

The logo for the Australian Alliance to End Homelessness (AAEH) features the lowercase letters 'aaeh' in a bold, white, sans-serif font. The letters are contained within a large, thin red outline that forms the shape of the letters.

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## MEDIA RELEASE

7 May 2021

### **Urgent government action needed to ensure people experiencing homelessness can access the COVID-19 vaccine**

**With no plans in place to ensure access to COVID-19 vaccinations for people experiencing homelessness, the Australian Health, Housing and Homelessness Network (A3HN) and the Australian Alliance to End Homelessness (AAEH) are calling for urgent action from the Australian and state governments.**

People experiencing homelessness are among those [most vulnerable to COVID-19 and influenza infections](#), and despite some of the over [116,000 people experiencing homelessness in Australia](#) being included in priority populations for early COVID-19 vaccinations, many, particularly those sleeping rough, will struggle to access the vaccination for a range of reasons.

Currently, those experiencing homelessness in Australia can be vaccinated due to old age, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander identification, chronic medical conditions, severe mental health conditions or disability. However, many do not fall within these prescribed priority groups, leaving thousands of vulnerable Australians experiencing homelessness at risk. Additionally, there is no strategy to ensure those experiencing homelessness have access to vaccinations even if they are in priority groups.

“There are currently too many barriers in place for people experiencing homelessness to receive the COVID-19 vaccine. We urge federal and state governments to immediately work with the sector to resource efforts to remove these barriers,” said David Pearson, CEO of AAEH.

People receiving vaccinations for influenza and COVID-19 are required to visit a doctor or service provider on [three separate occasions](#), including two to four weeks after the COVID-19 vaccination for the flu shot.

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“How is this supposed to occur for people who don’t have a home? It is the view of the Health, Housing and Homelessness Network that if the vaccine rollout is to be successful, the vaccination needs to come with appropriate accommodation,” said Mr Pearson.

In addition, scepticism about the need for COVID-19 vaccinations is [reportedly higher among those experiencing homelessness](#) than the general population, indicating that targeted education is needed to ensure safety among those experiencing homelessness and the wider community.

“People currently experiencing homelessness are a highly mobile group that are at heightened risk of contracting and/or spreading COVID-19. The lessons from this pandemic have demonstrated the need to implement a public health approach – including education, dissemination of information and a plan for follow-up vaccinations,” continued Mr Pearson.

COVID-19 has challenged us to think differently about many things. One of the lessons that our response to the pandemic has taught us is that ending homelessness is possible. The problem with the responses so far is that [only a third of people](#) given emergency accommodation during the pandemic were able to move into long-term housing.

“We need to treat homelessness, particularly rough sleeping homelessness, as much as a health issue as a housing or social welfare issue and most of all, we just can’t leave this issue in the ‘too hard basket’ any longer,” said Mr Pearson.

This lack of planning for an effective vaccine rollout is why the AAEH is continuing to call for the Australian Government to urgently implement a *COVID-19 National Rough Sleeping Homelessness Pandemic Response Plan* – something that has been done in relation to mental health and domestic violence, but not homelessness.

**-ENDS-**

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### **About the Alliance to End Homelessness**

[The Australian Alliance to End Homelessness](https://www.aaeh.org.au) (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.

### **About the Australian Health, Housing and 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 three 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.