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For immediate release

Jobless figures mask reality

Today's official jobless figure hides the real number of people wanting to work in Australia, an alliance of community and welfare groups said today.

The Brotherhood of St Laurence, Anglicare Australia, UnitingCare Australia, St Vincent de Paul Society and Catholic Social Services Victoria have joined forces to expose the true unemployment situation in Australia.

"The current definition that 'one hour's work a week' equals employment produced today's official jobless rate of 5.1 per cent," Tony Nicholson, Executive Director of the Brotherhood said today.

"At the risk of being predictable, we are compelled to say that this figure paints a misleading picture.

"Many Australians believe low unemployment means overall prosperity and financial security but today's figure fails to acknowledge the Australian battlers who are struggling against underemployment or those who have given up hope of finding a job.

"Based on the latest ABS figures from October 2004 we believe the real jobless rate is more than twice the size of the official figure when you include those who want more work and those who've given up looking for work altogether."

UnitingCare Australia National Director, Lin Hatfield Dodds said Australian Government figures show 3.6 million Australians live on a household income of less than \$400 a week but many of these people are not counted in jobless figures.

"These people find themselves in low paid, part time and casual jobs that don't provide enough money each week to cover the basics of food, utilities, medical bills and a roof over their heads," Ms Hatfield Dodds said.

"We want to send a message to our political leaders that for more and more Australians, a decent life is a pipe dream because they are caught in jobs that do not provide them with the means to offer a decent life for them and their families.

"With welfare reform on the National Agenda, we call on the Australian Government to engage with those of us who work daily with Australia's forgotten jobless."

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