

A3HN calls on the Federal Government to address homelessness as a health emergency, solvable through inclusive healthcare

Homelessness is as much a health issue as a housing issue, and it is solvable through inclusive healthcare, according to a position paper launched by the Australian Health, Housing and Homelessness Network (A3HN) this week.

A3HN's position paper, [Ending Homelessness Through Inclusive Healthcare](#), describes the significantly poorer health of people who experience homelessness, and what the Federal Government needs to do to improve health outcomes and accelerate efforts to end homelessness across the nation.

The paper puts forward two key recommendations to the Federal Government:

1. Establish a dedicated ongoing funding stream to better address the urgent healthcare needs of people experiencing homelessness;
2. Establish a Department of Health and Aged Care working group with PHNs, community health and homelessness sector representatives to consider how we can better meet the health needs of people experiencing homelessness within new and existing Commonwealth policy frameworks – including the National Housing and Homelessness Plan.

David Pearson, CEO of the Australian Alliance to End Homelessness (AAEH) which supports the A3HN, states: “Despite having a universal health system, not all Australians enjoy health equity. Visiting a GP is not easy for people when they are sleeping rough – they are busy managing safety, food and sleep, and often too exhausted. Access to appointments is made more difficult with no access to a phone or the internet.

“Homelessness is as much a health issue as a housing issue. These issues are inseparable and need to be better addressed, which is why we call on the Federal Minister for Health and Aged Care to respond to the recommendations set out in this paper,” Pearson concludes.

The paper also highlights the flow-on effect of barriers to accessing primary care and preventative health services, namely the ability to provide early intervention. Many people experiencing homelessness frequent emergency departments for conditions that could have been managed or prevented with earlier access to health care.

“With treatment for disease and illness often being provided at advanced stages, this comes with higher rates of admission and longer stays in hospital, putting additional strain on hospitals for conditions that could have been managed earlier or even prevented,” says Nicole Bartholomeusz, A3HN co-chair and CEO of [cohealth](#).

All too often, healthcare providers have to send people back into conditions that are adversely impacting their health.

“Not only are these health interventions costly and unsustainable, they do not adequately address the complex health and social needs of those experiencing homelessness. Raising awareness of these health impacts of homelessness, and sharing approaches to addressing them, is vital if we are to reduce the toll on people’s health,” says Bartholomeusz.

Moreover, experiencing homelessness can [reduce life expectancy by approximately 30 years](#). Many of these deaths and adverse health outcomes are preventable with tailored, primary health interventions, and robust data collection to guide intervention and track progress.

The A3HN brings together leaders from across the health, housing and homelessness sectors to better integrate policy, research and practice aimed at supporting a health-informed end to homelessness in Australia.

“We recognise the catalytic role these sectors have by working together and shifting us beyond awareness-raising activities to collective action. This cross-sector collaboration will enable us to achieve better health outcomes for those experiencing homelessness and move us closer towards our common goal: to make homelessness rare, brief and once-off,” says Bartholomeusz.

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About the Australian Health, Housing & Homelessness Network

The Australian Health, Housing and Homelessness Network (A3HN) works to support a health-informed end to homelessness in Australia. We bring together experts, researchers, practitioners and people with a lived experience of these sectors to support each other’s efforts to end homelessness through collaboration, advocacy, events and knowledge sharing.

The network is coordinated by the Australian Alliance to End Homelessness and was established to help support the implementation of the Advance to Zero campaign goal of demonstrating that ending homelessness is possible, community by community.

To learn more, visit aaeh.org.au/a3hn.