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MEDIA RELEASE

Repay Robodebt before Christmas

The St Vincent de Paul Society National Council of Australia has called on the Federal Government to pay back, in full, money paid to the flawed Robodebt scheme, which raised thousands of debts in error against people on income support payments who had intermittent, additional income during the year.

Commenting in response to the news overnight CEO, Toby oConnor said the Federal Government's commitment to completely overhauling its automated approach to alleged debts incurred by people on welfare is a welcome, if well overdue move.

'The Society also notes the Federal Government's commitment to freezing existing debt recovery pending the review', he said.

'The idea that a debt could be raised through an automated system without any evidence was a dangerous move.

'The notion that this process raises the debt

and victims have to prove they don't owe the money is highly questionable.

'Yet we've seen some of the most vulnerable people forced to repay money they did not owe.

'We note the legal challenge to the scheme and suggest unnecessary levels of stress and anxiety could have been avoided had the review been conducted before the practice was rolled out.

'We know through our work with people in local communities that this process has added to the trauma for many people living on inadequate allowances.

'This is another example of the Government's heavy-handed approach to people on welfare at a time when the number of people looking for work far outnumber available jobs,' Mr oConnor said.

The St Vincent de Paul Society in Australia consists of 60,000 members and volunteers who operate on the ground through over 1,000 conferences located in individual parishes across Australia.

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