



# MEDIA RELEASE

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## **Revised Homelessness Data to be treated with caution**

Shelter Tasmania has urged caution in interpreting revised homelessness estimates for 2006 as an actual decline to overall homelessness. The findings of the Australian Bureau of Statistics methodological review of *Counting the Homeless 2006* were released on Monday and there is concern that the reviewed statistics may be seen as indicative that the problem of homelessness is less serious and in less need of resources than previously thought.

“Regardless of changes in estimated data there has been no decrease in the real numbers of homelessness in Tasmania” said Shelter Tasmania’s Chairperson Andrea Witt.

The original statistics released in *Counting the Homeless 2006* stated that the homelessness population in Tasmania was 53 people per 10,000 in 2006. The revised figures released today list the rate of homelessness in Tasmania to be at 24 people per 10,000 in 2006, more than half of the original statistic.

“We understand that the task of estimating the number of people experiencing homelessness using Census data is extremely difficult, however we now have a homelessness figure that is half of the original statistic. Such a dramatic change raises some questions over the revised methodology especially when homelessness services supported 6800 Tasmanians last year” said Andrea Witt.

Approximately 50% of people who are homeless in Tasmania are categorised as being in secondary homelessness, which is experienced by people who frequently move from one temporary shelter to another whether that be ‘couch surfing’, youth refuges or emergency accommodation. As noted by ABS in their paper, if on Census night these people provided a usual address, which is often the case for youth and those escaping domestic violence, then the number of homeless are likely to be underestimated as they cannot be distinguished from people who were visitors on Census night.

“We have significant concern that this data misrepresents the serious issue of homelessness in Tasmania. The new methodology for counting homeless people focuses on rough sleepers, of which we have few in Tasmania due to our harsh weather conditions. Many of our homeless people seek temporary shelter with friends, relatives or in transitional housing.

Shelter Tasmania believes it is important to consider a range of other data sources in order to arrive at a complete understanding of the complexities of the homelessness problem in Tasmania.

“Shelter’s members work with people who are homeless or at risk on a daily basis due to the chronic lack of affordable housing. These services are reporting a an increase not a decrease in demand” said Mrs Witt.

In Tasmania there is a shortage of public housing with over 2,500 people on the waiting list. In addition, private rental is in short supply with less than a 4.1% vacancy rate across the state, and many of those properties too expensive for people on low to medium incomes. Until Tasmania addresses the issue of affordable housing, Shelter Tasmania believes that the number of homeless people will only increase.

Shelter Tasmania Is the Peak Body for Not for Profit Housing and Homeless Services across Tasmania. For more information see [www.shelertas.org.au](http://www.shelertas.org.au)

**For further information contact Andrea Witt**

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