

Census data shows dramatic rise in homelessness in Tasmania

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Shelter Tas, Tasmania's peak body for housing and homelessness, is deeply concerned by new Census data released today, showing a dramatic rise in the number of Tasmanians who were counted as being homeless at the 2021 Census.

"Census data provides vital five-yearly evidence of the state of homelessness, nationally and in Tasmania. With the release of this data, we see powerful evidence of the poor health of our housing system – a system that is failing too many Tasmanians," Shelter Tas CEO, Pattie Chugg said.

According to today's ABS figures, at the 2021 Census a total of 2 350 people in Tasmania were homeless, up from 1 622 in 2016. That's an additional 728 Tasmanians experiencing homelessness, with the total going up 44.8% in the five years since 2016.

"From having the lowest rate of homelessness of all States and Territories in previous Census years, Tasmania now has the fourth highest rate of people experiencing homelessness, at 42.1 per 10 000. This shocking trend is going in the wrong direction," Ms Chugg said.

In NSW, Queensland, and the ACT, the rate of people experiencing homelessness has decreased, but in Tasmania it has risen by 31% in the five years since 2016.

"This news is not surprising, but deeply concerning for all those Tasmanians facing housing stress and experiencing homelessness. With rising rents and cost of living pressures, more and more Tasmanians know someone who is finding it hard to get the home they need, or are living with housing hardship themselves.

"Troublingly, the homelessness data released today shows that 569 young Tasmanians aged 18 and under were without a home on Census night, and of these, 325 were children aged under 12 years old," Ms Chugg said.

Tasmania's housing and homelessness sector supports over 7 000 people per year, but on any given day, 42 requests for help go unassisted, and one third of requests involve family or domestic violence. Most times, requests for help are unassisted because people need accommodation and it simply can't be found.

"Housing and homelessness services who work day to day with people on low incomes across Tasmania report unprecedented hardship for people searching for an affordable home. The lack of affordable housing puts people at increased risk of housing stress, and in the worst cases, when people cannot find an affordable home to rent, they will end up homeless.

“Throughout Tasmania’s unaffordable private rental market, more and more people are being forced into overcrowded dwellings, with families doubling up in conditions that put their health and safety at risk. The Tasmanian Census data now shows that there are 709 people living in severely overcrowded conditions, up from 267 just five years ago. This makes the need to deliver an adequate level of social homes for Tasmanians even more urgent.

“Today’s data confirms the expanding affordability gap between people’s incomes and the cost of renting in Tasmania. The Rental Affordability Index report released last November, shows that Hobart is still the least affordable capital in Australia for renters,” Ms Chugg said.

Since 2016, the median cost of renting in Hobart has grown by 60%, and is now 11% higher than the median rent in Melbourne. However, the average rental household in Hobart earns less than the average rental income in Melbourne, and overall, average ordinary time earnings for Tasmanians are \$221.30 per week less than the national average.

“There is a deeply embedded problem with the housing system, as the private rental market does not deliver homes at rents people can afford, and we do not have enough social housing for people priced out of that market, people living with homelessness and people in need. Social housing provides affordable rent and the security people need to live well in a long-term home.

“Shelter Tas calls for 10% of Tasmanian dwellings to be affordable social rentals, and this can be achieved by the Commonwealth and State Governments working together to address this urgent crisis,” Ms Chugg said.

Shelter Tas supports the call for a National Strategy and approach, but we also need immediate action and funding to deliver homes while these negotiations are underway.

“Right now, the Commonwealth Minister for Housing, the Hon Julie Collins MP is refusing to fund fair pay for workers in the homelessness sector. Removing the Federal share of Equal Remuneration Order (ERO) payments, will mean a funding cut of \$68M nationally, and \$2M for Tasmania’s workers from July 2023. This decision needs to be reversed immediately. In a housing crisis, these workers need to be adequately funded for the essential work they do to support Tasmanians in need.

“Shelter Tas supports the State Government’s commitment to build 1 000 new homes a year for ten years, and calls on the Federal Government to match this commitment. This new data reveals a deeply embedded problem affecting our whole community. Urgent action is needed to reverse the worsening homelessness trends revealed by the Census. It is a wake-up call that we need to act now to reduce the number of Tasmanians experiencing homelessness, and ensure safe and secure homes for all, “Ms Chugg said.

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