



THE NUMBER OF HOMELESS WOMEN OVER 55 EXPECTED TO DOUBLE IN LESS THAN A DECADE

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A major new report by a progressive think tank, Per Capita, has found that homeless women over 55 are expected to double in less than a decade.

The report, using data from the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, forecasts that without significant new policies, more than 15,000 older women will become homeless by 2031.

It also found the most recent census data might not truly reflect the extent of homelessness among older women given they are more likely to be in emergency shelters, couch surfing, or sleeping in cars.

Executive Director of Catholic Social Services Australia, Ms Monique Earsman, said older women are the fastest growing group among the homeless, making up the majority of social housing tenants, and are the most significant users of specialist homelessness services.

"Older women are a very vulnerable group who, in the event of a relationship breakdown or being widowed late life, can find themselves with little or no superannuation or other financial resources," Ms Earsman said.

"Women and children escaping family violence, single mothers, and older single women are most at risk of falling into homelessness due to a crisis in affordable housing that has been years in the making.


"It is a thin line between having a home or not, between being safe or being in real danger because of homelessness.

"The facts are providing affordable social and emergency housing which prevents domestic and family violence will require a long-term commitment from governments and the community," Ms Earsman said.

The 'A Home of One's Own' report, commissioned by Australians Investing in Women, a not-for-profit organisation that advocates for philanthropists to invest in women, considers a gender view of the housing crisis.

Social housing stocks have declined markedly over the past three decades, and make up just 3% of all residences, down from 6% in the early 1990s.

While state and federal governments have recently committed more funding to increase the social housing stocks, this alone won't solve the crisis.



Older women make up 19% of public housing and 16% of community housing tenants in Australia, and 45% of older women who rent in the private market spend more than 30% of their income on rental costs.

The report recommended the following to mitigate risks to vulnerable women being homeless:

- More social housing investment by state and federal governments
- Reforms to the rental market to increase the number of genuinely secure and affordable options for those who will never own their own home
- Invest in shared-equity and build-to-rent models
- Establish innovative financial models to lend to women
- Increase funding for homes and services for women and children fleeing family violence

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