

Fact sheet: What is a by-name list (BNL)?

How communities use shared data to end homelessness

Last updated: Mar 30, 2026

Audience: General – anyone new to Advance to Zero or seeking to understand the basics.

What is a by-name list?

A by-name list (BNL) is a real-time list of all known people in a local community who are experiencing homelessness, recorded with their consent. Information is entered and updated by local services to reflect people's current housing situation and support needs. In some cases, people may be included anonymously or with limited identifying information. This shared information helps services work together to offer support, connect people with housing and track who still needs help.

A BNL also helps communities move from responding to homelessness in a fragmented way to working together with a clear, shared understanding of who needs support and what's needed to end homelessness locally. By-name lists are the first step to ending homelessness because we can't solve what we can't see.

What is a by-name list used for?

Traditional homelessness data is often delayed and can't guide day-to-day decisions. By-name lists change this by providing real-time, person-centered information that communities can use to:

- know who's experiencing homelessness right now
- understand the scale and nature of homelessness locally
- triage support for people with the greatest needs, like a hospital emergency department
- coordinate housing and services more effectively
- track how people move in and out of homelessness
- measure whether homelessness is increasing or decreasing
- advocate for the housing, funding and system changes needed to end homelessness.



BNLs support decisions at two levels: the **individual level** (through helping people get housing and support) and the **system level** (through understanding what's working and where change is needed).

Supporting individuals

By-name lists help communities focus on people, not programs. Like a triage system in a hospital emergency department, BNLs allow services to allocate housing and support based on urgency and vulnerability, so that those who need help most are supported first and no one is overlooked.

Supporting systems change and advocacy

As well as coordinating support at the individual level, BNLs can also play an important role in system-level change. BNL data can help identify trends, pressures and gaps in a local system, providing evidence that communities can use to plan services more effectively and advocate for the housing, resources and policy changes needed to end homelessness.

To ensure privacy, any data used for public advocacy or reporting is fully de-identified and aggregated so individuals can't be recognised.

Measuring progress towards ending homelessness

By-name lists provide the data communities use to understand whether they're making progress towards ending homelessness. Within the AtoZ framework, this includes tracking whether homelessness has become rare, brief and once-off – our definition of an end to homelessness.

The emphasis is not on perfect data, but accurate, timely information that helps communities learn, improve and sustain progress.

Frequently asked questions

How is by-name list data collected?

By-name list information is collected and updated by trained frontline workers from local services who are supporting people experiencing homelessness. With informed consent, workers enter and update information as people's circumstances change, helping the list reflect what is happening in the community in real time.

Where is by-name list data stored?

By-name lists are supported through secure databases that are managed locally and vary by state and territory. Each system operates in line with local governance, privacy and service delivery arrangements, while following shared Advance to Zero principles. More detail about database arrangements across Australia is available in the [Advance to Zero databases fact sheet](#).

Is a by-name list a waitlist for housing?

No. A by-name list is not a housing waitlist. It is a tool to help communities coordinate responses, triage support and understand what is needed to end homelessness locally.

Who can access the by-name list?

Only authorised organisations and trained users who are part of the local AtoZ collaboration can access identifiable information, and only with consent.

Does being on a by-name list guarantee housing?

No. Being on a by-name list does not guarantee housing, but it helps communities work together more effectively to connect people with housing and support as opportunities become available.

Is participation mandatory?

No. Inclusion on a by-name list is voluntary and based on informed consent. People can choose what information they share and can withdraw at any time.

Why is local data so important?

Because homelessness is experienced differently in every place. Local, real-time data helps communities respond to their specific circumstances rather than relying on delayed or generalised information.

How do you set up a by-name list?

Your community can take one of two paths in building a by-name list:

1. Build your BNL through your existing community resources. This includes using the Australian Homelessness Vulnerability Triage Tool (AHVTT) to gather initial information.
2. Kickstart your Zero project by hosting a [Connections Week](#) event to bring your community together and proactively gather information about all known people currently sleeping rough and/or experiencing long-term homelessness within that area. Connections Weeks may also use the AHVTT, or similar triage tool, to gather initial data.

Learn more

- **Contact** us at info@aaeh.org.au.
- **Read** the [AtoZ databases fact sheets](#)
- Stay up to date with our **events**: aaeh.org.au/events
- Sign up to our **mailing list**: aaeh.org.au/mailling-list