

**24 May 2023**

## **St Vincent de Paul Society Victoria cautiously welcomes ‘most difficult’ Victorian Budget**

The St Vincent de Paul Society Victoria tentatively welcomes initiatives that benefit low-income families and vulnerable people in a “most difficult” 2023-2024 Victorian Budget that targets the State’s rising debt.

Key among the **cost-of-living measures** announced by Victorian Treasurer, Tim Pallas – who dubbed his 9<sup>th</sup> budget his “most difficult” due to the State’s looming \$31.5 billion pandemic debt – was the \$400 million Power Saving Bonus, providing an additional \$250 to households that use the Victorian Energy Compare website to search for the cheapest electricity deal.

St Vincent de Paul Society Victoria Interim Group CEO Paul Turton said: “Keeping the lights or the heater on is a substantial contributor to the cost-of-living pressures on low-income households, and electricity bill relief and funding to improve the energy efficiency of low-income households is always welcome.

“But we also call for the \$250 bonus – which we have long argued for – to be paid directly to the householder rather than people having to apply for it online. And we fear that any benefit will be short-lived with tomorrow’s announcement of the VDO (Victorian Default Offer) changes – preliminary findings suggest a 30% increase that will see around a \$400-450 per year rise for the average household – which come into effect on 1 July.”

In other budget announcements, St Vincent de Paul Society Victoria applauds **housing and homelessness initiatives** funding for critical programs, such as:

- \$68 million to deliver a Housing First response including housing and support services for people experiencing, or at the risk of, homelessness.
- \$33 million to support young people with complex needs leaving residential care and other settings.
- \$117 million to support victim survivors of family violence and hold perpetrators to account.

“Across Victoria, there is simply not enough social housing to meet demand and the Victorian Government reiterated its commitment to deliver 12,000+ new homes for Victorians – including 185 social housing units within Melbourne and Bendigo, which we have partnered with the government to deliver – as part of its \$5.3 billion Big Housing Build.

“We are also buoyed by government assurances that no cuts will be made to our major services, such as our housing and homelessness services VincentCare Victoria or our housing provider VincentCare Community Housing (VCCH), which is excellent news.

“However, with **7 out of 10 of the people who call our Box Hill Welfare Line in private rental**, we know that obtaining social housing is like winning the lottery, and we would have liked to have seen support in the Budget for another ever-growing vulnerable cohort – renters.”

St Vincent de Paul Society is pleased that Victorian Government will be providing ongoing **waste levy relief** for the charitable recycling sector as part of the budget commitments announced, a position we lobbied for strongly, alongside other Victorian charities. If applied, the Landfill Levy would have resulted in an additional \$350,000 in costs that would have directly impacted the people we assist through our volunteer-led programs and services.

“By calling on landlords and big businesses that did well during this period to help shoulder the burden, this budget didn’t take the easy road in addressing the sizable debt incurred during the pandemic.

“We applaud the government’s moves to improve the lives of disadvantaged Victorians by including funding initiatives that support low and middle earners and families.”

*For any further inquiries about this story or to arrange an interview with Paul Turton, please contact our media office via the details below.*

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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 more than 950,000 members. To find out more visit [www.vinnies.org.au](http://www.vinnies.org.au).*