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New national data shows we need urgent action to reduce homelessness of children and young people

The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare Specialist Homelessness Services (SHS) data 2022-23 released today paints an alarming picture of the scale and spread of child and youth homelessness in Australia, says peak organisation Yfoundations

The capacity of homelessness services has fallen by almost 17,000 clients a year in recent times and services face a \$73 million funding shortfall from June 2024.

In 2022-23, three in ten SHS clients were under the age of 18. Almost 40,000 of SHS clients in 2022-23 were children and young people (15-24) presenting on their own. Similar to previous years, females and First Nations people were overrepresented in these figures.

“We see very similar trends in NSW, where almost 50% of people seeking help from Specialist Homelessness Services were under 25,” said Trish Connolly, Yfoundations CEO “There has also been a significant rise in rough sleeping among young people presenting alone.

“It’s particularly concerning that about half of young people presenting alone suffered mental health issues and one third experienced family and domestic violence, according to the national data.

“Services tell us that children and young people who come to them for help are escaping domestic and family violence however the data doesn’t reflect the true scale of the problem.

In 2022/23, every day, 295 people who needed a crisis bed or help were turned away because services were at capacity. We believe, these numbers will be much higher in reality, because we know that children and young people will couch surf, remain in violent homes, or sleep rough because they have no idea that services exist. Even if they did, the report demonstrates they are unlikely to get a bed tonight because services are full.

“Sadly, these figures show nothing has changed; it’s only become worse with a significant increase in people being turned away from getting a crisis bed or service,” said Ms Connolly.

“Current strategies are not working and we hope the Federal and State Governments take this into consideration when they’re developing the National Housing and Homelessness Plan and Agreement in 2024. Governments must urgently respond to the homelessness crisis by increasing investment in services but unfortunately, funding is on the decline.

“It’s clear that the broader rental, housing and cost of living crises, which show no sign of subsiding, is putting more pressure on already underfunded homelessness

service providers and making it harder for children and young people in desperate situations to find a home.

“A staggering number of children and young people turn up to services alone. Many of them have a mental health issue, are escaping domestic and family violence or have a drug and alcohol issue. They are incredibly vulnerable and continue to be neglected in government funding and responses.

“We need governments to commit to bold, decisive steps to get this crisis under control. The Federal Government should follow the NSW Government’s lead and commit to developing a standalone Child and Youth Homelessness and Housing Plan.

“A standalone Child and Youth Homelessness and Housing Plan could be instrumental in changing the lives of many children and young people for the better if it provides for sufficient long-term funding, commits to an ambitious target for eradicating child and youth homelessness within a reasonable timeframe and prioritises the lived expertise of those who have experienced homelessness as a child or young person”.

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