

16 November 2009

Private Members' Business

Homelessness in Australia

Main Committee

Mr BRADBURY (Lindsay) (7.52pm) — It is estimated that every night 105,000 Australians are homeless. These are the people sleeping rough on the streets, under bridges or in parks in our communities. They are people like Patrick, who recently phoned my office late on a Friday afternoon. He had been robbed by another resident of the shelter at which he had been staying and had slept in a park for the previous two nights. He also has terminal stomach cancer and was desperate for somewhere warm and safe to stay for the night.

Homeless people are often victims of domestic violence, alcohol or drug abuse or sufferers of mental illness. Increasingly they are low-income families or pensioners who have become unable to afford their private rental properties but face a wait of sometimes years to enter public housing. They are also the people going from couch to couch at friends' homes or staying in caravan parks or hotels, after having found themselves with nowhere else to go.

Debbie Peckham knows what it is like. She lives with her two children in temporary accommodation. She is currently housed in Barnardo's temporary accommodation in Kingswood and told Penrith Press on 22 September 2009:

'I know this isn't forever,' she said. 'I'm always thinking "OK, we're moving again, I've got to start packing."

The impact of homelessness is profound. It can disrupt the development of young children, who miss out on formal schooling, and cause further social dislocation and instability for families and individuals who are already being pushed to the fringes of our communities.

I am proud to be part of a government that has not only put homeless and housing affordability back on the national agenda but also is building more homes to house those in need. We have come a long way since before the last election. We now have a federal housing minister who is tackling this role with great passion. We have a white paper, *The road home*, which has delivered a bold target for the future: halving homelessness by 2020. We have put some serious financial support on the table, increasing the Commonwealth investment in addressing homelessness by 55 per cent to \$800 million over the next four years. Through the national affordable housing agreement that was struck with the states and territories, there will be an additional \$6.1 billion over five years for social housing and support for those in the private rental market at risk of becoming homeless.

Through the stimulus package we have made the single biggest Commonwealth investment in social housing by funding the construction of 19,200 units around Australia. In my electorate of Lindsay the

first two social housing units approved under the stimulus package are nearing completion and a further 250 units will be constructed over the next 12 months. Significantly, more than \$2.7 million was spent on repairs and maintenance for 583 dwellings in my electorate, which helped to increase the number of social housing dwellings available to tenants. These houses would otherwise have been uninhabitable. The social housing program is also complementing other schemes like the National Rental Affordability Scheme, which will deliver new houses to low- and middle-income families and individuals at 20 per cent below the market rent. Increasing the number of houses that are available to people who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless will help people like Debbie Peckham and Patrick.

We are also blessed to have outstanding networks of not-for-profit and community organisations which are providing essential support, assistance and direction in the homeless policy. I would like to take this opportunity to particularly acknowledge the work of the Nepean Campaign Against Homelessness. Established in 2007, the Nepean Campaign Against Homelessness has brought together a regional consortium of community housing groups, not-for-profit community organisations, churches, philanthropists, councils and government authorities and is convened by Stephanie Brennan, who I would like to thank for her dedication and commitment to this campaign.

In September the Nepean Campaign Against Homelessness launched a regional taskforce with the Minister for Housing with the goal of working within the policy framework set out by the Rudd government to deliver real outcomes in the Nepean region, including innovative solutions like the Common Ground model, which locates homelessness services and employment services in a combined accommodation facility. I would like to acknowledge the following members of the regional taskforce: Councillor Karen McKeown; Michael Vassili; Nick Sabel; the chair, Felicity Reynolds; Stephanie Oatley; Mary Waterford; the Hon. Phil Koperberg; Trish Doyle; Liz Giles; Katie Price; and Captain Colin Young. I would also like to single out Richard Eastmead, the owner of the Good Guys in Penrith, for his outstanding effort in engaging the local business community and raising the profile of homelessness in our community.

We have begun an important new phase in our policy approach to homelessness. I look forward to seeing the positive impacts that these efforts will have over the coming years.