



Media release

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Should Australia have a law to prevent homelessness?

“Australia could reduce homelessness if we adopted the Welsh model of requiring governments to deliver prevention support,” says Council to Homeless Persons CEO, and the Chair of Homelessness Australia, Jenny Smith.

“Currently in Australia, there is only *ad hoc* funding for prevention services, with most funding directed to supporting people after they have lost their home.”

Visiting Australia during Homelessness Week, 4 to 10 August, Welsh academic Dr Peter Mackie will speak at an [event](#) presented by Unison, RMIT and Council to Homeless Persons on Thursday, 8 August.

Dr Mackie will outline how the homelessness prevention law passed in 2015 in Wales reduced demand for crisis accommodation and shelters by 18 per cent.

The law forced local governments to increase their investment in supports that stop homelessness happening, such as support to prevent evictions, tenant/ landlord mediation, rapid rehousing capacity, and family mediation support.

If people in Wales become homeless even after receiving help, then local governments must assist them to gain housing, and ultimately must provide a home if they are in priority need.

“In Australia, we are seeing policy focus more and more on the ambulance at the bottom of the cliff and ineffective “quick fixes” like shelters, but international evidence shows the most effective strategy is to invest in prevention and social housing,” says Jenny Smith.

In Wales, “everybody who comes in the door who’s at risk of homelessness gets help and it’s the minimum help that’s required to keep a home, or if a person is already homeless, to find a home,” Dr Mackie explains.

“We’re now successfully preventing homelessness in nearly 70% of cases. The law has shifted everything earlier and we’re now less focussed on crisis.”

Dr Mackie also explained that enshrining the ‘duty to assist’ into law means there must be more social and affordable housing provided by government – something Australia needs if it wants to ease the current homelessness crisis.

“It will drive the provision of more housing because government ultimately has a duty to provide it,” Dr Mackie said.

In Australia, there is currently a shortfall of 433,000 social housing properties nationally (102,800 in Victoria).

“This would be a game changer in Australia,” says Council to Homeless Persons CEO Jenny Smith.

“The value of the Australian Government’s spending on social housing and homelessness services has fallen in real terms by \$82 million in the last five years. The Welsh experience



demonstrates that our federal government needs to increase, not reduce, its investment in social housing and homelessness services.”

Unison CEO Ed Holmes pointed out that “right now, over 40 000 households are currently on the waiting list in Victoria, with more than half of them on a priority category - which means their need for housing is critical.”

“The single, most important factor in preventing and solving homelessness is increasing the supply of social housing,” he said.

Australia’s first Professor of Urban Housing and Homelessness, RMIT’s Guy Johnson, said he was “pleased to welcome Dr Mackie to Melbourne as part of Homelessness Week 2019.”

“It’s great to have an international expert bring another perspective to the challenge of homelessness and how we can continue to tackle it here in Australia,” he said.

“RMIT’s partnership with Unison is about creating real change for Australians experiencing homelessness and central to that is collaborating with international experts like Peter.”

Professor Johnson leads the Unison Housing Research Lab at RMIT University, a unique partnership that combines academic research and industry knowledge to improve the lives of Australians facing housing issues.

Dr Mackie will outline how the Welsh homeless prevention law works in 3 stages:

- **Duty to prevent homelessness:** Local authorities are required to deliver prevention support to all households seeking help who are at risk of homelessness. This is successful for 68 per cent of clients.
- **Help to secure:** Of those whose homelessness isn’t prevented, or who only seek help after becoming homeless, local authorities must attempt to secure housing. This is successful for 41 per cent of clients.
- **Duty to secure:** For those whose homelessness persists, the local authority has a duty to secure housing if they are in priority need. 80% of these households are successfully accommodated.

Media Enquiries:

Council to Homeless Persons: Isabelle Oderberg 0435 966 251 or isabelle@chp.org.au

Unison: Aline Riche, Communications Manager, 0437 594 811 or ariche@unison.org.au

RMIT: 0439 704 077 or news@rmit.edu.au

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