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Mike Kelly joins MyHome in Canberra as promise given for the project

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My Home Canberra President, Shukry Sahhar and patron, Mike Kelly at site in Curtin. Picture: Elesa Kurtz

Mike Kelly's new office may only be down the road from Parliament House but in some ways it's worlds apart from Capital Hill.

His office is located in Pilgrim House and while it's got workers in suits, like Parliament House, it's also a place where many rough sleepers seek refuge, unlike Parliament House.

The Early Morning Centre - a support service for people experiencing or at risk of homelessness is based in the building, and consequently Dr Kelly said he bumped into people sleeping rough every day.

It spurred him to take action.

"You see that and you decide that is unacceptable and if it's unacceptable then we are all obligated to do something about it," Dr Kelly said.

"In a city like Canberra there is absolutely no excuse for this to still be an issue in 2020."

We still have to go through the detail plan so we will be working with the ACT government and the architects to come up with a plan that suits the site.

MyHome in Canberra president Shukry Sahhar

In his post-politics life, the former federal member for Eden-Monaro has taken on a role as a patron for MyHome in Canberra, which is a long-planned, proposed supported housing facility in Curtin for people in the community with mental health and housing issues.

It comes as the ACT Labor-Greens government [has pledged to deliver the project in the next four years](#).

The model is based on Home in Queanbeyan, which opened when Dr Kelly was the member for Eden-Monaro.

The facility provides long-term accommodation for people with a mental illness who are not able to live independently or are at risk of homelessness.

"Home in Queanbeyan brought together the embrace of people suffering from those issues and at the same time gave them that supported accommodation, which is the key so those issues can be addressed," he said.

"Ten years later Home in Queanbeyan has evolved into a really successful model. It proved it could be done.

"It was amazing how it galvanised the community around it, it's such a wonderful experience of embracing the people who are going through homelessness."

Dr Kelly retired [from federal politics in April due to ill health](#).

Shortly after, [he took a role with US technology company Palantir Technologies](#).

But he still wanted to contribute and he was the one who reached out to the team at MyHome. He said he wanted to help in whatever way he could.

"I reached out to the crew because I saw what was going on downstairs at Northbourne Avenue there at the bottom of Pilgrim House," Dr Kelly said.

"I knew the crew had long discussions with the Home in Queanbeyan crowd and understood what was involved ... so I just thought well let's see if we can help and become a part of that effort."

For Dr Kelly, the role is a personal one.

"I have lived the homelessness experience," he said.

"When I was a young fellow my family lived in my aunt's garage for quite a long period and that led to [an] alcohol problem, domestic violence and all sorts of family breakdown.

"I became homeless at 16 myself and I was just fortunate that a teacher took me in and set me up in a back room and that turned my life around."

Given his connections, Dr Kelly was able to discuss the project with Planning Minister Mick Gentleman and Greens leader Shane Rattenbury prior to the territory election.

But its place in the parliamentary agreement does not mean the project is guaranteed for this assembly term. The MyHome team has learnt this the hard way.

In the 2016 power-sharing agreement, Labor and the Greens had pledged to build accommodation for people experiencing mental health concerns and housing difficulties and this was going to be done "utilising the 'MyHome for Canberra' plan".

No money for the project was designated and [the team was left frustrated after territory budgets did not allocate funding](#).

But MyHome in Canberra president Shukry Sahhar said they had more confidence in this agreement.

The commitment said it would work "with the land owners and community organisations to deliver the MyHome proposal in Curtin".

In a pre-election pitch, [the ACT Greens proposed to spend \\$8.5 million on the housing facility](#) - which is what the estimated cost of the build is.

"It's a firm commitment, which I think is fantastic," Mr Sahhar said.

"We still have to go through the detail plan so we will be working with the ACT government and the architects to come up with a plan that suits the site."

MyHome already has the land in Curtin, which the Uniting Church donated.

The proposal is for a 20-unit complex, and each of the dwellings have one bedroom.

The site can cater for more than 20 dwellings and Mr Sahhar said they would be able to explore other options with the government, such as the addition of affordable housing.

It will adopt a "housing first" model with wraparound support.

"Our goal is to provide a safe and secure home where people can receive support to manage their medication, have someone to share stories with and to support them when they go out into the community," Mr Sahhar said in his recent AGM report. "We aim to encourage recovery and autonomy."