# Rough realities: Rising homelessness and housing insecurity in Sydney & NSW

3 August 2025

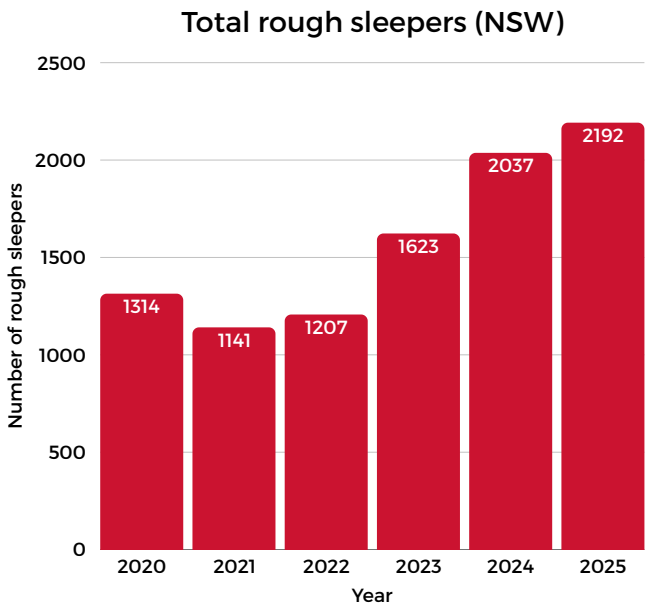
Homelessness is surging across NSW. Pressures are increasing on many fronts - housing costs are up, affordable rentals are scarcer and cost of living is climbing. Communities are suffering from repeated natural disasters, yet support services are stretched and cannot keep up.

**Key facts**

- Housing insecurity is on the rise throughout regional NSW and metropolitan Sydney.
- Overstretched services are underfunded and leaving vulnerable people behind.
- Coordinated action and investment are urgently needed to help people access secure housing.

**50% spike in people sleeping rough**

Since 2020,  number of people sleeping rough increased by 50%. Many of the 2,192 rough sleepers counted in 2025 are in the City of Sydney, Byron Shire, Coffs Harbour, Lismore and Tweed local government areas.



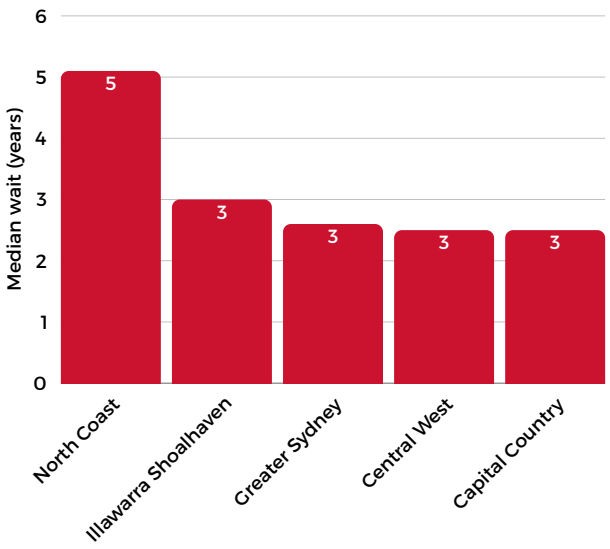


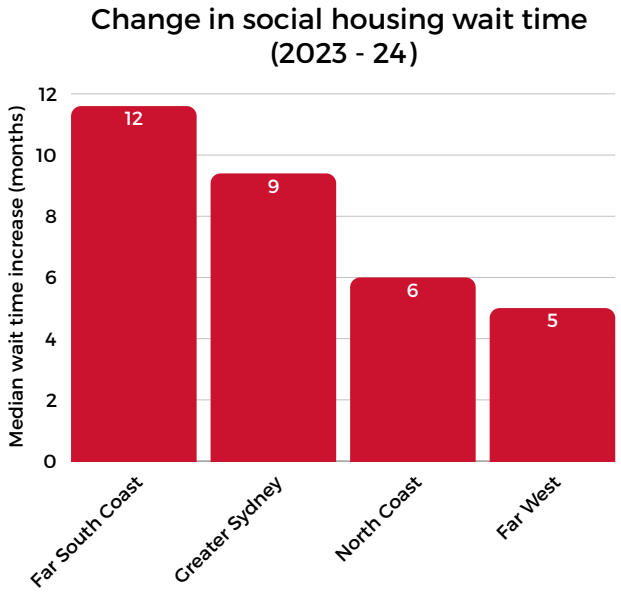
## Reach us

**E** admin@homelessnessnsw.org.au
**W** homelessnessnsw.org.au

## Social housing wait times are long and still growing

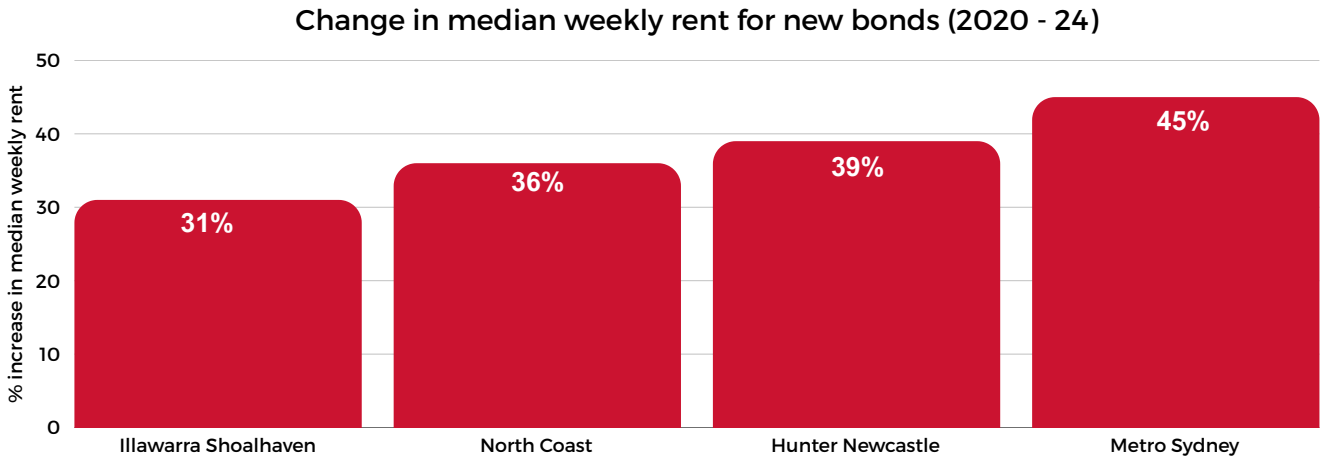
The wait times to access social housing are blowing out. The shortest median wait time is 7 months in Central Coast but elsewhere, like in the North Coast, it is more than 5 years. Wait times are getting longer in the Far South Coast, Greater Sydney, Snowy and Capital Country regions.




## Rents are increasing faster than wages

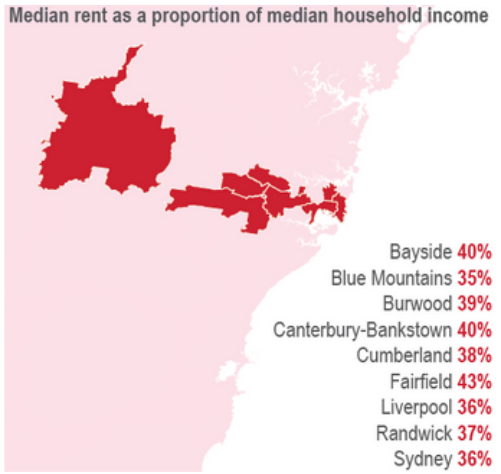
Rental bond data shows that median weekly rents across NSW have jumped significantly. Between 2020 and 2024, median weekly rents increased by at least 30% across the Illawarra Shoalhaven, North Coast region, Hunter Newcastle and metropolitan Sydney regions. With the wage price index increasing only 3.4% between 2024 and 2025, it is clear that the steep increases in rent are outpacing the growth in wages.

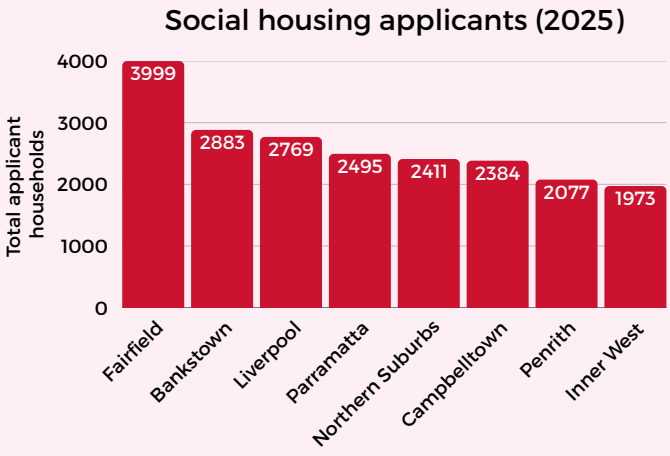


## Visible and hidden crisis in metropolitan Sydney

The City of Sydney continues to be in crisis. The 346 people sleeping rough in the CBD make up 15% of the count across the state. Yet, the LGA accounts for just 2.7% of the NSW population.

There are other hidden hardships, as communities across 9 of the 33 metropolitan LGAs are deep in rental stress. It is experienced in households from the City of Sydney and Randwick in the east to Liverpool in the west. It is most pronounced in Bayside, Canterbury-Bankstown and Fairfield local government areas, where the median rent is 40-43% of the household income. The social housing wait times are getting longer and there are high waiting lists all across Sydney, from Liverpool to the Inner West and Northern Suburbs.

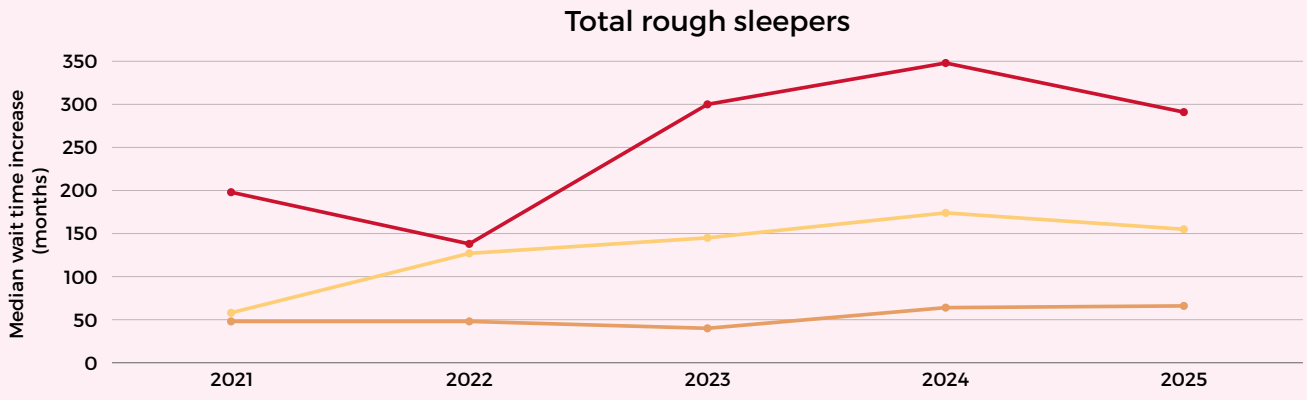



## Regional crisis spotlight: Northern Rivers

The devastating 2022 floods, followed by Tropical Cyclone Alfred in 2025, has turned the existing housing crisis in the Northern Rivers into an ongoing emergency. Rough sleeping has nearly doubled and between 2020-25, the numbers soared to 654 people. Social housing wait times shot up 10% just in the past year and are now at 60 months.

The region takes in Ballina, Byron, Clarence Valley, Kyogle, Lismore, Richmond Valley and Tweed local government areas. In all 7 local government areas in the Northern Rivers region, households are paying between 40 to 58% of household income to meet median rents.



**Specialist Homelessness Services are at a breaking point**

Demand is outstripping the available Specialist Homelessness Services. More people need help but caseloads have ballooned and staff are burning out. The services cannot meet the urgent and growing demand. With resources stretched thin, there are dangerous service gaps and unsustainable pressure on frontline workers.

Action 1: We need immediate funding relief with an increase of 50% from the baseline. This will help to address this crisis in service capacity and to make it more sustainable.

**More social housing is needed to provide safe pathways from homelessness**

The sharp rise in private rent shows the importance of social housing, which offers secure, below-market tenancies for disadvantaged households. If the social housing supply does not increase, more people will be left waiting for months or even years.

Action 2: We need to grow social housing by 10,000 homes per year, with the goal of reaching 10% of all housing in NSW being social housing.

Without immediate action, more people in NSW will lose their homes and sleeping rough will continue to climb. Wait times will continue to stretch out, intensifying with each new disaster. Everyone needs a secure place to call home, and NSW needs more funding for homelessness services and social housing.

## Reach us

**E** admin@homelessnessnsw.org.au
**W** homelessnessnsw.org.au

**Glossary**

- **Capital Country region –** includes the LGAs of Goulburn Mulwaree, Hilltops, Queanbeyan-Palerang Regional, Upper Lachlan, Wingecarribee and Yass Valley.
- **Central West region –** includes the LGAS of Bathurst, Blayney, Bogan, Bourke, Brewarrina, Cabonne, Coonamble, Cowra, Dubbo, Forbes, Gilgandra, Lachlan, Lithgow, Mid-Western, Narromine, Oberon, Orange, Parkes, Walgett, Warren, Warrumbungle and Weddin.
- **Far South Coast region –** includes the LGAs of Bega Valley and Eurobodalla.
- **Greater Sydney –** includes the metro councils found in the Local Government directory.
- **Hunter Newcastle region –** includes the LGAs of Cessnock, Dungog, Lake Macquarie, Maitland, Mid-Coast, Muswellbrook, Newcastle, Port Stephens, Singleton and Upper Hunter.
- **Illawarra Shoalhaven region –** includes the LGAs of Kiama, Shellharbour, Shoalhaven and Wollongong.
- **North Coast region –** includes the LGAs of Ballina, Bellingen, Byron Shire, Clarence Valley, Coffs Harbour, Kempsey, Kyogle, Lismore, Nambucca Valley, Port Macquarie-Hastings, Richmond Valley and Tweed.
- **Northern Rivers region –** includes the LGAs of Ballina, Byron, Clarence Valley, Kyogle, Lismore, Richmond Valley and Tweed.
- **LGA –** local government area.
- **Social housing waiting list –** the number of social housing applicant households on the NSW Housing Register.

**Further resources**

- **Housing and Homelessness Dashboard –** https://homelessnessnsw.org.au/data/housing-and-homelessness-dashboard/
- **NSW Budget Discussion Paper 2025-26 –** https://homelessnessnsw.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2025/03/20250318-AIHW-Budget-Discussion-Paper.pdf