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**SOCIAL JUSTICE**  
**NETWORK**

Welcome to the Social Justice Newsletter for May 2023

## Society supports calls to increase income support above poverty line

The [Society has joined community sector organisations, businesses, academics and advocates in calling for income support payment rates to be lifted](#) in the 2023 federal budget, and has called for the [increase to apply to everyone, regardless of how old they are](#).

A new federal government commissioned report has found more than one million Australians receiving income support payments like JobSeeker or Youth Allowance face the highest levels of financial stress because the support is seriously inadequate. The [Economic Inclusion Advisory Committee report](#) says that as a “first priority” the Government should commit to a substantial increase to JobSeeker base payments and Commonwealth Rent Assistance.

The [Society welcomes and supports all of the recommendations](#) proposed by the EIAC report and urges the Australian Government to act on them in line with our longstanding position over many years calling for increases to JobSeeker and other income supports. No matter what benchmark you compare it against, people on JobSeeker and other related payments are living in poverty.

You can join the calls on the Prime Minister to increase income support in the upcoming Federal Budget on 9 May using the tools and resources on the [Raise the Rate website](#). The time for action is now - as National President Mark Gaetani stated “we have nothing to lose and everything to gain by removing barriers to employment and giving those who need a hand up a fair go.”

**RAISE**  
**THE RATE**  
**FOR GOOD**

## Inequality widening as one million now in poverty

New research shows that nearly one million people in NSW are living in poverty, and an additional 100,000 people slipped into poverty over the five years to 2021 as housing costs rise and income fails to keep up with the rising cost of living. While NSW's poverty rate of 13.4% has remained relatively stable since 2016, it masks deepening inequality across the state. Sydney in particular has seen poverty become more entrenched in Western and South-Western suburbs compared to the city's eastern suburbs.

The NCOSS and NATSEM [Mapping Economic Disadvantage Research](#) project profiles the composition of people facing poverty in NSW. The research shows:

- Children comprise one-quarter of those living in poverty and have the highest poverty rate of all age groups (15.2%).
- Older people experienced the biggest increase in poverty levels in NSW, particularly older women in private rentals, with 50,000 more people aged 65 years and over falling into poverty.
- Around one-fifth of renters are living in poverty, with the rate of poverty nearly doubling for those in Greater Sydney (19.4%) as housing costs soar.
- People living in public housing have the highest rate of poverty at 60%, with social housing no longer providing an adequate social safety net.
- People who are unemployed or not in the labour force comprised more than half (58.6%) of those living in poverty, underscoring the inadequacy of income support payments.
- More than one-quarter of people living in poverty have a job, and are now the 'working poor' as cost of living pressures grow and wages stagnate.

The [report](#) calls for increases to income support payments to lift people out of poverty and for more social and affordable housing and rent assistance in response to the high cost of housing. The [key themes report](#) and [research report](#) are accompanied by an [online data mapping tool](#).

Another report into poverty nationally has also called for an increase to income support payments. The Australian Council of Social Service (ACOSS) and University of NSW report, [Poverty in Australia](#), shows that one in eight people and one in six children were in poverty nationally in 2019-2020. Households receiving income support faced a higher risk of poverty, including Newstart Allowance / JobSeeker Payment (60%), Parenting Payment (72%), Youth Allowance (34%), Disability Support Pension (43%) or Carer Payment (39%).

Nationally, the Society has seen a 20% increase in requests for assistance as more and more people struggle to make ends meet. We support calls on the government to take action on

housing affordability and to urgently increase income support payments to lift people out of poverty, and will be scrutinising the upcoming federal and state budgets closely.



## Rental affordability plummets

Rental affordability continues to plummet, according to [Anglicare Australia's annual Rental Affordability Snapshot](#), which shows the dire situation for low income and disadvantaged renters. The tight rental market is having the greatest impact on those with the least capacity to pay.

Nationally, less than 1% of rental listings surveyed were affordable for a person earning a full-time minimum wage. Just 0.4% were affordable for a person on the Age Pension and 0.1% were affordable for a person on the Disability Support Pension. No rentals were affordable for a person on JobSeeker or Youth Allowance.

Across Greater Sydney and the Illawarra, the number of affordable properties for people reliant on government benefits decreased by 74% and the number of affordable properties for people on the minimum wage decreased by 42%. Just 36 properties were affordable and appropriate for people living on income support payments. Only one property was affordable and appropriate for a single person living on the JobSeeker Payment, and no properties affordable and suitable for other households living on the JobSeeker Payment, Youth Allowance or Parenting Payment Single. For people living on the minimum wage, 4% of properties were affordable.

The Society is continuing to advocate governments for more social and affordable homes to ease the affordability crisis for those people doing it tough in our state, and for an increase in the rates of income support to allow people to live with dignity.



## Public hearings on Voice Referendum wording

During April the Joint Select Committee on the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island Voice Referendum legislation held its first public hearings across the nation. Everyday Australians in the regional communities of Orange and Cairns, as well as those in Perth and Canberra, had an opportunity to comment on the proposed wording of the Voice Referendum. Eminent legal and other witnesses, including representatives from the Uluru Statement from the Heart, also gave evidence to the Committee. The Committee is due to report in May 2023.

[Submissions](#) to the parliamentary inquiry concerning the amendments to the proposed question to be asked of Australians closed in April 2023. The [Society made a submission](#) supporting the Voice, and focusing on the Society's advocacy over many years for constitutional recognition of First Nations Peoples as well as its commitment to providing assistance, employment and procurement opportunities to First Nations Peoples.

The Attorney-General the Hon Mark Dreyfus KC made a submission which included the opinion of the nation's most senior legal advisor, the Solicitor-General. The opinion confirmed that constitutional recognition through a Voice to Parliament is legally safe and would improve our system of government. The Solicitor-General stated that the Voice will "no doubt prioritise



its resources by focusing on making representations on the matters it considers are of the greatest significance to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island peoples”.

The Society supports the Uluru Statement and the Voice as a social justice imperative to redress the wrongs of the past. The Voice will give First Nations Peoples a say in decisions about them and deliver real change to improve their health and wellbeing. See our resources about the Uluru Statement and the Society's position on our [website](#).



### **NSW government defers state budget**

The new Minns government has begun reshaping the state's agenda, announcing the NSW budget would be delayed until September in the face of record debt and significant economic challenges. With the recent Anglicare Rental Affordability Snapshot showing rental affordability worsening yet again (see article above), the Society will be advocating for more social and affordable housing and specialist support services in the next state budget for those doing it tough.

Along with letters to the Premier and new Opposition Leader, Mark Speakman, the Society has written to the new Labor Ministers congratulating them and seeking a meeting with key portfolio-holders. We have also written to the crossbench as they will play a critical role in determining the passage of legislation through the lower house.

We know that many of you are contacting your local MPs to congratulate them and to follow-up on any commitments made during the campaign. If you need support with writing letters or arranging a meeting contact the Social Justice Team at [social.justice@vinnies.org.au](mailto:social.justice@vinnies.org.au), and keep us posted with how you go.



## Events

### Post Budget Event

15 May 2023

Australian Council of Social Service

[Register here](#)

### Asset Based Community Development training

19 May 2023

City of Sydney

[Register here](#)

### Building Cultural Safety in Times of Change

18 May 2023

NSW Council of Social Service

[Register here](#)

### Refugee Week 2023

18 - 24 June 2023

[Click here](#) to learn more

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

**CONTACT US**