



aaeh
australian alliance
to end homelessness



Homes beyond COVID
Let's get the job done



#HomesBeyondCovid

A Sustainable response to Rough Sleeping
Winter 2020

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Introduction

The work so far

- 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.¹
- 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. This paper sets out what we think that should look like.

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.

Proposed COVID-19 National Rough Sleeping Homelessness Pandemic Response Plan

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.

Recovery response

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)² would enable 2,500 people³ 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 market⁴ 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.⁵ 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.
3. **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. An investment of \$3.5m over four years to set this standard in a range of communities by supporting the establishment of local by-name lists that are used to improve the coordination and prioritisation of appropriate housing to those in need.
 - b. This investment would see the **Zero Homelessness Approach**⁶ - successfully implemented in communities across North America – to be implemented across Australian communities with the support of the Australian Alliance to End Homelessness (AAEH).
4. **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:⁷
 - a. **A national 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 with mental illness who are discharged from institutional care, including hospitals and prisons.

- b. **Health and homelessness pilot** – An assertive intervention pilot 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 pilot would cost \$2.5 million per city, plus evaluation costs.
- c. **A network** – The Federal Government should support the AAEH to establish a Health, Housing and Homelessness Network with a broad range of health, and community organisations, professionals and people with lived experience.
- 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.
- f. **A Taskforce** – Recognising the urgency of this job, the Federal Government should call a special taskforce of the new National Cabinet of health and housing ministers to consider, support and drive the implementation of these recommendations.

Long term response

- 5. **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 model⁸ for adults and Foyer model⁹ for youth as well as single site models with outreach services.¹⁰ Not all people who sleep rough need permanent supported housing models like this, but for those who do, these models save lives.
- 6. **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.¹¹ 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.
- 7. **Income Support** – The 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.

Further information

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About the AAEH

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 Approach, 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.

Founding Partners



Campaign Partners



Major Partners



Research Partners



International Partners



Notes

- ¹ 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.
- ² 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.
- ³ 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.
- ⁴ 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
- ⁵ 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.
- ⁶ Advance to Zero Campaign Briefing, AAEH, March 2020, <https://aaeh.org.au/assets/docs/Publications/200317-Advance-to-Zero-Campaign-Briefing.pdf>
- ⁷ 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
- ⁸ For evidence see: Brisbane Common Ground – Evaluation, <https://issr.uq.edu.au/brisbane-common-ground-evaluation>
- ⁹ 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
- ¹⁰ 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>
- ¹¹ Building the Recovery, Community Housing Industry Association, May 2020, <https://www.communityhousing.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/MediareleaseSHARP.pdf?x59559>