



Homelessness Australia

*Creating a framework for ending homelessness*

## **MEDIA RELEASE - EMBARGOED UNTIL 12.01AM 28 OCTOBER**

### **Federal homelessness funding the elephant in the room at COAG Summit on Family Violence**

As delegates meet in Brisbane for a COAG summit on violence against women, welfare heads warn that thousands of women and children will be turned away from family violence and homelessness services if a \$115 million national Homelessness Agreement is not extended.

The funding attached to the National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness (NPAH) represents one-third of all homelessness funding. Amongst the 80,000 clients supported by the NPAH funding are women and children escaping family violence who are at risk of homelessness. Last year, one-third of all clients who sought help from homelessness services cited family violence as one of the reasons they needed help (equal to 85,444 clients experiencing family violence).

Homelessness Australia, the national homelessness peak, has pointed out the 'dark irony' of holding a COAG summit on women and children while homelessness is on the rise and National funding uncertainty hangs over the sector.

"Family violence is the number one driver of homelessness, so it is unconscionable that this funding is sitting in limbo while women and children are sleeping in their cars," said Jenny Smith, Chair, Homelessness Australia.

The Agreement has been in place for eight years, and will expire in June 2017, but services say that they are already overwhelmed by demand for assistance, and that significantly more, not less funding is urgently needed.

"Our sector is so stretched, already turning away 329 people every day. We have to target the most critical clients and often push others to the back of the line, meaning many families are on wait lists or miss out on help altogether. If this funding is cut, thousands of women and children will have no option but to remain in violent homes, or be on the street," said Ms Smith.

"There's a dark irony in getting together to discuss best practice in addressing violence against women and children, when the homelessness sector doesn't even know if they'll have the current funding to support this vulnerable group of people next year. Federal homelessness funding is the elephant in the room at the Brisbane COAG meeting," she said.

Over 150 homelessness and family violence programs are currently funded by the NPAH, and it supports an estimated 80,000 clients.

WESNET, the national women's peak advocacy body on domestic and family violence, says that the NPAH funding is vital to the wellbeing and safety of Australian women and children.

"Whilst we are expecting some very positive announcements at the COAG summit the ongoing uncertainty around homelessness funding will overshadow these. Thousands of women and children will have their support ripped from under them if the NPAH is not extended, so it should be a priority agenda item in Brisbane and it doesn't seem to be on the agenda," said Julie Oberin, Chair, WESNET.

National Shelter, the peak housing body, criticised the lack of indexation of the NPAH, saying that the sector has effectively lost close to \$10 million dollars in the last three years because the funding has not been linked to inflation. National Shelter says if the Agreement is extended, it must be fully indexed, and locked-in for five years.

A chronic shortage of affordable housing plays a critical role in pushing women into homelessness after they've left family violence, said National Shelter Executive Director, Adrian Pisarski.

"With thousands of people waiting for public housing, and rising rents shutting people out of the market, we should be asking not, 'why doesn't she leave?' but 'where can she go?'" said Mr Pisarski.

- Continues -

“The Federal Government has yet to reveal its plan to tackle homelessness, and the underlying drivers of housing affordability. We’re calling for leadership in the face of a homelessness epidemic, and a plan to ensure that every woman, man and child has a safe, affordable place to call home. We want to see a five-year commitment to the NPAH of \$115 million p.a., with full indexation,” said Mr Pisarski.

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**Interview opportunities:**

- Jenny Smith, Chair, Homelessness Australia
- Julie Oberin, Chair, WESNET
- Adrian Pisarski, Executive Director, National Shelter
- Tracy Phillips, Executive Officer, Bonnie Support Services for Women (Sydney-based) provides support and accommodation to women and children who are homeless, at risk of homelessness or escaping family violence. Without NPAH funding, Bonnie Services will no longer be able to provide 24-hour crisis support to women who are experiencing family violence, and will also be forced to cut its family violence counselling program.