

Minister Zoe Bettison

Minister for Social Housing

Friday, 10 October, 2014

Federal Government should commit to homelessness funding

South Australian homelessness service providers have joined the State Government to call on the Abbott Government to commit to homelessness funding as part of today's World Homeless Day 2014 – *locals act locally on a global day*.

Social Housing Minister Zoe Bettison says the Federal Government must step up and commit to funding beyond next year or vulnerable South Australians will pay the price.

"The South Australian Government is committed to reducing homelessness and we have contributed significantly to making this happen since being elected in 2002," Ms Bettison said.

"Total funding for homelessness services in South Australia in 2014-15 is \$55 million, shared jointly by the State and Commonwealth Governments.

"However, Commonwealth funding remains uncertain beyond June 2015 and this is placing undue pressure on the homelessness sector including front line service providers like Common Ground, Hutt Street and Catherine House."

Ms Bettison said South Australians should be very proud of the homelessness services provided in this State.

"The sector is committed to assisting our State's most vulnerable people into safe, secure and affordable accommodation as well as helping them to reconnect with the community and rebuild their lives," she said.

Hutt Street Centre Chief Executive Ian Cox said any funding cuts would have a dramatic impact on people experiencing homelessness.

"A 30 per cent reduction in funding to Hutt St Centre would mean that 700 people could miss out on a service," Mr Cox said.

"This will increase waiting lists, frustrate the people who we are trying to assist, and cost both the community and economy in terms of unemployment, health care, crisis care and income security.

"South Australia has led the way nationally in our homelessness response and we urge the Commonwealth Government to meet its responsibility with a strong commitment to ongoing homelessness funding."

Common Ground Chief Executive Officer Maria Palumbo said withdrawing funding would "kick vulnerable South Australians when they are down".

“Removing existing support would take these issues to a whole new level and leave more South Australians without a safe, affordable and permanent place to live,” Ms Palumbo said.

“It would put added pressure on our health and welfare systems, including child protection - not to mention flow on impact in terms of police and prison resources. South Australian communities will feel this impact heavily.”

Catherine House Chief Executive Officer Madge McGuire said women were often the “hidden homeless” in the community – along with their children.

“Half the homeless population are women, most of whom have already suffered unimaginable trauma and often abuse,” Ms McGuire said.

“Funding cuts would take away their hope for a better future – for themselves and their children.”

Ms McGuire said in this, Mental Health Week, it was also important to recognise that mental health issues and homelessness go hand in hand.

“Right now more than one in five people aged between 15 and 64 who are admitted to a mental health service in Australia are assessed as having significant problems with their living conditions,” she said.

“By providing South Australians with both housing and support when they are struggling we can actually reduce anxiety and help them make permanent and positive changes in their lives, and ultimately, less dependent on welfare.”