



## Welcome to the Social Justice Newsletter for April 2020

### Vinnies responds to COVID-19

As the situation in relation to COVID-19 evolves, so too has the way in which Vinnies' members, staff and volunteers work. The safety of all our people – including the people we assist – has been at the forefront of the Society's efforts to establish new ways of providing assistance, supporting our people, and staying connected.

Like any crisis, this pandemic comes with the potential to exacerbate existing inequalities, and to further exclude marginalised groups. It has also presented opportunities to reshape the way in which our social welfare system supports all members of our communities. To date, our social justice response has focused on securing immediate supports for those in need. And while there are still major gaps – most notably for people on temporary visas, including people seeking asylum – there has also been some encouraging progress.

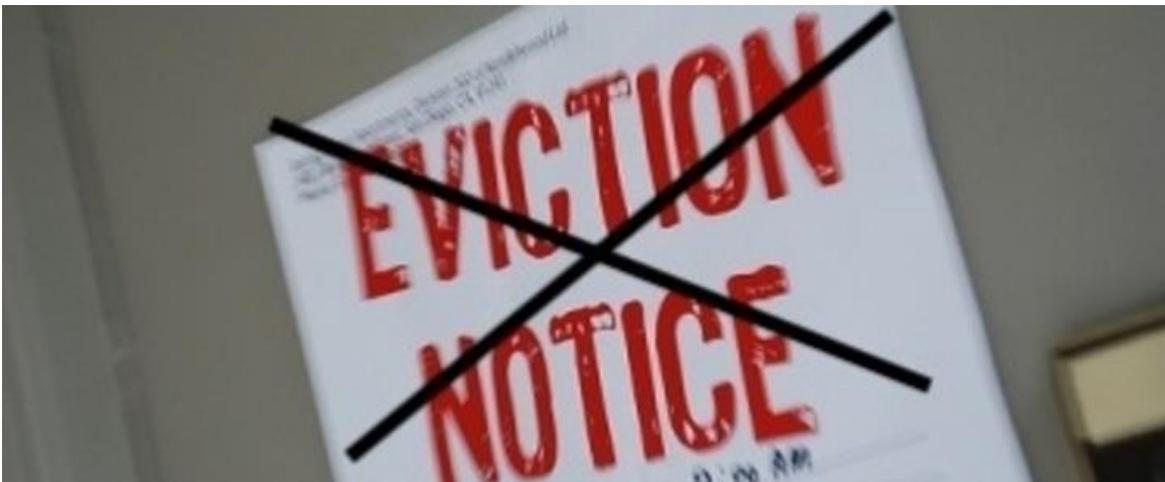
With the epidemic curve now flattening, it is time for us to widen our focus to ensure that medium to longer term responses contribute to creating more just and equitable communities.



## NSW moratorium on COVID-19 evictions

Last week the NSW Government introduced a six-month moratorium on evictions for tenants who have lost at least 25 per cent of their weekly household income because of COVID-19 and who negotiate in good faith with their landlord over future rental repayments.

Having joined the Tenants Union and other organisations in advocating for an evictions moratorium, Vinnies welcomes this initiative. However, there's more work to be done to protect renters from being evicted for other reasons and to ensure tenants don't end up with significant rental arrears too. For more information [click here](#).



## Sign the new online petition for social housing

As the economic impacts of the response to COVID-19 extend through our communities, Vinnies is concerned there will be an increase in the number of people who experience homelessness and who are in need of social housing.

With over 100,000 people already on the waiting list, a commitment by the NSW Government to invest in new social housing would give hope and housing to so many people when they need it more than ever before. It would also create new construction jobs and related economic activity that would help the NSW recover from the economic crisis caused by COVID-19.

Thousands of people across NSW have already signed the Vinnies hard copy petition for more social housing. To continue the momentum and respect the need for physical distancing, we're now promoting an [online petition](#). If you've not already signed either petition please [click here to sign](#) and share with your friends and family.

If you're also interested in writing to your state MP about this issue please [send us an email](#) and we'll share a letter template that you can amend and send.



# Build more social housing

Right now, more than 100,000 adults and kids across NSW are waiting for social housing. Some are homeless. Others are living in severe housing stress.

Will you join us in calling on the NSW Government to build more social housing so everyone in our community has a secure place to call home?

[SIGN THE PETITION](#)

## Join our new Wednesday Webinars

Vinnies is pleased to launch our new series of Wednesday Webinars to support members, volunteers, employees and supporters to come together online to engage on key social justice issues.

Drawing on the perspectives of people with lived experience, frontline workers, academics and experts, our webinars are a chance to deepen your understanding of contemporary social justice issues in our communities, shape our response, and become part of our network for change.

Our Wednesday Webinars will kick off from 12pm to 1.30pm on 6 May with [Advocacy: Speaking out against injustice](#) where we'll share advocacy skills and techniques and our approach to shaping a more just society. At the same time the following week you can learn more about our [Build Homes, Build Hope](#) campaign for more about our campaign, including how you can get involved.

Over the Wednesdays that follow we'll host webinars on [The Uluru Statement: Time to be heard](#), [Drug Law Reform](#), [People seeking asylum: Protection and the pandemic](#), and [Raise the Rate: Towards a stronger social security system](#).

Click on the links above to reserve your space. To allow for a participatory experience, the numbers for each webinar will be capped. Where there is strong demand, we will seek to repeat webinars over the months ahead.



## Support for people seeking asylum

Vinnies NSW has recently signed onto Refugee Council of Australia's #NobodyLeftBehind campaign, asking that the government ensures that all people, including people seeking asylum, have access to medical treatment and Medicare, have a financial safety net so they are not forced into destitution, and are prevented from losing their legal status and access to support.

We also continues to work closely with the Catholic community, advocating more privately with the Federal government on similar issues.

To show your support, please [sign this petition](#) developed by Catholics for Refugees, asking the Federal Government not to leave anyone behind during the COVID-19 pandemic.

If you are yet to do so, we encourage you to join the many people who have already written to their Federal MP. We're also now asking people to write to their NSW MP to encourage the Premier to work with the Federal Government to ensure people seeking asylum can access necessary support. For a copy of the the letter template, please email us at [social.justice@vinnies.org.au](mailto:social.justice@vinnies.org.au). You can find the address for your Federal MP [here](#) and your State MP [here](#).

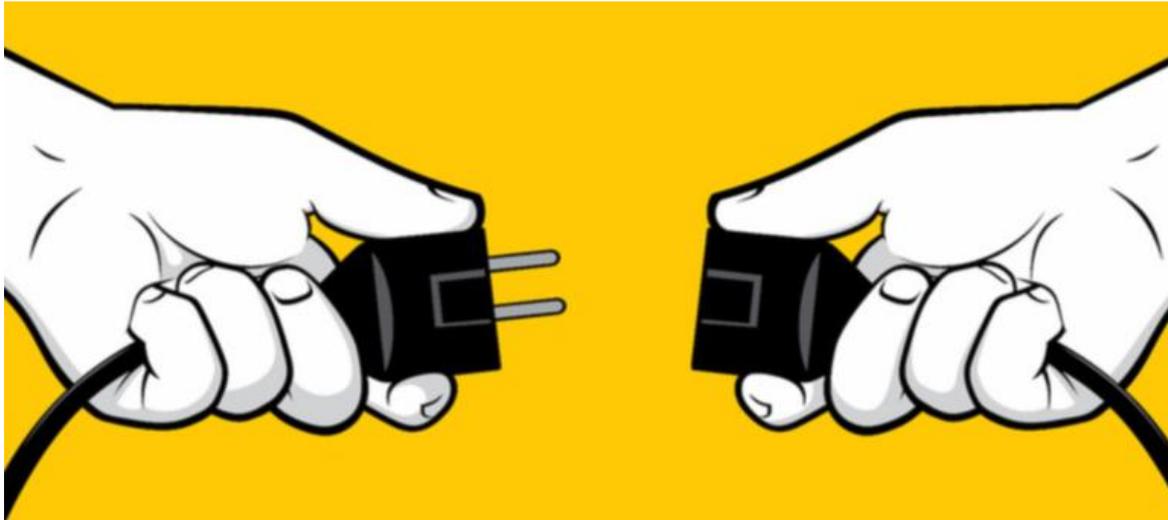


### **Vinnies responds to higher energy bills**

With people required to stay at home to help keep our communities safe, many households will face higher energy bills in coming months. At the same time, many people will be experiencing a loss of income. To help ensure everyone can access the energy they need to stay healthy at home, we've been working in partnership with a range of organisations to advocate for support from energy companies and from the NSW Government.

The NSW Government has since allocated additional funding to the energy accounts payment assistance (EAPA) scheme, while the Australian Energy Regulator has urged energy businesses to extend payment supports to all residential customers in financial stress, and to stop any disconnections until at least 31 July. While some energy retailers have agreed to implement these recommendations, there is still work to be done to ensure consistent support is available to all customers. You can read Sydney Alliance's [summary of the current state of play here](#).

We are also working with the Public Interest Advocacy Centre (PIAC) to prepare practical advice to help households minimise the increase in their energy bills over the winter months ahead. This will shortly be available via the [Members and Volunteers website](#).



## Reconciliation

What started as the Week of Prayer for Reconciliation in 1993 is now observed annually as *National Reconciliation Week*. Running from 27 May to 3 June, the week commemorates two significant milestones in the reconciliation journey – the successful 1967 referendum, and the High Court Mabo decision.

Of this year's theme, *In This Together*, Reconciliation Australia writes “[it] is now resonating in ways we could not have foreseen when we announced it last year, but it reminds us whether in a crisis or in reconciliation we are all #InThisTogether.”

While this year, opportunities to come together for physical events may be limited due to COVID-19, the Vinnies NSW Reconciliation Action Plan Committee has put together some ideas to encourage everyone to take time to learn about our shared past, and to explore how each of us can contribute to a more reconciled Australia which [you can access here](#). You can also visit [Reconciliation Australia's website](#) for more resources and ideas.



## Mental health resources and study

Vinnies NSW is concerned about the mental health and well-being of all people living in the Australian community, but especially those who are already marginalised or socially isolated. The Australian Government has put together a comprehensive mental health portal that contains useful tips, information about mental illness, and how to help yourself and others. More information can be found at [headtohealth.gov.au](http://headtohealth.gov.au).

The University of Western Australia, Minderoo Foundation and Forrest Research Foundation are conducting research into the mental health impacts of COVID-19 on our communities. They are looking for participants who are either in 14 day quarantine or are socially distancing. For more information, please visit [thecarestudy.com](http://thecarestudy.com).



## Upcoming webinars

### **Advocacy: Speaking out against injustice**

12pm-1.30pm Wednesday 6 May

[Register here](#)

### **Build Homes, Build Hope**

12pm-1.30pm Wednesday 13 May

[Register here](#)

### **The Uluru Statement: Time to be heard**

12pm-1.30pm Wednesday 27 May

[Register here](#)

### **Drug Law Reform**

12pm-1.30pm Wednesday 10 June

[Register here](#)

### **People seeking asylum: Protection and the pandemic**

12pm-1.30pm Wednesday 17 June

[Register here](#)

### **Raise the Rate: Towards a stronger social security system**

12pm-1.30pm Wednesday 24 June

[Register here](#)

**Do you know of a local social justice event or news  
item that you'd like everyone to know about?**

**CONTACT US**

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Sent Via [ActionNetwork.org](https://ActionNetwork.org). To update your email address, change your name or address, or to stop receiving emails from Social Justice Network, please [click here](#).