable in a country as wealthy as ours, we still have children, families and individuals in every community living well below the poverty line. Poverty is a policy choice made over and over again by governments across the political divide across many decades.

“It’s not just 3.32 million Australians that don’t have much money. It’s 3.32 million Australians without safe and secure housing constantly worried about losing their home, not eating regularly or nutritiously, not heating or cooling their homes, and not going to a doctor before it all gets too late.

“Too often poverty is presented as being due to a person’s individual failings, when in reality it’s an entrenched structural issue in society. As community service providers, we see the impact of this injustice first-hand. The current cost of living crisis has seen an overall increase in demand for support services by at least 30%, with the lowest income households bearing the brunt of sky-high prices.

“Despite half a century of government inquiries, reports, and recommendations, there has been no meaningful action to address economic inequality in Australia. A fair go for all has failed.

“Recent increases to the Commonwealth Rent Assistance and JobSeeker payments are helping, but these measures haven’t kept up with inflation and cost of living and fall well short of the long term and meaningful change we need to make a real difference.

“Whoever forms government after the election next year will inherit a federal budget in surplus and the responsibility of fifty years of inaction that has left millions of people unable to afford the basic costs of living a simple life – food, shelter, clothing, sleep.

“If not now, when? How many more Australians will live below the poverty line until real action is taken?”

UnitingCare Australia calls on the Federal Government to implement the following recommendations of the Economic Inclusion Advisory Committee and take tangible steps towards a fairer society where everyone has a chance:

- Substantially increase the base rate of JobSeeker and related working age payments to 90% of the Age Pension.
- Commit to a timeframe for the payment increases.
- Improve the indexation arrangements for payments.

About UnitingCare Australia and the UnitingCare Network

UnitingCare Australia is the national body for the Uniting Church’s community services, the largest social services network in Australia. The UnitingCare network supports 1.4 million people every year across 1,600 sites in urban, rural, and remote communities, with over 55,000 staff and 17,000 volunteers.

Anti-Poverty Week - 13-19 October 2024

For more than 20 years [Anti-Poverty Week](#) has operated in Australia around the 17th of October, the UN Day for the Eradication of Poverty. Our purpose is to help Australians understand poverty and to take action collectively to end it. Several [resources are available](#) including statistics and reports about poverty in Australia.

[UnitingCare Australia is a Major Sponsor](#) of Anti-Poverty Week (National Director, Claerwen Little is on the National Facilitating Group), as well as Uniting NSW.ACT, UnitingCare Queensland, Wesley Mission Queensland, Uniting WA, Wesley Mission Sydney, Uniting Communities (CEO Simon Schrapel is National Co-Chair) and Uniting Vic.Tas (CEO Bronwyn Pike is State Co-Chair, Victoria, and Executive Officer Jeremy Pettet is State Co-Chair, Tasmania).

Media contact: Anna Page – annap@nat.unitingcare.org.au – 0432 560 975
Spokespeople available for interviews.