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## The gap is growing between rich and poor - Australia must act to reduce levels of poverty

Insecure work is pushing more Australians with jobs below the poverty line and entrenching inequality, the ACTU said today.

ACTU President Ged Kearney said Anti-Poverty Week, which starts today, was a reminder of the difficulties faced by millions of Australians on low incomes.

“Despite the strength of our economy over the last decade there is still a stubbornly high rate of poverty in Australia,” Ms Kearney said.

She said around 12.8% of all Australian's were living below the poverty line, after taking account of their housing costs - 17.3% of all children were also living below the poverty line.

“There are too many families living lives of stress and deprivation due to poverty.

“Disturbingly, we are seeing an increase in the number of people with jobs who are living below the poverty line, due to underemployment and insecure work.

“Not only do these workers often not have the sick leave and carers’ leave permanent workers can fall back on in an emergency, they do not know how many hours they will be working from one week to the next. This makes it difficult to plan for the future and makes buying a house a distant dream.

“We are seeing the development of a working poor in Australia, where workers in full-time jobs face a constant battle to support their families, save money, or pay the rent,” Ms Kearney said.

At the same time as this growing poverty we are seeing that the richest 10 per cent of Australians have gained almost 50 per cent of the growth in income over the past three decades.

“At this rate we will have an American-style split between the working poor and the super-rich. Stemming job insecurity by ensuring workers can rely on jobs that pay them a fair wage is one way to protect Australia from that scenario.”

“Growing inequality of income is made worse by the increasing cost of housing and cuts to public services.

Ms Kearney said that welfare payments in Australia needed to be raised.

“We have a situation in Australia where the Newstart Allowance has been allowed to decline relative to average wages and other welfare payments and is now barely enough to live on,” Ms Kearney said.

“Unions and business groups agree that subjecting the unemployed to this level of poverty is actually making it harder for them to find work.”

“Cuts to payments to single parents have added cruel and unnecessary hardship to their lives and those of their children.”

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