

3 August 2020

**Homelessness Week: Social housing an opportunity to reduce homelessness and strengthen the economy.**

As Australia enters what is likely to be a prolonged economic recession caused by the global coronavirus pandemic, there has never been a more important time to reap the economic and social benefits of investing in new social housing according to the CEO of Social Futures, Tony Davies.

“We know the government is looking for ways to maintain employment and stimulate the country’s recovery,” said Davies. “Investing in our social housing stock will both reduce demand on government and social services in the long run and give an immediate boost to employment and the economy, especially in regional areas.”

A lack of social housing is a significant and growing problem in Australia. According to the [Everybody’s Home campaign](#) in 2016 more than 120,000 people were experiencing homelessness in Australia. In NSW, the waiting time for social housing for many applicants is often longer than 10 years.

**Strategies for improvement**

In recent submissions to the [NSW Housing Strategy and Commonwealth Parliamentary inquiry into Homelessness](#), Social Futures made several recommendations to reduce waiting lists for social housing and improve the wellbeing of people living with insecure housing arrangements. These included:

- Significant public investment in housing supply to produce a minimum of 5,000 new social housing dwellings in NSW every year for the next 10 years.
- Better targeting of resources to increase social and affordable housing stock to the areas most in need including often neglected regional areas.
- Making better use of government land in areas close to transport, education, employment and services to prioritise residential development that meets the needs of local communities.

The submissions also included recommendations around supporting Community Housing Providers and ensuring our housing stock is designed with people with disabilities and our ageing population in mind.

According to the most recent census data, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people experience homelessness at more than seven times the rate of the total Australian population. Social Futures also recommended governments include this reality in its planning and allocation of resources.

“There is increasing evidence that private property and rental markets do not work effectively for many in our community. Bottom line, there needs to be significant investment from government in our housing supply if we are going to see meaningful reductions in homelessness and housing stress,” said Davies.



Social Futures is the business name of the Northern Rivers Social Development Council, Ltd. ACN: 612 367 192

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**Homelessness in Northern NSW.**

While much of the national conversation remains focused on housing prices and rough sleepers in Sydney and other metropolitan areas, data shows homelessness is an issue throughout regional Australia with tourism focussed coastal areas like the Northern Rivers region facing chronic housing stress.

With only 4 per cent of the NSW population, the region recorded 18.7 per cent of the State's rough sleepers on Census night in 2016 (up from 18.4 per cent in 2011). Interactive '[heat maps](#)' provided by the Everybody's Home campaign show there were 800 homeless people in both the Richmond and Page federal electorates and a total of 8300 with social housing needs, according to the most recent data.

The region is characterised by relatively low incomes, lack of employment opportunities, high welfare dependency, significant pockets of social disadvantage, limited stocks of affordable housing (especially in the coastal areas) and a lack of regular public transport. The Richmond Federal Electorate was ranked third highest across the whole of Australia for rental stress at 43 per cent (7,390 households).

ENDS

**Note to editors:**

Social Futures is a community service organisation based in Northern NSW. We have more than 40 years' experience as a regional leader, advocating with the communities we work in; working in partnership with others; and providing services that promote inclusion, fairness and social justice. Our work encompasses homelessness and housing supports, youth and family services, programs that promote genuine participation for people with disability, community sector support, professional development, and systemic advocacy.



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