



# Advance to Zero (AtoZ): Connections Week toolkit

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# Connections Week toolkit

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This is the second edition of the Connections Week toolkit. Information in this toolkit has been extracted and updated from original content that was prepared and informed by a range of partners of the AAEH, including the Mercy Foundation, Micah Projects, the End Street Sleeping Collaboration, Launch Housing and Ruah Community Services. It is available as a free community resource.

Further information about each of these organisations can be found at:

- [Mercy Foundation](#)
- [Micah Projects](#)
- [End Street Sleeping Collaboration](#)
- [Ruah Community Services](#)
- [Launch Housing](#)



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## 1. About this toolkit

This toolkit is designed to help your community plan and deliver a Connections Week – a key step in the early stages of the [Advance to Zero \(AtoZ\)](#) journey. Where the [Advance to Zero: Getting started toolkit](#) sets out the overall path to becoming an AtoZ community, this guide takes you deeper into one of the most practical and powerful first actions: running a Connections Week. A Connections Week helps your community:

- Build a by-name list of people experiencing homelessness
- Gain a shared understanding of your local housing and support needs
- Strengthen collaboration across services and sectors
- Kickstart advocacy and momentum to end homelessness in your community.

This document provides both context and practical guidance. You'll find an overview of the strategies and principles of a Connections Week campaign, as well as step-by-step advice for planning, running and following up on a Connections Week.

If you're just beginning your AtoZ journey, use this toolkit alongside the [Getting started toolkit](#) to see how Connections Week fits into your broader strategy. For further guidance, reach out to the Australian Alliance to End Homelessness (AAEH) or a local AtoZ partner in your state or territory.

## 2. About Advance to Zero (AtoZ)

Advance to Zero (AtoZ) is a groundbreaking national initiative of the Australian Alliance to End Homelessness (AAEH) that supports local collaborative efforts to end homelessness, starting with rough sleeping – one community at a time. Using a range of proven approaches from around the world, communities are supported not just to address individual instances of homelessness, or even reduce overall homelessness, but to end it altogether.

AtoZ is characterised by three core components:

- **A common strategy:** Everyone working together with a shared strategy to end homelessness.
- **By-name data:** Building a real-time, community-wide list of individuals experiencing homelessness to inform decision-making.
- **A Housing First systems change approach:** Coordinating services, improving systems and advocating for lasting solutions.

Read the [About Advance to Zero fact sheet](#) to learn more.

### 3. What are Connections Weeks?

A Connections Week (formerly known as a Registry Week) is a key tool in the Advance to Zero approach. It's a focused, community-led event to:

- Identify by name every person in the community who is sleeping rough and/or experiencing long-term homelessness
- Understand their health, housing and support needs by using a standardised survey tool called the **Australian Homelessness Vulnerability Triage Tool (AHVTT)**
- Share findings with the community and decision-makers to build momentum for housing solutions.

Over the course of five days, trained teams of volunteers and service providers conduct outreach surveys, analyse the data and present the results back to the community on the final day.

Connections Weeks are not research projects or street counts. Instead, they're a way of knowing everyone in your community experiencing homelessness by name and beginning the process of finding safe housing for each person – all while building out a bigger picture of your community's unique housing and support needs.

#### **Why run a Connections Week?**

Running a Connections Week offers your community a number of key benefits, including:

##### **A way to know your local homelessness situation**

A Connections Week helps a community to identify by name every individual and family requiring safe, permanent and sustainable housing. Through knowing everyone by name, the work of permanently housing and appropriately supporting each person can truly begin. Building this by-name list is a core part of the Advance to Zero approach.

##### **Build local understanding of housing and support needs**

Understanding the real-time demand for housing and support services in each community also helps understand the level of housing and support supply that their community requires to end homelessness. Once each community sees that the problem is a solvable number, resources can be directed into actions that can assist people into permanent housing. In places where few or no services exist, a Connections Week can also be used to gather data that helps advocate for the services a community needs.

### **Kickstart collaboration**

By being a clear and distinct task that is achievable for a community in the early phases of collaboration, a Connections Week can help you kickstart collaborative work and bring together people from a range of services to work on a single goal.

### **Strengthen advocacy and build momentum**

Connections Weeks events are a proven way of building knowledge about local homelessness situations and gaining support. Managed carefully, de-identified data reported back to the community can be a very useful tool for advocacy and for building community momentum, political will and even identifying new funding opportunities, especially in communities that do not already have the data to make their case.

## **4. Connections Week methodology**

Each Connections Week consists of four major activities conducted in immediate succession that can be completed *in one week*:



The activities outlined in this section demonstrate how a concise timeframe can maximise campaign success and community momentum. However, communities may choose to take longer than one week for delivery.

- 1. Training** on day one of Connections Week, keeping it fresh, reducing the risk of knowledge loss and ensuring volunteers are confident and well prepared.
- 2. Surveying** on three consecutive days with data input completed every day.
- 3. Data analysis** daily with final checks on day four when all surveys are submitted.
- 4. Community briefing** on day five, or as soon as possible after the week, to keep momentum going.

## Overview of the four activities

### 1. Training

- Held at the start of Connections Week for all volunteers, workers, team leaders and organisers.
- Provides instruction on Connections Week processes and the **Australian Homelessness Vulnerability Triage Tool (AHVTT)**.
- Introduces all participants to each other, building a shared understanding of the broader campaign.
- Reinforces collective purpose and strengthens a sense of community across teams and organisations.

### 2. Surveying

- Survey teams meet for three consecutive early mornings (this can be on days two, three and four) to conduct outreach before dawn in public spaces.
- Focus is on engaging people sleeping rough, but can also include people residing in cars, motels, crisis accommodation or at service hubs.
- Day and evening survey shifts may be scheduled to reach people at different service points (e.g., soup kitchens, motels).
- Surveys are completed using the AHVTT and entered into a secure database daily.
- After three days, the community has a clear, real-time snapshot of local housing need and indicative support requirements.

### 3. Analysis

- While survey data is entered and reviewed daily for completeness and accuracy, final quality checks occur on day four once all surveys are submitted.
- Analysis includes: Number of people surveyed; demographics and health needs; history of homelessness; acuity and other psychosocial indicators

### 4. Day five: Community briefing

- Held on the final day of Connections Week (or the week afterwards, if you prefer). Non-identifiable data is presented to the community and to local/state decision-makers.
- Information shared summarises key findings and gives insight into the nature and scale of homelessness locally.
- All community members including volunteers, workers, local leaders, media and service providers are encouraged to attend.

Here is what a typical Connections Week schedule can look like over once week. (A concise timeframe can maximise campaign success and community momentum, however, some communities may choose to take slightly longer than one week for delivery).

	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
	<b>Day one: Training</b>	<b>Day two: Surveying</b>	<b>Day three: Surveying</b>	<b>Day four: Surveying and data analysis</b>	<b>Day five: Community briefing</b>
4:30am		Surveys completed in public space	Surveys completed in public space	Surveys completed in public space	
5:30am					
6:30am					
7:30am					Present Connections Week findings
8:30am				Final surveys completed at services	Distribute media release of findings and call to action
9:30am	Connections Week training				
10:30a m		Surveys completed at services throughout the day	Surveys completed at services throughout the day		
11:30am					
12:30p m				Analysis of Connections Week findings	
1:30pm					
2:30pm					
3:30pm					
4:30pm					
5:30pm					

## 5. Establishing and using a by-name list

Connections Week informs immediate follow-up work by services finding the fastest and most appropriate ways to get people experiencing homelessness into permanent housing.

Information collected through a Connections Week event is used to establish a community's by-name list. Using this list, partner organisations work together (through service coordination meetings) to triage people experiencing homelessness based on urgency and vulnerability, ensuring people are matched with the most appropriate housing and support as soon as possible.

People who move into housing are removed from the by-name list. Services continue to add new people to the list by completing AHVTT surveys when they meet. This builds an evidence base of inflow trends and helps a community to understand:

- By name, who is homeless in their community
- What each person's health, support and housing needs are
- Who and how many people and families have been permanently housed (and supported, if also required).

A by-name list is an effective and timely tool to understand and end homelessness in your community. With a well-maintained by-name list, you do not need to conduct street counts or any other methodology to understand the extent of homelessness locally.

## 6. The Australian Homelessness Vulnerability Triage Tool (AHVTT)

### 6.1 The AHVTT

The AHVTT is a tool that helps communities understand the needs of people experiencing homelessness. It takes the form of a survey that homelessness services go through in conversation with a person to learn about their housing, health and support needs. There are three AHVTT surveys: individual, family and youth.

Like a hospital emergency department, the AHVTT helps to triage by identifying who has the most urgent needs and what type of support or housing is most appropriate. This makes sure people are connected with the right help as quickly as possible.

The AHVTT was developed by the Australian Alliance to End Homelessness with partners. Input from frontline workers, First Nations representatives and people with lived experience was vital in making sure the tool reflects people’s real experiences of homelessness and their immediate needs. The AHVTT replaces the previous tool known as the VI-SPDAT.

When looked at together, de-identified AHVTT data can also show what resources are missing in a community and help advocate for the changes needed to end homelessness.

[Learn more about the AHVTT](#), or reach out to the AAEH or other local AtoZ partners in your state/territory for more information or help.

## 6.2 Conditions for using the AHVTT in Australia

The AHVTT is available for use free of charge to anyone who has been trained to administer the survey.

Reach out to the AAEH or other local AtoZ partners in your state/territory for more information about training or use.

# 7. Planning a Connections Week

Connections Weeks are intensive, community-led campaigns that require careful planning, strong collaboration and broad engagement. The following steps offer guidance on how to set up, run and sustain an effective and inclusive Connections Week in your community.

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## 7.1 Timing

Successful Connections Weeks take time to prepare and coordinate. The lead time required will vary depending on how established your local networks are and the broader political or sector context.

- Allow **3-6 months of preparation**, depending on the level of existing community collaboration and external factors.
- Choose a week with **minimal competing demands** by checking school holidays, public holidays, parliamentary sitting weeks and sector event calendars (e.g. Homelessness Week, Anti-Poverty Week).
- If you are running the event in one week, you’ll need to prioritise these key days:
  - ◆ **Monday**: A full-day training session for all participants.

- ◆ **Friday:** A showcase and results event for media, local leaders, government and campaign partners.

If your activity will run in a timeframe longer than a week, allocate key days, aiming to complete the activity as rapidly as possible to maintain momentum.

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## 7.2 Create a stakeholder map

Connections Weeks are most effective when they bring together diverse perspectives and contributions. Mapping your stakeholders early will help ensure that all parts of the community are represented and involved.

- Engage people from a **range of sectors**: housing providers (public, community, private), specialist homelessness services (SHS), broader community services, local government (particularly public space teams), state agencies and Members of Parliament.
- Reach out to stakeholders **outside the homelessness sector** – including justice, health, families and community services – for fresh insights and added capacity.
- Don't overlook **non-traditional partners** such as faith communities, RSLs, real estate agencies and local businesses or corporates.
- Expect your partnerships to extend beyond Connections Week. It is in everyone's best interest to solve homelessness in their community – not just the interest of the community services.

👉 Use a **stakeholder map** (ask your AtoZ coach for a sample) to visualise your network and identify any gaps in representation.

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## 7.3 Build a strong local team with critical partners

At the heart of a successful campaign is a committed and collaborative local team. This group drives the planning process, sets the tone for the campaign and helps maintain focus on housing outcomes.

- Start small. Focus your initial energy on a **core group of committed partners** before expanding to a wider group who may require more time to get on board.
- Identify a lead agency from the **community sector** to coordinate logistics. This reflects the community-owned ethos of Connections Week.
- Recognise the vital roles of **government, businesses, faith groups and civic leaders** as enablers and contributors to the campaign.

- Consider phased engagement – for example:
  - ◆ **Police** may provide intelligence early but become more publicly involved post-week.
  - ◆ **State housing departments** are essential early collaborators but will take a more active role after Connections Week as the focus turns to housing supply.

👉 Develop a **partnership agreement** to clarify expectations, roles and contributions (ask your AtoZ coach for a sample).

With your partner organisations, establish regular **planning group meetings** to:

1. **Set the foundations**  
Establish a shared vision, common goals and ways of working, including how decisions, recognition and resources will be shared.
2. **Coordinate planning and implementation**  
Meeting frequency will shift as the campaign evolves – less often in early stages, more frequently closer to the Connections Week, and then recalibrated post-week as needed.
3. **Maintain focus and momentum**  
As new challenges and opportunities emerge, the group can help prioritise work that directly supports housing outcomes through a Housing First approach.

👉 Ask your AtoZ coach for a sample **meeting agenda**.

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## 7.4 Involve the broader community

Broad community engagement helps build awareness, harness local goodwill, and create lasting public support. It can help you:

- **Recruit volunteers** for Connections Week roles.
- Increase **campaign visibility** and understanding through media and online channels.
- Build **relationships** that support permanent housing, healthcare and ongoing support pathways.

## Volunteer engagement

Volunteers can support you in many ways, including surveying, logistics, hospitality, admin and data processing. A well-managed process to recruit, support and recognise community volunteers can help **build public momentum** and strengthen community ownership, bolstering your campaign.

- To assist this, consider developing:
  - ◆ A volunteer handbook or manual
  - ◆ Volunteer flyers and role descriptions
  - ◆ Commitment cards and thank-you certificates

👉 Ask your AtoZ coach to show you sample **volunteer documents**.

## Media engagement

Thoughtful engagement with media can help communicate your message and gain public support, but it's important to approach this strategically and with care.

- Tailor messaging to the audience and the medium. Stay focused on the **key message: ending homelessness through permanent housing**.
- Build relationships with trusted journalists and offer training for peer advocates to share their stories safely and confidently.
- **Media releases and articles** can help raise awareness. Use campaign websites and social media to share resources and invite involvement – but ensure you have the capacity to manage these platforms effectively.
- Develop a **media strategy** that includes:
  - ◆ Clear key messages
  - ◆ Consent processes for any personal stories
  - ◆ Guidelines for safe and ethical storytelling.

## Storytelling with care

- Stories are powerful, but protecting the **dignity, privacy and rights** of people experiencing homelessness is essential.
- Participation in media stories should be **voluntary, informed and never linked to housing assistance**.
- Work with people who are already housed or well-supported if media interest is high, and avoid impromptu interviews during survey activities.

**Insider tip:** Once public interest grows, campaign messages can take on a life of their own. Reduce risks by preparing clear public messaging and setting boundaries around volunteer and media participation, especially on social media. Unless

specifically trained, it's best that survey volunteers refrain from posting during the Connections Week.

👉 Ask your AtoZ coach for sample **media releases and social media guidelines** used in previous campaigns.

## 7.5 Consider funding opportunities

Funding a Connections Week doesn't have to be expensive. Many communities share costs across partner organisations or secure small grants.

- Seek **small financial contributions** from partner organisations or approach local businesses, philanthropy, or government agencies.
- A short-term project worker (3 to 4 months) is often funded to coordinate activities. Typical costs include:
  - ◆ Project worker salary
  - ◆ Survey gratuities (\$15–\$20 cash)
  - ◆ Printing, catering, venue hire for training
- Optional extras: branded t-shirts, lanyards, or hoodies for volunteers to help create visibility and unity.

👉 Ask your AtoZ coach for a sample **project worker job description**.

## 7.6 Plan Connections Week logistics

Early planning helps ensure a smooth and safe week for volunteers and survey respondents.

- **Connections HQ/hub:**

Establish a **central meeting place** for team briefings (usually from 4:30am), supply collection and breakfast debriefs.

  - ◆ Needs access to toilets, kitchen, parking, and Wi-Fi.
  - ◆ Could be a service provider's office, church or community hall.
- **Supplies:**

Checking in at headquarters each morning rather than simply meeting at the first designated survey location allows the organising team to ensure all teams have the supplies they need. These include:

  - ◆ Survey kits (clipboards, AHVTT surveys, pens)

- ◆ Torches, maps, lanyards, hand sanitiser, water
- ◆ Cash gratuities, snacks or breakfast packs
- ◆ First aid kit and emergency contact list

→ **Transport:**

Plan travel to and from the Connections HQ in advance.

- ◆ One **vehicle and driver** (who is familiar with the local area) per team
- ◆ Use **fully insured** work vehicles and/or staff cars
- ◆ Collect and record vehicle insurance and driver licence details

👉 Ask your AtoZ coach for a template that can be used to record **private car usage** details.

→ **Surveying people:**

With a genuine, assertive and sensitive approach, most people are willing to participate in the survey. However, a small number of people may still decline.

- ◆ Offer a cash gratuity and provide a consent form
- ◆ Record observational details for people who decline (e.g. age, gender, location)
- ◆ Provide breakfast or snack to all, regardless of participation
- ◆ Volunteer training includes guidance on respectfully waking people and managing sensitive conversations

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## 7.7 Workplace health and safety

Connections Week involves early mornings, low light and outdoor environments. A strong safety plan is essential.

- Develop a comprehensive OH&S plan (see Appendix VII)
- Ensure all volunteers attend training and sign required forms
- Include protocols for:
  - ◆ Entering bushland or squats
  - ◆ Hourly check-ins by phone or text
  - ◆ Safe handling of gratuities
  - ◆ Wearing ID or high-vis vests (borrowed from partners or custom printed)
  - ◆ Confidentiality of personal and health information
- Assign experienced staff to respond to incidents or support teams on the ground.

👉 Ask your AtoZ coach for a sample **OH&S policy and an incident form.**

## 7.8 Training

Generally held on the Monday morning of your Connections Week (4-hour session), training prepares volunteers for their role and builds a shared understanding of the week's goals and safety expectations.

The session sets the tone and energy for the week and allows all volunteers and teams to meet each other. It is also an ideal opportunity for ensuring all legal, administrative and other documentation has been completed by participants.

- All volunteers must attend training to participate in the Connections Week.
- Training delivered by accredited facilitators (talk to your local AAEH contact)
- Covers purpose of Connections Week, safety protocols, how to administer the survey, logistics and team roles.

## 7.9 Analysis

A unique aim of Connections Week is for results to inform immediate action. This requires a rapid turnaround time, meaning you will need to start preparing at least one month prior so that data can be entered and checked quickly.

- Train a small local data team in advance
- Enter and clean data progressively during the week
- Set a midday cut-off on the last surveying day for final data entry and quality checks
- Prepare top-level results and key insights to share at the community briefing (templates for this can be prepared in advance).

👉 **Reach out to the AAEH** or other local AtoZ partners in your state/territory to see if they can help with this if you need.

## 7.10 Community briefing

The community briefing shares results, celebrates volunteer efforts and marks the transition to action.

- Held at the end of Connections Week (typically Friday)

- Invite service partners, volunteers, local leaders and media
- Present high-level results and key stories
- Include reflections or thanks from volunteers and local leaders
- Put a call out to government and community housing providers and (in some cases) the private rental system to pledge to provide the houses needed.
- Reaffirm the next steps: using the data to match people to housing.

👉 Ask your AtoZ coach for a sample **presentation slide deck**.

## 7.11 Housing pledge event

A Housing Pledge event (which can be incorporated into the community briefing) connects survey results to housing commitments and can accelerate progress toward housing people quickly.

- Invite housing providers (government, community and private) to pledge access to housing
- Invite support providers to pledge wraparound supports or brokerage
- Clearly link pledges to people identified during Connections Week
- Consider hosting this event during or shortly after the week.

## 8. After Connections Week

After Connections Week, your activities as part of an AtoZ community will shift gear – with a greater focus on lining up housing and support, creating a coordinated access system for prioritisation and matching, supporting people to stay housed and integrating healthcare.

The relationships that you create during Connections Week – and during the rest of your establishment journey (what we call action planning) – will set foundations and have longer term benefits as you embark together on AtoZ.

👉 See [Advance to Zero: Getting Started \(toolkit\)](#) for more information about AtoZ, the steps you can follow to establish your AtoZ community and what happens next.