

MEDIA RELEASE
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‘Invisible homeless deaths’: An estimated 90 people died in Queensland last year while sleeping rough

New research by the [Australian Alliance to End Homelessness](#) (AAEH) and the University of Western Australian (UWA) reveals that an estimated 90 people died while sleeping rough in Queensland last year, with the national estimate standing at 424 deaths¹. However, these numbers are likely to be a significant underestimate because there are no national systems in place to measure data regarding homeless deaths.

This [Homelessness Week](#), the AAEH and Micah Projects are urging the Australian Government to show leadership on this critical issue by urgently commissioning the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) to develop a national homelessness deaths and life expectancy gap reporting framework. The AAEH and Micah Projects also urge the Queensland Government to back this call.

Data regarding reduced life expectancy and causes of death has been widely used to drive efforts in improving better outcomes for many population groups in Australia. We measure road deaths and use this data to drive changes, just as we do with data on the life expectancy gap for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, which holds Australia accountable for ‘closing the gap’ and allows for progress to be tracked and measured.

As there is no consistent data collected or recorded on the deaths of people experiencing homelessness across Australia, this already vulnerable group is rendered further ‘invisible’ to governments – a point that is highlighted by the estimated 424 deaths of people experiencing rough sleeping homelessness across the nation last year. Alarming, **people sleeping rough have a reduced life expectancy of up to 30 years.**

The Queensland and national estimates were drawn from research conducted by the UWA [Home2Health](#) team, which identified 56 people who died while sleeping rough or with a long-term experience of rough sleeping in Perth alone last year. All of the deaths identified in this data have been confirmed by GP or hospital records.

The findings from Home2Health’s research are so significant that they should prompt urgent action by all Australian governments, said AAEH CEO David Pearson.

“This is a national emergency. If 424 people died in a plane crash last year, no expense would be spared in finding out what happened and how we can prevent this from occurring in the future,” said Mr Pearson.

¹ This estimate of national deaths associated with rough sleeping has been calculated using the actual figures from the University of Western Australia’s Home2Health research and extrapolated using the National 2016 Census Data. It has been calculated to raise awareness of the unknown actual number of people who die while sleeping rough or with a long-term experience of sleeping rough in Australia.

“If we are to drive change in this area, we must measure and publicly report what is an all-too-frequent but hidden occurrence in communities across Australia – that people are dying without a safe place to call home.”

Karyn Walsh, CEO of Micah Projects and Chair of AAEH, backs Mr Pearson’s statements and calls for urgent action: “If we treated homelessness like the public health issue that it is, we would be able to prevent the hundreds of senseless deaths among people experiencing homelessness across our nation. It’s critical that we implement a national system for tracking homeless deaths so we can get the death toll down to zero.”

Ending homelessness in Australia is possible, with more and more communities around the world demonstrating their ability to do so. As such, **the AAEH and Micah Projects urge the Queensland Government to support calls for the Australian Government to commission the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) to develop a national homelessness deaths and life expectancy gap reporting framework.**

Developing such a framework would make it possible to understand the extent of homeless deaths in Australia and inform how best to address this critical issue. As set out in this month’s national homelessness publication [Parity](#), the framework should:

- set out how to improve data capture;
- drive more accurate measures of homelessness in hospital and coronial administrative data;
- articulate the number of deaths among people experiencing homelessness (all types of homelessness), the age of death, and cause of death (direct and indirect) at both the local, state/territory and national level, and;
- seek to report such data in as close to real-time as possible.

-ENDS-

David Pearson, CEO of AAEH, and Karyn Walsh, CEO of Micah Projects and Chair of AAEH, are available for media interviews. For media enquiries, please contact:

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About the Australian Alliance to End Homelessness

The [Australian Alliance to End Homelessness](#) (AAEH) is an independent champion for preventing and ending homelessness in Australia – starting with rough sleeping homelessness. The AAEH supports Australian communities to individually and collectively end homelessness. Specifically, they work with local communities at all levels to ensure everyone has access to safe and sustainable housing services and that any incidents of homelessness that do occur are rare, brief and non-recurring.

Micah Projects

[Micah Projects](#) is a not-for-profit organisation committed to providing services and opportunities in the community to create justice and respond to injustice. Micah Projects engages with people experiencing adversity due to poverty, homelessness, mental illness, domestic violence, disability and all forms of discrimination.