

MEDIA RELEASE

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Council Welcomes Funding Future for Homelessness Agreement

The Western Australian Council of Social Service (WACOSS) welcomes the Federal Government announcement today to commit two years of funding for homelessness while the future of the National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness (NPAH) is reviewed.

“The uncertainty that had continued up until today’s announcement by Minister Morrison has meant many homeless services have been unable to take on any new clients, or plan for future support of their current clients, leaving many vulnerable people in a state of anxiety,” said WACOSS CEO Irina Cattalini.

“We were very concerned that the Federal Government’s decision to cut its housing and homelessness grants by \$20million last year, and the delay in announcing any commitment to NPAH funding was a backwards step at a time where demand for housing assistance and homelessness services to many of the most vulnerable members of our community continues to increase.” Ms Cattalini said.

“Today’s announcement, coupled with an ongoing commitment from the State Government to match the Federal funding, will bring welcome relief not only to the people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness, but also to the community service organisations providing them care and support.”

“Minister Morrison recognised that domestic violence is a leading cause of homelessness, and signalled his intent to focus future support under the NPAH on women and children affected by family and domestic violence.”

“This will be a necessary and important focus, but it will be important not to neglect other affected groups, particularly young people, those sleeping rough, or living in overcrowded dwellings. We are particularly concerned about the growing incidence of homeless families with children and the need for services to have the capacity to provide a holistic response for families.”

“It is also critical for Governments to address the policy and tax settings which contribute to the causes of homelessness by failing to deliver adequate levels of affordable housing. The experience of housing stress in WA is still being felt by people living on low incomes who have not felt any benefit from recent easing in the housing market.”

“Finally, the future of the National Partnership Agreement on homelessness must provide longer term security, through both funding certainty and clear targets of the outcomes expected through the Agreement.”

“We must continue to invest in social and affordable housing and provide funding certainty for community organisations and most importantly the people who need housing and homeless services” Ms Cattalini said.

See attached Fact File on Homelessness in WA.

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Fact File on Homelessness in WA

- In WA, 9,595 people are experiencing homelessness on any given night. Of these,
 - 25% are children;
 - 34% are experiencing homelessness due to domestic violence or family breakdown
 - 28% are homeless because they cannot afford suitable, safe accommodation.
- The Department of Child Protection and Family Support is responsible for the implementation of the National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness in WA.
 - It worked with the community services sector to design and deliver 20 programs state wide through 71 not-for-profit community service organisations.
- Our homeless services operate at full capacity, to the extent that in 2012-13, WA services were unable to meet 17,000 requests for assistance.
- The NPAH has allowed specialist homelessness service providers to support thousands of people in need.
 - In 2012-2013, homelessness services in WA assisted 21,409 people.
 - In 2012-2013, service providers found accommodation for 74% of the people who required it and assisted 87% of the people needing help to sustain their housing tenure.
- These are huge successes. By keeping people housed – or helping them find housing quickly – it helps stabilise families and prevents the compounding disadvantage that comes from repeated or prolonged periods of homelessness.
- The Department of Housing's social housing waitlist in WA has increased more than 80% in the last decade.
 - There are 20,294 applicants or 43,070 people on the social housing waitlist, with each applicant waiting, on average, 144 weeks or 1,007 days.
- The Report on Government Services (ROGS) released in January 2015 showed that the proportion of Australians spending more than a third of their income on rent has jumped sharply despite billions of dollars being spent on housing support.
 - Nationally, the proportion of all low-income households in rental stress rose to 40.7 per cent from 35.4 per cent in 2007-08.
 - The proportion of people experiencing repeat periods of homelessness grew to 5 per cent nationally in 2013-14, up from 4.3 per cent in 2012-13.