

# Where are you sleeping tonight?

Homelessness – Not just sleeping rough

2020



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# Shoalhaven Homelessness Taskforce

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The Shoalhaven Homelessness Taskforce was a Section 355 & 377 Committee of Council (Local Government Act 1993). It was a strategic advisory committee to advocate for and inform Council's decision-making process related to homelessness in the Shoalhaven. The Taskforce worked with Council to address issues, develop options and assist with the identification of preferred solutions as part of Council's decision-making process.

The Taskforce also played a key role in advocating community views on homelessness issues in the Shoalhaven.

Council continues to seek strategic advice on homelessness through the Shoalhaven Homelessness and Good Living Conditions Interagency.

The following is a series of hypothetical case studies developed by the Shoalhaven Homelessness Taskforce to raise awareness of homelessness and its impact on the individual, services and community in the Shoalhaven.

## What is Homelessness

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Many people have preconceptions about who experiences or who is at risk of homelessness. These ideas can be influenced by what we read or watch, our own experiences and those of our friends and family. Such impressions help to form our ideas of what a 'typical homeless person' looks like and who they are, but homelessness can affect anyone.

The typical perception of homelessness is someone who is 'sleeping rough', meaning that this person has no shelter or is living in an improvised dwelling.

However, there is no single definition of homelessness. The Australian Bureau of Statistics statistical definition for homelessness is that:

*"When a person does not have suitable accommodation alternatives, they are considered homeless if their current living arrangement:*

- is in a dwelling that is inadequate; or*
- has no tenure, or if their initial tenure is short and not extendable; or*
- does not allow them to have control of, and access to space for social relations."*

This means that homelessness is more than simply 'rooflessness'.

# How You Can Help

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Shoalhaven Homeless Services are always looking for an extra helping hand, if you have time to spare there are many opportunities to volunteer your time or donate.

Organisations you can volunteer with:

- Salt Care
- Safe Shelter Shoalhaven
- Southern Youth and Family Services

Organisations you can donate to:

- Salt Care
- Safe Shelter Shoalhaven
- Southern Youth and Family Services
- Illawarra Shoalhaven Men's Homelessness Service - St Vincent de Paul

# Where To Find Support

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If you are looking for support with a crisis, housing, food, clothing or other support in the Shoalhaven, click [here](#) or follow this link: <https://bit.ly/2PNHdJp>

Link2Home provides information, conducts assessments, and makes referrals to services across New South Wales. The service is for people who are homeless or who are worried they will become homeless, as well as for advocates acting on a person's behalf. Link2home is **available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week**, every day of the year on **1800 152 152**.



# Hypothetical Case Studies

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## Homelessness Amongst Older Men

The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare identify men, who are aged 35 years and older, make up the majority of those who are classified chronically homeless across Australia. It is common for older men who are going through a financial crisis and / or who find themselves unable to afford their current housing to be at the highest risk of becoming homeless. Another common cause of homelessness in males can be family or relationship breakdown.

Financial crises, family and relationship breakdowns and a lack of affordable housing are all major risk factors for older men who face homelessness. Men may be less likely than women to seek help for housing and homelessness related issues in a crisis, often due to the stigma surrounding personal or professional crisis.

Any period of homelessness can have negative impacts on health and wellbeing. Men who are homeless can be more likely to experience mental illness than males with a stable housing history. Homelessness can also have negative effects on social relationships if people are forced to relocate away from their friends and family. People who are experiencing homelessness can become socially isolated and are at a greater risk of developing physical and mental health conditions.

Men may be less likely to seek help for housing and homelessness related issues in a crisis. It is important to check in early on with people who are or might be experiencing a significant life event or hardship. A common sign of someone who is homeless is that they are moving from one temporary solution to another, until they find permanent and secure accommodation.



## Housing for Young People

For young people, a supportive and stable home environment is an important part of life, a stable home has a positive effect on physical and mental health and educational outcomes. Barriers for living out of home for the first time can be the cost of rent and utilities, financial instability and the availability of appropriate housing. Many young people have poor access to stable and long term, appropriate and affordable housing and as a result are at risk of homelessness.

Housing contributes to a sense of individual freedom and personal value. Appropriate housing gives young people a sense of positive self-esteem, a feeling that they have control over their lives. This contributes to their sense of identity and personhood.

Young people are at a point in their lives in which they are employed part-time or casually, in part to enable flexibility for study commitments or to undertake apprenticeships. Census statistics show that Shoalhaven rental costs are mostly in \$299 - \$349 a week price range. For a young person on a 3rd year apprentice weekly wage, estimated at \$525, affording appropriate housing while living sustainably and participating in community life is difficult in the Shoalhaven.

For young people in NSW, the situation is vastly different than for past generations. The housing context for young people today is characterised by declining homeownership rates, decreasing housing and rental affordability, a decline in the availability of social housing, and rising youth homelessness. High rental costs, low incomes, insecure share housing, and the lack of affordable housing and social housing stock all make independent living a challenge for many young people.

The Shoalhaven Affordable Housing Strategy states that increasing pressure from the Sydney housing market is having a significant impact on local people, who are forced to compete in an increasingly competitive local housing market. In particular, real rents are increasing compared with local incomes, and the relative scarcity of rental accommodation at the more affordable end of the market means that real estate agents can be increasingly selective about who is housed. This is also contributing to homelessness and increasing the risk of homelessness among groups who would once have been in more secure accommodation. At the time of writing this case study the largest housing provider in the Shoalhaven had no vacant affordable housing properties for rent.

Appropriate housing ends homelessness and is important to meet the physical, social, cultural, economic and developmental needs of young people. Stable and appropriate accommodation enables young people to thrive. However, many young people are experiencing poor housing outcomes, and are one of the most at risk groups of homelessness.





## Families and Homelessness

Many people might find it difficult to believe that homelessness not only effects the lives of individuals, but it can affect the lives of the families too. Children who are experiencing homelessness are almost always part of a family group, and children are one of the largest groups of Australians experiencing homelessness (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare).

The two common causes of family homelessness are domestic and family violence in Australia. However, a shortage of affordable housing and lower incomes means families are increasingly vulnerable to homelessness. Since July 2018 the local homeless sector have supported Shoalhaven families on more than 286 occasions since July 2018.

Often, families don't get a say in if they become homeless or not, and the primary aim for most families in a time of crisis is to stay together. The experience of homelessness with children makes an already precarious situation even more so. When a family is homeless both children and parents can experience heightened levels of stress and the complexities faced during this time can be daunting to the most connected and empowered community member.

For a child, being homeless can mean missing out on many things, and at a time when stability, health, wellbeing and education are some of the most important factors of their development. When a family loses their home, they are at risk of losing more than their belongings and jobs, they are likely to lose vital community connections with doctors and medical treatment, schools and sporting or social groups. Parents' stress levels are likely to be exacerbated, having to face the daunting complexities of maintaining their child's and their own wellbeing and dignity while living in vulnerable and unstable circumstances.

Children who are homeless are more likely to experience poor physical and mental health and experience low-self-



esteem, self-confidence, anxiety and depression. Homelessness can also have a negative effect on a child's ability to take part in school. Adverse effects on mental health and emotion isolation can mean that children who are homeless can have difficulty in relating to their peers.

A safe and stable home is one of the most important factors in maintaining the physical, emotional and mental health of parents and children. Homelessness can affect families from all walks

of life, and it is often difficult to identify as people find temporary solutions such as staying with friends or family, staying in hotels or caravan parks, short-term or crisis accommodations and even sleeping in cars. Early intervention and prevention of homelessness is key to addressing issues before they become major setbacks for families. There are many services across Australia and New South Wales that provide support to people at risk of or experiencing homelessness. A good first step is to reach out for support, telephone services can offer information and referral. Link2home is **available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week**, every day of the year on **1800 152 152**.

## The Not So Great Outdoors – Sleeping Rough in Summer

Until recently extreme weather conditions in the winter months has been the focus when protecting vulnerable community members who are sleeping rough. However, recent weather conditions and fire danger days in the Shoalhaven, and across the country, prompts concern for people sleeping rough in the community.

People sleeping rough are recognised as some of the most disadvantaged and vulnerable people in our community. On Census night in 2016, approximately 8,200 Australians were sleeping rough – either living on the streets, sleeping in parks, squatting in abandoned buildings, staying in cars or living in improvised dwellings. People who are sleeping rough in the Shoalhaven are also known to seek the peace and privacy of bushland.

Approximately 90% of the Shoalhaven is identified as Bush Fire Prone Land by the New South Wales Rural Fire Service. About 27% of this land is privately owned and the remaining land is either State Forest, National Park, Unoccupied Crown Land and Commonwealth Land. On average, the Shoalhaven has 600 bushfires per year, approximately 20 of these fires can be considered major fires that require two or more fire authorities to respond. As



As a typically average climate, the bushfire season in the Shoalhaven runs between September and March each year. Generally, rainfall is more pronounced in the Summer and Autumn months.

The Shoalhaven can experience significant fire activity at any time of the year and fires in less accessible parts of the Shoalhaven may burn for days and even weeks. During these periods, people sleeping rough are vulnerable to the threat of fire in an immediate emergency. Smoke reduces the quality of the air we breath and can cause a variety of health problems such as irritated eyes and throat, runny nose and illnesses such as bronchitis, emphysema and asthma. To minimise the effects of exposure to smoke, it is recommended to stay indoors, with doors and windows shut and turning on the air conditioner can also help purify the air. However, this advice is impractical and unachievable for people sleeping rough.

It can be difficult to find people sleeping in the bush with limited ability to describe locations, even more so in an emergency. People who are sleeping in bushland may not have access the apps and technology, such as the Fires Near Me NSW app or radio broadcasts, that the community often rely on in an emergency. It is important during this time that the community look out for people who are sleeping rough in extreme conditions. If you or another member of our community are in immediate danger, call 000 (triple zero).