

National Housing and Homelessness Plan Submission

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Overview

Homelessness Australia's submission is focused on preventing and addressing homelessness

As the national homelessness peak, Homelessness Australia works with a large network of organisations and individuals who are experiencing homelessness to provide a united voice on preventing and responding to homelessness.

Our submission is focused on ending homelessness with the aim of informing development of a National Housing and Homelessness Plan that radically alters the trajectory of homelessness in Australia.

We have drawn on the deep experience and expertise of the homelessness sector, people with lived experience and our community, as well as on data and contemporary research and practice from Australia and internationally. More than 680 people engaged in our series of dedicated engagement forums held to inform this submission.

Homelessness Australia convened 11 engagement forums in Aug-Oct 2023 to inform this submission including discussions on:

- Ending First Nations Homelessness
- Ending homelessness in Queensland
- Reducing homelessness risk across the population
- Joint peaks housing and homelessness consultation
- Preventing homelessness for children and young people
- Ending homelessness for people experiencing significant mental illness
- Ending homelessness for victim survivors of domestic and family violence
- Ending homelessness resulting from natural disaster
- The ideal service system to respond to children and young people without a home
- Ending homelessness for older people, and
- Ending homelessness for LGBTIQ+ people.

Forum recordings are available at <https://homelessnessaustralia.org.au/homelessness-plan/>

Ending housing insecurity and homelessness needs to be a first order priority

A record number of people across Australia are currently experiencing significant housing insecurity or homelessness, including many families, and unaccompanied children and young people. Many will be trapped in homelessness for an extended period as a result of systemic barriers to escaping homelessness. The enormously damaging impacts are well known and include:

- life altering damage to identity, mental health and wellbeing
- significant negative impacts for children and young people's life trajectory
- dramatic interruptions to schooling and study
- barriers to getting and keeping a job, with flow on productivity impacts
- severing of community connections
- exacerbation of family violence
- children removed due to housing instability
- people denied bail or parole because they lack a fixed address
- adverse intergenerational impacts
- community health risks
- negative impacts on community and labour market function
- reduced community adaptive capacity for managing transitions such as climate change.

An endless flow of Australian reports and inquiries into homelessness document the costs and harms suffered by individuals, families, local communities and taxpayers and identify ways to prevent and address homelessness. Despite this, homelessness has largely been treated as a lower order issue.

With the exception of Australia's short-lived and largely unrealised national homelessness strategy - the Road Home (2008) - there has not been a concerted national approach this century to tackle homelessness.

Australia's level of homelessness is both a choice and a major policy failure

Because nearly all homelessness is preventable, it is possible to end homelessness in Australia.

The overwhelming majority of people experiencing homelessness have been pushed into it by Australia's dire lack of affordable housing, income poverty or the epidemic of family violence. This exposes gaping holes in our universal safety net and a failure to deliver on core elements of the basic social contract.

Many experience homelessness after being failed by other service systems. A steady flow of people connected with child and family services, the justice system and mental health services in particular continue to travel the well-worn and well-known path to homelessness.

Despite the deep commitment of the homelessness sectors and some excellent small scale initiatives and pockets of great work, the high and growing level of homelessness across the nation reflects both political choice and major policy failing.

Rather than being prevention focused, Australia's approach to homelessness is largely crisis driven. Homelessness services are overwhelmed with unmet demand; options to rapidly rehome people into settled housing are extremely limited; people are being harmed by extended periods of homelessness and unsafe crisis accommodation; and those at risk of chronic homelessness are often unable to access the supports needed to secure and sustain housing.

A genuine and effective national strategy can end homelessness

Homelessness Australia commends the Australian Government for leading development of a much needed National Housing and Homelessness Plan. We welcome this integrated approach.

It presents a rare opportunity for transformative change. The Plan must create the foundations needed to create a very deliberate structural and operational shift from a system that manages homelessness, to one aimed at eliminating it.

Such transformation needs to be driven by a shared vision and commitment to end homelessness; with well defined targets, measures and indicators.

Translation of this vision and commitment into reality requires effective coordination with clear accountabilities across and between different levels of government, the homelessness sector and the broader community.

Importantly, the Plan should be backed by legislation, fit for purpose national partnership arrangements and strong governance that includes homelessness expertise representation.

The Plan needs to drive comprehensive, evidence-based action and funding to address the major factors that both cause homelessness and prevent exits from homelessness.

Preventing homelessness must be the main focus

Our submission calls for redesigning the interface between homelessness services and the broader social security and human services systems to create a sharp focus on prevention.

Universal protections including access to social and affordable housing and an adequate social safety net for low income households would dramatically reduce homelessness numbers. Establishing a 'duty to assist' would see public officials screen for homelessness risk and activate supports and referrals.

A systemic approach to targeted prevention for those at heightened risk of homelessness, using differentiated prevention pathways matched to different life stages and circumstances is needed. Taking effective approaches to scale would make a significant dent in homelessness numbers.

A commitment to no exits into homelessness would turn off the flow of people from out of home care, mental health wards and prison facilities. Targeted and timely tenancy support could prevent most evictions.

Homelessness needs to be rare, brief and non-recurring

A genuine and concerted focus on prevention would alter the nature of current demand for specialist homelessness services. It would mean the homelessness system could effectively provide crisis prevention to avert imminent homelessness and rapidly support people who lose their homes into settled housing.

We are calling for the National Housing and Homelessness Plan to embed evidence-based policy directions to guide future funding and actions. For responding to homelessness this includes:

- providing safe and quality crisis accommodation as part of a rapid rehousing approach
- rapidly rehousing people into settled homes as the central response to homelessness. Housing options, and the intensity and duration of homelessness supports should be flexibly matched to the circumstances of different households
- embedding Housing First as the system wide approach to redress severe disadvantage and end chronic homelessness
- connecting people to the mainstream and community support they need to exit homelessness and maintain housing.

As providers of more than housing services, homelessness services play a critical role in delivering direct, multi-disciplinary individual support and broader human service navigation.

Homelessness services must have the capacity, including through adequate and flexible funding, to address both the complexity and scale of presenting needs.

This involves expansion to address unmet need and a much stronger acknowledgement of the crucial expertise involved in support provision and multi-system navigation for many people experiencing homelessness.

Investment in strengthening sector capability is also a critical enabler of change. A national peak body could drive implementation of evidence-based approaches; share learnings; build equalities competence; ensure cultural safety; test innovations; and diversify the workforce (including a strong peer contingent).

Dedicated approaches are needed to end homelessness for different groups

Together with many children and youth homelessness services and peak bodies, Homelessness Australia believes that a dedicated Action Plan to end homelessness for unaccompanied children and young people must form part of the architecture of the National Housing and Homelessness Plan.

We need to turbo charge support for children and young people experiencing vulnerability, and embed developmentally appropriate evidence-based support and accommodation models that can enable family reunification, provide care for children and enable a successful transition to independence for young adults.

Likewise, we support the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Housing Association's (NATSIHA) call for a dedicated First Nations Housing and Homelessness Plan. This will enable the diversity of unique issues resulting in a ten-fold overrepresentation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in homelessness to be addressed with a self-determined plan.

There are important local and international lessons to draw from

The National Housing and Homelessness Plan ought to be informed by and build upon strong local and international examples. This submission particularly draws on:

- Scotland's [Ending Homeless Together 2018](#) because it is a comprehensive strategy underpinned by a shared ambition to end homelessness. Early indicators of success include the lowest levels of rough sleeping on record and a declining trend in repeat episodes of homelessness (1)
- The [Road Home 2008](#) which is universally acclaimed as Australia's high watermark in homelessness policy. Abandonment of key elements following a change of government means its potential was never realised. However, it provides a quality benchmark for the upcoming Housing and Homelessness Plan to meet - and ideally surpass. Some of the new ways of working, funded as pilots under the Road Home, serve as important demonstration projects that are ready for systemic adoption.
- Homelessness NSW's [systems approach to ending homelessness](#)
- successful adoption of Housing First programs across Australia
- short term improvements in homelessness during Australia's response to the Covid-19 pandemic.



1. See [keynote address at the Homelessness Australia and AHURI national homelessness conference 2022](#)

Recommendations

Strong foundations for reform in the National Housing and Homelessness Plan

1. Include a shared commitment to end homelessness within ten years and halve it within five and reflect the Sustainable Development Goal of adequate and affordable housing for everyone.
2. Incorporate measurable targets and indicators into the Plan, including key indicators related to homelessness prevention such as levels of rent stress, exits from care and eviction rates. Provide for progress against these measures to be regularly reviewed and reported on independently.
3. Establish explicit linkages to key drivers of homelessness by monitoring levels of family violence, number of children needing protection and social security protections. Insert the objective of ending homelessness into related strategies and legislation. Task key advisory groups including the Economic Inclusion Advisory Committee and the Women's Economic Equality Taskforce to consider homelessness in their advice to the Federal Government.
4. Consolidate housing and homelessness initiatives in the Australian Disability Strategy, the National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children, the National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children, Closing the Gap and the Aged Care Strategy. Provide for comprehensive tracking and monitoring of these as part of the National Housing and Homelessness Plan's outcomes framework.
5. Commission a housing related Targeted Action Plan under the Australian Disability Strategy given it is missing from the current priority areas under the Australian Disability Strategy.
6. Translate the Plan through a strong National Housing and Homelessness Agreement that:
 - specifies roles, responsibilities and accountabilities of different parts and levels of government
 - embeds reform commitments in schedules and bilateral agreements
 - establishes effective mechanisms to join up planning, resourcing and delivery across national, state and regional interfaces
 - includes a robust framework for monitoring outcomes
 - incorporates local government.
7. Provide for strong governance to drive, advise on and track Plan implementation. This should include an independent, expert Advisory Council on Homelessness that brings together people with lived experience, the homelessness sector, First Nations representatives, human services sectors and research experts.
8. Develop national homelessness prevention legislation to augment the Plan.

Recommendations

Strong foundations for reform in the National Housing and Homelessness Plan

9. Specify evidence-based policy directions to guide future funding and actions attached to the Plan and related national partnership agreements. These should include:
- a strong focus on prevention and early intervention
 - crisis accommodation as a short-term and safe pathway to settled housing
 - housing-led responses as the primary means to support rapid exits from homelessness
 - Housing-First as a system-wide response for people with complex needs at risk of chronic homelessness
 - differentiated service responses to prevent and address homelessness among different cohorts and at different life stages
 - joined up support and resources.

10. Specify core values that should drive the national approach to ending homelessness. These should include:
- rights-based
 - co-production with people with lived experience
 - equity
 - cultural safety
 - capabilities approach
 - person-centred.

Mainstream services must play a strong role in ending homelessness

11. Strengthen the role of mainstream services in delivering a holistic approach to ending homelessness. This could be supported by:
- a 'duty to assist' across universal welfare services to trigger public officials to screen for homelessness risk and activate supports and referrals
 - local approaches to join up support and use a no wrong doors approach
 - a commitment of no exits into homelessness, backed by frameworks for exit pathways, targets and measures.

Recommendations

Shifting the focus to homelessness prevention and early intervention

12. Ensure the balance of new investment under the National Housing and Homelessness Plan is focused on prevention (universal and targeted) and early intervention measures to end homelessness.

Make an initial \$500 million investment in a Prevention Transformation Fund, to create a separate pool of funding for prevention and early intervention programs, in line with Productivity Commission recommendations.

14. Halve rental stress by increasing income support, and restructuring and increasing Commonwealth Rental Assistance.

15. Develop national homelessness prevention frameworks to guide investment and action under the Plan, differentiated for high risk cohorts and key life stages.

13. Deliver a pipeline of 25,000 social housing and 25,000 affordable housing homes each year, to provide the homes needed to end homelessness.

16. Embed tenancy sustainment support as an offer for social housing residents

A well-functioning homelessness service system

17. Increase funding for homelessness services to the level needed to create a well-functioning system by:

- immediately increasing funding by \$450 million annually to address current unmet need and projected growth in demand
- adjusting funding in line with rising costs, including wages increases
- establishing a mechanism that adjusts funding in response to need
- accelerating the shift to longer term contracts
- removing restrictions that prevent flexible responses.

18. Support a national homelessness sector and workforce capability program to drive adoption of evidence-based and best practice program approaches and practice models

19. Embed rapid re-housing as the primary response to homelessness.

20. Embed Housing First as the system-wide approach to enable people at risk of chronic homelessness to gain and sustain housing. This would need to be supported by dedicated sector capability building.

Recommendations

An Action Plan for children and young people

21. Create a dedicated Action Plan on ending homelessness for unaccompanied children and young people under the National Housing and Homelessness Plan.

A First Nations Housing and Homelessness Plan

22. Empower and resource the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Housing Association to develop and implement a national First Nations housing and homelessness plan.



Australia lacks a coherent approach to addressing homelessness

Homelessness in Australia is getting worse

Too many people have experienced homelessness in Australia

More than one in ten Australians have had an experience of homelessness at some point in their lives, and more than third of those who have been without a home have slept rough. (2) (3)

First Nations people experience homelessness at almost ten times the rate of other Australians. A massive 29% of those aged 15 and over have experienced homelessness at some stage.

Three in every four people using homelessness services are women and children; 50% of whom have experienced domestic and family violence.

Climate change and natural disasters are causing increased homelessness. Recent Australian fires and floods have displaced thousands from their homes, in some instances triggering substantial homelessness at the local level. (4)

The number of people using homelessness services is increasing

While the rate of homelessness recorded in the Census has remained relatively stable, more

people are seeking homelessness support. Increased demand for homelessness services has escalated particularly rapidly over the past year as the housing crisis has intensified.

The monthly number of people using homelessness services increased by 13% for all people (almost double the national population increase) in the five years between July 2017 and June 2023. (5)

We anticipate homelessness rates are increasing even faster than this figure reveals, as services are increasingly unable to respond to the scale of people needing assistance.

Considerable growth in homelessness services use has occurred among:

- older people: usage has almost doubled in the decade from 2011-12 to 2021-22.
- First Nations people: July 2017 - June 2023 homelessness services figures reveal a 37% increase for women and girls; and a 30% increase for men and boys. (6)
- people experiencing mental illness: have experienced a 20% increase in the last four years.

Homelessness Australia notes an apparent high prevalence of homelessness among LGBTQ+ people. Current data gaps need to be addressed to increase our knowledge about prevalence and effective responses for this group. (7)

2. ABS, General Social Survey 2019, Table 12: Without a permanent place to live, Selected characteristics and experiences, 2019 (11% of respondents reported being without a permanent place to live and 4% reported having slept rough).

3. AIHW, Housing circumstances of First Nations people, September 2023 at <https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/australias-welfare/indigenous-housing>. Accessed on 3 October 2023.

4. F McDonnell, Homeless with a mortgage: Lismore's vulnerable look for a post-flood future. SBS News, 19 May 2022.

5. AIHW, SHS clients by sex and client groups, July 2017 to June 2023 at <https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/homelessness-services/specialist-homelessness-services-monthly-data/contents/monthly-data>. Accessed 12 October 2023.

6. AIHW, SHS clients by sex and client groups, July 2017 to June 2023

7. Data on LGBTQ+ is not collected in a systematic way in either the AIHW homelessness data or the Census homelessness count. See [Homelessness Australia, Notes on the consultation on LGBTQ+ homelessness](#).

The geography of homelessness is changing, with growing regional homelessness

Homelessness is growing at contrasting rates in different places and jurisdictions.

Regional rates of use of homelessness services increased at more than double the rate of capital cities (13% compared with 6%) in the four years between 2017-18 and 2021-22. (8)

Regional growth in homelessness was most marked in:

- Queensland: homelessness service use increased 29% in regional areas compared with 14% in Brisbane
- Western Australia: increased 35% in regional areas compared with 7% in Perth.

Over this period, homelessness services use in Tasmania increased by a massive 24%.

At more than ten times higher than the national average, homelessness rates in the Northern Territory remain particularly alarming. (9)

Structural failures and policy gaps are driving homelessness

The Productivity Commission, in its 2022 report on the National Housing and Homelessness Agreement In Need of Repair recognised that the causes of homelessness are substantially structural in nature and described Australia's growing levels of homelessness as clear and concerning evidence of national policy failure.

Poverty and tight housing markets interact with each other to have the most significant structural impact on the overall level of homelessness. Homelessness tends to be highest in locations with elevated unemployment and high median rents. (10)

This is reflected in the self-described primary reason that people provide for seeking homelessness assistance, with a majority identifying housing or financial issues. (11)

Main reason for seeking homelessness assistance	%
Housing issues (including housing crisis, eviction, inappropriate housing and housing situation ended)	35
Financial issues (including financial difficulty and housing affordability stress)	18
Family violence and other violence and abuse	28
Other family relationship issues	5
Health and other issues	14

8. H Pawson, A Clarke, C Parsell and C Hartley, Australian Homelessness Monitor 2022

9. ABS, Estimating Homelessness: Census 2021, March 2023

10. G Johnson, R Scutella, Y Tseng and G Wood Entries and exits from homelessness: a dynamic analysis of the relationship between structural conditions and individual characteristics, AHURI Final Report No.248. Melbourne: Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute, 2015.

11. AIHW, Specialist Homelessness Services Annual Report, Table CLIENTS.22: Clients, by main reasons for seeking assistance, and by state and territory, 2021-22

Although the overall structural issues increase the number of people experiencing homelessness, those with more vulnerability are the most likely to become homeless. Major risk factors include unemployment, experiences of trauma or violence, living with disability, acute mental illness, drug or alcohol issues. In contrast, having higher levels of education, a history of being employed and strong social support protect against homelessness.

The greatest individual predictor of homelessness is experiencing random shocks, such as job loss, violence, sudden change in health status or relationship breakdown. (12)

Rental stress among low income households is at crisis levels

Housing affordability stress is now the fastest growing cause of homelessness, with a 27% increase between 2018-22. (13) This represents a catastrophic failure of our housing system.

High housing costs are pushing large numbers of households into poverty and precarity, where they are simply unable to meet basic living costs. (14)

In 2022, well over half of low-income households in the private rental market (58%) were paying 'unaffordable' rents (more than 30% of household income). (15) Given high rent inflation, we anticipate this proportion may be even higher in 2023. Many of these households are not eligible for Commonwealth Rental Assistance (CRA).

The situation is especially dire for people reliant on income support payments. In June 2022, 63% of JobSeeker recipients and 75% of Youth Allowance recipients were in rental stress, even after receiving CRA. (16)

When climate and natural disasters destroy homes, this tends to exacerbate rent inflation in local housing markets and directly increases the risk of homelessness among low-income households. (17)

Decreasing social housing opportunities are exacerbating homelessness

The proportion of social housing stock has continued to fall relative to population and household growth. (18) At the same time, social sector lettings have steadily declined due to low tenancy turnover.

This is reducing access to a secure form of tenancy for some of Australia's most vulnerable community members, with tenancy in public housing in particular being a significant protective factor against homelessness. (19)

Inadequate social security protections are contributing to homelessness

Australia's low rates of income support and pension payments are widely and consistently identified as an important contributor to homelessness. Living at or below the poverty line, many households may be just one random shock away from an experience of homelessness. (20) This risk is doubtless exacerbated by the current cost of living crisis.

While recognising the Albanese Government's change of direction, punitive compliance requirements attached to income support payments have exacerbated income insecurity which fuels homelessness. Over recent years tens of thousands of people – including First Nations, parents of young children and people with disability

12. G Johnson, F Carey, S McCallum, 'Home Truths: Homelessness in Australia' in J Bretherton N Pleace, The Routledge handbook of Homelessness, 2023.

13. Pawson et al. [Australian Homelessness Monitor](#)

14. Over 1.3 million people in low-income households are pushed into poverty purely by 'unaffordable' housing costs – after meeting their rent payment liability, they have insufficient income to meet food, clothing and other basic living costs. See K Hulse, M Reynolds, C Nygaard, S Parkinson and J Yates, The supply of affordable private rental housing in Australian cities

15. Pawson et al. [Australian Homelessness Monitor](#)

16. AIHW, Housing assistance in Australia web report at <https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/housing-assistance/housing-assistance-in-australia/contents/financial-assistance> July 2023 Accessed on 12 October 2023

17. Knauss, 'We've run out of options here': NSW flood disaster worsens housing crisis in northern rivers; Guardian Australia, 10 March 2022.

18. For the period 2016-2021 Australia's social housing stock increased by 2.6%; markedly lagging population growth (5.7%) and household growth (8.2%). See Pawson et al. [Australian Homelessness Monitor](#)

19. Living in public housing is the single most significant protective factor for reducing the risk of homelessness. Living in community housing also provides significant protection from homelessness (though only one quarter as strong a protection as public housing). See Johnson, Carey and McCallum, Home Truths: Homelessness in Australia

20. Pawson et al [Australian Homelessness Monitor](#) citing various sources including Anglicare Rental Snapshot, 2022 and Parliament of Victoria Homelessness Inquiry.

have been breached, cut off, or withdrawn from the safety net for reasons such as failing to record activity requirements.

Eligibility requirements have a huge impact. Recent changes expanding access to parenting payment provide a welcome relief. However, trends over the last decade have largely been in the other direction. Significant numbers of people with disability are now placed on the lower Jobseeker payment (rather than the Disability Support Pension), and temporary visa holders have longer wait periods before becoming eligible for income support.

Temporary residents, new migrants, people seeking asylum and international students are frequently ineligible for income support and often experience homelessness because they have no income. The Covid-19 experience saw these dangerous gaps in the social safety net exacerbated, with increased homelessness among people on temporary visas who lost their jobs and were not eligible for income support. This has had lasting repercussions.

The interaction of Centrelink and state and territory administered child protection systems is contributing to family separations. Child protection often removes children who are living in 'inadequate' housing situations, including refuges or crisis accommodation. The household's income is then reduced because Family Tax Benefit allowances for children are withdrawn. This creates a perverse situation as the family's only hope of reunification is to secure appropriate housing, but their only hope for securing appropriate housing is the income provided by Centrelink to care for the child.

Inadequate responses to domestic and family violence are the major cause of homelessness for women and children

Family violence is the primary reason women and children seek homelessness support, but most victim survivors who flee violence don't receive the support and housing they need to escape a violent home. Many women return to violence because they have no money and nowhere else to go. Others want to leave a violent home but remain because they have no safe alternatives. (21)

When women do leave violence into homelessness, too often they face further violence. For many the only viable pathway out of homelessness is by forming relationships that provide access to shelter.

Family violence is a particularly significant driver of homelessness for First Nations women and children, affecting 46% of all women and children accessing homelessness services. (22)

Family violence is also the major cause of homelessness for children and young people presenting to homelessness services without an adult carer or guardian. Child abuse and neglect, and family rejection experienced by children identifying as LGBTQ+ are also significant issues.

Lack of support for children, young people and families at risk of homelessness, or those fleeing abuse or violence means opportunities to support children and families to thrive and to prevent homelessness are being missed.

21. Equity Economics, [Nowhere to Go: The benefits of providing long-term social housing to women that have experienced domestic and family violence](#), July 2021. See also: A Summers, *The Choice: Violence or Poverty*. University of Technology Sydney, 2022. <https://doi.org/10.26195/3s1r-4977>.

22. AIHW Specialist Homelessness services data cubes 2021-22, filtered for age, sex, indigenous status and domestic and family violence.

People are being pushed into homelessness from other service systems

Despite the clear evidence of high vulnerability to homelessness, people involved with other service systems are continuing to fall into homelessness at unacceptably high rates.

- Despite significant improvements in the continuation of care in recent years for young people ageing out of the out of home care system, in 2021-22, almost 8,000 children on a care and protection order and 6,000 young people leaving out-of-home care used a homelessness service. (23)
- Ex-prisoners have been the fastest growing category of homelessness service users over the past decade (24), with a 17% increase in the last four years. (25) Over half (54%) of prisoners expect to be homeless on release. In 2021-22, 9,000 people exiting custody used homelessness services.
- People with psycho-social health conditions are among the fastest growing groups of people using homelessness services. Gaps in community mental health support, significant access barriers to the NDIS, and difficulty navigating and purchasing individual support for those on the Scheme mean many are not being adequately supported.

Discrimination drives homelessness

The complex intersection of homelessness for First Nations people with other disadvantages, and the connections between discrimination in the justice system and child protection system and housing insecurity create patterns of causation of homelessness that are specific and distinct to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

Direct racism in the rental market is a live issue. A recent report commissioned by the Victorian Residential Tenancies Commissioner identified discriminatory barriers at every stage of a renter's journey, particularly at the point of applying for a tenancy, reflecting prejudice, discrimination and structural disadvantage.

Homophobia and transphobia are significant drivers of homelessness: around 25% of young homeless people identifying as LGBTIQ+ have experienced homelessness as a result of family rejection and conflict around their sexuality or gender identity. (27)

There is poor coordination across and between governments and partners

The Productivity Commission's assessment of the National Housing and Homeless Agreement (NHHA) is revealed by the naming of its 2022 report *In Need of Repair*. Describing the NHHA as ineffective, it called for a major overhaul. (28)

The Productivity Commission characterised the NHHA as merely a funding contract for services rather than an agreement for coordinated policy action across the federation. It concluded that the NHHA has not spurred reform. Although the NHHA requires states to develop their own strategies guided by national policy priority areas and priority cohorts, lack of overarching alignment and coordination mechanisms have undermined development and implementation of a coherent and mutually reinforcing approach. Further, it only relates to a small proportion of total housing assistance dollars.

21. Equity Economics, Nowhere to Go: The benefits of providing long-term social housing to women that have experienced domestic and family violence, July 2021. See also: A Summers, *The Choice: Violence or Poverty*. University of Technology Sydney, 2022.
22. AIHW Specialist Homelessness services data cubes 2021-22, filtered for age, sex, indigenous status and domestic and family violence.
23. AIHW, specialist homelessness services annual report 2021-22, Table CLIENTS.39: Clients by client groups, by state and territory.
25. C Martin, R Reeve, R McCausland, P Burton, R White, S Thomas, *Exiting prison with complex support needs: the role of housing assistance*, AHURI, 2021
26. WM Stone, ZA Goodall, A Peters and P Veeroja, *Aboriginal Private Rental Access in Victoria: "Excluded from the Start"*, Consumer Policy Research Centre/Swinburne University, 2021
27. Homelessness Australia, Notes for the National Plan on LGBTIQ+ people and homelessness 2023
28. Productivity Commission, In need of repair. Although the Productivity Commission made important recommendations around homelessness funding and coordination, Homelessness Australia does not support its recommendations to dismantle the social housing system.

The Report of AHURI's Ending Homelessness Inquiry (29) noted:

...we have eight loosely connected state and territory approaches to homelessness, each with different aims, governance and history. Federal funding for both homelessness services and income support represents a connecting thread, but it is a very loose thread and one that has not been used with strategic intent...

Disjointed policy approaches have worked at cross-purposes and created perverse outcomes. For example, the steady fall in social housing as a proportion of housing stock has coincided with the need for more funding for overstretched homelessness services.

There has also been a failure to recognise and define the role of local government, despite the significant front line role they have in relation to local housing and homelessness issues.

The homelessness service system is not set up for success

The current system is largely crisis driven

Australia's homelessness response is not designed to proactively prevent homelessness. Even at the most critical point where a household is facing imminent homelessness, there is often insufficient service capacity to help avert it. (30)

The structure of homelessness service systems and inadequate levels of funding result in a system focused on short term crisis interventions for people who have already lost their homes. AHURI's Inquiry into Ending Homelessness notes: (31)

The existing system suffers from 'choke points', with homelessness services unable to take on more homeless people in crisis, let alone initiate early intervention and prevention measures. These 'choke points' lead to greater homelessness and increased demand for homelessness crisis services. There is a notable absence of early intervention services and models of care that seek to act early to reduce the numbers entering homelessness. In reality, many human service agencies are active in this space, but their efforts are not integrated into the program logic of homelessness supports.

Failure to prevent homelessness causes enormous harm and cost

The costs and impacts of people falling into homelessness are much greater than preventing it from happening in the first place. The way homelessness can lead to and exacerbate mental health disorders provides a powerful illustration of this. Australian research revealed that although 31% of people who are homeless experience a mental health issue, only 15% had a mental health issue prior to becoming homeless. (32)

29. A Spinney, A Beer, D MacKenzie, S McNelis, A Meltzer, K Muir, A Peters and K Valentine, Ending homelessness in Australia: A redesigned homelessness service system, AHURI Final Report No. 347, AHURI, 2020. [6195/3s1r-4977](#).

30. In 2021-22, 31.5% of all homelessness clients (85,915 people) were seeking homelessness assistance to sustain a tenancy or prevent eviction. Services were unable to provide that support or a referral to 15.7% of those (13,528 people). AIHW, Specialist Homelessness Services Annual Report 2021-22, Table CLIENTS.24: Clients, by need for services and assistance and service provision status, and by state and territory, 2021-22.

31. Spinney et al. Ending homelessness in Australia

32. C Chamberlain, G Johnson, J Theobald Homelessness in Melbourne: Confronting the Challenges, RMIT, 2007

Those who develop mental illness after homelessness generally become homeless younger and remain homeless longer. (33)

The longer that people experience homelessness the greater the cumulative harm to their physical and mental health and wellbeing, education, economic participation and social connections. This accumulated harm has devastating impacts on individuals. It also creates broader costs to society and government funded services, including reduced labour force and education participation, reduced productivity, and increased costs in health, justice, child protection, domestic and family violence and the mental health service system.

People who have a first experience of homelessness before the age of 16 are most likely to experience homelessness as an adult.

There is huge unmet demand for homelessness services

There is a profound imbalance between demand and capacity of homelessness services to respond. Services are simply unable to meet the surging demand resulting from Australia's worsening housing crisis. This has devastating consequences for people seeking help, and is undermining the overall effectiveness of the homelessness system.

The crisis is increasing the trauma people experience while homeless as it is far more challenging to exit. This means each person needs much more support, at the same time that there are far more people needing support.

In 2021-22, nearly 72,000 people were turned away from homelessness services - an average of 288 per day. (34) 80% were women and children; 31% were under 18. (35) Since 2022, turn away rates have continued to increase.

Homelessness service providers report: (36)

- increasing numbers of people are being turned away
- decreasing capacity to avert crisis by preventing imminent homelessness
- growing waiting lists and waiting times to access a worker - preventing support for a rapid exit from homelessness and enabling relatively minor issues to intensify
- increasing use of demand management strategies, including restrictions on intake appointments, time limits on support periods and accommodation stays
- diverting scarce staff resources from supporting people to avoid or exit homelessness to the tasks of triaging and turning people away.

Many people receive some assistance, but are unable to get the help they need including: (37)

- over one-third of people needing accommodation
- over one-third of people needing mental health support
- 32% of people needing financial counselling
- 29% of people needing child specific counselling, or parenting skills education
- one in seven people needing help to sustain their tenancy.

The only way to address these system issues is to reduce the number of people being pushed into homelessness.

There is much repeat homelessness

The number of people experiencing persistent homelessness using homelessness services increased by over 22% between 2018/19 and 2020/21 (from 29,500 to 35,000 people). In just one year, 16,000 people returned to homelessness after being housed. (38)

Persistent homelessness is symptomatic of services being unable to meet people's needs when they first become homeless; and being unable to offer the flexible, ongoing and holistic support needed to enable those with complex needs to secure and sustain housing.

33. Scutella R, Chigavazira A, Killackey E, Herault N, Johnson G, Moschion J and Wooden M, Journey's Home Research Report No. 4, Melbourne Institute of Applied Economic and Social Research, 2014

34. AIHW Specialist Homelessness Services Annual Report 2021-22, Table UNASSISTED.1: Daily average unassisted requests, by state and territory, 2021-22

35. AIHW Specialist Homelessness Services Annual Report 2021-22, Table UNASSISTED.2: Unassisted requests, by age and sex, and by state and territory, 2021-22

36. Everybody's Home, Brutal reality: The human cost of Australia's housing crisis, July 2023

37. AIHW, Specialist homelessness services 2021-22 data tables

38. AIHW, Specialist homelessness services client pathways: Clients returning to homelessness in 2019-20, September 2023

Opportunities to rehome people are extremely limited

Homelessness services are finding it extremely difficult to rehome people given the dire shortage of low-cost rentals and record low vacancy rates.

As settling people into long-term housing options is getting harder, bottlenecks in crisis and transitional accommodation are getting worse. This means:

- more people are being turned away from crisis accommodation.
- many living in crisis accommodation cannot get places in medium term options such as transitional housing
- few people in transitional housing are being settled into ongoing housing.

People get stuck in a damaging merry-go-round of accommodation and homelessness that is re-traumatising, resulting in an intensification of mental ill health and economic exclusion. Rather than providing a pathway out of homelessness, this can increase an individual’s vulnerabilities to extended and repeat experiences of homelessness. (39)

The 2021-22 AIHW data below highlights that the overwhelming majority of people needing settled and medium term accommodation cannot get the support they need. (40)

Service sought by the client	Service need (no of households)	Service provided	Service not provided or referred
Short-term or emergency accommodation	108,822	59%	32%
Long-term housing	107,728	4%	72%
Help to sustain a tenancy or prevent eviction	85,915	81%	16%
Medium-term accommodation	80,406	26%	56%

39. E O’Sullivan, Key elements in homelessness strategies to end homelessness by 2030: A discussion paper, European Union, 2022.
40. AIHW, c, Table CLIENTS.24: Clients, by need for services and assistance and service provision status, and by state and territory, 2021–22
41. Whitworth and P Chiappalone, 3CR, Homeless in Hotels: health, services and peer voices in the COVID-19 pandemic.42. Northern and Western Homelessness Networks, A crisis in crisis: the appalling state of emergency accommodation in Melbourne’s north and west, 2019

More crisis shelters are not the answer

Responses to increases in homelessness, particularly increases in rough sleeping, often result in quick fixes rather than real solutions. Investment is made in substandard or even dangerous crisis shelters or emergency accommodation such as mattresses in car parks; tent cities; sleep buses; increased use of boarding houses or crowded, poor quality hotels.

Without exit points, people become trapped in these environments for months, or even years. Extended stays in crisis accommodation don’t end homelessness, they entrench it.

Many of these forms of accommodation create risks of their own. People with lived experience of homelessness consistently report negative experiences in accommodation crowded with highly vulnerable people, including exposure to risks of violence and exploitation, and drug use. (41)

Women and children, older people, unaccompanied children and young people, and people with disability or mental illness are particularly vulnerable in these environments.

A report by the Northern and Western Melbourne Homelessness Networks investigated what it was like living in rooming houses or emergency hotels: (42)

Women reported that it was ‘horrible, ‘terrible’, and that they feared violence and rape (one woman reported a rape in emergency accommodation). They said that it was ‘unclean’, ‘not appropriate for children’, that there were ‘no cooking facilities and nowhere to store food’.

Men similarly reported that it was ‘difficult’, ‘unclean’, ‘overcrowded’, ‘unsafe’, with ‘poor facilities’, ‘difficult to cook’ and they were unable to ‘store food’.

Internationally research has shown that: (43)

There is no convincing evidence that the provision of emergency accommodation, particularly large congregate shelters, for people experiencing homelessness achieves anything other than a temporary, generally unpleasant, sometimes unsafe, respite from the elements and the provision of basic sustenance for people experiencing homelessness. This is particularly the case for basic shelter services that simply provide a bed and food.

While short stays in quality refuges or crisis accommodation play an important role in providing immediate safe respite during the transition to settled housing, expanding crisis accommodation without delivering long term housing options is not a solution.

Failure to embed evidence-based approaches is perpetuating entrenched homelessness

People experiencing recurring or persistent homelessness are among the heaviest repeat service users, even though they make up just 13%

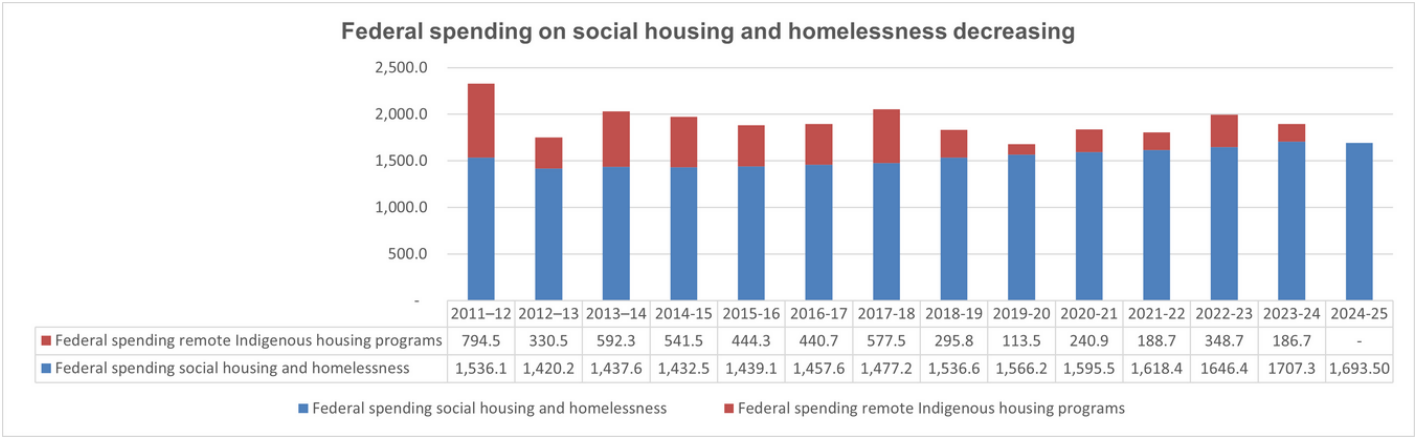
of the total number of people experiencing homelessness. (44) (45)

Those whose homelessness is entrenched typically have complex needs and experiences of trauma. This group also has frequent interactions with other services, including acute health and mental health services, the justice system, family violence, and child protection, without having their ongoing housing and support needs met.

Housing First models of support (discussed further below) are effective at tackling entrenched homelessness. Despite their success, there is inadequate resourcing in the homelessness system to extend this high support approach beyond existing small scale initiatives. By failing to systematise this evidence-based approach, we are missing the opportunity to make significant inroads into tackling entrenched homelessness.

Funding for social housing and homelessness has declined

Federal funding for social housing and homelessness under the National Housing and Homelessness Agreement and related federal state partnership agreements has declined 19% in real terms over the past decade. (46)



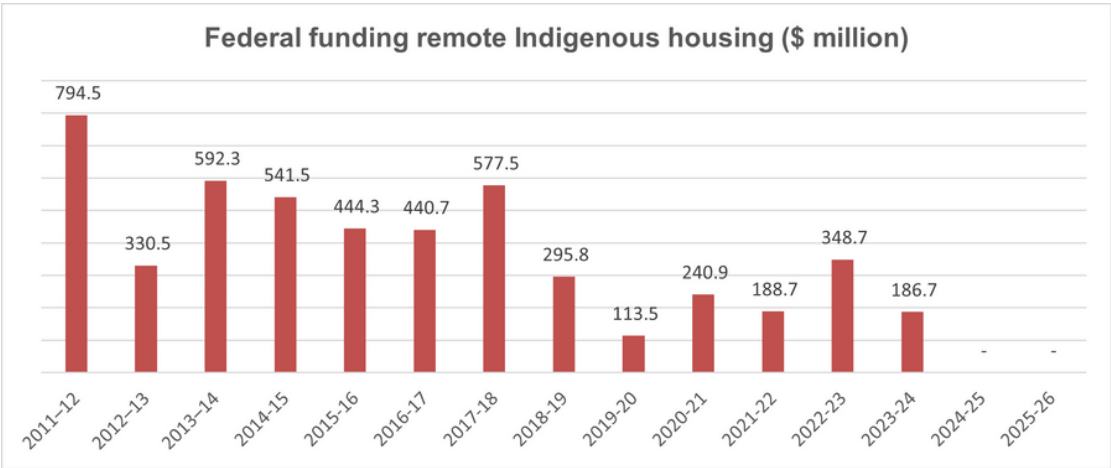
43. C Keenan, S Miller, J Hanratty, T Pigott, J Hamilton and C Coughlan, C. (2020).Accommodation-based Programmes for Individuals Experiencing or at Risk of Homelessness: A Systematic Review and Network Meta-analysis, London: Centre for Homelessness Impact, 2020 in E O’Sullivan, [Key elements in homelessness strategies](#)

44. S Taylor and G Johnson, Service use patterns at a high-volume homelessness service: A longitudinal analysis of six years of administrative data, Unison Housing, 2019.

45. AIHW, Specialist homelessness services client pathways: Clients experiencing persistent homelessness in 2019–20, September 2023.

46. The Federal Government spent \$1,437.6 million in 2023-14 and budgeted \$1,707.3 million in 2023-24, an increase of 19% in ten years. Over the same time inflation grew 26% and Australia’s population grew 12%. Spending in 2023-24 that was equivalent to the 2013-4 investment, taking account of both population growth and inflation would be \$2,036.5. This is \$329 million, or 19% more than budgeted. (See Federal Government Budget Papers)

Funding has fallen most acutely in First Nations Housing, from \$794.5 million in the 2011-12 financial year to a budget of zero for 2024-25.



Federal funding specifically for homelessness programs has increased from \$154.9 million in 2013-14 to \$195.3 million in 2023-24. While this is an increase in nominal terms, it represents a 12% reduction after accounting for population growth and inflation.

In 2024-25, federal homelessness funding is budgeted to be cut by more \$67.5 million, as the Government has not committed to continue funding to meet the increased wage costs associated with the Equal Remuneration Order.

Specialist homelessness services are doing their best under challenging circumstances

Despite these challenges, specialist homelessness services do prevent and end homelessness for many people and provide critical support to individuals and households in need. People working across the sector develop creative responses, find scarce resources and connect vulnerable people to the services they need, through persistence and the mobilisation of established networks.

The Plan must provide strong foundations for reform

Recommendations: Strong foundations for reform in the National Housing and Homelessness Plan

1. Include a shared commitment to end homelessness within ten years and halve it within five and reflect the Sustainable Development Goal of adequate and affordable housing for everyone.
2. Incorporate measurable targets and indicators into the Plan, including key indicators related to homelessness prevention such as levels of rent stress, exits from care and eviction rates. Provide for progress against these measures to be regularly reviewed and reported on independently.
3. Establish explicit linkages to key drivers of homelessness by monitoring levels of family violence, number of children needing protection and social security protections. Insert the objective of ending homelessness into related strategies and legislation. Task key advisory groups including the Economic Inclusion Advisory Committee and the Women's Economic Equality Taskforce to consider homelessness in their advice to the Federal Government.
4. Consolidate housing and homelessness initiatives in the Australian Disability Strategy, the National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children, the National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children, Closing the Gap and the Aged Care Strategy. Provide for comprehensive tracking and monitoring of these as part of the National Housing and Homelessness Plan's outcomes framework.
5. Commission a housing related Targeted Action Plan under the Australian Disability Strategy given it is missing from the current priority areas under the Australian Disability Strategy.
6. Translate the Plan through a strong National Housing and Homelessness Agreement that:
 - specifies roles, responsibilities and accountabilities of different parts and levels of government
 - embeds reform commitments in schedules and bilateral agreements
 - establishes effective mechanisms to join up planning, resourcing and delivery across national, state and regional interfaces
 - includes a robust framework for monitoring outcomes
 - incorporates local government.
7. Provide for strong governance to drive, advise on and track Plan implementation. This should include an independent, expert Advisory Council on Homelessness that brings together people with lived experience, the homelessness sector, First Nations representatives, human services sectors and research experts.
8. Develop national homelessness prevention legislation to augment the Plan.

Recommendations: Strong foundations for reform in the National Housing and Homelessness Plan

9. Specify evidence-based policy directions to guide future funding and actions attached to the Plan and related national partnership agreements. These should include:
- a strong focus on prevention and early intervention
 - crisis accommodation as a short-term and safe pathway to settled housing
 - housing-led responses as the primary means to support rapid exits from homelessness
 - Housing-First as a system-wide response for people with complex needs at risk of chronic homelessness
 - differentiated service responses to prevent and address homelessness among different cohorts and at different life stages
 - joined up support and resources.

10. Specify core values that should drive the national approach to ending homelessness. These should include:

- rights-based
- co-production with people with lived experience
- equity
- cultural safety
- capabilities approach
- person-centred.



Ambitious vision, goals and objectives including a commitment to end homelessness are needed

The Plan promises to provide national goals and objectives and include a long term vision for the future of housing and homelessness policy in Australia.

Homelessness Australia urges that this include a shared commitment from Australian governments to end homelessness within 10 years and halve it within five years, aligning it with ambitions in comparable countries.

We also want to see the Plan frame housing as a fundamental human right and reflect the Sustainable Development Goal of adequate and affordable housing for everyone.

Promising examples

Scotland's vision in Ending Homelessness Together:

is that everyone has a home that meets their needs and homelessness is ended. Actions to end homelessness are arranged under the following themes:

- a person-centred approach across public services
- preventing homelessness from happening in the first place
- prioritising settled housing for all
- responding quickly and effectively whenever homeless happens
- joining up planning and resources

The Lisbon Declaration 2021:

Member States agreed to work towards ending homelessness by 2023 (European Platform on Combatting Homelessness)

The Road Home (2008):

Set out a 12 year reform agenda with a target to halve overall homelessness. It was designed around three overarching strategies including prevention; improving and expanding services; and breaking the cycle of homelessness. New ways of working were funded as pilot projects through the National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness (NPAH). In describing what success would look like it said ...

Success will mean fewer people become homeless. There will be a falling demand for specialist homelessness services, but those who do access them will be moved quickly to permanent accommodation with appropriate supports if necessary. Assertive outreach will draw in those who are sleeping rough to ensure they are housed and that they stay housed.

Through a wide range of measures over the life of this strategy, the underlying causes of homelessness will be dealt with. There will be less domestic violence, fewer children under care and protection orders and more children from disadvantaged families completing their education. Housing will be more affordable. Rates of homelessness for Indigenous Australians will fall to at least the levels in the general population and housing standards in remote communities will be closer to those of other Australians.

Throughout the human services system, homelessness prevention will be considered a priority for all clients. Mainstream agencies will prioritise people who are homeless and work closely with specialist homelessness services to end homelessness for their clients.

A full range of services providing practical help to people who are homeless will be provided alongside innovative supported housing models targeted to those who need it. The Government's strategies will be evidence based, responsive to local conditions and needs, and adjusted as required to reflect changing social and economic conditions.

Homelessness will be considered unacceptable in Australia.

The Plan must be driven by targets, measures and indicators, with periodic reviews

Measurable targets and indicators need to be incorporated into the Plan to monitor and track progress against its objectives.

Headline targets ought to include:

- halving the number of low income households experiencing rental stress by 2028 and ending rental stress by 2033
- halving homelessness for women, children and young people fleeing violence by 2028 and ending homelessness by 2033
- halving the numbers of exits from statutory care and prisons by 2028 and ending them by 2033
- halving the rate of evictions by 2028 and halving them again by 2033
- halving the overrepresentation in homelessness by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians by 2028 and closing the gap by 2033

Targets should also be developed to track, continuously improve and adequately resource homelessness service responses to achieve:

- halving the turn away rate for homelessness services by 2028 and ending it by 2033
- halving the number of people who can't access the homelessness supports they need by 2028 and ending it by 2033
- halving the number of people experiencing repeat homelessness by 2028 and ending repeat homelessness by 2033.

Reporting on meaningful metrics needs to inform regular reviews and the design of periodic action plans at two-three year intervals throughout the life of the Plan.

Promising examples

Initial interim targets (intended to be periodically updated) for The Road Home included:

- People exiting care and custodial settings into homelessness is reduced by 25%
- Families who maintain or secure safe and sustainable housing following domestic or family violence is increased by 20%
- Families who are homeless or at risk of homelessness who receive financial advice, counselling and/or case management is increased by 25%
- People exiting from social housing and private rental to homelessness is reduced by 25%
- Young people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness with improved housing stability and engaged with family, school and work is increased by 25%
- Children who are homeless or at risk of homelessness provided with additional support and engaged in education is increased by 50%

Explicit linkages with key determinants of homelessness are needed

All homelessness starts in the community, with poverty, disadvantage, violence and discrimination as the key drivers. Homelessness is closely interlinked not just with the housing market, but also the labour market; social security and income supports; community services; child and family supports; and place-based initiatives. These cross-cut different portfolios and different levels of government and community.

The Australian Government is initiating significant reform agendas across many of these domains. While this Plan's intended primary focus on housing related levers is understandable, clear and explicit linkages to key determinants of homelessness (such as levels of family violence, number of children needing protection and social security protections) to align and mobilise mutually reinforcing approaches is both the challenge and opportunity of the upcoming Housing and Homelessness Plan.

The objective of ending homelessness needs to be inserted into related strategies and legislation, and explicit linkages made with:

- Australia's new national wellbeing framework which includes a range of indicators such as housing serviceability; financial security; experience of violence (intimate partner violence) and childhood experience of abuse. (47)
- the Economic Inclusion Advisory Committee whose role is to provide independent advice to government before every federal budget on economic inclusion and tackling disadvantage

- the Women's Economic Equality Taskforce given the gendered nature of homelessness and their remit to advise on gender responsive policy and the National Strategy to Achieve Gender Equality. Application of a gendered lens, including gender impact assessments to ensure the homelessness system meets the needs of diverse groups of women should be considered.
- Closing the Gap
- the Employment White Paper and Roadmap which includes an objective of overcoming employment barriers and broadening opportunity including through employment services that build capabilities, reducing barriers to work, partnering with communities inclusive workplaces, and improving women's economic equality.

Key trends in these broad homelessness drivers should be tracked and monitored as part of the National Housing and Homelessness Plan, with adjustments made to reflect downstream changes in numbers at risk of homelessness.

47. The Treasury, Measuring What Matters: Australia's First Wellbeing Framework, Australian Government, 2023

The Plan needs to bring together, track and report on housing and homelessness initiatives included in a range of other plans and strategies

The Department of Social Services Issues Paper references that the specific housing needs of some groups have been addressed in a range of national strategies.

The National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children 2022–2032 includes a range of housing initiatives in its initial action plan (and related First Nations Action Plan).

Although Australia's Disability Strategy 2021–2031 includes priorities for increasing the availability of affordable and accessible housing to give people with disability greater choice and control, housing is not currently identified as a priority area in the implementation roadmap. We support the Productivity Commission's call for a housing related Targeted Action Plan under Australia's Disability Strategy to be developed. (48)

Safe and Supported: The National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children 2021–31 includes many references to housing as a protective factor. However, the only action we can see included in the initial action plan relates to a housing and support framework for young people transitioning from care to adulthood. (49)

We note that the National Agreement on Closing the Gap and the recently endorsed Closing the Gap Housing Sector Strengthening Plan identify housing-specific actions for attention.

Aged care related initiatives to prevent and address homeless also need to be in scope.

It is critical that the Housing and Homelessness Plan brings the disparate initiatives sitting under different strategies together, and provides an overarching frame for monitoring and reporting on the impact of these initiatives on homelessness for each target group, and the overall outcome across the population.

It needs to be implemented through effective national partnerships and coordination

A national project of coordinated action is needed, with federal, state and territory governments as co-stewards of the housing and homeless system.

The Productivity Commission called for the next National Housing and Homelessness Agreement to be a living document, setting out objectives, outcomes, principles and governance arrangements, with the detail of reform commitments included in schedules and bilateral agreements. They recommended the agreement include:

- an agreed reform agenda including a commitment to reducing homelessness; expanding early intervention and prevention and Housing-First responses
- an explicit pool of funding for prevention and early intervention
- alignment with other agreements and policies
- well defined objectives
- an endorsed set of principles for designing and delivering housing assistance (that assistance be sufficient, fair and effective)
- broad scope covering housing affordability, housing supply, and all government-funded housing assistance policies and programs
- clearer roles and responsibilities
- outcomes focused on improving outcomes for people across all tenure types
- a robust performance monitoring and reporting framework
- meaningful, achievable and measurable targets
- a single base pool of funding allocated to jurisdictions according to need and the costs of providing services
- effective governance arrangements, including oversight by a Ministerial Council
- a schedule outlining support for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander housing and homelessness services, including capability building and effective involvement in the co-design of policies and programs.

48. Productivity Commission, In need of repair

49. Department of Social Services, Safe & Supported, the National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children 2021–31, First Action Plan 2023–26.

Strong mechanisms with meaningful performance indicators that connect national to state to regional to local policy, planning and delivery are needed to:

- continuously address structural problems like developing a pipeline of affordable housing to match need, including geographic need
- regionally track and monitor homelessness indicators and adjust responses as needed
- identify effective regional policy responses and regional delivery challenges.

Promising examples

Scotland is integrating housing with health and social care.

At the national level is a cross-sector structure for planning (the Homelessness Prevention Strategy Group). Five local delivery structures (Housing Options Hubs) operate at the regional level to bring together local authorities and collaborating partners. Local authorities provide regular housing needs and supply analysis to inform national investments in social and affordable housing.

Local government need to be mobilised

Local government is currently missing from the Ministerial Council (other than ACT operating as both a territory and local government) and from the NHHA - a significant gap that ought to be addressed via the Plan.

The Australian Parliament's [Inquiry into Homelessness](#) 2021 called for intergovernmental arrangements that formally recognise and strengthen the role of local government.

Promising examples

Council of Capital City Lord Mayors

Housing and homelessness is a major focus for the Council of Capital City Lord Mayors, backed by a working group and a community of practice. They call for coordination and partnerships involving all three tiers of government.

Strong and independent governance through an Advisory Council on Homelessness is vital

Establishment of the Housing and Homelessness Ministerial Council is an important and welcome development.

This governance needs to be augmented by an independent body to drive, monitor, report and advise on implementation of the homelessness reform agenda.

We recommend creation of an Advisory Council on Homelessness as part of this independent governance. It would include people with diverse lived experience of not having a home, homelessness sector leaders from across Australia, First Nations sector, health and human services representation, and research and academic experts spanning the breadth of homelessness experiences.

An Advisory Council on Homelessness would complement the new National Housing Supply and Affordability Council which has been set up to advise on the state of the housing market and ways to increase housing supply and affordability.

Although it may be appealing to broaden the National Housing Supply and Affordability Council's remit to include homelessness and add homelessness expertise to its membership, this is not recommended. Such a broad remit risks diluting the strong focus needed on ending and addressing homelessness. In particular, the hard work that needs to happen at the interface of homelessness and other human services needs critical attention.

Governance in relation to First Nations needs careful design to transition to community control.

Promising examples

The Road Home's governance arrangements included the Prime Minister's Council on Homelessness with the remit to drive national reforms, guide the implementation of the White Paper and regularly monitor progress towards the goals and targets. The Social Inclusion Board also had connections to monitoring related factors impacting homelessness. Both were discontinued by the Abbott Government.

48. Productivity Commission, [In need of repair](#)

49. Department of Social Services, Safe & Supported, the National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children 2021-31, First Action Plan 2023-26.

The Plan needs to be backed by legislation

National homelessness prevention legislation needs to be a feature of the new Plan to:

- recognise the universal right to housing
- provide a legal definition of homelessness and acknowledge the structural, systemic and individual drivers of homelessness
- establish its relationship and alignment with the Australian Government's policy for addressing homelessness as set out in the National Housing and Homelessness Plan and implemented through associated National Partnership agreements
- establish its relationship with the broader wellbeing, social and economic inclusion agendas and other national reforms that target the structural and individual causes of homelessness
- set out governance mechanisms, including the Advisory Council on Homelessness
- create a duty on public officials to assist and take reasonable steps to prevent homelessness for those at foreseeable risk
- provide statutory guidance about the approaches that ought to be available, reflecting strategic directions in the Housing and Homelessness Plan
- provide a rights-based approach to accessing homelessness services (consistent with upcoming approaches in aged care and NDIS)
- provide for equality impact assessments to monitor the effectiveness of homelessness prevention and response measures for different cohorts.

National homelessness legislation was planned to be introduced as part of the Road Home, but the Bill did not proceed following the change of government. (50) This ambition needs to be revived with the new Plan.

A number of comparable jurisdictions including Canada, Scotland, Wales and England have homelessness prevention legislation that could provide guidance for Australia.

Promising examples

Scotland legislated a universal right to housing in 2012.

Government and the homelessness sector describe it as being an enabler for people to understand and exercise their rights and also increasing the political appetite for action on homelessness. (51)

The Housing (Wales) Act 2014

The Housing (Wales) Act 2014 requires local authorities to take reasonable steps to prevent and relieve homelessness through a 'duty to assist'. The Act prioritises homelessness prevention and creates a right to access prevention services. Funding has been reorientated towards preventing homelessness.

50. Homelessness Bill 2013 (C1th)

51. See [keynote address at Australian homelessness conference 2022](#)

Establish evidence-based policy directions to guide future funding and actions

Clear directions in the Plan are needed to drive a coherent approach to funding and action. Below are core best-practice policy directions for inclusion, which are expanded on in the following sections of this submission.

Prioritise prevention and early intervention to 'turn off the tap and stop the flow of people into homelessness:

Given that most homelessness can be prevented, significant new funds to address homelessness should be directed at early intervention and prevention. This includes universal protections and evidence-based approaches to prevent those at higher risk – especially families, children and young people – from becoming homeless.

Differentiated approaches responsive to the needs of different cohorts and life stages:

People have different risks and experience homelessness differently. The upcoming Plan needs to provide a framework for differentiated approaches to prevent and respond to homelessness grounded in evidence-based approaches for different cohorts and life stages.

Crisis accommodation as a short-term and safe pathway to settled housing:

When homelessness does occur, the time spent in crisis and transitional accommodation needs to be minimised. The Plan needs to drive a shift away from unsafe forms of crisis accommodation and reliance on crisis accommodation for extended periods.

Rapid rehousing as the central response to homelessness:

The quicker people can get through an experience of homelessness the better the outcome. People should be moved quickly through a crisis response to long-term stable housing.

While most people can sustain ordinary housing in the community with little or no support, some people need support to sustain a home. Housing options, and the intensity and duration of homelessness support should be flexibly matched to the circumstances of different households.

Housing First as the system wide approach to redress severe and multiple disadvantage:

High fidelity Housing First models that combine affordable housing with tailored supports have proven successful at enabling people with complex needs and at risk of entrenched homelessness to sustain housing. Existing evidence-based models need to inform a national framework for Housing First.

Joined up planning and resources to prevent and tackle homelessness:

Ending homelessness requires a collective and mutually reinforcing effort to make it easy for people to access assistance. Mainstream services and community support can play a pivotal role in identifying risk and preventing homelessness. Collaboration with homelessness services enables local joined up approaches to support people at risk of, or experiencing homelessness to build community and economic participation, improve health and wellbeing and maintain housing.

The Plan needs to identify principles to underpin a consistent way of working

Co-production:

The voice of lived experience needs to be embedded in Plan development, implementation and oversight and at all levels of policy, program and service design.

Rights-based:

Recognition of housing and homelessness assistance as a right is fundamental. A rights based code or legislation would provide for people to be treated with dignity, respect and to be afforded agency.

Equity:

A proactive approach to address the correlation between structural inequality, discrimination and homelessness is needed. First Nations, culturally and linguistically diverse and LGBTQI+ communities in particular need to be in focus..

Equality impact assessments could be introduced to measure the effectiveness of policies and programs for particular cohorts. Given the large proportion of women and girls seeking homelessness support, a gender analysis is a priority.

Cultural safety:

The significant overrepresentation of First Nations people seeking homelessness services, and their unique needs creates an imperative for mainstream homelessness services to provide culturally safe, and responsive approaches, informed by the community controlled sector.

Capabilities approach:

This way of working with people, families and communities focuses on what people are able to be and do – their potential – rather than their deficits. It emphasises self-determination through policies, practices and relationships that enable individuals (and households) to make choices they value, and link with real opportunities available in the community to achieve them. (52)

Person centred:

Puts the individual (or household) at the centre of decision-making, and uses a holistic approach to understanding and responding to a person's circumstances and their broader context. (53)

Because of the high rates of trauma experienced by people without homes a trauma-informed approach will often be required. (54) This requires creating safety; trustworthiness and transparency; peer support; collaboration and mutuality; empowerment, voice and choice; and recognition of cultural, historical, and gender issues. It also means using approaches that do no harm.

The need for person centred responses is consistently reinforced by consultations with people who have lived experience of being without a home and using homelessness services. (55)

52. Department of Communities Tasmania, Housing Connect 2.0 Service System Design, 2020

53. Council to Homeless Persons, Person-centred practice guide, 2023

54. C Robinson, 'Trauma as a cause and consequence of homelessness' in Chamberlain et al. Homelessness in Australia. See also Feantsa, [Recognising the link between trauma and homelessness](#), 2017 and K Milaney, N Williams and SL Lockerbie [Recognizing and responding to women experiencing homelessness with gendered and trauma-informed care](#), BMC Public Health 20, 397, 2020.

55. Homelessness NSW, [Rare, brief and non-recurring: a system wide approach to ending homelessness together](#), 2023; Homelessness Queensland. See also SHS Practice Framework Queensland, June 2023.

Mainstream services must play a strong role in ending homelessness

Recommendation

11. Strengthen the role of mainstream services in delivering a holistic approach to ending homelessness. This could be supported by:

- a 'duty to assist' across universal welfare services to trigger public officials to screen for homelessness risk and activate supports and referrals
- local approaches to join up support and use a no wrong doors approach
- a commitment of no exits into homelessness, backed by frameworks for exit pathways, targets and measures.

Specialist homelessness services cannot deliver the entire homelessness response. Accordingly, the National Plan must seize the opportunity to recast the interface between mainstream, community and homelessness services. We have mapped what this could look like on page 41.

Mainstream services including health, employment services, Centrelink, education and training services, aged care and family and children services, have regular contact with large sections of the community, including those experiencing or at risk of homelessness. The Plan needs to establish levers to strengthen the responsiveness of mainstream services and reinforce the commitment of governments to address homelessness holistically.

A duty for public officials to assist is overdue

Australia is lagging behind comparable countries such as Wales and Scotland where public officials are subject to a duty to assist that creates an active responsibility to identify people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness and assist them to access available support.

The National Housing and Homeless Plan needs to introduce a duty to assist, backed by legislation. This would create a requirement for public services to ask about someone's housing situation, provide timely support to prevent homelessness (such as measures to maintain housing), and make appropriate referrals.

Agencies should also be required to review their policies and practices to ensure they do not make the lives of those at risk of or experiencing homelessness even more difficult - such as arbitrarily imposing penalties on someone receiving income support for a breach.

This needs to be backed by a joined up and no wrong doors approach

When someone is in crisis it is very difficult for them to navigate all the service system bureaucracies required to connect with different supports. Effective collaboration across community and human services would enable a more seamless and holistic response.

People should be able to access the help they need, irrespective of where the risk of homelessness is first identified. There should be 'no wrong doors' for people who are at risk of or experiencing homelessness.

Mainstream services have the opportunity to strengthen protective factors that reduce homelessness risks such as participation in community life, work or study, and improving health and wellbeing.

Achieving and sustaining a housing outcome often relies on a broad range of support outside of the homelessness sector including family violence services, health and mental health care, disability services, cultural services, education or employment, financial and legal aid. The best outcomes are delivered when these are joined up locally.

Promising examples:

Community of Schools and Services

The Community of Schools and Services in Geelong is a place-based approach to identifying at-risk young people and families and providing flexible long-term support to prevent homelessness and improve educational outcomes. It has helped reduce homelessness among adolescents by 40% and reduced early school-leaving by 20%.

Local schools and agencies work collaboratively to deliver services in an efficient and effective way guided by a practice framework that provides three levels of response: active monitoring; short-term support; and wrap-around support for more complex cases. There are eight streams of program funding that can be accessed from a single intake point.

Success factors include local community leadership; a formalised community collective using a community development process; a population-screening methodology backed by data that can proactively identify vulnerable young people and families prior to the onset of crises; a flexible practice framework; a single entry point into support; monitoring and measuring outcomes.

Local homelessness service networks

Across Australia, there are many examples of service coordination delivering improved outcomes. Some examples include:

- the South Australian Homelessness Alliances
- Victoria's regional homelessness networks
- the WA Alliance to End Homelessness
- the Service Integration Program in Queensland

Scotland

Has integrated support across housing, health and social care. To support this process, each local delivery area has developed a housing integration statement.

Governments need to commit to no exits into homelessness

The Plan needs to prevent major systems failures that see a steady stream of people moving into homelessness from prisons, hospitals, mental health or drug and alcohol services and statutory care. These highly vulnerable groups often become repeat users of specialist homelessness services.

We agree with the Productivity Commission's call for the next National Partnership Agreement to commit governments to implement a policy of no exits into homelessness. (56) This needs to be backed by targets and measures to track progress.

An important caution is that placing people leaving prisons or hospitals into short stay crisis accommodation merely delays, rather than avoids, an exit into homelessness. Instead, dedicated frameworks are needed guiding exit pathways into housing and post-release supports and connections to mainstream and community services.

Promising examples:

New South Wales Mental Health In-Reach Service:

Provides assertive 'in-reach' to people while they are in mental health units via specialist case coordination and wrap-around support to maintain long-term accommodation. Targeted at people that have been (or are at risk of) rough sleeping it is based on assertive outreach and Housing First principles.

This two-year, \$1.1 million initiative commenced in July 2022. It is a partnership between non-government organisations, Local Health Districts (Sydney, South Eastern Sydney and the Central Coast) and the NSW Department of Communities and Justice.



56. Productivity Commission, [In need of repair](#).

Prevention of homelessness needs to be the main focus

Recommendations: Shifting the focus to homelessness prevention and early intervention

12. Ensure the balance of new investment under the National Housing and Homelessness Plan is focused on prevention (universal and targeted) and early intervention measures to end homelessness.
Make an initial \$500 million investment in a Prevention Transformation Fund, to create a separate pool of funding for prevention and early intervention programs, in line with Productivity Commission recommendations.

13. Deliver a pipeline of 25,000 social housing and 25,000 affordable housing homes each year, to provide the homes needed to end homelessness.

14. Halve rental stress by increasing income support, and restructuring and increasing Commonwealth Rental Assistance.

15. Develop national homelessness prevention frameworks to guide investment and action under the Plan, differentiated for high risk cohorts and key life stages.

16. Embed tenancy sustainment support as an offer for social housing residents

Shifting the focus to homelessness prevention and early intervention

Most experiences of homelessness can be prevented. Preventing people from becoming homeless must be front and centre in Australia's National Housing and Homelessness Plan.

The Plan needs to drive the changes needed to prevent homelessness at both a broad population level, as well as developing targeted early intervention approaches appropriate to each life stage for groups most at risk of homelessness.

The National Plan should include a significant investment for a Prevention Transformation Fund, as recommended by the Productivity Commission. (57)

An initial annual investment of \$500 million would establish a ring fenced funding stream, over and above current homelessness expenditure, through the next NHHA. The Fund would target early-stage, crisis and emergency prevention interventions as well as other supporting measures that will be needed to shift to a prevention approach.

57. Productivity Commission, In need of repair.

A shift to prevention would mean the majority of people currently needing a homelessness response would have their needs met by universal services. This would reduce current demands on specialist homelessness services and enable them to focus on crisis prevention for those needing help to avoid imminent homelessness, and on rapidly supporting people who lose their homes into settled housing.

The diagram below illustrates this fundamental change.



Universal protections help prevent homelessness

Universal prevention aims to reduce the number of people becoming homeless overall. The Plan needs to acknowledge and include strategies to address the structural failings in Australia's housing and social security systems that put millions of people at risk of homelessness.

International evidence indicates that provision of sufficient secure and affordable housing and adequate income support could reduce homelessness in Australia by around two-thirds by eliminating homelessness among people who are simply income poor, and don't have other more complex issues. (58)

The Housing and Homeless Plan would make huge inroads into homelessness by providing:

Social and affordable housing to meet current and projected need:

A commitment to end homelessness requires a plan to alter Australia's housing system so that it produces sufficient social and affordable housing. Some 640,000 households across Australia currently have unmet housing needs and are either homeless or in housing stress. Unmet need will increase to 940,000 households by 2041. (59)

Provision of a pipeline of 25,000 social housing and 25,000 affordable housing homes each year, alongside increased support for housing costs would enable the achievement of the objective of halving housing stress in five years and ending it in ten years.

Research from around the world into homelessness confirms that no level of coordination, evidence-led practice or comprehensiveness of response can counteract the effects of insufficient affordable, adequate homes. (60)

Elimination of rental stress:

Increased support for housing costs is an important preventative measure for lower income households.

Australia's pandemic response illustrated the positive impact of reducing rental stress on homelessness. Temporary increases to income support payments in 2020 reduced the proportion of rent stress (from 40% to 29%) for households receiving CRA. Rental stress skyrocketed when these special measures were ended.

Rental stress among low income households could be immediately halved by restructuring and increasing CRA. Eligibility would be extended to low income households in private rental in rental stress who are currently ineligible because they do not receive an income support payment. (61)

Promising approaches :

Covid-19 response:

Universal prevention measures included doubling of income support and protections against rental increases and evictions. Significant relief from rental stress and insecure tenancies prevented homelessness. (62) Higher income support payments during this period also enabled many people using homelessness services to be transitioned relatively quickly into private rentals.

Scotland's Ending Homelessness Together:

Includes investment in anti-poverty measures such as discretionary housing payments and using information sharing powers to identify those most in need to tackle the root causes of homelessness. To counteract the negative impact of UK-wide welfare changes that include benefit caps, Scotland has increased provision of flexible payments.

The effectiveness of social support strategies, particularly those aimed at strengthening support for families and children; preventing gendered and family violence; reducing discrimination; justice reinvestment and crime prevention will also significantly impact on homelessness.

58. L Benjaminsen and S Bastholm Andrade Testing a Typology of Homelessness Across Welfare Regimes: Shelter Use in Denmark and the USA, *Housing Studies*, 30:6, 858-876, DOI: [10.1080/02673037.2014.982517](https://doi.org/10.1080/02673037.2014.982517) 2015. This research revealed that differences in access to social housing and adequacy of income support in the USA compared to Denmark was the primary cause of the USA having three times the homelessness as a proportion of population than Denmark. The research also found that the majority of people who were homeless in the USA were simply poor, and a smaller group of people who were homeless had complex support needs. Whereas in Denmark, homelessness is widely concentrated among groups with complex support needs due to mental illness and substance abuse problems because the welfare safety net prevents people who are simply poor from becoming homeless.
59. R van den Nouwelant, L Troy and B Soundararaj, *Quantifying Australia's unmet housing need A national snapshot*, Prepared for the Community Housing Industry Association, 2022.
60. I Baptista, DP Culhane, N Pleace, and E O'Sullivan, *From Rebuilding Ireland to Housing for All: International and Irish Lessons for Tackling Homelessness*, University of York, 2022.
61. R Ong, H Pawson, R Singh and C Martin, *Demand-side assistance in Australia's rental housing market: exploring reform options*, AHURI 2020 <https://www.ahuri.edu.au/research/final-reports/342>, doi:10.18408/ahuri8120801.
62. Pawson et al. *Australian Homelessness Monitor*.

Targeted prevention decreases risks for those most likely to experience homelessness

The Plan needs to drive the proactive prevention of homelessness among groups known to be at higher risk of experiencing homelessness. These include:

- women and children and other victim survivors of domestic and family violence
- First Nations people
- children and young people experiencing child abuse and neglect, or family rejection
- children and young people leaving state care
- older people
- LGBTQTI+ community
- people leaving prison
- people with untreated mental illness or with substance abuse issues
- people impacted by climate-related disasters and increased heat

The 2022 report of the Australian Parliament's Homelessness Inquiry also called for a focus on: older women; people in regional, rural and remote areas; and people seeking asylum.

Targeted prevention frameworks need to be developed

Targeted prevention needs to happen in a deliberate and evidence-based way that moves from current small scale initiatives to a systemic response.

It is reliant on programs delivered by other human services, such as youth services, child and family services, health and mental health services, family violence and justice system services, and the aged care system as well as early intervention programs delivered by homelessness services.

Initial priority cohorts for prevention frameworks include:

LGBTIQ+:

Provision of early intervention programs to support parents to be accepting and nurturing of LGBTIQ+ children and young people, and to mediate conflict around children's sexuality or gender identity is a practical step that would prevent significant trauma and homelessness.

Vulnerable families:

Although 'safe at home' programs have been a feature of homelessness prevention for women and children experiencing domestic and family violence, the systems needed to support their success, across policing, income support, domestic and family violence and other systems need strengthening. (63)

Older people:

Building on the success of the Carefinder program, efforts to prevent and address homelessness among older people need to be upscaled and augmented by dedicated professional education of the aged and acute care workforce, and by ensuring the new Aged Care Act retains special measures for people at risk of or experiencing homelessness.

People displaced by natural disasters:

The growing risk of homelessness resulting from more frequent and intense disasters falls most heavily on those already experiencing disadvantage. People experiencing homelessness prior to a disaster are particularly vulnerable, and can lose temporary shelter, and struggle to have their needs met in the broader community response. A framework to strengthen the response to people who are marginally housed or homeless in disasters is needed, with coordinated disaster planning including homelessness service providers, people with lived experience of being homeless in the path of disasters, community and government agencies.

Planning is also needed in partnership with First Nations communities impacted by rising sea levels or increases in hot days that threaten the liveability of their Country.

63. McAuley Community Services for Women, [Research findings on 'Safe at home'](#), 2023.

Promising examples:

Scotland:

Scotland has developed five distinct prevention pathways covering: people leaving prison; care leavers; women and children experiencing family violence; young people and veterans. They have also developed tailored Housing First practices for different cohorts and places.

Reconnect

Provides flexible holistic support to children to resolve or improve family relationships, and remain connected to school and community support. Funded as a pilot under the Road Home initiative, it has been highly successful and ought to be scaled up as a systemic response.

Home at Last:

Provides information and support to older people who may not recognise they are at risk of homelessness, or are unable to access homelessness or housing information services. Workers provide information about housing options, assistance to navigate the aged care system, and referrals to tenancy support to stabilise existing tenancies, or secure alternative housing or aged care before a person becomes homeless.

Homestretch:

Provides support and a housing subsidy to young people transitioning from out of home care to adulthood. Implementation of Homestretch is at different stages in each state and territory and not all states include the level of support and housing assistance needed for all young people leaving care. A common challenge across the country is the lack of appropriate housing options for young people, even where a housing subsidy is provided..

Aboriginal community controlled tenancy support programs:

Such as Aboriginal Housing Victoria's More Than a Landlord program, Noongar Mia Mia's Noongar Mia Bidee program and Larrakia Nations Tenancy Support Program provide culturally safe support for First Nations people to sustain tenancies and avoid homelessness.

Crisis prevention is critical when homelessness is imminent

Crisis prevention aims to prevent an experience of homelessness for households at imminent risk of homelessness, including those who receive an eviction notice, who have been told to leave their home, or who are leaving a health or justice facility and have nowhere to go.

Typically provided by specialist homelessness services, or by community legal or tenancy support services, crisis prevention might involve support with rental arrears; assistance with barriers to maintaining tenancy; negotiation and mediation with landlords; family mediation or legal support.

Homelessness services are highly effective at crisis prevention, with 85% of people who seek help when they are at risk of homelessness avoiding homelessness. However, demand pressures on services mean capacity to prevent imminent homelessness is increasingly at risk.

Promising approaches:

Private rental assistance program:

Victoria's Private Rental Access Program (PRAP) supports people to prevent their tenancy breaking down or to rapidly gain a new private tenancy. Flexible and intensive short term support and brokerage helps people address rental arrears, provides advocacy with real estate agents, refers people to financial counselling, and supports people to apply for new tenancies. Eight in 10 households that use the PRAP maintain their housing and avoid homelessness. (64)

Emergency funding in the USA:

An evaluation of short-term emergency funding in Chicago revealed that households who received a one-off benefit of \$1,000 were 76% less likely to experience homelessness within six months. (65)

64. J Watson, G Johnson and S Taylor, Staying home? Examining longer-term housing outcomes of the Private Rental Access Program (PRAP). Unison Housing, 2020

65. The largest homelessness prevention program in USA history (the Homelessness Prevention and Rapid Re-housing Program) demonstrated Preventing exits or discharges into homelessness from institutional and health settings (justice, health services, mental health, child protection etc) is another form of crisis prevention. See G Piña and M Pirog, The Impact of Homeless Prevention on Residential Instability: Evidence from the Homelessness Prevention and Rapid Re-Housing Program, Housing Policy Debate 29(4) pp.501-521, 2019. See also M Shinn, and R Cohen, Homelessness Prevention: A Review of the Literature (Location: Centre for Evidence-based Solutions to Homelessness, 2019). http://www.evidenceonhomelessness.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/Homelessness_Prevention_Literature_Synthesis.pdf

Homelessness should be brief and non-recurring

Recommendations: A well-functioning homelessness service system

17. Increase funding for homelessness services to the level needed to create a well-functioning system by:

- immediately increasing funding by \$450 million annually to address current unmet need and projected growth in demand
- adjusting funding in line with rising costs, including wages increases
- establishing a mechanism that adjusts funding in response to need
- accelerating the shift to longer term contracts
- removing restrictions that prevent flexible responses.

18. Support a national homelessness sector and workforce capability program to drive adoption of evidence-based and best practice program approaches and practice models

19. Embed rapid re-housing as the primary response to homelessness.

20. Embed Housing First as the system-wide approach to enable people at risk of chronic homelessness to gain and sustain housing. This would need to be supported by dedicated sector capability building.

We need a strong homelessness sector to deliver effective responses

Homelessness services need capacity to respond to need

The housing crisis is driving increases in demand that are overwhelming homelessness services and reducing the effectiveness of the service system. An immediate increase in homelessness resources of \$450 million annually is needed to address current unmet need and projected growth in demand. (66)

The National Plan needs to implement the Productivity Commission's recommendations to increase funding to address unmet need, to index funding to meet the increasing costs of service

delivery (including increased wages under the Social, Community, Home Care and Disability Services Award) and to develop a funding mechanism that is responsive to the impact of changes that reduce or increase homelessness.

Homelessness Australia also echoes the Productivity Commission's calls to accelerate the shift to longer-term contracts for providers of homelessness services and to remove restrictions that prevent flexible responses.

Flexible funding arrangements are essential to enable services to provide long-term support to people with complex needs, rather than support with arbitrary time limits. It is also needed to ensure those who are often currently excluded from housing and homelessness services - such as non residents - are able to access the help they need.

Investing in sector capability will help to strengthen homelessness responses

A national approach to strengthening homelessness sector capability to upscale evidence-based approaches, share learnings, drive quality improvement and innovation would deliver significant public value.

Delivery of these outcomes requires a peak homelessness organisation resourced to engage and support learning partners, including homelessness service providers, people with lived experience, researchers, government and community stakeholders. It could advance data-led learning for shared practice and support improved implementation capacity across the system through:

- growing and embedding sector wide co-production with people with lived experience
- developing communities of policy and practice to support peer learning and networking
- developing shared resources such as evidence-based practice guides, and a national Risk Assessment Framework, including a Common Risk Assessment Tool
- building equalities competence to strengthen understanding of the differentiated risk factors and approaches needed for different groups
- strengthening sector-wide capabilities in cultural safety for First Nations communities, including through partnering with the First Nations community controlled sector to assure and continuously improve cultural safety across the homelessness sector
- collaborative design and trialling of innovations
- evaluations.

A national workforce strategy is also needed to address the development of a strong, supported and skilled workforce able to achieve greater wellbeing for those who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless. A national workforce strategy would require:

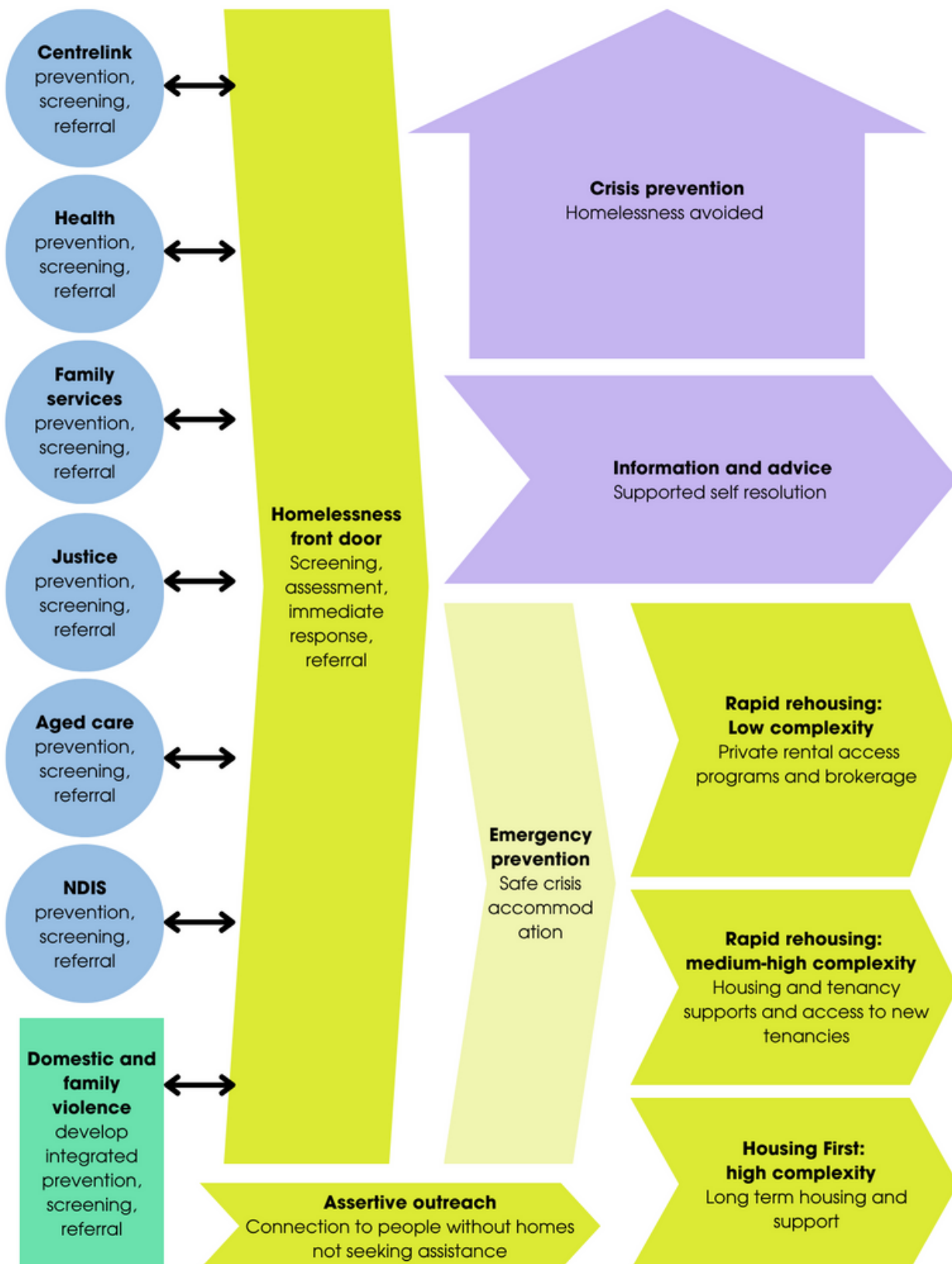
- funding to develop a workforce that is capable, effective, evidence-based, client-centred, trauma-informed, safe, and reflective of the diversity of the communities in which we work
- a plan for attracting, recruiting, and retaining skilled workers, and developing robust planning, mentoring, and leadership opportunities
- specialist family violence workers embedded in homelessness services for whom the prevention of and response to domestic and family violence is their core business.

This could build on and create a national framework for the work of state homelessness peak bodies including Homelessness NSW, Council to Homeless Persons, and Homelessness Queensland.



There are core elements of effective homelessness support

The most effective homelessness service systems operate as part of a network. While service systems need to be tailored to place, and will accordingly differ across remote, regional and metropolitan settings, the following core elements are mapped below:



Core elements for an effective response to adults experiencing homelessness include:

Easy access to homelessness services:

A visible and accessible front door providing screening for all clients, assessment and referral to appropriate prevention or homelessness

Assertive outreach:

To rough sleepers and people couch surfing or in unsafe marginal accommodation who would not otherwise approach a homelessness service

Strong connections to and from services:

Including Centrelink, domestic and family violence services, health, family services, aged care, the NDIS and the justice system

Crisis prevention:

Specialist crisis prevention workers able to take action to avoid imminent homelessness

Emergency prevention:

Safe, supported crisis accommodation

Rapid rehousing for people with low complexity:

Information, advice and referral to housing options (such as support to establish a private rental), and connections to other community services and supports

Support for people with medium-high complexity to gain and sustain housing:

- Housing and tenancy support to connect people with medium complexity to new long term tenancies and the community supports needed to sustain tenancies, and to help people resolve more complex issues threatening tenancy sustainment
- Housing First programs for people with complex needs and high vulnerability to entrenched homelessness
- Specialist domestic and family violence supports for people escaping from violence
- Strong place-based connections with other services including domestic and family violence services, health and AOD services, disability and mental health services, Aboriginal community controlled services, aged care, employment, and community and cultural supports

Emergency accommodation needs to be safe, short term and provide a pathway to settled housing

An effective homelessness service system needs to situate emergency accommodation as an safe and short term part of a broader system response, coupled with support for rapidly accessing settled housing.

While the best case response when someone is losing their home involves rapid rehousing to enable a new home to be established before a person is homeless, the reality is many people come to homelessness services having already lost their home and with nowhere to go.

Use of safe, quality emergency accommodation can provide respite and safety and improve people's wellbeing; enabling homelessness service providers to engage with people in an environment that better promotes autonomy and agency. (67)

Elements needed for effective and appropriate crisis accommodation include: (68)

- flexible length of stay
- well trained and supportive staff
- staff with lived experience and Aboriginal workers to support cultural safety
- trauma-informed care
- support for a broad range of needs
- a built form that is trauma-informed
- accommodation that is self-contained with kitchen facilities and private bathrooms, and options that allow people to keep pets with them, and
- provision of ongoing support after people exit the crisis accommodation to long-term housing to ensure tenancy sustainment.

67. Pawson et al. [Australian Homelessness Monitor](#).

68. D Batterham, S Tuahy, V Coram, K McKinley, V Kolar, S McNelis, and I Goodwin-Smith, [Crisis accommodation in Australia: now and for the future](#), AHURI Final Report No. 407, 2023.

Promising examples

Self-contained accommodation:

During Covid lockdowns people who were provided with quality self contained accommodation reported more positive experiences of emergency accommodation than in non-Covid times when emergency accommodation is commonly provided in crowded, poor quality hotels or rooming houses. For those with complex needs, it also provided the environment for more individualised case support.

Core and Cluster:

Many states are developing Core and Cluster crisis accommodation for women and children escaping family violence. Independent, self-contained units are 'clustered' around a 'core' of specialist support services (e.g. counselling, legal assistance, employment services) and other facilities (eg. children's play areas, audio visual equipment of court appearances). This model is intended to enhance privacy and independence and avoid the adverse impacts of some forms of communal crisis accommodation.

Rapid rehousing is the most effective and efficient response

Housing-led approaches which provide rapid rehousing are far more effective and efficient than maintaining people for extended stays in expensive crisis accommodation or temporary housing.

The insecurity of not knowing where you will live, or whether or not you will return to being homeless compounds the trauma of homelessness and delays people's ability to build long-term community connections and to invest in their education and economic wellbeing. Rapid rehoming minimises the harm of homelessness, and enables people to recover and rebuild their lives.

While most people who have lost their homes require minimal support to sustain housing once a new tenancy is established, others require assistance to make local connections with health, wellbeing and cultural supports in their community that strengthen their capacity to thrive and sustain housing without ongoing support from homelessness services. For example, older people who are vulnerable to homelessness may require aged care support as well as safe, suitable housing to sustain a home.

Housing led approaches may vary in the level of intensity (low, medium and high complexity) and duration of response, and need to offer a range of pathway options matched to the circumstances and needs of different households including:

- programs that support people to gain private rental. These may incorporate short term assistance for people facing temporary financial barriers; longer term rental subsidies for people with limited capacity to increase their income; or incentives for landlords to rent to people on low-incomes. (69)
- housing models designed for young people that provide developmentally appropriate support and build capabilities for a transition to independence (such as Youth Foyers).
- social housing
- Aboriginal housing
- supported housing for people with disability

69. Several studies have demonstrated that provision of subsidies or housing vouchers to assist with the cost of private rental has a positive impact on homelessness, overcrowding, staying with other households, and mobility for recipient households. Studies have demonstrated that financial incentives and rent guarantees to incentivise landlords to rent to marginalised groups and people on low incomes have a positive impact on their willingness to rent. Centre for Homelessness Impact, [Tackling tenancy insecurity in the private rented sector to prevent homelessness – what works?](#). UK, 2022.

- specialist aged care and housing models for older adults who have experienced chronic homelessness.

Housing options need to enable people to retain their community, cultural and economic connections, to be safe, and to be affordable.

For people with more complex needs, a Housing First model (described further below) providing ongoing, flexible, multi-disciplinary support, is the most effective approach to break the cycle of homelessness.

Promising examples:

Private rental assistance program:

Victoria's Private Rental Access Program (PRAP) supports people who will be able to sustain a private rental tenancy longer term to rapidly gain a new private rental tenancy. PRAP includes flexible support to help people with the processes of applying for a rental, incentives for landlords to rent to people on low incomes and short-term brokerage to help meet the initial costs of a new tenancy. (70)

Scotland:

Has used its national strategy to shift local service providers away from conditional and crisis-oriented service delivery models and towards evidence-based, housing-led approaches.

Housing led approaches work for people sleeping rough

Rough sleepers comprise around 8% of people experiencing homelessness on any given night, but 16% of people accessing homelessness services. People who are sleeping rough tend to move in and out of rough sleeping and other forms of homelessness and marginal accommodation, such as boarding houses, crisis shelters and couch surfing.

This group includes a mix of people who have simply been pushed out of an increasingly unaffordable housing market and people with more complex needs experiencing repeat or long-term homelessness.

Evidence-based approaches to ending rough sleeping and chronic homelessness include: (71)

- employing assertive outreach
- offering person-centred support and choice
- being housing-led
- taking swift action
- ensuring wider support needs are met
- collaborating effectively with other agencies and across sectors.

Learning from Covid

During extended Covid lockdowns, the Victorian Government provided resources for people who were homeless to move into hotels. The Covid homeless hotel program provided shelter to people who had been pushed out of housing because they lost their livelihood, as well as to people who were entrenched in homelessness, and who had been cycling between couch surfing, boarding houses, institutional settings such as rehab, prison or acute mental health, and rough sleeping. (72)

During Covid, people had higher income support payments. At the time, Melbourne also had a high vacancy rate. This made it possible for workers to rapidly rehouse hundreds of people, moving them quickly out of hotels and into private rental.

However, private rental was not a sustainable option for many people in hotels with complex needs who had no exit points and became stuck in hotels for extended periods, some in single sites with over 50 highly vulnerable people in a single hotel. These hotels exemplified the intensification of problems created when too many people with complex needs are crammed in together. (73)

A linked data set that examined service use of this group revealed they had been high frequency users of health, mental health, justice, child protection, family violence and drug and alcohol services in the year prior to being in the hotels.

The Victorian Government invested in a Housing First program, *From Homelessness to a Home*, for 1,800 individuals and 250 families to provide a pathway for this group out of hotels and into settled housing. With the housing and support they needed, many people gained employment, and were healthier and happier.

70. Watson, Johnson and Taylor, *Staying home?*

71. Mackie, Johnsen and Wood, Ending Street Homelessness: What Works and Why We Don't Do It, European Journal of Homelessness, Volume 13, No. 1, 2019

72. K Colvin, *The Year That Changed Everything—For a Time*, Parity Magazine, Council to Homeless Persons, December 2022. See also : Pawson et al., Australian Homelessness Monitor

73. Whitworth and Chiappalone, *Homeless in Hotels*.

Housing First models work for people with complex needs

Housing First is regarded as the most successful model to end homelessness for people who have experienced long term or repeated homelessness and who have high support needs. (74)

Evaluations of Housing First programs consistently report high levels of tenants sustaining their housing (typically ranging from 66% to 90%), which is significantly higher compared to 'treatment as usual' approaches. (75)

In Australia, around 27,000 people accessing homelessness services in a year are experiencing persistent homelessness. While not all this group will need the intensity of support provided by Housing First, it is indicative that a national program is needed that provides a Housing First response to at least 10,000 people annually to halve repeat homelessness in five years and end it in ten.

Housing First prioritises getting people quickly into stable homes. From this point, any other support needs they might have – such as alcohol and drug dependency, physical and/or mental health problems – are addressed through coordinated and intensive multidisciplinary support.

At the heart of Housing First lies the principles of rapid housing access, consumer choice and self determination, the separation of housing from support, flexible holistic recovery focused support for as long as needed, active engagement without coercion, and community inclusion. (76)

Housing First has been adapted to meet the needs of particular groups. In Australia, a number of community controlled Aboriginal organisations have adapted the model to provide a model that centres First Nation's people's cultural needs in the service response. (77)

Housing First for Youth approaches provide more intensive and developmentally focussed support than general Housing First to recognise the particular needs of young people.

Specialist models of aged care and housing, such as the Wintringham model, provide a Housing First response to older people who have experienced chronic homelessness.

Many of Australia's initial Housing First programs (Common Ground and Streets to Home) were resourced from the Road Home strategy and the National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness. These programs have been highly successful, but have never been scaled up to meet demand. Concerningly, a number of programs promoted as Housing First lack fidelity to the model and have consequently delivered poorer results.

Housing First needs to be embedded, as an evidence-based direction to guide investment under the National Housing and Homelessness Plan.

For this to occur, investment is needed to build sector capacity and capability including:

- resources and information to guide service providers to transform existing programs to a more successful high-fidelity Housing First model
- upskilling the homelessness workforce with Housing First training
- upskilling governments in commissioning high-fidelity Housing First programs
- sustaining a national Housing First Community of Practice to foster shared learning and to consciously evolve and develop the model for cohorts with specific needs or specific locational or demographic contexts. (Note: Backbone funding for Housing First training and a related community of practice ends in February 2024.)
- research to understand more about Housing First implementation and feed new knowledge into the sector

Homelessness Australia, in partnership with homelessness services and the Housing First Europe Hub sent practitioners to Europe for specialised training and delivered a train-the-trainer model for practitioners in Australia. A Housing First Community of Practice has been established and has adapted international Housing First principles to the Australian context. This small, mostly volunteer-run program provides the seeds of what is needed to expand Housing First with fidelity more broadly in Australia.

74. N Pleace, *Housing First Guide: Europe*, FEANTSA, 2016

75. C Roggenbuck, C. *Housing First: An evidence review of implementation, effectiveness and outcomes*, AHURI, 2022.

76. Homelessness Australia, *Australian Housing First Principles*, 2022.

77. Such as Noongar Mia Mia's *Noongar Mia Bidee* program and the *Noongar Cultural Framework and Noongar Housing First Principles*.

Promising examples of Housing First capacity building

Scotland:

Has introduced a program to build capability and capacity for a national framework for Housing First. It incorporates gathering evidence and data, an annual check-up for each local area and sharing of implementation learnings across the housing, health and social sectors.

England

Homeless Link, the national peak body for homelessness, provide Housing First practice guides, resources and training for services delivering Housing First and governments commissioning programs; a community of practice; and research and evaluations on Housing First.

Housing First Europe Hub

Provides support and innovation with Housing First Managers in an international community of practice; training, research and start-up resources for services developing Housing First programs; and assesses research gaps on Housing First and mobilises data and research on Housing First for organisations, housing providers, governments, and researchers

Promising examples of Housing First programs

Wintringham's housing, support and aged care model for older people with histories of homelessness and complex needs:

Provides a high fidelity example of Housing First, with exceptionally high housing sustainment rates. This program has been funded by mobilising a range of resources, including aged care funding, and (for some residents) NDIS funding.

First Nations specific programs:

Such as the housing and support programs delivered by Noongar Mia Mia and Wadamba Wilam have achieved particular success.



A Homelessness Action Plan specific to children and young people is needed

Recommendation

21. Create a dedicated Action Plan on ending homelessness for unaccompanied children and young people under the National Housing and Homelessness Plan.

Homelessness among children and young people

Children and young people experiencing homelessness unaccompanied by a parent or guardian have very specific needs and vulnerabilities that are different to homeless adults. They become homeless for many reasons that are unique to children, including child abuse and neglect, family dysfunction and breakdown, lack of effective care and guardianship by family or out-of-home care systems, and family rejection as a result of homophobia and transphobia.

There are significant gaps in homelessness services for children and young people

Children and young people often face significant barriers to accessing homelessness support and securing a home that provides the care that they need. Some receive adult-focussed responses that are inappropriate and exacerbate their vulnerability.

They are missing or poorly dealt with in some of the key policy frameworks relevant to homelessness. For example, children and young people

experiencing domestic and family violence on their own – not those accompanying their mothers or caregivers — are mostly absent in the National Plan to End Violence Against Women and Children.

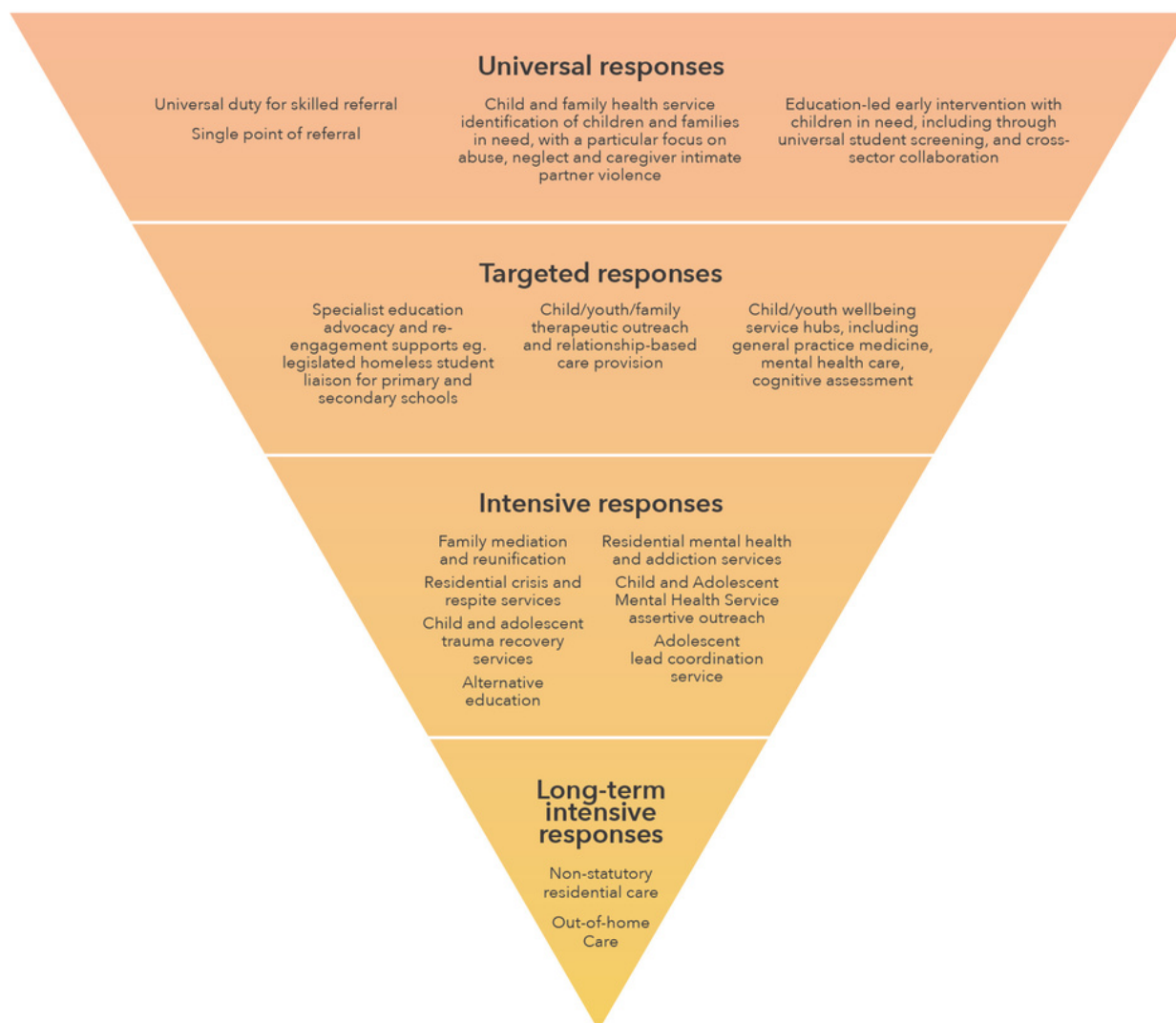
Young people experiencing homelessness have been included as a priority group in the National Housing and Homelessness Agreement. Accordingly, related homelessness services funding is primarily focussed on those aged 15-24 years.

The unique needs of children aged 10-14, who flee or are excluded from their home are ignored in most homelessness service systems, even though more than 3,300 children in this age range make their way to homelessness services annually. Many more would be homeless without coming to the attention of services.

Although there are some excellent youth homelessness programs, significant service gaps continue to exist for children and young people.

Ending children's homelessness requires a suite of responses that range from preventive family support and education-based screening to intensive, long-term, holistic care responses to children who have lost their home.

The breadth of prevention and response needed to meet the needs of unaccompanied children are depicted below: (78)



A dedicated Action Plan for children and young people would elevate their care and support needs. It would mobilise the particular service systems that surround children and young people - schools and re-engagement programs, child and family supports, adolescent mental health, child protection and juvenile justice - to provide an integrated response to child and youth homelessness.

It would focus on addressing the impacts of fractured family relationships, and the need to establish appropriate guardianship, support or mentor arrangements. (79) It would also need to tackle significant trauma, mental health and substance misuse challenges in this group. (80)

While many young people who have experienced harm in a family context will be able to find an alternative home environment with an appropriate adult in their natural and family support networks, others cannot.

The enormous shortfall of appropriate youth housing models needs urgent attention. Options that are affordable to young people (given they typically have lower incomes), provide medium term stability, address gaps in effective family support, and enable them to transition through developmental stages and build their capabilities to transition to independence are needed. The intensity and duration of support needed will vary according to the age and circumstances of different individuals.

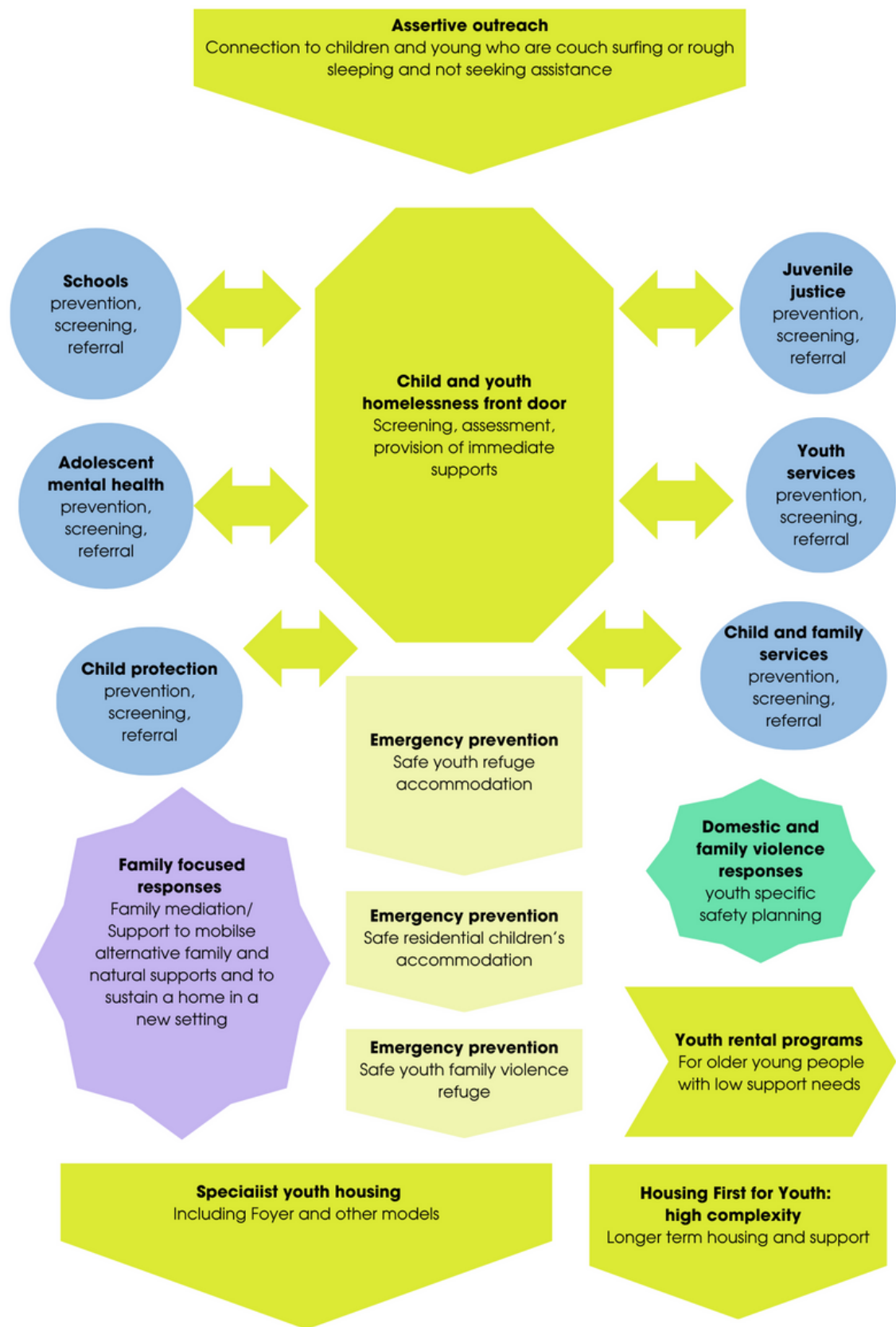
78. C Robinson, [Ending unaccompanied child homelessness in Australia](#), Parity Magazine, Council to Homeless Persons, 2023.

79. See also the Homelessness Australia and YFoundations consultation for the National Plan [‘The ideal service system to respond to children and young people without a home’](#)

80. C Robinson, ‘Reforming the engagement of schools with unaccompanied homeless children’, Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Education, 2021. <https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780190264093.013.1689>

Homelessness Australia endorses the [Youth Housing Framework](#) co-developed by specialist youth providers to inform development of the National Housing and Homelessness Plan. It provides a foundation for the funding of dedicated and fit-for-purpose youth housing models.

Mapped below is our system vision to end homelessness for children and young people. It depicts the importance of family focused interventions and of child and youth homelessness services operating in an ecosystem of other children and youth focused services, both to receive referrals and to be a part of any ongoing response to children’s needs.



Core elements of a homelessness service system for children and young people include:

Access to homelessness services

- pathways from universal services for children to a visible and accessible child and youth homelessness front door providing immediate care and support
- assertive outreach to children and young people who are couch surfing or rough sleeping or in other unsafe situations

Crisis prevention

- specialist youth and family workers to reconnect young people to family or natural supports and mediate family conflict where it's safe to do so, such as the Reconnect program
- specialist children's workers to work with children to address their care and guardianship needs
- residential children's accommodation to support children while care issues are addressed
- youth refuges for short-term respite or accommodation prior to housing

Rapid rehousing for older young people and young people with low complexity

- youth private rental programs to assist older young people and young people with low complexity into private rental tenancies

Development support and supported housing for young people

- youth homelessness support workers to support young people who can't return home into appropriate youth housing, Youth Foyer or Housing First for Youth programs, and support their development of independent living skills, connection with education and employment, and other community connections or services
- specialist responses for young people using violence and young people escaping from violence
- strong place-based connections with local schools, alternative and further education, and other services and community supports



A First Nations Housing and Homelessness Plan is needed

Recommendation

22. Empower and resource the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Housing Association to develop and implement a national First Nations housing and homelessness plan.

A community controlled First Nations Housing and Homelessness Plan

First Nations people are massively overrepresented among people experiencing homelessness, and experience significant unmet housing need across urban, regional, remote and rural areas. (81) Addressing housing inequality is at the core of closing the gap in homelessness and addressing entrenched disadvantages continuing in the aftermath of colonisation.

Homelessness Australia supports the call by the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Housing Association (NATSIHA) for a dedicated National Aboriginal Housing and Homelessness Plan that is developed and implemented by NATSIHA. (82)

It is clear that ending homelessness for First Nations Australians requires a self-determined approach, with unique solutions to meet the discrete challenges faced by First Nations people experiencing or at risk of housing insecurity and homelessness.

The Plan would need to advance achievement of and build upon the housing related targets in Closing the Gap, and include a target to close the gap between the number and proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and non-Indigenous people who are homeless.

Empowerment and community control in the development and implementation of a First Nations Housing and Homelessness Plan is critical.

So too, are clear commitments to funding First Nations housing and homelessness from both the Federal and State Governments, including the creation of a dedicated funding stream and commitments to allocating a proportion of existing funding to First Nations housing and homelessness programs.

81. First Nations people make up around 3.8% of the Australian population but over one-fifth of the homeless population nationally on Census night and 28% of the clients assisted by specialist homelessness services. AIHW, Housing circumstances of First Nations people, September 2023 at <https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/australias-welfare/indigenous-housing>. Accessed on 3 October 2023

82. NATSIHA, NATSIHA calls for urgent action to address housing needs and First Nations empowerment following referendum outcome, 20 October 2023. See also Homelessness Australia, National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Housing Association and Aboriginal Housing Victoria, [Ending First Nations Homelessness Forum](#), August 2023

Issues to address

The Plan will need to build on the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Housing Sector Strengthening Plan which aims to broaden and elevate the capacity of the community-controlled sector, and increase the proportion of services it delivers. (83)

Key issues for a First Nations Housing and Homelessness Plan include:

- identifying and addressing unmet housing needs in major cities, regional and remote areas
- tackling what NATSHIA describes as a 'total mismatch between the supply and demand' for appropriately designed and located housing options for First Nations people, including housing on Country
- guaranteeing a proportion of all new social housing is for First Nations households and the community-controlled sector
- addressing the funding chasm left by the cessation of the Remote Indigenous Housing Partnership
- addressing the high proportion of households living in substandard housing
- addressing the interconnection between the unmet housing need and the high rates of domestic and family violence-related injury and death amongst Indigenous women and high rates of child removal (84)
- tackling discrimination in the rental market
- expanding effective Aboriginal community controlled homelessness programs including culturally safe accommodation; tenancy support and Housing First initiatives (85)

- targeted approaches to those most vulnerable to homelessness and housing exclusion; including unaccompanied children and young people, children leaving child protection services, vulnerable families, women and children experiencing domestic and family violence, people entering and exiting prison and Elders
- planning to manage the impact of rising sea levels or increases in hot days that threaten the liveability of people's traditional lands
- a First Nations Housing and Homelessness Workforce Strategy
- a framework for upskilling and assuring cultural safety in mainstream housing and homeless services

Promising examples

The process of development of the Mana - Na Woorn -Tyeeen Maar -Takoort (Every Aboriginal Person has a home): The Victorian Aboriginal Housing and Homelessness Framework provides a strong example of a process and plan that has been developed by the community for the community.



83. Closing the Gap Joint Council, Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Housing Sector Strengthening Plan, 2022.

84. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner, Wiyi Yani U Thangani (Women's Voices): Securing our Rights, Securing our Future 2020 report and related publications. See also Cripps, K. and Habibis, D. (2019) Improving housing and service responses to domestic and family violence for Indigenous individuals and families, AHURI Final Report 320, Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute Limited, Melbourne, <http://www.ahuri.edu.au/research/final-reports/320>, doi: 10.18408/ahuri-7116201.

85. Such as Aboriginal Housing Victoria's More Than a Landlord program, Noongar Mia Mia's Noongar Mia Bidee program, First programs such as Noongar Mia Mia's Moorditj Mia program and the Noongar Cultural Framework and Noongar Housing First Principles and Larrakia Nations Tenancy Support Program.

ABOUT HOMELESSNESS AUSTRALIA

Homelessness Australia is the national peak body for homelessness in Australia. We provide systemic advocacy for the homelessness sector. We work with a large network of organisations to provide a unified voice when it comes to preventing and responding to homelessness.

Visit homelessnessaustralia.org.au

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Homelessness Australia acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of all of the lands on which we meet and work. We pay our respects to First Nations peoples and elders past, present and future. Always was, always will be, Aboriginal land.