

# Homeless images a wake-up call for us

**Paul Nicolaou**



**W**hen we saw a community of rough sleepers spring up on the doorstep of the Reserve Bank in Martin Place, the irony was inescapable.

An emphatically visible sign of homelessness, the housing crisis, high interest rates and high cost of living wrapped up in one.

With the Reserve Bank building undergoing major renovations the construction hoardings became shelter for a dormitory style encampment.

It was a telling reminder of the plight of the homeless and that this should not be happening in an otherwise prosperous city.

Business Sydney has for a long time been calling for the appointment of a homelessness commissioner or advocate to co-ordinate the efforts of charities and government agencies.

Next week we are holding a special forum in Sydney in collaboration with an organisation named Sydney Zero that believes it has the answer to solve rough sleeping.

We don't pretend to be an expert on homelessness or how to solve it.

And we admire the work of charities and government agencies as they try to alleviate

the crisis.

However, like the wider community, we wonder why there can be hundreds of people sleeping rough each night on our streets and in our parks.

Or that so many of those who are sleeping rough have serious mental health issues at a time when mental health services are stretched beyond breaking point.

We find it amazing that there can be people living under the steps of Sydney Town Hall, under the light rail viaduct at Wentworth Park, at Circular Quay and at numerous other locations.

With this in mind, it is a breath of fresh air to know that the organisations involved in Sydney Zero have made a commitment to collaborate to address the issue.

The objectives of Sydney Zero are that rough sleeping in Sydney should be rare, of short duration when it does happen and, when a person is housed, they should not have to return to the streets.

The images you are seeing of the “dormitory” popping up outside the Reserve Bank are a wake-up call.

We must not walk past the people we see sleeping rough in our city. They need us to act.

**Paul Nicolaou is executive director of Business Sydney**