

Mr Andrew Wallace MP  
Chair, House of Representatives Standing Committee on Social Policy and Legal Affairs  
PO Box 6021  
Parliament House  
CANBERRA ACT 2600

12 June 2020

Dear Mr Wallace

**Submission to the Inquiry into the Homelessness in Australia**

Thank you for the opportunity to make a submission to this important inquiry.

Despite the common misconception to the contrary, the scale of homelessness in Australia is both preventable and solvable – The Australian Alliance to End Homelessness (AAEH) exists to support communities to individually and collectively achieve this goal.

We work closely with organisations that have supported communities in the United States to end homelessness in twelve communities so far, and seven communities in Canada that have reduced homelessness using a housing first practice known as the Zero Homelessness Methodology (sometimes referred to as the functional zero approach).

The AAEH is an independent champion for preventing and ending homelessness in Australia. It is our view that there has never been a more important time to seek to end rough sleeping homelessness, given the many thousands of people who were, or were at risk, of sleeping rough that have now been temporarily sheltered in response to COVID-19. Urgent action is required to ensure that these people are not forced back out onto the street because of a lack of options. The submission sets out what action we think needs to be taken.

The AAEH works with local communities at all levels to ensure everyone can have access to safe and sustainable housing services and that any incidents of homelessness that do occur are rare, brief and non-recurring. Our membership includes individuals and organisations from a broad range of backgrounds and sectors from across Australia who share our commitment to the vision of preventing and ending all homelessness, starting with those sleeping rough.

This submission sets out:

- PART A - Our response and views on the impacts of COVID-19 on rough sleeping homelessness.
- PART B - The policies needed to end rough sleeping homelessness in Australia.
- PART C - Further background on the AAEH, our international partners and our work.
- PART D - How we have adapted the Zero Homelessness Methodology to support its implementation in Australia.
- PART E – Additional advice regarding specific Committee terms of reference.

It is worth noting that whilst the AAEH seeks to end all homelessness, we have chosen to focus our efforts on starting with rough sleeping homelessness, as this is the type of homelessness that if left unaddressed:

- Can reduce life expectancy by up to 30 years.<sup>1</sup>

- Costs taxpayers more to leave unaddressed than it does to solve.<sup>2</sup>
- Risks compromising Australia's recovery to the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Provides one of the most confronting and visible signs that as a community – Australia is failing its most vulnerable.

Homelessness is a policy choice. It will be the actions of policy makers that enables Australia to not just manage, or even reduce homelessness – but to end it for individuals, population groups, communities and ultimately all of Australia.

We would very much appreciate the opportunity to discuss this submission with the Committee.

Thank you for your work and we look forward to following the recommendations and response to the inquiry.

Kind regards,



**David Pearson**  
**Chief Executive Officer**

## **PART A - Our response and views on the impacts of COVID-19 pandemic on rough sleeping homelessness.**

### **In Summary**

- The Australian Alliance to End Homelessness (AAEH) estimates that amongst the communities that we work with, more than 5,000 people who were sleeping rough or at immediate risk of sleeping rough have been temporarily sheltered in the first eight weeks of this pandemic alone.<sup>3</sup>
- This makes up a significant proportion of the people currently sleeping rough, which according to the last census was 8,200 people.
- This phenomenal effort represents one of the most significant homelessness responses Australia has ever seen, but it is only a first step.
- As we know, we are not through this crisis yet and to get the job done we need a sustainable COVID-19 response to rough sleeping homelessness.

### **A health-informed end to homelessness**

- 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.
- 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. We must prevent this from occurring.
- Temporarily sheltering people sleeping rough has been an important pandemic 'crisis response', but it will not be an effective 'recovery response'.
- The best prescription we can provide for people sleeping rough in this health crisis is housing with support or simply a home, not a hotel room.

### **Why now?**

- Tipping people back onto the streets cannot be an option, but without urgent action it will be the only option for too many people.
- The rates of homelessness before this crisis were unacceptable and rising.
- What's changed is that 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.
- We also know that we're facing a new wave of people at risk of being trapped in rough sleeping as a consequence of the economic crisis that Australia is now experiencing from the COVID-19 pandemic.
- The good news is that despite the common misconception to the contrary, the scale of homelessness in Australia is both preventable and solvable.
- There has never been a better time to end rough sleeping homelessness in Australia than right now.

## **PART B - The policies needed to end homelessness in Australia.**

The Commonwealth Government needs to urgently implement a *COVID-19 National Rough Sleeping Homelessness Pandemic Response Plan* just as it has in relation to mental health and other needed areas.

To be a sustainable response, it needs to address the urgent or crisis needs, the short-term recovery needs and the longer term or structural needs of Australia's homelessness population.

The following are the policies that we have identified as being needed to end homelessness in Australia.

### **Crisis response**

1. **Maintain the crisis response** – State and Territory Governments need to continue their emergency levels of funding until people temporarily accommodated in response to COVID-19 receive a suitable housing placement.
2. **Rapid housing and support** – An immediate permanent housing response is required to support people who were sleeping rough and are now in temporary accommodation as a consequence of COVID-19. Some of this can be provided through the existing social housing stock. However, there simply isn't enough social housing to offer all people temporarily sheltered permanent housing in the short term.
  - a. We estimate that a \$49.4m investment in the first year (falling in the out-years)<sup>4</sup> would enable 2,500 people<sup>5</sup> temporarily sheltered to be provided with an immediate home in the form of a private rental property with support.
  - b. The private rental market has been significantly impacted by the economic consequences of the pandemic which have been compounded by a drastic reduction in permanent migration and temporary visa entries, resulting in a major rise in vacancies.
  - c. This investment includes \$23.4m per year in rental subsidies to individuals entering the private rental market<sup>6</sup> and \$26m in additional support to homelessness services and community housing providers over a year to ensure appropriate personal and tenancy management support.
  - d. Such an investment would generate savings to government in the health and justice areas alone of conservatively \$26 million - which would effectively pay for the funding of homelessness and community housing support costs of the program.<sup>7</sup> Longer term, the provision of permanent housing will result in transitions to employment (and government savings as a result) as well as reducing homelessness and improving education outcomes in the next generation.

### **Recovery response**

3. **A Commitment** – A joint Commonwealth, State, Territory and Local Government commitment (with timelines and targets) to the prevention and elimination of homelessness.
  - a. This commitment should include local and national action plans for the elimination of rough sleeping homelessness with certain population groups, for example Indigenous, youth and family homelessness.
  - b. These action plans should include targets, for example, to end veterans rough sleeping homelessness by 2025 – an eminently achievable goal.
4. **Prevent future homelessness and track progress** by setting a new community standard which sees the goal of community efforts focused on ensuring that any future rough sleeping homelessness is rare, brief

and non-recurring. This will be particularly important for any potential second wave of homelessness brought about by the economic fallout of the COVID-19 pandemic.

- a. A Commonwealth investment of \$3.5m over four years for community-based homelessness responses to set this standard in a range of communities by supporting the establishment of local by-name lists that are then used to improve the coordination and prioritisation of appropriate housing and support to those most in need.
  - b. This investment would see the Zero Homelessness Methodology<sup>8</sup> - successfully implemented in communities across North America - implemented across Australian communities with the support of the Australian Alliance to End Homelessness (AAEH).
  - c. Importantly this approach enables the prioritization of any new housing investment to people experiencing or at greatest risk of rough sleeping homelessness.
5. **An integrated health care response** – Homelessness is as much a health issue as it is a housing issue, both issues need to be addressed together urgently. The failure to do so is why rough sleepers in Australia are likely to die 30 years earlier than people in long-term accommodation. To address this, the AAEH has identified that we need:<sup>9</sup>
- a. **A national health and homelessness policy** – The Federal Government should create a taskforce on health equity, housing and homelessness to develop a national policy response in collaboration with State Governments, Primary Healthcare Networks and the community sector. Included in this policy should be a nation-wide and consistent commitment of ‘no exits into homelessness’ for people temporarily sheltered as a result of COVID-19; as well as people who are discharged from institutional care, including hospitals and prisons.
  - b. **Health and homelessness program** – An assertive intervention program embedded in community homelessness services in every state and territory, featuring flexible medical and outreach service delivery – including primary healthcare and psychiatric response, 365 days a year complementing acute services. The program would cost \$2.5 million per city, plus evaluation costs.
  - c. **A network** – The Commonwealth Government should support the AAEH to establish a National Health, Housing and Homelessness Network with a broad range of health, and community organisations, professionals and people with lived experience participating, to drive the improved integration of the health and homelessness sectors.
  - d. **Funding certainty** – Existing funding arrangements between Primary Healthcare Networks, and health, homelessness and vulnerably-housed services should be secured with a baseline commitment for a five-year period. This will give services the certainty they need to operate with the greatest effectiveness.
  - e. **Funding Equity** – The Federal Government must widen policy provisions to allow medical practitioners to bulk bill patients who have no fixed address and enable bulkbilling for street based and outreach consultations.

#### Long term response

6. **Build more supportive housing** – Further investment is needed – building on what we know works – by all levels of Government in supportive housing, including high density models like Common Ground model<sup>10</sup> for adults and Foyer model<sup>11</sup> for youth as well as single site models with outreach services.<sup>12</sup> Not all people who sleep rough need permanent supported housing models like this, but for those who do, these models save lives.

7. **Build and upgrade more Social and Affordable Housing** – Invest in the Social Housing Acceleration and Renovation Program (SHARP); which a range of national housing and homelessness leaders, including the Community Housing Industry Association and the Everyone's Home Campaign, have outlined would support thousands of jobs and expand Australia's social housing by 30,000 homes.<sup>13</sup> Housing should be a basic right in Australia, just as access to health care or aged care is. It currently is not because we lack sufficient housing and support.
8. **Income Support** – The Commonwealth Government should keep the new JobSeeker Payment in place until our income support system is fixed so that nobody is forced to live below the poverty line and driven into homelessness. Australia's social safety net should allow people to afford to put a roof over their head and food on the table. The pre COVID-19 level of the Newstart or the JobSeeker Payment was simply inadequate.

## **PART C - Further background on the AAEH, our international partners and our work.**

The Australian Alliance to End Homelessness (AAEH) has been an independent champion for preventing and ending rough sleeping homelessness in Australia since 2013.

Despite the common misconception to the contrary, we recognise that the scale of homelessness in Australia is both preventable and solvable. We are committed to supporting local communities to ensure that any incidents of homelessness that do occur should be rare, brief and non-recurring. We understand that access to housing is not merely about shelter, but about a home that is safe, affordable, appropriate and sustainable.

We are an incorporated entity with a Board of Directors that has worked with many communities across Australia. Our membership includes individuals and organisations who are leaders that share our vision of ending homelessness. We are not a peak body, but a community of practice, seeking to share with and support local communities to end rough sleeping homelessness in new and innovative ways.

Our work is focused around the following three initiatives, all of which support our vision of Australia as a country where everyone has a place to call home:

- Through the Advance to Zero Campaign we are seeking to connect, support and equip local communities to end rough sleeping homelessness, using the [Australian Zero Homelessness Methodology](#), often called the Functional Zero approach, pioneered successfully in North America.
- Throughout our [Allied Networks](#) we are seeking to build coalitions of people and organisations at national and local levels to build a shared understanding of the complex and interconnected causes of homelessness and how to end it.
- With our [Training and Advisory Service](#), we support communities to understand the challenges of overcoming homelessness at a personal and community level with the most effective programs and policies for preventing and ultimately ending all homelessness.

The work of the AAEH is evidence-based. It is informed by global best practice and research available from the most innovative, credible and successful international studies and programs in the most effective ways to end homelessness.

We are modelled on the highly successful [Canadian Alliance to End Homelessness](#) and have worked with an organisation called [Community Solutions](#) since our inception to train and coach local communities as well as working closely with other leading international organisations like the [Institute of Global Homelessness](#) (IGH) and [OrgCode](#).

We work with local community practitioners, policymakers, academics, corporate and community leaders so as to build collaborative coalitions committed to ending homelessness in their communities. By working together with the community at all levels including citizens, organisations and government.

Ultimately, AAEH exists to promote the most effective ideas for ending homelessness based on the most credible research and studies conducted around the world.

Our success to date

- In 2010 Brisbane held the first 50 Lives 50 Homes Campaign in Australia using a common assessment tool the VI-SPDAT. The campaign helped house and support the 50 most vulnerable

people on the streets through system improvements, setting a target and measuring progress through collaborative effort. Shortly after achieving the goals, Brisbane expanded the model by launching the 500 Lives/500 Homes campaign to support all population groups resulting in 580 families and individuals housed including 430 children.

- Perth also launched a 50 lives 50 homes campaign in 2016, included in it were over 30 organisations in a collective impact approach. The Perth Campaign achieved an 85% sustained tenancy rate for the 220 people housed and has now expanded to other locations. Importantly the collaborative efforts have not just improved outcomes in Perth they have also changed the way the homelessness system in West Australia operates.
- Since then Sydney, Melbourne, Adelaide and others have all undertaken adaptations of this methodology with significant success. These efforts have supported hundreds of people sleeping rough to move off the streets and into homes.
- Initially the focus of the approach was to ‘count up’ to the number of people housed, the development of the methodology has seen the focus shift to ‘counting down’ to the outcome of zero street homelessness.

### The Zero Homelessness Methodology (Functional Zero)

- In 2017 Adelaide was the first city to commit to functional zero street homelessness and to develop a public dashboard that is updated in real time to show how the city is tracking in reaching its goal.<sup>14</sup> In its first 12 months, the Adelaide Zero Project helped to house a record 161 people who were previously sleeping rough in the inner city. Importantly though the data the project collected, it was learnt that despite housing this record number, a total of 356 new people were identified as sleeping rough for the first time during this first 12 months. As a consequence, efforts to prevent and divert people from sleeping rough have become a greater focus of the systems efforts to end homelessness.
- There exists significant interest from other communities across Australia in utilising this methodology. Perth and Sydney have both launched projects modelled on the functional zero approach. A resourced national campaign will be crucial to making these local efforts sustainable and to supporting other communities to adopt the approach.

### The Tools

- To date the AAEH has engaged Community Solutions from the United States to deliver a series of mentoring programs and action labs to support all of these efforts. The action labs have occurred in Brisbane, Perth and the latest in Adelaide, in 2019, saw representatives from Perth, Brisbane, Melbourne, Sydney and Adelaide participating. These action labs are followed by online coaching over an extended period. They have helped to catalyse the development of local collaborations and the establishment of a number of local by-name lists - including the first certified ‘quality’ by-name list outside of North America in Adelaide.
- The AAEH has pioneered the use of the common assessment tool for each community to use. The VI-SPDAT has been reviewed by Professor Paul Flatau from the University of Western Australia and Ian De Jong from Org Code along with each of the participating communities. The Vulnerability Index – Service Prioritisation Decision Assistance Tool (VI-SPDAT) is a screening tool used by practitioners to support collaborative decision-making within and across agencies so as to provide the assistance required to house and support people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness. The information gathered in the survey assists practitioners to understand the needs of people, so as to effectively match the appropriate housing pathway, healthcare and community services to enable an individual to make choices in line with their personal needs and available resources. The tool



relies on people's disclosed information, to assist in prioritising the most vulnerable and to rapidly resolve crisis, focusing on collaborative prioritisation to organise our work to match housing, healthcare and social services in order to meet an individual or families' dynamic needs.

- The Mercy Foundation has supported through the AAEH the development of a tool kit for conducting connections weeks or registry weeks and Micah Projects is developing the Advance to Zero (AtoZ) Database to enable local communities to securely store and appropriately share data relating to their by-name lists.

### Founding Partners



### Campaign Partners



### Major Partners



### Research Partners



### International Partners



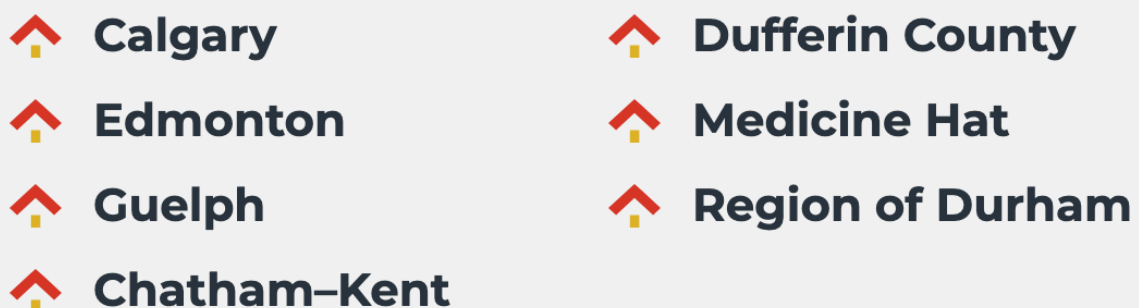
## PART D – How we have adapted the Zero Homelessness Methodology to support its implementation in Australia.

There are a growing number of communities (generally local government areas) in the United States and Canada that have either ended or reduced various forms of rough sleeping homelessness using the Zero Homelessness Methodology as part-developed and championed by an organization called Community Solutions. The Australian Alliance to End Homelessness has adapted this approach for use in Australia, and we have called this our Australian Zero Homelessness Methodology.

Success in the US ‘Built for Zero’ communities includes:



Canadian cities that are successfully reduce homelessness, in partnership with the Canadian Alliance to End Homelessness include:



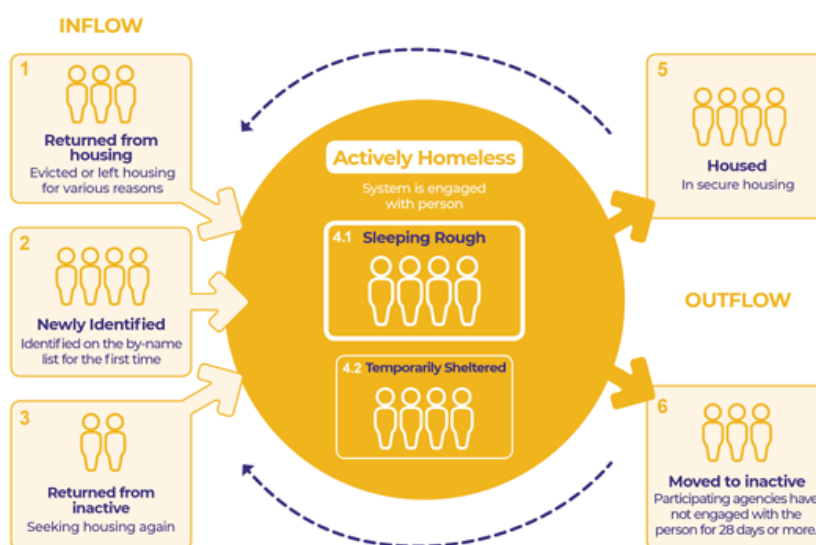
Two things differentiate the Zero Homelessness Methodology from business as usual— first, it demands dynamic measurement, meaning the ability to monitor and respond to homelessness in real time, rather than through static annual estimates, though often unreliable street counts. This puts more actionable data in the hands of local teams and officials. Second, it measures outcomes not primarily at the program level, but at the whole community level, by focusing on the question of whether the total number of people experiencing homelessness is declining toward zero at any given time, rather than on the outputs of particular programs.

Communities begin by developing a by-name list or a comprehensive person-specific accounting of every person experiencing homelessness and learning to keep this list up to date in real time as individuals’ circumstances evolve. This by-name list helps communities improve and customize service recommendations for each individual. It also provides communities with actionable data that can help focus local system improvement efforts to drive reductions in homelessness over time.

Functional zero homelessness is reached when the number of people who are homeless in a community in any given month is no greater than the average housing placement rate for that same period. In other words, a community reaches functional zero when the number of housing placements made is more than the number of people sleeping rough in a community for a minimum of three consecutive months.

Ending Homeless does not mean that no one will ever fall into homeless again it means that our homelessness systems functions to make rough sleeping homelessness rare, brief and non-reoccurring.

The functional zero measure has worked because it is a dynamic measure of homelessness - indicating the performance of a community's system in preventing and supporting people out of homelessness over time. The Zero Homelessness Methodology requires the measurement of the following parts of a community's system:



Importantly this approach places the person who is experiencing homelessness at the centre of the support system and ensures that their individual needs are the focus. Using this approach also provides a focus on prevention, by highlighting through real time data how many people are coming into the system - it enables a focus on supporting people to sustain housing before they become homeless. The approach can be used for any form of homelessness, but its success has been demonstrated with rough sleeping homelessness, particularly for veteran's homelessness and chronic rough sleeping. In the United States, a number of communities have since applied the approach to families and young people as well.

### Challenges

The AAEH has to date been a volunteer network of communities supporting each other's efforts. In order to maintain momentum AAEH and local communities need investment to keep driving the adaption and adoption of this methodology in Australia. Currently there has been limited investments by State Governments in supporting the implementation of this methodology.

The most significant investments came recently from the Western Australian Government with the announcement of the fast tracking of a \$34.5 million investment in a "Housing First Homelessness Initiative,

which extends successful housing-first collective impact approaches to Bunbury and other locations across Western Australia”.<sup>15</sup>

Other states have taken steps, with the New South Wales government supporting the End Street Sleeping Collaboration using the same methodology.<sup>16</sup> The South Australian Government’s Housing Strategy referenced the need to expand<sup>17</sup> the Zero Homelessness Methodology as pioneered in that state by the Adelaide Zero Project.<sup>18</sup> The City of Melbourne recently announced they would seek to establish a by-name list, following the lead by the City of Port Philip and Launch Housing with the Port Philip Zero Project in Victoria. Significant work has been lead by Micha Projects in Queensland over a number of years also, through the 500 Lives Campaign<sup>19</sup> and the Brisbane Alliance to End Homelessness.

Investment is required in the further adaption and adoption of the Zero Homelessness Methodology in Australia. In the United States local communities have received investment for this work, and in Canada the Canadian Government mandated the adoption of a version of this methodology in their national housing strategy.

Item 4 in Part B of this submissions sets out what it would take to support a nationally consistent roll out of this methodology in Australia.

### **Core components of the Australian Zero Homelessness Methodology**

The following is what the AAEEH has, so far, determined needs to be incorporated into efforts to implement the Zero Homelessness Methodology in Australia. Further work is needed to refine this and to build the Australian resources that will support the implementation of this approach in Australia.

#### Housing First Approach

1. **Focus on Ending Homelessness** – including a commitment to the principle of housing first, but not housing only, working collaboratively and through the setting of shared goals and targets
2. **Assertive Outreach** – including Connections (or Registry) Weeks to comprehensively identify person-specific data of everyone sleeping rough and build a plan to move each into housing
3. **Aligned housing** – ensuring sufficient housing is available, through prioritisation, innovation, throughput in the existing system and additional investment

#### Data Driven

4. **By-name Lists** – enabling a focus on people and their individual needs, being able to measure this and drive reductions over time
5. **Common Assessment Tool** – the VI-SPDAT enables individual needs to be assessed and recommended for support in a consistent, evidence-informed way, and for the full list of people experiencing homelessness to be fairly and effectively triaged according to local priorities
6. **Prevention focus** – the use of data to actually reduce inflow of people sleeping rough (both through prevention and diversion) as well as support the efforts of the broader community to address the causes of rough sleeping homelessness, i.e. poverty and housing affordability

#### Collective Impact

7. **Coalition of Stakeholders** – working collaboratively across sectors to raise awareness and build the case for working together to address the systemic problems whilst ensuring a strong voice for people with a lived experience
8. **Streamlined Governance Structures** – clearly identified decision making, communications and accountability mechanisms to find solutions to the challenges facing local systems
9. **Coordinated Entry System** – local collaborative mechanisms for the triage of housing and support for those most in need – creating a simpler, more streamlined path to housing
10. **Continuous Improvement** – enabling data to be used for continuous system and service improvement

not judgement - to drive reductions in homelessness across the whole community. This includes being informed by best practice research in other communities, nationally and internationally as well as the development evaluation frameworks

## **PART E – Additional advice regarding the Committee’s terms of reference.**

In regard to the following terms of reference for the Committee the AAEH has the following advice.

### **1. the incidence of homelessness in Australia;**

The incidence of homelessness are insufficiently known, particularly at a community level in a way that provides actionable intelligence or information for communities and services to use in a way that helps them improve services and the service system.

Imagine if we only collected accurate and comprehensive data on unemployment in Australia every four years. It would undoubtedly hamper our ability to address the challenge of unemployment. In effect this is what we do in Australia for homelessness. Real time by-name lists give the opportunity for communities to respond to and meet the constantly changing needs of people sleeping rough – as the COVID-19 pandemic has shown.

### **2. factors affecting the incidence of homelessness, including housing-market factors;**

See the following report that the AAEH and the Centre for Social Impact at the University of Western Australia released in 2018: *The State of Homelessness In Australia’s Cities: A Health And Social Cost Too High Report*.<sup>20</sup>

The report sets out how Australian homelessness services, largely operating in the inner-city areas of Australian cities, undertook interviews with over 8,000 people sleeping rough or otherwise homeless in concentrated data collection efforts called Registry Weeks (sometimes called Connections Weeks).

Using the VI-SPDAT (Vulnerability Index - Service Prioritisation Decision Assistance Tool) during Registry or Connections Weeks was the means of collecting data, with findings being used to assist agencies to prioritise services to those most in need.

The Report looks at the seven years that the VI-SPDAT was used (2010-2017) with 8,618 interviews conducted with 8,370 people experiencing homelessness across Australian capital cities and regional centres. *The State of Homelessness in Australia’s Cities: A Health and Social Cost Too High Report* represents the first analysis of the consolidated Registry Week data across Australia. The consolidated Registry Week data provides the largest and richest collection of information on people experiencing homelessness in Australian capital and regional cities outside the Census and the national administrative data for homelessness services, the Specialist Homelessness Services Collection.

### **3. the causes of, and contributing factors to, housing overcrowding;**

See *The State of Homelessness In Australia’s Cities: A Health And Social Cost Too High Report*.

### **4. opportunities for early intervention and prevention of homelessness;**

See *The State of Homelessness In Australia’s Cities: A Health And Social Cost Too High Report*.

The Zero Homelessness methodology is helpful in providing actionable intelligence or data to inform prevention efforts in relation to rough sleeping. The Adelaide Zero Project for example was able to house a record 238 people in the first 16 months of the project, but in that same time 447 number of people were

newly identified as sleeping rough for the first time. Prevention of rough sleeping must form a much larger part of the efforts to address the problem of rough sleeping homelessness. By-name lists provide a crucial tool for focusing these efforts.

5. services to support people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness, including housing assistance, social housing, and specialist homelessness services;

See Part B of this submission.

6. support and services for people at particular risk of homelessness, including:
- a. women and children affected by family and domestic violence;
  - b. children and young people;
  - c. Indigenous Australians;
  - d. people experiencing repeat homelessness;
  - e. people exiting institutions and other care arrangements;
  - f. people aged 55 or older;
  - g. people living with disability; and
  - h. people living with mental illness;

The VI-SPDAT, a common assessment tool used as part of the Australian Zero Homelessness Methodology helps understand, in real time, how well a community's service system is or isn't supporting each of these particular populations groups and enables the prioritisation of housing and support.

See *The State of Homelessness In Australia's Cities: A Health And Social Cost Too High* Report for what this is currently showing.

7. the suitability of mainstream services for people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness;

We have a lot of great services in Australia who support people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness, we need more funding for services and housing. However, we have far too little funded effort on how services can better work together to meet the needs of people who are sleeping rough or at risk of rough sleeping homelessness. The by-name list elements of the Australian Zero Homelessness Methodology provides a way to ensure that all services in a system are able to:

- put the individual needs of those sleeping rough at the centre of their efforts to reduce homelessness
- ensure that efforts to prevent homelessness can focus on those placed where the real time data is showing that new people are falling into rough sleeping homelessness

8. examples of best-practice approaches in Australia and internationally for preventing and addressing homelessness;

See Part D of this submission.

9. the adequacy of the collection and publication of housing, homelessness, and housing affordability related data; and

Greater transparency is needed in relation to the collection of data on rough sleeping homelessness in Australia. A key element of the Zero Homelessness approach is ensuring that data collected is 'owned' by the community that collects it so that it can be used for the benefit of everyone in that community's system to drive improvements. The Adelaide Zero Project for example releases the data that it collects, in a de-



identified way, each month on a public dashboard.<sup>21</sup> It is the intention of the AAEH to release similar data for each of the community's it works with once the quality of that data can be verified and the resources are rallied to enable this.

10. governance and funding arrangements in relation to housing and homelessness, particularly as they relate to the responsibility of Local, State, Territory and Federal Governments.

#### **A Commitment**

There is a role of all levels of Australian Government in addressing the problem of rough sleeping homelessness. The AAEH believes that a joint Commonwealth, State, Territory and Local Government commitment (with timelines and targets) to ending homelessness is needed.

- a. This commitment should include local and national action plans for the elimination of rough sleeping homelessness with certain population groups, for example Indigenous, youth and family homelessness.
- b. These action plans should include targets, for example, to end veterans rough sleeping homelessness by 2025 – an eminently achievable goal.
- c. Additional funding to support this effort is needed, as outlined in Part B of this submission.

#### **A greater Role for Local Government**

The AAEH believes that there is a greater role of Local Governments to play in ending homelessness, not in the provision of services, but in establishing and supporting local collaboratives, willing to use the Zero Homelessness Methodology. Managing the public domain is a responsibility of local government and efforts to end homelessness rather than just move the problem on ought to be more broadly supported by Local Governments. Many have taken up this role.

#### **The Business Case for Ending Homelessness**

The Commonwealth has a leadership role to play in supporting a better understanding of the business case for ending homelessness in Australia.

It costs more to leave the problem of rough sleeping unaddressed than it does to provide supportive housing. When we do not change our systems and practices to enable people sleeping rough to access housing, we waste money responding to the consequences of our failed policy decisions.

Australian research using government administrative data showed an average annual saving to government services of \$13,100 per person for ending their homelessness with permanent supportive housing. When people are housed, they use less criminal justice and health services than when living on the streets.<sup>22</sup>

Yet this recognition not been translated into government policy more broadly, even where pilot programs have demonstrated that these savings can be captured, and that better outcomes for homeless people can be delivered – see the Aspire Social Impact Bond in South Australia operated by Social Ventures Australia.<sup>23</sup>

The challenge is that savings occurring across different levels of government, within multiple portfolios of government and require taking a longer time horizon than standard Australian Government's budgets generally provide for.



## References

- <sup>1</sup> Homeless health care: meeting the challenges of providing primary care, Medical Journal of Australia, [https://www.mja.com.au/system/files/issues/209\\_05/10.5694mja17.01264.pdf](https://www.mja.com.au/system/files/issues/209_05/10.5694mja17.01264.pdf)
- <sup>2</sup> Cameron Parsell, the Conversation, <https://theconversation.com/supportive-housing-is-cheaper-than-chronic-homelessness-67539>
- <sup>3</sup> Estimated based on surveys conducted by the AAEH and Professor Paul Flatau from the Centre for Social Impact, University of Western Australia, as at mid-May 2020.
- <sup>4</sup> This include a rental subsidy to the individual of \$180 (inc. of Commonwealth Rent Assistance, which a number of people would automatically have access to once they entered private rental accommodation on an income support payment) per person per week and total support to agencies (community housing and homelessness case management support) of \$200 per person per week.
- <sup>5</sup> Based on high needs group \$300 per week average 0.5 weight, medium needs group of \$150 per week average 0.25 weight, and low needs group \$50 per week average 0.25 weight. The low needs group is below the average yearly cost of providing support to a person by homelessness support services while the medium and high needs group cost is above the average cost provided to a person by homelessness services which reflect both higher needs than average of many rough sleepers and the need for some level of tenancy management that will be required above personal support costs.
- <sup>6</sup> Much of this would be committed automatically via Commonwealth Rent Assistance payments that would accrue as those experiencing homelessness with income support payments enter private rental accommodation
- <sup>7</sup> Based on an average health and justice savings of around \$200 per week for a mix of rough sleepers drawing on a number of Australian research studies undertaken at the Centre for Social Impact UWA and by other homelessness researchers over the last 15 years. The mix of rough sleepers including those with very high needs spending time in hospital and residential mental health facilities and having high justice interactions, those with medium needs who spend short periods in health facilities and/or relatively low justice interactions and those who spend no nights in hospital or residential health facilities in a given year.
- <sup>8</sup> Advance to Zero Campaign Briefing, AAEH, March 2020, <https://aaeh.org.au/assets/docs/Publications/200317-Advance-to-Zero-Campaign-Briefing.pdf>
- <sup>9</sup> Leaving No-one Behind – A National Policy for Health Equity, AAEH, January 2020, [https://aaeh.org.au/assets/docs/20200120-POLICY-PROPOSAL\\_Leaving-no-one-Behind.pdf](https://aaeh.org.au/assets/docs/20200120-POLICY-PROPOSAL_Leaving-no-one-Behind.pdf)
- <sup>10</sup> For evidence see: Brisbane Common Ground – Evaluation, <https://issr.uq.edu.au/brisbane-common-ground-evaluation>
- <sup>11</sup> It is well established that the Youth Foyer model's benefits far outweigh the costs in both the short and long term: [http://library.bsl.org.au/jspui/bitstream/1/11370/1/KPMG\\_Education\\_First\\_Youth\\_Foyers\\_economic\\_evaluation\\_Jun2019.pdf](http://library.bsl.org.au/jspui/bitstream/1/11370/1/KPMG_Education_First_Youth_Foyers_economic_evaluation_Jun2019.pdf)
- <sup>12</sup> For evidence see: Professor Paul Flatau, Journey to Social Inclusion (J2SI) Mark II, 2015 to 2018, Sacred Heart Mission, <https://www.anzctr.org.au/AnzctrAttachments/369929-J2SI%20Study%20protocol%20Final.pdf>
- <sup>13</sup> Building the Recovery, Community Housing Industry Association, May 2020, <https://www.communityhousing.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/MediareleaseSHARP.pdf?x59559>
- <sup>14</sup> <https://dunstan.org.au/adelaide-zero-project/>
- <sup>15</sup> <https://www.mediastatements.wa.gov.au/Pages/McGowan/2020/06/Fast-tracked-Housing-First-project-to-ease-Bunbury-homelessness.aspx>
- <sup>16</sup> <https://www.acttoendstreetsleeping.org/>
- <sup>17</sup> South, Australian Housing Authority, Our Housing Future 2020-2030, Action 4.4, page 16, [https://www.housing.sa.gov.au/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0003/130692/Our-Housing-Future-2020-2030.pdf](https://www.housing.sa.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0003/130692/Our-Housing-Future-2020-2030.pdf)
- <sup>18</sup> <https://dunstan.org.au/adelaide-zero-project/>
- <sup>19</sup> <https://www.500lives500homes.org.au/>
- <sup>20</sup> <https://aaeh.org.au/assets/docs/Publications/THE-STATE-OF-HOMELESSNESS-IN-AUSTTRALIAS-CITIES-REPORT-Preliminary-Release.pdf>
- <sup>21</sup> <https://dunstan.org.au/adelaide-zero-project/dashboard/>
- <sup>22</sup> <https://theconversation.com/supportive-housing-is-cheaper-than-chronic-homelessness-67539>
- <sup>23</sup> <https://www.socialventures.com.au/work/aspire-sib/>