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To the editor

Homelessness is a growing national crisis.

There is no positive spin on the issue of homelessness.

Officially 21,715 Queenslanders are considered homeless. But that is just those who were able to be counted by the Australian Bureau of Statistics on Census night in 2016.

The real figure is likely much higher.

Many more are the hidden homeless, they are couch surfing with friends and family until they outlive their welcome, or they are sleeping in cars or in parks away from judging eyes.

The fact that in this day and age there are still people having to shiver through each winter without shelter, is frankly, a shameful indictment on society and how we treat those who have fallen through its cracks.

National Homelessness Week August 4-10 is a chance to take stock of just how bad the problem has become, but also an opportunity to forge a new path forward, a path of empathy and compassion, a path of housing and hope.

It needs all levels of government, corporates, not-for-profits, philanthropists, and visionaries coming together to clean it up. This week should serve as a wake-up call to all of us.

Vinnies are committed to saving as many families as possible from the perils of life on the street, housing more than 1200 people in the last year, but the problem is too big for us and other not-for-profits to confront alone.

The fact is there are a myriad of factors that only a coordinated approach will solve. There is an extreme lack of social and affordable housing, rising costs of living, unsecure and unstable work, growing underemployment, a sluggish economy and a social safety net in Newstart which hasn't seen a rise in 27 years and remains woefully inadequate.

The results of which mean thousands of Queenslanders don't have a home, including 3,372 children under 12. As a father I find that figure incredibly hard to stomach, and inexcusable.

Homelessness is a growing emergency we must address now, or see it spiral out of our control, evidenced by the fact that 190,000 Queensland households are in rental stress, putting them just two pay days or significant life events away from life on the street.

We are doing what we can, but we need help, and I challenge everyone in government, the private sector and the wider community to take five minutes and consider if that homeless person you walked past was your mother or father, your son or daughter, would you help them?

Kevin Mercer,

CEO
St Vincent de Paul Society Queensland.

ENDS.

Media contact: Joshua Paterson – 0408 675 567