



17 August 2017

For immediate release

### **Welfare changes will hurt the Hunter region**

The Samaritans Foundation is calling on the Senate to reject the Government's proposed welfare changes, likely to result in increased inequality and disadvantage in Australia, and in turn create further poverty.

“Measures like the new demerit point system, random drug testing and increased obligations to look for work that isn’t there are cruel and punitive. There is no evidence to back them up,” said Samaritans CEO, Peter Gardiner.

“These changes will hurt people across the region. We know that families are already experiencing financial stress through increased costs of living. This is another undue pressure that will also put strain on the welfare sector,” Mr Gardiner said.

Australia is facing growing inequality where the cost of living is rising faster than wages or government payments.

Inequality is now the worst it has been in 75 years, in spite of two decades of uninterrupted economic growth.

“In the Hunter region and across NSW, there are nearly five disadvantaged job seekers for every vacancy at their skill level. There are simply not enough jobs – or enough hours – to cater for the number of people who are looking for work.

“These changes will hit our regions hard. But instead of offering relief, people who need help are being scapegoated and demonised. Samaritans will support all genuine initiatives to help families and children who are struggling to get by, but a reliable welfare support system ensures stability for families and underpins our work.

“From our provision of Emergency Relief services across regional New South Wales, Samaritans is acutely aware that pressures on families are increasing. Changes in welfare support not only result in a negative impact on vulnerable people, but also on providers who experience increased demand for services and support,” Mr Gardiner said.

Anglicare Australia’s latest research has shown that the Hunter region:

- Have five disadvantaged job seekers competing for every vacancy at their skill level.
- Are facing a decline in living standards for people on income support, and higher cost-of living pressures than other parts of the country.
- Have almost no affordable rental properties for people on income support. Our annual survey of rental properties on the Central Coast and in the Hunter, Great Lakes, and Taree regions found none that were affordable for a single person on Newstart Allowance or Youth Allowance.

**-ENDS-**

**Media Contact:** Media are encouraged to contact Laura Dawson and Samaritans Communications team on 4960 7157 or 0438 475 772 to arrange an interview opportunity with Peter Gardiner.