



MEDIA RELEASE

29 July 2020

BUSINESS, LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND COMMUNITY SECTOR JOIN FORCES ON A SHORT STAY ACCOMMODATION COMMITMENT FOR KATHERINE

Nineteen of Katherine's leading business, local government and community sector organisations have joined forces, calling for the development of short stay accommodation in Katherine.

Signatories to a joint statement released today and to be put to candidates in the August 2020 NT election include Kalano Community Association, Katherine Town Council, Chamber of Commerce Northern Territory, the Australian Medical Association (NT), Wurli-Wurlinjang Health Service, Binjari Community Aboriginal Corporation, Aboriginal Housing NT (AHNT), Anglicare NT, Banatjarl Strongbala Wimun Grup, CatholicCare NT, Jesuit Social Services, Katherine Women's Crisis Centre, Mission Australia, Northern Australian Aboriginal Justice Agency (NAAJA), The Salvation Army, Save the Children, Somerville Community Services, TeamHealth, and NT Shelter.

Short stay visitor accommodation is vital in providing a safe, affordable and appropriate place to stay for those visiting town to access health services, or for cultural, sporting or family reasons. Katherine is the only major regional centre in the NT where such a facility does not already exist or previously been committed to.

Dr Robert Parker, President of Australian Medical Association (NT), said people travelling to Katherine for medical treatment should not have to sleep by the riverbed.

"Frequent attendees at the Katherine Hospital emergency department are 16 times more likely to be homeless than not. The lack of appropriate short stay accommodation in Katherine results in increased pressure on the hospital and exorbitant cost to the public health system, preventable if people are housed," Dr Robert Parker, President of AMA NT said.

With extremely high levels of homelessness in Katherine (31 times the national average), a chronic shortage of social and affordable housing, high rates of house crowding, and no appropriate visitor accommodation, the joint statement is calling for immediate action.

"With a service footprint the size of Tasmania and Victoria combined, Katherine is a major regional hub, yet it does not have short stay accommodation infrastructure in place needed to cater for Aboriginal visitors coming to town from outlying communities," Mayor of Katherine Fay Miller said. "We need a commitment from an incoming Northern Territory Government to step in and ensure Territorians coming to or residing in the Katherine region have access to the same services on offer as Darwin, Alice Springs and Tennant Creek."



Bill Headley CEO of Kalano Community Association said “The people of the Katherine Big Rivers region require a culturally appropriate, safe, and affordable place to stay when coming to town. We are calling on all parties to work with local organisations to put this right once and for all. Short Stay accommodation will go a long way towards helping the whole Big Rivers community.”

A survey conducted in early 2020 by management at the Salvation Army’s Katherine Doorways Hub revealed that 94% of people who had come into Katherine for a medical appointment were sleeping rough due to a lack of viable short-stay accommodation options in town. In a recent submission to the Parliamentary Inquiry into Homelessness, the Northern Territory Government acknowledged that “Medical patients should under no circumstance find themselves needing to sleep rough.”

NT Shelter Executive Officer Peter McMillan said it was rare for such a wide and prominent range of community, government and business leaders to come together with a clear call for what was needed, and sent a very powerful message to parties contesting the Election.

“We have a clear and consistent view on what is needed for Katherine. It makes good economic sense to provide safe and secure visitor accommodation for people coming to town. But most importantly, it is the decent thing to do.”

For more details on the campaign visit: www.ntshelter.org.au/katherine-needs-short-stay-accommodation

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Attached: Joint Statement signed by 19 organisations: *Katherine has been overlooked on short-stay visitor accommodation – it is time to put this right*