Why Homelessness is a Problem

Homelessness is a serious problem in Tasmania that affects people of all ages.

For many people homelessness is temporary, until they are able to recover and stabilise their situation. For others, homelessness can be longer term and difficult to break out of.

Homelessness doesn’t just cost individuals, it costs society as well. Studies have shown that for every $1 spent on housing a homeless person, governments can save between $2 - $13 in health and justice costs alone.¹

Having a secure and affordable home is a most basic human need and a human right. It also makes good economic sense.

About homelessness in Tasmania

Homelessness has been increasing across the State for over a decade. Census 2016 showed:²

- 1,622 Tasmanians are homeless. Over half are in the south, mainly in Hobart (57%).
- More males than females experience homelessness (58% males, 42% females).
- Most homelessness is hidden. Only 8% of homeless people sleep rough (137 people).
- Nearly 4 in 10 homeless people are younger than 25 years (38%). Of these, 48% couch surf or live with severe overcrowding, and 44% stay in supported accommodation.
- Nearly 2 in 10 homeless people are older than 55 years (18%).
- 1 in 10 homeless people are Indigenous (10.7%).
What causes homelessness?

Homelessness has many causes, which can include a lack of affordable housing; loss of employment; family breakdown and domestic violence; transition from care or custody; mental health issues; and substance abuse.

More than 120,000 Tasmanians live below the poverty line. As housing costs rise, it is increasingly difficult for low income Tasmanians to find a home they can afford. Lack of affordable housing is the most common reason for people seeking help from homelessness services (64% of all requests).

As well as being a major cause of homelessness, the lack of affordable housing keeps people in homelessness for longer. More people are also experiencing repeated episodes of homelessness, with returning clients now outnumbering new clients. Extended and repeated homelessness increases the support needs of clients.

Homelessness disproportionately affects young people and children, who now represent 52% of all homelessness services clients. A real concern is that children who experience homelessness have an increased risk of becoming homeless later in life.

Homelessness services in Tasmania

- Homelessness services assisted 6,508 Tasmanians in 2017/18
- Services are unable to keep pace with growing demand. The average number of daily unmet requests for assistance in the last year has increased to 28 unmet requests (an increase of 33% over the previous 2 years)
- 70% of unmet requests are from women
- 43% of requests for help are from families with children
- On average each day 16 requests from families with children go unmet (a 14% increase on the previous year)
- Young people and children are the fastest growing cohort of homeless people:
  - 2 in 5 requests for help are from young people under 25 years
  - 1 in 10 requests involve children under 10 years (12%)
- Tasmania makes up 12% of all unmet requests for homelessness services in Australia, despite only having 2.2% of Australia’s population.

Homelessness Support Services

A network of Specialist Homelessness Services (SHS) across Tasmania help house and support people who are at risk of or experiencing homelessness.

Highly skilled and experienced staff deliver effective and professional support to enable people to find housing and accommodation, including emergency and supervised accommodation. Services also assist people with issues of domestic violence, substance abuse and mental illness.

SHS services also provide information and advice, advocacy and financial supports. Some people receive assistance to maintain their existing tenancies, and to establish themselves in independent living.

Housing Connect is the first point of contact for help by people in housing stress, or who are experiencing homelessness or at risk of homelessness in Tasmania. Phone 1800 800 588.
Housing Ends Homelessness

Homelessness can be ended by an adequate supply of appropriate, affordable and secure housing, along with the support needed to help people stay housed.

Action from all levels of government - local, state and national - is needed, including:

- An increased supply of public and community housing to provide rental housing that will remain affordable in the long term.
- Increased investment in Tasmanian homelessness and crisis accommodation support.
- A strategic approach that integrates forward planning for housing with the other key government portfolio areas (including population growth, land use planning and economic development), in collaboration with the community and development sectors.
- Strengthening and broadening of Tasmania’s Affordable Housing Strategy.
- A National Housing Plan to increase the supply of targeted affordable housing and social housing.

Further information is available at www.sheltertas.org.au

NOTES

2 Homelessness Estimates, Census 2001-2016
3 TasCOSS 2018.
5 AIHW Specialist Homelessness Services Collection Data 2013/14-2017/18

Housing is a Human Right

Shelter Tas Fact Sheet – Homelessness in Tasmania v5 - www.sheltertas.org.au