

## Overview

Homelessness NSW is a peak not for profit organisation that works with its 120 members to prevent and reduce homelessness across NSW. Our members include small, locally based community organisations, multiservice agencies with a regional reach and large State-wide service providers.

Homelessness NSW welcomes the statement from the Australian Government that is committed to working in partnership with State and Territory Governments and non-government service providers to ensure that all Australians can access timely, affordable and high quality human services, which are appropriate to their needs, and are delivered in a cost-effective manner.

Despite all the efforts of government, non-government organisations and others all the indicators are that homelessness is increasing, and increasing rapidly. This is despite the fact that the lack data is a makes measuring homelessness problematic.

In 2011 Census homelessness in NSW was 28,000. This was a 20% increase since the 2006 census, and nationally the Census is the best data we have, despite his it is only available once every five years.

For a number of years, the City of Sydney has conducted a bi-annual street count. In February 2016 the number of rough sleepers in the City of Sydney was 486. Not only was this the highest number since the count began, it was also a 20% increase from 2015. This was at a time when the shelters in Sydney were 98% full. In other words, there was no possibility of the rough sleepers being housed in the existing system.

Unfortunately, neither the Census, nor the Street Count ascertain why people are homeless. Homelessness NSW believes that the main driver of homelessness is housing affordability. Last year we were part of Registry Week, where 516 people experiencing homelessness were interviewed. Of this group not one person had an income over \$400 per week. This is at a time when the median rent for a flat in Sydney is \$510 per week.<sup>1</sup> If homelessness is a lifestyle choice- it is clearly a choice only made by people in poverty. As part of this work all participants were asked what they wanted – the overwhelming response was a house, something they are unable to achieve in the current housing market.

This is further evidenced by the Anglicare Rental Affordability Snapshot. Over the first weekend in April, Anglicare members surveyed 75,410 rental properties across Australia and found just 21 properties were affordable for single adults living on Newstart, and only one was suitable for young people living on Youth Allowance.

The choice that people experiencing homelessness make is for housing. The current housing market prohibits them from that choice.

Homelessness NSW has trouble understanding how consumer choice can operate in homeless services. The vast majority of people experiencing homelessness find it as a crisis in their life. Notions about consumer sovereignty when a family return home and find the sheriff removing their goods and belongings because their landlord has fallen behind on their mortgage payments, or a woman is escaping a life threatening domestic violence situation or a teenager being kicked of their home by a parent's new partner could be seen as nonsense on stilts. Unfortunately, all of these scenarios are all too common.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.domain.com.au/news/sydney-rents-have-biggest-jump-in-four-years-domain-group-20151007-gk25l6/>

That is not to say that homeless services cannot improve their capacity to meet the needs of consumers, indeed this is occurring. Homeless services fully appreciate their obligations under Article 25 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

That is why specialist homeless services are increasingly including consumers in decision making and client centred care is the new norm. In Victoria our counterpart has developed a consumer charter, explaining rights and responsibilities.<sup>2</sup> In NSW we have StreetCare a consumer organisation of and for people who have experienced homelessness. StreetCare provide advice to government and non-government agencies on policies and practices relating to homelessness and housing, as well as giving assistance on how best to consult with homeless people.

Homelessness NSW believe that consumer choice is only a viable option when housing needs have been met.

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<sup>2</sup> [http://chp.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/consumer\\_charter\\_guidelines.pdf](http://chp.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/consumer_charter_guidelines.pdf)

## **Going Home Staying Home**

As a peak body for homeless services in NSW we were collaborated with as the NSW Government initiated their review of homeless services. We understand that the Commission has a copy of the PIR as well as the response of the peaks to that review. We would like to take this opportunity to reiterate some of our concerns regarding that reform process.

Rather than a reform we believe that this was more a matter of contract management. One of the stated aims of the reform was to cut the number of contracts being managed. Improving service delivery should never be conflated with contract management.

Throughout the process we expressed concern at the tendering process. We believed then and we believe now that competition is usually at odds with the cooperation and collaboration that is vital between service providers to ensure effective service delivery of homeless services. In the last 12 months Homelessness NSW has met with members and other homeless services across NSW. Without exception at every meeting we were informed that the process of competitive tendering had diminished the level of cooperation and it was only recently that this was returning to the sector.

Homelessness NSW were also concerned about the impact of competition on small, locally based services. We believe that the loss of a number of locally managed services highlighted that our concerns were well founded. We struggle to understand how cutting the number of providers can be seen as improving choice for consumers.