

MEDIA RELEASE

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CRISIS CALLS SURGE AS VICTORIANS STRUGGLE WITH COST OF CHRISTMAS

Mounting cost-of-living pressures are fuelling an increase in calls to St Vincent de Paul Society Victoria in the lead-up to Christmas, with a higher proportion of individuals and families seeking assistance for the first time, new data reveals.

St Vincent de Paul Society Victoria's Welfare Assistance Call Centre (1800 305 330) has reported a 29 per cent increase in calls in the lead-up to Christmas (Sep-Nov 24') compared to the same period two years ago.

Shockingly in the last three months, it has received more than 20,000 calls for support from the community, with almost one in 10 (9%) first-time callers, which has also increased from 7% in 2022. As revealed in the Society's [2024 Impact Report](#), the Welfare Assistance Call Centre answered more than 65,000 calls for help in the last financial year, with nine out of 10 requests related to food insecurity.

The majority of calls received by the welfare assistance call centre are directed to local St Vincent de Paul Society Victoria conferences – community volunteer groups - many of which are also reporting a significant increase in the support being offered through food aid, Vinnies Shops vouchers and no-interest loans.

St Vincent de Paul Society Victoria CEO Dr Jennifer Fitzgerald AM said: "We are witnessing a staggering increase in demand for our services as a result of the ongoing cost-of-living crisis and housing pressures across the state. Right now, around 800,000 Victorians, or 13.3% of the population*, are living in poverty, and many are feeling the strain of severe disadvantage.

"Every day, our call centre volunteers speak to people who cannot afford the necessities, especially food. These calls for help are sensitively managed by our network of more than 10,000 dedicated members and volunteers, who are on the frontline every day generously packing Christmas hampers and providing more than 110,000 home visits a year."

Conference members are ramping up local community donation collections to support the annual tradition of Christmas hampers for people in need. Designed to bring Christmas cheer, the hampers include a range of donated goods including fresh and long-life food products, clothing, children's toys and vouchers for Vinnies Shops.

Collectively, the 267 conferences across the state expect to pack more than 5,000 Christmas hampers this year. In Melbourne's west, the Footscray/Maidstone Conference (which includes Braybrook) is expecting to distribute 450+ Christmas hampers alone. Other areas experiencing an increasing need for assistance include Cranbourne (130), Traralgon (130), Hopper's Crossing (125), St Kilda East (122), Epping (110), Pakenham (110) and Doveton (100).

Hampers are lovingly packed by conference members for collection, home drop-offs or distribution alongside regular soup van stops, which deliver nourishing meals, hampers and even rough sleeper packs to those who cannot afford even the most basic of needs during the holidays.

"Our soup vans have been instrumental in delivering meals, hampers, rough sleeper packs and companionship, prioritising access to healthy, nutritious food for those in need," Dr Fitzgerald said.

"To meet the rising needs, we've also increased our soup van runs and special works programs delivering over 800,000 meals across Victoria in the last year and are establishing a new soups van hub in Dandenong."

Vinnies Soup Vans has seen the greatest demand for meals in Melton and the South-Eastern suburbs (Dandenong) which increased the number of meals being distributed by 76% and 45% respectively.

St Vincent de Paul Society Victoria's [2024 Impact Report](#) revealed the Society provided \$20.5 million in assistance to individuals and families in need of a hand-up in the last financial year – a 5.8% increase on the previous year.

“The rising cost of living has caused a notable increase in people seeking assistance with essentials such as rent, utilities, and medication,” Dr Fitzgerald said.

“Victoria is facing a homelessness crisis alongside a cost-of-living crisis. More than 30,000 people are homeless**, which is a 24% increase in just five years. Almost half of low-income households are at risk of losing their homes, struggling to pay for basic needs.

“We are experiencing a high level of demand across our housing and crisis accommodation services, VincentCare, as well as at our community hubs which offer drop-in services for individuals seeking immediate support.”

To donate to the [Vinnies Christmas Appeal](#), visit www.vinnies.org.au or call 13 18 12. All donations over \$2 are tax-deductible.

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ABOUT THE ST VINCENT DE PAUL SOCIETY:

The St Vincent de Paul Society and its wide network of members and volunteers provide practical frontline support, advocacy and friendship for the most vulnerable members of our community. Key services include home visitation; Vinnies Shops; youth programs; soup vans; assistance for asylum seekers and refugees; education and tutoring; and professional accommodation and health services through VincentCare. The St Vincent de Paul Society in Victoria has more than 10,000+ members and volunteers, and more than 60,000 across Australia. Internationally, the Society operates in 149 countries and has more than 950,000 members. To find out more visit www.vinnies.org.au.