

Homes for all: Housing First

Call for urgent expansion of housing with support for people with psychosocial disability and complex needs at risk of homelessness



10 October 2024 is World Homelessness Day and World Mental Health Day

People with psychosocial disability, cognitive impairments and complex behaviours are among the fastest growing groups of people using homelessness services and represent the bulk of repeat, long-term users of these services.

A dire lack of safe and recovery focused housing options leads to people unnecessarily cycling between chronic homelessness, crisis accommodation, health and acute mental health services, correctional facilities and exploitative institutional-style settings.

This has tragic consequences for individuals and their families and supporters. It also impacts public health and safety and creates repeated and intense demand for publicly funded services.

Proven models - such as [Housing First](#) - provide safe and stable housing alongside recovery and wellbeing support that enable people to sustain their housing, spend less time in care and institutional settings and be involved in community life. Despite delivering strong returns on investment, these approaches are few and far between. (1)

Every recent major Australian review into homelessness, mental health and disability has called for the expansion of housing with support and related measures to prevent chronic and repeat homelessness.

Immediate opportunities to make rapid headway include:

The upcoming 10-year National Housing and Homelessness Plan

1. Rapidly expand Housing First programs via a new national agreement to provide long term housing and support for people with complex needs, including First Nations led initiatives
2. Embed homelessness support for inpatients in care and mental health units, institutional and correctional settings – enabling longstanding commitments of ‘no exists into homelessness’ to become a reality
3. Expand mental health expertise within Specialist Homelessness Services to enable intensive responses and inform and uplift cross-sector capability

The upcoming 10-year National Housing and Homelessness Plan

1. Steward the rapid expansion of a continuum of recovery-oriented models of housing with support through both the NDIS and the upcoming psychosocial foundational supports
2. Establish a national program that assists people to sustain tenancies as part of the upcoming foundational supports for people with psychosocial disability
3. Develop a Targeted Action Plan on Homelessness and Housing under the Australian Disability Strategy, interlinked with the upcoming National Homelessness and Housing Plan

Aged care reforms

1. Urgently remove barriers to accessing aged care supports for people that have prematurely aged and have experienced homelessness

There is significant unmet need

Major reviews indicate there are upwards of 100,000 people with psychosocial disability and unmet housing and support needs, and in excess of 20,000 people with multiple and complex needs, including psychosocial disability, experiencing persistent and/or repeat homelessness.

NDIS participants with psychosocial disability

Around 100,000 (8%) NDIS participants register psychosocial disability as their primary or secondary presentation. (3) This group disproportionately face housing challenges, with many at risk of unsafe and exploitative living arrangements, unstable housing and homelessness.

Victorian Mental Health Royal Commission

Between 6,000-11,000 Victorians living with 'severe mental health issues' are homeless. A further 20,000 are living in housing situations that are problematic for themselves and/or those they live with. (4)

Productivity Commission Mental Health Inquiry

Of the ~300,000 people with 'persistent, severe and complex psychosocial disabilities, more than 31,000 are experiencing or at risk of homelessness have an unmet need for long-term housing; over 2,000 are stuck in institutional care because of a lack of other options; many more are living in "unsuitable accommodation"; over half (154,000) are not accessing the services they require – including finding and sustaining housing (5)

Specialist homelessness data: Persistent homelessness

AIHW longitudinal analysis of 27,000 homelessness service 2019-20 users who had been homeless for more than 7 months in the preceding two years revealed 56% had mental health issues (6)

Repeat homelessness

AIHW longitudinal analysis of 16,000 people who were experiencing homelessness in 2019-20, who achieved housing and then returned to homelessness revealed 64% had mental health issues. (7)

1. C Roggenbuck, C. Housing First: An evidence review of implementation, effectiveness and outcomes, AHURI, 2022 - Housing First programs consistently report high levels of tenants sustaining their housing (typically ranging from 66% to 90%).
2. Parsell, C., Petersen, M. & Culhane, D. (2017). Cost Offsets of Supportive Housing: Evidence for social work. *British Journal of Social Work*, 47(5), pp.1534-1553, Housing insecurity perpetuates high use of other costly government services including. Provision of supported housing has been found to save \$13,100 per person annually.
3. NDIA Quarterly Report 31 March 2024.
4. Victorian Royal Commission into Mental Health Final Report (Vol 2) 2021 citing evidence given (2020) by Dr Sarah Pollock from Mind Australia
5. Productivity Commission's Mental Health Inquiry Report (Vol 3) 2022
6. AIHW, [Specialist homelessness services client pathways: Clients experiencing persistent homelessness in 2019–20](#), Aug 2024
7. AIHW, [Specialist homelessness services client pathways: Clients returning to homelessness in 2019–20](#), Accessed 26/9/24