

MEDIA RELEASE



WESNET Inc
Women's Services Network



Homelessness Australia

Creating a framework for ending homelessness

Australia's peak women's organisation working to eliminate domestic and family violence

Embargo till 8 March 2011

Homelessness Australia and the Women's Services Network urge Australians to remember the 46,000 women who are experiencing homelessness on any given night as we honour International Women's Day 2011.

It is essential that everyone recognises that the major cause of homelessness in Australia is domestic and family violence,' said the national chairperson of the Women's Services Network (WESNET), Julie Oberin

'High levels of domestic violence, all too frequently mean that women and children are leaving their homes and communities to travel to the safety of a shelter or homelessness service,' Ms Oberin said.

Young women are the people most likely to use specialist homelessness services, with nearly one in every 50 young women aged between 15 and 19 staying in a homeless service.

Research indicates that a growing number of older single women now face homelessness, which is likely to increase as the population ages over coming decades.

"We know from both the census data and a recent study entitled *It Could Be You*, that the number of women aged 45 and over who are experiencing homelessness is increasing. It is a trend that must be closely monitored particularly over the course of the next decade as baby boomers retire many with insufficient savings and super to meet the costs of housing," Homelessness Australia's CEO Nicole Lawder said.

Women often face homelessness with their children. A large percentage of the children who accompany an adult to a homeless service are in the care of a woman, usually their mother, escaping domestic violence. In 2008/09, 1 in 39 Australian children aged 0-4 years were supported by a specialist homelessness service.

"Specialist Homelessness Services supported 78,000 women and 79,000 accompanying children. While these figures underscore the enormity of the problem of women's homelessness we should also reflect on the essential work delivered by providers of accommodation and support. They provide vital safe and nurturing environments for vulnerable women and their children, supporting them to make the transition from homelessness to independent living," Homelessness Australia's Chairperson Narelle Clay said.

Media release ends.

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Notes : Our organisations

Homelessness Australia is the national peak body representing more than 1500 providers of direct services for people experiencing homelessness and working to achieve our aim of creating a framework to end homelessness. For more information, please visit

www.homelessnessaustralia.org.au

The Women's Services Network (WESNET) is a Founding Council of Homelessness Australia, the national peak body for homelessness.

WESNET is the national peak body working on behalf of women and their children who are experiencing or have experienced domestic or family violence. With almost 400 members across Australia, WESNET represents a range of organisations and individuals including women's refuges, women's shelters, safe houses, women's housing services, women's counselling, support and advocacy services and information and referral services. <http://wesnet.org.au/>

The numbers

- On any given night approximately 105,000 Australians have no safe and secure place to call home.
- 56% of those were male, 44% female.
- Of those, 44,000 (43%) are under 25 and 12,000 are children aged 0-12.
- Evidence indicates that homelessness is increasing among children and families and older Australians.
- Just under 205,000 people received support from specialist homelessness services in 2008/09. Of those, just over 79,000 were children.
- 1 in 39 Australian children aged 0-4 spent time in a homelessness service in 2008/09.
- As at January 2010, 233,171 Australians were on social housing waiting lists.
- The National Housing Supply Council estimates that the shortage of affordable housing dwellings in Australia has reached 493,000.

The causes

- Escaping domestic and family violence is the most often cited reason given by women for seeking assistance from specialist homelessness services in 2008/09.
- Family breakdown was the most often cited reason given by young people.
- Financial crisis and being unable to meet housing costs were the most often cited reasons given by men.
- People leaving institutions such as child protection, foster care, mental health settings and prisons are at a much higher risk of becoming homeless than other Australians.
- The shortage of affordable housing is a cause of homelessness as well as being a major factor preventing people from being re-housed quickly.

The solutions

- Provide funding for an additional 220,000 affordable houses by 2020.
- Extend the National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness for a further five years from 2013 with a minimum of \$849 million.
- Increase non-pension income support payments by \$45 per week (which needs to be indexed).
- Increase funding for early intervention programs that have been proven to work.
- Support the homelessness sector workforce to ensure clients achieve their best outcomes.