



c/- Catholic Social Services Victoria  
 383 Albert St  
 East Melbourne VIC 3002  
 Phone (03) 9827 5569

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[letter addressed to each member of the Victorian Parliament, and to Secretaries of Departments.]

**High quality social services are part of the solution to the Global Financial Crisis**

'The current global financial crisis and its likely impact on the Australian economy will have an acute impact on the most disadvantaged members of society, as well as pushing increased numbers of low and middle income earners to seek the services of welfare agencies.'

This is the key finding of 'The impact of the global financial crisis on social services in Australia', an Issues Paper prepared late last month by ACCESS Economics for a coalition of Church-based peak welfare bodies – Anglicare Australia, Catholic Social Services Australia, The Salvation Army and UnitingCare Australia. A copy of this report is attached for your information.

The report documents the background to the crisis, its impact on Australia's economy, and the implications for social services. It finds that 'the demand for social services is already rising and will rise substantially in the short term', and that 'the services most immediately affected by deteriorating economic conditions are in employment, housing, financial and general counselling and emergency relief.'

'Meeting these challenges will require coordinated, collaborative responses involving all levels of Government as well as the social services sector. Growing and changing needs will require increasing and innovative policy responses that address the core origins of the mounting pressures.'

High quality social services are integral to a society that places the dignity of the human person and our collective responsibility for the common good at the heart of policy making. In addition to this, however, the Report highlights that 'high quality social services are an integral part of a productive economy. Investment in such services is a benefit not just to those in desperate need of services, but also reduces long term social costs and enhances the overall productivity of the economy.'

There have been some positive responses to this realization that protection of the poor and the most vulnerable must be an explicit priority as economic and financial adjustments progress. The COAG announcement in relation to homelessness is such a response. We urge that, in your consideration of the impact of the international financial crisis, you work to ensure that the needs of those most in need of assistance remain in clear focus.

Yours sincerely,

Rev Ray Cleary  
 CEO  
 Anglicare Victoria

Denis Fitzgerald  
 Executive Director  
 Catholic Social Services  
 Victoria

David Eldridge  
 Social Programme Secretary  
 Australia Southern Territory  
 Salvation Army

Raoul Spackman-Williams  
 Director  
 UnitingCare Victoria and  
 Tasmania