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Mallee Family Care takes local housing concerns to Senate inquiry

Mallee Family Care Chief Executive Officer Teresa Jayet today gave evidence to the Senate Economics References Committee's inquiry into social housing. She set out what the housing shortage looks like in the Mallee and what it will take to get social housing built in regional communities.

Ms Jayet told the committee that national housing commitments were not reaching regional communities like the Mallee, where need is high but local providers are small and the funding system is designed for large projects in the cities.

"Every week we see families who have received a notice to vacate, renters living with black mould because they're afraid to report it, and parents in steady jobs who can't find anywhere to live," Ms Jayet said.

"Mildura has no youth refuge beds. Right now, a young person who needs somewhere safe tonight is offered a motel, a caravan park or a move to Melbourne, more than 500 kilometres from home."

Ms Jayet pointed to the proposed Mildura Education First Youth Foyer, developed with SuniTAFE and the Brotherhood of St Laurence, as a project that is ready to build but stuck between governments. The Foyer would house up to 40 young people aged 16 to 24 who are homeless or at risk of homelessness. While they live there, residents are supported to stay in study, training or work.

She explained that Commonwealth housing funding can help pay to build the Foyer, but it doesn't guarantee the ongoing funding needed to run it. The 24-hour staff and support that make a Foyer work need a commitment from the Victorian Government, as Victoria's other Foyers have. The two sources of funding run on different timetables, and no agency is responsible for bringing them together.

"We know what young people in Mildura need, and we're ready to provide it. We have the partners, the site and the plans. What we don't have is a way to bring the money to build the Foyer and the money to run it together. Until we do, young people will keep being sent away from home to find somewhere safe to stay," Ms Jayet said.

Ms Jayet also told the committee that competitive funding rounds favour large providers with development teams, big balance sheets and many projects underway. In regions like the Mallee, the local not-for-profit is often the only organisation able to own and run social housing, yet it struggles to compete even where the need is greatest.

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"On current settings, the projects most likely to be built are in the places best equipped to build them, not the places that need them most," Ms Jayet said.

Mallee Family Care has called for a regional stream within Commonwealth social housing programs, building funding paired with guaranteed running costs, and a single Commonwealth entry point that brings Commonwealth and state funding together for projects that cross housing, homelessness and education.

"Governments have made significant commitments, and we acknowledge them. What matters now is that the money already committed reaches the communities where the need is greatest, and that includes the Mallee," Ms Jayet said.

Mallee Family Care's submission is available here: https://malleefamilycare.org.au/social-housing-inquiry

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About Mallee Family Care

Mallee Family Care is a dedicated, place-based community service organisation that has been supporting the regional, rural and remote communities of north-west Victoria, south-west New South Wales and Far West New South Wales since 1979.

With around 300 staff delivering more than 70 programs, Mallee Family Care supports thousands of people each year. It provides vital services in areas including family and youth support, mental health, financial counselling, tenancy advocacy, legal assistance, disability services, and early childhood education and care.

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