

Fast-tracked Housing First project to ease Bunbury homelessness

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McGowan Government brings forward its Housing First Homelessness Initiative in Bunbury

Evidence-based approach to support rough sleepers to stay in housing long-term
Bunbury one of five locations to share \$34.5 million in funding for rental subsidies and accompanying support services

A major project to address homelessness in Bunbury has been brought forward to provide rough sleepers with stable housing and support.

The State Government has been looking for ways to fast-track projects that will support the community in areas of critical need, as part of its response to COVID-19.

In December, the McGowan Government announced a record \$71.8 million funding boost for homelessness services to support the implementation of the State's first 10-year strategy on homelessness.

This record funding package includes \$34.5 million for the Housing First Homelessness Initiative, which extends successful housing-first collective impact approaches to Bunbury and other locations across Western Australia.

In a big step forward, Community Services Minister Simone McGurk today announced that the Department of Communities had commenced negotiations to appoint Ruah Community Services as the coordinating body - or 'backbone' - of the project.

The agreement is a critical component of the Housing First model and is expected to be awarded by July 1, with contracts for additional outreach workers and caseworkers to be finalised in the following three months.

Under the initiative, funding will be delivered for private rental subsidies to house 20 individuals or families each year.

The funding will also employ additional case workers to identify and work alongside people experiencing homelessness, engage them with support services and work to address the issues that led to them becoming homeless.

The Housing First model puts safe and permanent housing as the first priority for people experiencing homelessness.

Once that housing is secured, a multidisciplinary team of support workers can address more complex needs such as mental illness and drug and alcohol issues.

Participants are supported to stay in housing as they work towards recovery and reintegration with the community at their own pace.

A census of known rough sleepers was recently undertaken in Bunbury, with a view to developing personal intervention plans for each person identified.

This process identified approximately 70 people sleeping rough in Bunbury.

A significant number of the people identified were also experiencing issues around family and domestic violence, mental health, substance misuse and interaction with the justice and child protection systems.

Comments attributed to Community Services Minister Simone McGurk:

"The McGowan Government is committed to responding to the needs of vulnerable Western Australians at risk of or experiencing homelessness.

"The conditions created by the COVID-19 pandemic have prompted us to adapt to ensure support is available for Western Australians.

"Homelessness is an issue right across the country, and sadly Bunbury and the South-West are not immune from this.

"Unmet demand for homelessness accommodation in Bunbury made it an early candidate for the \$34.5 million Housing First Homelessness Initiative.

"There is significant work happening across government and the community services sector to address the needs of vulnerable people in this time of need."

Comments attributed to Bunbury MLA Don Punch:

"The not-for-profit sector in Bunbury work incredibly hard to support people living in insecure housing as well as those experiencing homelessness, but it is no longer enough and they need more support.

"The Housing First approach to addressing homeless is a proven model, so I am confident this new initiative will make a huge difference in our community.

"I welcome the decision to bring forward the Housing First project, which will work alongside local organisations to develop long-term solutions for people experiencing homelessness in Bunbury."

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