
Safe, secure, affordable housing the key to reducing homelessness

Homelessness is increasing in Australia, despite strong economic growth, according to the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) data released today.

The national rate shows an alarming upward trend - for every 10,000 Australians, 50 are homeless - though WA homelessness rates have fallen by 11 per cent. While the rate per 10,000 people in WA may have fallen as a result of population growth, the actual number of people the ABS was able to record experiencing homelessness had shifted by only 2 per cent.

Since 2011 there has been an almost 30 per cent increase in the number of Western Australians living on the streets or in supported accommodation for those experiencing homelessness, as opposed to staying in other temporary arrangements or living in overcrowded dwellings.

Strikingly, the age of those experiencing homelessness in WA has grown, with an increase in the numbers of those aged between 45 and 74 particularly.

The number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders experiencing homelessness has seemingly decreased by over 20 per cent.

“We have to recognise that this is a small cohort of people for whom it can be difficult to accurately represent in data despite the best efforts of ABS staff, so we should be cautious about drawing too grand conclusions from it,” said Louise Giolitto, Chief Executive Officer, WACOSS.

“What is clear is that the number of people experiencing homelessness has not significantly shifted since 2011, meaning that while WA has been successful in ensuring the homelessness population doesn’t grow, we haven’t succeeded in reducing it either.

“We need to take a housing-first approach to tackling homelessness in this state. It is by first rapidly providing access to permanent, stable, and supported housing, that we can start addressing the other needs of those experiencing chronic homelessness.

“We also need to increase the rights of renters, providing them access to longer-term leases, and abolish ‘no-grounds terminations’ to better protect them from falling into homelessness.

“This is particularly crucial with the number of people renting as they enter retirement increasing, despite the inadequacy of our age pension system to provide a dignified standard of living for those who don’t own their own home,” Louise Giolitto said.

Ends