

Our cops need a bed, not a couch

Paul Nicolaou



Fly-in fly-out workers are usually associated with mining projects in isolated corners of our country but it's also a workplace trend happening right here in our city.

Sydney's FIFO equivalent are city workers from emergency services, health professionals, cleaners, educators and hospitality sector employees.

Each has something in common. They can't afford to live anywhere near their workplaces whether it's a police station, fire station, hospital or school. So, they do Sydney's FIFO equivalent travelling to their CBD or inner city jobs from far afield including Newcastle, Wollongong, the Macarthur district and even interstate.

Many are on four-days-on four-days-off work patterns and can come into the city and find a place to put their head down between shifts.

We keep hearing of essential workers having to "couch surf", police sleeping in their cars or caravans and fireys bedding down at their fire stations.

Society pays a price just as much as the essential workers.

It's not unusual for cleaners and maintenance people to be commuting for hours each day to

do their indispensable work.

So, we have to get serious about making sure that essential workers can secure housing, whether for rent or purchase, closer to where they work.

It would benefit the city in more ways than one. At the last census, only 27,000 people lived in the CBD. We need far more if, in the post-pandemic environment, the city is to have the population necessary to drive the 24-hour economy.

At least doubling the CBD population in the next city council term is a priority in Business Sydney's 10-point plan for the looming local government elections. There are some positive signs that housing for essential workers is getting some attention. Premier Chris Minns and Planning Minister Paul Scully have made the housing crisis a priority.

Developers already have projects planned for key locations on the northside. A NSW parliamentary inquiry is set to tackle housing for essential workers and urban think tanks such as Urbis Australia are on the case to apply their planning skills.

It's simple really. No CBD police officer should have to sleep in their car between shifts.

Paul Nicolaou is executive director of Business Sydney