

Media Release

Wednesday 20 March 2019

Homelessness Services at breaking point – the time to act is now

The number of people experiencing homelessness in Western Australia (WA) is set to soar unless additional, long-term State Government funding is secured, the community services sector has today warned.

There are more than 9,000 Western Australians without a place to call home on any given night, with homelessness services reporting an alarming increase in people sleeping rough, in urgent need of basic supports. This includes young people, women and children fleeing family and domestic violence and First Nations people.

WACOSS CEO Louise Giolitto said the lack of funding increases over recent years had left homelessness services across WA at breaking point, with the most vulnerable in our community paying the biggest price.

She said the sector held grave concerns for the sustainability of specialist homelessness services, with significant cuts in service delivery an inevitability unless funding increased to match rising costs.

“Contracts for many service providers in the community services sector funded by the State Government have been extended year-to-year, since 2013 without any increase in funding to accommodate changes in legislation,” said Ms Giolitto.

“Services are facing their eighth short term extension in June 2019, and while the legislated award for employee costs have increased by up to 45 per cent, funding has remained the same. It’s simply unsustainable.

“This will impact homelessness services particularly hard, as the nature of the service provided is intensive, seven days a week, 24 hours a day to those most vulnerable in our communities.”

Specialist homelessness services provide a critical lifeline for people experiencing homelessness. They provide the full spectrum of safety and support for people who have fallen on hard times, addressing their ill-health, or mental health issues and providing much needed respite from the lack of sleep. They enable people to start building or rebuilding their lives.

UnitingCare West CEO Amanda Hunt said a lack of new funding would without doubt lead to an increase in people experiencing homelessness across Perth.

“Currently we have more than 200 men and women visiting our Tranby Centre every day, six days a week, many of them waiting in our car park for the doors to open,” said Ms Hunt.

“As a community we need a renewed focus on connecting people experiencing homelessness to long-term supports; providing them with pathways into employment and long-term, sustainable housing.”

Michelle Mackenzie, CEO of Shelter WA, said there was already a substantial funding gap for these services due to the ongoing roll-over of contracts.

“Homelessness touches everybody. Another extension without an increase to costs will have a severe impact on many in our community,” said Ms Mackenzie. “The unfortunate reality is that

agencies may have to reduce or cut services or start fundraising for basic service provision. This will impact on people's lives."

John Bouffler, Executive Director of Community Employers WA, said it was essential the government increase investment to enable providers to at least maintain the current level of service.

"The additional costs are not material from a State budget perspective yet are critical for the homelessness service providers and the people that desperately rely on these services," Mr Bouffler said.

"Without adequate investment there will be more women, young people and children living on the streets, in their cars or couch surfing in unsafe and unsuitable accommodation," he added.

Louise Giolitto said that in 2012 the Fair Work Commission made a landmark decision that addressed the gender undervaluation of work performed in much of the community services sector.

"We cannot forget the majority of the workforce in the sector (70%) are women. If the State Government does not adequately fund homelessness services, there is a very real risk of women in our industry being paid less. We need the State Government to live up to their commitments for gender equity," Ms Giolitto said.

"The State Government is developing a new 10-year Strategy on Homelessness. This is not the time to drop the ball on investment in peoples' lives. The time to act is now."

Ends.

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Service Provider - Media Contacts

To speak with a service provider about the effect this has on people who use services, please contact:

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Fast Facts

- On any given night over 9000 Western Australians experience homelessness
- 4000 clients are supported by 185 Homelessness Services across Western Australia, including 1000 children in families that need support
- Women fleeing family and domestic violence and young people are the majority of service clients
- 57 requests for assistance are unable to be met each day at current funding levels