

10 August, 2017

Aged & Community Services Australia warns on increasing rates of aged homelessness

Aged & Community Services Australia is deeply concerned about the rising rates of homelessness amongst older Australians, particularly women, with figures suggesting the problem will become more prominent as the population ages rapidly.¹

In Homelessness Week, ACSA expresses its support for an aged care industry with a mix of providers accommodating the needs of older Australians, including those caring for older members of the community with personal histories of housing insecurity and homelessness.

“Around the country, not-for-profit aged care providers including specialist organisations like the Salvation Army, Wesley Mission, and Wintringham - Australia’s largest aged care provider for the homeless - do invaluable work providing aged care services for those disadvantaged members of the community who might otherwise have no access to housing, let alone aged care services,” said Ms. Sparrow.

“Homelessness is a complex issue with many causes and effects,” said Ms. Sparrow. “We know that many older people can find themselves at risk of homelessness through life events; the death of a spouse, a lack of affordable housing or an inability to live off the pension, for example.”

The latest Australian Institute of Health and Welfare figures suggest that around 279,000 people sought help from specialist homelessness services in 2015-16, with 18,740 of those people aged 55 or over.² The majority of those seeking help were female (59%) and over a quarter were children under 18 (28%).

Homelessness Australia this week pointed out that, of the 1,618 women aged 50 and over who sought homelessness services in 2016, there was a startling rise in the rate of “hidden homelessness” through women sleeping in cars, rooming houses, squats and couchsurfing.³

With the rapid ageing of the population in coming decades, and the number of Australians aged 75 and over expected to increase three-fold over the next twenty years, the organisation has warned the number of Australians at risk of, and experiencing, homelessness will also rise significantly.

“As the population ages at a rapid rate, it is incumbent on policymakers to ensure that aged care providers have the appropriate funding to allow them to continue doing their invaluable work providing financially

¹ Homelessness and Older People, Homelessness Australia, January 2016.

² Australian Institute of Health & Welfare, 2015-16

³ Homelessness Australia chair Jenny Smith quoted in Probono Australia, ‘Drastic Increase in Couchsurfing Amongst Older Women,’ by Lisa Caneva, Editor, Monday, 7 August, 2017.

viable residential care services to older homeless people,” said Ms. Sparrow. “Rising rates of homelessness amongst older people need to be addressed through policies that extend extra protections to those disadvantaged in the community who require access to residential and community aged care services.”

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