

SINGLE PARENTS HIT HARDEST IN LOCAL RENTAL CRISIS



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Data from Anglicare's annual national Rental Affordability Snapshot shows single parent families in the Canberra & Goulburn region are bearing the brunt of the region's ongoing rental crisis.

In Canberra-Queanbeyan, as well as the Yass Valley, there are no properties affordable and appropriate to any of the single parent households Anglicare examined, including households with a full time minimum wage income. In Goulburn there was just two affordable properties for Single Parents and single adults on the minimum wage.

"One of the most distressing issues is that we have single parent families paying for rents on the private market far beyond their means", said Anglicare's Jeremy Halcrow who helped write the report. "In this scenario it's not surprising they have to turn to charities to put food on the kid's dinner plates."

Once such single parent is Owen, who lives with his 14 year old daughter in Queanbeyan. He was working until the end of last year when he was made redundant. Since then he has attempted to start his own business but this was unsuccessful, partly because he could not continue to financially resource a start-up.

While he was working, his rental costs of \$390/week were viable; however, now in receipt of Newstart and Family Tax Benefit, his rent accounts for 78% of the household income. The cheapest 2 bedroom rental our snapshot found cost \$220; even if he had been lucky enough to secure that, it would be costing 44% of his income. He would get the same amount of Rent Assistance for either property.

Owen admits that he is currently unable to afford the cost of heating, so the two of them have been rugged up in blankets. They are not looking forward to this winter in Canberra. Owen says he is considering moving to the NSW North Coast "where housing is cheaper and it is warmer!"

However, single parents risk losing Newstart for 26 weeks if they move to regions with higher unemployment, which makes it very difficult for people to move out of

Queanbeyan/Canberra despite the region's very high cost of living. Queanbeyan region has one of lowest unemployment rates in Australia (2.8%).

The 2013 Anglicare *Rental Affordability Snapshot* report shows that on Saturday 13 April, when the Anglicare network surveyed 56,414 rental properties across of Australia, less than one per cent of the properties listed were suitable for anyone on Newstart allowance, parenting payment, aged pension or disability support pension. In capital cities, suitable rentals were scarce. There was nothing available for Newstart or Youth Allowance recipients in Perth, Sydney, Canberra, Adelaide, Darwin or Melbourne. Families reliant on Government benefits would struggle to find a suitable rental in the capitals, with three per cent of listings available in Hobart and just one per cent in Brisbane.

Wagga also hit by crisis

In previous surveys Wagga appeared immune from the crisis, however this year's data shows the housing crisis has dramatically worsened in Wagga.

The number of affordable properties for low income families in Wagga has nearly halved between 2012 and 2013, dropping from 162 to 102.

Anglicare's research especially calls into question the Federal Government's decision to shift Single Parent families onto Newstart. While there are just 6 affordable and appropriate properties for Single Parents able to access the Parenting Payment, Anglicare researchers could find no properties for Single Parents reliant on Newstart.

"The cheapest appropriate property in Wagga was a 2 bedroom flat in Ashmont for \$160. That's 34 percent of their income for a Single Parent on Newstart," said Anglicare's

Options for Single Parents

Anglicare believes that pathways must be available to help people move from benefits into full-time employment. Such pathways do not realistically exist in Canberra for single parents because there are no affordable housing options for single parents in low income jobs.

"If Governments are serious about helping Single Parents move into the workforce, they must take more note of the difficulties low waged single parent workers are already facing in making ends meet in cities like Canberra", says Mr Halcrow. "The fact remains that low-paid and particularly part time workers are still unable to afford housing in this market and may have the added financial burden of childcare costs - such as after school and holiday care - as well."

For single parents the length of the public housing waiting list offers little relief. The average waiting time to access housing through ACT Housing is nearly two years at 638 days. There are 2173 applications in total on the waiting list for Housing in the ACT.

In Queanbeyan the situation is even more dire with the estimated wait from 5 years to more than 10 years.

Anglicare also believes Commonwealth Rent Assistance needs to be increased, and the definition of 'affordable' for National Rental Affordability Scheme properties re-thought.

“In markets across our region, even 75% of market rent (the current definition) is too much for a low income earner to afford. Options also need to be explored for providing an incentive to landlords who charge lower rents,” says Mr Halcrow.

Canberra-Queanbeyan Rental Affordability Summary

2012-2013 comparison for family groups

Household	Income source	Properties available in 2012	Properties available in 2013
Couple, two children (one aged less than 5, one aged less than 10)	Newstart Allowance (both adults)	0	0
Single, two children (one aged less than 5, one aged less than 10)	Parenting Payment Single	0	0
Single, one child (aged less than 5)	Parenting Payment Single	0	0
Single, one child (aged over 8)	Newstart + FTB A & B	(no data)	0
Couple, two children (one aged less than 5, one aged less than 10)	Minimum Wage + FTB A	3 (0.15%)	2 (0.10%)
Single, two children (one aged less than 5, one aged less than 10)	Minimum Wage + FTB A & B	0	0