

Snapshot: Anglicare Tasmania

North West Tasmania

Introduction

Anglicare Tasmania collected information on all the properties advertised as available for rent across Tasmania on the weekend of 13-14 April 2013. This included rooms available in share houses. The information was gathered from major real estate websites and from newspapers.

We assessed these properties on the basis of whether they were appropriate and affordable for people living on low incomes.

We worked out whether people who depend on Centrelink payments could afford to find suitable accommodation for themselves and their family. We also assessed the situation for people who are working and earning the Minimum Wage.

Findings

564 properties were advertised as available for rent in the North West and West Coast region over the weekend of 13-14 April 2013 with 2677 throughout Tasmania.

Of these, only a very small number were affordable for people who depend on Centrelink payment as their main source of income.

People on New Start and Youth Allowance

- There was only 1 property advertised in the North West which was affordable for a young person (aged over 18) who depends on Youth Allowance. This was in a shared house.
- There was only one other property affordable for a single person who depends on New Start Allowance. It was in a small settlement on the West Coast.
- Only 17% of the properties were affordable for a couple with two young children who are living on New Start Allowance (93 properties).

Single parents on Parenting Payment Single

- Only 16% of the properties in the North West were affordable for a single parent with one child (88 properties)
- Only 10% were affordable for a single parent with two young children (57 properties).

Single parents on whose youngest child is aged over 8

- 20 properties – only 4% of the total properties advertised in the North West – were affordable for a sole parent whose youngest child is aged more than 8. These people no longer qualify for Parenting Payment and can now only receive the lower New Start Allowance.

People on Age and Disability Pensions

- 4% were affordable for a single person on the pension (20 properties) but these were almost all in shared houses, most of which involved sharing a bedroom with 1 to 3 other people.
- 26% were affordable for a pensioner couple (148).

For people who are working full time and earn the Minimum Wage the situation is considerably improved but limited.

Minimum wage workers (in full-time work)

- 23% were affordable for a single minimum wage worker with no children (130 properties)
- 34% were affordable for a sole parent worker with 2 children (191 properties)
- 47% of the properties were affordable for a couple with two young children where both parents were working full-time (264 properties).

Discussion

The results of this survey confirm the very difficult situation that Tasmanians living on low incomes are facing when looking for housing in the private rental market.

The survey analysed all the properties advertised for rent in Tasmania's three main newspapers and on two major real estate websites over the weekend of 13-14 April and was designed as a snapshot of what Tasmanians living on a low income would confront on an average weekend if they were going through the classifieds looking for somewhere to live.

It should be noted that the very limited number of properties that we did find as suitable and affordable for people on low incomes 'doubled up' – that is, a property that is suitable for a single person looking for work would also appear as one of the properties an age pensioner could afford.

It is evident that the pressure on those few properties that are affordable is very great, and that in the absence of adequate housing supply people are being forced to spend more money than they can afford in order to obtain housing, thus putting sometimes dangerous pressure on other aspects of their budgets.

We assessed the appropriateness of the properties solely on the basis of the number of bedrooms required for the various household types. We found that many of the properties that were affordable in financial terms were located in comparatively isolated areas where employment and other services may be very limited and where other costs, such as transport, become disproportionately high. Thus many properties would in fact not be appropriate in terms of affordable access to employment, health services and education. It should also be noted that our survey is a very basic tool, and takes no account of the related housing costs such as how people must budget to accumulate enough money to pay a bond and rent in advance.

Other accommodation, ostensibly affordable, was in fact unlikely to be suitable. For example, while a single age pensioner may be able to afford to rent a room in a shared house, it is most unlikely that they would be the successful applicant for this type of accommodation which is mainly geared towards younger people, nor would such accommodation provide an appropriate environment for the person living on the Age Pension.

While there are a number of share houses advertised for rent, most of these are still priced too high to be truly affordable for people on low incomes. Many were offered on the basis of tenants (in some cases up to four people) sharing a bedroom. For many people this would not be considered safe or suitable, yet it may be the only truly affordable option.

While the situation for people who are working full time and earning the Minimum Wage was somewhat easier, it was still limited. Even where both members of a couple with two young children work full-time only one-third of the properties advertised would be affordable. A single person would only find 14% of the properties to be affordable.

In the North West and West Coast Regions the situation for young people and for single pensioners was particularly difficult.

Policy Implications

Our survey shows that it is young people who are facing the most difficulty in finding appropriate affordable housing with only a handful of suitable properties available anywhere in the state. In the North West and West Coast this is particularly the case.

However, Anglicare's service experience has shown us that where people are able to gain secure, affordable accommodation, with appropriate supports, they are able to do well in other aspects of life such as continuing with education or training, seeking employment and leading healthy lives.

With Tasmania having a low retention rate to complete school and follow further education and training, there is a great need to ensure that young people are able to find safe, secure and affordable housing.

The private rental market is patently not able to meet the needs of Tasmanians living on low incomes, whether in receipt of government pensions and benefits or earning low wages in employment.

Conclusion

Clearly much more needs to be done to ensure that Tasmanians living on low incomes are able to live dignified lives and not be forced into hardship in other areas of life in order to pay for their housing.

Anglicare has long advocated the importance of public housing and the need for community and social housing options to be structured so as to be truly affordable to people living on very low incomes.