



LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY FOR THE AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

SELECT COMMITTEE ON ESTIMATES 2023-2024

Mr Mark Parton MLA (Chair), Ms Jo Clay MLA (Deputy Chair),
Mr Michael Pettersson MLA

ANSWER TO QUESTION TAKEN ON NOTICE DURING PUBLIC HEARINGS

Asked by MR PETTERSSON on 27 July 2023: Minister VASSAROTTI (Homelessness and Housing Services) took on notice the following question(s):

Ref: *Uncorrected Hansard Transcript* 27 July 2023 [pages 113-114]

In relation to:

Can you provide details regarding the count of rough sleepers in the ACT?

MR PETTERSSON: In recent months, I have seen an uptick in the number of posts on the Canberra subreddit—people concerned about what they think is an increase in the number of people sleeping rough in our town centres. I was wondering if there was potentially a more accurate count as to how homelessness and potentially rough sleepers in our town centres are going.

Ms Vassarotti: Thank you for the question. I can really understand people's concerns around the issue. I think visibility around people who are rough sleeping has increased. It is something that I have noticed as well, and certainly the work that the rough sleeping working group has been doing has really been focussed on identifying—getting a really clear and accurate picture of the number of rough sleepers, and so I will probably look to—would it be Ms Spencer? To provide a little bit of detail in relation to this, and certainly I was looking at data only this week in terms of the numbers of known rough sleepers that we have and there is generally a group that we can be really confident about, and then there is a sub-group we are pretty sure that these are individual people but because people might be accessing a range of services we a little less certain of exactly what the number is.

[...]

But I will look to Ms Spencer just to speak specifically to the work that is being done in terms of us being very confident about the numbers of rough sleepers and being confident that we know that they are accessing services and when they are ready to be able to be provided with emergency accommodation, we are able to meet that need.

Ms Spencer: Thanks, Minister and good afternoon. I am Valerie Spencer, Executive Branch Manager for Housing and Homelessness Program. The minister is correct. There are a number of supports in place and that rough sleeper project and program led by OneLink and a number of providers in the sector is really key to understanding and knowing the individuals that might be sleeping rough.

The data that I have between 1 January and 31 March this year, there were 54 rough sleepers referred to services, and that number, minister you are correct, is relatively stable in terms of the number of sleepers that the sector can name and identify. There is, of course, a cohort that fluctuates and sometimes it is a bit difficult for the sector to actually track rough sleepers.

This particular project has significantly helped with that, and I have some data. Actually out of the 54 clients that were rough sleeping within that period of time, 19 have actually achieved their housing needs and no longer have requested support. Eleven of the rough sleepers are still being supported, and a number have disengaged with the program but that does not mean that the service is disengaged with those individuals, and certainly St Vincent de Paul's Street to Home and others are very active in continuing to provide supports and services to rough sleepers, and even those who have disengaged.

I mean, it does take some time to build that trust to provide the supports and to encourage rough sleepers to engage with those supports and services, and even transitioning to accommodation which can be quite a difficult transition for some people.

MR PETTERSSON: You used the phrase “relatively stable”. Over what timeframe are we talking?

Ms Spencer: So just as an example in terms of that number of about 54 being stable, for example the 2021 census that came out just this year we know that is a point in time data show that there was I think maybe 57 or 58—I have to just check the number, I do have it with me—rough sleepers at that point in time of the census, and so looking a year or two in, 54, so it is relatively stable over a reasonable time period.

MR PETTERSSON: And so this anecdotal observation over the past couple of months, is there a count ongoing that might be able to put some evidence behind those observations or it kind of once a year that we go out and do a count.

Ms Spencer: No, we do do regular counts in terms of the number of rough sleepers. I do not have that sort of trajectory or that trend data in front of me but certainly we can provide that on notice.

MINISTER VASSAROTTI: The answer to the Member's question is as follows: —

The 2021 Census identified the number of rough sleepers in ACT was 59.

Since early 2021, the ACT has piloted a mechanism to count the number of rough sleepers at the end of each month in the ACT. The data is provided by OneLink, and rough sleepers services including Street to Home, Early Morning Centre, and Ainslie Lodge (formerly Winter Lodge).

The table below shows monthly trend data from July 2022 for the number of confirmed rough sleepers.

July 22	Aug 22	Sept 22	Oct 22	Nov 22	Dec 22	Jan 23	Feb 23	Mar 23	Apr 23	May 23	Jun 23
80	79	92	64	70	54	51	61	58	51	52	71

Approved for circulation to the Select Committee on Estimates 2023-2024

Signature: 

Date: 9/8/2023

By the Minister for Homelessness and Housing Services, Ms Vassarotti MLA