



aaeh

australian  
alliance  
to end  
homelessness

**MEDIA RELEASE  
MONDAY 2 AUGUST**

**‘Invisible homeless deaths’: An estimated 20 people died in South Australia 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 20 people died while sleeping rough in South Australia last year, with the national estimate standing at 424 deaths<sup>1</sup>. 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 is 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 also urges the South Australian 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 South Australian 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.

---

<sup>1</sup> 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.

Livia Carusi, South Australian Board Director of AAEH, said that the number of deaths caused by rough sleeping homelessness in South Australia is likely to be far greater than the estimated 20 people.

“Because there is currently no way of measuring the deaths associated with rough sleeping homelessness, there are likely to be many more people who have died on the streets in South Australia that we tragically do not know about,” Ms Carusi said.

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.

“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.”

Ending homelessness in Australia is possible, with more and more communities around the world demonstrating their ability to do so. As such, **the AAEH urges the South Australian 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.

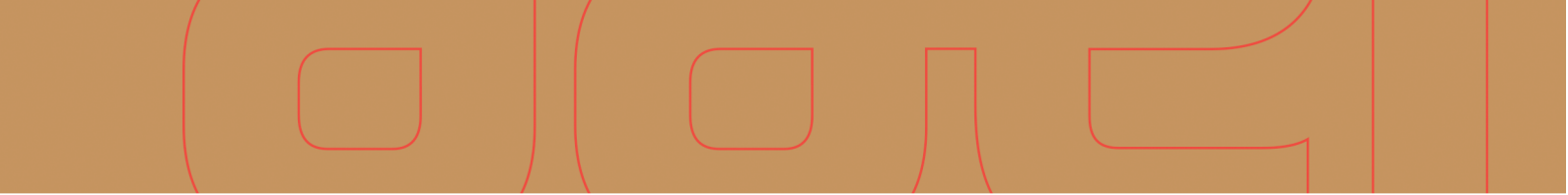
**-ENDS-**

**David Pearson, CEO of AAEH, and Livia Carusi, South Australian Board Director of AAEH, are available for media interviews. For media enquiries, please contact:**

- Dasha Romanowski on 0416 144 959 or [dasha@fiftyacres.com](mailto:dasha@fiftyacres.com)
- Alexandra La Sala on 0466 258 343 or [lex@fiftyacres.com](mailto:lex@fiftyacres.com)

#### **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.