

## **Sign up for the sake of vulnerable South Australians, but deep concerns remain**

**Today the SA Council of Social Service (SACOSS) will encourage a number of non-government agencies to sign contracts offered by the state government to provide extra emergency financial assistance to South Australians. This is despite wide-ranging and continuing deep concerns about the government's attempt to transfer to the community sector, without adequate resources, the responsibility it previously carried for antipoverty services.**

Ross Womersley, Executive Director of SACOSS, said "While Minister Rankine has repeatedly suggested that "not a cent/dollar less" is going to be spent on emergency financial assistance across this state, in reality 44 positions have gone from Families SA's antipoverty services, with projected government savings of \$11 million. Moreover, Families SA is now largely focusing on its core business of supporting families and children who are already in the child protection system. They will not be providing this type of antipoverty assistance to members of the general public faced with serious financial hardship".

"According to the Department's own figures nearly 40% of the people who previously sought financial counselling assistance from Families SA were in fact members of the general public. We all know rising costs of living are placing enormous pressure on individuals and families right across the South Australian community. This is most acute for those trying to survive on very low and inadequate incomes. If these people can't access immediate assistance to help sort their financial affairs, structure debt repayments, and address the issues that are making it exceptionally difficult to get by, they inevitably will slip further and further into poverty and experience even more dire consequences" said Womersley.

Womersley said, "It's not at all surprising that the non-government sector universally agrees the government's offer to transfer just 3.5 financial counselling positions, spread across SA, is completely inadequate and places community members confronted with real financial hardship at grave risk".

Womersley said, "We will be encouraging the agencies that have been invited to provide extra emergency financial assistance to go ahead and sign on, in a show of good faith. We know they worry that failing to do so will mean people needing that immediate help to put food on the table, or to pay a utilities bill, may be forced to go without. It is unacceptable for the government to have placed pressure on these agencies to sign up or else."

"SACOSS has been joined by Association of Major Charitable Organisations and organisations right across the welfare charitable sector in asking the Premier and his Cabinet to intervene so as to ensure a much better deal for the South Australian community".

**For further comment, contact SACOSS Executive Director Ross Womersley 0418 805 426**