

## **MEDIA RELEASE – April 10, 2014**

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### ***Peak body calls for Federal Government to commit to retaining “Last Safety Net” funding***

Community Information & Support Victoria (CISVic) is urging federal government to commit to maintaining funding levels for agencies providing emergency relief, generalist case work and financial counselling. Current funding agreements for these programs which provide “the last safety net” support to people in personal and financial crisis expire on June 30, 2014.

CISVic is a peak body which helps local communities help local people. CISVic agencies receive over \$3,000,000 annually from the federal government which they distribute to individuals and families who are unable to meet their most basic needs (national funding for emergency relief programs is \$84 million). The support provided includes food, food vouchers, or assistance with household bills, education, medical or transport costs. This support is predominantly provided by volunteers.

“Our agencies provide vital support to people in crisis – who are often without funds to meet the most basic of human needs. There are too many individuals and families living on “Struggle Street” who are doing it really tough” says CISVic Executive Officer, Kate Wheller, “56% of our clients live in poverty and 1 in 5 clients presenting to our ER agencies could not be assisted and were referred elsewhere”. In the last financial year, CISVic agencies provided emergency relief to over 45,000 people. Current funding for this critical service, case work and financial counselling expires in June 2014 and future funding remains uncertain.

“We are urging the Abbott Government to make a commitment now to continue funding these critical programs at current levels. Too many individuals and families are struggling to meet daily living costs; unable to buy food, pay rent and at risk of disconnection of gas and power due to high utility bills.”

The uncertainty of funding also impacts a number of paid workers who provide intensive support to clients presenting to ER agencies with complex needs. These federally funded caseworkers are key in meeting the needs of those who would otherwise fall through service gaps, while also providing highly valued support to volunteers. CISVic agencies provide intensive support to around 3000 people annually. Case work in ER is a crucial element of early intervention which prevents reliance on the service system and helps participants to re-engage with society both socially and economically.

One client said “My caseworker definitely helped me feel a sense of hope and security that help is available to move people through tough times and onto better lives.”

“We are concerned that in these economic times, with a reduction in full-time jobs, Victorian job losses in major industries, and rising household expenses, that this funding is uncertain” says Ms Wheller, “*Emergency relief is the last safety net that we cannot afford to lose*”.

