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SOCIAL JUSTICE
NETWORK

Welcome to the Social Justice Newsletter for December 2022

More than 40% of low-income households in rental stress

Housing stress is on the rise in all capital cities and regional areas across Australia according to the [recent annual Rental Affordability Index](#).

This will come as no surprise to members of the Society who are seeing an increase in the number of requests for assistance in their communities. The new data, published by National Shelter, Community Sector Banking, Brotherhood St Laurence and SGS Economics & Planning, shows 42% of low-income households are now in rental stress, compared with 35% in 2008. With rent increases continuing to exceed wages, more households are now struggling to find money to pay for food, heating and healthcare.

These findings highlight the urgent need to increase the supply of homes affordable to people on low incomes, including through investment in social housing, embedding affordable housing targets in planning policies, and fair limits on rent increases. These policies are part of [the Society's Election Statement, which you can read here](#). **You can also [add your name in support](#) of our Statement, calling for the next NSW Government to take action to create a housing system that works for everyone.**

Without bold action, the situation will continue to worsen. The report notes that while rents fell slightly during the pandemic, the decline was only temporary, with rents now equal or higher than pre-2020 levels. Natural disasters are further exacerbating housing stress, with NSW floods having had a devastating impact on the housing sector - see article below.



Northern Rivers report

With recent floods impacting communities across NSW, [new research co-commissioned by the St Vincent de Paul Society](#) shows action must be taken to better safeguard regional Australians against homelessness and displacement.

Conducted by the University of NSW City Futures Research Centre, the research looked at the relationship between housing vulnerability and climate change, focused on the Northern Rivers in the eight months following the severe floods earlier this year. Based on its finding, it offers a series of recommendations aimed at improving responses to future disasters, particularly for at-risk cohorts, and reducing underlying vulnerability. This includes measures such as growing the share of social housing as a proportion of total housing stock, and building disaster response into business-as-usual practice for organisations delivering social services.

In the lead-up to the [report's publication](#), delegates from the organisations involved in developing the report - the St Vincent de Paul Society, Mission Australia, the Salvation Army, Social Futures, the Australian Red Cross, the Tenants' Union of NSW, Shelter NSW, YFoundations and Homelessness NSW - met with several Ministers, Shadow Ministers and MPs to discuss the report and its recommendations. We thank these decision-makers for their time, and hope the report's finding will inform the ongoing response in the Northern Rivers, and investment in other communities at risk of floods and other climate disasters in the future.



Local meetings with MPs and Candidates

Thank you to everyone who has started connecting with candidates in their electorates to discuss the [Society's 2023 NSW Election Statement](#).

Updates on these meetings are starting to trickle in, with members of the Social Justice Network reporting that MPs have been grateful for the information about homelessness in their electorate, and in some cases surprised by the prevalence of housing stress.

Several current or aspiring MPs have committed to raising our key recommendations with decision-makers in their own parties, and using their voice to support action on social and affordable housing, protections for renters, and resourcing for homelessness services.

If you would like to get involved in talking to candidates in your electorate, please email social.justice@vinnies.org.au. We can connect you with others, and share resources and guidance, including [electorate factsheets](#), and [our guide to meeting with candidates](#).

The photo below shows Conference President Bernie Deady, Regional President Peter Dedy, Social Justice Representative Nishadh Rego and Rhiannon Cook from the Social Justice Team, following a meeting with the Member for Canterbury, Sophie Cotsis (left).



Sydney Alliance meets Matt Kean

Over 200 representatives from across the community met the Hon. Matt Kean in Parramatta on Wednesday 30 November. Members of the Society of St Vincent de Paul were there in force. The aim of the meeting? To press for action on soaring costs of living and the impacts of climate change in western Sydney.

As part of the diverse coalition that makes up the Sydney Alliance, church, mosque and temple leaders, unions, charities, researchers and other community leaders asked for commitments to curb surging power bills.

The assembly's co-chairs asked Mr Kean if he would reconfirm the Government's commitment to minimum energy efficiency standards for rentals, if they would support households transition from gas to more energy efficient home appliances, and if they would consider an energy hub to help communities access government schemes and get the best energy deals.

The Treasurer said the Government remained committed to energy efficiency upgrades for homes and that he would come back to the assembly next March with the Government's position on an energy hub and more support for households to transition away from gas.

To find out more about the assembly and get involved, visit the Sydney Alliance website [here](#).



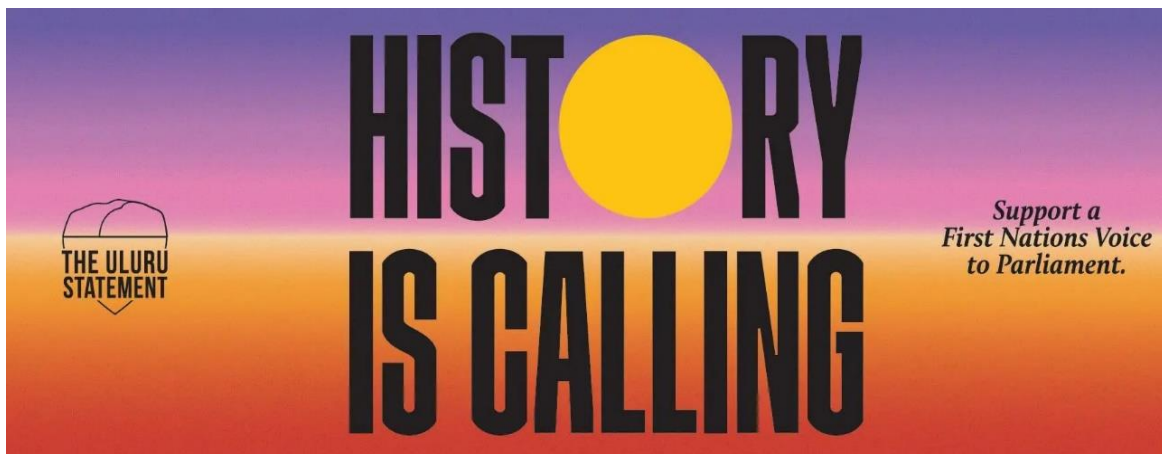
Raising awareness about the Uluru Statement

The Society's leadership has re-affirmed support for the Uluru Statement from the Heart.

Five short and easy-to-use resources have been produced to help inform members, volunteers, employees and supporters - to assist all of us in taking action in support of the Uluru Statement's call.

1. The [Social Justice Statement - The Struggle for Recognition](#) speaks of the experience of First Nations peoples since colonisation and explains why we support the call for Constitutional recognition - as Vincentians, as Church and as Australian citizens.
2. The [Uluru Statement from the Heart - Vincentian Reflection](#) is a great resource for your conference to reflect on and bring to prayer. Consider devoting one of your Conference meetings to discussing the Uluru Statement from the Heart.
3. The [Uluru Statement from the Heart Explainer](#) provides a background on the Uluru Statement and the importance of a Voice, Treaty and Truth. This is a really important read for people on the go.
4. [Why the Society supports the Uluru Statement](#). This very accessible statement sums up the Society's position. Consider distributing this to all members, volunteers and staff for quick reference. Post it on your notice board in your retail outlet, service centre or workplace.
5. [FAQs about the Uluru Statement and First Nations Voice](#) will keep you up to date with current debate and provide the answers to questions commonly asked in the community.

We are proud to support the call of the Uluru Statement from the Heart and hope these resources will be useful for all who are associated with the Society as we walk together towards the coming referendum.



Domestic Violence Rental Laws in NSW

In NSW, tenants can take direct and immediate action to end their tenancy to escape violence. They can do this without penalty if they or their children are experiencing domestic violence.

The provisions within the NSW Residential Tenancies Act 2010, designed to support victim-survivors in rented homes, were recently reviewed. In response, the [St Vincent de Paul Society's submission](#) made a series of recommendations aimed at improving their effectiveness. These included:

- Resourcing education and awareness-raising initiatives
- Making it easier for victim-survivors to provide to demonstrate they meet the eligibility requirements, and to navigate rental arrears, damages, and new bond payments
- Enabling more victim-survivors to remain in their homes
- Removing 'no grounds' evictions

To learn more and read our recommendations, you can [view our submission here](#). This [fact sheet from Tenants' Union of NSW](#) also provides practical information about domestic violence and tenancy law.

Keeping pets in rental properties

This month the Society made a submission to the NSW Department of Customer Service consultation on keeping pets in rental properties. We commented on how NSW tenancy laws are forcing people to choose between a beloved companion and a roof over their heads. Landlords' ability to prohibit pets disproportionately impacts low income and vulnerable people, particularly given the current rental market crisis. We noted that pets can be a vital source of social and emotional support, especially for isolated people, and are often akin to family members.

In our submission we recommended that NSW tenancy laws be changed to prohibit a blanket ban on pets in rental properties. We noted that these changes must be accompanied by an end to no-grounds evictions so that these laws are not used as a 'back-door' to prevent pets in rentals. We supported an approach that is based on animal welfare considerations in relation to the nature of the property. Our recommendations reflect our calls on the next NSW Government to better protect renters as outlined in our [2023 NSW Election Statement](#).



Energy efficient homes need to be a priority: New research and blueprint

As cost-of-living concerns and rising energy prices continue to dominate news headlines, two new research reports have been released confirming the projected increase in energy bills along with strong consumer support for improving the energy efficiency of Australian homes. Independent not-for-profit, Renew, has analysed how rising energy tariffs are set to affect homes with gas and all-electric appliances over the next two years. The report, [Limiting energy bills by getting off gas: All-electric homes after the 2022 energy crisis](#), shows that while both electricity and gas tariffs are set to rise, homes that use gas will face the biggest bill increases. All gas homes can expect bill increases of up to \$1,900, compared to all-electric homes with solar that can expect more limited increases of \$550-\$740. The report finds that renters are dangerously exposed to rising tariffs. It calls for government intervention to get homes off gas and to improve home insulation and energy efficiency.

Renew, along with Energy Consumers Australia and SEC Newgate, have also released a [major research report](#) on consumer attitudes to home energy efficiency. The study found that people are looking for help and support to make their homes more energy efficient and lower their energy bills. Tenants and financially vulnerable people in particular rate their homes as significantly less energy efficient. However, many were unaware of low cost options to improve to energy efficiency. The report found strong support for government reforms to improve the quality and energy efficiency of Australian homes.

The Society, along with 80 other supporter organisations has recently endorsed a community sector blueprint on minimum energy efficient standards in rental homes, [National Framework](#)

[for Minimum Energy Efficiency Rental Requirements](#). Led by the Healthy Homes for Renters Collaboration, the Blueprint provides an outline of key characteristics that should be present in minimum energy efficient standards for renters. Introducing minimum rental standards is a significant reform that has the potential cut emissions, lower the cost of living, improve public health, and reduce poverty and inequality.



Events

Safe Storytelling Workshop

Thursday 15 December 2022, online

[Register here.](#)

Indigenous Suicide Prevention Forum

21 - 23 March 2023

Australian Indigenous Psychologists
Association

[Register here.](#)

**Is there a local social justice event or news
item you'd like everyone to know about?**

CONTACT US