
MEDIA RELEASE

MAJOR CHURCH PROVIDERS' FINANCIAL HEALTH AND WELL BEING FORUM

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The financial resilience and financial inclusion of low income and disadvantaged Australian households will be the focus of a forum in Melbourne today, hosted by the Major Church Providers of social services in Australia.

Representatives from Anglicare Australia, Catholic Social Services Australia, The Salvation Army, and UnitingCare Australia will examine a number of issues, including emergency relief funding, financial counselling services and no interest loans schemes.

Delegates will discuss systemic difficulties in existing systems, opportunities for better links with other services such as affordable housing, family support and employment services, and the central role of data collection. Delegates will also discuss 'blue sky' options for the services of the future.

The forum aims to come up with ideas to:

- build financial literacy
- access affordable credit
- access adequate income to live a decent life
- reduce financial hardship and deprivation
- provide choice when accessing support services
- empower people to take control of their financial wellbeing

"We believe this consultation provides an opportunity for fundamental reform of the current inefficient, ad-hoc system," said Kasey Chambers, Executive Director of Anglicare Australia.

"We need strong sustainable services in the face of increasing demand. We already struggle to meet the needs of people who experience long-term hardship and are concerned about our ability to meet emerging needs in the face of the economic downturn," said David Eldridge, Territorial Social Program Secretary, The Salvation Army.

"The money in the Australian Government's stimulus package is available for the next two years. We will focus on both the \$81million for the existing emergency relief and financial counselling programs as well as the \$50m tagged for No Interest Loans Schemes," said Lin Hatfield-Dodds, National Director of UnitingCare Australia.

"We'll be looking at opportunities for prevention and early intervention – first aid is better than major surgery – and to help vulnerable Australians with better financial planning," said Frank Quinlan, Executive Director of Catholic Social Services Australia.

Delegates at the forum include strategic thinkers from the four major church providers, ministerial staff and senior departmental representatives. Ministers Gillard and Macklin have indicated that they are relying on feedback from this group to help them re-shape these services.

The Major Church Providers group will produce a report in the days following the forum. A copy of the report will be sent to all Federal politicians and key policy makers.

The major church provider networks provide the majority of social services in Australia.

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