

**Media Release**  
**For Immediate Release**  
**Thursday 10 March 2011**

**“Take affordable housing and homelessness off the political backburner”**

Reverend Harry Herbert, Executive Director, UnitingCare NSW.ACT, today urged politicians to commit to measures which will address the housing crisis in the State and reduce the numbers of people experiencing homelessness.

“Our services encounter many people who are on the brink of losing the roof over their heads or who are already homeless.

UnitingCare is urging the parties to commit to targets set out in the NSW Action Plan under the National Partnership on Homelessness. Currently there are over 27,000 people in NSW experiencing homelessness. The NSW Action Plan aims to reduce this by 7% by 2013 and 50% by 2020.

“There is no silver bullet to reduce homelessness. To achieve these targets, we will need to foster innovation and variety in the homelessness sector. This will involve funding programs that will prevent homelessness, as well as services that continue to support those needing support.”

Homelessness and a lack of affordable housing are closely related. The National Housing Supply Council has estimated that there is a shortage of 500,000 dwellings in Australia. In NSW, housing-stress affects many families.

“Over 45% of NSW low-income renters are experiencing ‘housing-stress’, a number that jumps to 57% for those in the private-rental market.” Mr Herbert explained.

“These families are spending more than 30% of their household income to simply have a roof over their heads and are dangerously close to being pushed out of the housing market and into homelessness.”

Mr Herbert said that the Federal Government's recent decision to reinstate the National Rental Affordability Scheme (NRAS) albeit with a longer timeframe around delivery and spend, was welcomed as it provided certainty around the program and allows organisations such as UnitingCare to properly plan their development pipeline. The State Government must now commit to provide matching incentives to ensure that NSW gets its full quota of affordable housing.

"It's time that we got serious about a long-term solution to providing adaptable and affordable housing when and where it is needed. I challenge the politicians of NSW to be courageous and just make it happen."

UnitingCare provides a range of services to assist homeless young people or families at risk of becoming homeless.

UnitingCare is also a registered Community Housing Provider and is engaged in the rollout of the NRAS which provides incentives for new housing construction for low to moderate income earners. The organisation is also working in partnership with Housing NSW to provide greater housing choice and support for tenants.

**END**

**For more information or to arrange an interview with Reverend Harry Herbert, Executive Director, UnitingCare NSW.ACT, please contact Ingrid Hoff, Media and Communication Officer, UnitingCare NSW.ACT on 02 9376 1415 or [ingridh@nsw.uca.org.au](mailto:ingridh@nsw.uca.org.au)**