

18 August 2022



Response to Question on Notice 1 – Standing Committee on Social Issues – Homelessness Amongst Older People Aged Over 55 in New South Wales

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The CHAIR: You can pass that through the Committee staff. We've got under 15 minutes left. I have a couple questions, as does Mr Mallard, and we will try to get back to Mr Primrose as well. I ask this question to you as representatives of council. If you are not the right person, feel free to take it on notice. We have heard a lot about the human impacts of homelessness, which absolutely should be the number one priority—and is—but I just wonder, as representatives of council, what some of the other impacts are on a council of homelessness in the area, particularly a regional council.

GLENN CANNARD: That's a very good question. There is a very extensive range of impacts, I suppose, that it has on council. We're happy to probably take that on notice and come back with a comprehensive response because, through our strategy, we have looked at as many opportunities where council services and staff intersect with the community in this space and what we can do to assist. It may be better that we come back with a broad-based answer, which gives some examples of what we have done with our rangers, our compliance areas and those sorts of things. They're often not what people see as the front line of these areas but they're incredibly important spaces.

Response:

It is widely acknowledged that there is major shortfall in affordable housing in most cities and many regional communities across Australia. Like other regional areas within close proximity to Sydney, the Central Coast's local housing market is facing increasing pressure, resulting in displacement of historical populations, and increasing gentrification. These effects flow on to more marginal populations, significantly increasing housing stress, social vulnerability, and homelessness, and affecting community and social wellbeing.

The recent in-migration induced by the Pandemic and the newly founded "work from anywhere" response has exacerbated the affordability issue further. The past 18 months has seen real estate prices soar and investors capitalising on the increase selling predominantly to owner occupiers. At the height of the 2020 pandemic, vacancy rates on the Central Coast dipped to 0.4% and as a result there have been excessive increases in rental prices, as demand outweighs supply.

Not only has this pushed more locals into housing stress and some into homelessness, but it has also severely disrupted the movement for those on the lower end of the housing continuum.



In response to this significant issue, Central Coast Council developed and adopted the Central Coast Affordable and Alternative Housing Strategy in April 2019. The Strategy is a comprehensive plan which addresses initiatives across the housing continuum, from homelessness through to home ownership, providing pathways for a range of households, from very low through to moderate incomes.

Council has employed many approaches to find effective practical and policy solutions to address the growing and complex need for affordable and alternative housing within the Central Coast region.

Some examples of work completed in 21/22 include:

Council Affordable Housing Land (CAHL) Proposal - The CAHL Proposal provides the framework for developing Affordable Housing on Council owned underutilised land. The CAHL was endorsed by Council on April 27 2021 for exhibition. Also endorsed was a site at 23-25 Ashton Ave to be utilised as the pilot site for the development of affordable housing. An EOI process for the site has been undertaken, short-listing a supplier panel of Community Housing Providers, with an RFP process to begin in August 2022. The outcome will be a partnership between Council and a CHP to develop, construct and manage a mixed tenure development which meets the needs of very low to low income earners.

Transitional Properties Portfolio - Three Council owned cottages (two in The Entrance & one in Wyong) have undergone basic upgrades and are tenanted by vulnerable community members. These tenants are part of a pilot transitional tenancy program supported by local services for a period of up to 2 years.

Central Coast Homelessness Protocol- An internal protocol and policy have been drafted to formalise Council's approach to working with rough sleepers on Council land/ property. The protocol includes a wallet card and brochure which are resources that can be distributed to rough sleepers and the community.

Brokerage Pilot Program - Two local Neighbourhood Centres have piloted the Intervention and Prevention Brokerage Program. The program included the provision of Opal Cards, Prepaid Mobile phones and capped financial assistance to prevent people from becoming at risk of homelessness. The program directly assisted 50 people with 7 people prevented from becoming homeless. This is a saving of \$175,000 to the ratepayer/ taxpayer that can be redirected back into the community.

Terrigal Rotary Shelterbag Project - Resourcing front line services with an improved weather resistant type of swag developed specifically for rough sleepers for the winter. The Shelterbags that Council has secured were donated to local Outreach services such as Doorways, Coast Shelter, Fathers Table, and Primary Care. Council Rangers have also received some Shelterbags to distribute to Rough sleepers they may encounter.

Support local homeless support services events – '100 homes exhibition'. To raise awareness of youth homelessness and the need for more affordable housing an installation of 100 houses was placed in Kibble Park for Youth Homelessness Matters Day on 21 April 2022. The houses were constructed using sustainable materials such as paper and bamboo and each house was lit by a solar powered lamp that produced a dazzling display at nightfall. To accompany the installation local support services, provided success stories of youth that had been homeless and when provided with safe and secure housing. These stories highlighted the benefit and need for more affordable housing options. 'A walk in their Shoes' installation for Homelessness Week 1-7 August 2022, to represent the homeless people on the Central Coast and raise awareness to the difficulties they face daily.

Socially Responsible Investing and Accessing Private Rental Toolkit - A draft toolkit was developed to assist Property Managers, potential tenants and support workers to ensure the continuance of the Socially Responsible Investment practice. The toolkit provides information for Property Managers to be able to equally advocate for tenant applications from those receiving income support payments. It also arms prospective tenants and support workers with the knowledge they require to understand the private rental market and the requirements of tenants. There is also a section to assist support workers in dealing with Property Managers and understanding the basics of the sector including the legislation on blacklisting tenants on databases such as TICA.

Crisis Relief Cards - as part of Council's ongoing efforts to battle financial hardship across the region, the Emergency Food Services Card provides a quick, simple database of local organisations that offer emergency services such as food hampers, discount vouchers and free meals. These services can be accessed by anyone in need and include contact numbers, addresses and referral information. The Financial Services Card lists services on the Central Coast that provide the community with financial assistance services such as financial counselling, EAPA Vouchers and other coupons. These valuable resources are on Council's website and hard copies are given to various stakeholders in the community to disseminate to those in need.

Inclusive design in public spaces - A seat dedicated to the 100-year celebrations of the Soroptimist organisation was installed in Kibble Park in late 2021. The seat design was specifically chosen due to its inclusive features such as the uninterrupted bench style seating with no arms to allow people to lay/ sleep on the bench. The solid header on the backrest provides some protection from passers-by and could be utilised to place items on. The base is enclosed so that, in the case of a rough sleeper resting on the bench, belongings may be safely stowed under the bench and out of sight to passers-by.

Internal Reference: D15297737

18 August 2022



Response to Question on Notice 2 – Standing Committee on Social Issues – Homelessness Amongst Older People Aged Over 55 in New South Wales

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The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: I just have two questions. One of our terms of reference is to look at the adequacy of the collection of data on older people experiencing, or at risk of, homelessness. I'm wondering how you as a local government find the current data that's available to you on the numbers and types of people who are homeless and, if there's a problem, if you have any suggestions as to how that might be overcome?

MELANIE SMITH: The data that we rely on is the census data and the Department of Communities and Justice data when they do their homeless counts and those sorts of things. It doesn't necessarily mean it's reliable data. One of the other things about homelessness that is important to note is there is a proportion of people that are homeless or sleeping rough—for example, couch surfing or sleeping in their cars with families—that doesn't necessarily show up on the count. I'm not convinced that the data is reliable—that is the answer to the question.

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: Any suggestions as to what may be done to help overcome that? I know it's not your problem, but what would make it more reliable and useful to you in terms of data?

MELANIE SMITH: That's a very difficult question to answer.

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: Please feel free to take it on notice.

MELANIE SMITH: Yes, certainly.

Reverend the Hon. FRED NILE: Could I ask you another one?

The CHAIR: Sorry, did you want to answer that question, Ms Smith, or take it on notice?

MELANIE SMITH: I'd be happy to take that one on notice and come back to you with a bit more thought behind it.

Response:

This isn't an area that has an obvious solution, particularly given the logistical complexity of collecting the data and the continually evolving nature of the issue. There are structured, periodic attempts to count homeless peoples and also ongoing random analysis and data collection however information isn't centralised nor is any basic analysis of age undertaken.



The best immediate enhancement would be improved resourcing and partnering for the quarterly street count currently conducted by Department of Communities and Justice. The scope of this undertaking could increase to include other agencies who may have data on locations and also be able to provide additional human resources. This would need to be coordinated to ensure proposed locations were as currently accurate as possible and all locations identified were visited. The other improvement would be some basic analysis of age group. While it may not be appropriate, nor logistically possible for homeless peoples to be questioned on the topic – it would not be that difficult to make a basic age assessment (e.g. under 25 years, 25 – 50 years, over 50 years) and track gender. While an approach such as this would not provide definitive data it would help understand trends over time and help plan for changing trends as they were identified.

Internal Reference: D15297737