

# Abandoned campsite highlights homelessness fight as WA election draws promises for housing crisis

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- [By Tabarak Al Jrood](#)
- [Topic:Homelessness](#)

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Homeless people have been living in bushland in Perth's south-east. *(ABC News: Tabarak Al Jrood)*

## In short:

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With the WA election drawing attention to the state's housing crisis, homelessness services are pleading for urgent help.

One grassroots charity in Perth's south-east — where some rough sleepers resorted to living at a bush campsite — says it can't keep up with demand.

## What's next:

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Both major parties have promised hundreds of millions of dollars to address the issue, but there are concerns the money will not go very far.

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In an isolated area of bushland in Perth's south-east, you can't walk far without stepping over a toy, a shoe or a ripped-up tarp.

They are the possessions left behind by dozens of people who have lived at the abandoned Mundijong campsite after finding themselves homeless.

"One gentleman who is now gone from the site lived here for three years in his car," the CEO of local charity Homelessness We Care Serpentine Jarrahdale, Stuart McLellan, said.

"Another family that lived here for over a year was a man who was a victim of domestic violence, and he had his children [who] were about eight and 12.

"If you live here, there's no play equipment for the children, there's no water, there's no sewage, there's no power.

"There's no fans or air conditioning, and in winter there are no heaters."

Items remain strewn across the abandoned campsite, left behind by those who sought shelter there.  
*(ABC News: Tabarak Al Jrood)*

It is a reality become increasingly common across the Shire of Serpentine Jarrahdale, one of the fastest-growing local governments in the country.

With a population that is expected to double by 2040 and suburbs bursting at the seams, more people are finding themselves doing it tough.

## Helping hand not enough

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It is what led Mr McLellan to start the local charity Homelessness We Care, a grassroots service to help people get back on their feet.

Stuart McLellan is the CEO of Homelessness We Care Serpentine Jarrahdale. *(ABC News: Tabarak Al Jrood)*

"What we do is we assess the person, we work with them, we look after their mental health, and we see where they need to go [and] we make sure they attend those services and any follow-up appointments as well," he said.

"The end goal that we would love to have is to put them in a house, and that's our stumbling block at the moment, is finding that house."

The volunteer-run charity now helps up to 100 people a week across the shire and surrounding suburbs, more than double the number of rough sleepers it saw two years ago.

Stuart McLellan (right) and his team are trying to get more and more people back on their feet. *(ABC News: Tabarak Al Jrood)*

"We think we are helping by giving them the food, but they suffer all the time because they're so stuck in their position and our role is to get them out of that hole," Mr McLellan said.

"We give a hand up, not a handout ... but there are far more people than we can deal with."

## 'This is not normal'

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It is that hand up that rough sleepers like Neill Alchin have been grateful for.

The 50-year-old lost everything after his long-term relationship ended a year ago and has been living out of a suitcase on the steps of a park in Kelmscott ever since.

Neill Alchin says his experience in trying to find a home has been "very difficult". (*ABC News: Tabarak Al Jrood*)

"If I had the foresight to kind of prevent this, I would have done everything to do so, but I didn't," he said.

"It's been a real challenge in that sense but with the help of dear friends and wonderful people like Stuart, it helps me sort of maintain my strength and my optimism for the future."

He described his experience in trying to find a home as a "very difficult" one and a "real test".

"I've reached out to as much people, within even the government itself, to sort of knock on the door and say hey, you know that we need some help here, you know this is not normal," he said.

"The response has been minimal, and we've had to just sort of vanish accordingly."

He feels the state government has not only failed in addressing the crisis, but also in their funding for community services like Homelessness We Care.

Homelessness We Care Serpentine Jarrahdale aims to provide help for those sleeping rough in the area. (*ABC News: Tabarak Al Jrood*)

"It's a disgrace [because] this is a homeless community now, and a couple of suburbs away, it's the same thing," he said.

"These wonderful people are basically doing the government's job."

## New cohort of homeless

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It is a similar story for the nearby City of Armadale, where services and infrastructure are struggling to keep up with the population surge.

The local government's population is expected to grow by more than 30 per cent over the next 20 years.

According to Street Aid founder Jay Dowling, that is also how much homelessness across the city has increased by in the past 12 months.

Jay Dowling is the founder of Street Aid. *(ABC News: Tabarak Al Jrood)*

"What we're seeing is because of cost of housing [and] the diminishing availability of housing, it's our at-risk that is becoming a growing challenge," he said.

The volunteer-led organisation provides a range of support services for the growing homeless population in the region — which Mr Dowling said now consists of a new unexpected cohort.

A rough sleeper in Perth's south-eastern suburbs. *(ABC News: Tabarak Al Jrood)*

"Now we're seeing professionals out on the streets, we're seeing families escaping domestic violence, we're seeing a growing number of over 50s on the streets," he said.

"It's no longer what you would have pictured ... it's now professionals who just simply cannot afford to stay in housing to continue to meet their commitments in terms of rent payments and mortgage."

He said the state government was playing "catch up" to a housing issue that was apparent a decade ago.

"We're essentially just adding housing stock, and the problem is still proceeding because more and more are becoming homeless everyday [and] the challenge is having the resources and funding to respond," he said.

## **Key election issue**

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Housing is a key issue in the looming state election and both major parties have promised hundreds of millions of dollars to address the issue.

Labor's Build to Rent fund aims to get long-term rental projects off the ground by offering land tax concessions to developers and boosting social housing by 1,000 homes a year, at a cost of more than \$1.5 billion.

Meanwhile, the Liberals have pledged \$500 million to fund critical infrastructure so 100,000 new homes can be built in key growth areas.

To tackle homelessness, the Nationals have promised \$10 million while Labor has committed \$19.5 million towards community housing and outreach services across Perth, Mandurah and Bunbury.

No election should ever, or can ever, be treated as a forgone conclusion. But it's a principle that is hard to stick by when writing a preview for the 2025 Western Australian election.

But Mr Dowling doesn't believe that will go very far.

He wants to see the incoming government shoulder more of the responsibility and lessen the burden on local governments and services.

"The state government have the ability to add housing stock, they have the ability to fund these agencies who are on the ground, and they have the ability to make sure there is continued focus on that at every time," he said.

Mr McLellan believes the federal government also needs to step in to address the issue at a national level.