



Homelessness Australia

Creating a framework for ending homelessness

MEDIA RELEASE

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We must deliver for older people

As the world prepares to celebrate the International Day of Older Persons on the 1st of October, Australia's national homelessness peak body urges all political parties to ensure that older Australians are afforded the dignity that a safe place to call home provides in the final years of their lives.

Homelessness Australia's representative for older people Lynne Evans said, "The International Day of Older Persons provides an ideal opportunity for us to think about how we might better meet the needs of older Australians who are marginalised and those who are experiencing homelessness."

Almost 20,000 Australians aged 55 and over experience homelessness on any given night and tens of thousands more are at risk of homelessness, living in marginal accommodation in insecure tenancies, boarding houses or caravan parks across Australia.

"These figures show that homelessness amongst older Australians is a significant problem that Governments need to carefully monitor," said Homelessness Australia's Chief Executive Officer, Nicole Lawder said.

Homelessness Australia notes that while the Productivity Commission Inquiry into the future care needs of older Australians acknowledged that some older Australians do not own their own family home that can be sold to finance a co-contribution fund, there have been no announcements from the Government about increasing aged care places for older people with limited means. This means that some older Australians are at risk of becoming homeless for the first time in the latter part of their life. Preventing homelessness for these senior Australians is an important priority.

"Many older people don't have a family home to sell in order to fund a co-contribution entry bond for an aged care facility. We urgently need an expansion of community aged care places and the Assistance with Care and Housing for the Aged program to enable Australians who are homeless or in social housing to access aged care beds when they need them," Ms Lawder said.

"Older Australians who are not home owners or able to afford home-purchase must be supported to access affordable rental accommodation that meets their needs and is well located close to transport and health and community services," Lynne Evans said.

The peak body noted that it was also important to provide access to more affordable housing options and independent living units for older people who can and wish to age in place in their own house, and do not need or want to enter the aged care system.

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Information for Editors

Homelessness and Older people: Statistics

- The 2006 Census count tells us that about 64 per cent of homeless older Australians are men, and 36 per cent are women.
- People in this age group are over-represented among people living in boarding houses, and as marginal residents of caravan parks. A quarter of the people staying in boarding houses are over 55 and 42 per cent of marginal residents of caravan parks are in this age bracket.
- People who are homeless for long periods of time often suffer from premature ageing, caused by the hardship of living rough. While they may be relatively young, they share a health and care needs profile with much older people. Long term periods of rough sleeping result in premature death, often due to chronic illness.

Causes of homelessness

- Homeless for this population is caused by a lack of affordable housing, including the shortage of public housing. The loss of private boarding houses in cities and caravans on Australia's east coast has compounded the problem in recent years.
- For others in this age group, homelessness may be chronic and entrenched, many have cycled in and out of homelessness for decades.
- A single person on the full social security pension plus full rent assistance will receive around \$385.50 pw, just over a conservatively estimated poverty line of \$345 pw.
- The death of a spouse can mean that people's income halves, and they may no longer be able to afford to pay their rent, which can lead to eviction.
- Older women escaping domestic violence are particularly vulnerable to homelessness, as they may have a small amount of money which precludes them from public housing but not enough to purchase or rent a home.
- Recent research has found there are a growing number of women aged 45 and over who are finding that they are experiencing homelessness later in life largely for financial reasons. Many of these women have been forced out of the workforce early with insufficient savings and superannuation, others have separated from life partners with insufficient means to meet housing costs and others have become homeless after the death of a spouse.
- This situation is compounded by the lack of appropriate care for older people, particularly those with complex needs or who are exhibiting challenging behaviours.

What needs to happen?

- Scale-up of innovative models that provide long-term aged care and housing services for people with histories of homelessness and marginal housing.
- The aged pension must be increased to a level that ensures people receiving this payment do not fall into poverty.
- There needs to be an increase in the number of community aged care packages that are available to people from disadvantaged backgrounds or who have limited means.
- We need to see more mainstream aged care providers getting involved in the provision of aged care places for people who have experienced or who are experiencing homelessness.
- The Assistance with Care and Housing for the Aged Program needs to be expanded.
- The Productivity Commission report on the future capacity, challenges and needs of the aged care system provides us with a good opportunity as a nation to examine how we can significantly reform an aged care system that has historically been established and funded with a view to servicing and supporting middle and upper class Australians. Growing numbers of older people from disadvantaged backgrounds will need aged care services and accommodation in the future. They will not have the luxury of selling a family home to pay an entry contribution bond. New funding models will be needed.