

New program launched to help women over 55 in Brisbane facing homelessness

A new project has been launched to assist women over 55 in Brisbane at risk of homelessness, amid concerns the number impacted has grown significantly due to COVID-19.

The Supporting Women Over 55 project is a joint initiative between Mission Australia and Brisbane City Council which aims to connect older women who don't have secure housing with services that offer financial, emotional and mental health support.

One in five Queenslanders experiencing homelessness are aged 55 and over, and 32,000 Queenslanders over 65 are in housing stress. This means they are low-income earners who spend more than 30 per cent of their income on housing and are therefore on the brink of homelessness. Between the 2011 and 2016 census, there was a 65 per cent increase in homelessness for older women in Queensland aged between 65 and 74.

Mission Australia's Fiona Terry said alarmingly, the group of women targeted in this project are invisible to the sector and therefore not seeking the help they need.

"Each of these women is managing their own unique journey. Their relationship may have ended, they're in a carer's role, experiencing health issues or they've lost their job or had their hours reduced, amplified by COVID-19. Often confronted with financial stress, such as mortgage repayments or challenges with lease agreements, they're staying with friends, family or in their cars. They may have limited superannuation, be ineligible for aged care and because of ageism, they are finding it difficult to regain employment," Ms Terry said.

"We know many of these women are shocked to find themselves in this situation and sadly feel a great sense of shame or denial. These are women we all know – they could be your peers, grandmother, mother, sister, aunt or a friend.

"Through no fault of their own they've been pushed into homelessness due to challenging circumstances, many for the first time in their lives. We want to speak with these women to not only help them navigate the services and housing they might need, but to get a clearer picture of what life is like for them, so that we can offer targeted support now and in the future."

Brisbane Lord Mayor Adrian Schrinner said: "Collaboration is crucial in helping people escape the cycle of homelessness and with women over 55 one of the fastest-growing groups at risk, this partnership with Mission Australia is critical in supporting our most vulnerable community members.

"Through our Pathways out of Homelessness Grants, we've supported a diverse range of local charities, including Mission Australia's project, to provide housing for older women to help ensure those most at-risk have a place to call home in Brisbane."

A research component of the project is also underway to gain an understanding of the women's experience, and to seek their feedback.

The Older Women Project is available to women living in the Brisbane City Council area aged 55 and over and will run until 2022. Those wishing to take part in the program are encouraged to contact Mission Australia's Fiona Terry on 0418 858 818 or Terryf@missionaustralia.com.au.

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