



FAIR
AGENDA

New analysis shows additional \$33.8M needed to address domestic violence service gap, as Cabinet minister sleeps out to raise awareness of problem

17/06/15

An additional \$33.8 million per annum of Federal Government funding is needed to ensure women fleeing domestic violence aren't left without the crisis accommodation support that can help keep them safe; new analysis from Homelessness Australia shows.

Inadequate funding means 423 people are turned away from homelessness services every night; and at least 2,800 women fleeing domestic violence are turned away each year. Experts say that number is increasing, and additional funding for specialist homelessness services is required to keep women safe from domestic violence.

Yet the Federal Government's most recent funding allocation for homelessness services isn't even enough to maintain services at their current levels, according to Homelessness Australia.

Services are a total of \$33.8 million short of the Federal funding they need to respond to even the most basic needs of domestic violence victims in the 2015/16 financial year.

"It's good to see a member of Cabinet will be sleeping rough this week to show their support for action to address homelessness," says Renee Carr, of community campaigning group Fair Agenda. "But it would be better if Cabinet ensured specialist homelessness services had the Federal funding they need."

"Despite all their talk about the national crisis, the Federal Government still has not adequately funded the services that are needed to help keep women safe," says Glenda Stevens CEO of Homelessness Australia. "When a woman tries to escape abuse, she is at greater risk of being killed by her partner. Without full funding for specialist homelessness services, women's lives will remain at risk."

"Women's refuges provide a safe physical space, and specialist skills in assessing and managing risk - which are needed to keep women and their children safe from further violence," said Ms Stevens. "If the government are really committed to keeping women safe; they need to commit the additional \$33.8M it will take to make sure they can at least access shelter and support workers who can assess the risks they're facing."

Renee Carr of Fair Agenda added: "More than one woman a week is being murdered in a domestic or family violence incident. It's unbelievable that in the midst of this national emergency, the Federal Government still isn't fully funding family violence services. It means thousands of women at risk are being turned away from homelessness services, as well as vital legal assistance services - that should be provided with the resources they need to help keep women safe."

FOR INTERVIEWS AND MEDIA ENQUIRIES

For comment on the campaign for full funding of family violence services: Renee Carr, Executive Director of Fair Agenda, 0435 597 976.

For comment on homelessness services and the funding need: Glenda Stevens, CEO of Homelessness Australia, 0405 900 360.

Survivor testimonies can also be made available upon request (0435 597 976).

If you cover this story, or any story regarding violence against women and children, please include the following information:

“If you or someone you know is impacted by sexual assault, domestic or family violence, call 1800RESPECT on 1800 737 732 or visit 1800RESPECT.org.au. In an emergency, call 000.”

Background information

Turn away figures

Domestic violence is the single biggest driver of homelessness for Australian women and children - noted as the primary driver for 23% of people seeking access to Specialist Homelessness Services. Funding for homelessness services is so inadequate that 423 people are turned away every night. Of that, a conservative estimate is that 2,800 women affected by domestic and family violence who need accommodation are turned away from homelessness services every year.

It's expected that this number will rise, as a result of the federal government's most recent funding decision; and because increased media attention normally causes increased demand for family violence services. Women are made aware that services exist and this leads them to seek the support that they need.

Homelessness services - a critical part of domestic violence response

Specialist Homeless Services are essential for ensuring the ongoing safety of women and children who are experiencing or at risk of experiencing violence within the home. They provide shelter, referrals to other services as well as specialist skills in assessing and managing risk.

Homelessness services also perform an important intervention role with men who have been removed from the family home due to their use of violence on their partners and children. Providing these men with accommodation and support services has been shown to reduce their likelihood of returning to the family home and using violence on their families.

Federal funding needed

Earlier this year the Federal Government renewed its commitment to the National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness (NPAH), providing \$115 million per year for two years to roll over the agreement until 30 June 2017. This allocation extended the arrangement whereby the Federal Government contributes 50% of homelessness service funding (with the other 50% contributed by the state and territory governments).

The allocation announced by the Federal Government earlier this year included an effective \$2.3 million cut to services for 2015/16, as a result of the Federal Government again choosing unilaterally not to index their contribution to the NPAH. This is contrary to the standard practice of federal, state and territory governments all indexing their contributions to intergovernmental agreements.

To address the indexation related cuts to services for 2015/16, and to ensure specialist services can meet the needs of the 2,800 women being turned away annually, an additional \$33.8 million of Federal funding is needed for the upcoming (2015/16) financial year. In line with the current funding arrangement, this figure represents 50% of the overall additional funding needs.

Minister Morrison has indicated that he may try to distract from this problem by proposing changes to funding allocations that have already been agreed to. "423 people are turned away from homelessness services every night." said Ms Stevens of Homelessness Australia. "A proposal to take money away from other homelessness services, to deal with the PR problem of the day, amounts to a sleight of hand. The Minister can't so easily distract from the real problem, which is the decision to under-fund vital family violence and other social services that provide life-saving support."

Under-funding of domestic violence services

Right now thousands of women are having to be turned away from homelessness and the family violence services that should be helping keep them safe, because those services don't have enough Federal Government funding.

Community Legal Centres - where a third of the work is family violence related - are having to turn away 150,000 people a year. Further, Family Violence Prevention and Legal Services - which provide a critical culturally safe service for Aboriginal women - are still unable to meet demand. The Productivity Commission has recommended \$200 million per year be immediately injected into legal assistance services in Australia, noting the Federal government should be responsible for \$120 million of that funding.