

**MEDIA RELEASE**  
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**‘First of its kind’: WA research raising national awareness of rough sleeping homelessness deaths, urges Australian Government action**

New research by the [Australian Alliance to End Homelessness \(AAEH\)](#) and the University of Western Australia’s (UWA) [Home2Health](#) team is helping to raise national awareness of rough sleeping homelessness deaths, marking the first Australian study of its kind to collect data around this tragic, largely overlooked occurrence.

The research reveals that 56 people died while sleeping rough or with a long-term experience of rough sleeping in Perth last year, with the national estimate standing at 424 deaths. In response to these shocking numbers, the AAEH and Home2Health are urging the Australian Government to show leadership on this critical issue by urgently commissioning a national homelessness deaths and life expectancy gap reporting framework.

Data regarding reduced life expectancy and causes of death has been widely used to drive efforts in improving better outcomes for many population groups in Australia. We measure road deaths and use this data to drive changes, just as we do with data on the life expectancy gap for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, which holds Australia accountable for ‘closing the gap’ and allows for progress to be tracked and measured.

As there is no consistent data collected or recorded on the deaths of people experiencing homelessness across Australia, this already vulnerable group is rendered further ‘invisible’ to governments – a point that is highlighted by the estimated 424 deaths of people experiencing rough sleeping homelessness across the nation last year. Alarming, **people sleeping rough have a reduced life expectancy of up to 30 years.**

The national estimate was drawn from data on Perth’s known 56 deaths in 2020 among people who had been sleeping rough, all of which have been confirmed by GP or hospital records. This equates to more than one death a week.

Lisa Wood, Associate Professor at the School of Population and Global Health at UWA and lead of the Home2Health team, states that this is likely a significant under-estimate as it only comprises the deaths that the Home2Health team has been notified of.

“Australia needs to follow the UK’s lead by annually releasing a count of homeless deaths and setting targets to reduce this atrocious life expectancy gap,” said Ms Wood.

“At the same time, we cannot lose sight of the people behind these grim statistics: each death is a life cut way too short. After all, no one sets out in life to become homeless.”

The findings from Home2Health's research and the national estimate based on them are so significant that they should prompt urgent action by the Australian Government, said AAEH CEO David Pearson.

"This is a national emergency. If 424 people died in a plane crash last year, no expense would be spared in finding out what happened and how we can prevent this occurring in the future," said Mr Pearson.

"If we are to drive change in this area, we must measure and publicly report what is an all-too-frequent but hidden occurrence in communities across Australia – that people are dying without a safe place to call home."

Ending homelessness in Australia is possible, with more and more communities around the world demonstrating their ability to do so. As such, **the AAEH urges the Australian Government to take action by commissioning the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) to develop a national homelessness deaths and life expectancy gap reporting framework.**

Developing such a framework would make it possible to understand the extent of homeless deaths in Australia and inform how best to address this critical issue. As set out in this month's national homelessness publication [Parity](#), the framework should:

- set out how to improve data capture;
- drive more accurate measures of homelessness in hospital and coronial administrative data;
- articulate the number of deaths among people experiencing homelessness (all types of homelessness), the age of death, and cause of death (direct and indirect) at both the local, state/territory and national level, and;
- seek to report such data in as close to real time as possible.

**-ENDS-**

**David Pearson, CEO of AAEH, and Associate Professor Lisa Wood, lead of the Home2Health team, are available for media interviews. For media enquiries, please contact:**

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### **About the Australian 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, 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.