



Welcome to the St Vincent de Paul Society NSW Social Justice Newsletter for October 2024

Join the Rosalie Rendu Forum - 16 October

The theme of this year's Rosalie Rendu Forum is, "*Rental Reforms: is ending no grounds evictions the end of the story?*". This free online event is on Wednesday 16 October, 6:00-7:30pm.

People who rent should have stable, healthy and affordable housing that feels like a home. The St Vincent de Paul Society NSW has welcomed the NSW Government's announcement that it will end no grounds evictions for renters on fixed-term and rolling leases. We see first-hand the impact that eviction and the threat of eviction has on vulnerable individuals and families. But what will these changes look like and what other reforms are needed?

Our esteemed speakers include: Trina Jones, NSW Rental Commissioner, Jemima Mowbray, Manager, Policy Tenant's Union, Dr Penelope Bowyer-Pont, Macquarie University, and our Anna Scott, Director, Housing and Homelessness who will advocate for a range of reforms to make renting fairer, more affordable and of an acceptable quality for low-income households.

Register by Tuesday 15 October at: <https://bit.ly/3yLwJn5>

For further information, contact: social.justice@vinnies.org.au



ST VINCENT DE PAUL SOCIETY NSW

ROSALIE RENDU FORUM 2024

RENTAL REFORM: IS ENDING NO GROUNDS EVICTIONS THE END OF THE STORY?

Wednesday 16 October 2024, 6.00pm – 7.30pm

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threat of eviction has on vulnerable individuals and families. But what will these changes look like and what other reforms are needed?

Join us as we hear from leaders advocating for a range of reforms to make renting fairer, more affordable and of an acceptable quality for low-income households.

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NSW Drug Summit - Promoting regional health

Earlier this month, NSW Health [announced](#) that the Drug Summit will include two days of regional forums in Griffith (1 November) and Lismore (4 November).

For decades, alcohol and drug treatment services in regional and remote areas across NSW have been scarce and difficult to access. However, daily tobacco smoking, risky alcohol consumption and illicit drug use [occur at higher rates in these areas](#). The impact on First Nations communities is particularly serious.

For many, the nearest health service is between 100 to 500 km away, which creates a barrier for those who cannot afford to travel or be away from work or family. Also, the stigma in smaller, close-knit communities prevents many from seeking help and for those that do, wait times for services can be upwards of 6 months.

The Drug Summit presents an opportunity to address this urgent, unmet need and the Society NSW looks forward to participating to improve health outcomes for people with alcohol and/or drug dependency issues in regional and remote areas.

To learn more about the factors contributing to alcohol and drug use in regional and remote Australia, you can visit the [Alcohol and Drug Foundation website](#).

The Society NSW has also made several recommendations related to alcohol and drug use to the NSW Government, which you can read about in our inaugural [AOD Social Justice Statement](#).



50 Years of Tackling Gendered Violence

The Society NSW attended Domestic Violence NSW's (DV NSW) 50th Anniversary Conference 'Past, Present and Future'. The event brought together domestic and family violence (DFV) subject matter experts, frontline workers and people with lived expertise to reflect on the achievements of the DFV sector in establishing a support system which has supported thousands of women and children to safety.

Today, this system is being stretched as [new research has found that 1 in 10 men in NSW](#) have had proceedings made against them for DFV offences. However, this only includes reports made to police. It does not fully account for the [1 in 4 Australian women who are impacted by DFV during their lifetime](#).

As such, the conference provided an opportunity to chart the path forward by focusing on primary prevention, housing and homelessness, children and young people, justice systems and improving supports for First Nations communities and those from migrant and refugee backgrounds.

What you can do

- Read the [Society NSW's Social Justice Statement on DFV](#) outlines our vision where all people can live safely in their homes and be treated with respect in their relationships.
- Listen to oral histories from DFV frontline workers and people with lived expertise [here](#).
- Support the movement to end DFV and sign DV NSW's [Pledge to End Domestic and Family Violence](#).



Reducing energy bills - new government energy strategy

We welcome the NSW Government's newly announced [Consumer Energy Strategy](#), which aims to allow households and businesses to access energy saving technologies to reduce energy bills and cost of living pressures. Representatives from the Society NSW attended the official launch of the strategy at NSW Parliament. It was great to hear from the Honorable Penny Sharpe, Minister for Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Heritage about the NSW Government's ambitious vision to transform homes and energy with people at the centre of the strategy.

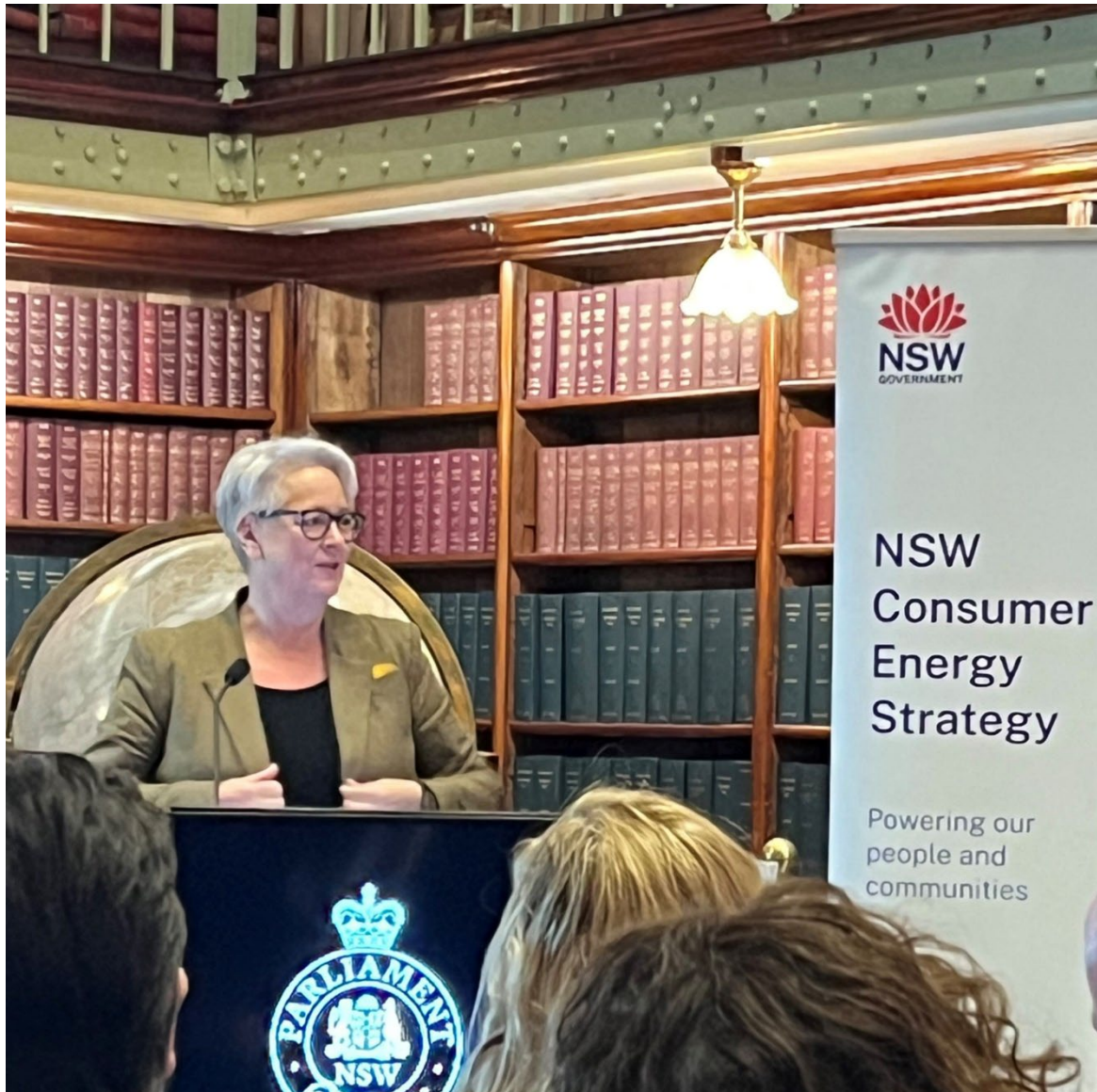
Key actions (out of the 50 proposed) include:

- \$238.9 million (announced in the June Budget) for the Home Energy Saver Scheme - to increase the use of energy savings technologies in homes
- Investigating mandatory energy efficiency standards for renters as part of a national framework
- Investing in more education and information about how to reduce energy bills, and investing in community and NFP organisations to deliver energy outreach work
- A voluntary energy rating scheme for homes when they are sold or leased

- Investment in efficiency upgrades to Aboriginal Housing Office and Aboriginal Community Housing providers
- 24,000 social homes to get energy upgrades (announced in June Budget)
- Reforms including making EAPA available, for embedded network customers (eg renters in apartments, caravan parks)
- Delivering a gas decarbonisation roadmap

We are pleased that many actions align with our [Submission, 2024.25 Pre-Budget Submission](#) and our [Social Justice Statements](#). We look forward to working with the NSW Government on the implementation of this Strategy, ensuring that it practically benefits the people we assist. The government will report back on the 50 actions in 2026.

Finally, on the subject of energy bills, National Council has issued its [July 2024 NSW Tariff Tracker](#). The Tariff Tracker reports on electricity and gas tariffs in NSW compared to 2023. In a nutshell, default market offers for electricity remain relatively unchanged but gas standing offers have increased by 15%. Those who can afford solar continue to benefit with cheaper bills than non-solar customers. There are also [spreadsheet-based tools](#) that allow users to calculate annual bills based on retail rates by entering consumption levels. Read more about tariffs in this [Energy and Water Ombudsman Factsheet](#).



Impossible Choices: Decisions NSW communities shouldn't have to make

Imagine if you had to make the impossible choice between paying for food or medicine? That is exactly what is happening to low-income households across the State. The NSW Council of Social Services (NCOSS) have recently released their 2024 cost of living survey [*Impossible Choices: Decisions NSW communities shouldn't have to make*](#) which highlights the struggles of over 1000 participants to keep up with rising cost of living pressures. Many households feel the strain, but some are disproportionately impacted. This includes First Nations households, carers, single parents and households with a disability.

Although latest inflation figures show a downward trend, other cost of living indicators are still high. Rents have increased annually by almost 7% and groceries 3.4%. With income support payments still below the poverty line, the cost of living crisis continues to cause

strain on households, including affecting health and child development outcomes. The Society NSW has witnessed the impact on people in the past year with an uptick in the assistance (\$13.7m) we provided. This is 60% greater than the previous year.

Key findings of the [Report](#) (with regional snapshot factsheets), include:

- 92% of single parents went without essentials to make ends meet.
- 82% of single parents had no money set aside for emergencies.
- One in five single parents lived with family and friends due to cost.
- 20% of children have moved due to rental terminations or non-renewals
- 78% of renters sought financial assistance at least once
- 70% renters had an increase in rents

The recommendations of the [Report](#), many of which align with our [2024.25 Pre-Budget Submission](#) and our [Social Justice Statements](#) asks, focus on lifting Commonwealth income support payments, including rent assistance, growing social and affordable housing to 10%, making rental reforms fairer, improving food security and making affordable public transport available.

There are many opportunities where you can make a difference:

1. [Email your local MP](#) about the Raise the Rate campaign.
2. Join the call to make [housing more affordable in your local community](#)
3. Sign the [National Rural Health Alliance petition](#) to the Australian government for more affordable and accessible rural health care
4. Join the [End Child Poverty campaign](#).



NSW children criminalised for disadvantage

NSW children are being criminalised for their disadvantage - the independent NSW Bureau of Crime Statistics Research (BOSCAR) made this alarming conclusion in a recently released [Report](#). Overwhelmingly, children aged 10 to 13 years are from disadvantaged backgrounds, from rural and remote regions and disproportionately are indigenous children (41%). Many have been the victim of violence and about a third had accessed homelessness services. BOSCAR noted that early involvement in the justice system is a strong predictor of further involvement, both as an adolescent and adult.

Earlier this year, the Society NSW joined the [Raise the Age NSW campaign](#) to provide a submission to the NSW Government, with 108 other organisations. It stated that we need to do better for our kids and asked the NSW Government to:

- **Resource and support Aboriginal Community-Controlled Organisations** to work with First Nations children, families and communities
- **Invest in services that prevent crime from the start** - like public health, public education from early childhood and beyond and community-based child, youth and family-based services
- **Fund targeted services and interventions** to help kids learn to be accountable and do better when they go off track
- **Be guided by evidence and change the legislation** to raise the minimum age of criminal responsibility from 10 to at least 14 years without exception.

Get involved and sign up to hear about campaign news and ways to support [here](#).

You can also read the Australian Human Rights National Children's Commissioner recent report "[Help way earlier! How Australia can transform child justice to improve safety and wellbeing](#)" which investigates opportunities for the reform of child justice and related systems across Australia and includes the voices of children and their families.



Register Now for Sydney Alliance Convention - 30 October

Register now for the Sydney Alliance convention! The annual convention will be held on 30 October, 6:00pm-8:30pm at Bowman Hall, 35 Campbell Street, Blacktown and we need the Vinnies blue t-shirt contingent to attend.

The Convention will gather 250-400 Sydney Alliance leaders to celebrate recent State Government wins, share stories and cast a vision for action in the lead up to the Federal Election in 2025, and meet with politicians.

Register [here](#). Please also contact us at social.justice@vinnies.org.au to let us know you are attending, request a Vinnies t-shirt or loop into transport suggestions.



Make renting fairer in NSW

It is widely acknowledged that Australia faces a rental affordability crisis, and one that is very severe for low-income households. The Society NSW and its members, volunteers and supporters have taken action for reform over many years to drive change that empowers tenants to exercise their rights, have mechanisms in place to limit excessive rent increases and to ensure rental homes comply with robust minimum standards, including for energy efficiency and accessibility. See our [Fairer Rentals Social Justice Statement here](#). The NSW Government has been working on major reforms that the Society NSW and other peak sector bodies have been calling on for some time.

We can report that the NSW Government is now finalising [a suite of measures to modernise the system](#) which will be introduced into the Parliament in October. We understand that the government will bring in reforms to:

- **End no grounds evictions:** establish a set of grounds to end a lease, giving greater certainty to renters and owners for periodic and fixed term leases.
- **Ensuring rents** can only be increased once every 12 months.
- **Crackdown on fees:** Better protections against unfair fees for paying rent or before your agreement starts (eg background checks)
- **Pets in rentals:** new rules to make it easier to rent with pets. Owners can no longer refuse pets except for certain specific reasons (eg breach of local government regulations or owner lives in property and doesn't want pet).
- **Tenant privacy and data rules:** to reduce risks to your personal information and make the application process fairer and easier.

Key initiatives already introduced include:

- a [free, online Rent check tool](#) - enter your postcode and other simple details about the home and suburb and see information about average rents for your area.
- a [portable bonds scheme](#), to start in 2025, allowing renters to transfer their current rental bond from one place to another
- investment in Rental Taskforce to fund investigators and inspectors to act on serious breaches of rental laws.

Watch this space for a review of the draft legislation when it arrives!



Over 250 people across the [Sydney Alliance](#), including Society NSW members, recently turned up to Sydney Alliance Local Council candidate forums and community events across Sydney and Newcastle. This action formed part of the [affordable housing campaign](#) in the lead up to local council elections.

The Society NSW's members and staff contributed to the campaign with detailed policy and strategic advice, honing specific asks to local candidates and helping to develop an [Affordable Housing Handbook](#). This easy-to-read guide provides the basics of our housing system and why it is critical that we advocate for more affordable housing.

Our regional president Tom Story and members from Sydney Archdiocese, Carmen and Narelle, attended the Lord Mayoral forum (photo below). Along with other Sydney Alliance member organisations, they put affordable housing questions to candidates, including the desperate condition of boarding houses in Glebe. Social Justice Committee members Tom Gersbach and Michelle Fonti were also active in their respective regions. Tom, with the Sydney Alliance local network group, invited local candidates for Camden to meet and provide answers about what action were they committed to taking to increase the supply of affordable rental housing in the area, as well as other actions, including letters to MPs and a survey. Michelle and other members focused on councils in the Northern Suburbs, South Eastern Sydney and Western Suburbs sending letters and meeting with candidates to outline key asks of committing to and delivering 10-15% affordable housing, providing incentives to not for profits to develop affordable housing and providing more community facilities. Excitingly, more meetings are planned with Mayors and elected councillors following the outcome of the local elections.

Thank you to our members for their amazing efforts in [this campaign](#). Watch out for more opportunities to be involved.



Events

Rosalie Rendu Forum - free online

16 October, 6-7:30pm

St Vincent de Paul Society NSW

Register [here](#)

Sydney Alliance Convention

30 October, 6-8:30pm - free

38 Campbell Street, Blacktown

Sydney Alliance

Register [here](#)

Domestic & Family Violence and Centrelink Welfare Rights Centre

22 October, online

Free - info about income support payments for those affected by DFV.

Register [here](#)

Locked out: Poverty and the Australian housing crisis

15 October - free

Brotherhood of St Laurence

Register [here](#)

**Do you have a local social justice event or news item to share?
CONTACT US HERE!**

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St Vincent de Paul Society
NSW *good works*

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