

MEDIA RELEASE

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Homelessness needs a joint response

St Vincent de Paul Society National Council of Australia CEO, Toby O'Connor, today welcomed the Morrison Government's focus on emergency accommodation for a growing number of Australians. But he said housing options for low income people are seriously limited and the solution requires the cooperation of not for profit providers, private developers and governments – federal and state and territory.

Responding to comments by the Assistant Minister for Community Housing and Homelessness Luke Howarth this morning, Mr O'Connor said emergency accommodation will hopefully capture people when they are beginning to fall, but stronger pathways needed to get people out of crisis circumstances and into secure, long-term, affordable housing requires a massive increase in community and public housing stock.

'The Society's first-hand experience with assisting homeless people across Australia demonstrates that those options simply do not exist at the moment', Mr O'Connor said.

'While people sleeping rough are most visible, we cannot ignore the tens and thousands of people experiencing other forms of homelessness, including people who are couch-surfing, living in overcrowded dwellings, or living in other forms of unsafe and insecure housing.

'There might be empty dwellings in our capital cities, but whether they're full or not will really have very little impact on the folk we're talking about who are at the very bottom end when it comes to housing affordability.

People on Newstart cannot afford the rents in our big cities. We know from the Anglicare Australia 2019 rental affordability survey that only 1 out of 70,000 rental listings was affordable to people living on Newstart.

'I congratulate the government on making this issue a priority and I invite the Assistant Minister to visit housing projects launched recently by the St Vincent de Paul Society in a number of states.

'We've been working in this space for 40 or 50 years and have a lot to offer in terms of experience and advice.

'I have written to the Assistant Minister seeking a meeting with him in the weeks ahead to discuss how the St Vincent de Paul Society can assist develop new approaches to a complex problem,' Mr O'Connor said.

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