

Attachment G - Provide support for people without permanent residency in NSW experiencing homelessness

People in NSW without permanent residency (PR) are in a particularly precarious position with regards to homelessness. This includes women and their children who are victim-survivors of domestic and family violence. Their experience of homelessness is directly related to discrimination on the basis of visa status and mode of arrival to Australia, and exclusion from the basic safety net available to other people in New South Wales. Domestic Violence NSW and the National Advocacy Group on Women on Temporary Visas Experiencing Violence¹ found that people on temporary visas face a range of barriers when at risk of and facing homelessness including:

- inability to access housing (NSW Housing policy prevents people on temporary visas from accessing transitional, social and public housing and rental assistance).
- inability to access healthcare (NSW Health policy excludes people without Medicare from accessing public hospitals except in limited circumstances; Commonwealth policy prevents people on temporary visas from accessing Medicare except in limited circumstances).
- inability to access income (Commonwealth policy prevents people on temporary visas from accessing Centrelink; People on temporary visas may have no or limited work rights depending on the visa type and conditions, and childcare responsibilities).
- challenges in accessing crisis accommodation (Service providers do not receive specific funding to assist people on temporary visas. Some service providers limit the number of people on temporary visas they support due to the high costs of supporting people without income for extended periods and their inability to access long-term housing).
- risk, fear and threats of deportation and separation from their children (People on temporary visas face complex intersecting legal issues relating to domestic violence, immigration, family, and child protection law and require legal advice and representations).
- lack of culturally safe and accessible services and free interpreting services.
- limited social networks and access to support, lack of understanding of their rights.
- inability to return to country of origin due to pandemic conditions
- inability to leave Australia with children due to complex and contradictory legal systems

Homelessness is often the result. A recently released report regarding people seeking asylum, living predominantly in West and Southwest Sydney, and their housing, homelessness, income, and employment experiences since arriving in Australia, found:²

- 55% had experienced some form of homelessness since arriving in Australia,
- 9% of respondents had slept rough, in a car, or in another improvised dwelling, and
- 14% had stayed in emergency accommodation since arrival.

Further, a study conducted by Foundations Housing found that 29% of crisis accommodation in Sydney based domestic and family violence services were occupied by women seeking asylum and on temporary visas, and their children.³ This is similar to findings in one of the first large scale studies of migrant and refugee women in Australia, where one third of women surveyed

said they experienced domestic and family violence and nearly a quarter reported increasing severity during COVID-19 lockdowns.⁴ It is incredibly hard for services to support such women and their families, as when there are no other alternatives for them, they often result in very long stays in what is temporary or transitional settings.

Work by Homelessness NSW also estimated approximately 20% of people sleeping rough in inner-city Sydney do not have permanent residency.⁵

The stripping back of access to any kind of income support in 2018 has likely resulted in increases to homelessness, compounded by the pandemic. The Status Resolution Support Service (SRSS) was one of the very few options available and enabled people to access roughly \$35 per day, a rate of 89% of JobSeeker. However, in 2020-2021 the Federal Government cut the SRSS funding by 85%, and the number of people receiving SRSS dropped from 13,299 in February 2018 to 3,159 in January 2021.⁶ This has had a direct and large impact on homelessness, with the Asylum Seeker Resource Centre reporting that since the cuts came into effect, accommodation assistance provided by them increased by 265%.⁷ For NSW this means that of the estimated 40,000 people seeking asylum in NSW, roughly 95% do not have access to any income support when they are not in work.⁸

This is significant, particularly considering the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on work. A survey of 101 people seeking asylum in Western Sydney found that all participants who had work prior to March 2020 lost work completely or had hours reduced following the pandemic. As people seeking asylum were excluded from JobKeeper, they were often the first to lose work and the last to re-gain it.⁹

A survey from the Refugee Council of Australia (RCOA) on homelessness and hunger amongst people seeking asylum during COVID-19 found:

- Over 88% of people seeking asylum asking for assistance from the service agencies and charitable groups had difficulty paying rent due to COVID-19.
- 55% are at risk of homelessness
- Over 14% are already currently experiencing homelessness (in a car, on the streets or in emergency accommodation).

The RCOA survey included reports of 'treating young children in this group for malnourishment and related diseases' and further reported the likely inability of this cohort to recover without support "people have exhausted their Super, savings, and other supports. There are debts being accumulated, which are likely to result in substantial hardship and destitution for some time to come."¹⁰

The consequences of widespread exclusion by the Federal Government have largely fallen to the states to repair.

To date, there has been very little relief to people without residency experiencing homelessness, and what support is available has been piecemeal and short-term. In 2020 and 2021 much-welcomed grants totalling \$6 million (temporary visa holders, asylum seekers and refugees) were delivered through Multicultural NSW for services to assist people with no permanent residency during the COVID-19 pandemic, however these were temporary in nature.

Of a \$11.3 million funding package for homelessness services and temporary accommodation on 30 June 2021, \$1 million was available to assist temporary visa holders, asylum seekers and refugees, again for a limited time only.

From the Federal Government, commitments have included \$10 million to trial the Temporary Visa Holders Experiencing Violence Pilot for one year and in the 2021-22 Budget they committed an additional \$10.3 million to extend the pilot for a further year, and \$13 million to the Red Cross to deliver relief and counselling to temporary migrants and people on bridging visas. These

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announcements while welcome are very limited in scope, considering the impacts of COVID on a very exposed group of people.

With the assistance of support services, in August 2021 the Emergency Accommodation program was extended to 33 people without PR in inner city Sydney. While some people exited due to the short-term nature of the service or because they had higher support needs than the Program was able to provide, many people have stayed in the accommodation. Some people had previously been sleeping rough for 7-9 years and are now accommodated.

No person in Australia should have to live with violence, face separation from their children or experience homelessness on the basis of their visa status. People without permanent residency, and their children, should have basic protections in Australia. Homelessness NSW recommends, in the NSW 2022-23 Budget the NSW Government:

Provide support for people without permanent residency in NSW experiencing homelessness, through funding for:

- **A medium term supported accommodation service**
- **Access to social housing, including products such as private rental subsidies and Temporary Accommodation**
- **A Housing First model accommodation program for those rough sleeping longer term or with multiple support needs**

¹ National Advocacy Group on Women on Temporary Visas Experiencing Violence, 'Path to Nowhere: Women on Temporary Visas Experiencing Violence and Their Children' (Australian Women Against Violence Alliance, 2018), <https://awava.org.au/2018/12/11/research-and-reports/path-to-nowhere-report-women-on-temporary-visas-experiencing-violence-and-their-children>.

² Anjali Roberts, Nishadh Rego, and Dr. Elizabeth Conroy, 'A Place to Call Home: A Report on the Experiences of Homelessness and Housing Exclusion among People Seeking Asylum in Greater Sydney' (Sydney: Jesuit Refugee Service and Western Sydney University, 10 December 2021), <https://aus.jrs.net/wp-content/uploads/sites/20/2021/08/A-Place-to-Call-Home-Survey-Findings.pdf>.

³ Anjali Roberts, 'Foundations Housing Project: A Scoping Study on Housing for People Seeking Asylum & Strategic Areas of Action towards Housing for All' (Sydney: Jesuit Refugee Service, Life Without Barriers, Asylum Seeker Centre, March 2020), <https://aus.jrs.net/wp-content/uploads/sites/20/2020/06/FoundationsHousingReport-for-WEB.pdf>.

⁴ Marie Segrave, Rebecca Wickes, and Chloe Keel, 'Migrant and Refugee Women in Australia: The Safety and Security Study' (Monash University, 2021).

⁵ Homelessness NSW, 'The Experience of People without Australian Permanent Residency Accessing Emergency Accommodation in Inner City Sydney' (Sydney: Homelessness NSW, December 2021), <https://homelessnessnsw.org.au/our-work/reports/>.

⁶ Anjali Roberts, Nishadh Rego, and Dr. Elizabeth Conroy, 'A Place to Call Home'.

⁷ House of Representatives Standing Committee on and Social Policy and Legal Affairs, 'Inquiry into Homelessness in Australia', Final Report (Canberra: Parliament of The Commonwealth of Australia, July 2021), https://parlinfo.aph.gov.au/parlInfo/download/committees/reportrep/024522/toc_pdf/Finalreport.pdf;fileType=application%2Fpdf.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Anjali Roberts, Nishadh Rego, and Dr. Elizabeth Conroy, 'A Place to Call Home'. p.4

¹⁰ Refugee Council of Australia, 'Homelessness and Hunger among People Seeking Asylum during COVID-19', Refugee Council of Australia, 2020, <https://www.refugeecouncil.org.au/homelessness-and-hunger-among-people-seeking-asylum-during-covid-19/>.