



## NEW SOCIAL HOUSING DWELLINGS TO BE BUILT IN BALLARAT

Nine new social housing dwellings will be built in Ballarat following a Victorian Government funding announcement on May 22. Centacare Ballarat was successful in its application for a grant of \$2 million to build six one-bedroom and three two-bedroom units at its existing Mitchell Park social housing site. Centacare chief executive Tony Fitzgerald said the entry level housing provided an opportunity for people to establish themselves, secure employment and look to move back into the private rental market. "One of the critical success factors in people's well-being and health is to have a roof over their head," he said.



"We find having this stock available is the perfect entry point for people who are experiencing homelessness, so we can start them on a journey of getting back to a strong sense of well-being for themselves."

Construction of the nine new properties is expected to be completed in around twelve months, adding to the existing twenty-nine units at the site. Tenants for the homes are sourced through the Victorian Housing Register and through direct referrals. The amount paid to rent the property is proportionate to the tenant's income. Wrap around support is provided to tenants through referrals to programs that address relationship issues, employment and alcohol and drug counselling.

Mr Fitzgerald said the decision to build one and two bedroom dwellings was in direct response to the greatest need. "The two major groups of people who are looking for housing are families, a two bedroom place would fit their needs, and single people, particularly singles over 55, which is one of the fastest growing groups of people experiencing housing risk," he said.

Mr Fitzgerald said while this investment was a great step, thousands more social housing dwellings were needed across Victoria to meet demand. "This is a good start in accessing the Social Housing Growth Fund. That level of investment needs to continue so we have got good stock," he said.

Wendouree MP Juliana Addison said homelessness and housing insecurity was a big challenge for the Ballarat community, particularly following the economic fallout of COVID-19. "We know there is a number of factors that contribute to homelessness," she said. "That is why we are investing money into family violence and into mental health. We want to make sure people receive a wrap around set of services to prevent homelessness in Ballarat and providing them with a roof over their head is an important part of that puzzle."

Ms Addison said this investment was part of a five year plan to deliver 2200 new homes across Victoria and she acknowledge there would continue to be a high demand for social housing stock. "I am always talking to the minister about the need for investment in public and social housing in Ballarat," she said.

The Council To Homeless Persons said the Victorian Government needed to increase Victoria's social housing stock to the national average of 4.5 per cent of all housing to address the deficit in stock. This would be an increase of 6000

dwellings per year over ten years. There were more than 44,000 households on the social housing waiting list in Victoria in February.

Centacare Housing Board chair Neil Jens said while he considered there to be a reasonable balance between the available private rentals and the number of tenants looking in Ballarat, he saw people slip through the cracks. "If you can't get those references, or you have a checkered rental history you slip through the gaps and there is no where to go unless you can rely on the provision of these sorts of houses," he said.

*Article courtesy of the Ballarat Courier, text and photo by Rochelle Kirkham*

*Photo: Centacare Housing Board chair Neil Jens, Wendouree MP Juliana Addison and Centacare chief executive Tony Fitzgerald at the site where new social housing dwellings will be built.*