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JULY 3 2020 - 1:30PM

# Coronavirus lockdowns create new wave of homelessness in regions

Jody Lindbeck

Local News

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Job losses linked to the coronavirus lockdowns have created a new wave of homelessness, with some people no longer able to pay their rent.

In Wagga, the first participants have joined a new **\$36 million state government** program to help get rough sleepers into permanent homes. So far, five Wagga referrals have been made to Argyle Housing, the organisation administering the Together Home program in the city.

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Wendy Middleton, chief executive officer of Argyle, told *The Daily Advertiser* the program provided not only housing, but a range of other services to people for up to two years.

In regional areas, since the beginning of the coronavirus lockdown, Argyle is seeing an increase in people who have lost their job, cannot afford their rent and have left rental properties, she said.

"We know there are rough sleepers and all the agencies are working with them, putting them in temporary accommodation. But we are seeing another cohort of people coming through and they are people who cannot afford their rentals," Ms Middleton said.

Across the Murrumbidgee, 10 assistance packages have been allocated. These are not necessarily allocated to a single person, but could be used to assist a whole family. People who are referred to program are individually assessed as to what individual services they need, including drug and alcohol services and mental health support.

"It's not just a house. It's



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"It's not just a house. It's where people commit to working with the services so they can maintain their tenancy," Ms Middleton said.

The new program, according to Minister for Families, Communities and Disability Services Gareth Ward, follows on from the state government's initial response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

According to the 2016 Census, there were 107 people in Wagga classified as homeless, with 10 of these reported to be living in "improvised dwellings, tents, or sleeping out". The remainder were living in a range of temporary accommodation.



 Wendy Middleton

Homelessness NSW CEO Katherine McKernan said a housing-first model was critical to providing stability for rough sleepers.

"The sector has worked hard in recent months to get to this point and this additional funding will provide the critical next step to help secure housing and the supports people need to sustain tenancies," she said.

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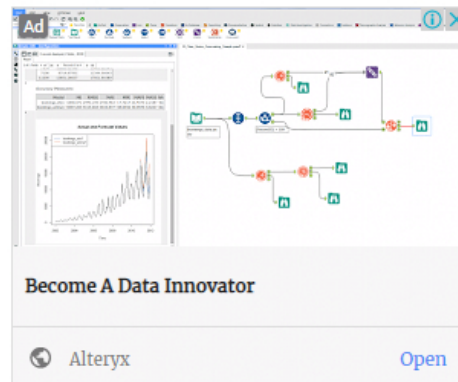
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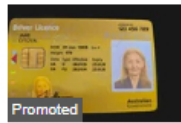
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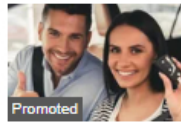
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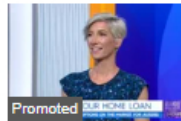
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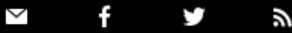
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