



Memo to the Movement

To: The Australian Advance to Zero Homelessness Movement
From: The AAEH Chair and CEO
Date: 11 February 2021
Subject: Update on our common assessment and pre-screen tool the VI-SPDAT

Dear Advance to Zero Colleague,

This Memo to the Movement is the first in a series of updates we will provide from time to time about the efforts to end homelessness in Australia, the development of our tools and methodology. These memo's will be available on our website [here](#) and we encourage you to share them with your colleagues and to urge them to sign up for direct updates from the AAEH [here](#).

For those who aren't aware the VI-SPDAT is an essential part of the Advance to Zero Movement in Australia. The Vulnerability Index – Service Prioritisation Decision Assistance Tool, or VI-SPDAT, is a pre-screening tool that is used to better understand the housing and support needs of individuals or families who are experiencing homelessness. Further information about it can be found in the fact sheets available on our website [here](#).

Future of the VI-SPDAT in Australia

Many of you may be aware OrgCode, the creators of the VI-SPDAT, have [indicated](#) some changes to their ongoing support for the use of the tool in the USA. These changes are about the USA and not the VI-SPDAT's use in Australia. Both OrgCode and the AAEH are committed to supporting the ongoing use and development of the VI-SDPAT in the Australian context.

A number of years ago, the AAEH and OrgCode teamed up to develop an Australian version of the tool, and since then we have engaged in an ongoing process of improvement of the Australian version of the tool and its use in the Australian context. This includes:

- The regular provision of training on the use of the tool – see [here](#) for details of this training.
- We are currently working on the development of a self-guided online training module as a refresher resource for people who have already participated in training.
- Led by OrgCode, with the support of many of the AAEH partners, we are reviewing the scoring component of the Australian Version 3 of the tool to ensure its ongoing effectiveness in the Australian context, based on the data from its use in Australia.
- We are seeking funding to develop cultural engagement protocols for the improved use of the VI-SPDAT with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people as well as people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds experiencing homelessness.
- Leaders from across the Advance to Zero movement also meet monthly as part of the Campaign Steering Group to discuss the use of the VI-SPDAT and other tools the AAEH has developed with our varied international partners.

- We have established a health, housing and homelessness network/community of practice to amongst other things support the use of the VI-SPDAT and the advance to zero homelessness methodology in health settings.

There is much to be done, thank you to all of our existing partners who helping us with this and if you are interested in being involved with any of this work, please get in [contact](#).

Recent research in the USA on the use of the VI-SDPAT

Thanks also to those of you who have been in touch with your thoughts on the [study](#) by Associate Professor Courtney Cronley from University of Tennessee. This report looks at the impact of Version 2.0 of the VI-SPDAT in the USA and a range of matters including the intersection of gender, race and the trauma of homelessness.

As practitioners, at the AAEH we wouldn't ordinarily engage with the research community's debates about the VI-SPDAT for one simple reason, there is no alternative to this important tool, and to just get on with our ongoing work of seeking to improve the tool and its use in the Australian context.

In this instance, given the feedback we thought it important to point out the following:

- This report draws on experiences in the south east of the USA, and the conclusions do not align with our experiences in Australia, or the analysis of the data that a number of Australian researchers have undertaken.
- The report, as so often occurs, misunderstands the use of the VI-SPDAT as an assessment tool, rather than a screening tool, hence the importance of the training in its use.
- The VI-SPDAT is not a decision-making tool itself, it is intended to help inform the decision making of practitioners.
- The tool is not intended to be used in isolation, but alongside and within service coordination processes (i.e. the Advance to Zero Campaign) for matching resources to a person's need, it is not a static or stand-alone indicator.
- The purpose of using the VI-SPDAT is not as a data collection or research tool, but about helping people to access housing – this is its primary purpose – and it does so in a standardised way so that we can recognise and highlight the impact that homelessness has on health and wellbeing at both an individual and population level.

One thing that we can all be collectively proud of in recent years is the increased way in which we have all used the data collected from the use of the VI-SPDAT for improved advocacy and to highlight the needs of people sleeping rough in Australia. We need to do more of this.

Meanwhile, both the AAEH and OrgCode are absolutely recognise the need to continue to improve the tool itself and our use of it (though training and other measures). That's why all the activities as set out above that we are undertaking together is so important.

Finally, can we express our sincerest gratitude to Iain De Jong and all the team at OrgCode for their tireless efforts in developing, improving and supporting the use of the VI-SPDAT in Australia.

We hope that his information is of assistance to your work. Further questions, feedback, or offers to assist in our ongoing efforts to improve the tool and its use in Australia are always greatly appreciated.

Sincerely,

**Karyn Walsh - Chair, AAEH
& David Pearson - CEO, AAEH**