

MEDIA RELEASE

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BUCKING THE TREND - NO CHRISTMAS JOY FOR NT HOMELESS AS NUMBERS RISE AGAIN

More and more people are seeking support from specialist homelessness services in the NT, while fewer people over the past 12 months have been supported into housing, says affordable housing and homelessness peak body NT Shelter.

Executive Officer at NT Shelter, Peter McMillan, said he was dismayed to see a further 3.4% increase in the number of Territorians seeking support, compared to a 0.4% rise elsewhere. The number of people unable to be assisted rose from 45.3% to 48.7% for the same period.

Increased demand in the NT accounted for 21% of the total national rise in numbers of people seeking assistance, further highlighting the disproportionate and growing burden of homelessness in the Territory compared to the rest of Australia.

“We have now seen a 17% rise in demand over the past 3 years for essential services that support homeless people, or those at risk of homelessness, one in every two of whom are experiencing domestic and family violence. We are unable to help almost half of the people in need because we don’t have enough housing and we don’t have enough specialist support”, said Mr McMillan.

The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW)’s 2019 Annual Report reveals that more people in the Northern Territory that presented for services were already homeless compared to the previous year (36% compared to 32%). Of real concern, the number of Territorians assisted into housing declined from 34% in 2017-18 to 25% in 2018-19.

Mr McMillan said that the latest figures were a stark reflection of the chronic underfunding for NT housing and homelessness services and clearly demonstrated that more needed to be urgently done to support those whose housing situation is unstable.

“The evidence is clear. Where support services are provided to persons at risk of becoming homeless, a tenancy can be maintained in 9 cases out of 10. This proves the value of these services and shows why it is so important that we get help to those who need it, or our homelessness situation will continue to worsen as we are seeing right now”, Mr McMillan said.

Under the National Housing and Homelessness Agreement (NHHA), Commonwealth Government funding provided to state and territory governments for affordable housing and

homelessness services is distributed according to share of population. While Western Australia receives approximately \$157.3 million for an estimated homeless population of 9,004 persons, the Northern Territory, with 52% more people experiencing homelessness (13,727), receives \$19 million under the deal - a meagre 12% of WA's funding.

The NT Government has committed in its recently released housing strategy to advocate for funding aligned to the high levels and complex nature of needs in the Territory.

"More than ever, we need the NT Government to actively prosecute the case at every opportunity for more funding from Canberra as \$19 million out of \$1.4 billion, or 1.3% of the total amount, is ridiculously out of whack with what is needed. The outdated, nonsensical funding method is failing a growing number of Territorians", Mr McMillan said.

Other trends outlined in the AIHW report showed that Aboriginal people represented an increasing proportion of total clients, up 5.4%. Young people presenting alone were also an increasingly vulnerable group, with a 24% rise in the number of clients.

"Aboriginal persons are already well and truly over-represented in the homelessness system and yet the proportion continues to rise even further, not decline. We are also alarmed at the huge rise in the proportion of young people in need of assistance. This is bucking the national trend where we're seeing a slight decline. More needs to be done to ensure that young people get the help they need with housing and other supports", said Mr McMillan.

NT Shelter's Pre-Budget submission, released today, provides the Northern Territory Government with 9 key priorities for the 2020-21 year for housing and homelessness services.

"The latest AIHW data shows that we have a huge mountain to climb to end homelessness, with the challenge increasing with each passing year. More than ever, we need to put in place solutions that will result in more social and affordable housing supply and address the overwhelmingly disproportionate homelessness challenges that we currently face here in the NT", said Mr McMillan.

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Enclosed: NT Shelter Pre-Budget Submission 2020-21
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NT Shelter is a not-for-profit organisation that works towards a just and fairer housing system in the NT. We aim to ensure appropriate and affordable housing is available for everyone, especially disadvantaged groups and those on low incomes.