

Urgent plea on housing

NATASHA EMECK



NT Shelter's Peter McMillan.

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Scott Morrison.

Virus study shows alarming homelessness scourge among NT women

A WHOPPING 33 per cent of Territorian women have experienced homelessness or know someone who has, according to a new study.

The findings are part of a new national study commissioned by The Body Shop to examine the extent of female homelessness during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The research found 22 per cent of women in the Territory have experienced domestic/ family violence or know someone who has, while 44 per cent believe homelessness will never happen to them.

The NT has 12 times the national average rate of homelessness, with about 13,000 people experiencing homelessness on any given night.

NT Shelter chief executive Peter McMillan said they had watched the rate of homelessness in the NT rise by 25 cent since 2014, and they were expecting those numbers to increase further due to the pressures of COVID-19.

"There's been rising unmet demand for housing assistance," he said.

"This year, we've seen a lot of pressure on the system as more people can't make rent and find themselves in hard times. We've seen many people that had never approached non-government organisations for support before asking for help.

"Sadly, due to the lack of public housing availability, people who need a home in Darwin could be facing an eight-year wait."

The 2020-21 budget, released yesterday, included \$199m for housing, including \$49m for housing and homelessness services and \$109m for urban public and affordable housing.

Mr McMillan said the government missed an opportunity to ramp up social housing construction to help boost the Territory's economy after COVID-19.

"We've been told there's been no reduction for services, but ultimately I think this budget was a missed opportunity," he said.

“They also didn’t have funding for a Katherine short stay accommodation centre we have estimated will cost about \$5m.

“The community has been desperately pushing for this.”

The Katherine community has 31 times the national rate of homelessness.

The recent AIHW Specialist Homelessness Services annual report showed most people needing help across the NT were Indigenous, most were women – and even more alarmingly, one in six were under the age of 10.