



Homeless services left to mop up after the system fails

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In a report released today the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) has found that over 30% of people presenting to homeless services have either a mental health or substance use problem.

"This latest data highlights the failure of mental health and substance use programs to provide responsive health services to those people who need it, when they need it," said Council of Social Service of NSW (NCOSS) Acting Director, Ms Michelle Burrell.

"The report confirms what homelessness services have been saying for a long time," says Ms Sue Cripps, Executive Officer of HomelessnessNSW.ACT.

"Services have been dealing with the fallout of a decaying mental health system for many years, with workers having to take the role of quasi 'health worker', attempting to deliver mental health care; a role they should never be expected to do," she added.

According to Mr Michael Coffey, Executive Officer of the Youth Accommodation Association, homelessness services provide a substantial safety net for the failures in health service provision in NSW.

"People unable to gain treatment through mental health and drug and alcohol services routinely end up in crisis, being accommodated through the homeless service system," said Mr Coffey.

"Domestic violence remains the single highest cause of homeless in Australia," says Catherine Gander, Executive Officer of NSW Women's Refuge Movement Resource Centre."

"It is well documented that domestic violence has an adverse effect on the mental health and well being of women and children. We are only too aware that a high percentage of clients presenting at our services have mental health problems, a fact born out in the report that shows that the most common reason for those seeking support that had a mental health problem was domestic violence on 14% of occasions. "

"Although recent funding announcements on mental health are most welcome, those dollars will count for very little if people who are homeless can't gain access to treatment and continue to cycle through our homeless services," added Ms Burrell.

"Strong leadership is needed on this issue, with urgent action to better coordinate and resource responses to homelessness in NSW," she added

"A Homelessness Strategy, led by the Premier, would intervene early, provide a coordinated and responsive service system for people experiencing homelessness and those at risk of homelessness and strengthen support services for homeless people with mental health or substance problems," they said.