

Summer 2021/22 Congregation Connect



Fighting poverty together

At Uniting, we work across a range of community services, intervening early to help people avoid crisis, as well as supporting those who live life at the margins.

As part of our work to end poverty, we partnered with the Centre for Social Impact at Swinburne University to look at what the end of COVID-19 income and tenancy benefits has meant for the people who received them.

This research is called: No fighting chance. Impact of the withdrawal of COVID-19 income and tenancy benefits.

At the beginning of the pandemic, Australia united to ensure that our most vulnerable did not suffer.

In April last year, the Federal Government introduced a \$550 per fortnight Coronavirus Supplement for people on JobSeeker payments, along with the JobKeeper wage subsidy scheme for employed people.

At the same time, the Victorian Government instituted a moratorium on evictions, suspended private rental increases and provided private rent relief for renters and landlords impacted by the pandemic.

However, these measures were time-limited.

The Coronavirus Supplement was gradually cut back and finally replaced in April 2021 with a \$50 increase in the permanent rate of JobSeeker payments.

All tenancy payments and benefits in Victoria were withdrawn by the end of March 2021.

Since then Australia, particularly Victoria, has faced further waves of COVID-19 lockdown measures, largely without these levels of income and tenancy support being reinstated.

“In April this year, I noted that the cut to the JobSeeker payment will force more people into poverty and place even greater pressure on emergency relief services,” says Uniting Vic.Tas CEO, Bronwyn Pike.

“Sadly, our research validates this.

“In Victoria alone, 648,000 adults and children struggle to survive on income payments that are below the poverty line.

“Many are at risk of homelessness due to a shortage of affordable housing.”

The research finds that to end poverty we must:

- Introduce a permanent increase in JobSeeker and Parenting Payment rates to ensure that the income support system provides an adequate safety net for individuals and families who rely on them
- Benchmark JobSeeker to wages to reduce income inequality and give people a fighting chance in an increasingly competitive housing and employment market
- Increase the amount of Rent Assistance provided to ensure that everyone has access to adequate rental support
- Increase investment in social housing to improve the supply of safe, secure and affordable homes.

By visiting www.everybodyshome.com.au/anti-poverty-week and signing the petition to the Federal Treasurer, you too can stand up and demand more be done.

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Uniting is the community services organisation of the Uniting Church in Victoria and Tasmania.

Uniting



Pancake Day - or Shrove Tuesday - 2022 is on the horizon.

Each year, congregations across Victoria and Tasmania organise Pancake Day events to have some fun and make a difference.

This year, events were heavily impacted by COVID-19 lockdown restrictions. Regardless, we still had 55 participating congregations, schools and community groups - helping us raise nearly \$15,000.

We're hopeful that Pancake Day 2022 will provide an opportunity for your congregation members to host an event in person.

If you have already started planning your event, visit pancakeday.com.au/vic-tas to register your festivities.

Funds raised from Pancake Day are used to help some of the most vulnerable and marginalised people in our communities.

You will help us provide emergency relief for families facing crisis and support people experiencing homelessness to find safe and secure housing.

Proceeds also aid people living with a disability to find work and support older people to live independently in their own homes.



Uniting enjoys partnering with congregations, presbyteries and parish missions, so we would appreciate hearing from you.

We recently sent out a survey asking you to tell us how we can work better as part of the Church to respond to Christ's invitation to serve humanity by creating an inclusive, connected and just world.

To tell us how we're doing, please visit surveymonkey.com/r/Uniting_engagement_check

Contact Uniting

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Putting food on tables for families in crisis

Thank you to the members of the Toorak Ecumenical Movement for supporting our Food For Families appeal.

Toorak Uniting Church (TUC) has been a member of the Toorak Ecumenical Movement since signing the Ecumenical Agreement in 1980.

Together with partner churches St Peter's Roman Catholic Church, St John's Anglican Church and the Swedish Church, members of the TUC share in Lenten Studies and worship at Easter, Pentecost and Advent.

Through their shared commitment to helping people in crisis, the churches also come together each year to raise funds for non-perishable food and toiletry items to donate to people in hardship.

The churches have been fundraising for this reason for over 30 years through their Food For Friends program.

The Uniting Vic.Tas team in Narre Warren were a recent recipient of this generosity, receiving \$1655 in goods to distribute to locals in need.

Donations like this are essential, as more and more people turn to us for help due to the challenges of the continuing COVID-19 pandemic.

This year, our own Food For Families program is turning 30.

Donating food is a practical way to get through a tough time. We invite your congregation to participate this year.

For more information, visit foodforfamilies.org.au