



MEDIA RELEASE

Friday 14th August, 2020

MALLEE FAMILY CARE SPEAKS OUT ON HOMELESSNESS

The Chief Executive Officer of Mallee Family Care, Ms. Teresa Jayet, presented to the *Inquiry into Homelessness in Victoria* on Thursday and during her submission, provided some sobering insights into the affect a lack of social and affordable housing is having on people living in the Mallee.

The Inquiry, chaired by Fiona Patten MLC, is taking submissions from organisations working on the frontline to gain an understanding of the changing scale and nature of homelessness in Victoria, its impact and government responses.

Ms. Jayet says that over the last several years, Mallee Family Care has seen increasing numbers of people seeking assistance due to homelessness and she predicts the organisation will see a further spike in calls for help as the supplementary and income support payments that were put in place as an immediate response to COVID-19, begin to be rolled back.

In her opening address to the Committee, Ms. Jayet said that homelessness cannot be solved without homes and called for investment in social and crisis housing as an urgent priority.

“The key to preventing and ending homelessness is an adequate supply of safe, affordable, long-term housing.”

The Mallee Family Care submission was evidenced with substantial data based on the homelessness service the Agency delivers in the Swan Hill region, a feature that was commended by the Inquiry. Among the statistics Ms. Jayet highlighted were:

- The largest cohort of people accessing services were youth between the age of 18 and 25
- The number of women seeking assistance is increasing and they now account for 57% of all requests for Mallee Family Care homelessness support services
- Over one in two people accessing support had a prior mental health diagnosis or were experiencing mental health issues
- More than three in four people accessing the service were on government support payments

Ms. Jayet said this data was pivotal in understanding the drivers of homelessness and in developing place-based responses in tangent with holistic policy to address and ultimately end homelessness.



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By way of example, Ms. Jayet referred to the recently announced Victorian Government ‘From Homelessness to a Home’ Package which aims to head lease 1,100 properties from the private rental market to provide permanent housing for rough sleepers.

“Whilst this announcement theoretically sounds promising, its application in our service area is problematic. In Swan Hill we have a 0.33% rental vacancy rate and a shortfall of 260 social housing buildings. There simply aren’t the properties available for the Government to head lease.”

Ms. Jayet said any policy decisions around housing must be done within the context of place and through the lens of early intervention and prevention models.

“When considering the issue of homelessness and measures to address its persistence and prevalence, policy makers must consider the implications of geographic locations. We must have place-based policy to account for the nuances of locality, particularly in regional, remote and rural settings.”

Organisations from around the state are participating in the Inquiry’s public hearings with the final Report due to be tabled in February 2021.

ENDS



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