



ENDING HOMELESSNESS IN AUSTRALIA

Homelessness can be ended in Australia through investment in social and affordable housing, long-term support to those who need it, and targeted programs addressing the underlying drivers of homelessness.

An evidence-based briefing by the Centre for Social Impact – April 2022

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THE SHORTAGE OF AFFORDABLE HOUSING, POVERTY AND FAMILY AND DOMESTIC VIOLENCE IS DRIVING AUSTRALIA'S HIGH HOMELESSNESS RATES

To end homelessness and [housing precarity](#) in Australia, targeted, [evidence-driven policy](#) is needed to address the shortage of social and affordable housing and the underlying causes of homelessness.

Homelessness is a growing problem—nationally there is an estimated [50 persons who are homeless for every 10,000 people](#). People under 35 years of age, [Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people](#), and women and families fleeing family violence are more likely to experience homelessness.

Homelessness is not an individual issue, but a problem with inadequate funding to address systemic creators of disadvantage. Appropriate policy settings and properly-funded services that address the underlying contributors to homelessness—such as housing supply and affordability, family and domestic violence, and poverty—will have wide-reaching impact.

Inequalities are often interlinked—the ongoing role of [colonisation and dispossession](#) continues to have a direct impact on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who experience homelessness [at rates far above those for the non-Indigenous population](#).

Long-term health conditions, family and domestic violence, abuse and trauma, and personal relationship breakdowns all contribute to the incidence and structure of homelessness. More people experience homelessness in [disadvantaged locations](#).

Not every experience of homelessness is alike and a one-size-fits-all approach to solving homelessness will not work. People experiencing homelessness often also have [high health needs](#) that require [long-term supportive housing](#). High levels of [intergenerational homelessness](#) and [childhood and adolescent homelessness](#) exist among those [currently experiencing homelessness](#).

Investment in programs addressing family, childhood and youth homelessness will reap significant immediate rewards but also act to reduce chronic homelessness among adults.

Currently there are over 1,600 government-funded Specialist Homelessness Services providing support and accommodation services to people who are

experiencing or 'at risk' of homelessness in Australia. Demand for these services is only [increasing](#) and is currently outpacing availability.

In 2020/21, there was an estimated rate of [108 Australians experiencing or at risk of homelessness, receiving support from Specialist Homelessness Services for every 10,000 people](#). Last year, there were around [114,000 unassisted requests](#) for help to these services, with three in five of these unmet requests involving accommodation requests.

There is a critical shortage not only of immediate short-term emergency supported accommodation, but also permanent social housing and private rental housing options for those experiencing homelessness.

Across Australia, homelessness services have come together to end homelessness, particularly chronic rough sleeping homelessness, in the communities in which they work (the [Advance to Zero](#) campaign).

The Centre for Social Impact's recently released [analysis of Advance to Zero data collected over the last ten years in our Ending Homelessness report](#) reveals the severity of the homelessness problem Australia faces.

On average, people had experienced homelessness for 3.8 years; close to double that for rough sleepers. The majority were assessed to have high health acuity needs, with those sleeping rough, those with a serious brain injury or head trauma, learning or developmental difficulties, or a physical disability, having the [highest needs](#).

Those experiencing homelessness reported a range of long-term serious medical conditions and diagnosed mental health conditions which were significantly higher than rates seen across the general population.

The Centre for Social Impact has undertaken many studies revealing that [the health and justice costs of homelessness are high; for young people, for adults, and for governments](#).



HOMELESSNESS IS PREVENTABLE AND SOLVABLE

Evidence has shown that offering safe and secure [housing first](#) while addressing mental illness or substance abuse problems creates better outcomes.

Australian Housing First programs focus on making permanent housing available to people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness as an immediate priority.

Housing provides a significant benefit for [people's wellbeing, physical](#) and [mental health](#) and [quality of life](#). Providing people experiencing homelessness with rapid access to permanent supportive housing results in [more positive outcomes](#).

Impact evaluations of various Housing First programs in Australia over the last decade (e.g., [the Misha project](#), [the 50 Lives 50 Homes program in Perth](#), [the Journey to Social Inclusion program in Melbourne](#), and the [Brisbane Common Ground program](#)) have found significant returns to government from investment in Housing First programs.

Recently the Housing First approach has been tabled in the [House of Representatives Standing Committee's Inquiry](#) into Homelessness in Australia, but there must be commitment to the considerable additional investment in social and affordable housing and long-term supports for those with high needs for it to be effectively implemented.

Currently, many people experiencing homelessness find support in an extended crisis and transitional

housing response, such as remaining in temporary accommodation in a shelter. These services are important in the absence of permanent housing but are expensive to run and do not address long-term issues with housing.

The [need for affordable housing](#) for Australians is reflected in the [155,000 households](#) currently on the social housing waiting list. There is also a national shortage of just over [400,000 homes that are affordable for Australians](#) who are experiencing homelessness or living on the lowest incomes.

[Well over one third of people accessing homelessness services in Australia seek assistance as a result of family and domestic violence \(FDV\)](#).

[Addressing FDV](#) requires holistic preventative programs and while they are provided by family and domestic violence services in Australia, and having a [significant social impact](#), they require significant increased funding.

Many of those supported by homelessness services [have been in juvenile detention or prison in their lifetime or have been in out-of-home care as children](#). Policy actions to address the underlying drivers of entry into the juvenile justice system and out-of-home care together with supportive policies for those that are currently in custody or care [has long-term positive impacts on ending homelessness in Australia](#).

WHAT CHALLENGES REMAIN?

Homelessness continues to grow in Australia. Long-term funding for social and affordable housing, and supported housing programs are [essential to end homelessness](#).

State and Territory governments have recently introduced [holistic homelessness strategies with a stronger focus on ending homelessness and increased funding on social housing](#). However, to end homelessness, significant sustained investment in social housing and homelessness funding by the Australian Government is required. This funding needs to resource coordinated approaches to

housing and to support, emphasising prevention and early intervention as well as crisis and post-crisis responses.

Beyond this, additional and innovative sources of funding to the homelessness and community housing sector are needed, and must be actively encouraged through policy action that will support increased giving and [impact investment](#).

Any national strategy needs input from expert groups, particularly direct input from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled services and those with lived experience of homelessness.



[Culturally appropriate responses are required for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people experiencing homelessness](#) including those sleeping rough away from home, and these services should ensure that people are physically and culturally safe and aligned with [pathways appropriate to their requirements](#).

Homelessness service delivery in Australia is not always appropriate for people from [culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds](#). Further investment is required to develop [culturally appropriate support](#) including translation services; bilingual staff reflecting the client cohort; cultural training; strong links to cultural and community groups; and culturally specific services.

The economic underpinnings of homelessness are poverty and unemployment. Transition to employment among those in homelessness programs, including among those transitioning to permanent housing, remains low and a major challenge for homelessness policy.

There are a number of points where it may be possible to prevent homelessness, including tenancy support, hospital discharges, release from prison and child protection.

[Potential pathways](#) out of homelessness involve intersections with other systems and sectors, such as through the health and community mental health systems, and through portfolios that are very much the preserve of the Federal Government such as residential and community aged care and through the NDIS, given the prevalence of disability and premature ageing amongst certain cohorts, especially people sleeping rough.

Against this background, the challenge for government and the community sector is to support service integration across service systems. [Improved service integration leads to improved client outcomes](#).

Improving data quality, evaluation and research around homelessness in Australia provides important direction and an evidence base for action to end homelessness. The existing national monitoring and evaluation system does not have explicit homelessness targets for Australia. [Setting explicit end homelessness targets in Australia will provide discipline and accountability](#).

RECOMMENDED NEXT STEPS

Five key actions require immediate Australian Government investment:

1. The development and implementation of a National End Homelessness Strategy to be applied across Australia supported by both the Australian Government and State and Territory governments.
2. An increase in the supply of social and affordable housing directed to an end homelessness goal.
3. Comprehensive application of Housing First programs linked to wrap-around support for those entering permanent housing with long histories of homelessness and high health and other needs.
4. Targeted prevention and early intervention programs to turn off the tap of entry into homelessness which address the underlying drivers of homelessness.
5. Supportive systems and programs which build the enablers of an end homelessness program.

CSI RESOURCES/REPORTS

- [Ending homelessness in Australia: An evidence and policy deep dive](#)

OTHER RESOURCES

- [Census of Population and Housing: Estimating Homelessness](#)
- [Specialist Homelessness Services Annual Report 2020–21](#)

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