

WODONGA HOMELESS SLEEPING ROUGH AND MOSTLY YOUNG AND SINGLE

Fifteen percent of the 660 people who sought help from the Rural Housing Network's Wodonga branch last year were 'sleeping rough' – living in cars, tents or improvised dwellings - and another 25% were staying with friends or family.

Nearly 60% of those who came to the Rural Housing Network (RHN) for assistance were not receiving Newstart or Youth Allowance and 76% were single, with or without children.

Rural Housing Network (RHN) CEO, Celia Adams said the data for the last financial year shows that homelessness is affecting people in all walks of life.

"This shows you that high numbers of people who are not dependent on welfare are seeking assistance. We know this is mostly due to two things; that they experience some trauma incident in their lives which reduces their ability to work and they don't have the resources to meet all their financial commitments, and the second is the high cost of private rental," Ms Adams said.

"When an individual or family is paying more than 30% of their income in rent, this is called housing stress and many people know someone in this situation," Ms Adams said.

"In Wodonga we are seeing an increase in rough sleeping which is another indicator that people are pushed to extremes by not being able to access affordable housing."

Ms Adams said in this, national Homelessness Week, data for Wodonga serves to highlight how widespread homelessness is and how it affects people.

"The story of Ken Arthur is one we can all relate to. We all know someone who is in his early 60s and has lost a close family member due to a terminal illness. Ken clearly explains what having safe and secure housing means for his life and his future," she said.

The Wodonga data is consistent with the findings of the *2016 Housing Affordability and Homelessness in the Hume Region* report which looked at data for the last three years.

"Across the region we are seeing predominantly women and mostly young people aged between 18 and 35."

As part of Homelessness Week, RHN's offices in Wodonga, Shepparton, Wangaratta and Seymour will hold awareness raising events. In Wodonga you can drop in to Uniting Care at 1 Nilmar Avenue from 10am on Thursday 4 August for a BBQ to learn more about homelessness and how you can help, as well as pick up resources. All welcome.

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