

MEDIA RELEASE

Homelessness can be fixed within a decade

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Australia can end homelessness within a decade if it commits to building 50,000 social and affordable homes per year, expands Commonwealth Rent Assistance to reduce rental stress, and reorients government services towards the prevention rather than symptoms of homelessness through a new 'duty to assist', according to Homelessness Australia.

The [peak body's submission to the National Housing and Homelessness Plan](#) notes that one in ten Australians will experience homelessness in their lifetime and First Nations people confront a homelessness rate almost ten times that of other Australians.

"Homelessness is a growing national crisis, the harsh brunt of which is felt by First Nations people, women, children, and those exposed to climate change," Kate Colvin, CEO of Homelessness Australia, said. "The structural failures and policy gaps, especially in housing affordability and support for vulnerable people, are pushing more people into a strained system."

The Submission recommends the Commonwealth and states should:

- Commit to end homelessness within ten years and halve it within five, developing measurable targets and indicators on levels of rent stress, exits from care and eviction rates, which are regularly and independently reviewed; including a commitment to construct 50,000 social and affordable homes per year.
- Restructure and increase Commonwealth Rent Assistance, thereby immediately halving rental stress. Eligibility for the payment should be extended to people on low wages in rental stress who are currently ineligible because they do not receive income support. Rental stress skyrocketed when special COVID measures ended.
- Strengthen mainstream services that provide support in tough times, and adopt a 'duty to assist' where public officials, such as Centrelink staff, screen for homelessness risk, activate supports and referrals, and commit that no one exits public services into homelessness.
- Closely monitor key drivers of homelessness such as family violence, child abuse and adequacy of social security.



"The homelessness system is simply not resourced to assist people in need," Kate Colvin said. "The sad reality is that 72,000 people were turned away from homelessness services in 2021-22 alone. This is a reflection of real human suffering and trauma. It is intensifying daily.

"We must pivot to preventing people from becoming homeless in the first place. The duty to assist someone at risk of homelessness must be woven through the fabric of all government services. Nobody should exit a government service into homelessness."

The Homelessness Australia submission notes that in recent years regional areas have seen a sharp increase in homelessness, outpacing rates in capital cities.

Contributing factors to homelessness include unemployment, a severe lack of low-cost housing, and lack of support when people experience crises, like family violence, child abuse, or mental ill health. The pandemic aggravated existing holes in social safety nets, especially for temporary residents, new migrants, and international students, who are ineligible for income support.

Discrimination further fuels the crisis, with reports of direct racism and LGBTQIA+ discrimination aggravating homelessness. The fallout from natural disasters due to climate change has left thousands without shelter, highlighting the urgent need for coordinated disaster planning and response.

A robust national plan can combat this crisis by addressing its root causes. "Housing stress is the fastest-growing cause of homelessness, with an astonishing 27% increase from 2018 to 2022," Kate Colvin said. "Commonwealth Rent Assistance simply hasn't kept up with the reality of a white hot rental market. Eligibility for it must be expanded beyond those who receive income support."

On current trends the 640,000 households whose housing needs are not being met is projected to surge to 940,000 by 2041. The submission recommends a pipeline of 50,000 social and affordable homes annually and enhanced support for housing costs.

Initiatives like Housing First programs demonstrate the importance of providing support alongside stable housing to resolve homelessness for people who have been homeless for a long time, but they require expansion and further support.

National initiatives like the Carefinder program have shown some success in preventing homelessness among older Australians, but would achieve more if all providers screened people for risk of homelessness.

"A national commitment is overdue," Kate Colvin said. "Homelessness is entirely solvable and Australia has all the resources and insight necessary to end it within a decade. All we lack is the political and financial commitment."