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State of the Region – Homelessness Week 2022

At the commencement of homelessness week, the region's largest homelessness service, BeyondHousing, has revealed it's been another year for enormous numbers of local people seeking their support.

BeyondHousing CEO Celia Adams said the organisation assists thousands of people each year who are in a housing crisis, at risk of homelessness, or in financial stress.

"Our homelessness team in the Ovens Murray Goulburn regions assisted 3,538 households in 2021-22, this is consistent with the level of support from the previous year. BeyondHousing sees more than half, 56 per cent, of all people who sought help from specialist homelessness services across the region.

"We supported 6,442 households across all our client services, which includes people who need help to find and keep a home in the private rental market," Ms. Adams said.

BeyondHousing's purpose is to end homelessness and it works with people to find safe and affordable housing. Sadly, the demand for services is growing and the solutions are harder to find.

High homelessness rates in the region have been worsened by the current cost-of-living crisis.

"Unfortunately, the issues of homelessness and a lack of affordable housing are not new, it has been going on for many years, for far too long across the country.

"Rates of homelessness did not increase because there isn't a clear-cut solution to homelessness, there is and that's safe, secure affordable housing and adequately funded support services. Having enough housing, in the form people need it is critical. With the safety and security of a home, and a tailored support service people can connect with employment and education opportunities, with family and within their community."

Ms. Adams said they were particularly concerned with the rates of people experiencing repeated homelessness, with 63 per cent of clients having been helped by the organisation before.

"So many people haven't had an increase to the rate of income support, whilst rent and costs of living continue to rise exponentially. This tells us that people will be continually vulnerable to the risks of homelessness. Two in three of them will access a homelessness service again in the next few years.

"I think this is quite remarkable because that's saying these are people who have a history of interaction with the homelessness and housing systems, yet they are still needing that support because they can't escape the cycle as economic, social and health impacts create barriers to stability in their lives."

Ms. Adams hoped this year's homelessness numbers would motivate our leaders across all levels of government to ramp up the resources for evidence based, housing-focused solutions to homelessness that are proven to work.

"We can make an impact by increasing the construction of affordable housing at a scale that meets the needs of the community.

“Since Homelessness Week last year, BeyondHousing has completed construction of 34 new homes and is currently constructing or planning construction of over 150 new homes in the next two years. This has been possible through our own funds in addition to funding from the Peter & Lyndy White Foundation and through the Victorian Government.

“But significantly more homes are needed. Even at the current rate of construction we could not build enough homes for the 2,062 households already on the lengthy priority housing waitlist, let alone respond to the demand for affordable housing given a dire shortage of private rentals in the region,” Ms. Adams said.

“On the current trajectory, housing stress is only going to worsen for people on low and middle incomes. People’s ability to maintain their current housing situation is being increasingly compromised by the rising cost of food, petrol, and other living expenses.

“The numbers are staggering. More than 6,300 households experiencing homelessness sought help from specialist homelessness services in our region. There are more than 3,800 households on the housing waitlist, a social housing shortfall of at least 5,600 homes and disastrously low rental vacancy rates like we haven’t witnessed before.

“This is a housing and homelessness crisis in this region that is not going to be easy or quick to solve and organisations like ours cannot do it alone.

“We can’t wait anymore for a long-term systematic investment in social housing, for affordable appropriate land or courage in decision and policy making that will help alleviate rental housing shortages, such as inclusionary zoning or caps on tax breaks for investment properties, as suggested by the recent OECD report.

“Houses are places for people to live in, to create secure futures and families. They’re not just investments. As a society we need to think about having those important, brave conversations on how we all might be prepared to address the crisis and the system that has led us to this point.

“There are too many families and individuals who have already waited for too long and many more that will join this list by the time the next Homelessness Week rolls around.”

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About: BeyondHousing is the largest community housing organisation within the Goulburn and Ovens Murray regions of Victoria. BeyondHousing is the main entry point for the homelessness system and provides a range of supports for people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness. If you or anyone you know is experiencing or at risk of homelessness, call 1800 825 955.

For more information or to arrange an interview, contact: Chelsea McGrath on 0432 179 178