

Welfare must invest properly in those with greatest need

“UnitingCare Australia shares the Government’s desire to see more people assisted into the workforce, but we also caution that a realistic understanding of the challenges facing the most vulnerable Australians is required,” said Lin Hatfield Dodds, National Director of UnitingCare Australia, in response to Minister Morrison’s speech at the National Press Club today.

“For many people welfare can and should function as a short term safety net, helping them through a difficult period of life before they move back into engagement with the workforce,” said Lin Hatfield Dodds, National Director of UnitingCare Australia.

“But we need to pay serious attention to how we support and enable change for those who are the most vulnerable. There are many people who are dependent on welfare for longer periods of time who cannot move to independence without significant supports.”

“Addressing the deepest challenges in our welfare system requires a long term view. This is why the New Zealand investment approach is to be applauded. In order to make long-term savings—and to improve people’s life chances—investment and early intervention are required,” said Lin Hatfield Dodds.

“We need to understand what life is like for the most disadvantaged Australians and we need to give them more support, not less. One key aspect of that support is ensuring that people’s payments are adequate to provide their basic needs and allow them to participate in the community.”

“The McClure report outlined the importance of ensuring payments are adequate now and in the future. It recommended changes that would lead to no one being worse off than they currently are. It is crucial that the Government pay particular attention to these recommendations.”

Each year, as part of the work of supporting those most in need, UnitingCare West seeks to learn more about the thousands of clients whose lives we touch. In December, we released a report focused on economic disadvantage and what this means for the people that we work with. The results clearly highlighted the failures of the current welfare system with many vulnerable individuals and households struggling to make ends meet. The current housing affordability crisis in Western Australia, combined with the high cost of utilities and relatively low levels of welfare support, has seen demand for our services continue to increase.

“Welfare reform offers a valuable opportunity to improve the provision we make for people who rely on benefits. We must focus on making sure we improve the quality of supports we give to the most disadvantaged people.”

END OF RELEASE

For a copy of the UnitingCare West Most in need report visit:

<http://www.unitingcarewest.org.au/about-us/publications/most-in-need-report/>

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About UnitingCare West

UnitingCare West assists over 30,000 individuals and families each year. With 300 staff members and over 300 volunteers, UnitingCare West is a community service agency that has a mission to support, serve and empower those most in need. UCW operates over 35 community service programs from 17 sites across Perth, reaching as far North as Merriwa and as far South as Bunbury, in the areas of community housing, accommodation, homelessness, family support, mental health and disability services. UnitingCare West's clients include those in the community experiencing financial hardship, domestic violence, child abuse trauma, mental health issues and disability to name a few.