



MEDIA RELEASE

Urgent expansion of services needed for people with psychosocial disabilities at risk of homelessness

October 10 2024 is World Homelessness Day and World Mental Health Day

A shocking number of Australians with psychosocial disabilities are struggling with unmet housing and support needs, prompting calls for an urgent expansion of services.

People with psychosocial disability, cognitive impairments and complex behaviours are among the fastest-growing groups of users of homelessness services. Major reviews indicate there are more than 100,000 people with psychosocial disability (8 per cent of NDIS participants) who have unmet housing or support needs. Meanwhile there are more than 20,000 people with multiple and complex needs experiencing persistent homelessness.

Of the 300,000 Australians with 'persistent severe and complex psychosocial disabilities', more than 31,000 are at risk of homelessness and have an unmet need for long-term housing. More than 2,000 are stuck in institutional care due to a lack of other options, while many are living in "unsuitable accommodation".

"These individuals are disproportionately facing housing challenges, and are among the most vulnerable people in the community," CEO of Homelessness Australia Kate Colvin said.

"Everyday, they face unsafe and exploitative living arrangements and homelessness, while being at risk of becoming repeat, long-term users of homelessness services due to a lack of appropriate solutions."

These challenges lead vulnerable people to cycle between chronic homelessness, crisis accommodation, health and acute mental health services, correctional facilities and exploitative institutional-style settings. While this has tragic consequences for individuals and their families, it also impacts public health and safety.



On World Homelessness Day and World Mental Health Day, Homelessness Australia is calling for urgent action to expand safe and stable housing with support services for these vulnerable people.

The call comes as part of a push to implement proven models such as **Housing First**, which combines stable housing with support services to help vulnerable people remain safe and reduce reliance on public services.

Despite having a positive impact, these models remain underdeveloped across Australia. Every recent major Australian review into homelessness, mental health and disability has called for the expansion of housing to prevent chronic and repeat homelessness.

Homelessness Australia has indicated immediate opportunities to address the crisis. Key recommendations include:

- Expand Housing First programs through a national agreement to provide long-term housing and support for people with complex needs.
- Embed homelessness support within mental health units, institutional and correctional settings to prevent discharges into homelessness.
- Expand mental health expertise within Specialist Homelessness Services to better respond to people with psychosocial disabilities.
- Reform the NDIS to rapidly expand recovery-focused housing models and establish a national program to assist with tenancy sustainment for people with psychosocial disability.
- Develop a Targeted Action Plan on Homelessness and Housing under the Australian Disability Strategy linked with the upcoming National Homelessness and Housing Plan.
- Remove barriers to aged care for those who have experienced homelessness and are prematurely ageing.

“Without safe and supportive housing, people with psychosocial disabilities face tragic and preventable consequences such as repeated homelessness and interaction with correctional facilities,” Kate Colvin said.

“It is concerning that a country like Australia has hundreds of thousands of people with psychosocial disabilities without a safe space to live. This country has the capacity and now it is time to urgently address this crisis and invest in housing that promotes recovery and wellbeing, helping people rebuild their lives.”