




Speech By
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MEMBER FOR TOOHEY

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PRIVATE MEMBERS' STATEMENT

Housing and Homelessness

 **Mr RUSSO** (Toohey—ALP) (2.03 pm): Many Australians experience events in their lifetime that may place them at risk of, or can result in, homelessness. Many specialist homelessness community services and not-for-profits have been watching, with trepidation, homelessness spiral out of control despite the best efforts to house people in appropriate properties with adequate support services in place. One of these groups is St Vincent De Paul. Members of local conferences have researched homelessness looking for solutions. I have been provided with a copy of a report prepared by four Vincentians who have permitted me to speak on its contents. I would like to thank Frank Ford, Narelle Bowden-Ford, Andrew Lock and Jim Lucey.

A key finding of the Vincentians' research into housing was that of all the groups forced into homelessness, currently two groups appear most vulnerable to homelessness—women over 55 and families impacted by domestic violence. The impact on women aged over 55 years was the centre of the Mercy Foundation report released in 2020, *Older women and homelessness*. This report found that that cohort of older women was the fastest growing group to experience homelessness in Australia with the figure almost double the growth rate within the homeless demographic. Sadly, research also shows that most of these women have never been homeless before, and many will move between staying with family or friends or house-sitting or even sleeping in their car. They are the hidden homeless. This group of women have suffered lifelong discrimination with their resultant financial and housing insecurity due to systemic factors such as lack of superannuation, working part-time or casually throughout their lives, taking time out of the workforce to care for family, bearing the brunt of the gender pay gap, an increasingly unaffordable private rental market, and age discrimination. A life event such as the death of a spouse, serious illness, divorce or no-grounds eviction can push a woman into homelessness. What can be done to help these vulnerable women now?

The project report by Frank and his colleagues looked into the impacts of four areas in their research and this ultimately influenced their proposal. They found that a study done in 2013 showed compelling differences in constructing stand-alone accommodation facilities and an alternative scattered site model, with the comparison done on projects where both programs opened at the same time. The construction of the stand-alone accommodation took four years to build in order to house 50 low-income families and 50 homeless individuals, at a cost of \$34 million. The scattered site model had a \$1.5 million budget with a three month start-up.