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Homelessness Week: YiSSA highlights the need for a stronger housing system

As Homelessness Week 2026 begins, peak bodies NT Shelter and Aboriginal Housing NT are calling on governments and the community to turn awareness into action by investing in the housing solutions needed to prevent and end homelessness in the Northern Territory.

This year's Homelessness Week theme, Homelessness Action Now, comes at a defining moment for the Territory. The proposed closure of YiSSA Short-Stay Accommodation in Marrara, has brought unprecedented public attention to homelessness and highlighted the pressures facing systems already struggling to meet demand.

Homelessness is not inevitable. Awareness alone will not end homelessness. The solutions exist, but they require commitment and investment. This Homelessness Week, we call for bold action at the scale needed to ensure everyone has a safe place to call home

The Northern Territory experiences the highest rates of homelessness in the country, with one in 25 Territorians accessing a homelessness service last year. A shortage of housing that Territorians can afford and a tight rental market is leaving more people - locals and those wanting to call the NT home - unable to secure housing. This makes it harder for employers to attract and retain workers and places additional demand on homelessness services and other essential systems.

NT Shelter CEO, Annie Taylor, said that while YiSSA has brought homelessness into the public conversation, the issues extend beyond this key service.

"Homelessness is the result of a housing system that has fallen behind the needs of Territorians, and it has been building for decades in the Northern Territory. YiSSA has brought that reality into the public conversation."

Aboriginal Housing NT CEO, Leeanne Caton, said Homelessness Week was an opportunity to focus not only on responding to homelessness, but on preventing it.

"Aboriginal people experience homelessness at disproportionately high rates. Prevention starts long before someone walks through the door of an urban homelessness service. It starts by ensuring Aboriginal communities have enough safe, appropriate housing so people don't have to leave home in the first place."

YiSSA is operated by Yilli Housing Aboriginal Corporation with Mission Australia providing on-site support services. It currently accommodates almost 400 people, with another 300 on the waitlist. During the wet season, the service expands to accommodate an additional 200 people, providing protection from severe weather and reducing the health risks associated with rough sleeping, including exposure to wet weather illnesses such as melioidosis and pneumonia.

Yilli Housing Aboriginal Corporation CEO, Yvette Park, said the attention on YiSSA should be a catalyst for lasting change.

“The closure of YiSSA will have a widespread impact on services across Darwin. We’ve heard the warnings from the Australian Medical Association NT and Menzies School of Health Research; everyone is concerned that if we lose 200 beds from accommodation services so quickly, it will impact the Territory’s health services, our homelessness system, policing, alcohol and other drug services, the rental market, public housing the list goes on.”

Mission Australia Executive General Manager, Community Services, Sue Budalich said the priority remained supporting people through the transition.

“Above all, this is about people. Residents at YiSSA are living with profound uncertainty about where they will go next, while our staff continue to support families with compassion and professionalism despite facing uncertainty themselves. Our priority remains ensuring every resident has a safe and appropriate pathway forward.”

The organisations acknowledged the Northern Territory Government’s commitment that no one will become homeless as a result of the service’s closure.

They said the transition highlighted the complexity of responding to homelessness during a housing crisis, where services and Government are working together in an environment of limited housing supply and growing demand.

Ms Taylor said that complexity also pointed towards a solution.

"Building a stronger homelessness system that has the resilience to withstand service closures means investing in enough housing to meet the NT’s needs. If we learn from the challenges of Homelessness Week 2026 and invest in housing solutions, we will reduce homelessness and build a healthier, safer and more resilient Northern Territory."

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