



MEDIA RELEASE

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Human toll of veteran homelessness revealed. Economic costs to top \$4.6 billion in next 30 years

A ground-breaking report commissioned by not-for-profit body Housing All Australians (HAA) has revealed the alarming extent of veterans' homelessness in Australia.

Entitled *Give Me Shelter: Leave No Veteran Behind*, the study conducted by professional services firm RPS, a Tetra Tech company, found that if left unaddressed, the cost of veterans' homelessness to the Australian economy will reach \$4.6 billion in the next 30 years.

"It is crucial that we acknowledge the future costs associated with the unintended consequences of failing to provide housing for all Australians, particularly those who are most vulnerable, such as our esteemed veterans," said Rob Pradolin, Founder and Executive Director of Housing All Australians.

"Homelessness among service personnel is not just a personal tragedy but a collective failure of society. These brave men and women who have served their country with honour and sacrificed so much should never face the harsh realities of experiencing homelessness.

"Our duty as a society is to ensure that veterans are provided with the support and resources they need to reintegrate into civilian life and have a place to call home." he said.

The Returned & Services League of Australia (RSL) has demanded urgent community attention to the report and the staggering incidence of veteran homelessness it exposes – an issue now costing Australia \$344 million a year due to veterans not participating in the economy or employment, and veteran deaths by suicide.

RSL Australia President, Greg Melick said the numbers and costs were unacceptable and called on Federal, State and Territory Governments to take urgent and immediate action.

"Many of these veterans have risked their lives for our country and to protect our way of life, experiencing events that impact their mental health. We need to house these veterans not only because it makes economic sense, but importantly, because it is the moral thing to do," Greg Melick said.

Give Me Shelter: Leave No Veteran Behind identified several risk factors contributing to veteran homelessness, including being single, unemployed, experiencing financial strain, physical injuries, disabilities, mental health issues, limited social connections, and a higher number of lifetime traumatic events.

The veterans most vulnerable to becoming homeless are those transitioning out of the armed forces, and those aged 35 or under. Close to 6,000 or 5.3% of Australia's half a million current and former service personnel experienced homelessness in the past year, a rate nearly three times higher than that of the broader population.

However, the research by RPS found that only 1.1% of veterans access homeless support services, in contrast to 3.4% of the general population. *Give Me Shelter: Leave No Veteran Behind* also revealed that the suicide rate among female veterans is 107% higher than the general population, and nearly 30% higher for men, while the financial cost of all veteran suicides is estimated to total \$140 million annually.

RPS Chief Executive Officer – Australia Asia Pacific, Meegan Sullivan, whose team led the research said having access to the first ever Census data about military service has allowed Australia to examine the true human and economic costs of veteran homelessness in a way that was never possible before.

“Veteran’s homelessness is a big issue, but it’s not an insurmountable one. With a better understanding of the numbers and factors that contribute, we can start investing as a community in solutions that support veterans to remain in housing, and stay happy and healthy,” Ms Sullivan said.

Give Me Shelter: Leave No Veteran Behind provides a very strong business case for governments, agencies, and communities to work together and collaborate on comprehensive strategies and initiatives that ensure no Australian is left without a home, especially our veterans.

Greg Melick said the report made salutary reading and its findings must be addressed by governments as a key priority in their own efforts to deal with the national homelessness issue.

“The time for action is now if we are to remove this great inequity imposed on our veterans and if we are to mitigate this unacceptable economic and social cost to our nation,” he said.

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RSL National Media contact: Tony Harrison – 0417 318178 tony.harrison@rsl.org.au

About Housing All Australians

HAA was established in 2019 as a not-for-profit, to facilitate a private sector voice, and re-position the discussion and action on social and affordable housing as economic infrastructure for a prosperous Australia. HAA is a group of private sector individuals and corporates with a shared vision that is in Australia's long term economic interest to house all Australians, including those on low incomes.

About RPS

RPS, A Tetra Tech Company, defines, designs and manages Australia Asia Pacific's most successful infrastructure, development and resources projects.

From the transport infrastructure that keeps our cities moving, to the masterplanned communities and commercial projects that enhance regional centres, RPS collaborates with industry, government and the community to take critical projects from ideas to reality.

A diverse, yet highly integrated network of consultants, we help our partners to identify and capitalise on opportunities, while formulating effective strategies to achieve their goals.
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