

MEDIA RELEASE
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Regional women in Victoria face homelessness crisis

Women in regional Victoriaⁱ are facing a housing crisis with new research revealing one in seven has been homeless in the past five years.

YWCA National Housing surveyed 1039 women living on low to moderate incomesⁱⁱ across regional Australia to determine their access to affordable housing.

The research found 14 per cent of women living in regional Victoria reported having been homeless in the past five years and 2.3 per cent were homeless at the time the study was conducted in late 2019.

In addition, more one in six Victorian research participants (17 per cent) knew of at least one woman who was currently homeless.

YWCA National Housing and Property Development Director Jan Berriman said the *Women's Housing Needs in Regional Australia* report revealed higher levels of homelessness than previous studies and statistics.

“One quarter of women who had been homeless, either in the past five years or currently, did not share their situation with any family member or friend, reflecting the likelihood of a much higher level of homelessness than previously understood,” Ms Berriman said.

“This is the first national study of women’s access to housing outside the nation’s capital cities and it clearly shows an urgent need for more safe, secure and affordable accommodation.”

NSW had the highest numbers of regional women who reported they had experienced homelessness in the past five years (17 per cent) and South Australia had the lowest (8 per cent). The national average was 12 per cent.

The report found many women sacrificed daily essentials to meet their housing payments with 30 per cent reporting they went without meals in the past year and 44 per cent refraining from heating or cooling their homes.

Ms Berriman said the numbers of women experiencing homelessness were expected to increase in the aftermath of bushfires, droughts and pandemics like COVID-19 because housing and jobs would be lost and rates of domestic and family violence were likely to increase.

“Domestic and family violence is the leading cause of homelessness for women in Australia, and in regional areas the impacts are even more severe because social services and supports may be limited and strained to start with,” she said.

“We need to urgently double and diversify affordable housing options in the regions or face a tsunami of homeless women and children.”

Ms Berriman said the solution lay in the public and private sectors working together on innovative, commercially sustainable and affordable housing options.

“YWCA National Housing is pioneering novel housing solutions that involve partnerships with private operators and build-to-rent projects that provide eligible tenants with options to buy,” she said.

“But this research demonstrates we need to innovate on a much larger scale to meet demand.

“Government, philanthropic, corporate and community organisations need to partner to create and increase the supply of social and affordable housing options whilst funding housing support services across the country.”

This research was partially funded by the Commonwealth Department of Industry, Innovation and Science through the Building Better Regions Fund Community Investments Stream Round 3.

Find the full report here: www.ywcahousing.org.au/research

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About YWCA National Housing

YWCA National Housing is the only national women’s housing provider in Australia. We currently provide over 150,000 nights of affordable accommodation to women through our owned and operated properties in Victoria, Queensland and Northern Territory.

YWCA National Housing believe the provision of safe, secure and affordable accommodation is a foundation for empowering women to lead a fulfilled life. We provide and advocate for improved access to safe, secure and affordable housing for low income Australians, particularly women and their children.

About YWCA Australia

YWCA Australia is a leading intersectional feminist organisation focused on improving gender equality for women, young women and girls. For 140 years, we have challenged the systems, structures and policies that act as barriers to women, especially young women, achieving their full potential.

Our high-impact evidence-based programs and services are inclusive of all women and offer support with housing, homelessness, safety, wellbeing and leadership. We aim to positively impact the lives of more than two million women, young women and girls by the end of 2023.

ⁱ Sample size – 174 women in Victoria

ⁱⁱ <https://www.ywcahousing.org.au/research>