

WINE NEWS

Homeless people failed by the commonwealth funding model, experts nationally say

By Sowaibah Hanifie

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PHOTO: Carlos Hernandez lives on the street in Darwin (ABC News: Sowaibah Hanifie)

The Federal Government's homelessness funding structure is not meeting the demands of areas with highest needs, social support organisations have argued.

The Northern Territory has the lowest population of Australia's six states and territories but has consistently had the highest rates of homelessness in the country for over a decade, according to figures from the Australian Bureau of Statistics.

Despite this, it has received the least amount of funding support from the Commonwealth.

Frontline services have said people are being turned away because funding under the National Housing and Homelessness Agreement (NHHA) is distributed to states according to population size, rather than need.

4,494 people needing support in the Northern Territory were turned away in the year 2017-18, according to the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare.

'I can't take it much longer'

Carlos Hernandez, 75, has been sleeping rough on Darwin's streets for seven months.

He said it was because he sends most of his pension to his impoverished family of four in Indonesia.

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Key points:

- Across Australia, 4,494 people needing support for homelessness were turned away in the year 2017-18
 - Advocates say funding arrangements are not meeting demands in areas with high rates of homelessness
 - They say the model should be changed to a needs-based structure
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He said he cries almost every day because he has been absent in most of his children's lives, sleeping on the streets or on strangers' couches in Australia.

"I'm not going to let my children sleep on the road, I don't care if I have too, but not my children, they're too small. The money I have, I cannot pay for rent," he said.

"My drug is my son and my daughter, every time I have money, I call my wife.

"My children call me saying come home. My little girl is not six years old yet.

"I feel aching, I feel aching, I can't take it much longer."

Mr Hernandez can barely walk due to two fractures in his spine and is illiterate after escaping from Cuba as a young boy, limiting his job prospects.

Of his \$280-a-week pension, he said he sends \$150 of that to his wife. He saves whatever is left in the hope that one day he'll have enough to live with his family, in whatever country that may be.

This week he has \$20 for shopping and next week only \$5. Mr Hernandez said in the past he's gone three days without food or living on basics like bread and beans.

"There are many people who tell me you need to stop posting money to your wife, you need to live too. I understand but my children over there, nobody will knock on the door and say here's some money," he said.

'Not keeping up with demand'



PHOTO: John is an Aboriginal man sleeping near a building in Darwin's CBD with his wife. (ABC News: Sowaibah Hanifie)

The NT St Vincent de Paul chief executive Fran Avon said her organisation was at capacity and turning away around six calls every day because of funding constraints.

"For some people, the situation is I need accommodation tonight and we have to say we can get you something in six weeks' time," Ms Avon said

"By that time their situation is either much worse or they've had to find alternative solutions."

NT Shelter executive officer Peter McMillan said it made little sense not to fund services based on need.

"There are significant shortfalls for housing right across the board in Northern Territory and what we also see is a significant shortfall of funding for services," he said.

"There's no reason why states such as Western Australia, that has 9,000 homeless, should be receiving \$157 million dollars under that agreement, whereas we (NT) have 13,700 and we receive \$19 million." o



PHOTO: This 80 year old defence force veteran is one of hundreds of homeless people in the Territory who sleep on the streets. (ABC News: Alen Dowler)

Homelessness Australia chair Jenny Smith said there was a decrease in funding to Indigenous housing and homelessness by \$200 million over three years.

"It's unarguable that we need national strategies both for homelessness and for housing," she said.

"Really we're going to have to strongly encourage them to develop the policies we need to see the investment we need in social housing."

Federal Assistant Housing Minister Luke Howarth said in a statement that \$5.8 million of \$20 million was allocated to the NT under the NHHA.

He said funding specific to homelessness was allocated based on homeless population, and the general funding of the NHHA was based on population size.

"This approach specifically recognises the variation in levels of homelessness across jurisdictions," he said.

"The NHHA ensures that funding for homelessness services will be ongoing and indexed for the first time, to provide certainty to frontline services that help Australians who are homeless or at risk of homelessness."

The Productivity Commission was reviewing the NHHA for 2022 to inform funding arrangements for 2023.

Topics: homelessness, community-and-society, government-and-politics, states-and-territories, nt