



Homelessness Week 1-7 August 2022

It's time to end homelessness in Tasmania

Too many Tasmanians are facing the cold realities of housing hardship and homelessness this winter.

The first week in August each year is national Homelessness Week, which aims to raise awareness of people experiencing homelessness and end it for good. This is more than just another week on the calendar, as we know that people are living with housing hardship and homelessness every day of the year. Homelessness Week 2022 highlights the work that homelessness and housing services do every day to assist Tasmanians who are doing it really tough.

Tasmania's rental crisis means more Tasmanians are at risk of homelessness. The last ABS Census in 2016 counted more than 1 600 Tasmanians who were living without a home. When the data from Census 2021 is released later this year, we expect to see this number increase significantly.

Tasmania's critical shortage of affordable rental homes is the number one cause of homelessness. Over 50 Specialist Homelessness Services work state-wide to support those experiencing or at risk of homelessness to find safe and secure homes, assisting 6 600 people last year alone. Over 13 000 households live in social housing, supported by not-for-profit Community Housing Providers and Communities Tas, and there are now over 4 000 households on Tasmania's social housing waiting list.

Both the Tasmanian theme for Homelessness Week 2022 – *Housing Ends Homelessness* – and the national theme – *To end homelessness we need a plan* – make it clear that homelessness is only solved when we all have a secure home that we can afford.

This year, Homelessness Week includes a wide range of activities and events, including purple lights – the colour of homelessness awareness – for the first time. Public buildings in Hobart, Launceston, Devonport and Ulverstone will be illuminated purple all week. There are digital and live events including films, breakfasts, walks and exhibitions where people can learn more about homelessness in the community, and hear the stories of people with lived experience of homelessness. View the full events calendar on the Homelessness Week 2022 page at www.sheltertass.org.au.

Shelter Tas encourages the whole community to appreciate the vital role of social housing to keep people safely housed and reduce homelessness. We need to reverse the attitude of NIMBY (Not in My Backyard) which sets barriers to building new social homes, and say 'Yes, in My Backyard' (YIMBY) across all neighbourhoods - because everyone needs a home.

For women and children, family violence is a major cause of homelessness, and the reason for one third of requests to Specialist Homelessness Services. Tasmania's current private rental market offers very few affordable and secure options for women and children who need to leave a violent situation.

For many Tasmanians, an experience of homelessness is temporary and they are able to quickly stabilise their situation. For others, finding and maintaining a safe and affordable home is extremely difficult, and

homelessness lasts much too long; often due to factors outside a person's control, such as lack of rental homes at a price they can afford. Most homelessness is hidden from view, with less than one in ten sleeping rough – more often people face temporary (couch surfing), precarious and unsafe conditions.

Even a short experience of homelessness can cause anxiety, depression, feelings of shame and failure with profound and lasting impact. It is harder to stay healthy, maintain education or employment when forced to live without a kitchen, bathroom or access to internet and power - basic facilities that many of us can take for granted.

Tasmania's homelessness statistics are chilling. One in 82 people in Tasmania received assistance from homelessness services last year. This is higher than the national rate of one in 92. In Tasmania, nearly half (48%) gave their reason for seeking assistance as 'housing crisis', compared with 34% nationally. Each day last year, 46 requests for help to Tasmanian Specialist Homelessness Services went unassisted, mainly because no suitable accommodation could be found. This is an increase from 36 unassisted requests last year.

Shelter Tas and our members welcome the state government's commitment to build 10,000 social and affordable homes over the next ten years. It makes good social and economic sense, as data shows it costs more to leave people without the homes they need. Shelter Tas calls for a boost to construction until we reach a level of 10% of all dwellings as social housing, an increase from the current level of 6%. Safe, secure, appropriate and affordable housing for people on low incomes has a high social return on investment – but we are not only investing in housing, we are investing in community.

The latest ABS data shows that Tasmanian incomes are the lowest of all states and territories (Tasmanian median weekly income is \$701, while the Australian median income is \$805) but our rents are higher than in Melbourne. The Ministerial Reference Group on Housing which met for the first time in July 2022 is a good start to reversing the negative trends of housing stress and homelessness in Tasmania.

Shelter Tas would like to thank and acknowledge our member organisations, Specialist Homelessness Services, not-for-profit Community Housing Providers and all those who work towards ending homelessness. Even more importantly, we acknowledge all our fellow Tasmanians who have experienced, or who are currently experiencing homelessness, housing stress and housing insecurity.

Right now is the perfect opportunity to plan for homes for everyone and reverse the trend of increasing homelessness in Tasmania, because *housing ends homelessness!*

For housing assistance, please call Housing Connect on 1800 800 588.

For more about Homelessness Week 2022, please see www.shelertas.org.au

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Peak Body for Housing and Homelessness