



**Submission to National Housing and
Homelessness Plan Issues Paper – A
Transformational Plan to End
Homelessness**

October 2023

Acknowledgement of Country

The Australian Alliance to End Homelessness would like to acknowledge the Kurna people as the Traditional Custodians of the land on which we work. We recognise their ongoing connection to the land, and pay our respects to Elders past, present and emerging. We recognise that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are more likely to experience adverse health outcomes, housing insecurity, and homelessness than non-Aboriginal populations. We support the need for a healthier future that intertwines the wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and the land, particularly concerning health, housing and homelessness throughout the country.

The Australian Alliance to End Homelessness gratefully acknowledges the work of Mr David Pearson in shaping this submission informed by his 2021 Churchill Fellowship research and report ‘Homelessness is solvable: How we can end it in Australia’¹ and the work and insights of Australian Alliance to End Homelessness members working to solve homelessness in Australia. We would also like to acknowledge the work of Pauline Logan in synthesising and building on our work to develop this submission. Finally, we would like to thank Alliance members and supporters for continuing to contribute to our work.

Australian Alliance to End Homelessness

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¹ David Pearson (2023). *Homelessness is solvable: How we can end it in Australia*. https://aaeh.org.au/assets/images/Full-Churchill-Report-Homelessness-is-Solvable-With-Appendices-Compressed_compressed.pdf

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1. About the Australian Alliance to End Homelessness and our Advance to Zero Framework

1.1 The Australian Alliance to End Homelessness (AAEH)

The AAEH is an independent champion for preventing and ending homelessness in Australia. We recognise that the scale of homelessness in Australia is both preventable and solvable and that despite the common misconception to the contrary, we can end homelessness in Australia.

We are a community of practice that has, since 2013, supported organisations, local communities and governments to work collaboratively to prevent and end homelessness in Australia, not just at an individual level, but systemically. Specifically, we work across sectors, industries and levels of government to prevent, reduce and end homelessness to ensure everyone has access to the housing and support they need so that any future incidents of homelessness that do occur are rare, brief and a one-time occurrence.

Ultimately, the AAEH exists to bring community, business and government together to advocate for and inspire action for an end to homelessness in Australia.

1.1.1 Churchill Fellowship to explore international efforts to end homelessness

The AAEH is informed by evidence and insights from international and national end homelessness networks. This includes the 2021 Churchill Fellowship (Fellowship) research undertaken by AAEH Chief Executive Officer, David Pearson, to explore how communities around the world are seeking to reduce and end homelessness and what it takes to systemically end homelessness.² The Fellowship included visits to leading end homelessness communities and organisations in the US (Chicago, Washington DC, New York, Seattle, Los Angeles), Canada (Toronto), England (London, Leeds, Manchester), Scotland (Glasgow), Finland (Helsinki) and Sweden (Stockholm).

[Learn more about the AAEH >>](#)

1.2 The Advance to Zero Framework

The Advance to Zero (AtoZ) Campaign is a groundbreaking national collective impact initiative of the AAEH that supports local collaborative efforts of communities, organisations and individuals to prevent and end homelessness, starting with rough sleeping - one community at a time.



² David Pearson (2023). Homelessness is solvable: How we can end it in Australia.

https://aaeh.org.au/assets/images/Full-Churchill-Report-Homelessness-is-Solvable-With-Appendices-Compressed_compressed.pdf

The Campaign focuses on system change outcomes and putting the individual needs of the people experiencing, or at risk of, homelessness at the centre of that system to make homelessness a rare, brief and once off experience - how the AAEH define an end to homelessness.

The Campaign is underpinned by the Advance to Zero (AtoZ) Framework to help guide efforts to end homelessness in Australia, based on what is working around the world and what we’ve learned from the efforts of more than 30 communities so far in Australia – it is the AAEH theory of change. To achieve change the problem is broken down to focus on a particular type of chronic homelessness (rough sleeping), and broken down further to focus on a particular sub-population (such as families or veterans) through a place-based approach.

Using a range of proven approaches, activities and tools from around the world, communities are supported to prevent and end homelessness. The elements of the Framework are shown in Figure 1 below.

Figure 1: Advance to Zero Framework

A Shared Strategy				
To prevent, reduce and end all homelessness in Australia by ensuring that when it does occur it is rare, brief and once off measured by seeking to reach and sustain functional zero				
Four Approaches to Ending Homelessness				
Housing First - System Change	Person-Centered & Strengths Based	Data Driven Improvement	Place-Based Collaboration	
Seven Agreed Activities (Applying the Four Approaches)				
Prevention				
Assertive Outreach		Service Coordination		
Common Triage		Leadership & Advocacy		
A Real-Time By-Name List		Housing First - Programs & Permanent Supportive Housing		
Implemented Through Improvement Cycles				
Action Planning	Quality Data	Improving to Zero	Sustaining Zero	Expanding to Zero for All (not sequential)

Communities, generally defined as a local government area, or collection of local government areas, measure progress towards ending homelessness by calculating ‘Functional Zero’ - a dynamic way of determining if a community has been able to make homelessness a rare, brief and once off occurrence.

Communities are supported to track progress towards Functional Zero by collecting consistent by-name data through a common assessment tool or survey that can provide guidance in ending individual homelessness and provide community-wide data needed to support community advocacy and government planning.

The AAEH supports communities participating in the AtoZ Campaign or community of practice through facilitating:

- A series of six-monthly improvement cycles, where communities work together, build capacity and share knowledge, tools and resources.
- A series of national Allied Networks focused on particular sectors like health, business or veterans, and large-scale change efforts across cities, regions or states and territories. This includes a national Large Scale Change backbone group in partnership with Community Solutions (US), to provide a forum for shared problem-solving and standardisation of approach across the A2Z campaign, and to build capacity to support a growing cohort of communities to advance towards 'functional zero' homelessness through large scale change efforts.
- Training, coaching and other infrastructure or tools-based support through these improvement cycles in collaboration with international and domestic partners.

The Campaign also supports community-based efforts to build public support for ending homelessness and political support for renewed Commonwealth, State and Local Government investment in the type of housing, support services, healthcare, and local coordination efforts needed to end homelessness in each community.

Whilst the Campaign starts with rough sleeping, it does not finish there. Some communities also focus on all chronic homelessness, families, veterans and other forms of homelessness.

[Learn more about the Advance to Zero Framework >>](#)

2. Executive Summary

The AAEH recognises that homelessness is solvable. We know from international and local evidence and experience that to end homelessness we must pursue opportunities to develop housing and homelessness systems in different ways that support transformational change.

A National Housing and Homelessness Plan is an important step towards such change. The Plan needs to include a goal to **end homelessness**, not just reduce it. Ending homelessness is defined as rare, brief and once off when it does occur. It is measured by seeking to reach and sustain Functional Zero - a dynamic way of determining if a community has been able to make homelessness rare, brief and once off, supported by quality, real-time, by name data.

The Plan must also include mechanisms and initiatives that build on local and international evidence, frameworks and tools to support interagency working and collaboration across services and sectors and better coordination across systems to create a person-centred system. It must also recognise the diverse experiences and needs of people experiencing or at risk of homelessness and that homelessness doesn't exist in isolation - it intersects with other individual experiences and failures in other systems.

Homelessness impacts on families, communities and society as a whole and has severe implications for individuals experiencing, or at risk of homelessness; there is substantial evidence of poorer health and well-being outcomes. This results in significant costs – both human and economic. Experiencing homelessness brings with it a serious and detrimental impact on health and is known to reduce life expectancy by up to 30 years.³ International evidence reports as many as one in three deaths while homeless were attributable to conditions that could have been prevented or treated.⁴

The National Plan must recognise that homelessness is preventable and solvable in Australia. It must value all individuals and families in our communities. It must include actions to reshape the social, political and economic systems that allow homelessness to continue. It must distinguish the homelessness service system and an ending homelessness system.

³ Wood L, and Vallesi S 2021. Deaths Among People Experiencing Homelessness: Each One, a Life. Parity Magazine vol. 34, no.7, pp. 31-4. https://api.research-repository.uwa.edu.au/ws/portalfiles/portal/151048386/Deaths_among_homeless_Each_one_a_life.pdf

⁴Aldridge RW, Menezes D, Lewer D, Cornes M, Evans H, Blackburn RM, Byng R, Clark M, Denaxas S, Fuller J, Hewett N, Kilmister A, Luchenski S, Manthorpe J, McKee M, Neale J, Story A, Tinelli M, Whiteford M, Wurie F, and Hayward A 2019. Causes of death among homeless people: a population-based cross sectional study of linked hospitalisation and mortality data in England, Wellcome Open Research vol. 4, no. 49. <https://doi.org/10.12688/wellcomeopenres.15151.1>

Our submission advocates for a National Housing and **Ending Homelessness** Plan. The National Plan to End Violence Against Women and Children 2022 – 2032 commits to ending violence against women and children in Australia in one generation.⁵ The Plan demonstrates that an equivalent joint Australian, state and territory government ambition is possible for a national ending homelessness plan.

Our recommendation for a National Housing and **Ending Homelessness** Plan is supported by other recommendations focused on:

- Governance, leadership and investment mechanisms that support transformational change:
 - ◆ National Cabinet initiative to enable ending homelessness efforts
 - ◆ Interagency Council on Ending Homelessness
 - ◆ State Government Interagency Coordination
- Support and investment in local programs to prevent, reduce and end homelessness:
 - ◆ Scale the Advance to Zero Framework rollout
 - ◆ Invest in existing community led efforts to end homelessness
 - ◆ Provide flexible brokerage funding to help end individual homelessness
 - ◆ Build employment pathways – including through social enterprise
- Nationally focused housing and homelessness investments and actions:
 - ◆ Create and sustain permanent supportive housing systems
 - ◆ Provide for inclusive healthcare through a homelessness and health equity framework
 - ◆ Grow the Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisation sector, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workforce in the homelessness system and improve cultural safety
 - ◆ Establish a National Homelessness Early Intervention Service
- Structural preventions to address factors impacting homelessness:
 - ◆ Build and upgrade more Social and Affordable Housing
 - ◆ Make income support liveable
- Better prepare for the effects of climate change on people experiencing homelessness:
 - ◆ Leverage the Advance to Zero Framework and By-Name List tool

The AAEH is available to provide further guidance and advice on our submission and recommendations for ending homelessness. We would welcome the opportunity to inform the development of the National Plan.

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⁵ Commonwealth of Australia (Department of Social Services) 2022. National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children 2022-2032.

https://www.dss.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/11_2022/national_plan_to_end_violence_against_women_and_children_2022-2032.pdf

3. Summary of Recommendations

3.1 Establish a National Housing and Ending Homelessness Plan

To support the implementation of strategies to prevent, reduce and end homelessness, the Commonwealth Government should:

Recommendation 1: A transformational National Plan to End Homelessness - Establish a National Housing and Ending Homelessness Plan and ensure that 'ending homelessness' is the ambition of the new housing and homelessness plan. Also ensure that the Plan is underpinned by:

- Principles that recognise the structural issues impacting people's access to secure, appropriate and affordable housing and contributing to homelessness - social inequality, poverty, the insufficient investment and supply of affordable housing.
- The failures in 'upstream' social systems.
- Australian government commitments to protect and uphold human rights and that having safe, secure and affordable housing is a human right.

The Plan should include focus areas and strategies that provide:

- Governance, leadership and investment mechanisms;
- Investment in local place-based efforts to prevent, reduce and end homelessness;
- Nationally focused housing and homelessness investments and actions;
- Structural preventions to factors driving new homelessness; and
- Better preparation for climate change effects on people experiencing homelessness.

3.2 Governance, leadership and investment for transformational change

Recommendation 2: Establish a National Cabinet initiative to support efforts to end homelessness – Establish a joint partnership between the Commonwealth Government, all States and Territories and the representatives of Local Government for all levels of government to work together and enable efforts to end homelessness.

This should be similar to the way the Council of Australian Governments got together to create the National Depression Initiative, Beyond Blue, which has been so successful in helping to de-stigmatise depression and anxiety and improve access to support. A similar initiative is needed, involving all levels of government, not just to change attitudes about the perceived pervasive and intractable nature of homelessness, but to support efforts and demonstrate that ending homelessness is possible.

Recommendation 3: Interagency Council - Establish an Interagency Council on Ending Homelessness, to support the engagement of Commonwealth service delivery agencies relevant to ending homelessness, including in disability, aged care, primary health, veterans, social security, etc. The Council should be supported by a central agency like the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet, jointly with the Department of Social Services.

Recommendation 4: State Government Interagency Coordination - Require having state-based, across-government, and intergovernmental coordination mechanisms in place as a requirement of funding as part of the new National Housing and Homelessness Agreement funding.

3.3 Support and investment in local programs to prevent, reduce and end homelessness

Recommendation 5: Scale the Advance to Zero rollout - Fund the rollout of the Advance to Zero Framework in more local communities through the renegotiation of the National Housing and Homelessness Agreement.

Recommendation 6: Invest in existing community led efforts to end homelessness - Urgently invest to support and accelerate existing community led efforts to end homelessness that are utilising the Advance to Zero Framework.

Recommendation 7: Develop an integrated data collection and reporting system - Review and develop Specialist Homelessness Service data to include Functional Zero data points, and explore the integration of By Name List data (including vulnerability triage data).

Recommendation 8: Flexible Brokerage Fund - Establish an 'Ending Homelessness Flexible Fund' to provide brokerage funds to support efforts to drive and sustain reductions in people experiencing homelessness through the Advance to Zero Campaign - with a particular focus on prevention and diversion activities.

Recommendation 9: Integrate Employment Pathways - Consider and include ways of better integrating employment service and homelessness support systems to provide more employment pathways - including improved support for social enterprises.

3.4 Nationally focused housing and homelessness investments and actions

Recommendation 10: Determine Unmet Need for Supportive Housing - Commission an agency such as the Productivity Commission or the National Housing Finance and Investment Corporation (NHFIC) to review and determine the level of unmet need for supportive housing in Australia and, most importantly, what it would take to end chronic rough sleeping homelessness. The review should also investigate the creation of a Commonwealth Rent Assistance (CRA) top-up for people who have an experience of chronic rough sleeping homelessness to ensure future instances of chronic homelessness can be prevented.

Recommendation 11: Growing Permanent Supportive Housing - Establish a Permanent Supportive Housing Growth Fund for capital and services to meet the immediate needs of those experiencing chronic homelessness, tying such investments to communities across Australia that are seeking to not just manage homelessness better but are working to end it. Targeting such investments towards communities with quality data, service coordination forums, and the other elements associated with ending homelessness efforts will substantially increase the 'bang for buck' or impact these investments can have, as they can be leveraged to transform - or unclog - local homelessness and housing systems.

Recommendation 12: Sustaining Permanent Supportive Housing - Support the AAEH to establish a National Permanent Supportive Housing Network, to guide the development of local supportive housing systems in Australia, build understanding, improve practice, and help to ensure that when we do build permanent supportive housing that they stay permanent supportive housing.

Recommendation 13: National Homelessness and Health Equity Framework - The Department of Health should develop a National Homelessness and Health Equity Framework for healthcare to homeless and vulnerable communities with high utilisation of acute healthcare, that:

- Includes a dedicated, adequate and ongoing funding stream through Primary Health Networks (PHNs) to better address the urgent healthcare needs of people experiencing homelessness.
- Is informed by a working group that considers how to better meet the health needs of people experiencing homelessness within new and existing Commonwealth policy frameworks – including the National Housing and Ending Homelessness Plan.

Recommendation 14: Grow the Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations Sector - Consider how as part of the National Plan and the renegotiated National Agreement efforts can be redoubled, as committed to in the National Agreement on Closing the Gap, to build the Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations (ACCO) sector, in particular those organisations that work on preventing and ending homelessness.

Recommendation 15: Grow the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workforce - Better support and grow the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workforce in services working in homelessness response systems.

Recommendation 16: Improve Cultural Safety - Support the establishment of an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Ending Homelessness Network to improve cultural safety in efforts to end homelessness within existing homelessness response systems, including to:

- provide a space for peer-to-peer support,
- develop training resources and cultural engagement protocols,
- ensure Indigenous data sovereignty,
- share best practices, and
- better support the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workforce within the existing housing, homelessness and other related sectors.

Recommendation 17: National Homelessness Prevention Service - Invest in a National Homelessness Prevention Service, modelled on the Finish Housing Advisers Prevention program.

3.5 Structural preventions to address factors impacting homelessness

Recommendation 18: Build and upgrade more Social and Affordable Housing – Commit to substantially increase investment to expand Australia’s social and affordable housing supported by job creation measures.

Recommendation 19: Increase Income Support – Commit to substantially increase investment in income support as part of the development of a National Housing and **Ending** Homelessness Plan.

Recommendation 20: Sustained engagement and leadership by the Commonwealth Government – Commit to sustained engagement and leadership by the Commonwealth Government to provide a focus on addressing upstream system failures impacting homelessness.

3.6 Better preparation for climate change impacts on people experiencing homelessness

Recommendation 20: Leverage the Advance to Zero Framework and By-Name List tool – Invest in By-Name List tools and Advance to Zero community-led ending homelessness efforts to support communities to better prepare for, and respond to, the effects of climate change.

4. A transformational National Plan to end, not just reduce, homelessness

4.1 Establish a National Housing and Ending Homelessness Plan

We wholeheartedly support the need for a national plan on housing and homelessness. Not since the Rudd Labor Government released 'The Road Home' policy have we had this. However, what goes into the Plan is what matters.

To support the implementation of strategies to prevent, reduce and end homelessness, the Commonwealth Government should establish a National Housing and Ending Homelessness Plan.

Ending homelessness needs to be the ambition because what else is acceptable? A Plan without an ambition to end homelessness will simply add up to a range of measures that ultimately just manage it a bit better. Australia is the only country visited ⁶on David Pearson's recent Churchill Fellowship without an ambition to end homelessness.⁷

The Plan's ambitions should recognise the structural issues impacting people's access to secure, appropriate and affordable housing and contributing to homelessness - social inequality, poverty, the insufficient investment and supply of affordable housing and the failures in other social systems.

It should also emphasise Australian government commitments to protect and uphold human rights and that having safe, secure and affordable housing is a human right.

The *National Plan to End Violence Against Women and Children 2022 – 2032* commits to ending violence against women and children in Australia in one generation.⁸ The *Supported Accommodation Assistance Act 1994* (as amended) includes a Preamble that recognises structural factors and their consequences in marginalising and excluding people. It is also premised on Australia's human rights commitments and a clear intention for people who are homeless, or at risk of homelessness, being given opportunities to redress their circumstances. The Act also obligates Specialist Homelessness Services to demonstrate they are upholding people's rights.

⁶ Australian Government 2014. Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (as amended).

<https://www.legislation.gov.au/Details/C2014C00101>

⁷ David Pearson (2023). Homelessness is solvable: How we can end it in Australia.

https://aaeh.org.au/assets/images/Full-Churchill-Report-Homelessness-is-Solvable-With-Appendices-Compressed_compressed.pdf

⁸ Commonwealth of Australia (Department of Social Services) 2022. National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children 2022-2032.

https://www.dss.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/11_2022/national_plan_to_end_violence_against_women_and_children_2022-2032.pdf

Equivalent joint Australian, state and territory government ambitions and commitments must be provided for in a National Housing and **Ending Homelessness** Plan. We have a momentous opportunity to prevent, reduce and end homelessness in our community and provide opportunities for people to redress their circumstances supported by services upholding their obligations.

Ending homelessness is an ambition, it is a theory of change, a methodology, a framework, and a campaign, but first and foremost, ending homelessness requires a strategy.

4.2 Components for an end homelessness strategy

The following key components are proposed for an Australian strategy to end homelessness:

Strategy Aim	The aim of our strategy should be to <u>prevent, reduce and end all homelessness</u> .
Definition	An end to homelessness is defined as a state where homelessness is <u>prevented where possible and rare, brief and once off</u> when it does occur.
Measure: Functional Zero	A community will know that we have ended homelessness if they have reached a <u>functional zero</u> , a dynamic measure, which must be sustained, and indicates that a specific geographic community has measurably solved homelessness for a particular population group.
Framework: Advance to Zero	The AtoZ Framework (or Theory of Change) sets out the approaches that can be taken to reach functional zero, based on what has worked in Australia and around the world.
Implemented Through Improvement Cycles	The AtoZ Framework is implemented through improvement cycles, starting with action planning, achieving quality data by-name list data, using improvement to drive to zero, sustaining functional zero when achieved and expanding to others along the way.

To explain the terms used in more detail:

- **Prevented:** means stopping people from becoming homeless in the first place. By working upstream and avoiding having people leaving public institutions (like hospitals, prisons, and child protection systems) and going into homelessness, investing in prevention programs to support people whose tenancies are at risk, greater renters' rights, providing adequate social security etc. There are many types of prevention, and far too little focus is placed on prevention.
- **Rare:** means proactively reducing the number of people experiencing homelessness in a community to as close to zero as possible - what we call Functional Zero. That is when a housing and homelessness system can support more people into permanent housing than are coming into that system - not just at a point in time, but over time.
- **Brief:** means if someone is experiencing homelessness, it should be for as little time as possible. People who are new to homelessness should be identified and supported back into a home as quickly as possible.
- **Once Off:** means no one should experience multiple episodes of homelessness, i.e. that it is non-recurring and for those who are housed following an experience of homelessness they should be supported to avoid returning to homelessness.
- **Functional Zero:** measures whether a community has ended homelessness for a population. It is reached when a community can demonstrate that their system is routinely housing more people than are coming into it and has sustained that state for a period of time, thereby ensuring that homelessness is rare, brief and once off.

Recommendation 1: A transformational National Plan to End Homelessness - Establish a National Housing and **Ending Homelessness** Plan and ensure that 'ending homelessness' is the ambition of the new housing and homelessness plan. Also ensure that the Plan is underpinned by:

- Principles that recognise the structural issues impacting people's access to secure, appropriate and affordable housing and contributing to homelessness - social inequality, poverty, the insufficient investment and supply of affordable housing.
- The failures in 'upstream' social systems.
- Australian government commitments to protect and uphold human rights and that having safe, secure and affordable housing is a human right.

The Plan should include focus areas and strategies that provide:

- Governance, leadership and investment mechanisms;
- Investment in local place-based efforts to prevent, reduce and end homelessness;
- Nationally focused housing and homelessness investments and actions;
- Structural preventions to factors driving new homelessness; and
- Better preparation for climate change effects on people experiencing homelessness.

5. A National Cabinet initiative to support efforts to end homelessness

If we genuinely want to end homelessness in Australia, it will take all levels of Government working together to support the implementation of strategies to prevent, reduce and end homelessness. This includes shifting community narratives and expectations about the nature of homelessness, de-stigmatising homelessness and showing that homelessness is solvable. The only place that a reform of this scale will be achieved is through the National Cabinet.

Such an initiative should be a joint partnership between the Commonwealth Government, all States and Territories and the representatives of Local Government. Similar to the way the Council of Australian Government's created the National Depression Initiative, Beyond Blue, which has been successful in helping to de-stigmatise depression and anxiety and improve access to support.

A similar initiative is needed, involving all levels of government, not just to change attitudes about the perceived pervasive and intractable nature of homelessness, but to enable efforts and demonstrate that ending homelessness is possible.

Recommendation 2: Establish a National Cabinet initiative to support efforts to end homelessness – Establish a joint partnership between the Commonwealth Government, all States and Territories and the representatives of Local Government for all levels of government to work together and enable efforts to end homelessness.

This should be similar to the way the Council of Australian Governments got together to create the National Depression Initiative, Beyond Blue, which has been so successful in helping to de-stigmatise depression and anxiety and improve access to support. A similar initiative is needed, involving all levels of government, not just to change attitudes about the perceived pervasive and intractable nature of homelessness, but to support efforts and demonstrate that ending homelessness is possible.

6. Establish intergovernmental and interagency coordination mechanisms

Homelessness is such a complex issue that no government can solve it alone. They need to work with other levels of government (Commonwealth, state and local) and across the various arms of that level of government.

Homelessness is not the problem; it is the result of the problem. Homelessness is what happens when other government service systems let vulnerable people down. Child protection systems, income support, the veteran's support systems, mental health, corrections, disability, aged care, migration the list goes on.

To improve these systems, we need to engage them, across government. The Commonwealth Government needs to play a role in this, and it needs a mechanism to do so.

6.1 The US Interagency Council on Homelessness

In the US the Interagency Council on Homelessness (USICH), established by the White House, provides that mechanism.⁹ It recognises that solutions to homelessness cut across federal, state, and local jurisdictions. Congress has charged the USICH with building a robust interagency, cross-sector approach to preventing and ending homelessness. Its mission is to coordinate the federal response to homelessness and create partnerships with the private sector and state and local governments to reduce and end homelessness.

Homelessness declined 9% overall in the decade after USICH published the first Federal Strategic Plan to Prevent and End Homelessness in 2010. The plan drove significant progress among families and veterans experiencing homelessness, which respectively declined nearly 30% and 50%.

USICH has certified that more than 60 communities across more than 30 states have ended veteran homelessness. Noting their definition of ending homelessness is a point in time achievement measured through street counts. In Australia, we wouldn't consider this to be 'ending homelessness', but rather a milestone on the way to ending homelessness.

⁹ David Pearson (2023). Homelessness is solvable: How we can end it in Australia. https://aaeh.org.au/assets/images/Full-Churchill-Report-Homelessness-is-Solvable-With-Appendices-Compressed_compressed.pdf

The USICH consists of representatives (secretaries/agency heads or their designees) from 19 federal agencies on its governing Council and a full-time staff led by an Executive Director.

Membership includes for example:

- The Department of Health and Human Services (HHS)
- Department of Education (ED) - which has been important in supporting families and youth.
- Department of Veterans Affairs (VA)
- Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD)
- The Department of Interior - which is responsible for First Nations homelessness
- Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) - a benefit of having them engaged is that it has sparked conversations about better disaster resilience efforts in relation to people experiencing homelessness, and developing support resources.¹⁰

USICH makes it possible to combine federal resources to end homelessness more effectively. For example, it has helped pair Housing and Urban Development-funded housing with Medicaid-funded services to deliver high-quality permanent supportive housing.

The USICH Executive Director, Jeff Olivet, shared during the Fellowship research that despite the existence of the Council there is still a lot of fragmentation, but it would be many times worse without it. To quote Mr Olivet “I highly recommend establishing a council in Australia and would be happy to meet with the new Australian Minister” (16 May 2022).

6.2 Interagency collaboration in Finland and the United Kingdom

Insights on the role of Government shared during Fellowship research on Finland’s success in ending homelessness initiatives included:

- There has long been a broad political consensus in Finland on ending homelessness. Each of the 8 different coalition governments since 2008, have pursued national programs to end homelessness.
- Practically all parties represented in the current Parliament are committed to the goal of eradication. The fact that recently there has been no need to justify the target of halving and eradicating homelessness is a good illustration of this single-mindedness.
- Housing has been seen as a human right.
- The eradication of homelessness is a social objective, the ownership of which is unequivocally in the hands of the public authorities.

A feature of the success of the Finnish model was attributed to the importance of a culture of working together across governments and working in consultation with the sector. Much of the progress and the original Housing First principle came from an expert working group.

The Fellowship research in the UK found that, while interagency effort is often activated or enabled during the development of a strategy, or a particular reform effort, sustaining interagency cooperation has been challenging. For example, local UK homelessness agency

¹⁰https://www.usich.gov/resources/uploads/asset_library/Omicron_Variant_of_COVID19_What_Homeless_Service_Providers_Need_to_Know.pdf

reports on the Rough Sleeping Strategy in the UK were that it was signed by all the government agencies to support a budget bid or reform initiative for individual portfolios. Without an ongoing interagency mechanism, it was challenging to engage all government agencies to help with delivery in the long term.

Public sector experts were canvassed during the Fellowship research on the usefulness of a commission model, which several Australian Governments have. For example in relation to mental health. Commissioning models were widely found to be expensive and often focused more on policy reform; rather than the operational coordination amongst agencies that is also needed, and so often missing.

6.3 Australian Interagency Council on Ending Homelessness

Australia needs an interagency mechanism that requires agencies to connect and take shared responsibility for planning, investment, evaluation and learning to improve wellbeing outcomes for vulnerable people impacted by homelessness or at risk of homelessness. This should include working with specialist departments.

The mechanism needs to be ongoing. Consideration should be given to it being supported by a central agency like the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet, jointly with the Department of Social Services.

Recommendation 3: Interagency Council on Ending Homelessness - Establish an Interagency Council on Ending Homelessness, to support the engagement of Commonwealth service delivery agencies relevant to ending homelessness, including in disability, aged care, primary health, veterans, social security, etc. The Council should be supported by a central agency like the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet, jointly with the Department of Social Services.

6.4 State Interagency Coordination

An ongoing requirement for State Government interagency coordination is needed if ending homelessness is truly the goal. This requirement is needed because never in the history of the Australian Federation has a State Government had the attention span to sustain effort on this issue. Political and bureaucratic attention always moves on before the job is complete, but to their credit usually after progress has been made. Coordination efforts often get merged in with other human service coordination activities and the focus is lost. Key personnel leave their roles, and their functions fall away.

Recommendation 4: State Government Interagency Coordination - Require having state-based, across-government, and intergovernmental coordination mechanisms in place as a requirement of funding as part of the new National Housing and Homelessness Agreement funding.

7. Invest In Placed-based Efforts to End Homelessness

7.1 Inadequate homelessness measurements

You can't change what you don't measure and in Australia, we don't really measure the amount of homelessness that exists.

The Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) estimates homelessness every five years in the census - but it is an estimate as there is no explicit question about homelessness in the census. In addition, the day the census data was released it was already 19 months out of date. We need to do better than estimate how much homelessness there is on one night every 5 years. Imagine how we'd manage problems like unemployment if we estimated the rates every five years and then took 588 days to release this information.

Homelessness services are required to report to the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) on the effectiveness of their efforts at helping the individuals who access their services, as well as the number of people they turn away. This can be up to 260 people a day. But it does not measure how much homelessness there is.

Various state and territory governments in Australia conduct what are called point-in-time (PIT) street counts, which are a measure of the number of homeless people on a specific day (hence the point-in-time reference). This type of counting is known as "taking a snapshot" of the situation. They do not, however, identify people by name and there is a lot of variation in how these PIT counts are conducted and how transparently the results are shared.

None of these efforts add up to what many call 'actionable intelligence' about what is going on in their community regarding homelessness. To address this long-standing and much talked about data gap, communities have acted, initially usually without government support.

7.2 By Name Lists - quality, real-time, homelessness measurement tools

Community Solutions¹¹, the US organisation that has supported 14 communities so far to end homelessness, have advocated the adoption of real-time By Name Lists (BNL) because homelessness is a dynamic problem, which changes from night to night, from person to person. Every community in the US and Canada that has ended homelessness, has first developed what's called a 'quality By Name List'.

¹¹ Community Solutions 2023. <https://community.solutions/the-challenge/>

A BNL¹² is a comprehensive list of every person in a community experiencing homelessness, updated in real time. Using information collected and shared with their consent, each person on the list has a file that includes their name, homeless history, health, and housing needs.

By maintaining a BNL, communities can track the ever-changing size and composition of their homeless population. They know current and detailed information on every homeless person in each subpopulation.

Communities use BNL data plotted in graphs to understand the impact of different ideas designed to reduce homelessness and see if these ideas work. Because they are constantly tracking who is experiencing homelessness in their community, they're able to see if their interventions are working. And they're able to tell quickly, allowing them to course correct if they aren't seeing improvement.

In Australia, the Advance to Zero Framework has added an extra level of richness to the data, by seeking to ensure that a tool is used to collect information on the needs and vulnerabilities of each person experiencing homelessness in a community (a VI-SPDAT tool – see below).

7.3 Quality, certified, Australian By Name Lists

A BNL is therefore not just a static list of names that one or even a handful of agencies have, or even a dynamic list that only a handful of agencies have. In short it means that you have the vast majority of organisations supporting people experiencing homelessness feeding into the list, you have it shared, and community owned, and you have had the list certified as quality. In Australia, the AAEH certifies community efforts to create a quality BNL utilising the BNL scorecard developed with Community Solutions (US). Importantly, BNLs do not just consist of Specialist Homelessness Services funded through the National Housing and Homelessness Agreement; but also agencies who are self funded, independent of government, and or funded by other parts of government (i.e. health, justice, anti-poverty etc).

The scorecard assesses:

- community participation and coverage,
- policies and procedures, and
- data infrastructure to track data points related to system-wide inflow and outflow.

Some communities start by creating a BNL focused on a specific population, like single adults. Others create lists that account for all households experiencing homelessness in their community. The goal is that eventually, communities will build one list accounting for all people experiencing all forms of homelessness. The Advance to Zero Campaign in Australia focuses on starting with rough sleeping homelessness, with local communities then deciding when and for which groups to expand their BNL to include.

¹² David Pearson (2023). Homelessness is solvable: How we can end it in Australia.

https://aaeh.org.au/assets/images/Full-Churchill-Report-Homelessness-is-Solvable-With-Appendices-Compressed_compressed.pdf

Such a BNL enables scarce housing and support to be triaged according to local priorities along with a prevention focus, better advocacy, and supports the implementation of the Housing First approach.

Ultimately, it gives a real-time feedback loop as to whether a community's improvement efforts to end homelessness are working - not just at an individual or service provider level, but across a community/system.

The AAEH is supporting over 25 communities to develop BNL in Australia - an important element of these BNL is that they have been driven and continued to be 'owned' by the community.

To build a quality BNL there needs to be trust and consent from the people experiencing homelessness. Experience has shown this is much easier to get if the data is owned by a community collaboration that has the sole purpose of ending homelessness, as opposed to governments which include law enforcement, child protection and other agencies that have the powers of compulsion.

7.4 Systems measurement

The goal is not data collection, the goal is to take the people on your BNL and make sure each person gets connected to housing, or to prevent people from coming onto the list in the first place. So, we track how people move through the homeless response system to determine if efforts are getting closer or further away from the goal of ending homelessness. The BNL provides a way to measure this by ensuring that everyone on the list is categorised according to where they are in the system. In Australia, we call these the Functional Zero data points. The data points are:

Inflow: the new people

When a person loses housing and enters into homelessness, they're part of what is called inflow. Inflow data points are:

- Newly identified: People new to homelessness.
- Returned from housing: People who experienced homelessness before, got connected with housing, and now are homeless again.
- Returned from Inactive: People who experienced homelessness before and exited to unknown destinations (left town, were institutionalized for 90+ days etc), and now are homeless again.

Actively homeless: the people without housing right now

People who are currently homeless are categorised as:

- Actively homeless: This group contrasts to people whose status is 'Housed or Inactive'
- Temporarily Sheltered: Those who were experiencing rough sleeping homelessness but have moved into temporary housing/shelter. This is a new data point in the Australian context because the Advance to Zero Campaign focuses on ending rough sleeping as a first step, and seeks permanent housing outcomes, not moving off the street into temporary housing as a satisfactory outcome.

- ATSI Mobility: There are groups of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in Australia who are sleeping in the public domain and who are not seeking housing but are vulnerable and need support (including from cultural sources as well as government and/or non-government services - for example, support to return to Country). This is a category that has not been operationalised by any communities in Australia yet but is being explored by some.¹³

Outflow: the people who are no longer homeless

Outflow data points are:

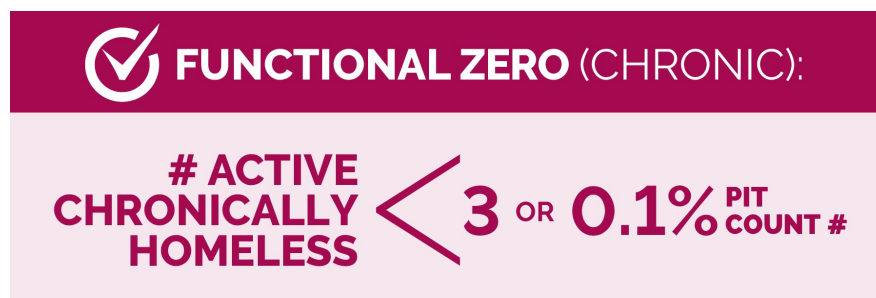
- Housing placements: People who are connected to permanent housing.
- Moved to inactive: People who exit out of homelessness without support from the homeless response system, such as finding their own housing, moving out of the community, or entering a long-term stay in an institution.

7.5 Functional Zero – An effective progress measure

The BNL collects the data needed to determine progress on the goal of ending homelessness, but it doesn't calculate this. The concept of Functional Zero provides that measure.

Functional Zero is “a milestone, which must be sustained, that indicates a community has measurably ended homelessness for a population. When it’s achieved, homelessness is rare and brief for that population. Communities in Built for Zero are confirmed for achieving functional zero using their quality, by-name data, which is updated at least monthly”.¹⁴

Functional Zero needs to be measured slightly differently depending on the population group that your campaign or local zero project is focused on. The US calculates Functional Zero this way for chronic homelessness:



(Image: Community Solutions, USA)

¹³ More information about this can be found here: <https://saaeh.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/Aboriginal-Mobility-Data-Project-Report-FINAL-1.pdf>

¹⁴ <https://community.solutions/built-for-zero/functional-zero/>

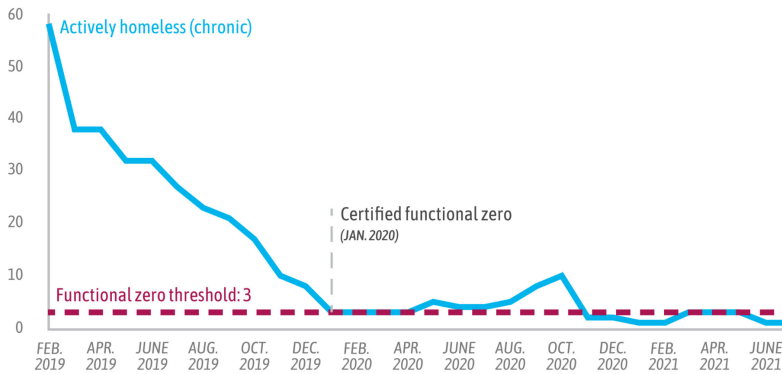
And this way for veterans homelessness:



(Image: Community Solutions, USA)

The below image is an example of a community having reached functional zero in the US, using their calculation for the chronic homelessness population definition of functional.

Bakersfield/Kern County, CA reaches functional zero for chronic homelessness



(Image: Bakersfield/Kern County, California, reached FZ for chronic homelessness in January 2020, and have continued to sustain it, Community Solutions, USA)

The Australian definition used by the Advance to Zero Campaign is that Functional Zero is what happens when a community’s six-monthly average housing placement rate is greater than the number of people sleeping rough.

To reach Functional Zero, the average number of housing placements must be more than the number of people sleeping rough in a community for a minimum of three consecutive months.

7.6 Other Progress Measures

Functional Zero is a progress measure because ultimately, the goal is to end all homelessness and to achieve and sustain absolute zero homelessness. Absolute zero is not possible to sustain until significant structural challenges are addressed in our society, policies, politics, and economy. For these reasons, several progress measures have been the focus of efforts in the US, Canada and Australia to end homelessness. Functional Zero is the most significant of these, others progress measures include:

- **Quality By Name List (QBNL):** when communities can answer yes to all the questions on their population-specific by-name list scorecard.
- **Shift Reduction:** A “shift” constitutes a measurable, meaningful reduction in homelessness for a community. More specifically, it means that a community has driven the number of people experiencing homelessness below their median for six consecutive months. A shift in the median tells us when there has been a fundamental, sustained change in the level at which the system operates”.¹⁵
- **Others:** a range of other progress measures can be adopted by local communities, for example, the first time a milestone like 100 people having been housed from the BNL, the first time a shift reduction in inflow occurs (i.e. successful prevention efforts).

7.7 The VI-SPDAT Tool

The VI-SPDAT or Vulnerability Index – Service Prioritisation Decision Assistance Tool is a pre-screening tool that is used to better understand the housing and support needs of individuals or families who are experiencing homelessness. By better understanding the needs of people, services can more effectively match individuals or families to the most appropriate housing option, healthcare service and/or other community support.

The VI-SPDAT’s purpose is to help ensure all individuals and families who are homeless in a community get the right response. It helps communities build their BNL.

The VI-SPDAT is being used throughout Australia by communities that have already made a collaborative commitment to ending street homelessness in their community. It is an essential tool for communities to use as part of the Advance to Zero Campaign.

The AAEH has worked with OrgCode, the creators of the VI-SPDAT in the US, to develop a new version of the tool explicitly for use in Australia. OrgCode has indicated they will no longer be supporting the use of the VI-SPDAT in the US and has partnered with the AAEH to support the development of a new version of the tool - to be called the Australian Homelessness Vulnerability Triage Tool (AHVTT).

¹⁵ <https://community.solutions/what-is-a-shift-a-by-name-list-and-what-do-they-have-to-do-with-ending-homelessness/>

7.8 Primary, secondary and tertiary prevention interventions

Structural and systemic interventions that work at the level of primary prevention are needed to provide the policy, practice, and funding backbone for individual interventions to be successful.

Secondary prevention includes intervention strategies aimed at those who are at imminent risk of homelessness (i.e. received an eviction notice) as well as those who have recently become homeless, with the aim of avoiding homelessness or moving out of homelessness as quickly as possible. Secondary prevention includes a range of options such as emergency financial assistance, family mediation, and domestic violence victim support.

The Housing First model is a type of tertiary prevention by providing chronically homeless individuals with housing and supports to maintain housing stability.

All three forms of prevention (primary, secondary and tertiary) must occur simultaneously to effectively prevent homelessness.

7.9 Advance to Zero – a systems change approach to ending homelessness

The AAEH has supplemented the BNL, Functional Zero and other solutions with knowledge from around the world, including through the Fellowship research, about what it takes to end homelessness. This knowledge is summarised in the Advance to Zero (AtoZ) Framework (see pp 1-3).

As Norman Suchar, from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, shared: “You could make many homelessness responses twice as effective if you managed the system better, but the inclination is always there to fund direct services, it’s inefficient. If you want to shift the dial, fund the improvements to the systems.” (16 May 2022).

The Fellowship research confirmed evidence from around the world that innovation is better achieved through community efforts than prescribed by governments. The current Royal Commission into Defence and Veteran Suicide¹⁶ highlights challenges facing veterans in our community. North American communities have had significant success in ending veteran’s homelessness. The AAEH and Advance to Zero focus on chronic homelessness and rough sleeping also has the potential for a focus on ending veteran homelessness through the Advance to Zero Campaign.

¹⁶ Royal Commission into Defence and veteran Suicide 2023.
<https://defenceveteransuicide.royalcommission.gov.au/about>

7.10 Scaling the Advance to Zero Framework to sustain long-term efforts

To date the work to implement the Advance to Zero Framework have largely been funded through:

- Time-limited philanthropy;
- Some, generally once off, local government grants;
- Within the existing already stretched resources of the specialist homelessness services (SHS); and
- A limited number of state government grants, usually once off.

None of this is sustainable or is a solid foundation from which to build the foundations for the long-term efforts required to end homelessness. If we are serious about ending homelessness, we need to scale and fund existing efforts. This need not, and should not, come at the expense of other efforts to deal with the broader problem of overall homelessness or the broader problem of housing affordability in Australia.

Commonwealth Government financial support is urgently needed to implement the system-wide Advance to Zero Framework in Australia, and invest in community-led efforts utilising the Framework to support their success.

Improved and integrated data is fundamental to a system-wide approach to ending homelessness and building towards better outcomes. US end homelessness efforts have been impacted by fragmented data systems that are difficult to remedy retrospectively. There are opportunities to update and integrate current and new data sources such as Specialist Homelessness Service data and quality By Name List data, including vulnerability triage data. Current SHS data was developed in 2010/11 and would benefit from being reviewed. This would also provide an opportunity to explore the incorporation of By Name List data as a core component of SHS data collection. Consistent data collection and reporting would also require integrated data collection platforms. The AAEH with support of philanthropic partners has enabled the progress to date.

Recommendation 5: Scale the Advance to Zero rollout - Fund the rollout of the Advance to Zero Framework in more local communities through the renegotiation of the National Housing and Homelessness Agreement.

Recommendation 6: Invest in existing community led efforts to end homelessness - Urgently invest to support and accelerate existing community led efforts to end homelessness that are utilising the Advance to Zero Framework.

Recommendation 7: Develop an integrated data collection and reporting system - Review and develop Specialist Homelessness Service data to include Functional Zero data points, and explore the integration of By Name List data (including vulnerability triage data).

8. Provide flexible brokerage funding to help end individual homelessness

So much investment in health, human services and homelessness goes into responding to needs, rather than solving problems.

The role of brokerage or flexible funding has been essential to a range of communities around the world¹⁷ and Australian communities seeking to end homelessness. Communities need greater access to flexible funding to enable the innovations, improvements, and solutions needed to drive reductions in homelessness - particularly in relation to prevention.

Money matters. The Fellowship research found that in the US for example they have a plethora of government voucher programs and initiatives across federal, state, regional and local government agencies. They also have a substantially larger philanthropic sector and a well-established business culture of corporate giving than Australia.

Organisations like All Chicago have been successful in collecting funding through a range of sources and directing them through brokerage funds to support the system change efforts needed to drive reductions.

The National Alliance to End Homelessness in the USA has also advocated for these types of funds, as what drives people to sleep rough is varied, but often very small issues, and a small amount of flexible funding can go a long way in helping prevent the catastrophic consequences that even a short experience of rough sleeping can cause.

The Fellowship research found European countries all emphasised the importance of flexible funding to assist with efforts to address the failings of other systems and demonstrate innovation in the way these systems interact.

Recommendation 8: Flexible Brokerage Fund - Establish an 'Ending Homelessness Flexible Fund' to support efforts to drive and sustain reductions in people experiencing homelessness through the Advance to Zero Campaign - with a particular focus on prevention and diversion activities.

¹⁷David Pearson (2023). Homelessness is solvable: How we can end it in Australia.

https://aaeh.org.au/assets/images/Full-Churchill-Report-Homelessness-is-Solvable-With-Appendices-Compressed_compressed.pdf

9. Build Employment Pathways - including through Social Enterprise

Better employment pathways are needed to provide opportunities for people with an experience of homelessness. These should be integrated with the National Plan.

Australia's social enterprise sector is more emergent than countries like the United Kingdom, Canada, and the USA. Consequently, their social enterprise sector is generally more connected to the homelessness sector and provides support to help recover from or prevent homelessness.

There are some great small scale examples of social enterprises providing employment pathways to people with an experience of homelessness in Australia. There are **opportunities to scale the impact** with the right incentives and support. For example, via social procurement and the use of housing maintenance and other contracts.

Recommendation 9: Integrate Employment Pathways - Consider and include ways of better integrating employment service and homelessness support systems to provide more employment pathways - including improved support for social enterprises.

10. Create and sustain Permanent Supportive Housing systems

10.1 Create Permanent Supportive Housing Systems

Housing alone doesn't solve individual instances of homelessness, housing and support do. All too often the support isn't provided and doesn't meet the individual's needs, including by not being intensive enough or not lasting long enough. For some people, their needs are so profound that they may always need a level of additional support.

Permanent supportive housing is a proven solution to homelessness for the most vulnerable chronically homeless people. It pairs housing with case management and supportive services.¹⁸

The AAEH seeks to advance the development of a supportive housing system in Australia, not just a collection of supportive housing facilities, as an approach for change that:

- Leans in to address the root causes of inequity.
- Breaks down silos.
- Creates smarter and better-integrated systems.
- Builds more resilient communities.
- Helps inform efforts to end homelessness.

There is good evidence to show - through data collected during Australian Connections Weeks' - that approximately 50-60% of those people experiencing rough sleeping homelessness will require permanent support to sustain housing. This is because they may have several health conditions, such as chronic illness, disability, mental illness and/or a history of having had a traumatic brain injury. Others who experience this type of homelessness will also need permanent housing to end their homelessness but may only need short-medium term support or no additional support at all.

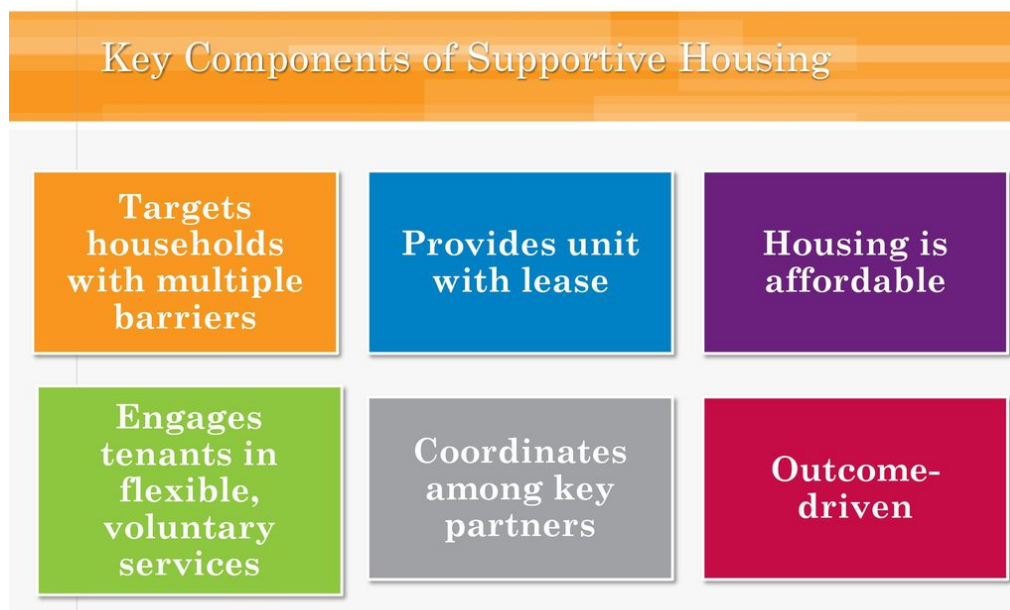
For the small group of Australians who have high (and often, complex needs) and who experience long term homelessness we need a systemic response to their permanent housing and support needs. We need an adequate supply of 'permanent supportive housing'. We don't need a great amount of this type of housing, simply an adequate amount for the current number and future number of people with high and complex needs who will not sustain permanent housing without permanent support.

10.2 Key Components of Permanent Supportive Housing

The US truly has a supportive housing system, rather than just a collection of supportive housing facilities. It recognises that supportive housing is the type of housing that is needed to end the experience of those who have a long term, or chronic experience of homelessness and multiple and often intergenerational needs arising from poverty and trauma.

¹⁸ www.mercyfoundation.com.au/our-focus/ending-homelessness/common-ground-permanent-supportive-housing/

Key components of supportive housing are shown in the diagram below.



(Image: Key Components of Supportive Housing, Corporation for Supportive Housing, USA)

10.3 Types of permanent supportive housing

There are several ways that permanent supportive housing can be created and managed. The two primary ways are 'high density' models (for example, Common Ground) and 'scatter site' models. High density models, like Common Ground, involve people living in one apartment complex, using a mixed tenancy model (e.g., not everyone who lives there has support needs or has experienced homelessness) and some of the support they need to sustain their tenancies are provided 'on-site'. There are workers on-site who can assist tenants with support as well as helping to coordinate other professional health, mental health, and support services for the person. With 'scatter-site' models, people live in separate houses or units and support workers visit the person's home to help deliver or coordinate needed support.

Not everyone who has slept rough needs this type of housing, but for those who do, it not only literally saves lives, it is also cheaper for taxpayers. The Corporation for Supportive Housing in the USA has done a lot of work to demonstrate this. In Australia, we know that these savings are \$11,000 per person.¹⁹

The Fellowship research found that groups, such as the New York Supportive Housing Network, have done a lot to build the network of these types of services. This reflects an important part of the model; that while they are permanent, the goal should be to, over time, graduate people out of these types of expensive services and into social housing or private rental. This requires services working together as a system, rather than just individual agencies.

¹⁹ <https://theconversation.com/supportive-housing-is-cheaper-than-chronic-homelessness-67539#>

10.4 Need for a systemic approach in Australia

Australia has not had a systemic approach to providing permanent supportive housing. A wave of permanent supportive housing was built firstly as a consequence of the Social Inclusion efforts of the South Australian Rann Government, and later the Rudd Government's 'The Road Home' homelessness policy and investments. From time to time, some new services have been built by state governments.

There are no peak bodies who focus on advocating for this type of housing at a national level, there are very few organisations and individuals who even seem to understand what it is and how it differs from general social housing.

Most of the public servants and sector leaders who were involved in the initial waves of building supportive housing in Australia have moved on to other roles. What little discussion there is regarding permanent supportive housing seems to focus on if the supportive housing should be on scattered site or single site models.

This needs to change supported by determining unmet need for supportive housing, funding its growth and developing and sustaining local supportive housing systems.

Recommendation 10: Determine Unmet Need for Supportive Housing - Commission an agency such as the Productivity Commission or the National Housing Finance and Investment Corporation (NHFIC) to review and determine the level of unmet need for supportive housing in Australia and, most importantly, what it would take to end chronic rough sleeping homelessness. The review should also investigate the creation of a Commonwealth Rent Assistance (CRA) top-up for people who have an experience of chronic rough sleeping homelessness to ensure future instances of chronic homelessness can be prevented.

Recommendation 11: Growing Permanent Supportive Housing - Establish a Permanent Supportive Housing Growth Fund for capital and services to meet the immediate needs of those experiencing chronic homelessness, tying such investments to communities across Australia that are seeking to not just manage homelessness better but are working to end it. Targeting such investments towards communities with quality data, service coordination forums, and the other elements associated with ending homelessness efforts will substantially increase the 'bang for buck' or impact these investments can have, as they can be leveraged to transform - or unclog - local homelessness and housing systems.

Recommendation 12: Sustaining Permanent Supportive Housing - Support the AAEH to establish a National Permanent Supportive Housing Network, to guide the development of local supportive housing systems in Australia, build understanding, improve practice, and help to ensure that when we do build permanent supportive housing that they stay permanent supportive housing.

11. Develop A National Homelessness and Health Equity Framework

Homelessness needs to be seen as a health issue as much as it is a housing issue. This was the case before the COVID-19 pandemic, and it's particularly the case now. The failure to better integrate our health and homelessness responses is one reason why people who sleep rough are likely to die up to 30 years earlier than those with stable housing and is why an estimated 424 people die whilst experiencing rough sleeping homelessness in Australia each year.²⁰

Through the Churchill Fellowship research, it seemed apparent that health services are much more integrated into housing and homelessness services in other countries than they are in Australia. There is no doubt many reasons for this, in the US, for example, the fact that the homelessness system acts as a much bigger part of the social safety net as they don't have as equitable access to healthcare or as comprehensive an income support system as Australia. As a result, there are some outstanding examples of integrated health and homelessness services.

Australia also has excellent examples of best practice examples for integrated health and homelessness responses to prevent, reduce and end homelessness and to improve access to healthcare and health outcomes for people experiencing homelessness.

11.1 Integrated health and homelessness service examples

Several examples are detailed in a recent position paper developed by the AAEH and its Australian Health, Housing and Homelessness Network (A3HN); drawing on the Churchill Fellowship research and work of the Network²¹ :

- Advance to Zero Campaign (Australia): supporting collaborative community efforts, starting with rough sleeping – one community at a time.
- Nurse-led Outreach Health Care: Homelessness to Home Healthcare After-Hours Service (Brisbane), with an estimated net social benefit between \$12.61m to \$13.06m in improvements to health-related quality of life.²²
- Royal Perth Hospital - Dedicated Hospital Homeless Team with Primary Care In-reach (Perth): adapted from the UK Pathway approach, the service is a collaboration established in 2016 between Royal Perth Hospital, Homeless Healthcare and Ruah Community Services, providing people experiencing homelessness with support in admission to hospital, discharge planning and linking with community-based services.

²⁰ Pearson D, Vallesi S, and Wood L 2021. Dying homeless in Australia: we must measure it better. Parity Magazine vol. 34, no.7, pp. 13-5. https://api.research-repository.uwa.edu.au/ws/portalfiles/portal/151048454/Dying_Homeless_in_Australia.pdf

²¹ Australian Alliance to End Homelessness 2023, Ending Homelessness Through Inclusive Healthcare: Position Paper, Adelaide, South Australia

²² Connelly L 2013. An economic evaluation of the homeless to home healthcare after-hours service. Micah Projects, Brisbane. https://micahprojects.org.au/assets/docs/Publications/IR_130_An-Economic-Evaluation-of-the-Homeless-to-Home-Healthcare-After-Hours-Service.pdf

The Team was featured as a case study by the Productivity Commission in 2021, notably for its focus on early intervention and prevention.²³

- Multidisciplinary Outreach Healthcare – St Vincent’s Hospital Homeless Health Service (Sydney): a specialist team of Aboriginal workers, peer support workers, nurses, doctors and allied health staff providing outreach care to people experiencing homelessness and diabetes and podiatry services via an Integrated Care Mobile Clinic Vehicle.²⁴
- Medical Respite: the concept began in the US in the 1990’s to provide short-term supported discharge and post-hospital care to avert discharging people experiencing homelessness to the streets. Respite programs have expanded with the US²⁵ and are also provided in the UK, Denmark and Australia. Australian examples demonstrating reductions in hospital use and associated health-system cost-savings include Tierney House (Sydney)²⁶, The Cottage (Melbourne)²⁷ and the Medical Respite Centre (Perth)²⁸
- Permanent Supportive Housing – Common Ground (Brisbane): a permanent supportive housing apartment facility established in 2012 providing on-site services including a registered nurse. A cost-benefit analysis reported savings of \$13,100 per person per year.²⁹
- Housing First - Doorway: established in 2010 by Wellways to provide integrated housing and recovery support for people with severe and persistent mental illness and experiencing or at risk of homelessness. A program evaluation identified net annual health service use savings of \$13,096 per participant.³⁰
- Specialist Homelessness Primary Care Multidisciplinary Services such as:
 - ◆ Homeless Healthcare (HHC) (Perth): established in 2008 to improve the health of people experiencing homelessness. A 2022 evaluation among a cohort of patients with three years follow up hospital data, found a 48% reduction in

²³ Productivity Commission 2021. Implementing innovation across the health system.

<https://www.pc.gov.au/research/completed/chronic-care-innovations/health-implementation-priorities.pdf>

²⁴ St Vincent’s Hospital Homeless Health Service 2023. <https://www.svhs.org.au/our-services/list-of-services/homeless-health-service>

²⁵ National Health Care for the Homeless Council 2023. Medical Respite Program Directory: Descriptions of Medical Respite Programs in the United States. <https://nimrc.org/medical-respite-directory/>

²⁶ Conroy E, Bower M, Kadwell L, Reeve R, Flatau P, and Miscenko D 2016. St Vincent’s Hospital’s Homeless Health Service: Bridging the Gap between the Homeless and Health Care.

²⁷ Gazey A, Vallesi S, Martin K, Cumming C, and Wood, L 2019. The Cottage: providing medical respite care in a home-like environment for people experiencing homelessness. *Housing, Care and Support* vol. 20, no. 1, pp. 54-64. doi:10.1108/HCS-08-2018-0020

²⁸ Wood L, Vallesi S, Tuson M 2023. Perth’s First Medical Respite Centre: Evaluation of the First Year of Operation, Executive Summary. Institute for Health Research, UNDA. <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/6071957fd38b343b68afe4d5/t/649a9375a8e2a313b45ba357/1687851896175/Year+1+MRC+Evaluation+-+Exec+Summary.pdf>

²⁹ Parsell C, Petersen M, and Culhane D 2017. Cost Offsets of Supportive Housing: Evidence for Social Work. *British Journal of Social Work* vol. 47, no. 5, pp. 1534-1553. <https://doi.org/10.1093/bjsw/bcw115>

³⁰ Dunt DR, Benoy AW, Phillipou A, Collister LL, Crowther EM, Freidin J, and Castle DJ 2017. Evaluation of an integrated housing and recovery model for people with severe and persistent mental illnesses: the Doorway program. *Australian Health Review* vol. 41, pp. 573-581. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1071/AH16055>

hospital costs, equating to a cost reduction associated with fewer emergency department and inpatient admissions of almost \$11,000 per patient.³¹

- ◆ Home Wellbeing: a part of the Toward Home Alliance (Adelaide) provides mental health and nursing care and supports access to mainstream health services as well as ongoing support to people once they are housed.³²
- ◆ cohealth (Melbourne): provides a community health team to support individuals and families. Services include primary care and specialist services such as homeless outreach mental health services, outreach alcohol and other drug support, mobile clinical services (e.g. GP, Hep C vaccinations, COVID-19 testing), access to dental care, medical practitioners, nurses and allied health professionals such as counsellors, social workers, dietitians, podiatrists and physiotherapists, and homelessness support services.³³

11.2 Issues with siloed health services and models of care

Drawing on the experience and research of Network members the paper (p12) emphasises that - Siloed health services and models of care do not work well for this population group, because:

- The health needs of people experiencing homelessness are often multiple and complex.
- Contacting and navigating health services is often overwhelming or impeded by practical barriers (such as access to and cost of transport or not having a phone or address to be reminded of appointments).
- There may be a low level of trust of health services (and government agencies) because of past negative experiences (or people are excluded from services due to criteria or after having multiple missed attendances).
- Trauma is pervasive, both from experiences prior to homelessness and while experiencing homelessness.
- The transient nature of homelessness makes comprehensive medical care difficult. Services need to be available in a multitude of settings and provide numerous touchpoints for people to feel safe and supported in accessing care wherever they are.

11.3 Wide endorsement of a national homelessness and health equity framework

The Network has identified a critical need for a National homelessness and health equity framework. This is endorsed by:

- Australian Healthcare and Hospitals Association
- Institute for Urban Indigenous Health
- Launch Housing
- Centre for Health in All Policies Research Translation

³¹ Tuson M, Wood L, Wood I, Vallesi S 2022. The Homeless Healthcare Hub: Evaluation Snapshot, August 2022. Institute for Health Research, UNDA. https://api.research-repository.uwa.edu.au/ws/portalfiles/portal/193666269/Hub_evaluation_report_final.pdf

³² Sonder Better Care Better Health 2022. Strategic Plan (2022-2027).

<https://sonder.net.au/app/uploads/2023/05/Sonder-Strategic-Plan-2022-2027.pdf>

³³ cohealth 2023 <https://www.cohealth.org.au>

- Royal Perth Hospital
- Neami National
- Institute for Healthcare Improvement
- Mercy Foundation
- Ruah Community Services
- End Street Sleeping

The health equity framework should be reflected in the National Housing and **Ending Homelessness** Plan.

Recommendation 13: National Homelessness and Health Equity Framework - The Department of Health should develop a National Homelessness and Health Equity Framework for healthcare to homeless and vulnerable communities with high utilisation of acute healthcare, that:

- Includes a dedicated, adequate and ongoing funding stream through Primary Health Networks (PHNs) to better address the urgent healthcare needs of people experiencing homelessness.
- Is informed by a working group that considers how to better meet the health needs of people experiencing homelessness within new and existing Commonwealth policy frameworks – including the National Housing and **Ending Homelessness** Plan.

12. Close the Homelessness Gap to support better outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples

The work of ending homelessness is entirely bound up in the work of de-colonisation and reconciliation. Efforts must improve to end systemic racism and to Close the Gap in the housing and homelessness indicators for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians.

The Churchill Fellowship research in the US and Canada highlighted that Australia, like them, was founded on stolen land. This is bound into our identity that land ownership is part of what is seen as success - convicts in Australia and the US were given land when they were released. The Fellowship research didn't identify great practice beyond meeting with a range of people who recognised the problem and were committed to walking alongside First Nations people, and people of colour, to address what we too often don't call out for what it is in Australia, systemic racism.

12.1 Grow a strong and sustainable Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations sector and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workforce

The Fellowship research highlighted how a strong and sustainable Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workforce and community-controlled sector - delivering high-quality services to meet the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people across the country, is essential to efforts to end homelessness.

Recommendation 14: Grow the Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations Sector -

Consider how as part of the National Plan and the renegotiated National Agreement efforts can be redoubled, as committed to in the National Agreement on Closing the Gap, to build the Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations (ACCO) sector, in particular those organisations that work on preventing and ending homelessness.

Recommendation 15: Grow the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workforce - Better support and grow the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workforce in services working in homelessness response systems.

Recommendation 16: Improve Cultural Safety - Support the establishment of an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Ending Homelessness Network to improve cultural safety in efforts to end homelessness within existing homelessness response systems, including to:

- provide a space for peer-to-peer support,
- develop training resources and cultural engagement protocols,
- ensure Indigenous data sovereignty,
- share best practices, and
- better support the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workforce within the existing housing, homelessness and other related sectors.

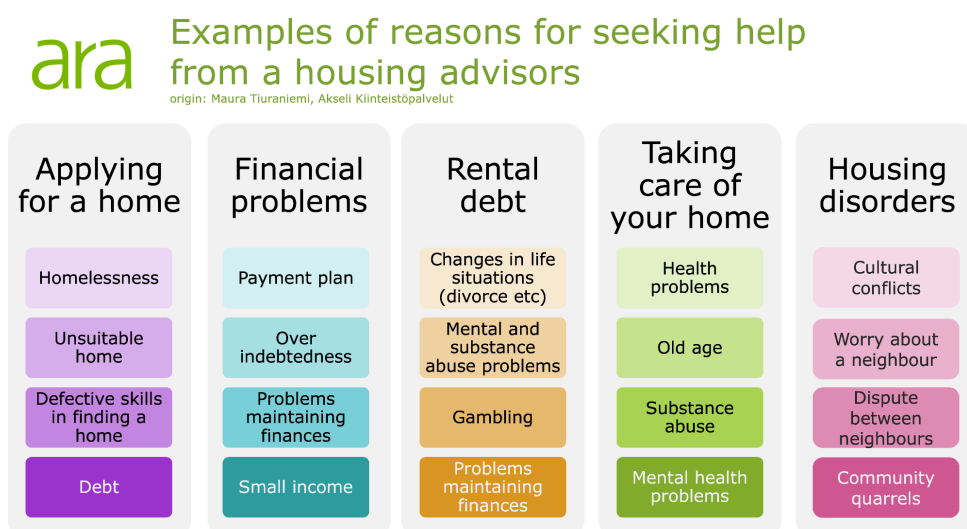
13. Establish a National Homelessness Early Intervention Service

Prevention needs to be a bigger part of our homelessness systems. Current efforts are overwhelmingly geared to respond to the problem, increasingly to resolve it, but not to prevent it.

13.1 Finnish Housing Advisors Prevention Program

Finland stood out in the Churchill Fellowship research as undoubtedly the world leader in efforts to end homelessness. One of the less well-known elements of their strategy is the early intervention or prevention service. There are many factors that make it difficult to directly translate activity from Finland to Australia, but the national prevention service is one that could and should be adopted in Australia.

The Finnish Housing agency ARA, have funded a national housing advice or counselling program, a preventative service that works with people before homelessness becomes an issue. Essentially it's the 'Lifeline' for housing. The reasons people seek help are quite diverse.

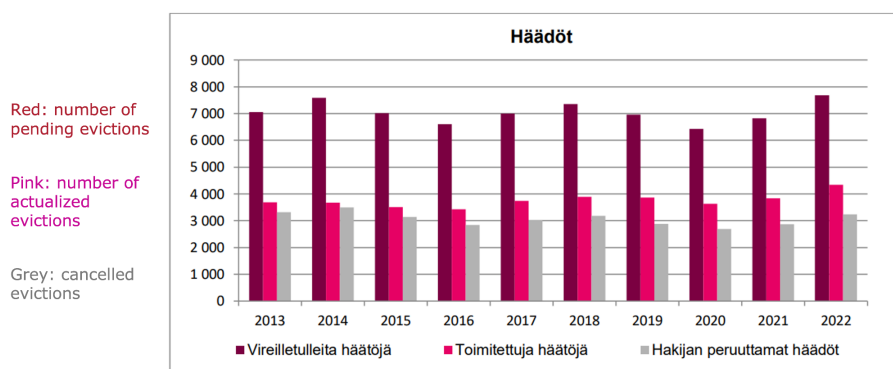


(Image: Shared Presentation re Homelessness Prevention workers, ARA, Finland)

The main job of Housing Advisors is to prevent evictions. Housing Advisors work in either local government agencies or non government organisations and have a Social Work degree.

ARA runs a community of practice or network to support the Housing Advisors who generally work alone. They provide training and support to facilitate this community of practice.

Finland has very good data on how many evictions there are, and what the costs of these evictions are, for all concerned. Because of their interventions, about half of the pending evictions don't actually happen.



(Image: Shared Presentation re Homelessness Prevention workers, ARA, Finland)

Finland has also studied eviction costs. They range from €1,600 to €21,400 - the average cost is €6,300 + an average rental debt of €4,300 = €10,300 loss of income for housing providers. Providing housing tenancy officers is substantially cheaper when you consider all the follow-on costs to the housing organisation, the individual and the community.

13.2 Investing to prevent homelessness

We need to ‘turn off the tap’ as the Institute of Global Homelessness often describes it, or prevent more and more people from experiencing homelessness in the first place.

Increasingly there are effective, impressive, but generally small scale, early intervention programs in Australia. Understandably, it is hard to take funds from a crisis part of the system, while the system is in crisis, and invest upstream. The States are primarily responsible for the existing system and struggle with this.

It makes sense therefore for the Commonwealth, as part of broader reform efforts, to invest in services that prevent homelessness from occurring. This need not require the Commonwealth to enter directly into commissioning homelessness services - something it has to date largely not done - but could require a broadly nationally consistent model to be rolled out.

Recommendation 17: National Homelessness Prevention Service - Invest in a National Homelessness Prevention Service, modelled on the Finish Housing Advisers Prevention program.

14. Build and upgrade more Social and Affordable Housing

Housing ought to be a right in Australia, just as access to health care or aged care is. It currently is not because we lack sufficient investment and supply of affordable housing.

A credible National Housing and **Ending Homelessness** Plan needs to incorporate all the recommendations above. Broader structural change is also required to sustain an end to chronic homelessness and to support efforts to end all forms of homelessness.

Recommendation 18: Build and upgrade more Social and Affordable Housing – Commit to substantially increase investment to expand Australia’s social and affordable housing supported by job creation measures.

15. Make income support liveable

It is broadly understood and has been conclusively demonstrated, that the current rate of the JobSeeker payment, and other income support, is not enough for people to stay above the poverty line and to avoid being driven into homelessness.³⁴

Australia’s social safety net should allow people to afford to put a roof over their heads and food on the table.

Recommendation 19: Increase Income Support – Commit to substantially increase investment in income support as part of the development of a National Housing and **Ending Homelessness** Plan.

16. Address ‘upstream’ system failures

There are a range of other structural factors that impact homelessness in Australia, which require greater consideration. For example, how child protection systems drive young people into homelessness, outdated drug and alcohol policies, Closing the Gap, and how other ‘upstream’ systems fail.

The Advance to Zero Framework sets out a series of approaches and activities that seek to address these at a local level. Investment in scaling the Advance to Zero Framework will help address local system failures. Sustained engagement and leadership from the Commonwealth Government is needed to ensure these efforts are successful. The National Plan needs to include a focus on addressing structural and systemic factors impacting homelessness.

Recommendation 20: Sustained engagement and leadership by the Commonwealth Government – Commit to sustained engagement and leadership by the Commonwealth Government to provide a focus on addressing upstream system failures impacting homelessness.

³⁴ Raise the Rate for Good Campaign 2023. <https://www.raisetherate.org.au>

17. Better prepare for the effects of climate change

17.1 Benefits of the Advance to Zero Framework, Tools and Data

People experiencing homelessness often become displaced and disconnected from support during climate disasters. Effective service support to those most in need are critical during and following climate disasters. Some communities across Australia have identified the Advance to Zero Framework By-Name List data tool as beneficial in supporting appropriate community preparedness and responses to disasters for people experiencing homelessness.

Communities who implement By-Name tools better are prepared in the event of a disaster. Participating support services are already working collaboratively to complete a common screening tool and to coordinate responses to support individuals and families experiencing homelessness.

The data in the list enables key vulnerable individuals and families in the community who are engaged with participating support services to be identified. The data can also help locate and contact vulnerable people during a crisis and provide information on key presenting needs that have already been identified. This can be used to help plan the extent of support that may be required such as for shelter, healthcare, financial support and mental health support. By-Name tools also promote and support a collaborative approach between services, including other services that may be involved in disaster relief and response work, to ensure people experiencing homelessness can get the help they need.

The AAEH briefing document - *Advance to Zero Framework and Disaster Resilience* includes case studies on how By-Name Lists have helped communities in New South Wales, Queensland and South Australia.³⁵

Recommendation 21: Leverage the Advance to Zero Framework and By-Name List tool – Invest in By-Name List tools and Advance to Zero community-led ending homelessness efforts to support communities to better prepare for, and respond to, the effects of climate change.

³⁵ Australian Alliance to End Homelessness 2023. Advance to Zero Framework and Disaster Resilience - Briefing Document. <https://aaeh.org.au/assets/docs/Advance-to-Zero-Framework-and-Disaster-Resilience.pdf>

18. Conclusion

Not only is homelessness solvable; it is necessary. Having a safe, secure, affordable home is not a luxury. It is a fundamental human need. There is no time to lose and much to be done.

If it is to be effective the National Plan must recognise that homelessness is preventable and solvable in Australia. It must value all individuals and families in our communities. It must include actions to reshape the social, political and economic systems that allow homelessness to continue. It must distinguish the homelessness service system and an ending homelessness system.

The National Plan must be transformational. It must demonstrate a joint Australian, state and territory government ambition for a national ending homelessness plan.

It must be a National Housing and **Ending Homelessness** Plan committed to improving the lives of people experiencing or at risk of homelessness and to creating a more inclusive, just Australian community.

The AAEH would welcome the opportunity to provide further guidance and advice to inform the development of the National Plan.

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