



Illness

# The ingenious use for Australia's empty hotel rooms

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EVERY night across Australia, an estimated 25,000 hotel rooms sit empty.

At the same time, about 105,000 people experience homelessness and hundreds struggle to find a safe place to sleep, often as a result of domestic violence.

Those two facts have led to the creation of “[spare keys](#)”, a new charity striving to convince hotels to make unoccupied rooms available to the homeless at a heavily discounted rate.

The brainchild of former hotel executive Matt Granfield, [spare keys](#) has launched in Queensland but will soon branch out into other states and hopefully other countries.

“If we can find rooms that are going to be suitable, then it’s going to allow more vacancies in crisis accommodation,” said Mr Granfield.

“They’d be helping to free up rooms right across the system.”



📷 Matt Granfield has started Spare Keys which lobbies hotels to provide rooms for homeless people at a discount rate. Picture: Josh Woning

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He said the cost to a hotel for cleaning and servicing a room was generally about \$35 a day — less for serviced apartments that were cleaned weekly.

“Some hotels want to do it as part of their corporate responsibility program. For others it’s purely benevolent,” Mr Granfield said.

But he recognised that [the stigma attached to homeless people](#) could be off-putting to hotels — with even those who had signed up, reluctant to be identified.

“In many instances, victims of domestic violence are staying in hotels anyway. Hotels are well prepared to deal with those situations and problems are very rare,” he said.

CEO of domestic violence help service DV Connect, Diane Mangan, said the [spare keys](#) initiative was “an absolute godsend”.

“We spend a fortune on motels, particularly in the summer months. It’s about \$80,000 a month (in Queensland alone),” said Ms Mangan.

“What we do need is access to motels and hotels at very minimal cost because the demand for safety is increasing.”



📷 Could spare keys be the answer to Australia's homelessness problem? Picture: Thinkstock

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Andrew Jackson owns eleven serviced apartments in Longreach and Blackall which he regularly rents out to homeless people for as little as \$90 a week.

“I’ve been doing it off my own bat because I’m passionate about helping the homeless,” said Mr Jackson.

“When I approached the normal channels to say I could help, I just got the brush off.”

Mr Jackson was even called to a meeting with a local police officer, who accused him of “bringing homeless people into the area”.

“That’s the government — the people we pay taxes to, to look after people,” he said.

“There is a stigma attached to the homeless but quite often, they just need a chance.”

Australia’s biggest hotel groups Accor and Mantra were both reluctant to publicly commit to [spare keys](#), despite calling it “very admirable”.

“Accor Hotels is committed to our Community Fund for healthy families where we are focusing all of our fundraising efforts and this side of social responsibility,” said Director of Communications for AccorHotels Pacific, Angela Cowley.