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CENSUS REVEALS HOMELESSNESS ON RISE IN REGIONAL VICTORIA

More than 1,222 people experienced homelessness on 2021 Census night in the Ovens Murray and Goulburn regions, an increase of 13.2 per cent from 2016, according to data released today by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS).

Celia Adams, CEO of BeyondHousing, the region's main homelessness system access point, said Census data offers an important insight into the prevalence of homelessness in the region, putting numbers on what the organisation knew was happening in the region.

"The Census gives us a snapshot of what is happening and is valuable in informing homelessness support services like ours, our partner agencies, and decision-makers at all levels of government about the considerable homelessness need in our community.

"We know from the demand for our services that the homelessness experience for regional Victorians has been an enduring and often repeated one due to the rising costs of rent, a decline in the availability of affordable rental housing and mounting pressure from increased costs of living.

"Across Australia, 48 people are experiencing homelessness for every 10,000 people, in Victoria it is 47 in 10,000. But in our region, we are seeing rates much higher. In Moira Shire, it is 77 per 10,000 people, 61 per 10,000 in Greater Shepparton and 50 per 10,000 in Wodonga.

"We are also able to see the number of people considered marginally housed and at risk of homelessness. This is a substantial number in our region, with 1,288 people at real and immediate risk at that point in time."

The highest numbers of people experiencing homelessness in the region on Census night were in Greater Shepparton - 418 people, followed by Wodonga - 215 people, and in Wangaratta - 125 people. Homelessness had increased by 67 per cent in Wangaratta compared to 2016 Census, with a 28 percent in Wodonga and 26 per cent in the Strathbogie Shire in the same period.

"With Census data showing a rise in homelessness across the state and in our region, this highlights the critical need for the government to continue building more social and affordable housing and to continue to adequately fund homelessness services to meet demand," Ms Adams said.

"Measures to reduce the spread of COVID-19 throughout 2021 contributed to some of the changes in the homelessness data, particularly impacting how people experienced homelessness and how they were able to be supported in our region.

"With additional funding provided to our homelessness services by the Victorian Government, we were able to reduce the number people experiencing chronic homelessness and sleeping rough. We helped more people stay in supported and crisis accommodation such as a motels and caravan parks and kept them safer for longer. During 2020-21 we provided over 11,100

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nights of crisis accommodation, but once funding ceased in 2021-22 our funding could only stretch to just over 6,700 nights.”

Ms Adams encouraged the State and Federal governments to commit to funding the support and pathways to home that have real social impact.

“We can continue making inroads to ending homelessness. Housing ends homelessness. A safe, secure, affordable home is the foundation of human dignity and opportunity.”

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About: BeyondHousing is the largest community housing organisation within the Goulburn and Ovens Murray regions of Victoria. BeyondHousing is the main entry point for the homelessness system and provides a range of supports for people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness. If you or anyone you know is experiencing or at risk of homelessness, call 1800 825 955.

For more information or to arrange an interview, contact: Chelsea McGrath on 0432 179 178