

Floods and Homelessness

April 2021

Climate change events such as the 2019/2020 bushfires and the recent floods greatly impact homelessness and the capacity of homelessness services to deliver services in the affected areas.

The ongoing under-resourcing of the homelessness service sector, the high demand for social housing and the already limited private rental markets for people on low incomes combined with a continued emergency response to bushfire, pandemic and floods is not sustainable for services, staff or people at risk of and experiencing homelessness.

Once again, during the floods in the Mid North Coast and Nepean-Hawkesbury areas services were required to be evacuated and staff went over and above to assist with this whilst in many instances also having to support their own families and prepare for their own evacuation.

Homelessness NSW calls on the NSW Government to urgently consult with services in the flood and bushfire affected areas to identify what resources can be provided to support services to address the current and ongoing issues that have been created by these weather events and to urgently look at the ongoing affordable housing options including investment in social housing as well as short term options to meet current housing need in the affected areas.

Homelessness NSW also calls on the NSW Government to provide additional funding for the Temporary Accommodation Program to assist in addressing the impact of the floods on access to crisis and other accommodation.

Following last year's devastating bushfires Homelessness NSW made an extensive submission to the Bushfire inquiry on climate change events and homelessness. The recent floods have shown that these recommendations are as relevant in these circumstances. We know that the bushfires and now the floods services have lost access to properties. Staff lost their homes. The NSW Government must support the sector that supports the community.

That is why we call for the development of emergency response planning that includes homelessness services and for the NSW Government to invest in:

- Resources to assist homelessness services to prepare and plan for extreme weather events and inclusion of homelessness services in emergency management prevention and preparation planning, with a focus on client safety and additional support requirements.
- Resources to support homelessness services in managing the influx of clients and increase in workload during an emergency and in the recovery period, including how staff might be redeployed from other areas to support the response to enable existing staff to support their own personal evacuation or property management response.
- Resources provided to Councils in areas with rough sleeper communities to plan for and lead a response to support people sleeping rough during hazardous periods to ensure that they remain healthy and safe.

- Resources to ensure that all low cost housing, including social housing, can ensure a smoke free and healthy environment in order to protect the health of tenants.
- Aboriginal community led planning and resources to ensure that Aboriginal people are not displaced from their homes and community and are able to access affordable and appropriate housing.
- Resources to provide affordable housing for the most vulnerable members of the community during the recovery period.

Click [here](#) to read our submission.

Examples from the recent floods include:

Hawkesbury

Homeless 'sites' on the Hawkesbury River and Caravan and Ski Parks being flooded with no initial plan in place to support people. Homelessness services and the Department of Communities and Justices worked collaboratively to support people by going across in boats and ferrying them back across the river to where there are services, looking for accommodation options and providing ongoing support – but it was a rapid scramble to find accommodation, food and other supports with no pre-existing plan in place for this – and there will be limited long term options because there is no available social housing and no services in the area.

Mid North Coast

In the Mid North coast, it would be great see something specific about flexible and responsive access to Temporary Accommodation during severe weather events. We still faced the red tape of people not being eligible for TA due to breaches. Homelessness services paid for those people we connected with to access safe and dry accommodation. A localised Plan that was led by DCJ or Council and aimed at assisting those who are sleeping rough would be welcomed. The plan would be in place and communicated prior to a crisis.

Homelessness drop-in services became the default evacuation centre for people sleeping rough. Pete's place was a natural point for people to go during the weather event in Coffs over the weekend. Port and Kempsey did have evacuation centres but people sleeping rough don't present to these locations. People sleeping rough are also unlikely to call Link2 Home. This is why there is a specific plan needed for those sleeping rough.