

# Snapshot: The Samaritans Foundation – Central Coast, Newcastle/Lake Macquarie, Hunter (incl. Port Stephens) and Mid-Coast

## Introduction

The Rental Affordability Snapshot is an annual national initiative of Anglicare Australia, which reports on the amount of private rental properties advertised on a given date across Australia and their suitability for people receiving government income support.

On 7 April 2018, Samaritans Foundation completed an analysis of data from the private rental market across several major NSW regions – Central Coast, Newcastle/Lake Macquarie, Hunter (incl. Port Stephens) and Mid-Coast. These regions span a total area of 40,000km<sup>2</sup>, with a combined total population of 1,061,839 (ABS 2016). Within these regions are 9 local government areas (LGAs) and this Snapshot reports on the rental property data for 11 locations within these LGAs.

The table below gives some relevant background statistics for each major region. For the purposes of this report, the percentages of the population on Income Support directly relate to the fourteen household types used in the Snapshot and do not represent the total amount of income support recipients as reported by the Australian Bureau of Statistics.

*Table 1: Demographic Characteristics of the major Snapshot regions*

Region	Population*	Unemployed Population*	Income Support Recipients*	Snapshot Locations
Central Coast	335,309	5.3%	38.2%	Gosford Wyong
Newcastle/Lake Macquarie	363,766	5.4%	34.8%	Newcastle Lake Macquarie
Hunter (incl. Port Stephens)	270,806	4.4%	36.1%	Maitland Port Stephens Cessnock Singleton Upper Hunter
Mid-Coast	91,958	5.7%	50.4%	Great Lakes Taree

\* Source: ABS Regional Profile Data 2016 (<http://stat.abs.gov.au/itt/r.jsp?databyregion#/>)

Samaritans Foundation provides support to low-income households throughout the Central Coast, Newcastle/Lake Macquarie, Hunter and Mid-Coast regions including:

- Accommodation and support for homeless youth
- Emergency relief services
- Youth and family support services
- Disability support services
- Permanency Support Program (PSP) and related support services



## Findings

On 7 April 2018, 3,072 rental properties were advertised across the 11 Snapshot locations in Central Coast, Newcastle/Lake Macquarie, Hunter and Mid-Coast regions. This number represents a 6.4% decrease (211 properties) on last year's Snapshot.

*Table 2: Rental Affordability Snapshot – Central Coast, Newcastle/Lake Macquarie, Hunter and Mid-Coast Snapshot locations, by household type and percentage*

#	Household Type	Payment Type	Number Affordable and Appropriate	Percentage Affordable and Appropriate
1	Couple, two children (one aged less than 5, one aged less than 10)	Newstart Allowance (both adults)	13	<1%
2	Single, two children (one aged less than 5, one aged less than 10)	Parenting Payment Single	3	<1%
3	Couple, no children	Age Pension	113	4%
4	Single, one child (aged less than 5)	Parenting Payment Single	4	<1%
5	Single, one child (aged over 8)	Newstart Allowance	2	<1%
6	Single	Age Pension	112	4%
7	Single aged over 21	Disability Support Pension	16	1%
8	Single	Newstart Allowance	0	0%
9	Single aged over 18	Youth Allowance	0	0%
10	Single in share house	Youth Allowance	0	0%
11	Couple, two children (one aged less than 5, one aged less than 10)	Minimum Wage + FTB A (both adults)	688	22%
12	Single, two children (one aged less than 5, one aged less than 10)	Minimum Wage + FTB A & B (both adults)	47	2%
13	Single	Minimum Wage	317	10%
14	Couple, two children (one aged less than 5, one aged less than 10)	Minimum Wage + Parenting payment (partnered) + FTB A & B	101	3%
	<b>Total number of Properties</b>	<b>3072</b>		

**On the Snapshot day, these are the number of unique properties affordable and appropriate for:**

Households on income support payments (#1-10)	Households on minimum wage (#11-14)
216	1005

The total number of properties advertised in each Snapshot location was less than the previous year except for Taree and Gosford, with an increase of 25% (34 properties) and 4% (19 properties) respectively. The number of advertised properties in Cessnock and Upper Hunter showed the greatest decreases, being 33.3% and 37.1% respectively.

While a property could be affordable and appropriate for more than one income type, any individual property can only be rented out by one income type at any time. To this end, we found that:

216 individual properties were suitable for at least one income type living on income support payments without placing them in housing stress. This is a 30.1% decrease (309 properties) than those affordable and appropriate advertised in 2017.

Almost one third (1,005) of the properties advertised were affordable and appropriate for households on a minimum wage. This is a 9.3% decrease (104 properties) on last year's Snapshot.

- The majority of the 216 properties were mainly suited to singles and couples on the aged pension with no children.
- There were no properties affordable or appropriate for singles on Newstart or Youth Allowance.
- Couples living in the Upper Hunter with two children and receiving Newstart had the choice of 9 properties out of 100 advertised for that LGA. Almost all Snapshot locations had no properties suitable for parents receiving full income support.
- With the exception of those on a minimum wage, 5 of the 11 Snapshot locations had only a handful of properties suitable for one household type, being couples on the aged pension.
- The highest number of properties affordable and appropriate for households on a minimum wage was recorded in Newcastle (387 properties), comprising 38.3% of the total properties advertised in that Snapshot location.
- The highest percentage of properties advertised in an area as suitable for households on a minimum wage household type was recorded in the Upper Hunter (69%)

### *Single People*

Out of the total 3,072 properties, there were no affordable or appropriate properties for a single person on Newstart or Youth Allowance, even in shared accommodation.

A single person on minimum wage could only find a suitable rental property in Newcastle, Taree or the Upper Hunter but very little elsewhere.

### *Single Parents and Single Aged Pensioners*

Single parents on Newstart or Parenting Payment Single with one child would not find an affordable or appropriate rental property in most of the Snapshot locations.

Newcastle had the largest number of properties for a single Aged Pensioner (103 out of a total of 112 for this income type). All other Snapshot locations had either no properties or a very small number for this income type.



### *Families receiving income support*

Families on the minimum wage had a significantly greater amount of rental properties to choose from than all the other income types. 22% (688) of all rental properties in the Snapshot were affordable and appropriate for couples with 2 children on the minimum wage and receiving Family Tax A Benefit.

However, this was 3% less than the amount of properties available for this income type in 2017.

### *Older people, and people with disabilities*

Couples on the aged pension with no children had a small number of properties affordable and appropriate in each Snapshot location, with the highest amount of properties reported in Newcastle (32), the Upper Hunter (22), and Taree (20).

People on a Disability Support Pension could find a small number of properties for rent in Newcastle (7) and little or no properties throughout the rest of the Snapshot locations.

## Discussion

The findings of the 2018 Rental Affordability Snapshot for the Central Coast, Newcastle/Lake Macquarie, Hunter (incl. Port Stephens) and Mid-Coast regions highlight the lack of affordable and appropriate advertised private rental properties available for people on income support, especially single young people and single parent families.

When compared with 2017 results, there has been a marginal decrease in the number of suitable properties across all Snapshot regions. The renewed confidence in the Hunter economy due to higher coal prices has boosted the Upper Hunter mining sector and employment. On the flip side, this has contributed to a decrease in the amount of private rental properties advertised due to people moving back into mining related jobs.

For young people on Newstart or Youth Allowance, this is the 7th year where there are no private rental properties affordable or appropriate across the total Snapshot region. As a result, this cohort are often homeless or “couch surfers”, adding to overcrowded housing situations.

This is in line with the findings of Census 2016 which found the highest rate of homeless was in the 19-24yr age group. It described 44% of the homeless population Australia-wide (estimated at 116,427), as people living in “severely crowded” dwellings. Census reported this category of homeless as having the largest increase since 2011, particularly in NSW where it has risen by 74% - providing an indicator of housing unaffordability.

This year we have seen a decline in rental offerings for people on the minimum wage, further adding to the argument that the private rental market is now failing to offer suitable properties to an increasingly larger group.

The financial pressure and mental stress of not having stable and secure accommodation is a reality for an increasing number of marginalised people within our communities. This will only continue to place increased pressure on government services and non-government agencies such as Samaritans.

Our already swamped social housing system, which at 30 June 2016<sup>1</sup> had a waiting list of 194,600 households across the country, has an average wait time of 5-10 years depending on the type of property.

In 2017 Samaritans:

- provided 967 young people in Newcastle and the Hunter with accommodation support
- provided 1,375 young people with mental health support.
- Emergency Relief Centres assisted 13,346 people across the Snapshot footprint, mainly with support of food and food vouchers, referrals for financial support and payments for utilities.

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<sup>1</sup> Australian Institute of Health and Welfare



## Conclusion

For the past 7 years the trend has continued to worsen for people on government benefits trying to find a suitable place to live in the private rental market. When and how do we find to a better situation for these vulnerable groups in our community?

Samaritans is a proud supporter of the national [Everybody's Home](#) campaign, which was launched in March 2018.

Part of this campaign was a national call for state and territory governments to develop a National Housing Strategy to meet Australia's identified shortfall of 500,000 social and affordable rental homes.

A National Housing Strategy will determine the respective roles of federal, state and local governments and identify the full range of instruments required to achieve this.

In 2015 the Federal Government formed an Affordable Housing Working Group, the scope of which was to seek proposals that improved the supply of affordable housing and maximise the effectiveness of government expenditure. This government initiative is a move in the right direction but there is much more to be done.

Without taking strong and deliberate action, it will be some time before the results of the Rental Affordability Snapshot reflect a positive outlook for vulnerable people in the Central Coast, Newcastle/Lake Macquarie, Hunter (incl. Port Stephens) and Mid-Coast regions. There is no further time to wait.