



PARLIAMENT OF NEW SOUTH WALES  
LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

**FIRST SESSION OF THE FIFTY-SIXTH PARLIAMENT**

**Private Members' Statements**

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1 August 2017

**HUNTER HOMELESS CONNECT DAY**

**Ms SONIA HORNERY ( Wallsend ) ( 12:53 ):**

Living costs are rising and our housing affordability crisis is worsening, while wage growth is stagnant and chronic unemployment and underemployment are a fact of life for many people in Wallsend. Homelessness is rising in our local community. For many facing homelessness, sleeping rough, couch-surfing or living out of their cars, accessing services is incredibly difficult, if not impossible. They may not know how to use the services or how to get access to them.

The statistics are sobering. Based on 2011 Census of Population and Housing figures, 105,237 Australians were homeless at that time. According to Hunter Homeless Connect, the evidence is all too clear that these figures have risen significantly over the past five years. The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare says that more than 279,000 Australians sought help from specialist homelessness agencies across the country last year, equivalent to one in 85 people. Many members of this place are all too aware of homelessness as many homeless people visit our offices seeking help. Sixty per cent of those seeking help were female and a quarter were Indigenous, while collectively they received over 22 million days of support and about 7 million nights of accommodation, according to data compiled by Hunter Homeless Connect. Shockingly, 275 requests for assistance were unable to be met every day.

Today is Hunter Homeless Connect Day, an annual event that aims to link people in need to vital services. Hunter Homeless Connect is a volunteer group that coordinates Hunter Homeless Connect Day. It aims to help people who are homeless, who are doing it tough or who are at risk of homelessness. The event has been running since 2009. According to Hunter Homeless Connect, services include "accommodation and housing, health and wellbeing, legal and financial assistance" and lots more. In 2017, the theme is "Fresh Eyes". Hunter Homeless Connect says "the day's focus turns to the community and how we see those who are experiencing homelessness or those who are at risk of becoming homeless and how we can help". Today, more than 80 government and non-government services will gather at the basketball stadium in Broadmeadow to offer access to "free

health checks, including eye checks and access to free glasses, immunisations, podiatry services, diabetes screening and more". It is great that these services are being offered to some of the most vulnerable people in our community. I volunteer with Rotary Wallsend and all who participate have a wonderful day.

Hunter residents have also donated generously to provide "bedding, clothing [and] toiletry care packs for both women and men", and I applaud those who have donated. I encourage donations for the 2018 Hunter Homeless Connect Day, although I acknowledge that it would be great if we could rid our community of the scourge of homelessness and not need to have this day. Hunter Homeless Connect has also recently published *My Connections Home—Journeys Through Homelessness*. This book chronicles the reality of homelessness in the Hunter, told through nine emotionally charged profiles of Hunter residents who have been homeless and come out the other side.

I acknowledge the chairperson of Hunter Homeless Connect, Peter Di Girolamo, who lives in my electorate, for his tireless work in combating homelessness both through Hunter Homeless Connect and other avenues. I also acknowledge other members of Hunter Homeless Connect's committee, including vice chair Scott Redman, treasurer Sally Hoyle, secretary Tanya Rowney, fundraising officer Mark O'Dwyer and committee members Sally Regan, Deborah Blackhouse, Rudi Vitasz, Alyson Segrott and Andrew Nelson. These people, along with the volunteers who have worked so hard to make Hunter Homeless Connect Day such a success for nearly a decade now, deserve our thanks and gratitude. Homelessness is a scourge on our society, and we must do everything we can to support those impacted by it. We must work tirelessly to limit, if not eliminate, homelessness—and in the meantime we must help people who are in need.