

GPO Box 1307 Canberra ACT 2601

Contact: Bishop Philip Huggins (Chair)
0418 799 515
Sue Leppert (Executive Director)
0402 825 282

MEDIA RELEASE

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100,000 reasons to invest in homeless services

Community organisations today called on state and territory ministers meeting this week to use a once-in-five years' opportunity to help homeless people.

Commonwealth, State and Territory Ministers meet this week to agree on a five-year funding package for refuges, shelters and other homeless services. It would take only an extra 1 cent per Australian per day to keep this homeless service safety net operating.

National community organisations called upon Commonwealth, State and Territory governments to show leadership to ensure the sustainability of services that assist homeless people and prevent homelessness.

"One in every 200 people in our community is homeless¹. Almost half of them are under the age of 25². Yet the Australian Government spends only 4 cents per day per Australian on services to help homeless people leaving us with a system in crisis," said ACOSS President Andrew McCallum.

"Over 700 people are turned away from homeless assistance services each day due to a lack of resources³. More than 200 of them are children⁴. A 2004 independent report has recommended a minimum increase in funding of 15-25 per cent just to keep the homeless service system operating. An increase of 35-40 per cent is required to meet current levels of unmet demand and the needs of homeless people,"⁵ said Jack Quinane, Executive Officer of the Australian Federation of Homelessness Organisations. "Failure to act now means the national tragedy of 100,000 Australians being homeless will continue for at least another five years."

"Without a minimum funding increase, women escaping domestic violence, homeless children, young people and vulnerable adults will face an even bleaker future as homeless services are cut back or close," said Commissioner Les Strong of the Salvation Army Eastern Territory. "What is going to happen to the homeless people who face domestic and family violence, sexual assault, mental illness, drug and alcohol dependency and other traumas on a daily basis if our homeless services are not funded to help them?" said Commissioner Ivan Lang of the Salvation Army Southern Territory.

"Commonwealth moves to allocate funds to pilot projects must not be at the expense of front line services. A couple of pilot projects in exchange for service closures are not a fair deal for homeless Australians", said Rex Graham, Manager Homeless Services, Wesley Mission.

Australian Federation of Homelessness Organisations, Executive Officer, Jack Quinane
Ph: 0410 574 440

Australian Council of Social Service, President, Andrew McCallum Ph: 0419 626 155

Mission Australia, General Manager Community Services, Marie Leech Ph: 0418 679 626

Wesley Mission, Manager Homeless Persons Services, Rex Graham Ph: 0423 029 579

St Vincent de Paul Society, Manager Community Relations, John Picot Ph: (02) 9560 8666

The Salvation Army, (NSW) Rhonda Gregory, Territorial Consultant Social Support Programs Ph: 0407 220 474, (Vic) John Dalziel, Media Liaison Officer Ph (03) 9896 6007

Anglicare Australia, Executive Director Sue Leppert Ph: 0402 825 282

¹ Chamberlain, C. and MacKenzie, D. (2003) *Counting the Homeless*, Australian Bureau of Statistics, Melbourne.

² Ibid.

³ AIHW (2004) *Demand for SAAP assistance by homeless people 2002-03* Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, Canberra.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Erebus Consulting Partners (2004) *National Evaluation of the Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP IV) - Final Report* Commonwealth of Australia, Canberra.