



McAuley Community Services for Women

A ministry of the Sisters of Mercy

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MEDIA RELEASE

HOMELESSNESS SHOULD NEVER BE THE SAFER OPTION FOR WOMEN

Far too many women end up homeless as a result of family violence because it is the safer option, says McAuley Community Services for Women CEO Jocelyn Bignold.

Her statement came at the launch of the **Homelessness should never be the safer option** electoral campaign in front of 600 teddy bears on the steps of Parliament House on Thursday 30 October at 11am.

The campaign includes a position paper by McAuley Community Services for Women which spells out the gender disparities in current homeless programs and policies.

"The incidence of women who are homeless in Victoria has increased by 20% and beyond from 2006 as a result of insufficient affordable housing, family violence and mental illness. We can turn the trend around but it requires a gender lens in order to respond appropriately to the specific needs of women," she says.

She is calling on all Victorian electoral candidates and parties to make public their policies on homelessness, public housing, family violence and mental health ahead of the election on 29 November.

"Too often we hear people say why don't they just leave? The reality is that they have nowhere to leave to. If they go to a refuge or our safe house, returning home is often not an option because it is unsafe, there is not enough secure and affordable housing and funding for homelessness programs is skewed towards men which is often not appropriate for women."

McAuley Community Services for Women wants a commitment to:

- Funding for programs and an integrated service response to enable women and their children to stay at home without fearing for their lives.
- Funding for a range of housing options, giving women a choice according to their situation, preferences and needs. This includes women-only services.
- Funding for support services that address the specific needs of women, with or without children, and who are homeless, particularly as a result of family violence or mental illness.
- Investment into gendered analysis of all homelessness programs; policy and funding to make sure that women are not continually discriminated against.
- Investment into an affordable housing strategy to increase the supply of low cost homes.

Homelessness should never be the safer option.





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Ms Bignold's call comes two days after the Federal Government acknowledged that its long awaited policy review on housing and homelessness had been shelved.

Each teddy bear symbolises a woman that McAuley Community Services for Women has supported over the past year through its family violence and homelessness programs.

The organisation runs Victoria's only 24/7 crisis centre, a refuge program and is one of two organisations solely focussed on providing housing for women who are homeless.

Media inquiries: Penny Underwood on 03 9818 8540 or 040 99 252 99.

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