

Media statement



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Country agency calls for increased social housing to address homelessness

COUNTRY agency ac.care is calling on governments to invest more in social housing and mental health services as it continues to support hundreds of people without a home or on the brink of homelessness in regional South Australia.

Over the past financial year, ac.care's homelessness service worked with 1304 clients, housing 95pc of people who approached the agency for assistance across eastern regional South Australia.

This included 430 people in various forms of housing, including private rentals, ac.care directly supported to maintain their existing tenancy and avoid the risk of becoming homeless.

However, ac.care homelessness and community services manager Trish Spark said a lack of affordable properties for rent or sale in the regions, along with a public housing shortage, increased pressure on vulnerable people.

"We work with people in very challenging situations, including families with young children, and trying to ensure they continue to have a safe home or access to emergency accommodation at an appropriate regional property if they are already sleeping rough is increasingly difficult due to limited housing options," Ms Spark said.

Her comments back this year's National Homelessness Week campaign, which begins Monday, August 3, with the agency supporting the theme of Everybody Needs a Home.

Homelessness Australia is calling for greater government investment in social housing to construct 30,000 social housing properties nationally over four years to create jobs, stimulate the economy and help end homelessness.

"We welcome federal and state government efforts in this area, but more needs to be done as sadly the lack of affordable housing continues to put enormous pressure on people struggling to maintain a safe home," Ms Spark said.

Meanwhile, she said a rise in unaddressed mental health issues was a growing contributor to homelessness issues in regional areas and exacerbated issues for people struggling to maintain tenancies or secure a property.

"The lack of adequate mental health services in regional areas continues to pose challenges for vulnerable people, amplifying disadvantage and the risk of homelessness," she said.

"There is a desperate need for long-term, supported mental health facilities in regional South Australia for those who have difficulty living independently and sustaining tenancies."

Ms Spark raised concerns scaling back of increased JobSeeker payments that were introduced in response to the impact of COVID-19 would add pressure on household budgets, potentially pushing people out of safe and stable accommodation.

She said the agency was concerned about a potential influx of people requiring support in the months ahead as the impact of COVID-19 on jobs and incomes continued to affect country people.

“Increased payments provided by the Federal Government brought JobSeeker to a level that helped lift people out of the poverty trap and allow them to afford necessities to have a safe and stable home and build a better future, but we are greatly concerned about what will happen when this is scaled back,” Ms Spark said.

Ms Spark said a lack of accommodation for youths in regional areas was also a key issue identified by ac.care, prompting the innovative joint-agency Studio Purpose project in Murray Bridge to convert a disused South Australian Housing Authority property into four units for young people to lease as part of a diverse support program.

However, she said although this pilot project would demonstrate a way forward and make a significant difference in the lives of young tenants of the properties, it was not enough to address the needs of the large number of youths at risk of homelessness across regional South Australia.

ac.care can be contacted on 1300 ACCARE (1300 22 22 73).

Caption

EVERYBODY NEEDS A HOME: ac.care homelessness and community services manager Trish Spark has backed calls for greater investment in social housing to ease pressure on people in regional areas at risk of homelessness. The organisation’s homelessness services assisted 1304 people last financial year.

Regional statistics

ac.care homelessness service 2019/20 financial year agency-wide and regional statistics						
Region	Clients	Percentage housed	Clients assisted to sustain tenancy/prevent homelessness	Male	Female	Mental health issues identified
Riverland	420	96%	165	47%	53%	
Limestone Coast	446	96%	128	53%	47%	
Murraylands/ Adelaide Hills	438	94%	137	45%	55%	
Total	1304	Avg 95.3%	430			Avg 40%

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About ac.care

ac.care is one of the few organisations created and run by country people for country people. Formed in Mount Gambier in 1986, our mission is to ensure all country people to have a safe home, enough money to live on and strong, positive relationships. Incorporated as Anglican Community Care and operating as ac.care, we provide services in the Limestone Coast, Murraylands, Murray Mallee, Riverland, Fleurieu Peninsula and Adelaide Hills. Our core services include foster care recruitment and support, residential care, homelessness services, Aboriginal programs, emergency relief, adult community education, financial and general counselling, family services and support.