

MEDIA RELEASE



**Palliative
Care
Australia**

Palliative Care Australia Inc.

Level 1, 21 Napier Close, Deakin ACT 2600 | PO Box 24, Deakin West, ACT 2600
t: 02 6232 4433 | f: 02 6232 4434 | w: www.palliativecare.org.au | e: pcainc@palliativecare.org.au



Connect with Palliative Care Australia

19 June 2014

Vulnerable homeless need palliative care

On any given night in Australia, there are over 105,000 people who are homeless. These people face significant social and economic impacts, such as long term unemployment, exclusion from the community and chronic ill health. But what happens when they are diagnosed with a terminal illness?

‘Data demonstrates that if you do not have a carer, you are far more unlikely to be able to be cared for in the place of your choice at the end of your life,’ said Dr Yvonne Luxford, CEO of Palliative Care Australia. ‘But what about if you are homeless? Who is there to support you?’

The largest proportion of homeless people are younger Australians, with under 25s accounting for 46% of the homeless population. However, nearly one quarter are aged over 45 years, with a significant percentage having multiple or complex needs.

‘A growing issue of concern is homeless mature women, who may have stayed at home to bring up children and find themselves alone due to the death of their partner or divorce,’ said Dr Luxford. ‘With no savings or superannuation and no recent workforce skills, they end up homeless. A large proportion of these may also be ‘hidden homeless’ as they often couch surf.’

Some of the common issues for people who are homeless and require palliative care relate to identifying their needs and finding an adequate place to care for them. Having no fixed address makes it extremely difficult to make and keep appointments and manage health needs.

‘This is a very vulnerable group of people. They face the daily stress of having no money or home, and making decisions about whether or not they eat or look after their healthcare’, said Dr Luxford. ‘There are also often complex issues related to mental illness or drug and alcohol use, which makes comprehending health information and regularly taking medications for other needs more difficult.’

We live in a society that does not find it easy to talk about our end of life care needs. This can be exacerbated for homeless people, who face complex health issues, are less likely to seek health advice early, are socially isolated and can be reluctant to engage with healthcare professionals. People who are homeless have wishes and preferences for the end of life, just like anyone else, and they should be encouraged to talk about their choices.

‘For people who are homeless, flexibility and coordination with service delivery is essential and we must encourage palliative care, homeless, health and community services to work together. Including palliative care services in homelessness programs will make conversations about end of life wishes for homeless people happen,’ Dr Luxford said.

Contact: Claire Maskell Gibson– PCA National Communications Manager– 02 9239 2906/0406 258 722

PCA is the peak national organisation representing the interests and aspirations of all
who share the ideal of quality care at the end of life

Patron: His Excellency General the Honourable Sir Peter Cosgrove AK MC (Retd), Governor-General of the Commonwealth of Australia

Tonight, CEOs across Australia are taking part in the Vinnies CEO Sleepout. The event is a unique way for business leaders to actively combat the issue of homelessness by rising to the challenge and experiencing a small dose of what it is like to sleep rough for one night. The night is an experiential, no frills affair with CEOs given nothing more than a beanie, a sheet of cardboard, and a cup of soup.

Canberra/Goulburn CEO Paul Trezise says that providing more affordable housing is vital if people are to escape the cycle of homelessness.

‘Improving access to safe, secure, affordable and appropriately located housing means better outcomes in health, education, employment and community inclusion. If we want to assist people to move out of homelessness into community or independent housing, or to prevent people becoming homeless in the first place, addressing housing affordability is crucial,’ he says.

St Vincent de Paul Society Canberra/Goulburn is hoping to raise \$500,000 from tonight’s Sleepout and are encouraging the Canberra community to dig deep for the CEOs who face a tough night ahead, with temperatures expected to reach as low as -2 degrees.

‘I have lived in Canberra for four years now, and whilst I absolutely love the place, I couldn't imagine for a moment existing here without permanent housing,’ said Dr Luxford. ‘I will only be sleeping out in freezing conditions for one night, but for thousands of Australians this is a long term situation.

‘We need to do much more to raise awareness of the real issues of homelessness, including palliative care for these vulnerable people.’

To learn more about the CEO Sleepout or to show your support, visit www.ceosleepout.org.au
#CEOSleepoutAU @VinniesACT

Ends