

Media release

Thursday 2 October 2008

Call to stop older Australians from becoming the forgotten face of the nation's homeless

Two of nation's leading aged care and homeless services organisations have called for the needs of older homeless people to not be overlooked as the Federal Government moves towards formalising its long-term strategy for addressing the homelessness crisis.

The comments of Catholic Healthcare and Wintringham were made at the launch of the Council to Homeless Persons' 'Meeting the Needs of the Elderly Homeless' edition of its *Parity* magazine in Melbourne yesterday, Wednesday 1 October 2008, and ahead of this month's release of the Federal Government's White Paper on Homelessness.

The edition of *Parity* was launched by Senator the Hon Ursula Stephens, Parliamentary Secretary for Social Inclusion and the Voluntary Sector Parliamentary Secretary assisting the Prime Minister for Social Inclusion, at Melbourne Town Hall.

Operating throughout NSW and south-east Queensland, Catholic Healthcare is Australia's largest Catholic provider of residential and community aged care services, and works with 3,500 Community Services clients including people experiencing or at risk of experiencing homelessness. Melbourne based Wintringham is a highly specialised welfare company that provides housing and care to elderly, frail homeless men and women.

According to Catholic Healthcare Managing Director Chris Rigby, it is imperative that the complex and growing needs of older people are reflected in the White Paper on Homelessness.

"Recent figures from the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare suggest that around 11,000 of Australia's 188,000 homeless are over the age of 50," Mr Rigby said. "Much of the commentary around the Green Paper on Homelessness (the forerunner to the October White Paper) earlier this year concentrated on the fact that half of Australia's homeless are under the age of 24.

"The risk is, of course, that the needs of older people will be overlooked in the White Paper and the soon-to-be released national plan of action for ending homelessness in Australia.

“These members of our community are the most vulnerable of all homeless people and simply cannot be forgotten in any long-term approaches to alleviating homelessness. Older people experiencing or at risk of experiencing homelessness are often in greatest need of help, but due to the many factors associated with ageing and isolation, they are either unable or unlikely to come into contact with people who can help them in finding a pathway out of homelessness.”

From a policy perspective, Wintringham CEO Bryan Lipmann described the White Paper as being “the most important issue facing Wintringham today”.

“Throughout the last 20 years, our policy work has concentrated entirely on trying to make Australia’s aged care program sufficiently adaptable to accommodate the needs of the elderly homeless – a group of people who were not considered during the construction of the program many years ago,” Mr Lipmann said.

“Wintringham is calling on the Rudd Government to include into the White Paper on Homelessness adequate measures to ensure that frail and elderly homeless people can access the aged care system. Such measures will require adequate capital and recurrent funding that would be targeted exclusively at providers who will undertake to deliver appropriate services to the elderly homeless.”

Mr Rigby added that overall, the White Paper must address access to, and the provision of, individualised accommodation options for people experiencing or at risk of experiencing homelessness, as well as facilitating partnership models of support that foster social connectedness and increase access to support services for these members of our community.

“In other words, the White Paper must focus on both ‘place and purpose’ for Australia’s homeless, with a choice of safe and secure housing and accommodation options that are supported by an enabling, holistic approach that leads to meaningful social and economic participation.”

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About Catholic Healthcare's Community Services

Catholic Healthcare's Community Services works with a diverse range of people and communities to enable and maintain sustainable and vibrant lives. With a client base in excess of 3,500 people, Community Services works with the elderly, financially disadvantaged, people experiencing or at risk of experiencing homelessness, people with a disability, people with a mental illness, carers and children and young people with special needs or who are at risk of harm.

About Wintringham

Wintringham is a not-for-profit non-religious welfare company providing a wide range of aged care and housing services to frail elderly men and women in Melbourne. Motivated by the belief that homeless people should have the same right of access to high quality aged care services that the rest of the community takes for granted, Wintringham has designed and built many aged care homes some of which have won United Nations awards. At a time of life when many elderly people are need care and support, Wintringham offers homeless people a "Home until Stumps".