

There was a period in Australia when the 'right' to housing went unquestioned. In post WW2 Australia, State Housing authorities, with support from the Federal government, invested in social housing throughout our country. At that point in time, we seemed to understand as a nation that all people and all families, even those in low paid work or unable to work (due to illness or unemployment) deserved the dignity of housing. That particular Australia, lost for the past few decades, can be and must be recovered.

Homelessness is a direct result of poverty and unaffordable housing options. It is not a result of illness, addictions, poor choices or a lack of living skills. Those things can definitely lead to poverty. Understanding that poverty does not have to result in homelessness is the first step to understanding that Australia can manage homelessness much better than it has, in fact, bring to an end the indignity and shame of long term homelessness.

There is a significant community and government cost to not ending people's experience of long term homelessness. Research conducted in Australia and elsewhere has shown that people who sleep rough are high users of government funded and other services. Parsell (2015)ⁱ found that in the 12 months prior to moving into permanent supportive housing that a group of long term homeless people in Queensland each used about \$48,000 in government services. These included police interactions, custody, ambulance and hospital costs. In the 12 months after living in permanent supportive housing (Brisbane Common Ground) that same group cost the government approximately \$35,000. This cost included the price of providing the permanent supportive housing. There was a cost off-set of \$13,000 to our community by ensuring that people were housed and supported. It actually costs more money to keep people homeless. More importantly, it costs people experiencing it their dignity and health.

The Australian government in recent decades has moved away from a civil society that provided basic protections to people who are unemployed, unwell or experiencing poverty for other reasons. Increasingly we have seen charities grow in number and size in order to pick up after government failure. Whilst helping our fellow citizens with the basics of life,

such as temporary shelter, food and clothing is a genuine and kind response – it has now reached a point where it is clear that our governments rely on charitable efforts to fill the large and growing gaps in our social safety net. Charities are not in a position to end long term homelessness or the casualisation of employment. This is rightly the work of governments and their policies. Adequate access to jobs and housing as well as income support or rehabilitation (if required by some individuals) is the mark of a civil society. Handing out free leftover food in a park is not.

When volunteer and charitable efforts must necessarily be focused on helping people to simply survive, they are not able to be focused on the additional benefits they can actually bring to our community. Connecting up with social activity, caring for our environment, facilitating friendship networks, helping out in genuine times of crisis, these should be some of the core roles of charitable and philanthropic endeavours.

The New Liberals will put back in place a better social safety net for Australia. Ensuring income support when people are unable to work is at a rate that is adequate to meet the basic needs of living, such as housing, food, utilities and clothing.

We will also fund the States to re-invest in social housing to ensure that there is an adequate supply of social housing and for those who need it, permanent supportive housing. We will bring to end long term homelessness through the use of evidence based community efforts that are directly linked to a range permanent housing models.

We understand that there will always be individuals and families who will go through times of crisis and may become homeless. That experience should be prevented or be experienced as briefly as possible. Establishing a national response that aims to keep people housed or return people back to housing as rapidly as possible is our intention. If individuals or families require either short or long term support services to sustain that housing, those services will be available in our communities.

ⁱ <https://issr.uq.edu.au/brisbane-common-ground-evaluation>