



Sydney Women's Homelessness Alliance Response to the National Summit on Women's Safety: Ending Violence Against Women and Children, 2021

Sydney Women's Homelessness Alliance (SWHA) is an interagency meeting for services that aim to address homelessness and its impacts for women in Sydney. Together, we have come up with a response to the National Summit on Women's Safety: Ending Violence Against Women and Children that occurred on the 6th and 7th September 2021.

Sydney Women's Homelessness Alliance supports the notion that the key to women's safety is timely access to safe, permanent and affordable housing. In our considerable experience, we know that it is only when that housing need is met that other needs can be met. Being homeless or precariously housed is a state of crisis in which women and children feel unsafe, contributing to intergenerational trauma. The pathway to social housing is prolonged and precarious, working with unrealistic timeframes and a bottleneck effect due to the chronic shortage of public housing. It is not a trauma-informed system as service users feel unsettled and services risk burnout.

Services have traditionally struggled for funding to meaningfully support women who are homeless or in precarious living situations, more so since housing reforms of 2013 when services were forced to merge or close, including refuges. Since the Summit, NSW Premier Dominic Perrottet announced an investment of almost \$500 million into building 75 new refuges and 200 affordable homes for women escaping domestic violence.

While this is a welcome investment into women's homelessness, we feel that it is merely a drop in the ocean as systemic issues that put women at risk of harm and homelessness are not addressed. While domestic and family violence is the most obvious and urgent cause of homelessness for women and children, we know that ANY woman can become homeless due to systemic issues such as the gender pay gap; age discrimination in the workforce; less job security due to casualisation of labour and diminished earning capacity due to carer responsibilities. These factors have been made painfully obvious throughout the COVID-19 pandemic.

With less financial security, it can take a single crisis or change in circumstances for any woman to find herself homeless, such as job loss, eviction, or the breakdown of a relationship. Other factors which exacerbate risk include mental



illness and comorbidity due to trauma histories or physical disability. Overarching these issues is the unaffordability of the private housing market.

Older women were identified as the fastest growing group of homeless people in 2011. Five years later, this group had increased by 30% and, shamefully, nothing has been done. We continue to see older women, often homeless for the first time, couch surfing or sleeping in cars due to a lack of other options. We would like to see more innovative models to accommodate an ageing population which disadvantages women in terms of safety and security.

While we appreciate the injection of funds for women and children escaping domestic violence, this will only serve as a band aid until systemic issues which create economic disadvantage for all women are addressed. Until then, we call for more social housing programs for all women to promote their safety and that of future generations.