

---

## TRANSCRIPT

### Doorstop

Parliament House Canberra

20 October 2009

### GOVERNMENT MUST MAINTAIN SOCIAL HOUSING COMMITMENTS

Representatives from the major church providers of social services urge the Government to at least maintain current commitments to social housing in light of possible cuts to the stimulus package.

Major Church Providers represented by:

Lin Hatfield Dodds, National Director UnitingCare Australia

Kasy Chambers, Executive Director Anglicare Australia

---

- KASY CHAMBERS: ...groups calling for a winding back of the stimulus package. They need to be very aware, clearly aware of the effect that sacrificing any part of the Government's social housing investment would have on the most vulnerable in our community.
- QUESTION: Can you just explain that? So, is it - are you talking about money that's been allocated for social housing, you don't want that to be wound back?
- KASY CHAMBERS: That's correct. Secure and affordable housing is one of the lynch pins of a decent standard of living and we need to make sure that that investment, that compassionate response to the global financial crisis is continued.
- QUESTION: How much is that worth? How much are the stimulus packages that have been allocated to social housing? Do you know? Or...
- KASY CHAMBERS: We're now up to an amount of \$5.7 billion and that's important to keep that rolling out across every state and territory of Australia.
- QUESTION: Just what kind of an impact that the stimulus package to this point had on those who are low income earners?
- KASY CHAMBERS: Well it's happened at the time of the GFC. The GFC has had a strong impact from those who are already on low incomes, who are already vulnerable. So, this is, I guess, stopping them falling any further down.
- QUESTION: Is there a concern that if the stimulus package does continue to be rolled out as is, that interest rates will continue to rise as the Reserve Bank Governor has indicated and that's going to still put pressure on families anyway.
- KASY CHAMBERS: There's certainly some thoughts that the inflation rate will go up and therefore interest rates will go up. But Anglicare Australia in its family report launched last week, finds very, very clearly that those who are affected by the GFC will continue to be affected for some time to come. So, we're still seeing increases in the

number of people coming to our door and the lag effect of the GFC will dictate that those people will need help for some time to come...

QUESTION: So rapid interest rate rises which have been flagged by the RBA is obviously not going to help.

KASY CHAMBERS: It's certainly not going to help. Every expense on a family's budget puts them under more pressure, but we also need to be aware of those families in rental accommodation or in no accommodation.

QUESTION: But if the Government does roll back stimulus spending, would you argue for that money to then be put in other social housing projects that - perhaps by another name, not as stimulus spending.

LIN HATFIELD-DODDS: The major church provider networks came out very enthusiastically welcoming the Government's historic investment in social and community housing. Over many decades, many governments have removed bricks and mortar from communities. They've been sold off over many years.

As Kasy has said, somewhere safe and secure to live is one of the basic building blocks to be able to live a decent life. There are many Australians that need that. Over 100,000 Australians are homeless. Hundreds of thousands more Australians are living in very precarious accommodation.

So, we don't want to see any of that money pulled away from bricks and mortar, so we're encouraging the Government not to take anymore money out of social and community housing.

QUESTION: What would happen if they did?

LIN HATFIELD-DODDS: It will simply mean less accommodation on the ground in Australian communities over the years to come. The reason this spend, the original \$6.4 billion commitment is so historic, is it gives us the capacity as a country to deliver affordable accommodation to low income and vulnerable Australians in almost every community across our country.

That means for children, for current adults, current families, for their children and their children's children, there's going to be safe - somewhere safe and affordable and secure to live. That's a huge start up when people are living in chaos and crisis.

QUESTION: Can I just clarify? The original spending is over \$6 billion and now you say a little over \$5 billion is left. So, not much of that \$6 billion has been spent anyway.

LIN HATFIELD-DODDS: Well the Government has already removed \$650,000 from the stimulus allocation. As I understand it, the way the money's being spent, it's running through the states and territories. Each state and territory has a different framework and a different way of dealing with that money. But certainly, community housing groups, social service providers like our own networks and many groups are desperate to get their hands on that stimulus spend to start, you know, putting bricks and mortar on the ground for people who need a home.

QUESTION: Do the church organisations themselves run social housing...

LIN HATFIELD-DODDS: Yes we do, right across the country. And some very large social housing packages. Not that that means large social housing precincts. We tend to build social housing developments that are quite small on a human scale. So, it's not about building the ghettos of the past again, it's about ensuring that people who are disadvantaged and vulnerable have got great homes to live in, in the communities that they can become a part of.

QUESTION: Do public housing authorities follow the same sort of pattern of building smaller units these days rather than big estates?

LIN HATFIELD-DODDS: It differs all over the country...

KASY CHAMBERS: Yes...

LIN HATFIELD-DODDS: Different states and different territories have got different approaches. In the ACT it's a lot more disaggregated. There are other states where people are retro-fitting those tall apartment buildings and making them more human scale and more liveable.

QUESTION: Are you happy with the progress that has been made so far, knowing the money that has been spent as part of the stimulus menu?

LIN HATFIELD-DODDS: We've been happy with the Australian Government's speed of getting the money out to the states and territories. Across the country there's been some hold ups. We hear from our organisations on the ground in different states and territories about getting that money out onto the ground.

So, we'd like to encourage state and territorial governments to run that money through as quickly as possible. Clearly there'd have to be transparent processes and that's fine, but it is stimulus spend. We need to get it out there to keep boosting the economy and we want it in bricks and mortar for vulnerable families.

QUESTION: Which state governments are doing more of the holding up of the running? Is there one particular jurisdiction that...

LIN HATFIELD-DODDS: I don't think so. I think it's variable. It's variable in different parts of different states. I don't think it's any one government that's sort of saying we're going to hold this up. I think it's a problem just of large bureaucracy. So, I guess what we need is ministers to be saying to their bureaucrats, you know, this is really important for the future of vulnerable families.

QUESTION: Are you concerned that social housing will be the first target area if the Government does move to wind back stimulus spending? Is this...

LIN HATFIELD-DODDS: We're concerned that it may be one target area. It was a very large allocation. It was a hugely historic allocation of money and what we don't want to see is to lose any more of that money. It's desperately needed on the ground. The unmet need was there before the global financial crisis. The unmet need has got larger. This kind of investment will go a long way to closing the intergenerational gap around somewhere, you know, safe and affordable housing.

QUESTION: But it won't go very far towards closing the waiting lists. I mean the waiting lists for public housing are immense.

LIN HATFIELD-DODDS: They are immense. Look, it will go some way towards closing those and I think it's about getting as many people as we can into public social community housing and then helping them move on from there into other forms of housing, so keeping people moving through the system.

QUESTION: If the stimulus is wound back, how much would you be prepared to - how much do you think will be an appropriate amount to lose?

LIN HATFIELD-DODDS: Absolutely none.

QUESTION: No, well if you had - if some had to be lost?

LIN HATFIELD-DODDS: Well that's - I guess that's a premise we're not accepting...

KASY CHAMBERS: That's right. That's a premise that there are other areas that aren't - that are more important than this type of investment. We see day in and day out numbers of people coming to our services who are coming for help with food, with their utilities and their rent because they've nowhere safe and affordable to live. We see elderly people who are in housing that's inadequate, who are scared to actually ask for the step to be mended that's unsafe because they're afraid of being asked to leave. There could be nothing more basic than housing in a rich country like Australia. So we think there are other places to look for this savings then.

QUESTION: Do you think that the worst impacts are over in Australia in terms of the global financial crisis...

KASY CHAMBERS: No...

QUESTION: ...or do you expect to see more families out of jobs and out of houses?

KASY CHAMBERS: We're certainly seeing more people coming to our services still. As I say, we launched a report called State of the Family last week. We're seeing that there's a lag. The Prime Minister talked about a nine month lag between the effect in the economy and the effect on real people. We're still seeing that there are a lot of people still to come through. There's a lot of young people who left school this time last year who didn't get jobs. They're middle aged families who have lost their jobs who are now living off their life savings. That's diminishing. And there are many more people who are under-employed and having their hours still cut. So the effects are still walking their way through and will be for some time.

QUESTION: So you wouldn't - you don't place much credence in the last job figures which show more than 40,000 jobs were created?

KASY CHAMBERS: What they don't pick up on is under-employment, the job figures. That's an area of large concern. We were working with a lot of families before the GFC who were cobbling together incomes from four or - you know, sometimes even four jobs. When hours are cut they lose their ability to meet their bills.

LIN HATFIELD-DODDS: And we would say one unemployed Australia is an unemployed Australian too many. One child going to sleep hungry tonight, one person sleeping out rough, you know, one person with a disability that can't access buildings is too much.

Australia is a very wealthy country in spite of the global financial crisis. There's still enough wealth in this country and enough opportunity to share around. Between us we deliver more than 70 per cent of all social services across the country. We do that not to run a business. We do that because we share the Government's dream of social inclusion of communities where everybody can belong, be valued and contribute.

And so we need to get bricks and mortar on the ground. We don't want to see any of the stimulus spend stop. We welcomed all of it. You know, the money that's going into education is fantastic. The money that went into emergency relief to financial counselling, fantastic.

The fact that we've got a government that took the opportunity of having to spend to get the economy moving again to invest in people and communities was just wonderful from our perspective, and so we're saying today that we don't want any of that rolled back.

ENDS

---

20 October 2009

Contact: Judith Tokley, Catholic Social Services Australia, 0408 824 306

---

20 October 2009

Contact: Judith Tokley, Catholic Social Services Australia, 0408 824 306

**Formatted:** Position:  
Horizontal: Right, Relative to:  
Margin, Vertical: 0 cm,  
Relative to: Paragraph, Wrap