



Vinnies
good works

NSW SOCIAL JUSTICE
NETWORK



NSW SOCIAL JUSTICE STATEMENT

**HOMELESSNESS SHOULD BE
RARE, BRIEF AND NOT REPEATED**

OUR VISION

Everyone in our community should have a stable, safe and healthy place to call home. If someone's housing is at-risk or they are in crisis, they should receive timely, person-centred support to sustain their housing, and where needed, rapid access to emergency accommodation. For people with long and recurring histories of homelessness, they should not only be supported to secure a permanent home that meets their needs, but they should also receive the flexible help they need to successfully sustain their home and improve their quality of life. The St Vincent de Paul Society NSW fundamentally believes in this through the social principle of dignity of the human person, which enables life and flourishing. Through this, we can work towards reducing the risk of homelessness, and where it does occur, ensure that experiences of homelessness are rare, brief, and not repeated.

OUR RECOMMENDATIONS

The Society NSW calls on the NSW Government to better support people experiencing homelessness to get the services they need by:

- Developing and committing to a detailed medium to long-term funding strategy that substantially boosts funds for Specialist Homelessness Services to meet the gap in demand relative to services.
- Developing a sustainable Aboriginal controlled Specialist Homelessness Services sector to deliver positive outcomes for First Nations people, including through adequate resourcing to grow the sector and long-term partnering to strengthen existing capacity.
- Investing in the SHS workforce by improving access to regular and ongoing specialised training and clinical supervision of staff, so they are better equipped and supported to respond to clients' needs.
- Investing in the continuation and upscaling of successful Housing First programs, including delivering more long-term housing options.

THE CHALLENGE

On any given night across NSW around 35,000 people are experiencing homelessness, a 27% increase over the last decade.¹ And the numbers of people sleeping rough has increased by 69% in just the last two years,² with significant increases in regional areas such as the north coast.³ While the cost of living continues to soar and social housing supply stagnates, more and more people will find themselves in precarious housing

OUR CONTRIBUTION

St Vincent de Paul Society NSW is a leading provider of frontline services with 100 services state-wide. We operate 26 housing and homelessness services to give people access to long-term, safe, and stable accommodation that meets their individual needs. In 2023-2024 we supported more than 9,000 people at risk of or experiencing homelessness through case management support, crisis and transitional accommodation, early intervention and prevention, drop-in engagement centres, and general welfare support including meals, showers, toilets and laundry facilities.

Since 2020 we have delivered the NSW Together Home Program in collaboration with two community housing providers to provide stable homes and wrap-around support to more than 50 people who had experienced complex homelessness.

THE FACTS

- Around 35,000 people are homeless in NSW.
- Specialist Homelessness Services report an 88% increase in unassisted requests.
- Action to address homelessness could save the NSW Government up to \$1.5 billion per year

situations and at-risk of homelessness. This risk of homelessness is even higher for certain population groups including First Nations people, women and children fleeing domestic and family violence, refugees and people seeking asylum, and people living with disability.

Specialist Homelessness Services (SHS) work to support people who are experiencing, or at-risk of, homelessness through the provision of accommodation and case management. With the number of people experiencing homelessness rising but no real increase in funding, SHS providers are struggling to keep up, reporting an 88% increase in unassisted requests from 2019-20 to 2022-23.⁴ In 2022-23, St Vincent de Paul Society NSW housing and homelessness services was unable to assist almost twice as many people as the year before due to the surge in demand. This means that thousands of people in crisis are going without a safe place to sleep each night.

Given NSW has one of the lowest per person spends on homelessness nationally⁵, the NSW Government must increase funding for homelessness services to meet growing and more complex demand along with funding for effective models of support. To make homelessness rare in the future, governments must address the underlying structural factors that lead to people becoming homeless in the first place, include poverty, unaffordable housing, racism and discrimination.⁶

THE IMPACT

People who are homeless are more likely to experience poor mental and physical health and be at increased danger of abuse and violence.⁷ Australian studies suggests people sleeping rough are more likely to die 30 years earlier than the general population with a median age of death around 50 years.⁸ Without a stable home and with poor health and safety, people experiencing homelessness find it difficult to work or study, and are often trapped in a cycle of poverty. The NSW homelessness peak body has estimated that action to address homelessness could save the NSW Government up to \$1.5 billion per year through a reduction in demand for health, mental health and corrective services from clients that were experiencing homelessness.⁹

A Housing First approach emphasises that people should be afforded the same unconditional right to a home that is safe and stable, and access to flexible support that is responsive to their unique needs. The NSW Together Home Program is demonstrating the positive impacts of unconditional housing complemented by individualised, person-centred, recovery-orientated support.¹⁰ Early findings indicate positive impacts on housing, health and well-being outcomes for people with long-term experiences of rough sleeping associated with this combined investment in housing and individualised support.¹¹

¹ ABS (2023) States and Territories, *Estimating Homelessness: Census Data*

² NSW Department of Communities and Justice (2023), *2024 NSW street count technical paper | Family & Community Services*

³ NSW Department of Communities and Justice (2023) *2023 NSW Street Count Technical Paper*

⁴ AIHW (2024) Data tables: Specialist homelessness services historical tables 2011-12 to 2022-23, *Specialist Homelessness Services Annual Report 2022-2023*.

⁵ In 2021-22, NSW expenditure on homelessness services was \$39.54 per person, the third lowest after QLD and WA. Source: Productivity Commission (2023) *Report on Government Services 2023*, Part G, Section 19, Homelessness services — Data tables contents.

⁶ Fry, T (2021) *Pathways to Homelessness Report*, NSW Department of Communities and Justice

⁷ Productivity Commission (2022) *In need of repair: The National Housing and Homelessness Agreement*, Study report, Australian Government, 26. <https://www.pc.gov.au/inquiries/completed/housing-homelessness/report/housing-homelessness.pdf>, p.3

⁸ Knaus C. & Evershed N. (2024) *Out in the cold: What do we know about homelessness deaths in Australia – and why nobody is tracking them?* 6 February 2024, The Guardian Australia.

⁹ Homelessness NSW (2022) *End Homelessness Together*.

¹⁰ Davies, K., Harvey, N., Dimmock, A., Buykx, P. & Krogh, C. (2023). *Together Home: Practitioners' Perspectives on Building Resilience and Relationships with People Who've Experienced Long-Term Homelessness*. Presentation to NCOSS NGO Forum on preliminary report.

¹¹ Homelessness NSW (2023) *NSW Pre-Budget Submission – FY 23-24*.

JAMES' STORY

James is a First Nations man who was referred to St Vincent de Paul Society NSW after many years of rough sleeping and long-term homelessness. James struggled to maintain his tenancy due to a lack of formal support networks, and difficulties relating to his mental health, alcohol/drug use, legal matters, and family reconnection.

Through the Together Home program, St Vincent de Paul Society NSW was able to work with James to find appropriate housing, better support his mental health, and address his substance use concerns using a harm minimisation approach. He was supported to access culturally appropriate services like the Aboriginal Legal Service to assist with family mediation and was able to reconnect with his children. The team were also able to work with pet support services and the housing provider so that James and his emotional-support animal could be reunited in James' new home. This was vital to James' mental health and well-being.

Through a holistic service approach, collaboration between different services, and by focusing on James' strengths, James was able to complete the Together Home Program. James now lives in his home along with his emotional support animal and has long-term supports in place to sustain his tenancy and move forward in his life.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

- [Society NSW's homelessness reports and submissions](#)
- [National Council's Housing and Homelessness Policy](#)

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

The St Vincent de Paul Society NSW acknowledges Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the Traditional Custodians of this land, with deep respect. May Elders, past and present, be blessed and honoured. May we join together and build a future based on compassion, justice, hope, faith, and reconciliation.

St Vincent de Paul Society NSW is a lay-Catholic member and volunteer-based organisation that has been assisting people experiencing disadvantage and hardship in NSW for over 140 years. Our aspiration is an Australia transformed by compassion and built on justice.



[SOCIALJUSTICE.VINNIES.ORG.AU](https://socialjustice.vinnies.org.au)