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Australian Alliance to End Homelessness media release

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Policy plan launched to ensure people experiencing homelessness are not tipped back out onto the street as we recover from COVID-19

The Australian Alliance to End Homelessness (AAEH) has launched a 7-point policy plan to not just recover from COVID-19 but to ensure we can actually end rough sleeping homelessness across Australia.

AAEH's COVID-19 National Rough Sleeping Homelessness Pandemic Response Plan calls for a health-informed approach to end to homelessness.

“People sleeping rough are an incredibly vulnerable health population, and if they get COVID-19 it will not just be bad for community transmission, it would be fatal for many of them. The best prescription we can provide for people sleeping rough as we recover from this health crisis is housing with support or simply a home – not a hotel room,” said AAEH’s chair Karyn Walsh.

Amongst the communities they work with, the AAEH estimates that more than 5,000 people who were experiencing or at risk of sleeping rough were temporarily sheltered in the first eight weeks of the health pandemic.

AAEH chief executive officer David Pearson says that this is a significant effort, but warns tipping people back onto the streets cannot be an option – and without urgent action it will be the only option for too many people.

“The rates of homelessness before this crisis were unacceptable and rising. If we don’t sustainably address rough sleeping, it will compromise our pandemic recovery response due to the risk of community transmission and place added strain on our health system,” said Mr Pearson.

“If we want people to follow public health directives relating to social distancing, personal hygiene and staying home if unwell, then it needs to be recognised that none of this can be achieved without a home.

We are also seeing a new wave of people at risk of being trapped in rough sleeping as a consequence of the economic crisis.

“However, we must remember that the scale of homelessness in Australia is both preventable and solvable. This paper sets out how we can solve this issue. There has never been a better time to end rough sleeping homelessness in Australia than right now.”

The proposed COVID-19 National Rough Sleeping Homelessness Pandemic Response Plan is broken down into three distinct stages: crisis response, recovery response and long term response.

Temporarily sheltering people sleeping rough has been an important pandemic 'crisis response' but it will not be an effective 'recovery response.' Only housing and support will solve this crisis – and this requires urgent additional Commonwealth and State Government investments.

The policy plan is available online: <https://aaeh.org.au/assets/docs/Publications/Housing-Beyond-COVID.pdf>

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About the 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, we 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.