



**MEDIA RELEASE:**

**For immediate release**

**19 July 2016**

**Preventing youth homelessness could save \$626M annually, but how?**

This burning question will top the agenda at the annual Homelessness Forum presented by The Northern Rivers Housing Forum in Lennox Head this Thursday 21 July.

In his keynote address, Associate Professor David McKenzie from Swinburne University will outline the results from a recent study that determined the real, often overlooked, economic costs of youth homelessness in Australia.

“Homelessness is a issue all over Australia and particularly in regional areas, where it is a challenge we have not yet met” says Mackenzie. “What we didn’t know before this study is the huge cost to the Australian economy – currently \$626 million – of young homeless people accessing health and youth justice services.

“The astounding thing is this figure is more than the amount we spend on youth homelessness services” he continued. “We need to invest in early intervention, focusing on families and young people. Young people need to be pulled out of homelessness quickly, for example through affordable housing, which is a big issue in regional areas and requires investment, but that expenditure will be far outweighed by the potential savings to the community and the economy.”

Representatives from homelessness service providers, local government, research and academic institutions will gather at the forum to take an in-depth look at homelessness our region, including current statistics, policies and government priority areas.

“Chronic homelessness and housing affordability are significant issues for the Northern Rivers and more can be done to address them” says Forum Convenor, Trish Evans. “Events like these which bring together service providers, people who have been homeless, planners, researchers and government organisations are key to finding solutions that will work.

“The forum will be interactive and feature a Q & A Panel made up of the key providers of homelessness services in the region so that participants can actively contribute to the conversation.”

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Also on the program Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) Census Homeless Enumeration Manager, Gemma Luckett will be ensuring local ABS Census workers understand issues of local homelessness from local services to capture accurate data at the 9 August Census. Mission Australia's Head of Policy and Advocacy, Marion Bennett will look at National Homelessness Policy & Funding post the Federal Election and Nel Pickette from the Department of Family & Community Services (FACS) will close the forum with an examination of the NSW Homelessness Strategy and the Premier's Youth Homelessness Priorities.

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#### **Notes to editors**

1. **The Northern Rivers Housing Forum** was established to highlight housing issues and needs and determine innovative and sustainable approaches to address these issues across the region. The forum has representation from across the Northern Rivers region encompassing the interests of business, government, non-government and the broader community.
2. **Northern Rivers Social Development Council** (NRSDC) is a community-based not-for-profit organisation that promotes fairness and social inclusion in the Northern Rivers region of NSW. It is the lead contact point for the Northern Rivers Housing Forum.
3. Access the Swinburne research here: <http://www.swinburne.edu.au/news/latest-news/2016/04/the-cost-of-youth-homelessness-in-australia-.php>
4. Associate Professor David McKenzie Swinburne University is available for interview. Please contact him directly on 0412 104 873.
5. Trish Evans, Director Development & Innovation, Northern Rivers Social Development Council and Homelessness Forum Convenor, can provide a local angle on homelessness in the Northern Rivers Region. Trish is available for interview – please contact her directly on 0447 212245.