



St Vincent de Paul Society
NSW
good works

REBUILDING ESSENTIAL SOCIAL INFRASTRUCTURE AND PROGRAMS

NSW 2024-25 Pre-Budget Submission

February 2024

Dear NSW Treasury

The St Vincent de Paul Society NSW (**the Society**) thanks the NSW Treasurer for the opportunity to make a pre-budget submission.

The Society and the NSW Government have a rich history of collaboration. For decades, the Society and relevant departments have worked together to provide on-the-ground assistance across the State in order to, among other initiatives, combat homelessness, support women and children experiencing domestic and family violence, provide financial support to low-income residents and support marginalised communities including First Nations people.

We would like to particularly acknowledge Minister Rose Jackson MLC and her collaborative approach to addressing the issues facing the most vulnerable members of our community. Her transparent and inclusive style sets a powerful example, and we are enthusiastic about the prospect of continuing our close collaboration with Minister Jackson. Together, we can drive meaningful change and create a more equitable and just society for all.

The 11 recommendations outlined in this document respond to the persistent cost of living crisis that disproportionately impacts people already doing it tough in our community. Broadly, these recommendations are to dramatically increase social housing supply with support, increase homelessness services and programs funding, extend food relief programs and make energy more affordable. Our recommendations follow targeted consultation with the Society's members and professional services and are informed by Society data about the people we assist.

In addition to this document, the Society has also lodged a separate submission with a number of important funding proposals.

With the number of people in NSW at risk of or experiencing homelessness, we hope that you consider our recommendations and look forward to working with you to deliver real outcomes.

Yours sincerely



Yolanda Saiz
Chief Executive Officer
St Vincent de Paul Society NSW

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

The St Vincent de Paul Society NSW acknowledges Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the Traditional Custodians of the land on which we live and work, with deep respect. May Elders, past and present, be blessed and honoured. May we join together and build a future based on compassion, justice, hope, faith, and reconciliation.



SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

The St Vincent de Paul Society NSW recommends that the NSW Government provide for the following housing, homelessness and cost of living relief measures and policy initiatives in the 2024-25 budget:

Restore the social housing safety net for people in housing need by:

- 1) Making a significant, multibillion-dollar investment now to deliver new and upgraded social homes to meet people's housing need, reduce homelessness, and create a more resilient, inclusive housing system.

Set social housing tenants up for success by:

- 2) Funding \$30 million per annum recurrent to provide a package of longer-term, flexible wrap-around support services for social housing tenants to improve their wellbeing and build their capabilities to sustain their tenancies so that homelessness is not repeated.

Support people experiencing homelessness to get the services they need by:

- 3) Funding the SHS sector with an additional \$50 million per annum during the term of the contract extension to bridge the gap in demand relative to services.
- 4) Investing in a SHS workforce development package, including specialised training and clinical supervision for staff, so they are better equipped and supported to respond to clients' complex needs.
- 5) Invest \$62 million over three years to continue delivery of the Together Home Program.

Support women and children on temporary visas fleeing domestic and family violence by:

- 6) Removing permanent residency and citizenship requirements to access social housing and other housing and homelessness services and supports.
- 7) Providing stimulus brokerage funding for integrated case management to support the delivery of services to people seeking asylum and other women on temporary visas.

Stop people going hungry by:

- 8) Increasing funding for transport and related logistic costs of providing localised emergency food relief and wrap-around services to reduce poverty and improve health outcomes.
- 9) Convening a taskforce of NSW NGO experts to review and collaborate to provide a fair, efficient and fit for purpose food relief system.

Make energy rebates more equitable by:

- 10) Revising the Low-Income Household Rebate to be a fixed percentage of a person's energy bill, instead of a flat rate.
- 11) Reviewing and ensuring all NSW rebates are equitable, accessible and adequate.

INTRODUCTION

St Vincent de Paul Society NSW (the Society) welcomes the opportunity to make this submission to the NSW Government outlining our funding and policy priorities for the 2024-25 state budget and forward estimates.

This submission outlines our 11 recommendations in response to the persistent cost of living crisis that disproportionately impacts people already doing it tough in our community. Broadly, these recommendations are to dramatically increase social housing supply with support, increase homelessness services and programs funding, extend food relief programs and make energy more affordable. Our recommendations follow targeted consultation with the Society's members and professional services and are informed by Society data about the people we assist.

Daily, the Society bears witness to the fact that people on low incomes or experiencing disadvantage are disproportionately impacted by the persistent cost of living crisis. As a 'first responder' to this crisis, we provided \$13.7 million of assistance across NSW to approximately 87,000 people – an increase of 60% on the previous financial year¹. The first six months of this financial year have also seen an exponential demand in requests for assistance.²

More people are coming to us for the first-time, rising to one in three, including those who are employed. This increased need is across our metro, regional and rural footprints. Initial short time crisis relief is extending to assistance over longer periods of time. Our No Interest Loans Scheme team have noticed people's struggle to manage their finances with an increase in people relying on unaffordable Buy Now Pay Later Schemes.

Again and again, we hear stories of people with jobs forced into homelessness due to lack of affordable housing, families forgoing food or

unable to buy essentials for their kids, older people who cannot pay their electricity bills and keep cool, lack of crisis accommodation for people experiencing domestic and family violence and people living in sub-standard social and private housing. In some areas, the need is compounded by the devastating impacts and 'long tail' of natural disasters.³

The continuing cost of living and housing crises has meant that people are still facing hardships, which have not only remained, but that have become greater and more complex.⁴ People are presenting with more complex health and social issues – a food voucher is simply not enough anymore.⁵ People's health and wellbeing are suffering due to the ongoing cost of living and housing crises. We must act now to restore our social safety by investing in essential social infrastructure and delivering better targeted programs for people doing it tough.

We urge the government to adopt the cost of living relief measures in this submission to make a difference to those people who need it most. Many measures will result in associated cost savings through improved health and wellbeing, reduced service use and productivity gains. Most importantly, partnering together we can strengthen our essential social safety net and transform lives to create a fairer, more resilient NSW.

This Submission is set out in five parts.

These are:

- 1. Summary of recommendations**
- 2. Introduction**
- 3. Our recommendations**
- 4. Conclusion**

¹ St Vincent de Paul Society Pty Ltd NSW, *Creating a Compassionate Future, 2022-23 Annual Report*, <https://cms.vinnies.org.au/media/y3lnf3zj/annual-report-2022-23.pdf?path=y3lnf3zj%2Fannual-report-2022-23.pdf> (22-23 SVDP Annual Report)

² The number of people assisted, and the amount of assistance provided in FY2022-23 compared to the previous financial year, have increased respectively by 18% and 62%. In the first half of this financial year, Society members have assisted almost 70% of the total people supported in the entirety of FY22-23.

³ van den Nouwelant, R. & Cibin, A. (2022), *The Impact of housing vulnerability on climate disaster recovery* (Sydney: City Futures Research Centre)

⁴ Impact Economics and Policy (2023) *Beyond roads and bridges: Critical social infrastructure for South West Sydney*, NCOSS, https://www.nccoss.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/Beyond-Roads-Bridges_Social-Infra_SW_Sydney_WEB_SINGLES.pdf

⁵ 22-23 SVDP Annual Report - our Housing and Homelessness Services have increased by 4.5% and our Health Services by 10.3%.

OUR RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Deliver significantly more social homes with wrap-around support

Everyone should have a safe, affordable and healthy place to live. Yet on a daily basis the Society hears stories from people across the state who are living in an airless shipping container, a mouldy leaking room, a tent, or their car because they cannot afford a decent place to live. As the housing crisis deepens, our failure as a society to value social housing as essential social infrastructure becomes more stark, with devastating consequences for people on low incomes whose only alternative is homelessness.

“Before the [transitional accommodation] place I had moved about 10 times. I had a private rental back in February. I was working at the [business name], lost my job which means couldn’t afford the rent with my car repayments on top let alone all the other bills that were coming in... Then ended up on the streets basically... I was sleeping in my car some nights. I was hitting her father up for his couch some nights but between that – yes. I couldn’t stay there. It was just too much on me...” (SVdP National Housing tenant)⁶

The private rental market has reached a point of extreme unaffordability. Housing prices in NSW have surged since the start of the pandemic, increasing between 10-30% in some areas.⁷ Anglicare Australia’s 2023 Rental Affordability Snapshot found virtually no properties were affordable for people on income support payments.⁸ Around half (46%) of people the Society assists are experiencing housing stress.

Governments are responsible for funding social housing as a safety net for people who cannot afford or sustain private housing. In NSW, there is a chronic and severe shortage of social housing compared to need. There are more than 57,360 households⁹, over 125,000 people¹⁰, on the NSW social housing waitlist. The number of priority applicants has increased by 86% in just under five years.¹¹ At the same time, social housing supply has fallen to 4.5%¹² of total NSW residential dwellings, down from 5.1% in 2001¹³ and well below the 7% OECD average.¹⁴

It will take at least 80 years for all the people on the NSW housing wait list to be housed at the NSW government’s current investment levels.¹⁵

⁶ Blunden, H. (2023). *A longitudinal study of the wellbeing of social housing tenants of St Vincent de Paul Housing – Baseline Report*. Social Policy Research Centre, UNSW Sydney and St Vincent de Paul Society of NSW: UNSW Social Policy Research Centre

⁷ National Housing Finance and Investment Corporation (2023) *State of the Nation’s Housing 2022–23*, Australian Government, <https://www.nhfc.gov.au/research/state-nations-housing-report-2022-23>

⁸ Anglicare Australia (2023) *Rental Affordability Snapshot, National Report 2023*, <https://www.anglicare.asn.au/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/Rental-Affordability-Snapshot-National-Report.pdf>

⁹ As at 31 December 2023, source: NSW Department of Communities and Justice, *Social housing applicant households on the NSW Housing Register*, accessed 12 February 2024, <https://www.facs.nsw.gov.au/housing/help/applying-assistance/social-housing-waiting-list-data>

¹⁰ Evidence given by the Department of Communities & Justice in Budget Estimates 2019-2020 advised that multiplying the number of applicants by 2.2 gives the approximate number of people waiting for social housing.

¹¹ NSW Department of Communities and Justice, *Social housing applicant households on the NSW Housing Register*, accessed 12 February 2024, <https://www.facs.nsw.gov.au/housing/help/applying-assistance/social-housing-waiting-list-data> and DCJ social housing register wait list 2019 data.

¹² Based on 155,262 NSW social housing dwellings as proportion of 3,425,600 NSW residential dwellings as at 2023. Source: NSW Department of Communities and Justice, *Social housing residential dwellings dashboard* 30 June 2023, accessed 12 February 2024;

¹³ Groenhart, L. and Burke, T. (2014) *Thirty years of public housing supply and consumption: 1981–2011*, AHURI Final Report No.231. Melbourne, Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute: https://www.ahuri.edu.au/sites/default/files/migration/documents/AHURI_Final_Report_No231_Thirty-years-of-public-housing-supply-and-consumption-1981-2011.pdf

¹⁴ OECD (2022) *PH4.2 Social Housing Rental Stock*, OECD Directorate of Employment, Labour and Social Affairs - Social Policy Division, <https://www.oecd.org/els/family/PH4-2-Social-rental-housing-stock.pdf>

¹⁵ Rachwani M (2023) *‘I feel so abandoned’: the ‘safety net’ overlooked in NSW election promises on housing*, article, The Guardian, <https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2023/mar/12/i-feel-so-abandoned-the-safety-net-overlooked-in-nsw-election-promises-on-housing>

And the true extent of social housing need is likely much greater than indicated by the housing register. Estimates range from the ‘conservative’ figure of 132,600 households¹⁶ to 221,500 households¹⁷ with unmet housing needs in NSW. Based on household growth projections, there will be 320,700 households with unmet housing need in NSW by 2041.¹⁸

In addition to the shortage of social homes, the state’s existing social housing stock is in desperate need of repair and maintenance. Less than two-thirds (60%) of NSW public housing dwellings meet agreed minimum acceptable standards.¹⁹ The proportion of public housing dwellings of an acceptable standard has been in decline since 2018. This means tenants are living without washing or cooking facilities or functioning toilets and are living in homes with major structural problems.

Inadequate and poor-quality social housing is contributing to high and growing rates of homelessness, domestic violence, and poverty. Not only does this impact individual and community wellbeing, but it also puts fiscal pressures on other parts of the budget including health, justice, and families and communities. The associated economic costs of the social housing shortfall have been projected to be \$445 million a year by 2036.²⁰ Conversely, every \$1 invested in social and affordable housing is estimated to deliver \$2 in benefits.²¹

We acknowledge the NSW Government’s recent planning proposals which include inclusionary zoning for affordable housing in eight Sydney precincts, and the creation of Homes NSW to improve the social housing system. Homes NSW

has the potential to deliver a more efficient and responsive housing and homelessness system by driving greater collaboration and coordination in the delivery of assets, services, and programs. The next critical step to create a fairer housing system is to substantially grow the state’s social housing portfolio and deliver good quality, well-located, affordable social homes that meet the needs of current and future generations.

The NSW government should invest in an immediate, large-scale and sustained social housing expansion program to deliver new and upgraded social homes for people in housing need. This should include dedicated housing for First Nations people delivered through community-controlled organisations in line with NSW Closing The Gap commitments. This investment should be underpinned by a roadmap to restore the social housing safety net initially up to 5% in the short-to-medium term and then increasing to 10% of all residential dwellings over the next two decades.²²

Recommendation:

Restore the social housing safety net for people in housing need by:

- 1) Making a significant, multibillion-dollar investment now to deliver new and upgraded social homes to meet people’s housing need, reduce homelessness, and create a more resilient, inclusive housing system.**

¹⁶ National Housing Finance and Investment Corporation (2023) *State of the Nation’s Housing 2022–23*, Australian Government, 101. <https://www.nhfc.gov.au/research/state-nations-housing-report-2022-23> [As at 31 July 2023]

¹⁷ UNSW City Futures Research Centre, *Social and affordable housing: needs, costs and subsidy gaps by region*, December 2022.

¹⁸ UNSW City Futures Research Centre, *Social and affordable housing: needs, costs and subsidy gaps by region*, December 2022.

¹⁹ Productivity Commission (2024) *Report on Government Services 2024*, Part G, Section 18: released 22 January 2024, Data Tables (18), Table 18A.41 <https://www.pc.gov.au/ongoing/report-on-government-services/2024/housing-and-homelessness/housing/rogs-2024-partg-section18-housing-data-tables.xlsx>

²⁰ Nygaard C. (2022) Cost of inaction: Social and economic losses due to the social and affordable housing shortage, Centre for Urban Transitions Swinburne University of Technology, <https://www.communityhousing.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/CHIA-Everyones-Home-Wider-Benefits-Analysis-31.3.2022.pdf?x70290>

²¹ SGS Economics & Planning (2022) Give me shelter: The long-term costs of underproviding public, social and affordable housing, report for Housing All Australians, https://sgsep.com.au/assets/main/SGS-Economics-and-Planning_Give-Me-Shelter.pdf; Jackson, A. & Ruting, B. (2023). *Beyond roads and bridges: Critical social infrastructure for South West Sydney*. NCOSS; Nygaard, C.A. & Kollmann, T. (2023) *Social and affordable housing in Australia: A social cost benefit analysis*. Community Housing Industry Association.

²² Based on 3,425,600 NSW residential dwellings, a total of 171,280 social housing dwellings would be required to comprise 5% of total dwellings. Based on current 155,262 social housing dwellings (June 2023), an additional 16,020 social homes would be required, equating to 5,340 new homes per year for three years. City Futures Research Centre 2019 research identified that investing in 5,000 new social homes each year for 10 years would cut the social housing waitlist by 75% and reduce the number of people experiencing homelessness by more than 16,000. 2022 City Futures research identified growth on average of 6.5% over 2 decades to meet unmet need nationally.

While it is well established that more social homes are required, the need for wrap-around support to assist tenants successfully sustain their tenancies and improve their wellbeing is often overlooked with the focus on delivering more bricks and mortar dwellings. Yet more than just a roof is required for tenants to thrive and to break the cycle homelessness.

Where social housing was once primarily the domain of people experiencing poverty, it is increasingly being rationed to priority applicants. Around three-quarters (73%) of newly housed tenants are now priority applicants.²³ They include people who may have experienced homelessness, domestic and family violence or institutional child sexual abuse or who have a disability. By virtue of their priority status, these tenants are more likely to have multiple, complex needs that can make sustaining a home more difficult.

Evidence suggests that when people have support to maintain their social housing tenancy for at least 12 months, then they will be significantly more likely to successfully sustain the tenancy long term.²⁴ Social housing coupled with appropriate ongoing support have been shown to result in significant cost-savings to government from reduced health, justice and social services use, in addition to the savings from reduced homelessness.^{25,26}

Recent research about Social and Affordable Housing Fund (SAHF) tenants housed with St Vincent de Paul (Society) Housing Pty Ltd (formerly Amélie Housing) identified that the provision of tailored supports with quality housing correlated with housing stability and high levels of tenant wellbeing.²⁷ Other modelling suggests a three-fold social return on investment for safe and secure living combined with wrap-around tenant support services.²⁸

Several NSW programs have been established in recognition of the importance of combining safe and secure housing with ongoing support to improve wellbeing and deliver sustainable solutions to end homelessness.²⁹ However access to most of these programs is restricted by specific program cohort eligibility. The broader SAHF program is only available to tenants in the 3,400 SAHF properties out of more than 155,260 social homes.

The NSW government should fund longer-term flexible, wrap-around supports to assist social housing tenants to strengthen their capabilities, maintain housing stability, and improve their wellbeing. These support packages will amplify the social impact of the government's investment in new social housing by supporting tenants to sustain their tenancies so that homelessness is not repeated.

Recommendation:

Set social housing tenants up for success by:

- 2) Funding \$30 million per annum recurrent to provide a package of longer-term, flexible wrap-around support services for social housing tenants to improve their wellbeing and build their capabilities to sustain their tenancies so that homelessness is not repeated.**

²³ NSW Department of Communities and Justice, *Newly housed from the NSW Housing Register*, accessed 12 February 2024, <https://www.facs.nsw.gov.au/housing/help/applying-assistance/social-housing-waiting-list-data> and DCJ social housing register wait list 2019 data

²⁴ Habibis, D., Atkinson, R., Dunbar, T., Goss, D., Easthope, H., and Maginn, P. (2007) *A sustaining tenancies approach to managing demanding behaviour in public housing: a good practice guide*, AHURI Final Report No. 103, Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute Limited, Melbourne, <https://www.ahuri.edu.au/research/final-reports/103>.

²⁵ Zaretzky, K., and Flatau, P. (2015) *The cost effectiveness of Australian tenancy support programs for formerly homeless people*, AHURI Final Report No. 252, Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute Limited, Melbourne, <https://www.ahuri.edu.au/research/final-reports/252>;

²⁶ KPMG (2019), *Education First Youth Foyers: Economic Evaluation*, Brotherhood of St Laurence, Melbourne.

²⁷ Blunden, H. & valentine, k. (2023). *A longitudinal study of the wellbeing of social housing tenants of St Vincent de Paul Housing – Final Report*. Social Policy Research Centre, UNSW Sydney

²⁸ ACIL Allen. (2022) *Social return on investment of BaptistCare NSW & ACT*. https://baptistcare.org.au/uploads/images/ACIL-Allen_Social-Return-on-Investment-Study_BaptistCare.pdf

²⁹ These include: Together Home program, Youth Foyers, Social and Affordable Housing Fund (SAHF), Sustaining tenancies (SHS).

2. Support safe pathways out of homelessness and into homes



When someone's tenancy is at-risk, they should be supported to sustain their rental, so they do not become homeless. When someone is in crisis, they should be able to access emergency accommodation while they are supported into long-term housing. Yet as the acute housing crisis forces more people into homelessness and services are stretched well beyond capacity, those in need of assistance are increasingly being left with nowhere to go. The result is that single older women are sleeping in their cars, young working men are couch surfing or sleeping rough, and families with kids are living in tents in the bush.

People who are homeless are more likely to experience poor mental and physical health and be at increased danger of abuse and violence.³⁰ Australian studies suggests people sleeping rough are more likely to die 30 years earlier than the general population with a median age of death around 50 years.³¹ Without a stable home and

with poor health and safety, people experiencing homelessness find it difficult to work or study, and are trapped in a cycle of poverty. These devastating personal impacts translate into substantial costs to society, including through lost productivity and associated accommodation, health and justice system costs.

In the face of our housing and homelessness crisis, NSW Specialist Homelessness Services (SHS) are being overwhelmed. Services are at breaking point as funding stagnates in the face of surging demand, leaving staff with no option but to turn away desperate, vulnerable people on a daily basis. At the same time SHS services are supporting increasing numbers of clients with more complex needs, without additional resourcing or support. This has dire consequences for the tens of thousands of people in need of help.

NSW has experienced a dramatic increase (88%) in unassisted requests for SHS services over the last three years.³² In 2023, NSW Specialist Homelessness Services (SHS) were unable to meet 47 requests for assistance per day from people at risk of, or experiencing, homelessness.³³ Of those people who did receive some support, half were unable to have their immediate accommodation needs met and almost 80% did not get their long-term housing needs met.³⁴ And these figures do not capture those people in need of help who did not seek it out, estimated to be around two-thirds of people experiencing homelessness.³⁵

The Society's experience reflects the challenges across the sector. Last financial year, our housing and homelessness services saw an 80% increase in the number of people they were

³⁰ Productivity Commission (2022) *In need of repair: The National Housing and Homelessness Agreement*, Study report, Australian Government, 26. <https://www.pc.gov.au/inquiries/completed/housing-homelessness/report/housing-homelessness.pdf>, p.3

³¹ Knaus C. & Evershed N. (2024) *Out in the cold: What do we know about homelessness deaths in Australia – and why nobody is tracking them?* 6 February 2024, The Guardian Australia.

³² AIHW (2024) *Specialist homelessness services annual report 2022–23, Unmet demand for specialist homelessness services*, AIHW, Australian Government

³³ AIHW (2024) *SHS On any given day, across New South Wales 2023*, https://www.aihw.gov.au/getmedia/873fa1de-1a75-45c4-a85d-3034d9ddb668/hou_333_oagd_nsw.pdf

³⁴ 50.8% not provided or referred for identified need for short-term or emergency accommodation. Source: Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (2024) *Specialist homelessness services 2022–23 Data tables*, Clients.24.

³⁵ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (2021) *Specialist homelessness services annual report 2020–21, Unmet demand for specialist homelessness services*, AIHW, Australian Government, accessed 27 September 2022.

unable to assist, despite supporting 5% more people than the year before (see box on page 10).³⁶ Our services also report serious concerns about increasing staff overwhelm and burnout as they support increasingly complex clients while also grappling with the ethical implications and emotional toll of having to turn away more and more people in need. Anecdotally these challenges are not unique to the Society and are widespread across the SHS sector.

Box 1: St Vincent de Paul Society NSW housing and homelessness services

The Society operates twenty-six housing and homelessness services across NSW, including 12 DFV services to give people access to long-term, safe, and stable accommodation that meets their individual needs. In 2022-23, these services assisted close to 9,000 people, a 5% increase on the previous year. We are achieving positive outcomes for our clients. Of the clients at risk of homelessness, around half (53%) were assisted to maintain housing and 40% of people who were homeless prior to receiving support are now in stable housing.

We must, and we can, do better to support people without a home. Additional funding is urgently needed for SHS providers to meet growing unmet need in the community now. The NSW government should fund a non-recurrent 20% increase to SHS providers for the contract extension period, equivalent to \$50 million per annum for the next two years, to reduce the gap between demand and service provision. This funding must include provision to service the Equal Remuneration Order (ERO) to account for SHS wages growth should supplementary funding not be included in the new federal funding arrangements beyond 2023-24. SHS contracts should be indexed at a rate of 6.2% to cover

increased service delivery cost and make up indexation shortfall in Commonwealth funds.

Along with increased core funding, a supplementary package of workforce support is required to allow organisations to invest in their human resources. This should include funding for organisations to recruit more SHS staff with specialist skills in areas such as mental health and drug and alcohol. It should also include provision for more clinical supervision to existing staff along with the delivery of more responsive, face-to-face specialist training to meet emerging challenges. This will mean SHS staff are better equipped and supported to respond to clients' complex needs.

Noting the significant and growing over-representation of First Nations people experiencing homelessness,³⁷ we support additional, specific investment in Aboriginal-led approaches to sector development to provide culturally competent service delivery and choice for First Nations people.³⁸

Recommendations:

Support people experiencing homelessness get the services they need by:

- 3) Funding the SHS sector with an additional \$50 million per annum during the term of the contract extension to bridge the gap in demand relative to services.**
- 4) Investing in a SHS workforce development package, including funding for specialised roles and more responsive, specialised training and clinical supervision for staff, so they are better equipped and supported to respond to clients' complex needs.**

Along with a well-resourced and equipped SHS sector, we need a sustainable Housing First service response that successfully support people

³⁶ St Vincent de Paul (2023) *Operations Report 2022-23, Housing and homelessness*, Data refreshed 19/07/2023.

³⁷ At the 2021 Census, the numbers of First Nations people experiencing homelessness in NSW increased 10% from 2016.

³⁸ Homelessness NSW (2024) *NSW Pre-budget submission 2024-25*.



experiencing homelessness into long-term, stable housing and improve their wellbeing. The NSW Together Home Program is demonstrating the positive impacts of unconditional housing complemented by individualised, person-centred and recovery-oriented support.³⁹ Early findings indicate positive impacts on housing, health and wellbeing outcomes for people with long-term experiences of rough sleeping associated with this combined investment in housing and individualised support.⁴⁰

Along with a significant and sustained investment in social homes, strengthening the NSW homelessness service system through adequate SHS sector funding, a well-equipped SHS workforce and Housing First approaches will mean that people who are homeless, or at risk of homelessness, get the support they need to be safe, housed and well so that homelessness in NSW is rare, brief, and not repeated.

Recommendations:

Support people experiencing homelessness get the services they need by:

- 5) Invest \$62 million over three years to continue delivery of the Together Home Program.

Domestic and family violence is increasing, with reported incidents now at a higher rate than during COVID.⁴¹ Domestic and family violence is the primary reason women seek support from homelessness services.⁴² Yet with SHS providers at capacity, one in three women and children escaping family violence are missing out on essential services.⁴³ Because of a lack of refuge spaces and other affordable housing options,

³⁹ Davies, K., Harvey, N., Dimmock, A., Buykx, P. & Krogh, C. (2023). *Together Home: Practitioners' Perspectives on Building Resilience and Relationships with People Who've Experienced Long-Term Homelessness*. Presentation to NCOSS NGO Forum on preliminary report.

⁴⁰ Homelessness NSW (2023) *NSW-Pre-Budget-Submission-FY23-24*.

⁴¹ Impact Economics and Policy (2023), *Beyond roads and bridges: Critical social infrastructure for South West Sydney*, NCOSS, p.28.

⁴² AIHW (2022) Clients who have experienced family and domestic violence, Specialist homelessness services annual report 2021-2022, <https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/homelessness-services/specialist-homelessness-services-annual-report/contents/clients-who-have-experienced-family-and-domestic-violence>

⁴³ The Salvation Army (2022) *Social Justice Stocktake – Taking Stock of Our Communities in NSW*, p12, https://www.salvationarmy.org.au/scribe/sites/auesalvos/files/social-justice-2022/NSW_TSASocialJusticeStocktake.pdf

women are often left with a tough choice: stay with a violent partner or become homeless.

For women and children on temporary visas fleeing violence in the home, there is a further lack of safe accommodation options. Specialist homelessness services face challenges providing housing pathways for temporary visa holders because they lack access to income support and are not eligible for NSW social housing, Medicare or other services. The Society's homelessness services have reported women and children staying in a refuge for up to two years due to a lack of exit options.

Women on temporary visas and their children who are experiencing violence have equal rights to a safe place to live. In line with recommendations from the national inquiry into family, domestic and sexual violence⁴⁴ and the 2022 Blueprint for Reform,⁴⁵ the NSW Government must provide access to financial support, brokerage funding and more sustainable accommodation options for all women and children experiencing domestic and family violence, regardless of their visa status.

Recommendations:

Support women and children on temporary visas fleeing domestic and family violence by:

- 6) Removing permanent residency and citizenship requirements to access social housing and other housing and homelessness services and supports.**
- 7) Providing stimulus brokerage funding for integrated case management to support the delivery of services to people seeking asylum and other women on temporary visas.**

Box 2: Targeted Early intervention - 'Breaking the Cycle of Violence: Assisting Women and Children Experiencing Domestic Violence to Rebuild Their Lives'

Breaking the Cycle of Violence was a flexible, person-centred program delivered by the Society and funded through a philanthropic grant to assist single women, and women with children, escaping domestic violence across the state. The program provided families escaping DFV with brokerage funding and material assistance to support them on their journey from initial crisis to effective re-establishment. Packages were tailored to each individual or family to address their different needs. The program reduced the need for women and children to return to unsafe situations and ensured that longer-term living arrangements were sustainable. It highlights the benefits of flexible brokerage funding that can be tailored to meet the individual needs of people experiencing homelessness by providing more timely, effective support from crisis through to more stable long-term accommodation.

⁴⁴ Australian Government Response to the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Social Policy and Legal Affairs Report: Inquiry into family, domestic and sexual violence (2023)

⁴⁵ National Advocacy Group on Women on Temporary Visas Experiencing Violence, 2022, Blueprint for Reform: Removing Barriers to Safety for Victims/Survivors of Domestic and Family Violence Who Are on Temporary Visas



3. Food relief programs that reach more people

The extent and severity of food insecurity among households continues in response to the cost-of-living crisis.⁴⁶ In the past year, 37% of NSW households were food insecure a figure which has grown in recent years.⁴⁷ Across NSW more people are taking 'last resort' measures to cover costs including skipping meals, cutting out nutritious food such as fruit and vegetables, or going without essential items or medication, which affects their mental, emotional and physical health.⁴⁸

The Society's members distributed approximately \$6.9m worth of food parcels and vouchers across the State in FY22-23, up 42% from the previous financial year. From July 2023 to Feb 2024, our data is already showing an almost 50% increase

in food relief assistance. Our network of Vinnies Vans services provided support to people more than 70,000 times throughout metro and regional areas in FY22-23. Data shows we assisted twice as many people compared with prior to COVID-19, with 2,500 people seeking assistance each week from our Vans services in Sydney alone (see Box 3, page 14).⁴⁹

This rise in people seeking assistance has been largely driven by people who have never had to seek support previously. This cohort, which now includes people with jobs, are cutting down or going without food just so they can afford to pay their rent or mortgage payments.⁵⁰ Food insecurity is considered one of the potential precursors to people living in poverty and future poor health.⁵¹

⁴⁶ See generally the Foodbank Hunger Report 2023, <https://reports.foodbank.org.au/foodbank-hunger-report-2023/>; https://reports.foodbank.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/2023_Foodbank_Hunger_Report_IPSOS-Report.pdf

⁴⁷ Foodbank Hunger Report 2023, https://reports.foodbank.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/2023_Foodbank_Hunger_Report_IPSOS-Report.pdf, slide 6, Accessed at 14/2/2024. Includes ACT data.

⁴⁸ NCOSS (2023) Cost of Living Report, p13; See also Foodbank Australia, *Submission in response to the Senate Select Committee on Cost of Living Inquiry*, Feb 2023, <https://www.foodbank.org.au/wp-content/uploads/FBA/Documents/Foodbank-Australia-Cost-of-Living-Inquiry-Submission.pdf>, p19-20

⁴⁹ 22-23 SVDP Annual Report, p.25. <https://cms.vinnies.org.au/media/y3lnf3zj/annual-report-2022-23.pdf?path=y3lnf3zj%2Fannual-report-2022-23.pdf>

⁵⁰ 22-23 SVDP Annual Report, p.25. <https://cms.vinnies.org.au/media/y3lnf3zj/annual-report-2022-23.pdf?path=y3lnf3zj%2Fannual-report-2022-23.pdf>

⁵¹ Botha, F. & Payne, A.A. (2022) What explains high levels of food insecurity in Australia? Melbourne Institute Research Insight: 04/22, https://melbourneinstitute.unimelb.edu.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0005/4348247/ri2022n04.pdf. See also Foodbank Senate Submission (2023), pp19-20.

Research identifies that there is a low reliance on food assistance compared to the number of people who are food insecure.⁵² This may be due to low awareness but could also be due to cost of living pressures. Society members' report that people seeking food assistance often have no money to put on an Opal card to travel to a community food pantry. There is a need to better understand how and where emergency relief initiatives, such as localised mobile food vans, can make the biggest impact in a particular area, including the importance of coupling food relief with other 'wrap-around' essential health services⁵³. The importance of community connection must also not be underestimated when people are facing increased social isolation.⁵⁴

There is also a need to undertake an analysis of current NSW food relief services provided by the community sector in NSW. This will help to understand any gaps in service provision, and opportunities to improve people's access to food services. Ensuring that there is community and sector level collaboration and co-ordination of these services is important so they have the greatest impact and reach.

Box 3: Vinnies Van Services

The Society operates seven Vinnies Vans services throughout Sydney and regional NSW. They delivered more than 70,000 instances of assistance over FY22-23. They provide much more than a meal – offering connection to people experiencing hardship along with referrals to additional services. At some locations Vinnies has partnered with other health providers who deliver front-line health services together with the Vans to reduce poverty and improve health outcomes. The Society plans to expand its Vinnies Vans services over the coming year to meet demand in areas such as Greater Western Sydney, Campbelltown and Coffs Harbour, along with increasing the number of stoppages on existing services.

While there is no one size fits all approach to improving food insecurity, the Society recommends increasing funding for transport costs and related logistic costs for services to local communities that directly provide food relief together with wrap-around supports, such as mobile van services, as an important mechanism to meet increasing community need for food.

Programs that improve awareness of food relief services, and delivered so that they are culturally sensitive and in local languages are essential to give people and communities a 'hand-up' to rebuild their lives when they are at their most vulnerable. Ultimately more people and communities experiencing disadvantage in NSW will have access to food when needed and will be strengthened by community sector food projects and initiatives. Most importantly this will improve physical health, increase confidence, reduce social isolation, improve quality of life and for children, result in better performance at school⁵⁵ reducing reliance on health and other essential public services.

Recommendation:

Stop people going hungry by:

- 8) Increasing funding for transport and related logistic costs of providing localised emergency food relief and wrap-around services to reduce poverty and improve health outcomes.
- 9) Convening a taskforce of NSW NGO experts to review and collaborate to provide a fair, efficient and fit for purpose food relief system.

⁵² Botha & Payne (2022), p.7. School based programs and education can also assist with building food and nutrition literacy - Bowden, M. (2020) Understanding Food Insecurity in Australia, (Australian Institute of Family Studies), <https://aifs.gov.au/resources/policy-and-practice-papers/understanding-food-insecurity-australia>

⁵³ Hall & Partners, (2023) Emergency Relief in Australia: A review of the Commonwealth Funded Emergency Relief program, <https://www.dss.gov.au/review-of-commonwealth-funded-emergency-and-food-relief-services>

⁵⁴ NCOSS (2023) Cost of Living Report, p13.

⁵⁵ Foodbank Senate Submission (2023), p.18

4. Energy affordability crisis relief

The energy affordability crisis is not over. Many people on low incomes and experiencing disadvantaged in NSW are still struggling to pay their energy bills because of high prices. Our No Interest Loans Scheme (NILS) identifies utility bills as one of the most significant household expenses for people on low incomes seeking emergency loans for essential home items. Regional areas, in particular, have been hit hard.⁵⁶ Sadly, energy hardship debt is increasing.⁵⁷

Lower-income people spend a larger percentage of their income on energy bills and are less able to respond to price rises.⁵⁸ They are more likely to live in poorly insulated and inefficient rental accommodation and are not able to invest in more efficient homes or have the capacity to do so because they rent. Energy bills can be a ‘hidden hardship’. People seek food relief from the Society⁵⁹ (see [4.3] above) because there is little left over after they have paid the rent or mortgage and their energy bill. Sometimes they cut down on energy use, or go without medicine to pay their energy bills.⁶⁰ Stress and anxiety associated with cost of living pressures take a significant toll affecting people’s mental, emotional and physical health, and personal relationships.⁶¹

The Society acknowledges the positive measures by State and Federal governments to reduce energy bills in the past year which has offset high prices to a degree.⁶² We welcome the many EAPA Consultation proposed reforms and note important recommendations in [our EAPA Reform Submission](#) (Nov 2023). But more can be done to improve energy equity, accessibility and affordability.

The current system of energy concessions that are a fixed (or flat) amount rate is inequitable, particularly for low-income households. An effective concession scheme must be adequate, equitable, responsive, and easily accessible.⁶³ Percentage-based energy concessions are fairer as they “self-correct” a bill based on energy prices and fluctuating household consumption.⁶⁴ Many low income households with high energy use due to household size, poor housing condition, or specific needs such as a chronic medical conditions, get less relief than those with moderate and low usage because the current fixed rate concession covers less of their total expenditure.⁶⁵

Ensuring energy affordability and equity also requires other systemic reforms including further investment for energy efficient retrofits of social housing⁶⁶, mandatory energy performance standards for rental homes⁶⁷ and measures to ensure the fair and equitable transition to electrification and renewable energy and net zero by 2050.⁶⁸

⁵⁶ NCOSS (2023) Cost of Living Report, p13.

⁵⁷ NCOSS (2023) Cost of Living Report, p12; EWON Media Release, accessed as at 31.1.2024. The Energy and Water Ombudsman reported that energy affordability complaints increased nearly 60% after mid-2023 year price increases; ACOSS (2023) *Energy Cost of Living Snapshot*, <https://www.acoss.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/ACOSS-Energy-Cost-of-Living-Snapshot-October-2023.pdf>, p.2.

⁵⁸ NCOSS, (2022), *Tough times, Hard Choices, Recommendations to NSW Government – struggling households and rising cost of living in NSW*, p4, https://www.ncoss.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/NCOSS_CostOfLiving22_FINAL_DESIGNED.pdf (UTS Institute of Public Policy and Governance and NCOSS)

⁵⁹ Food vouchers and parcels are the largest area of relief that the Society provides – more than \$7.3m in the FY 22-23.

⁶⁰ ACOSS, (2023) *Energy Cost of Living Snapshot*.

⁶¹ NCOSS, (2023) *Cost of Living Report*, p13.

⁶² Alviss Consulting and St Vincent de Paul Society Pty Ltd, (2023) *The National Energy Market – Where prices are high and innovations are low*, <https://cms.vinnies.org.au/media/41abmez2/2023-nem-tariff-tracker-where-the-prices-are-high.pdf?path=41abmez2%2F2023-nem-tariff-tracker-where-the-prices-are-high.pdf> p7. The Society was a partner to this report.

⁶³ ACOSS, (2022) *Reforming Electricity Concessions to better meet need*, p6. Also identified in an Auditor-General’s report in 2017, <https://www.audit.nsw.gov.au/our-work/reports/energy-rebates-for-low-income-households>, Accessed at 8.2.2024.

⁶⁴ ACOSS, (2022) *Electricity Concessions Reform Report*, p13

⁶⁵ ACOSS, (2022) *Electricity Concessions Reform Report*, p9.

⁶⁶ The latest funding announcement only provides for 60,000 social housing retrofits out of 400,000 dwellings nationally.

⁶⁷ Healthy Homes for Renters, *Community Sector Blueprint: National Framework for Energy Efficient Rentals*, <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/602f0d14c4c0a77efc25e152/t/64b095418e792e5f538088fb/1689294161675/Final+Community+Sector+Blueprint+-+Mandatory+Minimum+Rental+Standards+++%28July+2023%29.pdf>

⁶⁸ St Vincent de Paul Society NSW, *Climate Equity Social Justice Statement*, https://cms.vinnies.org.au/media/jdups3my/02_climate_equity_sj_statement.pdf?path=jdups3my%2F02_climate_equity_sj_statement.pdf

Increasing awareness of available concessions is also key to improving energy relief.⁶⁹ Feedback from community energy training workshops is that information must be delivered by trusted community messengers or organisations (like NGOs) and be in local languages, culturally appropriate and cater for low literacy. For example, we support a Community Energy Hub model connecting communities to trusted local energy experts, independent from energy companies.⁷⁰

Finally, ensuring energy equity also means simplifying the structure of ongoing rebates (including application processes) to improve accessibility to concessions⁷¹. There is an opportunity to rectify rebate inequities, noting the Social Programs for Energy Code reforms consultation is in progress, and we draw your attention to relevant recommendations in the 2017 Auditor General's report.⁷²

Recommendation:

Make energy rebates more equitable by:

- 10) Revising the Low-Income Household Rebate to be a fixed percentage of a person's energy bill, instead of a flat rate.**
- 11) Reviewing and ensuring all NSW rebates are equitable, accessible and adequate.**

CONCLUSION

The Society urges the NSW Government to use the upcoming Budget to build on reforms that continue to prioritise people in our community most impacted by the persistent cost of living and housing crises. Acknowledging careful management of the State's finances is needed, we continue to live in unprecedented economic, environmental and societal conditions that must be addressed.

The recommendations we propose will help the NSW government to rebuild the essential

public services and programs that families and households rely on. **They can make a real difference to uplift those in our community struggling to make ends meet and provide an all-important social safety net.** This will benefit all. It will help to improve people's quality of life and health and wellbeing but will also have important economic benefits for our State - reducing the need for health and related services, improving productivity, and increasing rates of labour participation. Working together we can deliver a more just and inclusive NSW.

⁶⁹ ACOSS, (2022) Electricity Concessions Reform Report, p.26. See also Auditor-General's report "Energy rebates for Low Income Households" (2017), <https://www.audit.nsw.gov.au/our-work/reports/energy-rebates-for-low-income-households>, Marketing and communications [4.1.5]. Accessed at 8.2.2024. ACOSS, (2023) Energy Cost of Living Snapshot, p.2.

⁷⁰ Sydney Alliance, Voices for Power, Roadmap to clean and affordable energy, Accessed at 31.1.2024.

⁷¹ See Auditor-General's report in 2017, <https://www.audit.nsw.gov.au/our-work/reports/energy-rebates-for-low-income-households>, - Structure of ongoing rebates[4.1.3], embedded networks [4.1.4], Accessed at 8.2.2024.

⁷² Noting for example that the Low Income Household Rebate is not comparable to the Family Energy Rebate and also that households with both electricity and gas receive more assistance than single fuel households. "Equity within the ongoing rebate schemes" [4.1.2]



ABOUT THE ST VINCENT DE PAUL SOCIETY IN NSW

In 1833 in Paris, 20-year-old student Frederic Ozanam resolved to do what he could to bear witness to his Christian upbringing by assisting those less fortunate in the community. Together with a group of friends, he sought the advice of Sr Rosalie Rendu, who guided their approach towards one that affirms the dignity of each human being and invites a deep relationship of solidarity.

Declaring that no form of charity would be foreign to their work, the first 'Conference of Charity' has since grown into a worldwide movement that continues to seek out and address poverty in all its forms. We are committed to those people who live on the margins of our community regardless of their religious affiliation or otherwise and are guided by Catholic social principles of dignity of the human person and solidarity. We work to shape a more just and compassionate society and have been a pillar of support for NSW people for over 140 years.

The Society now has over 4000 members in 358 local conferences across NSW who offer food, material and financial assistance to people in their communities as well as companionship and social support. Members of the Society who visit people who need help in their homes, refer those at risk to our services, where we offer case management, support services, and referral to other agencies to help keep people at home. Specialist responses are provided for women and children wishing to leave family and domestic violence while retaining

existing housing. Our Vinnies Vans provided over 70,000 instances of assistance and are supported by members and volunteers including wrap-around supports, referrals and companionship.

Professional services have been established in response to the needs of people at risk of or experiencing homelessness, people with disability, people seeking support in relation to alcohol and other drug use, and people experiencing other forms of exclusion. Our 26 support centres provide financial crisis and material aid to those in need across metropolitan, regional and rural areas.

Through our community housing provider, St Vincent de Paul (Society) Housing Pty Ltd (formerly Amelie Housing), we provide social and affordable housing with tailored support to meet the needs of the growing number of people locked out of the private rental market. This CHP manages approximately 1,400 dwellings in NSW. We are inspired to create a more just and compassionate society and to offer a 'hand-up' to people experiencing the most disadvantage. We respect their dignity and encourage them to take control of their own destiny and aspire to shape a more just and compassionate society for all.

To this end, it is vital that the Society raises its voice to advocate for action from government, business and the broader community to address the causes and impact of hardship and poverty particularly during this persistent cost of living crisis.

REBUILDING ESSENTIAL SOCIAL INFRASTRUCTURE AND PROGRAMS

NSW 2024-25 Pre-Budget Submission



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