

Facts Companies Need to Know for Winter Giving

The chill of winter is biting for those at risk, who are vulnerable, or experiencing the impact of poverty and financial exclusion. Here are some facts your company might need to be aware of to start the conversation about how you can help through giving.

The compounding impacts of poor health, age, homelessness, fuel poverty, financial exclusion mean that our most vulnerable communities don't just brace themselves for winter. They fear it. And they need community support to get through it.

The cold brings Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs into sharp focus, particularly the most basic needs. So when you can't afford, find or know how to seek out security, safety, food, warmth and rest – what do you do? So many of Australia's charities exist to provide an answer to this very question and there are numerous companies looking to play an active role in supporting solutions to these social challenges.

These facts and figures will help illustrate why winter is more chilling for some than others, and what practical ways corporate community investment specialists, and charities, can work together to make a change.

This house is freezing

Rough sleeping in the dead of winter is unthinkable. But there it is. It is the situation of over 15,000 people ([according to 2013 – 2014 figures](#)).

We'll get back to homelessness.

For those with a home, financial hardship can translate to inadequate means to afford heating among other preventative but costly measures that improve comfort, health and wellbeing in the home. CSR Australia has published an article that references a study undertaken by Professor Adrian Barnett, a researcher based at the Queensland University of Technology. The article highlights this finding from Professor Barnett: 'Australia's death rate due to cold weather, which at 6.5% is almost double that of Sweden's at 3.9%, is almost entirely due to the poor quality to which we build our homes'.

The article, written by CSR's Project Manager - Innovation, Scott Clarkson, states: 'Energy poverty also dictates that poorer people are more vulnerable to these hazards, as heating their largely uninsulated homes becomes more expensive and inefficient while they are forced to make choices that adversely affect their health.

Constant exposure of a building to low temperatures often results in mould caused by condensation, leading to more frequent illnesses and an increased likelihood of a shorter life expectancy. Staying comfortable is an important part of cardiovascular health and preventing allergies which have a terrible impact on our wellness throughout the nation.

As the weather finally cools we should take note of the conditions our aged and frail relatives are faced with each day. It is clear that insulating and efficiently heating a home helps lower blood pressure and

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reduce risk of life threatening illnesses, and that's not even including the bill shock from your energy company around September'.

This is vital information for organisations providing care and support services to ageing or vulnerable people. It's also an important way the building, engineering, architectural, energy and aged care sectors could work together to support people at risk. Great focus for a corporate responsibility initiative – and a focused workplace giving campaign.

Shift the Story on Homelessness

Yes, a staggering number of people sleep rough every night (see above). Sleeping rough, also called primary homelessness or rooflessness, is experienced by people without conventional accommodation or shelter of any kind or improvised shelter.

That number has to reduce and campaigns such as the Vinnies CEO Sleepout – which is a stroke of brilliance - aim to bring leaders from across industries and sectors into the conversation about homelessness. The experience is not the same, of course. CEOs participating usually do so with the finest warm clothing, they are at no times under threat, unsafe, abused, physically or mentally unwell and distressed. People sleeping rough often are, and the event acknowledges that. But it's a glimpse, and for many leaders, an entry point to doing more to help.

It's also only one facet of homelessness. There's so much more to it than sleeping rough, and the story needs to shift for

the broader public – Australia's workforce included – to better understand the breadth of the problem. For all your staff know, they could be working with someone who is homeless.

For a start, what gets people to this place? Relationships Australia outlines the following reasons people become homeless or look to access services:

- Family violence (25%).
- Financial difficulties (15%).
- Housing crisis/affordability (18%).
- Inadequate or inappropriate dwellings (10%).
- Relationship or family breakdown (6%).

They also conducted a [survey](#) to understand people's attitudes to homelessness. Homelessness Australia did the same, but with a smaller sample of participants. The differences in perception in the [Homelessness Australia](#) survey reveals that sleeping rough dominates, whereas in reality severely overcrowded housing followed by supported housing is the experience of most.

So the story needs to change, and an understanding of the various transitions required to make a meaningful difference in people's lives. Solving for homelessness is not a quick fix, it requires long term commitment from the right charity partners and companies in it for the duration.

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Get Hungry to Solve Food Insecurity

In June 2016 the Huffington Post [published this article](#), which highlighted the contents of Australian food relief organisation [Foodbank's](#) annual [Hunger Report](#). One in six Australians report having experienced food insecurity (that they didn't have enough food for themselves or their family and could not afford to buy more food) in the past 12 months.

The report also says that 43,000 people every month are turned away empty handed from food relief charities because of a lack of food and resources and a third of those going without are children.

Without sufficient nourishment, you get ill. Very ill. [You can't concentrate at school](#). Severe hunger impacts your mood and your mental health.

The Salvation Army's [2017 Economic and Social Impact Survey](#) revealed that many people seeking our help are living on less than \$18 a day once housing is covered. A workplace giving donation of \$5 will provide a hot meal to someone in need and \$35 will provide pantry basics.

How to Help?

Every bit counts. Companies and charities can band together on winter appeals to highlight the issues of homelessness, fuel and energy poverty, and food insecurity today and rally Australia's workforce to contribute to warming the winter months for our most disadvantaged communities through workplace giving today.



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