

## **Families hit hard with rising cost of living and gambling addiction**

*With Tasmanian state elections to be held on 3 March 2018, Uniting Vic.Tas is setting out its position on key issues facing the Tasmanian electorate.*

### **What is the issue?**

Tasmania is experiencing a period of strong economic growth off the back of a booming tourism industry and growing retail and hospitality sectors. But many Tasmanians struggle to make ends meet with the increase in rental prices and cost of living as well as slow salary growth. Over a third rely on government payments to survive.

Jobs are becoming less stable. In the year leading up to September 2017, 92% of jobs created in Tasmania were part-time. There is considerable under-employment, with 60% of casual workers saying they do not get enough hours to make ends meet. Disadvantaged groups, such as older people, people with disability and migrants have particular difficulties finding work.

Tasmania has the highest proportion of low income households and people living below the poverty line in Australia. For example, 7000 Tasmanian households cannot afford heating during winter and 21,000 struggle to pay their bills.

Between 2015 and 2017 83% more people came to Uniting for emergency relief services more than five times a year – evidence that more and more Tasmanians are experiencing some form of financial stress.

Electronic gambling machines, commonly referred to as poker machines or pokies, are a factor that we see contributing to the increasing hardship and poverty affecting Tasmanians.

An estimated 8,000 Tasmanians can be considered as a problem or moderate risk gamblers. The knock-on effects are significant, with each problem gambler estimated to have a negative effect on a further 5-10 people, such as dependents, spouses or friends.

## **What needs to be done**

At Uniting, we believe that no one should be left behind. That is why we are supporting the introduction of greater transparency in government spending and legislation, which will require government to publish a distributional analysis of each year's budget and provide a Cost of Living Impact Statement with new legislation.

There is a need to increase the number of jobs in Tasmania. It is important that initiatives that look to create jobs take into account people with disability, migrants and older people to enter or remain in the workforce.

Uniting is part of a coalition of organisations calling for a phasing out of poker machines in hotels and clubs to reduce the economic and health consequences arising from addiction gambling. Independent public polls have also supported our calls to reduce or completely remove poker machines from hotels and clubs.