



LEAVING NO ONE BEHIND

SOLVING AUSTRALIA'S HOMELESSNESS

The Greens' plan to eliminate homelessness by 2020

For a wealthy nation like ours, there are thousands of people falling through the cracks. Every day hundreds of requests for basic shelter and vital support are left unmet. It is time to fix the housing crisis, starting with those most urgently in need.

On any given night more than 105,000 Australians are homeless. That's 1 in every 200 people.

According to the last census 6813 of these people were sleeping on the streets. Many thousands more were forced to couch surf, live in severely overcrowded housing, or in places like caravan parks and boarding houses that lack personal space and security.

More than a quarter of our homeless population are children under the age of 18. On census night almost 18,000 children under 12 were counted as homeless, 402 were sleeping rough.

The old parties know that these problems exist, but they lack the courage to provide enough funding for housing and services for Australians experiencing homelessness.

> A CUT THROUGH SOLUTION

Homelessness is a complex issue but the solution is simple: match the funding for housing and support services to the scale of need. We need a cut-through solution.

That's why we're announcing our plan to care for people in housing crisis by doubling funding for homelessness services and providing a home for all Australians currently sleeping rough by 2020.

The Homelessness Action Plan has three priorities:

- **To provide an emergency package to build 7000 new homes by 2020** – enough to house every person currently sleeping without adequate shelter.
- **To include a 50% target of fast build, modular or 'prefabricated' housing** which will be significantly faster and more affordable to build; and
- **To double the current funding for specialist homelessness services in Australia.**

The Australian Greens' policy goes straight to the heart of the problem: there are simply not enough services or shelter for those most in need. Our Homelessness Action Plan will fix the lack of accommodation and services by providing the care and support, and bricks and mortar to bring people in from the margins.

Australia's current response to homelessness relies heavily on the provision of emergency services and is a very expensive way of responding to a seemingly intractable problem. But what would happen if we shifted our energy from barely managing the problem to actually trying to end homelessness? The Greens know this can be done, and also that it is the right thing to do.

The Labor party have committed to halving homelessness by 2020 but are not on track to reach this target. The Coalition won't even commit to this target. The Greens commit to doing our best to end homelessness altogether.

> WHAT WOULD IT COST?

Some will say that we cannot afford this, but really, can we afford not to? The current approach costs our community greatly. And research shows a better approach will save money over the long term. There is a better way.

The independent Parliamentary Budget Office has confirmed:

- Providing a new home for every rough sleeper by 2020 would cost approximately **\$233.2 million** per annum
- Doubling federal funding for Specialist Homelessness Services provided under the National Affordable Housing Agreement would cost **\$507 million** per annum
- Signing a new National Partnership on Homelessness and doubling it to 2020 would cost **\$275 million** per annum and would be matched by the states, (based on the original partnership signed in 2009).



> A NEW HOME FOR EVERY AUSTRALIAN SLEEPING ROUGH

Homelessness agencies provided more than 7,000,000 nights of accommodation in 2011-12 - but it wasn't enough¹. In 61% of cases of requests for accommodation, none was available at the time².

The Australian Greens Homelessness Action Plan will go straight to the heart of this problem and build 7000 new homes for those experiencing chronic homelessness, by 2020.

Our priority is to provide secure, long term housing *and* the intensive support and services needed to help people maintain their tenancy and address the complex issues that led to homelessness.

This policy would therefore directly fund an increase in the supply of social housing (public and community housing) for people in high need, including housing that varies across locations, cultures, and regions, and using a the 'Housing Plus' approach, where housing *and* services are provided together. This includes 'Pathways to Housing', Foyers, and Common Ground models.

Most importantly, it's not just the bricks and mortar that solve the problem, but investing in long term care and services to help people once they're in housing to stay in housing.

The Anglicare *State of the Family Report* notes that secure housing tenure is a key component of establishing roots in and connection to a community. Belonging somewhere is the beginning of living an included life³.

Providing a home for every one of Australia's people sleeping rough by 2020 is the most urgent place to start.

> HALVING THE TIME AND COST OF HOUSING

Our initiative to build 7000 homes for those sleeping rough by 2020 includes a 50% prefabricated or modular housing target.

The Greens believe the modular housing industry offers a significant and exciting opportunity to deliver new and affordable housing supply we have available right now. It is a far more environmentally sustainable product, can be built to any

design, and is extremely well suited to infill and regeneration developments in urban centres. The housing would be in well located areas with good access to opportunities to jobs, education, health care, services and transport.

As well as caring for people experiencing homelessness, our policy will provide construction jobs at a time the economy risks slowing down at the end of the mining boom. Manufacturing jobs will also be boosted with the stimulus of building prefabricated modular homes that can be made here in Australia.

It's time to harness that opportunity.

Modular housing can be delivered in significantly less time and at up to half the cost of conventional 'brick and tile' homes. Modular housing is also far more affordable to run: its high level of insulation means the house uses 10% of the energy of a five star home, and is far easier to heat in winter and cool in summer.

In suburban Perth, for example, a one bedroom house was recently delivered in just 14 weeks from the time of order to manufacture and delivery to site. At a cost of \$75,000 the house can be installed in 10 hours by four people⁴. A two bedroom house costs about \$100,000.

> FUNDING TO DOUBLE CURRENT SERVICES

Across Australia there are almost 1,500 agencies that provide specialist services to people experiencing homelessness or who are at risk of becoming homeless. More than 230,000 Australians used these services in 2011-12. But that same year there were 136,818 instances where a request for service went unmet. This equates to an average of 374 unassisted requests every day⁵.

In the large majority of cases these unassisted requests were for accommodation – most for emergency or short term accommodation. But in 61% of requests for accommodation there was none available at the time of the request.⁶

Accommodation is not the only service people are being turned away from.

People can become homeless – or be at risk of homelessness - for many reasons, ranging from sudden financial our housing difficulties, to complex issues involving family breakdowns,

¹ AIHW (2012) *Specialist Homeless Services 2011-12*, released December 2012 at <http://www.aihw.gov.au/publication-detail/?id=60129542549>

² AIHW (2012) p89 and Figure 6.6

³ Anglicare Australia's State of the Family Report October 2010.

⁴ This figure has been revised since the release of June 21st. Cockburn Herald 'Pre-fabulous' Cockburn Herald September 15,2012

⁵ AIHW (2012) p85

⁶ AIHW (2012) *Specialist Homeless Services 2011-12* p89 and Figure 6.6



health, and other causes of disadvantage. People receiving support from specialist homelessness services on average identify eight reasons why they require assistance.

Domestic violence is still the main cause for homelessness. 77, 178 of all people receiving assistance from homelessness agencies were escaping some form of domestic violence or family violence, but emergency accommodation was only provided in 81% of cases.

There is also a high level of unmet need for services such as drug and alcohol counseling, intellectual disability services, family planning and pregnancy assistance, child specialist counseling, mental health services, psychiatric services, assistance to maintain tenancies, training and employment assistance, financial advice, and counseling. But research shows that last year **in up to one in five cases, the need for these services went unmet**⁷.

Groups with special interests are overrepresented in the homelessness population, for which more substantial and longer term services are needed. These include children and young people, (43% of all homelessness clients, most often as a result of domestic and family violence); Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples (22% of the homeless population), families (33% of all clients, the majority being single parent families), people with mental health issues (19%) and clients leaving health care (2%) and correctional facilities (2%).

Broadening the base of funding so money could go directly to health, mental health and substance use programs for example is vital, particularly to help people exiting services.

But agencies providing services to these groups are struggling with extremely high case loads and are not able to provide the long term and intensive support needed.

It is unacceptable that Australia has such high turnaway rates. It's also unfair that that people providing these services of care and support are doing so with constant doubt hanging over their heads on how much longer they'll be funded for.

That's why we're announcing our policy to double funding for Homelessness Services to 2020.

More funding for services will enable increased support over longer periods to assist people across a range of complex issues. It would also enable services to reinstate successful projects such as the *Homelessness Innovation Projects Fund*, which focuses on entrenched employment and issues of disadvantage.

⁷ AIHW (2012) *Specialist Homeless Services 2011-12* page 91 Figure 6.8: Services with a high unmet need at the end of support (excluding accommodation) 2011-12. Figure shows between 15-25% of clients requiring these services are going without.

Doubling the funding to Australia's specialist homeless services will provide a more caring Australia, and a more secure job to those providing these important services.

> WHAT IS THE CURRENT FUNDING FRAMEWORK?

Under the National Affordable Housing Agreement (the NAHA) the federal government provides funding worth \$495 million, to providing support and accommodation to 230,500 people (1:97 Australians) including 88,000 children⁸. But it has failed to keep up with the growth in demand over recent years, and is not matched to any key indicators or benchmarks from the states.

Our policy to double funding would be conditional on states committing to a net increase in social housing, contributing 'in kind' (such as government owed land for affordable housing), supportive planning processes, a Royalties for Regions contribution from mining states, and providing transparent annual reports on their additional spending on homelessness and affordable housing programs.

The National Partnership on Homelessness (NPAH) signed in 2009 and expiring in June 2013 provided \$550 million over four years, to support a further 180 programs aimed at prevention and early intervention, breaking the cycle of homelessness, and providing 'street to home' initiatives. The federal government has at the last hour announced \$159 million 'transition' funding to scrape through to next year while a new partnership is negotiated with the states. Meanwhile the organisations that rely on this funding and the people that rely on those organisations have no future certainty.

The Auditor General's May 2013 report found the National Partnership was failing to reduce homelessness under the targets agreed to in the White Paper: Between 2006-2011 homelessness increased by 17% overall. The number of Indigenous homeless people rose by 3%.

The Greens believe it's not enough to simply increase funding for existing services. We need to rethink the overall system to get a better design and better outcomes, and we also need to target housing and services effectively. The Greens recognise much of the research is pointing to the fact that most clients need limited upfront support for short periods to get back on their feet, but many more require intensive support for short and long periods of time, and sometimes permanently.

⁸ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) 2011. Government-funded specialist homelessness services: SAAP National Data Collection annual report 2010-11: <http://www.aihw.gov.au/WorkArea/DownloadAsset.aspx?id=10737420818>



The problem is our systems are still designed around crisis rather than ongoing support that eases off as the situation improves. This is why the Greens will tie this package to **system redesign** to ensure effectiveness and efficiency.

The Greens recognise the sector and service providers have the expertise, along with people who have experienced homelessness, to guide where the funding should go and how programs need to evolve over time to be most effective. Ongoing, regular roundtables and formal vehicles such as the Prime Minister's Council on Homelessness are strongly supported for this purpose.

> THE ROAD HOME?

In 2008 the Australian government announced an unprecedented commitment to tackle homelessness. It released a policy White Paper called 'The Road Home' which included the ambitious goals to halve homelessness by 2020 and provide services to all rough sleepers seeking them. The Road Home emphasised the need for early intervention for those at risk of homelessness as the most effective way to reduce homeless.

For those already experiencing homelessness it emphasised the need to assist people to move quickly to stable housing with continued support so that homelessness does not recur.

Four years on we have made little progress. The numbers of rough sleepers has fallen slightly – showing that progress can be made. But the overall number of homelessness has actually increased by 17% since the last census.

There remains a huge unmet need for accommodation. Last year emergency or short term accommodation was only provided to 68% of the people seeking it, medium term accommodation was provided to 40% and long term accommodation was only provided to 8%.⁹

Housing outcomes are also very poor for rough sleepers seeking assistance. More than 25,400 people were living without shelter when they sought support in 2011-12. 19% were assisted into supported accommodation and 29% moved into a house or flat, but more than half (52%) remained homeless at the end of the support period.¹⁰

Finally, of those who are accommodated, many find themselves without a pathway to stable, secure, long term accommodation and a place to call their own.

The government has failed to make life better for people who are homeless.

> THIS IS JUST ONE ESSENTIAL PART OF OUR NATIONAL HOUSING PLAN

The Greens recognise Australia is in the midst of a housing crisis across the entire spectrum. The Homelessness Action Plan is just one part of the Greens plan to fix housing affordability in a decade.

⁹ AIHW (2012) *Specialist Homeless Services 2011-12* p34 and figure 3.5 p35

¹⁰ AIHW (2012) *Specialist Homeless Services 2011-12* p38