



# Homelessness is solvable: How we can end it in Australia

David Pearson

*2020 Churchill Fellow awarded to study efforts to end homelessness*

United States of America | Canada | England | Scotland | Finland | Sweden



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**David Pearson, 28 June 2023**

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Front Cover:

- **Measurement** - Top Left - Poverty maps of London - from the Thames Reach CEO's office, UK.
- **Supportive Housing** - Bottom Left - one of a number of permanent supportive housing services operating as part of a system in Chicago, USA.
- **The Problem** - Top Right - People sleeping rough in front of the US Treasury building with flags at half mast because of COVID-19.
- **Targets** - Bottom Right - the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, New York, USA
- **Housing and Support** - Middle - Managed Alcohol service in Glasgow, UK



*(Image: Public Art Installation, Downtown Seattle, USA)*

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### **Keywords**

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### **Acknowledgement of Country**

I acknowledge the Kurna people on whose lands I live and work, and pay my respect to elders past and present. In a spirit of reconciliation, I also acknowledge that homelessness is a concept brought to the lands now known as Australia through the process of colonisation and that this has left a lasting legacy of disparity and inequity.<sup>1</sup>

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are also more likely to experience housing insecurity, ill health and homelessness than non-Aboriginal people. For example, the forcible removal from traditional homelands continues to this day to undermine access for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to secure and stable housing.<sup>2</sup> Greater focus on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander homelessness is needed and recommendations in that regard are made in this report.

### **Acknowledgements**

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- The AAEH partners all over Australia who have so willingly shared the knowledge, experiences and resources to help develop much of the knowledge that this report builds on - particularly the founding partners of the AAEH and my colleagues at the Centre for Social Impact.
- The Staff at the AAEH who have carried a heavy load whilst I was undertaking this Fellowship and finally the board and in particular our Chair Karyn Walsh who is always available and willing to chat, share and strategise.
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- And last but not least all of those people with lived experience of homelessness who spent time with me and so generously shared their insights, their wisdom and their stories.

### **Trigger Warning**

Please note that this report discusses suicide and mental illness which may be triggering for some readers.

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<sup>1</sup> Pat Anderson, *Lowitja O'Donoghue Oration*, Don Dunstan Foundation, June 2021, Available <https://dunstan.org.au/events/lodo20/>

<sup>2</sup> Australian Human Right Commission (2022) *Education: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples* <https://humanrights.gov.au/our-work/education/aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islanders-australias-first-peoples>

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## Quotes

*“I know ending homelessness is possible because there was none when I started my career”.*

- Nan Roman, The National Alliance to End Homelessness, USA

*“I feel like my “only options at times are suicide or to rob a bank”.*

- Guy, person with a lived experience, Chicago, USA

*“If sleeping rough is somehow a choice, why do no rich people choose to do it?”*

- Mark McGrevy, De Paul International, London, UK

*“Homelessness is not a moral failure of people, it is a moral failure of society - it is immoral to choose eviction over extreme wealth inequality”.*

- Donald Whitehead - National Coalition for the Homelessness, USA

*“To end homelessness you need an unwavering belief that this is possible...[and] a voracious appetite to learn”.*

- Jake Maguire - Community Solutions, USA

*“This is literally a life or death issue, we need to act with a sense of urgency, but simultaneously take the long term view. Short-term solutions aren’t helping anyone”.*

- Jeff Olivet, US Interagency Council on Homelessness

*“You could make many homelessness responses twice as effective if you managed the system better, but the inclination is always there to fund direct services, it’s inefficient. If you want to shift the dial, fund the improvements to the systems”.*

- Norman Suchar - U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development

*“To end homelessness you need to join up government policy and community-led organising”.*

- Laurel Blatchford - Former Chief of Staff at the US Department of Housing and Urban Development

*“Just as with climate change, we should focus on the net reduction, not the programs that might get us there. The outcome of ending homelessness is what is most important”.*

- Philip Welkhoff - Gates Foundation, USA

*“Homelessness is what happens when every other system fails”.*

- Alex Fox, Mayday Trust, Leeds, United Kingdom

*“There is plenty of research on housing problems in the world, we need more solutions”.*

- Patrick Duce, World Habitat, England, United Kingdom

*“My proudest possession is the key to my home”.*

- Julie - Resident, Mercy Housing, Chicago, USA

## Acronyms Guide

AA	Alcoholics Anonymous
AAEH	Australian Alliance to End Homelessness
ABS	Australian Bureau of Statistics
ACI	Anchor Communities Initiatives (A Way Home Washington)
ACORN	Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now (USA)
AHVTT	Australian Homelessness Vulnerability Triage Tool
AIHW	Australian Institute for Health and Welfare
API	Associates for Process Improvement (USA)
ARA	Housing Finance and Development Center (Finland)
AtoZ	Advance to Zero (Australia)
A3HN	Australian Health, Housing and Homelessness Network
BIPOC	Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (USA & Canada)
BNL	By-Name List
CA	Coordinated Access
CAN	Community Ambition Network (Glasgow)
CAEH	Canadian Alliance to End Homelessness
CCCLM	Council of Capital City Lord Mayors (Australia)
CHP	Community Housing Provider
CLT	Community Land Trust
COAG	Council of Australian Governments (Australia)
CoCs	Continuums of Care (USA)
CPI	The Center for Public Impact
CRA	Commonwealth Rent Assistance (Australia)
CS	Community Solutions (US)
CHI	Centre for Homelessness Impact (UK)
CSI	Centre for Social Impact (Australia)
CSH	Corporation for Supportive Housing (USA)
DESC	Downtown Emergency Service Centre (Seattle)
EPOCH	European Platform on Combating Homelessness (Europe)
FEANTSA	European Federation of National Organisations working with the Homeless (Europe)
FEMA	Federal Emergency Management Agency (USA)
FUSE	Frequent Users Systems Engagement (CSH, USA)
FZ	Functional Zero
GAEH	Glasgow Alliance to End Homelessness
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GMHF	Greater Manchester Housing First (UK)
HARC	Homelessness Advocacy, Research, and Collaboration Lab (Chicago)
HHS	US Department of Health and Human Services
HiAP	Health In All Policies
HMIS	Homeless Management Information System (USA)
HRS	Homelessness Response System (USA + Australia)
HSCP	Health and Social Care Partnership (Glasgow)
HUD	US Department of Housing and Urban Development
IGH	Institute of Global Homelessness
IHI	Institute for Healthcare Improvement
LAHSA	Los Angeles Homelessness Services Authority (USA)
LE	Lived Experience
LGBTIQ	Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, or questioning

NA	Narcotics Anonymous
NHS	National Health Service (UK)
NHHA	National Housing and Homelessness Agreement (Australia)
NICE	National Institute of Care and Excellence (UK)
NIMBY	Not in my back yard
OECD	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
PDSA	Plan, Do, Study Act cycle
PIT	Point in Time Count
PSH	Permanent Supportive Housing
PTS	Person-led, Transitional and Strengths-based (UK)
PWLE	People with lived experience
RBA	Results Based Accountability
RSLs	Registered Social Landlords (Scotland)
SA	South Australia
SDGs	United Nations Sustainable Development Goals
SHLN	Supportive Housing Leadership Network (USA)
SHS	Specialist Homelessness Service (Australia)
SIB	Social Impact Bond
STARS	Service Triage, Assessment & Referral Support Tool
UBI	Universal Basic Income
UK	United Kingdom
UN	United Nations
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
USA	United States of America
USICH	United States Interagency Council on Homelessness
VA	US Department of Veterans Affairs
YABs	Youth Advisory Boards
VI-SPDAT	Vulnerability Index - Service Prioritisation Decision Assistance Tool
WIFM	What's in it for me



*(Image: Grenfell Street, September 2020, Adelaide, Australia)*

## Executive Summary

Ending homelessness is possible. This is not something I *believe*, any more than I *believe* in the human-induced nature of climate change. I *recognise* climate change is happening because scientists have demonstrated it with data. I similarly *recognise* that ending homelessness is possible because, through the course of my Fellowship, I met with a growing number of communities who have demonstrated with data that they have ended homelessness.

Homelessness is a big complex problem. Solving it requires many things. Throughout my Fellowship, I asked everyone I met two simple questions - whether they be philanthropists, academics, CEOs, social workers, heads of government agencies, or people previously or currently living on the streets.

I asked

- **Is ending homelessness possible?**
- **Based on your experiences, what are the three most important things you think it would take to end homelessness?**



(Image: Community Solutions, USA)

All answered the question ‘is ending homelessness possible’ in different ways, some hesitated or didn’t answer for quite some time, but almost all eventually said ‘yes’. Just a few said no, some thinking it was the wrong question, that we should seek to prevent homelessness rather than end it, and others just didn’t believe it possible. The overwhelming majority of the people I met thought ending homelessness was indeed possible.

What they believed it would take was a combination of the following, in order of frequency:

- Leadership - firstly community leadership, then political
- Data - reliable, quality, real-time, person-centred
- Collaboration - at all levels, service delivery, improvement and governance
- Prevention - providing care before care is needed
- Hope
- Funding/investment
- Better coordination/integration of health and other support services with housing
- Permanent supportive housing
- Person-centred approaches
- Curiosity, improvement and an ongoing willingness to learn
- More affordable housing, better income support and reducing inequality
- Understand trauma
- A rights-based entitlement to home

A hallmark of the feedback I received has been optimism, positivity and a can-do attitude in the face of some pretty dire circumstances. The reality is that in most places, in Australia and in the countries I visited, it is a bad situation getting worse. In fact, a low point in my Fellowship was a roundtable meeting in Los Angeles when discussing the challenges of working on such an overwhelming issue the staff around the table revealed they each have members of their own teams who show up to work every day to help people experiencing homelessness who are themselves experiencing homelessness. Such is the state of the Californian housing market and the poor wages people working in the homelessness sector are subject to.



Despite these challenges, what initially attracted me to the Australian Alliance to End Homelessness (AAEH) - the organisation I now lead - was this same sense of optimism, positivity and a can-do attitude demonstrated by those involved.

## A Framework for Ending Homelessness

When I started as the inaugural CEO of the AAEH in May 2020 we were a volunteer network with little money, no staff, and the approach to ending homelessness or our methodology had just been turned on its head - from counting up to the goal of ending homelessness for a specific number of individuals (i.e. the 500 Lives Campaign in Brisbane or the 50 Lives Campaign in Perth)<sup>3</sup>, to counting down to the goal of ending homelessness for a whole community (generally a local government area like the City of Adelaide for the Adelaide Zero Project).<sup>4</sup>

In 2021 I applied for, and was awarded, a Churchill Fellowship to help me figure out what this change meant, how it could be applied in the Australian context and to document it in an agreed and commonly understood way. My Fellowship travels were delayed substantially by the COVID-19 pandemic and family illness, but this gave me the opportunity to spend almost two years learning about the homelessness service systems across Australia and to consider what questions I wanted to ask when I was finally able to travel.

Three years after taking on the AAEH CEO role, two years after winning a Churchill Fellowship, and a few weeks after returning I can finally, with some confidence, outline what I think it would take to demonstrate that ending homelessness is possible in Australia. It takes the form of this following framework:

A Shared Strategy				
To prevent, reduce and end all homelessness in Australia by ensuring that when it does occur it is rare, brief and once off measured by seeking to reach and sustain functional zero				
Four Approaches to Ending Homelessness				
Housing First - System Change	Person-Centered & Strengths Based	Data Driven Improvement	Place-Based Collaboration	
Seven Agreed Activities (Applying the Four Approaches)				
Prevention				
Assertive Outreach		Service Coordination		
Common Triage		Leadership & Advocacy		
A Real-Time By-Name List		Housing First - Programs & Permanent Supportive Housing		
Implemented Through Improvement Cycles				
Action Planning	Quality Data	Improving to Zero	Sustaining Zero	Expanding to Zero for All (not sequential)

(Image: The AAEH Advance to Zero Ending Homelessness Framework, Australia)

<sup>3</sup> The 500 Lives and 50 Lives campaigns were some of the most successful campaigns that sought to identify and house a set number of the most vulnerable people experiencing rough sleeping homelessness in those communities. Once the initial 50 people were identified and housed, many communities expanded the number they were counting up to, others kept going and some wound up.

<sup>4</sup> The Adelaide Zero Project, learning from these efforts, was the first community to seek to count down to the goal of ending homelessness - or functional zero. More information can be found at <https://saaeh.org.au/azp/>

It is, of course, a work in progress, as ultimately we won't know what it will take to end homelessness in Australia until the first community does it. However, this framework, which I explore further in this report, is for communities who share the aim of ending homelessness to follow, to inform their efforts, and be guided by. It was initially called a methodology and developed collaboratively by the many partners of the AAEH across the country. My Churchill Fellowship has provided the opportunity to test and refine it further.

## No Definition and No Strategy

What has struck me as one of the most surprisingly simple realisations to come out of testing this framework and the Fellowship overall is that despite homelessness having been around for some time and the number of actors involved with it, very little thought or effort has gone into defining what exactly an end to homelessness actually means. Many have adopted the language of ending homelessness, even the branding, but surprisingly few (particularly in Australia - less so overseas) have taken the time to define what success looks like.

Similarly, Australia stands alone of all the countries I visited without a strategy - not just no strategy for ending homelessness - it has no housing and homelessness strategy at all. The Albanese Labor Government has thankfully committed to developing a new national housing and homelessness plan but to date there is no word if this plan will have an ambition to end homelessness or if it will simply add up to a range of measures that ultimately just manage it a bit better.

## This Report

It is hoped that this report can inform the development and content of this new national plan, but also the efforts of others with an interest in ending homelessness - including state and local governments, the community services sector, universities, businesses and others. To that end, this report provides some context or background on Churchill Fellowships, me and my work at the Australian Alliance to End Homelessness, a summary of what I have learned it would take to end homelessness and some key insights from each country I visited. Importantly it also proposes a series of recommendations for action for everyone who needs to be involved in efforts to end homelessness.

The appendixes summarise in detail what I learned, what I heard, where I went and further context for many of the recommendations for action. They are intended to be resources to support and inform efforts to end homelessness in Australia into the future. These appendixes are therefore intentionally long and detailed.

## Call to Action

If there is one single conclusion that my Churchill Fellowship has left with me it is this: ending homelessness is possible, but it is not something that can be achieved by one individual, one agency, one level of government, one program, building, policy or pill.

Ending homelessness has and can only be achieved by coalitions of like-minded leaders, people and organisations standing together and saying enough is enough - that we will no longer accept homelessness in our community.

Not only is homelessness solvable it is necessary. Having a safe, secure, affordable home is not a luxury. It is a fundamental human need. There is no time to lose and much to be done.

## Background

What follows is some further background on me, the AAEH and its work. A large focus of my Fellowship was meeting with people and organisations, and testing assumptions and strategies that underpin my work in Australia as a leader of the AAEH, as well as the AtoZ Campaign.

I was able to visit the following cities, those highlighted in red I visited in 2022 and those in gold in 2023.



(Image: Google Maps, modified)

For further information about my itinerary and who I met, see Appendix B.

For further background on a number of the concepts in this report, see Appendix D.

## Churchill Fellowships

In late 2021, I was awarded a Churchill Fellowship to explore how communities around the world are seeking to reduce and end homelessness. Churchill Fellowships are awarded by the Churchill Trust and they provide financial assistance to Australians from all walks of life who want to further their search for excellence overseas. My Fellowship enabled me to focus on the very broad goal of what it takes to systemically end homelessness.

More information about Churchill Fellowships can be found at: [www.churchilltrust.com.au](http://www.churchilltrust.com.au)

## About Me

- I recognise that ending homelessness is possible and that it is not normal or something we should accept.
- I have worked towards this goal in a range of roles in the community, government, university, and philanthropic sectors, including currently as the CEO of the Australian Alliance to End Homelessness where I am working to build a national movement of communities seeking to end homelessness in Australia - starting with rough sleeping.
- In 2020 I received a Kenneth Myer Innovation Fellowship which enabled me to take on the role of inaugural CEO of the AAEH.
- I am also a Senior Advisor with the Institute of Global Homelessness (IGH).
- Before holding these roles I was the Executive Director of the Don Dunstan Foundation, where I helped lead the establishment and development of the Adelaide Zero Project, a nation-leading initiative seeking to end rough sleeping homelessness in the inner city.



- Prior to this I was the Senior Policy Adviser to several South Australian Premiers and Commonwealth Government Ministers in a range of portfolio areas including mental health, health, housing, homelessness, child protection, education, innovation, the arts, treasury, planning and urban development, public sector reform and others.
- I have a Bachelor of International Studies and a Bachelor of Media, with Honours in Politics and Public Policy from the University of Adelaide.
- I am currently also Deputy Chair of the Adelaide Fringe Festival and Chair of the Fringe Festival Foundation.
- In 2019 I was recognised as one of the top 40 Under 40 leaders in South Australia.
- I live in the inner city of Adelaide, Australia, and am married to Dr Jill MacKenzie and father to Sophie MacKenzie-Pearson.

## The AAEH

- The Australian Alliance to End Homelessness (AAEH) is an independent champion for ending homelessness in Australia.
- We recognise that the scale of homelessness in Australia is both preventable and solvable and that despite the common misconception to the contrary, we can end homelessness in Australia.
- We have, since 2013, supported individuals, organisations, governments and local communities to work collaboratively across sectors to end homelessness - not just at an individual level, but systemically.
- Specifically, we work to prevent, reduce and end homelessness by ensuring everyone has access to the housing and support they need so that any future incidents of homelessness that do occur are rare, brief and a one-time occurrence.
- Through the Advance to Zero Campaign, our Allied Networks and our Training and Advisory Services, we support local communities to demonstrate that ending homelessness is possible.
- For more information, about each of these, see our website at: [www.aeah.org.au](http://www.aeah.org.au)
- Ultimately, the AAEH exists to bring community, business and government together to inspire action for an end to all homelessness in Australia.

**aaeh**  
australian alliance  
to end homelessness

COMMUNITY, BUSINESS  
& GOVERNMENT ENDING  
HOMELESSNESS

## The Advance to Zero Campaign

- The Advance to Zero (AtoZ) Campaign is a groundbreaking national initiative of the AAEH that supports local collaborative efforts to end homelessness, starting with rough sleeping – one community at a time.
- Using a range of proven approaches from around the world, communities are supported not just to address individual instances of homelessness, or even reduce overall homelessness, but to end it.
- The Campaign itself is a collaboration (or what's sometimes called a collective impact initiative) between a broad range of communities, organisations and individuals that are all committed to making homelessness rare, brief and once-off – how we define an end to homelessness.
- Communities, generally defined as a local government area or collection of local government areas, seek to measure their progress towards this goal by calculating what we call Functional Zero, a dynamic way of determining if a community has been able to make homelessness rare, brief and a one-time occurrence.

**A** **Z**  
advance  
to zero

- To help guide these efforts to end homelessness, the AAEH developed what we called the Advance to Zero Methodology (and what this report proposes renaming the AtoZ Framework) based on what is working around the world and what we've learned from efforts so far in Australia.
- The Campaign supports community-based efforts to build public support for ending homelessness and political support for renewed Commonwealth, State and Local Government investment in the type of housing, support services, healthcare, and local coordination efforts needed to end homelessness in each community.
- A key way in which this is done is through supporting communities to collect consistent by-name data through a common assessment tool or survey that can provide guidance in ending individual homelessness, but also the community-wide data needed to support community advocacy and government planning.
- The AtoZ Campaign focuses on ending homelessness one type, and one community at a time.
- While Australia is one of the most prosperous and livable countries in the world, many individuals continue to be trapped in a cycle of homelessness, often transitioning from unstable accommodation to emergency shelters to rough sleeping to housing and back again. This can continue for many years resulting in a state of chronic homelessness – putting huge cost pressures on local health, homelessness and other systems, as well as significantly reduced life expectancy for the individuals concerned.
- Whilst the Campaign starts with rough sleeping, it does not finish there. Some communities also focus on all chronic homelessness, families, veterans and other forms of homelessness.
- The strategy, or theory of change, is based on what has worked overseas, and seeks to break the problem up – to focus on a particular type of homelessness, and then to break that up and to focus on a particular sub-population and to do all of this in a placed based way.

#### How it works

- The AAEH supports communities participating in the AtoZ Campaign or community of practice through a series of six-monthly improvement cycles, where communities work together, build capacity and share knowledge, tools and resources.



*(Image: Advance to Zero Learning Session, Brisbane 2022, Australia)*

- The Campaign is supported by a series of Allied Networks focused on particular sectors like health, business or veterans, and large-scale change efforts across cities, regions or states and territories.
- With our international and domestic partners, the AAEH provides training, coaching and other infrastructure or tools-based support through these improvement cycles.
- Importantly, the strategy does not seek to count up to the goal of housing more and more people, but to change the system and count down to the goal of Functional Zero.
- It is by focusing on this system change outcome and putting the individual needs of the people experiencing homelessness at the centre of that system, that we can actually end homelessness.
- More information about the AtoZ campaign can be found on the AAEH website.



# What Does It Take To End Homelessness?

The following summarises what I've learned about what it takes to end homelessness, based on observing the Built for Zero communities that have done it (in the United States and Canada), the communities that have made significant progress, Finland and Glasgow, and based on my experiences in Australia leading the AAEH.

## Understand The Problem

There are literally hundreds of thousands of pages of words written about the phenomenon of homelessness - the types of homelessness, the needs of those experiencing homelessness, the need for more housing and cutting the existing data every conceivable way you could ever want to look at. This report and my Fellowship focused squarely on solutions.

If you want to understand more about the phenomenon of homelessness, I'd recommend:

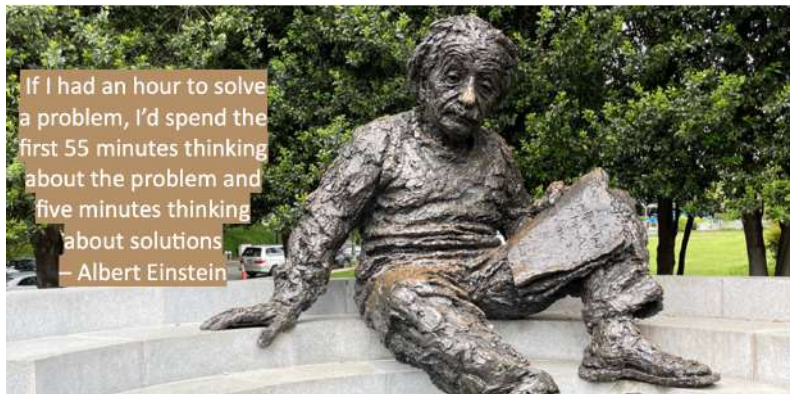
- The Centre for Social Impact's analysis of all the data - including data collected through the Advance to Zero Campaign - in their comprehensive 2022 'Ending Homelessness Report'.<sup>5</sup>
- The Productivity Commission's review of the National Housing and Homelessness Agreement.<sup>6</sup>
- The Launch Housing 2022 Homelessness Monitor.<sup>7</sup>
- The great overview/snapshot in Churchill Fellow Leanne Mitchell's report titled: Everyone's Business - What Local Government Can do to End Homelessness.<sup>8</sup>

In order to discuss solutions I've found it helpful to first be clear about the nature of the problem.

### *There are no Silver Bullets*

Homelessness is a complex problem, there is no one agency, government, program or pill that will solve it, in short, there are no silver bullets. In fact, it's insightful to be aware of the history of the concept - it comes from mythology. The silver bullet is what you use to kill a mythical creature, the werewolf. There's no one thing that's going to solve this problem - including housing. More housing alone is not going to solve the problem. More case management alone is not going to solve the problem. More outreach alone is not going to solve the problem. We need a whole range of different things to help us solve this problem.

To solve a complex problem you really need to understand the nature of the problem we're trying to solve - or as Albert Einstein once poignantly said:



(Image: Einstein Memorial, Washington DC, USA)



<sup>5</sup> [https://aaeh.org.au/assets/docs/homelessness\\_deep\\_dive\\_full\\_report.pdf](https://aaeh.org.au/assets/docs/homelessness_deep_dive_full_report.pdf)

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.pc.gov.au/inquiries/completed/housing-homelessness/report>

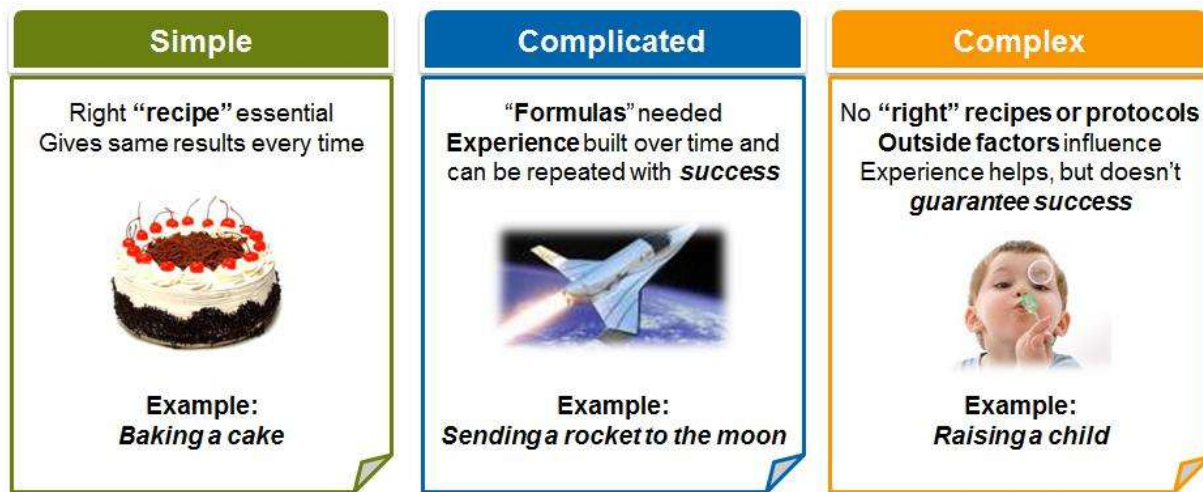
<sup>7</sup> <https://www.launchhousing.org.au/ending-homelessness/research-hub/australian-homelessness-monitor-2022>

<sup>8</sup> [https://www.churchilltrust.com.au/news\\_item/tackling-australias-homelessness-crisis-new-report/](https://www.churchilltrust.com.au/news_item/tackling-australias-homelessness-crisis-new-report/)

The problem of homelessness is not actually the problem, it's the result of the problem. When other human service systems fail what you get is homelessness. It's when mental health, corrections, child protection, drug and alcohol, private rental, social housing, family violence and other systems fail that homelessness results.

So it's complex, but what is a complex problem? The best explanation (as shown in the graphic below) that I have heard is as follows:

- **Simple Problems** - are like baking a cake. If you put in all the ingredients, you follow the recipe, you do the same thing, you can bake the same cake over and over again and get pretty similar results (unless you're terrible at cooking).
- **Complicated Problems** - are like figuring out how to put a person on the moon. It's very hard the first time, but once you've worked it out, the experience can help you to build procedures that you can then follow. If you follow the same process, use the same science and calculate the variables, you can get the same result.
- **Complex problems** - are when human beings get involved. It is like raising children, as any parent knows if you raise one child the same as you raise the other, do all the same things, and give them all the same opportunities in life, you won't necessarily get the same result because human beings are complex.



(Image: FSG, 2023, USA)<sup>9</sup>

Add trauma and multiple levels of disadvantage, as you have to when considering homelessness, and the problem becomes even more complex - what's often called a 'wicked problem'.

In recognition of this, our efforts to end homelessness must be able to respond to this complexity and we need to make sure that we're using the right tools to solve the right problems. Complex problems can't be solved with just simple solutions like programs. So many governments, services and organisations default to thinking that solutions to the problems they face can be addressed with the right policy or the right program, better commissioning or better service delivery.

A program like providing food is a service that's vital but it's a simple problem, the person lacks food so we need to give them food. You solve the problem with the service, but if you want to end homelessness you've got to solve multiple problems at once across different service systems at different points in time. You need a different set of tools.

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.fsg.org/blog/what-having-baby-teaches-you-about-complexity/>

This is where system change efforts like the collective impact approach come in. Collective impact is a structured form of collaborative effort that brings together diverse stakeholders to address complex social issues. By establishing a shared vision, common agenda, and coordinated actions, collective impact aims to change the way systems operate. Further information on the collective impact approach can be found in Appendix D.

In short, we need more tools in the toolbox. As the saying often goes: if all you have is a hammer every problem looks like a nail. For governments, in particular, their tool of choice is commissioning or funding new services - generally through competitive tender processes that force agencies to compete, breaking down the collaboration needed to solve complex problems. The following table sets out the broader array of solutions or tools needed to end homelessness.

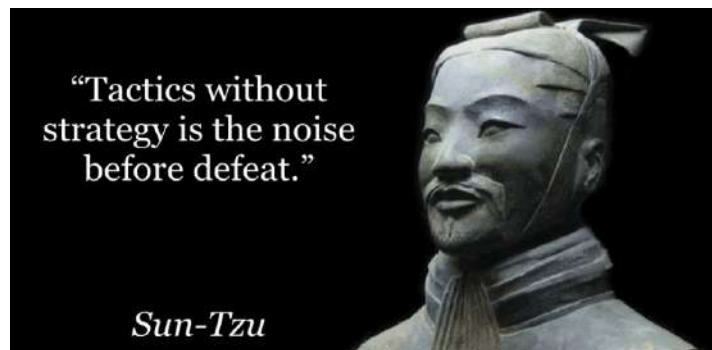
Problems	Solutions
Simple	Services and Programs
Complicated	
Complex	Systems Change Collective Impact Improvement
Wicked	

Homelessness is not a simple or even complicated problem, it's a complex problem that requires solutions that meet the complexity.

**No Strategy or Definition**

In grappling with complexity, strategy serves as a compass, guiding decision-making and action amidst intricate and uncertain circumstances - or what at times felt like chaos when I first joined the AAEH. In the context of complex social challenges, strategy provides a systematic approach to understanding interconnected issues, aligning efforts, and fostering collaboration among diverse stakeholders, ultimately increasing the likelihood of ending homelessness.

It is easy to get lost in the complexity, to feel overwhelmed by it and to focus on short-term wins or things that feel as though they have an impact. When I returned from my Fellowship and sought to summarise what I had learned, this statement by Sun-Tzu resonated with me:



(Image: Cambridge Caledonian, USA)<sup>10</sup>

<sup>10</sup> [https://lake.blogs.com/my\\_weblog/2017/05/tactics-without-strategy-is-the-noise-before-defeat-or-why-you-need-a-exit-or-succession-plan.html](https://lake.blogs.com/my_weblog/2017/05/tactics-without-strategy-is-the-noise-before-defeat-or-why-you-need-a-exit-or-succession-plan.html)

Australia is the only country I visited without a strategy that seeks to end homelessness, indeed as noted earlier, Australia doesn't even have a strategy in relation to homelessness and housing. What we are left with is a range of activities, programs and efforts that too often just amount to tactics.

## Ending Homelessness Requires a Strategy

Ending homelessness is an ambition, it is a theory of change, a methodology, a framework, and a campaign, but first and foremost, ending homelessness requires a strategy.

My Churchill Fellowship has given me the opportunity to better understand this and to clarify/propose the following key components of any Australian strategy to end homelessness:

<b>Strategy Aim</b>	The aim of our strategy should be to <u>prevent, reduce and end all homelessness</u> .
<b>Definition</b>	An end to homelessness is defined as a state where homelessness is <u>prevented where possible and rare, brief and once off</u> when it does occur.
<b>Measure: Functional Zero</b>	A community will know that we have ended homelessness if they have reached a <u>functional zero</u> , a dynamic measure, which must be sustained, and indicates that a specific geographic community has measurably solved homelessness for a particular population group.
<b>Framework: Advance to Zero</b>	The AtoZ Framework (or Theory of Change) sets out the approaches that can be taken to reach functional zero, based on what has worked in Australia and around the world.
<b>Implemented Through Improvement Cycles</b>	The AtoZ Framework is implemented through improvement cycles, starting with action planning, achieving quality data by-name list data, using improvement to drive to zero, sustaining functional zero when achieved and expanding to others along the way.

At a high level many communities and the AAEH have talked about preventing, reducing, and resolving homelessness for some time in Australia, but this proposed 'typology' of ending homelessness strategy components placed each concept into context and how they relate to each other.

Various stakeholders I met with have very strong views about the relative importance of each concept. Slight variations in the terminology were used in different parts of the world, but what is important is that communities have a shared, transparent ambition. This is something that the Institute of Global Homelessness (IGH) has been very helpful in encouraging in Australia and around the world.

Too often the tendency is to see them as conflicting, or in the case of Functional Zero, much misunderstanding of what this represents (further background on this in Appendix D). There is also space I believe for all of these various definitions, measures and aims. The point of this is to have a shared aim, and for communities to own it. Hopefully, the above guide to the components of an ending homelessness strategy helps communities, policy makers, researchers and advocates to better understand how these components fit together and complement each other.

## Defining an End to Homelessness

It perplexes me that although homelessness has been occurring for some time, and the large number of actors involved with it, very little thought or effort appears to have gone into defining what exactly an end to homelessness actually means or looks like. At the AAEH, we understand an end to homelessness as being



where homelessness is prevented where possible and, when it does occur, is rare, brief and a one-time occurrence.

This definition and the explanation below have been heavily influenced by a range of organisations and governments around the world including the Homelessness Hub in Canada, the Centre for Homelessness Impact in the UK, World Habitat and others.<sup>11</sup>

To define an end to homelessness, also requires a definition of what constitutes homelessness - this is measured very differently in many countries, the Institute of Global Homelessness framework for understanding homelessness is particularly instructive in this regard.

People without accommodation	People living in temporary or crisis accommodation	People living in severely inadequate and insecure accommodation
<p><b>1A</b> People sleeping in the streets or in other open spaces (such as parks, railway embankments, under bridges, on pavement, on river banks, in forests, etc.)</p> <p><b>1B</b> People sleeping in public roofed spaces or buildings not intended for human habitation (such as bus and railway stations, taxi ranks, derelict buildings, public buildings, etc.)</p> <p><b>1C</b> People sleeping in their cars, rickshaws, open fishing boats and other forms of transport</p> <p><b>1D</b> 'Pavement dwellers' - individuals or households who live on the street in a regular spot, usually with some form of makeshift cover</p>	<p><b>2A</b> People staying in night shelters (where occupants have to renegotiate their accommodation nightly)</p> <p><b>2B</b> People living in homeless hostels and other types of temporary accommodation for homeless people (where occupants have a designated bed or room)</p> <p><b>2C</b> Women and children living in refuges for those fleeing domestic violence</p> <p><b>2D</b> People living in camps provided for 'internally displaced people' i.e. those who have fled their homes as a result of armed conflict, natural or human-made disasters, human rights violations, development projects, etc. but have not crossed international borders</p> <p><b>2E</b> People living in camps or reception centres/temporary accommodation for asylum seekers, refugees and other immigrants</p>	<p><b>3A</b> People sharing with friends and relatives on a temporary basis</p> <p><b>3B</b> People living under threat of violence</p> <p><b>3C</b> People living in cheap hotels, bed and breakfasts and similar</p> <p><b>3D</b> People squatting in conventional housing</p> <p><b>3E</b> People living in conventional housing that is unfit for human habitation</p> <p><b>3F</b> People living in trailers, caravans and tents</p> <p><b>3G</b> People living in extremely overcrowded conditions</p> <p><b>3H</b> People living in non-conventional buildings and temporary structures, including those living in slums/informal settlements</p>
<b>IGH FOCUS AREA IN BOLD</b>		

(Global Framework for Understanding Homelessness, Institute of Global Homelessness, Chicago, USA)<sup>12</sup>

So what does the information in the AAEH definition mean precisely?

- **Prevented:** means stopping people from becoming homeless in the first place. This can be achieved by working upstream and avoiding having people leaving public institutions (like hospitals, prisons, and child protection systems) and going into homelessness, investing in prevention programs to support people whose tenancies are at risk, greater renters rights, providing adequate social security etc. There are many types of prevention, and far too little focus is placed on prevention.

<sup>11</sup> <https://world-habitat.org/our-programmes/homelessness/campaign-principals/>

<sup>12</sup> <http://ighomelessness.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/globalframeworkforundertanding.pdf>

Further information about definitions of homelessness in Australia can be found at:

<https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/australias-welfare/homelessness-and-homelessness-services>



- **Rare:** means proactively reducing the number of people experiencing homelessness in a community to as close to zero as possible - what we call Functional Zero. That is when a housing and homelessness system is able to support more people into permanent housing than are coming into that system - not just at a point in time, but over time.
- **Brief:** means if someone is experiencing homelessness, it should be for as little time as possible. People who are new to homelessness should be identified and supported back into a home as quickly as possible.
- **Once Off:** means no one should experience multiple episodes of homelessness, i.e. that it is non-reoccurring and for those who are housed following an experience of homelessness they should be supported to avoid returning to homelessness.

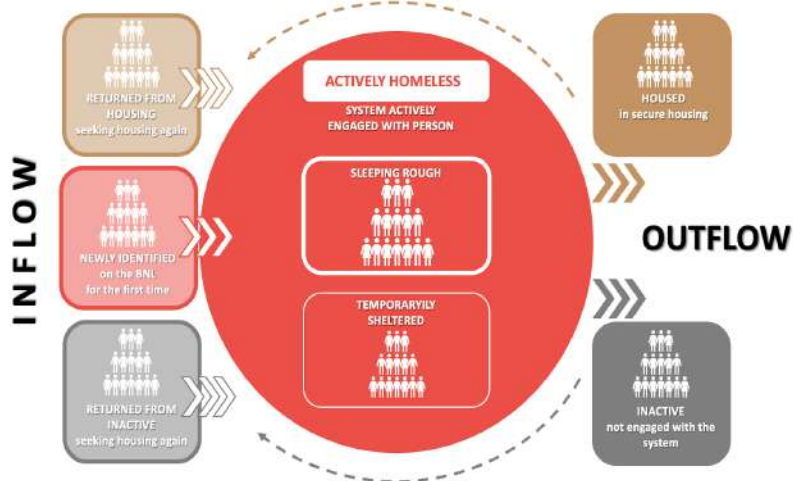
## Measuring Homelessness

In Australia not only do we not have a national strategy, we have no national systems in place to measure the rates of homelessness across the country – rather, we estimate it every five years through the census. The day the latest census was released it was nineteen months out of date. Imagine how we’d manage problems like unemployment if we estimated the rates every five years and then took 588 days to release this information.

This is why communities in Australia, inspired by the successful efforts in the US and Canada, have begun to collect their own data - known as a by-name list. It is called a by-name list because it literally lists everyone experiencing homelessness by name, and identifies their needs. Importantly this is done with the consent of the people experiencing homelessness, for the primary purpose of supporting them into housing.

We not only need to measure the rates of homelessness, we need to be able to measure if our efforts are working. As homelessness is a complex, constantly changing problem, we need to track our progress in a dynamic way.

This is where the ‘functional zero’ measure pioneered by Community Solutions comes in. Functional zero is calculated using the data collected through by-name lists, with further background available in Appendix D. In Australia, we track progress toward functional zero by measuring the following data points:



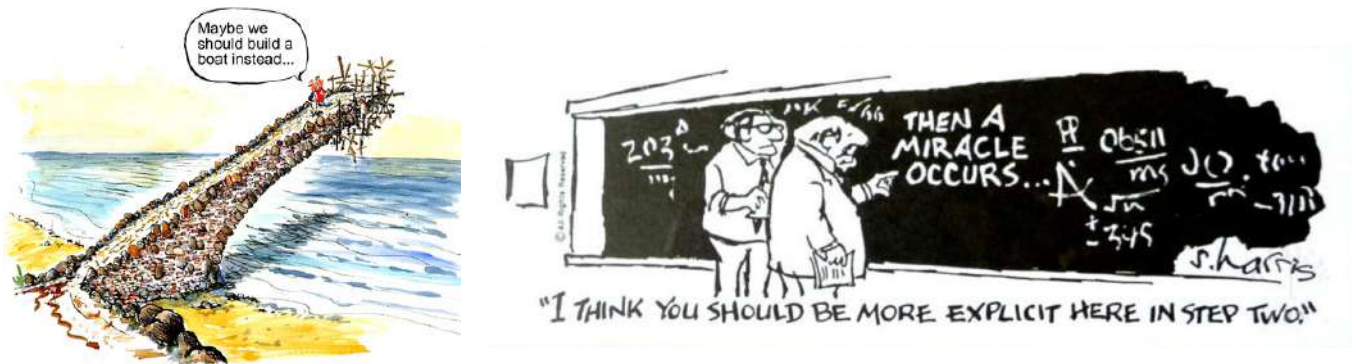
(Image: By-Name List Data Points, AAEH 2023, Australia)

## Framework/Theory of Change

If strategies to end homelessness need to set out an aim, have a clear definition and a way to measure progress, they also need to have a theory of change or framework.

A theory of change is essentially a comprehensive description of how and why a desired change is expected to happen in a particular context. It helps illustrate what has been described as the ‘missing middle’ between what a change initiative does and how these activities add up to the desired outcome being sought. It does this by first identifying the desired long-term goals and then working back from this to identify all the conditions that must be in place (and how these relate to one another) for the goals to occur.<sup>13</sup>

In the case of ending homelessness, this is working back from the outcome of functional zero or rare, brief and once off homelessness in a community. The AAEEH has developed a theory of change called the Advance to Zero Methodology to help guide efforts to end homelessness in Australia, based on what is working around the world and what we’ve learned from efforts so far in Australia. It is our theory of change that has evolved based on what we are learning.



(Image: Centre for Theory of Change, New York, USA)<sup>14</sup>

The following section which sets out a new version based on the insights from this Fellowship, has also seen a slight name change from the AtoZ Methodology to the AtoZ Framework, to better reflect its descriptive, not prescriptive nature.

### A Shared Aim

Some of the people I met with on my Fellowship initially thought that solving a complex or even ‘wicked’ problem like homelessness was not possible, but when presented with the definition of an end to homelessness as being rare, brief and once off - pretty much all changed their view. Having a shared, clearly defined and measurable aim is clearly essential.

Ending homelessness requires a strategy, and the AtoZ Framework is about informing that strategy. It starts therefore with having a shared system-wide aim. That aim should include a clear definition and way to measure progress. We have developed the following:

**A Shared Strategy**

To prevent, reduce and end all homelessness in Australia by ensuring that when it does occur it is rare, brief and once off measured by seeking to reach and sustain functional zero

The precise meaning of prevented, rare, brief and once off has already been covered. But a more detailed definition of functional zero, something that is often confused or misinterpreted, is as follows:

- **Functional Zero:** measures whether a community has ended homelessness for a population. It is

<sup>13</sup> <https://www.theoryofchange.org/what-is-theory-of-change/>

<sup>14</sup> <https://www.theoryofchange.org/what-is-theory-of-change/>

reached when a community can demonstrate that their system is routinely housing more people than are coming into it, and has sustained that state for a period of time, thereby ensuring that homelessness is rare, brief and once off.

### Four Approaches to Ending Homelessness

Understanding the complexity of the challenge that ending homelessness represents, the Framework also sets our four ‘approaches’ that can be applied to local community efforts to end homelessness, these are:

Four Approaches to Ending Homelessness			
Housing First Systems Change	Person Centered & Strengths Based	Data Driven Improvement	Place-Based Collaboration

1. **Housing First Systems Change** - involving a commitment to seek to change the entire system of support for people experiencing homelessness, not just individual services or programs. It seeks to implement the principles of the housing first approach at the system level. Specifically, to provide immediate access to housing with no housing readiness requirements, whilst simultaneously working with people to promote recovery and wellbeing.
2. **Person-centred and Strengths Based** - a commitment to put the person experiencing homelessness at the centre of the service system, to build on their strengths to support an end to their homelessness. Listening to the voices of people with a lived experience of homelessness and ensuring culturally appropriate responses are central to this approach.
  - It is about recognising that people are the experts in their own lives and that we need to listen to that expertise.
  - This approach is based on the principle that policies should be developed according to the existing needs of the individual rather than the needs of organisations or the system.
3. **Data Driven Improvement** - is about building problem-solving capability across a system through an ongoing process of learning, testing and adopting new ideas and ways that build on the successful efforts to drive reductions in homelessness through cycles of improvement. Informed by quality by-name data these improvement efforts can help change systems to better meet the needs of the people in need of support from them. We have adopted the methodology developed by Community Solutions and the Institute of Healthcare Improvement to inform these efforts.
4. **Place-Based Collaboration** - Commitment to work together in a place and in a coordinated way that holds everyone involved accountable to reach our shared goal of ending homelessness. We have adopted the collective impact approach as a way to guide these efforts.

### Seven Agreed Activities

In addition, there are seven agreed activities that should be implemented in a way consistent with each of the four approaches to ending homelessness, these activities are:

Seven Agreed Activities (Applying the Four Approaches)	
Prevention	
Assertive Outreach	Service Coordination
Common Triage	Leadership & Advocacy
A Real-Time By-Name List	Housing First - Programs & Permanent Supportive Housing

1. **Prevention** – the best way to end homelessness is to prevent it from occurring. To enable systems to

provide care before care is needed. The use of data and continuous improvement practices to focus early intervention and prevention work on reducing the ‘inflow’ of people entering into rough sleeping is crucial.

2. **Assertive Outreach** – coordinated street outreach efforts are essential in helping to identify and support people who feel unsafe or otherwise unable to come into traditional services - including through the use of Connections (or Registry) Weeks.
3. **Common Triage** - ensuring there is a coordinated triaging of the scarce housing and support resources in the system to support the most vulnerable first. One element of this triage process is a common tool that enables the collection of data on an individual's needs so that they can be assessed and recommended for support in a consistent, evidence-informed way (i.e. the VI-SPDAT/AHVTT - see Appendix D for further information).
4. **A real-time quality by-name list** – of people experiencing homelessness and their individual needs, provides a shared understanding, or quality data, to inform who needs what support, whether efforts are working, how to target resources best, and how to improve the system as a whole. It also enables scarce housing and support to be triaged according to local priorities and it enables a prevention focus, better advocacy and the implementation of Housing First.
5. **Service Coordination** – a community-wide, data driven approach to the coordination of services and housing allocations ensures more equitable, efficient, and effective resource allocation. Ensuring whole of government support for this effort is crucial, as is ensuring there are escalation and improvement pathways in place to support this work.
6. **Leadership and Advocacy** – systems leadership is crucial to advocate for the changes in government policies, organisational practices and community attitudes necessary to drive the broad based change needed to end homelessness. Leadership and advocacy lead to sustainability - ending homelessness is a long term proposition. Leadership and Advocacy are also incredibly important because they are needed to obtain:
  - Public support, sometimes generated through information or YIMBY (Yes in My Back Yard) Campaigns.
  - Political commitment at all levels (National, State/Territory and Local).
  - Policy changes and adequate funding and investment.
7. **Housing First – Programs and Permanent Supportive Housing** – ultimately the biggest driver of homelessness is the lack of affordable and appropriate housing. Leveraging the by-name list data to support better systems planning and advocacy to get access to housing and support needed is crucial to sustaining tenancies, particularly among those with the most acute and chronic experiences of homelessness. Housing First Principles for Australia have been developed to inform these efforts and the AAEH is developing permanent supportive housing principles.

Support resources about all of these activities are available for communities participating in the Advance to Zero Campaign and further background on many of the concepts can be found in Appendix D.

### Improvement Cycles

To encourage the implementation of these activities and approaches, we support communities to establish local Zero Projects through a series of improvement cycles. Through these cycles, communities are supported to break up the problem and the work into smaller and smaller pieces. As communities work their way through each improvement cycle, a range of different tools, coaching, training, milestones recognition and other resources are made available.

Implemented Through Improvement Cycles				
Action Planning	Quality Data	Improving to Zero	Sustaining Zero	Expanding to Zero for All (not sequential)



1. **Action Planning** - a starting point where communities develop a collaborative system wide plan to help get key stakeholders on the same page, set targets, agree to next steps and build an improvement team who is responsible for getting to zero. These plans also set out how communities will establish a collective impact initiative or Zero Project.



2. **Quality By-Name List** - where communities work to build a comprehensive real-time, by-name list of people experiencing rough sleeping homelessness in their community.



3. **Improve to Zero** - where communities use a range of solutions, tools and approaches - including triage, improvement and data-driven advocacy to drive monthly reductions in homelessness.



4. **Sustaining Zero** - when communities have achieved functional zero and are seeking to sustain it.



5. **Zero for All \*** - communities expand their focus to new target populations and greater geographical areas to continue the campaign toward ending all homelessness.

*\* = not necessarily sequential*

## The Story of Zero

Much of the AtoZ Framework has been adopted from the successful efforts of the Built for Zero Campaign in the USA - which has since spread to Canada, the UK, and Europe. All have been supported by Community Solutions, a not for profit agency, that I was able to spend quite some time with during my Fellowship and who for a number of years have provided a significant amount of support to Australian communities. They describe themselves as being an agency that doesn't simply believe that all communities have the power to end homelessness because they work with more than 100 communities making it a reality every day.

The Built for Zero Campaigns were informed by the lessons from the 100,000 Homes Campaign also supported by Community Solutions. A key lesson of that campaign was that despite reaching their target of housing 100,000 people previously sleeping rough - they weren't able to reduce homelessness by anywhere near 100,000 people. They realised that rather than



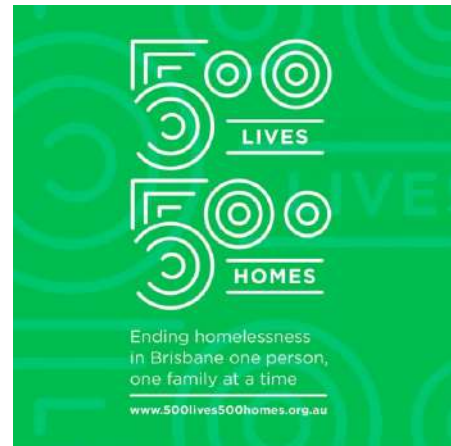


just processing people through broken systems more quickly, they need to change the way those systems work. Put another way, they realised that they were counting the wrong way - rather than counting up to the goal of housing a set number of people, they needed to count down to the goal of ending homelessness. This was the genesis of the functional zero measure.

A series of communities in Australia ran similar campaigns, notably the 500 Lives Campaign in Brisbane and the 50 Lives Campaign in Perth. The AtoZ Campaign evolved out of these campaigns, all of which started by conducting connections weeks or a series of community-driven activities aimed at identifying and surveying individuals experiencing homelessness within a specific area over a short period, often a week. This approach involves volunteers and outreach teams engaging with people who are homeless, conducting surveys to gather information about their circumstances and needs, and subsequently entering this data into a centralised by-name list.

Initially, the focus of the approach was to 'count up' to the number of people housed, however, communities around the world have shifted their focus to 'counting down' to the outcome of functional zero homelessness.

In 2017 Adelaide was the first community in Australia to commit to achieving functional zero street homelessness and to developing a public dashboard that is updated monthly to show how the city is tracking in reaching its goal. In its first 12 months, the Adelaide Zero Project, which I helped lead the establishment of, housed a record 161 people who were previously sleeping rough in the inner city. Importantly, as a consequence of the data the project collected, it was identified that despite housing this record number, a total of 356 new people were identified as sleeping rough for the first time during these first 12 months. This demonstrates the importance of efforts to prevent and divert people from sleeping rough at a system level, not just to seek to house as many people as you find.



*(Image: Connections Week Volunteers Training/Launch, Hutt Street Centre, Adelaide, Australia)*

## Why Start With Rough Sleeping?

Ending homelessness requires focus and it involves learning the lessons from elsewhere. The Advance to Zero Campaign, just like the Built for Zero Campaigns in the USA and Canada, focuses on rough sleeping. This is not

because this type of homelessness is more important than any other type of homelessness - but because the focus of the campaign is to demonstrate that ending homelessness is possible in Australia, modelled on the successful efforts of other communities.

Whilst the statistical categories of rough sleeping, couch surfing, overcrowding and others are important, from the perspective of the people experiencing homelessness, they are often almost meaningless because people move between all of these types of homelessness on a regular, sometimes daily basis.

There are however other reasons to focus on rough sleeping, including:

- It can reduce a person's life expectancy by up to 30 years, leading to an estimated 424 deaths of people living on the streets from often preventable illnesses as estimated by the AAEH.<sup>15</sup>
- It is more costly to governments to leave the problem of chronic rough sleeping unaddressed than it is to provide permanent housing. In fact, it is \$13,100 cheaper per year, per person.<sup>16</sup>
- The overrepresentation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, people with a disability and other particularly vulnerable populations.
- It is the most prominent form of inequality in our community - when we leave this unaddressed, it starts to pull communities apart. Larger and larger groups of people starting to sleep rough, creates conflict in local communities that often lead to a 'hardening' of community attitudes and counterproductive policy responses.

There are many reasons to focus on rough sleeping, but the biggest is that such a focus works. The efforts in the USA have been successful in reaching functional zero in 14 communities and the Canadian Alliance to End Homelessness, through their Built for Zero Campaign, has supported three communities (as set out below). They have all done it by focusing on particular types of rough sleeping - chronic or veteran rough sleeping homelessness. They have not done it by - to quote the Academy award winning film - trying to do everything, everywhere, all at once. We need to start somewhere, and if everything is a priority, then nothing is a priority.



(Image: Community Solutions, Built for Zero Progress Dashboard, USA)<sup>17</sup>

<sup>15</sup> [https://aaeh.org.au/assets/docs/MEDIA-RELEASE\\_-\\_E2%80%98Housing-is-healthcare%E2%80%99\\_-\\_Renewed-calls-for-urgent-Australian-Government-action-on-rough-sleeping-homelessness.docx.pdf](https://aaeh.org.au/assets/docs/MEDIA-RELEASE_-_E2%80%98Housing-is-healthcare%E2%80%99_-_Renewed-calls-for-urgent-Australian-Government-action-on-rough-sleeping-homelessness.docx.pdf)

<sup>16</sup> <https://theconversation.com/supportive-housing-is-cheaper-than-chronic-homelessness-67539>

<sup>17</sup> <https://community.solutions/>

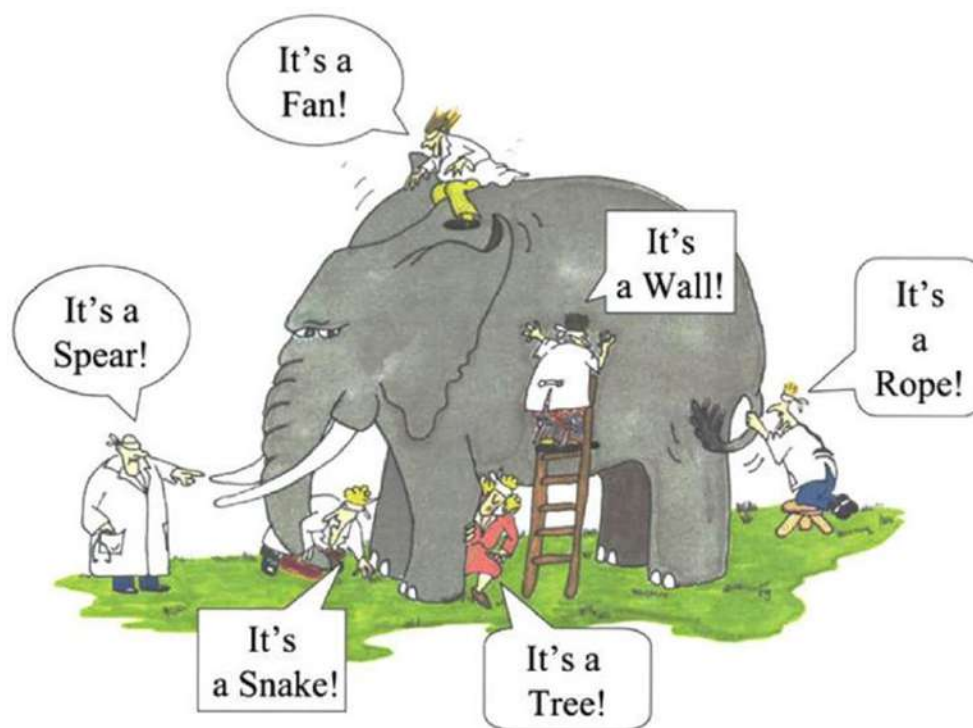


(Image: Canadian Alliance to End Homelessness, Built for Zero Progress Dashboard, Canada)<sup>18</sup>

It's worth noting that despite the decades of homelessness reductions that Finland has been driving they have not yet ended homelessness in a place or for a population, though they are getting close! However, what both the North American examples and the Finnish success have in common is that they have both successfully sought to change the systems in which they are operating.

### It's About System Change

Ending homelessness requires system change because homelessness is not merely a single-issue challenge but a complex outcome of various interconnected factors. System change entails addressing the underlying structures, policies, and interactions that contribute to homelessness. In order to change a system, one must first be able to see it – a notion exemplified by the fable of the elephant and the six blind men. In this analogy, an elephant enters a village, and six blind men begin touching it, each describing it from their limited perspective as shown in the following image.



(Image: John Godfrey Saxe fable of the 'Blind Men and the Elephant, Companies are Elephants, Medium, USA)<sup>19</sup>

<sup>18</sup> <https://bfzcanada.ca/>

<sup>19</sup> <https://medium.com/analysts-corner/companies-are-elephants-d9bf807bf217>

Similarly, various stakeholders in the homelessness system often see only a part of the whole picture. To end homelessness, we need to step back and view the entire system comprehensively - this is what a by-name list helps with, and what a collaboration or zero project enables in terms of the various players in the system being able to 'see' the complete system. Just as the six blind men need to communicate and combine their insights to understand the full elephant, we must collaborate and integrate efforts across sectors to end homelessness.

**Policies to Support Collaboration and Systems Change**

The challenge in Australia has been that we do not have a policy framework for creating the collaborations necessary to enable the system to see itself. In the USA they have policies requiring Continuums of Care and Coordinate access to be established, and in Canada they have a policy of coordinated access and a nationally-funded Built for Zero campaign.

The US Government Department for Housing and Urban Development (HUD) describes Continuums of Care (CoC) as being:

*Designed to promote community wide commitment to the goal of ending homelessness; provide funding for efforts by non-profit providers, and State and local governments to quickly rehouse homeless individuals and families while minimizing the trauma and dislocation caused to homeless individuals, families, and communities by homelessness; promote access to and effect utilization of mainstream programs by homeless individuals and families; and optimize self-sufficiency among individuals and families experiencing homelessness.<sup>20</sup>*



(Image: Continuums of Care, Community Solutions, USA)

Both the USA and Canada have developed the concept of 'Coordinated Entry', a process that helps communities prioritise assistance based on vulnerability and severity of service needs, to ensure that people who most need assistance can receive it as quickly as possible. Coordinated entry processes also provide information about service needs and gaps to help communities plan assistance and identify needed resources. Further background on both can be found in Appendix D.

There is no direct comparison for the Australian context, we have developed a number of activities including service coordination, the by-name list and coordinated triage. We have adopted the language of triage as it invokes the notion of triaging that takes place in emergency medicine where the preliminary assessment of patients or casualties occurs in order to determine the urgency of their need for treatment and the nature of treatment required.

<sup>20</sup> <https://www.hudexchange.info/programs/coc/>

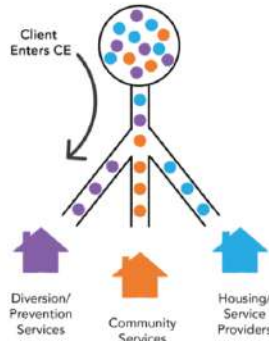
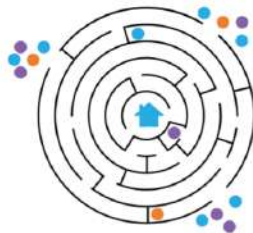


### Without Coordinated Entry

Clients continually re-directed, creating delays in service or even distrust, especially the most vulnerable populations.

Available resources are underutilized or misused as clients are continually referred to multiple providers.

Multiple assessments leading to duplication of services, and poor data tracking.



### With Coordinated Entry

No wrong door approach, meaning any agency participating in CE has the ability to direct a client to the resources that best match their needs.

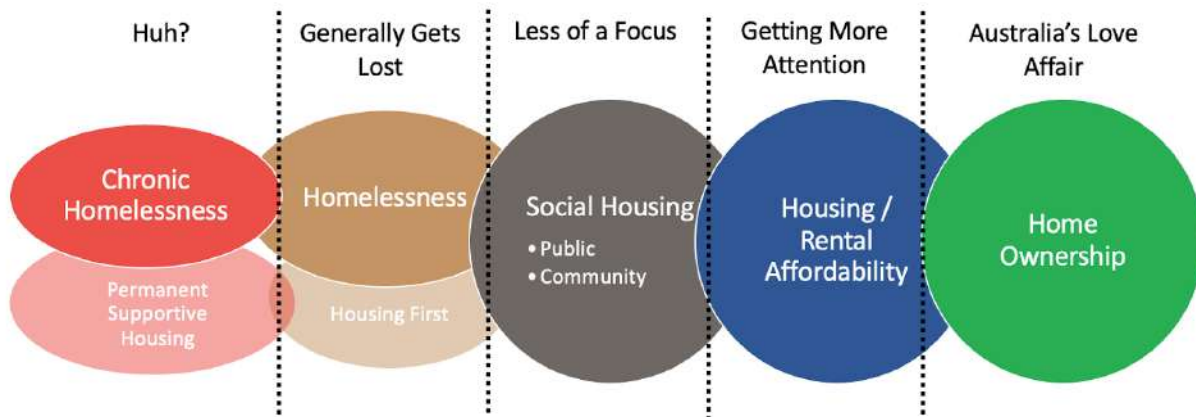
Shared resources and assessments to better understand our population.

Clients are placed in safe and stable housing options faster and more effectively to reduce length of time homeless and returns back to homelessness.

(Image: Community Alliance for the Homeless, USA)<sup>21</sup>

These comparisons raise the question of who needs to be involved in efforts to end homelessness in the Australian context? This has been one of the hardest questions to answer because of all the countries I visited Australia has the most decentralised policy framework on homelessness. Essentially the Commonwealth Government require, through the National Housing and Homelessness Agreement (NHHA) the States and Territories to have a strategy. However, the Productivity Commission recently reviewed the NHHA and found that this agreement was ineffective, did not foster collaboration, nor did it hold governments to account - in effect, it is “a funding contract, not a blueprint for reform”.<sup>22</sup>

As a consequence, each state and territory does their own thing in Australia with vastly different focuses and results. Generally, one of the more consistent features of homelessness policy is not one of seeking to end homelessness but is one of neglect. Ending homelessness for a population group (if it exists at all) gets lost within the broader focus on homelessness policy which in turn generally gets lost within the broader challenge of social housing, which gets lost in the broader challenge of housing affordability, which in turn is generally subservient to the great Australian dream of home ownership (see illustration below). Something again the Productivity Commission found, when it suggested redirecting more investment from supporting first home buyers to people facing homelessness.



(Image: What is the focus? Housing vs Homelessness Policy, AAEH, Australia)

To address this ‘gap in focus’ and to replicate what has largely been created through policy settings in the USA and Canada through CoCs and Coordinated Access, communities in Australia have banded together locally

<sup>21</sup> [www.cafth.org/coordinated-entry/](http://www.cafth.org/coordinated-entry/)

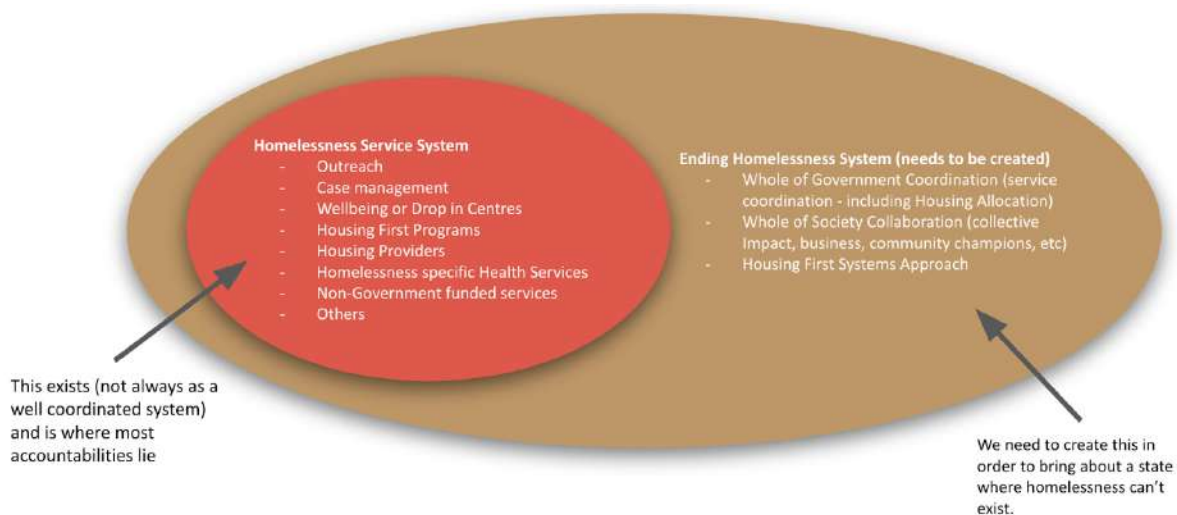
<sup>22</sup> <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2022-09-30/housing-productivity-commission-report-latest/101489072>



and self-initiated their own local AtoZ collaborations with limited government support and often in a stop-start manner because of limited resources.

### Collective Impact

Many of these Australian efforts have been informed by the collective impact approach, to make up for the lack of government engagement in systems change efforts to end homelessness, as compared to government efforts to recommission and improve the existing specialist homelessness sector. Such recommissioning processes generally rely on competitive tender processes that set up agencies to compete against each other for this funding, rather than collaborate as the efforts to end homelessness require. Collective impact helps with addressing this, but I've also found it helpful to be clear on the difference between the homelessness service system and an ending homelessness system.



(Image: Homelessness vs Ending Homelessness Systems, AAEH, Australia)

Coordination and integration across homelessness services is crucially important, but if the goal is to end homelessness then it is insufficient, as this system can't solve the problem alone. That requires whole of government and whole of society efforts to change the way these systems operate, the combination of these efforts makes up what I think we should call the 'ending homelessness system' in Australia.

Ensuring there is someone thinking about this system, and how to change it, is the unique role of a backbone organisation in a collective impact initiative: to hold the vision, and ensure the right people are in the right rooms at the right time, with the right Information.<sup>23</sup> The accountabilities of government and services pull them into focusing on short-term needs and to try and do everything, everywhere for everyone all at once. Generally, no one is responsible for the whole system. A backbone focuses on supporting the system change with the specific measurable aim of the collaboration. Backbones take many forms and can be in local governments, in service delivery agencies or in independent agencies like think tanks, universities and other dedicated system change agencies - but wherever they sit, their role is to think of the system. To see the entire elephant.

If who should be involved in system change efforts in the Australian context was one of the hardest things to contextualise from overseas, figuring out what is Housing First and what its role is in ending homelessness was probably the most contentious.

<sup>23</sup> The AAEH acts as the backbone for the Advance to Zero Campaign and also as the backbone for the Western Australian and South Australian efforts. The AAEH supports the backbones in Qld, NSW and Victoria.

## Housing First and Ending Homelessness

I've found through my Fellowship that people in the housing and homelessness sectors have very strong views about many things, no more so than Housing First. Trying to understand exactly what Housing First is has been challenging because so many of the people I've met have such strong views about their element. WARNING: If debates about the types of Housing First are not your thing, you might want to skip this section.

### What is Housing First?

Confusingly, there are many types of Housing First, called different things in different contexts. The phrase is often used interchangeably as a term for a particular type of program, as an approach or philosophy, and as a systems change effort. The thing is, it is all of these things. To help better understand the different types of Housing First, the diagram below is the clearest guide setting out the different types of Housing First for the Australian context. My particular thanks to my colleagues Leah Watkins and Karyn Walsh who helped me make sense of all the knowledge people had shared with me, when I got back home.



*(Images: Australian Guide to the Types of Housing First, edited with permission, Leah Watkins)*

Housing First has evolved separately but concurrently out of two places. The Housing First program model, which has evolved from the mental health and homelessness Pathways service in the United States<sup>24</sup> and the Housing First principle or philosophy which has evolved out of Finland. Both are needed as part of strategies to end homelessness and have been integrated into the Australian Advance to Zero Framework.



### Housing First Approach - A Compass

Often used interchangeably with:

- Practice
- Philosophy
- Principle / Principles



### Housing First Programs - A Roadmap

Examples Include:

- Journey to Social Inclusion (scattered site)
- Common Ground (single site)



### Housing First System - A Compass

Often used interchangeably with:

- Ending Homelessness
- The Finish Housing First Principle

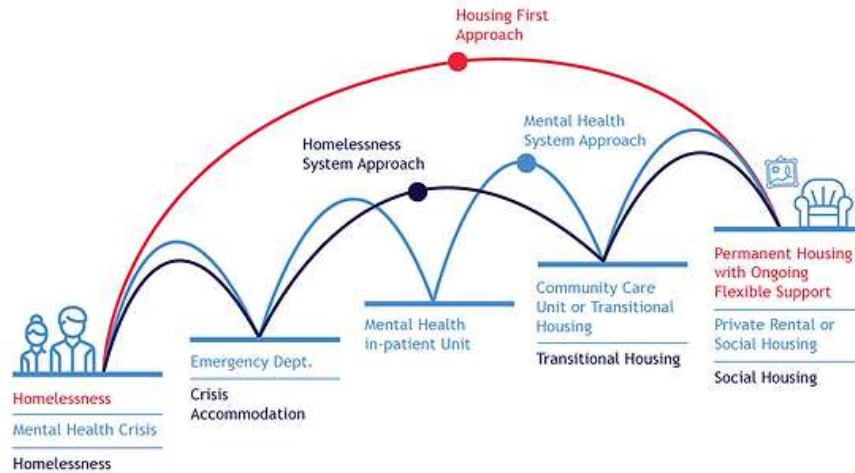
*(Images: Australian Guide to the Types of Housing First, edited with permission, Leah Watkins)*

<sup>24</sup> <https://www.pathwayshousingfirst.org/>

The Housing First Europe Hub I think differentiates these types of Housing First best when they describe the approach and the systems change effort, as a compass, to guide the way. Conversely, Housing First programs are more of a road map, they are descriptive as they have a particular model behind them for which fidelity is important including whether this be scattered site (housing in the suburbs) models, or single site higher density models that enable greater permanent onsite support like Common Ground (called Permanent Supportive Housing).

**Housing First Approach**

A leading champion of Housing First in Australia is Micah Projects and they described the Housing First approach in this way.<sup>25</sup>



(Image: Housing First Approach, Micah Projects, Australia)

The following principles for Australia have been developed collaboratively to promote the implementation of this approach in Australia, with the support of the Housing First Europe Hub, whose creation was supported by the Y Foundation out of Finland.



(Image: Housing First Principles, Homelessness Australia)<sup>26</sup>

**Housing First Programs**

Housing First as a program is an internationally recognised evidence based service intervention for people with high support needs who have experienced long-term or chronic homelessness. However, there is often

<sup>25</sup> [www.endhomelessnesswa.com/our-approach](http://www.endhomelessnesswa.com/our-approach)

<sup>26</sup> <https://homelessnessaustralia.org.au/homelessness-resources/housing-first/>

furious discussion about what types of program interventions do and do not constitute Housing First - the fidelity debates. This is I think for a number of reasons:

- Confusion re language and concept. There are debates about the categories of Housing First, what fits into each category and what they are named, varying from country to country.
- There are programs that call themselves Housing First but aren't.
- It's not well understood that high fidelity Housing First programs are not for everyone, whereas the Housing First approach is.

This last point took me a while to wrap my head around. There are some people with low acuity/needs for whom a Housing First program intervention would not be overkill. With some light touch support, they can be assisted back into housing - without the need for an intensive, ongoing and relatively expensive Housing First program intervention. They would however benefit from the services in that system utilising the Housing First approach/principles. There is also a group of people who have very high needs, or are high acuity, that may never be able to live independently, without some sort of support. For this group of people, permanent supportive housing might be a better option. The following diagram sets this out:



(Image: Australian Housing First Systems Change Guide + Acuity, edited with permission, Leah Watkins)

### Housing First and Systems Change

The value of Housing First in many ways is the simplicity which it brings to the homelessness problem - homelessness can be ended by providing housing and adequate support. However, this simplicity at times has led to Housing First being misinterpreted as a one-size-fits-all solution to a deeply complex issue. I think this is why it has evolved beyond just an approach underpinned by principles, and a series of programs, but is also a systems change effort. Again I have worked with colleagues in Australia to make sense of what I learned about Housing First as a Systems Change effort and the following guide sets this out:



(Image: Australian Housing First Systems Change Guide, edited with permission, Leah Watkins)

There are a few points worth clarifying.

The first is that there is a role for crisis accommodation in a Housing First system, but it needs to be small. Australia doesn't by and large have the problem of very large-scale crisis accommodation (shelters) in the way that colder climate countries in the Northern Hemisphere have. We do need to reduce barriers and improve the quality of crisis accommodation in many Australian communities though. There is no role however for transitional accommodation<sup>27</sup> in a Housing First system, and any services providing them should seek to transition them to permanent housing, or better yet Permanent Supportive Housing (see Appendix D for further background on Permanent Supportive Housing).

Second, Permanent Supportive Housing is a type of Housing First. Some advocates argue that because the support is connected to the place where support is provided and not the individual, that this is somehow not Housing First. Independent living in low density housing in the suburbs is not what everyone wants. If someone wants to live in higher density living, why shouldn't that be their choice? If wealthy people can choose to have 'congregate living' with shared gyms and concierges in luxury apartments and retirement villages, why shouldn't incredibly vulnerable people have those same options. For reasons I don't understand, some high fidelity Housing First advocates view this as not aspiring to independence.

Lastly, whilst there is a massive body of evidence that shows that Housing First programs work, as the Y Foundation pointed out to me, there is less evidence about what makes up Housing First as a systems change effort.

### ***Housing First and Ending Homelessness***

The difference between Housing First and ending homelessness is that Housing First is primarily an approach, and ending homelessness is about strategy. In this sense, Housing First is an important part of strategies to end homelessness, but it is not the only thing needed to end homelessness. To achieve an end to homelessness you also need to prevent it, to know how much of it there is (by-name lists) and to meet the needs of everyone in the system.

As Juha Kaakinen, former head of the Y Foundation in Finland told me:

***"We know that housing first works, it is successful about 80% of the time. But if the goal is to end homelessness, we need to find ways to meet the needs of 100% of the people in the system. Researchers have conducted 10,000+ peer-reviewed studies on housing first programs into the 80% that high-fidelity housing first programs work for, but there are next to no studies about the 20% that it didn't work for and why".***

Housing First works to end homelessness for some individuals, Housing First is crucially important, but if the goal is the end of homelessness, rather than just to house people, then Housing First is a second-order issue. The first-order issue is ending homelessness and more precisely a strategy to end homelessness - that must incorporate Housing First. You could say more simply that Housing First is about tactics, and ending homelessness is about strategy.

Now, of course, we need more investment in Australia in Housing First programs, but we should focus on the goal we want - ending homelessness. The central lesson of the 100,000 Homes Campaign, that the Built for Zero and Advance to Zero Communities have learned is that yes Housing First ends an individual's

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<sup>27</sup> Excluding youth services, as transition is a normal part of the youth experiences and youth specific Housing First principles often lean more towards choice and self determination to accommodate this.



homelessness - but if you want to end homelessness for a community you need to seek to end homelessness, not just deliver high fidelity programs in broken systems. It requires a systems change approach.

Now Housing First is also a system change effort - but there isn't an evidence base behind Housing First as a system change effort, in the way that there is for Housing First as a program level intervention. In fact, Juha Kahila, Head Of International Affairs, Y Foundation in Finland told me:

*“Time is running out to demonstrate the effectiveness of housing first at the system level, Governments have been increasingly backing housing first, but it's not delivering the results with a rigid focus on high-fidelity programs that solve an individual's problem but won't solve the community problem.”*

When I asked Juha Kaakinen, if the Finns had their time again would they call it Housing First Systems Change or would they call it ending homelessness, the answer was “ending homelessness, this is the goal” with the Housing First ‘principle’ as they call it, or the ‘approach’ as I’ve proposed calling it for consistency in naming in the Australian context, as an important part of that.

We have the opportunity in Australia to avoid the confusion that exists about Housing First as a system change effort elsewhere, and the risks of being pulled into often endless debates about fidelity if we focus our strategy, efforts and language on the first-order issue, ‘ending homelessness’. This is after all the thing we want, rather than trying to build up Housing First into something bigger than it is, one of a number of valuable, evidence-based approaches to ending homelessness (as set out in the AtoZ Framework). In the end, you can do Housing First and not end homelessness, but you can't end homelessness and not do Housing First.

### The Homelessness Sector: ‘Eating its own’

To ‘eat one's own’ is to turn on and attack members of one's own group or sector.

There is a tendency - both in Australia, and internationally - to ignore, talk down, misunderstand, misquote and mischaracterise the work of others in the homelessness sector.

This tendency is prominent amongst senior managers, researchers, CEOs, advocates and some policymakers. Interestingly rarely in the six countries I visited, nor in my work in Australia, have these debates surfaced among front-line staff, people with lived experience, or even political leaders (although the political leaders certainly benefit from divisions within the sector).

I found a lot of the difference stems from a lack of dialogue and open-mindedness, tribalism, competition, and a scarcity mindset that a lack of resources so often drives.

The debates often centre around one program model or another, one tool or another, one definition or another. What is or isn't Housing First, what definition of ending homelessness should be used, which milestones people recognise on the way to ending homelessness, and whether the emphasis should be on data, coordination, prevention, or just advocacy for more social housing?

The strength of these arguments often has more to do with which charismatic leader, organisation, or country first championed a model, rather than any clear-eyed analysis of what works. This tendency isn't helped by the fact that sometimes it is the researchers who are the most ‘tribal’ in these debates, something that a number of leaders I met with expressed frustration about.

Whilst we know a lot about what works at a program level, it was said to me frequently that we know very little about what works at the system level, particularly given how few communities around the world have ended homelessness or are making large-scale progress towards this aim.

As a consequence, it would seem that a little more open-mindedness, or a sense of curiosity, is called for from some CEOs, managers, researchers, and advocates. It would also be helpful for the people in these 'leadership' positions to engage and support those who are seeking to apply approaches from other jurisdictions rather than quietly, passive-aggressively, criticising, and undermining these efforts.

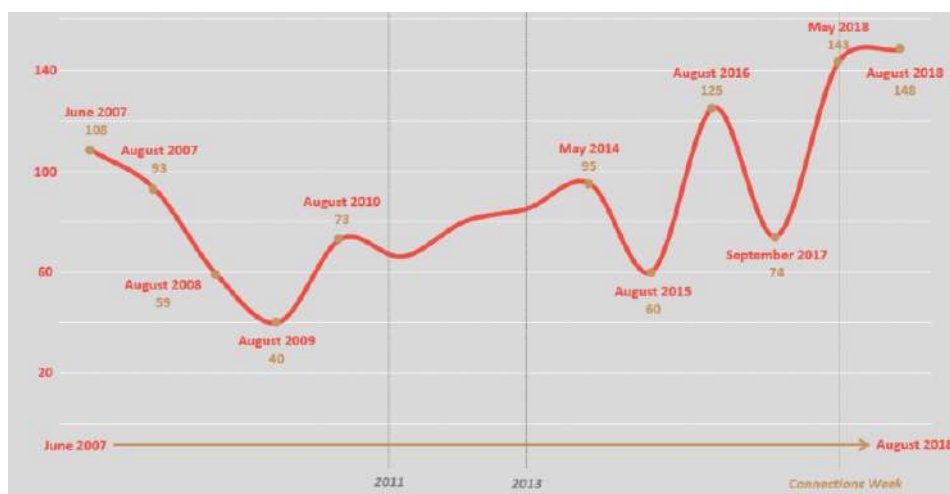
This isn't to say that we shouldn't critique and seek to improve individual and collective efforts, but to do so in a productive way, in a transparent way, through respectful dialogue and not mischaracterising or commenting critically while remaining ignorant of the actual efforts being undertaken. These are all behaviours I have unfortunately seen repeatedly in Australia and during my Churchill Fellowship.

I hesitated to include this section in my report, because it is petty, it is negative, it is only a small number of people, and as you will read in the rest of the report I remain eternally optimistic about the efforts to end homelessness. I am optimistic because of the overwhelming positivity, generosity, humility and kindness of the many people and organisations I have met through my work with the AAEH and through my travels as a Churchill Fellow. Having witnessed this behaviour so regularly internationally, and having been on the receiving end of it so often in Australia, I didn't feel this report would tell the whole story without me 'calling it out'.

As Lydia Stazen from the Institute of Global Homelessness said it best 'this problem is big enough for us all to find our space to work on it'.

## Advocacy Strategy

My involvement in homelessness policy started when I became the Social Inclusion Adviser to the South Australian Premier Mike Rann. At that time (2009) as a consequence of a number of things including the Social Inclusion Initiative and the recommendations of the Thinker in Residence - Rosanne Haggarty, we were able to reduce the number of people rough sleeping down to about 40 in the inner city. According to the Adelaide Zero Project by-name list, as of June 2023, it is now 130+ people.<sup>28</sup>



(Image: History of Rough Sleeping In Adelaide, SAAEH, Australia)<sup>29</sup>

<sup>28</sup> <https://saaeh.org.au/progress-dashboard/>

<sup>29</sup> <https://saaeh.org.au/progress-dashboard/>

The Social Inclusion era was the high water mark in efforts to end homelessness, but I remember well when the data were released showing homelessness had been reduced to a record low of 40 people, naive me thought at the time that the sector and the media would welcome this result. They did not. The discussion focused on how rough sleeping is not the only form of homelessness, that data could not be relied upon, and what more needed to be done - everything but what was working, what progress was being made and how it was done. There seemed no room for solutions, only the space to talk about problems and failure.

The dominant narrative in homelessness is crisis, and on this occasion, as in so many more that I have seen working in and out of homelessness policy over the preceding 14+ years, is what I would describe as a deficit-based advocacy strategy from the sector. The glass is always half empty. As a consequence, political leaders in these situations throw their hands in the air and say 'why bother? I've got plenty of other problems to focus on'.

Another example of this happened more recently (2020) in Western Australia when the WA Premier released the Government's strategy (the first in Australia to commit to ending homelessness) and a large funding commitment - the response was critical because it wasn't enough. And to be clear it wasn't enough. But which political leaders, Premiers, Treasurers and Ministers will be willing to stake their reputation, to spend their political capital, on an issue in which they can't win? They wouldn't, it's not human nature.

We know that when working with people experiencing homelessness, a focus on faults and what's not working rarely gets you anywhere. In fact, it's generally counterproductive. What every front line homelessness sector worker knows is you need to focus on strengths - to take a strengths based approach.

Yet what characterises most homelessness and human service advocacy is relentlessly talking up the crisis (because there is one). As a consequence, there is often a disincentive for political leaders to engage in the issue, and what you get is policy and reform neglect, until the crisis escalates to such a level that something must be done; then you too often get short-term reactions, law and order responses, temporary short-term (generally non-Housing First) investments. In other areas of human service delivery in Australia, what you usually get when the crisis hits a tipping point is a Royal Commission.

In many of the countries I visited, and in Australia, almost every area of human service delivery is in crisis. Child protection systems are in crisis, our mental health systems are in crisis, hospitals are in crisis, there is a home ownership crisis, there is a housing affordability crisis, there is a broad homelessness crisis, and there is a crisis of people dying whilst sleeping rough largely from preventable illness.

The space for crises is pretty crowded, however, the space for solutions is wide open.

I have dedicated my working life to the issue of ending homelessness because if we are to end homelessness we need to improve all these systems. Ending homelessness isn't just about homelessness, it's about changing and fixing all the other broken systems because homelessness is not the problem, homelessness is the result of the problem.

Finland seems to have recognised this in the way their key agencies undertake advocacy. They have the Y Foundation which is the trusted partner of the government in solving the complexities of the problem and they have a representative body 'No Fixed Abode', which undertakes more traditional advocacy.

My Fellowship has confirmed my view that the human service sector, and the homelessness sector specifically, need to create the space for a more strengths based approach to advocacy. It doesn't need to be all the time, governments need to be called out for their chronic underinvestment in social housing and

human service systems more generally - but there needs to be the space to focus on strengths and developing solutions. This needs to be done in a joined up way, speaking not with one voice, but with a consistent voice.

Build for Zero has done this successfully in the US. They have focused on strengths, they have broken the problem up and made progress through 'proof points' - demonstrating that it is possible to end homelessness one population group and one community at a time. This approach creates the space for progress to be made, recognised, and built upon.

It enables advocates to go to governments, federal, state and local, and break the problem up, to make it smaller rather than bigger. Our usual tendency is to go to government with bigger and bigger numbers: we need X large number of houses and \$X billions in investment.

I first came across Build for Zero when I was the social policy adviser to the then South Australian Premier Jay Weatherill. There I spent a lot of time thinking of and advocating for ways to get greater investment in housing, homelessness, mental health, child protection and other areas of critical need. Then after an election, the Premier took on the Treasury portfolio, and I consequently also became a Treasury adviser. I no longer needed to 'make the case to others'. Sitting in meeting after meeting, finding ways to make 'savings' really focuses the mind. In this context, it's pretty hard to argue for more investment into a system that is fundamentally broken. Most human service systems are in crisis and swamped by need, governments don't want to tip more money into broken systems or leaking buckets as we called them. They want to fix the holes in the bucket and meet the need.

This is what Built for Zero in the US, and the Advance to Zero effort in Australia does. A glass half empty perspective would say it helps make the progress necessary to avoid the need for a Royal Commission into the growing number of people who die whilst experiencing rough sleeping. Or a more strengths based perspective would say it helps us know precisely what we need to solve this problem, one population group and one community at a time. It helps political leaders have confidence that if they invest their time, political capital and government resources they can make progress in an area of public policy that is so often a bottomless pit of demand.

In this sense Advance to Zero is not just about rough sleeping, it's not even just about homelessness, it is about empowering communities and then governments to change local systems to solve complex problems.

## Context, History and the Economy

One of the things that stood out most for me in visiting so many different communities seeking to deal with the challenge of homelessness is the importance of context.

If you stand on the street, and look up into the systems that exist to support people experiencing homelessness, they all look quite similar, the needs of the people in each system obviously vary, but the problem is pretty similar. However, if you were a government official looking down on the homelessness systems, you would see they are mind bogglingly complicated and very different.

I found it very helpful to put into context how each system got to where it is now as the complexity of these systems is so often a consequence of historical legacy, not any intentional design.



As Winston Churchill himself is often quoted as saying. “Those who fail to learn from history are doomed to repeat it”.<sup>30</sup>

Learning about the history of homelessness is hard because it has not been well documented. At times I felt that my Churchill Fellowship was an oral history of historical homelessness efforts in the communities I visited, as the Meeting Notes Appendix of this report sets out.

The shortest summary of the history of homelessness I can present is this:

- First Nations people are the original homeless. Those dispossessed from their land, and the frontier wars in the US, Canada and Australia, saw the first documented cases of homelessness appear in colonial records from the 1640s in North America. European settlers were displacing First Nations peoples and the resulting conflicts on the frontiers led to homelessness among both First Nations and settler people.<sup>31</sup>
- The Industrial Revolution saw homelessness accelerate, and there have been waves of homelessness that have come and gone during the Great Depression and the building of the modern welfare state.
- Many have argued that the latest wave started in the 1970s with the broad-based adoption of neoliberal economic policies, underinvestment in (and in many cases large-scale sells-offs of) public housing, coupled with the introduction of well-meaning but poorly implemented policies of de-institutionalisation.

First Nations homelessness is a legacy of colonisation and the incomplete progress of reconciliation.

Chronic homelessness is the legacy of poorly implemented policies of deinstitutionalisation.

Mass homelessness is the consequence of neo-liberal economic<sup>32</sup> policies and while climate change is forcing a long hard look at our economic system to make it less extractive to the detriment of the planet, our economic systems remain incredibly detrimental to all people, and homelessness is an inevitable consequence of that.

I both believe and recognise that we can technically solve homelessness through the Advance to Zero framework laid out here, but to structurally solve it, to solve all forms of homelessness for everyone experiencing it, will require broader reforms such as those implemented in Finland. As Jake Maguire from Community Solutions said to me, ‘while we are waiting’, we have Advance to Zero to demonstrate that ending homelessness is possible one community and one population group at a time.

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<sup>30</sup> There is some debate as to if Winston Churchill ever used this exact form of words, despite it having been regularly attributed to him. I think the point is still well made, further information here: <https://www.inlander.com/Bloglander/archives/2016/02/16/condon-misattributes-quote-to-churchill-in-the-state-of-the-city-speech>

<sup>31</sup> <https://invisiblepeople.tv/history-of-homelessness/#:~:text=During%20the%20Industrial%20Revolution%20and,lose%20their%20jobs%20and%20homes>

<sup>32</sup> Neoliberal economic policies have a preference for markets over government, economic incentives over cultural norms, and private over collective action. Neoliberalism it is a hard concept to pin down, but is a catchall for policies associated with deregulation, privatisation or fiscal austerity. It was broadly recognised as part of my fellowship conversations as the ideas and practices that have produced growing economic insecurity and inequality.



## Key Insights

The following section outlines some key insights from each of the countries I visited as well as further reflections on the challenges and benefits of making comparisons with each of them, with Australia.

### What can we learn from the United States of America?

My first stop was the United States. I recognise that it seems strange to look to the USA for inspiration on how to solve homelessness. When I told people I was visiting the USA to learn about efforts to end homelessness, some were outright dismissive of the idea that there is or was anything we could learn from the USA about ending homelessness. They believed that the home of Skid Row<sup>33</sup> and the nation enduring abject poverty at a scale unparalleled in the Western world, was not the kind of place that Australia could learn much from.



(Image: Australia / USA Map Comparison)<sup>34</sup>

I obviously disagree, having chosen the United States as the first place to visit on my Fellowship. The reality is that what unites Australia and the USA is far greater than what separates us - and I certainly learned a great deal. Australia is a lot more like the USA than many in Australia recognise. As a nation, we are more like the USA than we are Finland for example, even though I firmly believe we should seek to be much more like Finland.

Probably the most common reflection from every country I visited, starting in the USA, is that the language of ending homelessness is so prevalent, it's part of the lexicon. The language of ending homelessness, or what it means (to make it rare, brief and non-recurring), is very much part of government strategies and policy documents, organisation strategic mission statements, and even in the names of a vast number of organisations. It's not seen as threatening. None of this is true of Australia, though it is changing.

During my visit to the USA, I was able to meet with people from communities that have actually ended homelessness for particular population groups - for example, Arlington County, Virginia in relation to veteran homelessness, or Chatanuga in relation to chronic rough sleeping homelessness.

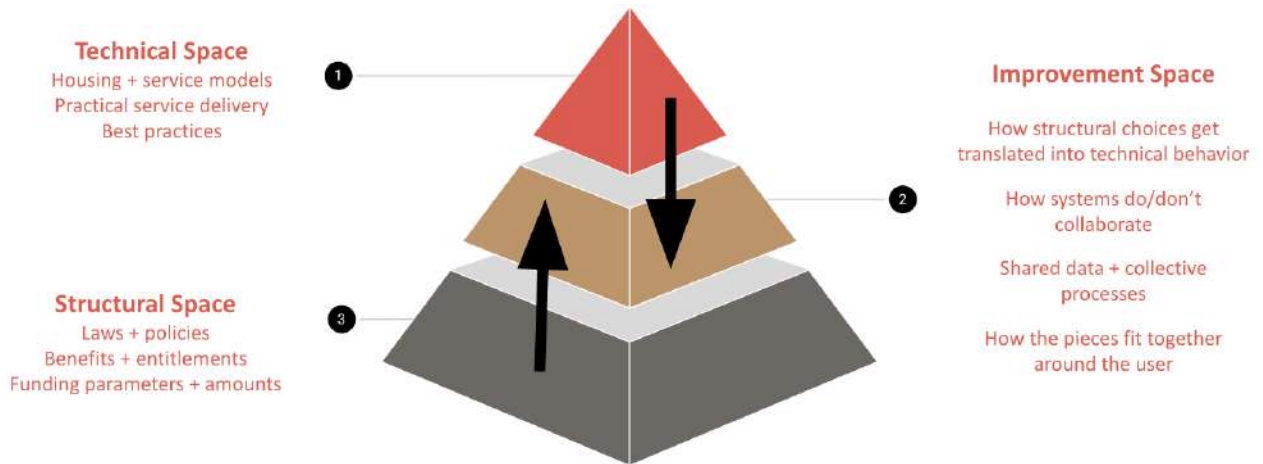
There were, however, a number of key insights that really stood out:

- **Shrink the Change** - Sometimes the challenge can feel so large and out of control that the constant need to respond to crises can overtake any progress towards change. In the USA it is so hard to get change from governments that they have really focused on shrinking the change - no matter how large the problem might be - to put elements within your control. This is inherently empowering, for

<sup>33</sup> Skid Row, an area near downtown Los Angeles, contains one of the largest ongoing populations of people experiencing homelessness in the United States.

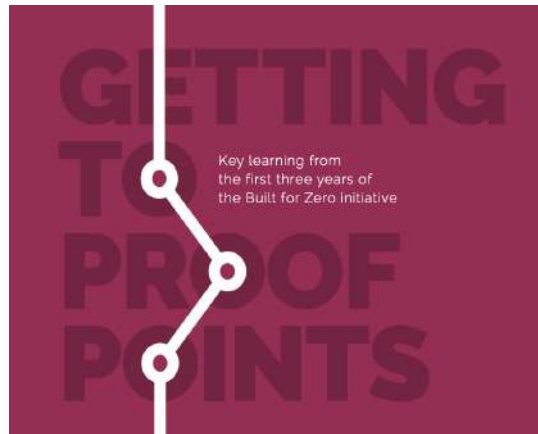
<sup>34</sup> Blog Website, accessed 30 May 2022, <https://blog.done.gr/snifsnif/comparisons>

both the leaders in the sector, and for political leaders to make the bigger broader structural changes that are needed to end homelessness. We could all do more to shrink the change by focusing on what Community Solutions call the improvement space as shown here.



(Image: Guide to the Improvement Space, AAEH, Australia, modified with permission from Community Solutions)

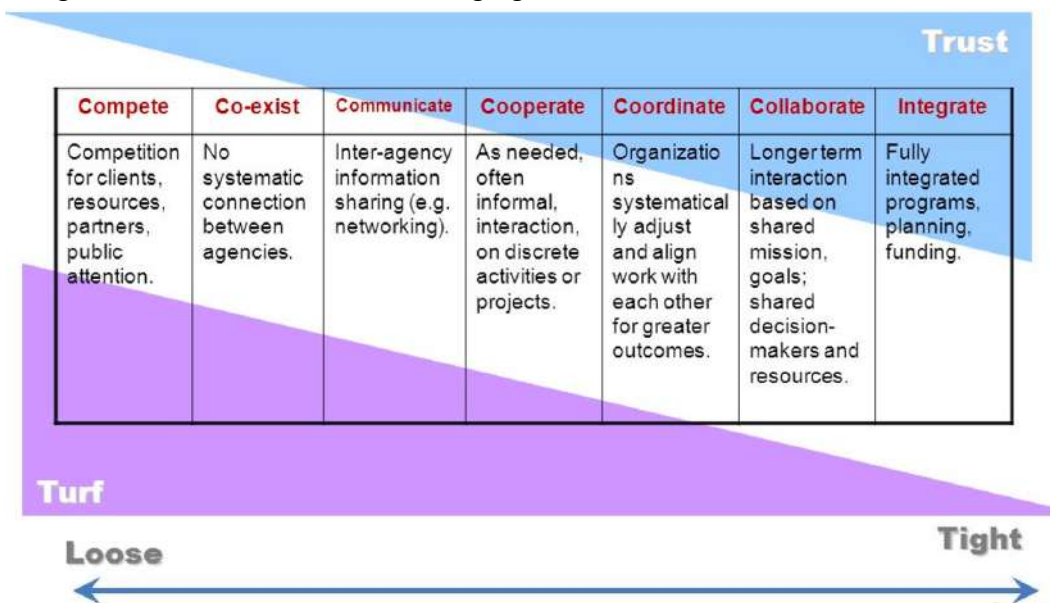
- **Use Proof Points to demonstrate that ending homelessness is possible** - The USA had the first communities anywhere in the world to demonstrate that ending homelessness is possible. They did it by shrinking the change, by focusing on a place, and on a particular population group. It still surprises me that so many people’s reaction to this is to downplay and diminish it. To end homelessness requires a belief and a recognition that ending homelessness is possible, the success of these initial communities has inspired a movement of communities around the world seeking to emulate their success. It is also, fundamentally, an advocacy strategy. So often the housing and homelessness sectors go to the government and make the problem bigger. It's no surprise then that political leaders are hesitant to prioritise the issue because it's so easy to get lost in the complexity and because no matter what they do it will never be enough. A proof points advocacy strategy, as developed in the USA, flips that on its head. It makes the problem smaller, more digestible and more local.
- **Health Equity** - As the US health system has so many inequities and barriers to access, and because the homelessness service system is such an integral part of the social safety net in the US (because their income support system is so negligible compared to Australia) - healthcare has been integrated into homelessness services in a way that would be the envy of many communities in Australia. There are some excellent examples of this that Australia could learn a lot from. The US is by no means perfect, and in fact, in many ways, it is because the problem is now so out of hand, that they treat homelessness as a public health crisis. In Australia, we need to see homelessness as much of a public health issue as it is a consequence of the housing affordability crisis - people are literally dying.



## The world needs more Canada

No country is more comparable to Australia than Canada. New Zealand is not as big, the USA is so much bigger, and European countries don't have the same colonial history, dispossessing the First Nations people. One of the things that Canadians are renowned for is just being nice - that was certainly true of my visit. Key insights for me were:

- **Being nice isn't the same as collaborating** - What we often think of as collaboration at the systems level is often just communication - see the table below from the Tamarack Institute. One way of addressing this is by having better systems level meetings and better backbone organisations to support this. Canada has a significant number of ending homelessness collective impact initiatives, there are examples of great practice just as there are pockets of frustration at 'talk fests' that don't lead to impact. Too often we fight so hard to establish backbones we're exhausted by the exercise and give little consideration to what being a good backbone looks like.



(Source: Tamarack Institute, 2018 Canada)

- **Plan for the long haul** - Ending homelessness should absolutely be the ambition but we must also realise that this is a long-term effort, particularly in large cities. This was the salient advice of a number of Canadian stakeholders I met with. Setting milestones along the way will be key to maintaining momentum, in particular using milestones that measure the reduction in the prevalence (or percentage of homelessness per head of population) is important. Prevalence is how public health issues are measured, and homelessness is amongst other things a public health crisis.
- **Racism and Reconciliation** - Both Canada and Australia were settled on stolen land and racism remains stubbornly present (if often just below the surface). The legacy of this lives on in the homelessness we seek to end. Canada has done a lot more work with and for First Nations groups regarding culture and ending homelessness. Australia has a long way to go. Leadership, listening and investment will be needed to address this. Canada has much we can learn from in this area.



(Photos: CAEH Conference Welcome to Country and Public Art, Edmonton, 2019 Canada)

## The UK - A mixed bag

Some of the worst homelessness I saw on my travels was in London, the place where some of the most impressive reductions in homelessness in the past have occurred. I also saw some incredibly impressive results in Glasgow and some truly inspiring efforts regarding practice and collaboration in the UK. It was very much a mixed bag.

Highlights were:

- **Prevention, Prevention, Prevention** - We need to listen to the early warning systems - when someone is struggling to pay rent, that's the point to intervene and prevent homelessness, not only respond after they've been evicted. As Lorine McGraw from Glasgow said to me "we need to provide care before care is needed". Prevention is a much bigger part of the thinking and effort in the UK than it is in Australia. There are many types of prevention and Appendix D sets out further background on this.
- **Opportunity: Employment and Social Enterprise** - The UK is a lot stronger at integrating employment and homelessness efforts than Australia, including in relation to supporting social enterprise and social procurement, both of which provide significant opportunities for more flexible employment arrangements to aid in the recovery of people who have experienced homelessness, particularly chronic homelessness. I think this might have something to do with the fact that employment services are commissioned nationally, but delivered more locally, whereas in Australia employment services are commissioned by a different level of government (the Commonwealth) from our broader community services which by and large are commissioned by state and territory governments. Either way, there are a lot of opportunities to better integrate these sectors to provide better social outcomes from both.



(Photo: Social Bite Social Enterprise that employs people who have experienced homelessness, and also donates profits to support efforts to end homelessness, London, UK, 2022)<sup>35</sup>

<sup>35</sup> <https://www.fmj.co.uk/baxterstorey-teams-up-with-social-bite-to-tackle-homelessness/>

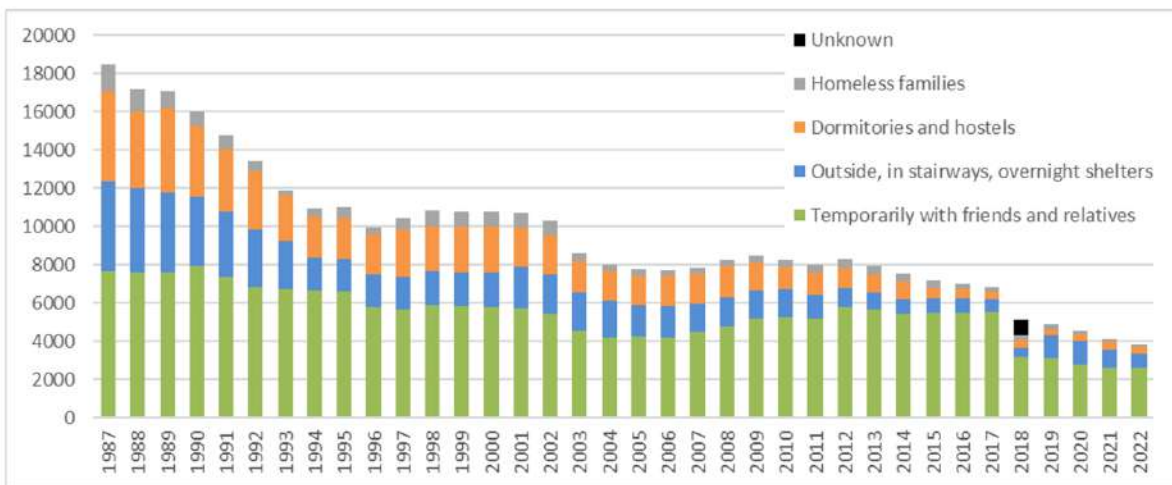
- **Person Centred Approaches** - I wouldn't say that the UK as a whole is a leader in putting the needs of people at the centre of service systems, but they certainly have pockets of excellence and some really interesting innovations regarding co-design in health and homelessness, engaging and empowering the voice of people with a lived experience and trauma informed practices<sup>36</sup>, for example. See Appendix A for further background and insights.

## Finnish Trailblazers

Finn's are trailblazers in so many ways. Finland:

- Is the third most prosperous country in the world.
- Is the best country in the world in comparisons of human wellbeing.
- Is the freest country in the world together with Sweden and Norway.
- Is the safest country in the world.
- Has the least organised crime in the world and has the third least corruption in the world.
- Judicial system is the most independent in the world.
- Availability of official information is the best in the EU.
- Banks are the soundest in the world.
- Has the third best pension system in the world.
- Has the third most personal freedom of choice in the world.
- Has the fourth best press freedom in the world.
- After Denmark and Sweden, Finland is the most socially just EU country.
- Is the best country in the world in protecting fundamental human rights.<sup>37</sup>

Finland is unique and comparisons of their homelessness efforts in isolation of everything else they have done is difficult. Nonetheless, there is much to learn from Finland and their Housing First/Ending Homelessness results are impressive over a long period of time, the following graph sets this out:



(Source: ARA, Number of Homeless 1987-2022, Finland)

<sup>36</sup> Trauma-informed practice acknowledges that trauma can hinder development, affect relationships, and contribute to mental ill-health. Recognising the prevalence of trauma among homeless individuals, efforts to end homelessness should include practices that prevent re-traumatisation. This approach, known as trauma-informed care, focuses on understanding trauma's impact, prioritising physical, psychological, and emotional safety, and enabling survivors to regain a sense of control or empowerment.

<sup>37</sup> [https://www.stat.fi/tup/satavuotias-suomi/suomi-maailman-karjessa\\_en.html](https://www.stat.fi/tup/satavuotias-suomi/suomi-maailman-karjessa_en.html)



The Finns I met with were at pains to point out that notwithstanding a lot of misleading international media, they haven't actually ended homelessness. But they are rightly proud of their success underpinned by the Housing First principle they have adopted.

Key Insights from Finland were:

- **It's the economy stupid** - To paraphrase Winston Churchill regarding democracy - capitalism is the worst way of organising an economy except for all the alternatives. The Finns, along with their Scandinavian neighbours, have been the most successful countries in the world at civilising capitalism in making it work for everyone, not just a privileged few. If in Australia homelessness isn't the problem, it's the result of the problem, in Finland, that maxim still holds true, but the other service systems aren't anywhere near as broken as they are in Australia, the USA and UK.
- **Focus on ending homelessness, not just Housing First programs** - It's often said that if we want to end homelessness all we need to do is invest in Housing First, but as the Finns pointed out to me, that's not true. By their nature Housing First programs can only ever support those that they are designed for, and as successful as they are, they only work for between 85-90% of people. To end homelessness we need to support 100% of people experiencing homelessness. To mainstream Housing First, to make it part of business as usual, you need to seek to end homelessness. Housing First is only one element of what is needed to end homelessness, so zero in on ending homelessness, otherwise the risk is too great you don't end up actually ending homelessness, instead you just provide high fidelity programs to a larger group of people, similar to the experience in a number of other European Countries.<sup>38</sup>
- **Permanent Supportive Housing Systems** - Finland and the USA are the only countries I visited that have Permanent Supportive Housing (PSH) systems. Australia does not. We have a small number of buildings that operate as separate services, that have by and large struggled to maintain the 'supportive' part of PSH. Discussion regarding housing and homelessness in Australia focuses almost entirely on the need for more social housing - for which there is a clear need. Too little consideration is given to what type of housing is needed in advocacy and policy discussions in Australia. If we are to end homelessness in Australia we need a Permanent Supportive Housing system like Finland.



*(Photos: Finnish Supportive Housing, Waiting to meet with the Y Foundation and Departing Helsinki, Finland)*

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<sup>38</sup> As set out in "Ending Homelessness?: The Contrasting Experiences of Ireland, Denmark and Finland", Mike Allen, Lars Benjaminsen, Eoin O'Sullivan, and Nicholas Pleace, 2020, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctvx1hvwv>

## More Quotes

*“Western democracies see homelessness as largely an issue to be managed, to manage the people on the streets as efficiently as possible. To not let it cause too much disruption and to not let it cause too much cost”.*

- Mark McGreevy, De Paul International, London, UK

*“We don’t debate the data in meetings anymore. We debate solutions”.*

- Pat Togher, Glasgow Health & Social Care Partnership, Scotland, UK

*“More of our staff are about to become clients, we already have homelessness support staff who show up to work every day but are homeless themselves, California is just not affordable”.*

- Hazel Lopez, Senior Director, The People Concern Los Angeles, USA

*“The secret is to gang up on the problem - not each other”.*

- Jake Maguire, Community Solutions, USA

*“It helps to talk about the global narrative. We can count the number of people living in slums and the number of refugees in the world, but we currently have no way to understand how many people are experiencing homelessness in the world right now.”*

- Mark McGreevy, De Paul International, London, UK

*“We need to act with urgency but strap in for the long term”.*

- Samara Jones, Convenor, Housing First Europe Hub, UK

*“We can make change by showing how it's done, not just by arguing our case”.*

- Elisabeth Hammer, Managing Director, Neunerhaus/House of Nine, Austria

*“Philanthropy is part of the problem when it sees itself as being here for the long haul, we're all saving for a rainy day, and it's pouring outside... We need to break down this mindset that we're here for the long term, we need to be here to solve the problem”.*

- Emily Bradley, Director, Strategic Investments, United Way Greater Los Angeles. USA

*“The cost of not providing person centred services grows cumulatively until it reaches a tipping point where systems start to harm people rather than help them”.*

- Alex Fox, Mayday Trust, Leeds, UK

*“Take the profit out of housing, when you take the profit out, you put people back into it. We need to be moving away from the financialisation of housing”.*

- Patrick Duce, World Habitat, England, UK

*“Homelessness is the result of poverty, poverty is the result of inequality, and inequality is the result of government's inability or unwillingness to take the requisite action.”*

- Mark McGreevy, De Paul International, London, UK

## Recommendations For Action

The following recommendations for action are a result of my Churchill Fellowship, the many conversations I had, the varied resources I read along the way and of course my ongoing work leading the AAEH.

They are self evidently not the result of any detailed consultation process - which I acknowledge I would ideally like to conduct. For now, that is beyond the scope of this Churchill Fellowship Report. It is my intention to refine these recommendations over time, along with the many partners of the AAEH to sharpen up and be clearer about the actions that are needed by various actors to end homelessness. Feedback on these recommendations is therefore greatly appreciated.

For further context on these recommendations, see the meeting notes and the key concepts and further background parts of this report.

### Commonwealth Government Recommendations For Action

To support the implementation of strategies to prevent, reduce and end homelessness, the Commonwealth Government should:

1. Establish a National Housing and Ending Homelessness Plan
2. Invest in Placed-Based Efforts to End Homelessness
3. Develop a National Homelessness, Housing and Health Equity Policy
4. Establish Intergovernmental and Interagency Coordination mechanisms
5. Create Permanent Supportive Housing Systems
6. Close the Homelessness Gap
7. Establish a National Homelessness Early Intervention Service
8. Better Support Employment Pathways - including through Social Enterprise
9. Invest in an Ending Homelessness Flexible Fund
10. Address the Structural Factors driving new homelessness

#### *A National Housing and Ending Homelessness Plan*

- We need a national plan on housing and homelessness. Not since the Rudd Labor Government released 'The Road Home' policy have we had this. However, what goes into it is really what matters.
- Ending homelessness needs to be the ambition, because what else is acceptable? Australia is the only country I visited on my Fellowship without an ambition to end homelessness.
- **Recommendation 1: A Plan to End Homelessness** - Ensure that 'ending homelessness' is the ambition of the new housing and homelessness plan being developed.

#### *Invest In Placed-Based Efforts to End Homelessness*

##### Measurement

- You can't change what you don't measure and in Australia, we don't really measure the amount of homelessness that exists.
- The Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) estimates homelessness every five years in the census - but it is an estimate as there is no explicit census question about homelessness.
- Homelessness services are required to report to the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) on the effectiveness of their efforts at helping the individuals who access their services, as well as the number of people they turn away. This can be up to 260 people a day.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> <https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2020/dec/11/homeless-services-turn-away-260-people-daily-due-to-lack-of-accommodation>

- Various state and territory governments in Australia conduct what are called point-in-time (PIT) street counts, which are a measure of the number of homeless people on a specific day (hence the point-in-time reference). This type of counting is known as “taking a snapshot” of the situation.<sup>40</sup> They do not, however, identify people by name and there is a lot of variation in how these PIT counts are conducted.
- None of these efforts add up to what many call ‘actionable intelligence’ about what is going on in their community regarding homelessness.

#### The By-Name List

- Community Solutions in the US have advocated the adoption of real-time by-name lists because homelessness is a dynamic problem, which changes from night to night, from person to person (See Appendix D for more information about by-name lists).
- Developing a real-time, quality, by-name list of people experiencing homelessness and their individual needs provides a shared understanding to inform who needs support, whether efforts are working, how to best target resources, and how to improve the service system as a whole.
  - In this context a ‘quality’ by-name list (BNL) means that you have the vast majority of providers feeding into the list, you have it shared, and community-owned, and you have had the list certified as quality by the AAEH, utilising our by-name list scorecard. A by-name list is not just a static list of names that one or even a handful of agencies have, or even a dynamic list that only a handful of agencies have.
- Such a BNL enables scarce housing and support to be triaged according to local priorities and it enables a prevention focus, better advocacy and supports the implementation of the Housing First approach (see Appendix D for more background).
- Ultimately, it gives a real-time feedback loop as to whether a community's improvement efforts to end homelessness are working - not just at an individual or service provider level, but across a community/system.
- The AAEH is supporting over 25 communities to develop by-name lists in Australia - an important element of these by-name lists is that they have been driven and continue to be ‘owned’ by the community.
- In order to build a quality BNL there needs to be trust and consent from the people experiencing homelessness. This is much easier to get if the data are owned by a community collaboration that has the sole purpose of ending homelessness, as opposed to governments which include law enforcement, child protection and other agencies that have powers of compulsion.

#### Utilise the Advance to Zero Framework

- The AAEH has supplemented what we have learned from Community Solutions about by-name lists and other solutions with knowledge from around the world, including through this Fellowship, about what it takes to end homelessness.
- This knowledge is summarised in the Advance to Zero Framework or Theory of Change.
- **Recommendation 2: Support New Communities** - Support the rollout of the Advance to Zero Framework in more local communities through the renegotiation of the National Housing and Homelessness Agreement.
- As Norman Suchar, from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, told me: “you could make many homelessness responses twice as effective if you managed the system better, but the inclination is always there to fund direct services, it’s inefficient. If you want to shift the dial, fund the improvements to the systems”.
- Commonwealth Government financial support is urgently needed because, to date, efforts to

<sup>40</sup> <https://www.homelesshub.ca/solutions/monitoring-progress/point-time-counts>

implement the system-wide AtoZ Framework have largely been funded through:

- time-limited philanthropy;
  - some, generally once off, local government grants;
  - within the existing already stretched resources of the Specialist Homelessness Services (SHS), and;
  - a limited number of state government grants, usually once off.
- None of this is sustainable nor is it a solid foundation from which to build the foundations for the long-term efforts required to end homelessness.
  - In addition, the evidence from around the world is that innovation is better achieved through community efforts than prescribed by governments.
  - If we are serious about ending homelessness then we need to fund it, and this need not, and should not, come at the expense of other efforts to deal with the broader problem of overall homelessness or the even broader problem of housing affordability in Australia.
  - **Recommendation 3: Support Existing Communities** - Urgently invest in existing community led efforts to end homelessness, that are utilising the Advance to Zero Framework, to support and accelerate their success.
  - The Commonwealth Government should urgently directly financially support community-led efforts, utilising the Advance to Zero Framework, in Australia.
  - Invest in the existing community-led efforts, utilising the Advance to Zero Framework, in Australia to support their success.

#### ***Develop A National Homelessness, Housing and Health Equity Policy***

- Throughout my Fellowship, it seemed apparent to me that health services are much more integrated into housing and homelessness services in other countries than they are in Australia.
- No doubt there are many reasons for this. In the USA, for example, the homelessness system acts as a much bigger part of the social safety net as they don't have as equitable access to healthcare or as comprehensive an income support system as Australia.
- As a result, there are some outstanding examples of integrated health and homelessness services.
- Irrespective of the reasons, homelessness needs to be seen as a health issue as much as it is a housing issue. This was the case before the COVID-19 pandemic, and it's particularly the case now.
- The failure to better integrate our health and homelessness responses is one reason why people who sleep rough are likely to die up to 30 years earlier than those with stable housing and is why an estimated 424 people die whilst experiencing rough sleeping homelessness in Australia each year.<sup>41</sup>
- Based on my Fellowship experiences and the existing work of the AAEH and its Australian Health, Housing and Homelessness Network (A3HN), the following have been developed.
- **Recommendation 4: Health Equity** - The Department of Health should develop a National Homelessness and Health Equity Policy, that:
  - Includes a dedicated, adequate and ongoing funding stream through Primary Health Networks (PHNs) to better address the urgent healthcare needs of people experiencing homelessness.
  - Is informed by a working group that considers how to better meet the health needs of people experiencing homelessness within new and existing Commonwealth policy frameworks – including the National Housing and Homelessness Plan.

#### ***Intergovernmental and Interagency Coordination to End Homelessness***

- Homelessness is not the problem, it is the result of the problem. Homelessness is what happens when other government service systems let vulnerable people down. Child protection systems,

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<sup>41</sup> [https://aaeh.org.au/assets/docs/MEDIA-RELEASE\\_-\\_E2%80%98Housing-is-healthcare%E2%80%99-Renewed-calls-for-urgent-Australian-Government-action-on-rough-sleeping-homelessness.docx.pdf](https://aaeh.org.au/assets/docs/MEDIA-RELEASE_-_E2%80%98Housing-is-healthcare%E2%80%99-Renewed-calls-for-urgent-Australian-Government-action-on-rough-sleeping-homelessness.docx.pdf)



income support, the veteran's support systems, mental health, corrections, disability, aged care, migration, the list goes on.

- This is a refrain that I heard time and again during my Fellowship, and through my travels throughout Australia.
- Homelessness is such a complex issue that no government can solve it alone. They need to work with other levels of government (Commonwealth, state and local) and they need to work across the various arms of that level of government.
- To improve these systems, we need to engage, across government. The Commonwealth Government needs to play a role in this and it needs a mechanism to do so.
- In the United States the Interagency Council on Homelessness, established by the White House, provides that mechanism. Australia needs something similar.
- It needs to be ongoing because sustained engagement was crucial in Finland, and as has been seen in efforts in the UK, while interagency effort is often activated or enabled during the development of a strategy, or a particular reform effort, sustaining interagency cooperation has been challenging. The Rough Sleeping Strategy in the UK was signed by all the government agencies, but this action was seen by many as being because they all wanted to get a budget bid up or their piece of the reform initiative pie for their portfolio - but rarely do they show up for the long haul, to help with delivery.
- I discussed with public sector experts the usefulness of a commission model, which a number of Australian Governments have in relation to mental health for example. These can be expensive and often focus more on policy reform rather than the operational coordination amongst agencies that is also needed, and so often missing.
- **Recommendation 5: Interagency Council** - Establish an Interagency Council on Ending Homelessness, to support the engagement of Commonwealth service delivery agencies relevant to ending homelessness, including in disability, aged care, primary health, veterans, social security, etc.
- Consideration should be given to such a council being supported by a central agency like the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet, jointly with the Department of Social Services.
- **Recommendation 6: State Government Interagency Coordination** - Require having state-based, across-government, and intergovernmental coordination mechanisms in place as a requirement of funding as part of the new National Housing and Homelessness Agreement funding.
  - This requirement is needed because never before in the history of the Australian Federation has a state government had the attention span to sustain effort on this issue: political and bureaucratic attention always moves on before the job is complete, but to their credit usually after progress has been made. Coordination efforts often get merged with other human service coordination activities and the focus is lost. Key personnel leave their roles and their functions fall away. An ongoing requirement for interagency coordination is needed if ending homelessness is truly the goal.

### **Create Permanent Supportive Housing Systems**

- Housing alone doesn't solve individual instances of homelessness, housing and support do. Yet the support all too often isn't provided and doesn't meet the individual's needs including by not being intensive enough or not lasting long enough. Some people's needs are so profound that they may always require some level of additional support. This is where Permanent Supportive Housing (PSH) comes in. I visited some inspiring services of this kind in the USA and Finland in particular.
- For more information about Permanent Supportive Housing see Appendix D.
- The US truly has a supportive housing system, rather than just a collection of supportive housing facilities - which is what exists in Australia and many examples of which have struggled to maintain the 'supportive' part of supportive housing.
- In Australia we had a wave of Permanent Supportive Housing built as a consequence first of the Social Inclusion efforts of the South Australian Rann Government (date), and then the Rudd Government's 'The Road Home' homelessness policy and investments (date).

- From time to time, some new services have been built by state governments, but one of the most surprising things for me, after witnessing the maturity of this type of housing in the US, is how friendless Permanent Supportive Housing seems to be in Australia.
- There are no peak bodies who focus on advocating for this type of housing at a national level, there are very few organisations and individuals who even seem to understand what it is and how it differs from general social housing.
- Most of the public servants and sector leaders who were involved in the initial waves of building supportive housing in Australia have moved on to other roles. What little discussion there is regarding Permanent Supportive Housing seems to focus on if the supportive housing should be on scattered site or single site models. All of this needs to change.
- Supportive housing is the type of housing that we know is needed to end the experience of those who have a long-term, or chronic experience of homelessness and multiple and often intergenerational needs arising from poverty and trauma.
- Not everyone who has slept rough needs this type of housing, but for those who do, it not only literally saves lives, it is also cheaper for taxpayers. The Corporation for Supportive Housing in the USA has done a lot of work to demonstrate this. In Australia, we know that these savings were at least \$11,000 per person eight years ago.<sup>42</sup>
- Other groups such as the New York Supportive Housing Network have done a lot to build the network of these types of services because a really important part of the model is that while they are permanent, the goal should be to, over time, graduate out of these types of expensive services and into social housing or private rental. This requires services working together as a system, rather than just individual agencies.
- **Recommendation 7: Unmet Need** - Commission an agency like the Productivity Commission or the National Housing Finance and Investment Corporation (NHFIC) to review and determine what the level of unmet need for supportive housing is in Australia and most importantly, what it would take to end chronic rough sleeping homelessness.
  - The review could also investigate the creation of a Commonwealth Rent Assistance (CRA) top-up for people who have an experience of chronic rough sleeping homelessness to ensure we can prevent future instances of chronic homelessness from occurring.
- **Recommendation 8: Growing Permanent Supportive Housing** - Establish a Permanent Supportive Housing Growth Fund for capital and services to meet the immediate needs of those experiencing chronic homelessness: tie such investments to communities across Australia that are seeking to not just manage homelessness better but are working to end it.
  - Targeting such investments towards communities with quality data, service coordination forums, and the other elements associated with ending homelessness efforts will substantially increase the 'bang for buck' or impact these investments can have, as they can be leveraged to transform - or unclog - local homelessness and housing systems.
- As it was once colourfully explained to me, PSH can be the laxative for constipated homelessness and housing systems - but only when the system is coordinated.
- **Recommendation 9: Sustaining Permanent Supportive Housing** - Support the AAEH to establish a National Permanent Supportive Housing Network, to guide the development of local supportive housing systems in Australia, build understanding, improve practice, and help to ensure that when we do build PSH they stay permanent supportive housing.

### **Close the Homelessness Gap**

- Travelling to the USA and Canada highlighted for me the fact that like Australia, these countries were founded on stolen land. It is bound into our identity that land ownership is part of what is seen as

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<sup>42</sup> <https://theconversation.com/supportive-housing-is-cheaper-than-chronic-homelessness-67539#>

success - convicts in Australia and the US were given land when they were released. Migrants were given land to incentivise them to come.

- The work of ending homelessness is entirely bound up in the work of decolonisation and reconciliation.
- I wish I could say I came across lots of great practice in relation to this on my travels. I did not. I did meet with a range of people who recognised the problem and were committed to walking alongside First Nations people, and people of colour to address what we too often don't call out for what it is in Australia, systemic racism.
- My Fellowship highlighted how a strong and sustainable Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workforce and community-controlled sector - delivering high-quality services to meet the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people across the country, is essential to efforts to end homelessness.
- We need to improve our efforts to end systemic racism and to Close the Gap in the housing and homelessness indicators for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians.
- **Recommendation 10: Grow the ACCO Sector** - Consider how as part of the National Plan and the renegotiated National Agreement they can redouble efforts, as committed to in the National Agreement on Closing the Gap, to build the Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations (ACCO) sector, in particular those organisations that work on preventing and ending homelessness.
- Alongside the need to grow and support the ACCO sector, is the need to better support and grow the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workforce in the existing homelessness response system's services.
- **Recommendation 11: Improve Cultural Safety** - Support the establishment of an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Ending Homelessness Network to improve cultural safety in efforts to end homelessness within existing homelessness response systems. In particular to:
  - provide a space for peer-to-peer support,
  - develop training resources and cultural engagement protocols, including in relation to Housing First practice, service coordination, data collection and triage,
  - ensure indigenous data sovereignty,<sup>43</sup>
  - sharing of best practices, and
  - better support the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workforce within the existing housing, homelessness and other related sectors.

### ***Establish a National Homelessness Early Intervention Service***

- Finland is undoubtedly the world leader in efforts to end homelessness, one of the less well-known elements of their strategy is their early intervention or prevention service. There are many factors that make it difficult to directly translate activity from Finland to Australia, but their national prevention service is one that I am convinced could and should be adopted in Australia.
- We need to 'turn off the tap' as the Institute of Global Homelessness often describes it, or prevent more and more people from experiencing homelessness in the first place.
- Increasingly there are effective, impressive but generally small scale early intervention programs in Australia. Understandably, it is hard to take funds from a crisis part of the system, while the system is in crisis, and invest upstream. The states are primarily responsible for the existing system and struggle with this. It makes sense therefore for the Commonwealth, as part of broader reform efforts, to invest in services that prevent homelessness from occurring.
- **Recommendation 12: Prevention** - Invest in a National Homelessness Prevention Service, modelled on the Finnish Housing Advisers Prevention program.

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<sup>43</sup> More information on this available at: <https://aiatsis.gov.au/publication/116530>

- This need not require the Commonwealth to enter into directly commissioning homelessness services - something it has to date largely not done - but could require a broadly nationally consistent model to be rolled out.
- For further information on this program see the meeting notes from Järvinen Mrika from the Finnish Housing agency ARA in Appendix A.

### **Better Support Employment Pathways - including through Social Enterprise**

- Australia's social enterprise sector is more emergent than countries like the United Kingdom, Canada and the USA. Consequently, the social enterprise sector in these countries is generally more connected to the homelessness sector and provides support in helping recover from or prevent homelessness.
- There are some great small scale examples of this in Australia already, but there are some big opportunities to scale up the impact with the right incentives and support.
- Social procurement and the use of housing maintenance and other contracts to provide greater employment opportunities for people with an experience of homelessness is one obvious area.
- **Recommendation 13: Employment Pathways** - As part of the development of the National Housing and Homelessness Plan consider ways of better integrating employment service and homelessness support systems to provide more employment pathways - including improved support for social enterprises.

### **Invest in an Ending Homelessness Flexible Fund**

- Money matters. In the USA for example they have a plethora of government voucher programs and initiatives across federal, state, regional and local government agencies. They also traditionally have a substantially larger philanthropic sector and a more well-established business culture of corporate giving than Australia.
- The European countries I visited all emphasised the importance of flexible funding to assist with efforts to address the failings of other systems and demonstrate innovation in the way these systems interact.
- So much investment in health, human services and homelessness goes into responding to needs, rather than solving problems.
- The role of brokerage or flexible funding has been essential to a range of communities around the world and Australian communities seeking to end homelessness - they need greater access to such funding to enable the innovations, improvements, and solutions needed to drive reductions in homelessness - particularly in relation to prevention.
- Organisations like All Chicago for example, have been successful in collecting funding through a range of sources and directing it through brokerage funds to support the system change efforts needed to drive reductions.
- In the USA, the National Alliance to End Homelessness has also advocated for these types of funds, as what drives people to sleep rough is varied, but often very small issues, and a small amount of flexible funding can go a long way in helping prevent the catastrophic consequences that even a short experience of rough sleeping can cause.
- **Recommendation 14: Flexible Fund** - Establish an 'Ending Homelessness Flexible Fund' to support efforts to drive and sustain reductions in people experiencing homelessness through the Advance to Zero Campaign - with a particular focus on prevention and diversion activities.

### **Structural Prevention - Addressing the factors driving new homelessness**

- A credible national housing and ending homelessness plan needs to incorporate all of the recommendations above. This is what I think it will take to demonstrate that ending chronic rough-sleeping homelessness in Australia is possible.

- The above recommendations will not be enough to sustain an end to chronic homelessness and to support efforts to end all forms of homelessness - broader structural change is also required.
- What else needs to be considered in relation to the development of a National Housing and Ending Homelessness Plan is to:
  - **Build and upgrade more Social and Affordable Housing** – to do this ultimately greater investment is needed. Many reports and proposals have outlined how more investment would support many thousands of jobs and expand Australia’s social housing by 30,000 homes.<sup>44</sup> Housing ought to be a right in Australia, just as access to health care or aged care is. It currently is not because we lack sufficient investment and supply of affordable housing.
  - **Make Income Support Livable** – It is broadly understood and has been conclusively demonstrated, that the current rate of the JobSeeker payment, in particular, is not enough to stay above the poverty line and to avoid being driven into homelessness. Australia’s social safety net should allow people to afford to put a roof over their heads and food on the table. The COVID-19 JobSeeker top-up should be reinstated.
- **Recommendation 15: Social Housing Investment** - Continue to increase investment in social housing and income support as part of the development of a national plan on housing and homelessness.
- Finally, it is important to be clear that a range of other structural factors that impact on homelessness in Australia require greater consideration. This includes things like how child protection systems drive young people into homelessness, outdated drug and alcohol policies, meeting all the targets set in the Closing the Gap strategy<sup>45</sup>, and how other ‘upstream’ systems fail. The benefits of the Advance to Zero Framework are that it sets out a series of approaches and activities that seek to address these issues at a local level, but what will absolutely be needed to ensure this is successful is sustained engagement and leadership from the Commonwealth Government in working across these systems with a common goal, to end homelessness.

A reminder that further context and background on these recommendations can be found in the Meeting Notes and Key Concepts and Further Background sections of this report.

### The National Cabinet Recommendation for Action

If we genuinely want to end homelessness in Australia, it will take all levels of government working together to support the implementation of strategies to prevent, reduce and end homelessness. I believe that the only place that a reform of this scale will be achieved is through the National Cabinet.<sup>46</sup>

- **Recommendation 16: A National Initiative** - the National Cabinet consider the establishment of a national initiative to support efforts to end homelessness.
- Such an initiative should be a joint partnership between the Commonwealth Government, all states and territories and the representatives of local government.
- This should be similar to the way the Council of Australian Governments got together to create the National Depression Initiative, Beyond Blue, which has been so successful in helping to de-stigmatise depression and anxiety and improve access to support.
- We need a similar initiative, involving all levels of government, not just to change attitudes about the perceived pervasive and intractable nature of homelessness, but to support efforts to demonstrate that ending it is possible.

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<sup>44</sup> Building the Recovery, Community Housing Industry Association, May 2020, <https://www.communityhousing.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/MediareleaseSHARP.pdf?x59559>

<sup>45</sup> <https://www.closingthegap.gov.au/>

<sup>46</sup> <https://federation.gov.au/national-cabinet>



## State Government Recommendations For Action

To support the implementation of strategies to prevent, reduce and end homelessness, state and territory governments should:

- Commit to ending homelessness.
- Invest in building local capacity to end homelessness at the system level.
- Invest in programs that work.
- Meet the Housing Need.

### *Commit to ending homelessness*

To date only the Western Australian and South Australian Governments have committed to ending homelessness and that has taken a lot of work and leadership - in and out of government. In many of the overseas jurisdictions I visited, making such a commitment was not seen as particularly controversial or 'brave'. The discussion was focused more on how to achieve that goal.

- **Recommendation 1: Have a Strategy** - Establish and publicly document a whole of government strategy to end homelessness, including:
  - A target or timeframe.
  - Utilise the Advance to Zero Framework in the development of that strategy.
  - Establish across government and intergovernmental coordination efforts to support the implementation of that strategy.

### *Invest in Building Local Capacity to End Homelessness at the System Level*

Ending homelessness is possible, but it's not easy, it takes sustained effort, leadership and a set of skills or capabilities.

- **Recommendation 2: Sector Capacity** - Enhance sector capability by providing training and capacity-building initiatives that empower local communities to undertake the type of work that ending homelessness requires: working collaboratively, using data to inform decision-making, trauma-informed, Housing First, etc.
- **Recommendation 3: Make Collaboration Easier** - Consider setting policies, or issuing guidelines on engaging with and procuring support from collective impact initiatives - to be clear on how state government agencies and personnel can best engage with and support these collaborations. Currently government processes are rarely equipped to support this new way of working.
- **Recommendation 4: Invest in Backbones** - Collective impact backbones are essential to ending homelessness as they enable cross-sector collaboration, the establishment of quality data, support service coordination, and improvement as well as comprehensive, coordinated and sustained efforts that tackle the multifaceted nature of the problem that is homelessness.<sup>47</sup> Working in them is hard, specialised work, and innately long-term. Funding for this work is often ad-hoc and insufficient.
- **Recommendation 5: Data Linkage** - Better utilise by-name list data currently being collected by undertaking data linkage efforts with other service systems to inform all AtoZ work, particularly prevention efforts.
- **Recommendation 6: Coordination Hubs** - Support the establishment of hubs or the co-location of service coordination efforts, backbone activities and other system change efforts to enable across system collaboration and improved service coordination.

### *Invest in programs that work*

- **Recommendation 7: Invest in Housing First Programs** - We know they work. The Advance to Zero framework incorporates the Housing First approach that seeks to connect people experiencing homelessness with long-term housing as quickly as possible and without preconditions. Housing First

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<sup>47</sup> A list of the backbones or coordination agencies for Advance to Zero Efforts in Australia can be found on the AAEH website: <https://aaeh.org.au/local-communities>

programs work best for people with long histories of homelessness, mental illness or addictions, and can achieve housing stability in long-term housing if provided with the right support.

- **Recommendation 8: Peer Work** - Develop homelessness peer workforce strategies to increase the number of, and support best practice in relation to, peer workers in the housing and homelessness sectors.
- **Recommendation 9: Social Procurement** - Better utilise the significant investment in housing maintenance contracts by adding social procurement components to support employment opportunities for people who have experienced homelessness.
- **Recommendation 10: Integrate and Invest in Health** - Review and invest in support needed to better integrate all health services (hospital, mental health, alcohol and other drugs, primary care) with efforts to end homelessness, making sure that resources are there to address the health inequities that people experiencing homelessness face.
- **Recommendation 11: Better Rehab** - Invest in the establishment of long-term managed alcohol models of supportive housing generally but also specifically culturally appropriate models to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait people experiencing homelessness who are also grappling with addiction.

### **Meet the Housing Need**

- **Recommendation 12: Supply** - Invest in more of the type of public, community, and permanent supportive housing that by-name list data is showing is needed.
- **Recommendation 13: Triage Allocation** - Use by-name list data to triage the allocation of the scarce local housing allocations on the basis of vulnerability, suitability and local improvement priorities identified by Advance to Zero efforts.
- **Recommendation 14: Regulation of CHPs** - Community Housing Providers struggle to allocate housing vacancies to the most vulnerable (as demonstrated by the data on who is getting housed and where from by-name lists across the country. There are many reasons for this, amongst them the often incredibly prescriptive regulatory environments providers operate under. Improvements need to be made to provide more flexibility to prioritise allocations on the basis of vulnerability and collaboratively set local improvement priorities.
- **Recommendation 15: Make Renting Fair** - Greater collaboration and investment are required to better prevent evictions, ensure healthier homes<sup>48</sup>, address racism and other discrimination, strengthen rights regarding pets, no-fault evictions, and other rights for people seeking or currently renting.
- **Recommendation 16: Short Stay Distortions** - Review the impact of short-term rental providers like Airbnb and consider options to mitigate the negative impacts on housing affordability and homelessness in their jurisdictions.

A reminder that further context and background on these recommendations can be found in the Meeting Notes and Key Concepts and Further Background sections of this report.

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<sup>48</sup> More information available at: [https://www.betterrenting.org.au/healthy\\_homes\\_for\\_renters](https://www.betterrenting.org.au/healthy_homes_for_renters)

## Local Government Recommendations For Action

The local government's role in relation to homelessness in Australia is very different from those of the countries I visited. Apart from a handful of exceptions, they don't provide direct homelessness services. They still, however, have an important role to play in homelessness as they are the level of government closest to the problem and are therefore in a unique position to support local efforts to end homelessness.

My Churchill Fellow colleague Leanne Mitchell outlines in her report what role local governments can take in ending homelessness incredibly well, and as follows:

### KNOW YOUR LOCAL HOMELESSNESS SITUATION

- **Collect local data:** Know your local homelessness situation. Collect data in your area and use that to make your decisions about what to do next.

- **Listen to your community:** Take time to listen and learn from your community. Know what they are doing and build your approach with them.

- **Establish a shared definition of homelessness:** Work with your partners and agree on how you jointly define homelessness. This will help align your work.

### LEAD THE NARRATIVE AND DRIVE COLLABORATION

- **Nurture community alliances:** As a council, carefully consider your role in local collaborations. If the opportunity arises step back and let the community lead.

- **Embrace lived experiences:** Look to people with a lived experience of homelessness to partner in and inform your work. They will bring a perspective and an ability to connect that you may not be able to access in other ways.

- **Involve all parts of government:** Consider which government partners will be most important to you in addressing homelessness locally and bring those people together.

- **Collaborate to address welfare, safety and amenity:** Establish coordinated partnership responses with agreed goals and well-defined roles and responsibilities.

- **Communicate and educate for better outcomes:** Councils have the connections and the means to change perceptions of homeless. Make the time to tell the story.

### ORGANISE YOUR APPROACH AND YOUR WORKFORCE

- **Build a collaborative strategy:** Develop a homelessness strategy, but make sure it is not just yours. A genuine approach to collaboration will see



better outcomes for the whole community.

- **Lead good giving initiatives:** Be prepared to have tough conversations with your community about on-street giving. Conversations about alternative ways of helping can redirect goodwill and see better outcomes for people experiencing homelessness.

- **Structure your teams for success:** Working in homelessness is hard. Support your staff by establishing a clear understanding of your goals and shared values.

- **Involve your mayor and senior management:** Equip your mayor and councillors with knowledge and information and involve them in your homelessness efforts to tell your local story and build support for your efforts.

- **Rethink and realign budgets:** Tight budgets may become the fundamental barrier to councils taking action on homelessness. Look for funding opportunities internally and assign funds where you can. Some lobbying of State and Commonwealth to increase their funding.

### ACT TO PREVENT AND END HOMELESSNESS

- **Know what you can do to influence housing supply:** Use planning powers to control and direct influence over your housing supply. Ensure collaboration between council planners and homelessness service staff to align efforts and create more opportunities.

- **Refocus prevention:** Make the most of the community connection points that councils hold and build organisational-wide responsibility for upstream interventions that prevent homelessness.

- **Bring in your libraries and other customer service staff:** Recognise the value of your colleagues who work with your community but are not the homelessness 'experts'. With the right training and support they can help identify and respond to homelessness.

- **Know what you can offer in crisis response:** Local Government is in a good position to convene on-the-ground crisis response. Know where you can add value and take an informed, human rights approach that considers the needs of all members of your community.

(Image: Guidelines for Local Government, Leanne Mitchell, Churchill Fellow Report, 2019, Melbourne Australia )<sup>49</sup>

What I would add by way of further detail to this is that local government can be among the most effective stakeholders in holding the vision not just to manage homelessness but to end it. There are so many accountabilities that pull state governments and homelessness services into trying to manage homelessness, and to try and do everything, for everyone, everywhere all at once. Local governments have the 'luxury' and the responsibility to focus on their local community and its specific needs. This is unique.

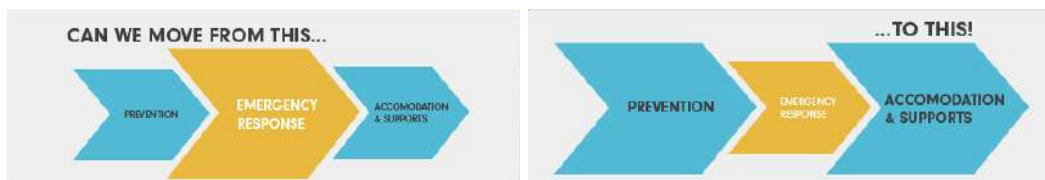
<sup>49</sup> <https://www.churchilltrust.com.au/fellow/leanne-mitchell-vic-2019/>

That said, a frustrating observation I would make about local government involvement in homelessness in Australia, is that wherever local governments have stepped up, it has often seen state funded systems step back, particularly in capital cities. This is an understandable consequence of under-resourced and failing systems, but it doesn't advance the efforts to actually solve the problem.

To support the implementation of strategies to prevent, reduce and end homelessness the local government sector should:

- **Recommendation 1: Utilise the Ending Homeless Local Government Guidelines** - as developed by Churchill Fellow Leanne Mitchell and set out above.<sup>50</sup>
- **Recommendation 2: Declare the ambition to end homelessness** - Sometimes the hardest part about being a leader is being willing to go first. The Adelaide City Council (South Australia) and Port Phillip Council in Victoria were almost the first to do this in Australia and local governments were central to this in the communities that have successfully ended homelessness in other jurisdictions. Australia is alone in the nations I visited without a policy ambition to end homelessness. One of the most successful factors in shifting this is when local councils have led the debate and declared their ambition to support efforts to not just manage homelessness but to end it.
- **Recommendation 3: Focus efforts on ending homelessness** - Local government's involvement in crisis responses is needed from time to time, but is largely the responsibility of state governments. Local government should take the longer view and focus on bringing communities together to create local zero projects and to financially support the backbone efforts of these initiatives.
  - This focuses local accountability, builds whole of society buy-in and doesn't pull local government into direct service delivery (often with the crisis or emergency response focus) and/or enable cost-shifting from state governments.
  - Wherever possible local government should avoid being a direct provider of homelessness services, and focus on the things that it is uniquely suited to contribute to, namely as a:
    - convenor (bring communities together);
    - coordinator (service coordination, multi-agency case conferencing);
    - improver (supporting improvement in systems integration, prevention, etc.);
    - advocate (transparency in data and outcomes); and
    - funder of the above including backbone work.
- **Recommendation 4: Develop Resources to Make It Easier** - Agencies like the state-based Local Government Associations, the Australian Local Government Association and the Council of Capital City Lord Mayors (CCCLM) should support the development of tools and resources to make it easier for local governments to engage in and support this work.
- **Recommendation 5: Capital Cities Dashboard** - The CCCLM should work with the AAEH to establish a centralised real-time/monthly homelessness public dashboard for capital cities outlining the status of their efforts to end homelessness to support advocacy efforts.

A reminder that further context and background on these recommendations can be found in the Meeting Notes and Key Concepts and Further Background Appendices of this report.



(Image: Strategies for Ending Homelessness, The Canadian Observatory on Homelessness, 2013, Canada)<sup>51</sup>

<sup>50</sup> <https://www.churchilltrust.com.au/fellow/leanne-mitchell-vic-2019/>

<sup>51</sup> <https://www.homelesshub.ca/resource/what-are-5-ways-end-homelessness>



## Community Services Sector Recommendations For Action

Interestingly when I finished tidying up all my notes from all the meetings I had across the entire Fellowship I didn't have a single recommendation for the community service sector.<sup>52</sup> I had to think quite hard about the following.

I think there are two reasons for this. Firstly, the community service sector can't solve the problem alone, homelessness is what happens when other service systems fail. It takes a whole of government, whole of sector, and whole of community effort to solve homelessness - my Fellowship focused more on these other systems. The second reason is, they already do so much. There is a reason that the burnout rate of the homelessness workforce, for example, is so high.

That said, there are clearly things that need to change in the way the community services sector operates (including in the homelessness, housing, justice, health and broader social services sectors). To support the implementation of strategies to prevent, reduce and end homelessness, the community services sector should:

- **Recommendation 1: Utilise AtoZ** - Embrace all the elements of the Advance to Zero Framework - in particular through supporting local Advance to Zero efforts or by establishing one. This action includes supporting Housing First, by-name lists, improvement, person centred approaches that integrate the voices of people with a lived experience and more.
- **Recommendation 2: More than Branding** - The language ending homelessness is in the names, taglines and other marketing materials of many organisations I visited. Ending homelessness needs to be more than just a branding exercise, it needs to be properly understood and defined, with contributions measured and the ambition included in strategic plans. It is also a better frame for the concept of Housing First as a systems change effort, even though conceptually they are very similar.
- **Recommendation 3: Re-direct Some Resources** - Invest where possible in systemic efforts to end homelessness, not just program-level responses, and do so in a joined-up, collaborative way.

### Allied Sectors

- **Recommendation 4: Participate in Service Coordination** - For those community service organisations from the allied sectors of mental health, primary health, alcohol and other drugs, corrections, and Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations, work within the collaborative 'service coordination' forums of Advance to Zero efforts.

### Community Housing Providers

- **Recommendation 5: Vulnerability** - House the most vulnerable first, and where that isn't possible advocate for the regulatory and funding changes that would make it possible.
  - It's not possible to know who the most vulnerable are if you don't know who is in your system, and there are no common assessment processes. AtoZ helps to address this.
- **Recommendation 6: Better Understand** - Work with the local AtoZ Campaigns and the AAEH to better understand how CHPs can support the efforts to end homelessness.
- **Recommendation 7: Grow Supportive Housing** - Support the establishment of a Supportive Housing Leaders Growth Network to improve understanding of supportive housing models and to coordinate advocacy for greater governmental investment in Permanent Supportive Housing.

A reminder that further context and background on these recommendations can be found in the Meeting Notes and Key Concepts and Further Background sections of this report.

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<sup>52</sup> The community services sector includes homelessness, housing, primary health, public health, mental health, alcohol and other drugs, justice, family services, disability, gambling, food and many other human services.



## Universities Recommendations For Action

If I didn't initially think much about the recommendations for the community services sector, I thought regularly about the role of universities and researchers throughout my travels.

Universities and researchers have such an important role to play in ending homelessness, however, their significance is often overlooked and under-resourced. I asked many of the people and organisations I met with about the role of researchers in ending homelessness and I experienced almost unanimous recognition of their crucial role, but also high levels of frustration with academia across service providers, system change advocates and policymakers.

One comment from a community that has been very successful in its efforts to end homelessness stood out: "Just because there hasn't been a massive number of peer review journal articles or randomised control trials into something doesn't mean it doesn't exist". Another stated that "Ongoing research projects and evaluations are increasing our understanding of the homelessness phenomenon, but there is still a need for research that is of concrete use in practice".

It is important to recognise that many of these frustrations are felt most acutely by researchers themselves and are to do with the way university research is funded (or not) and what is valued and measured in the career progression of individual researchers. Collaboration and translation, or efforts to see their research findings implemented are not generally supported. Understanding the drivers of this and potential solutions is beyond the scope of my Fellowship. However, what I have picked up is that in order to better support the implementation of strategies to prevent, reduce and end homelessness the university sector in Australia should:

- **Recommendation 1: Evaluate Strategies and Systems More** - Try and invest more time evaluating and understanding ending homelessness strategies and less time evaluating Housing First programs (that we know work, but operate in broken systems). Running the fidelity ruler over services delivering programs in broken systems isn't always helping. A greater focus on how to improve systems, in setting clearer more effective strategies, in improvement work and in using data will ultimately be more helpful in achieving impact.
- **Recommendation 2: Focus More on Translation** - Emphasise translating research findings into practical applications for end-users.
- **Recommendation 3: Use the AtoZ Framework** - Researchers should utilise the AtoZ framework to guide these efforts and help with the iteration and improvement of the framework over time.
- **Recommendation 4: Formal Ending Definition** - Australia lacks a commonly agreed definition of what an end to homelessness looks like in policy documents and academic publications. The research community should help resolve this, drawing upon the work of the Centre for Homelessness Impact, and others.
- **Recommendation 5: Research Agenda** - Work with the AAEH to develop options for the establishment of a national ending homelessness research agenda integrated into local efforts to end homelessness with a focus on improving understanding of what works and the translation of that into real time practice (as opposed to the current predominant focus on retrospective evaluations of programs).
- **Recommendation 6: Impact Report** - Establish an annual ending homelessness report card, including an independent rating on the progress and the comparative efforts of each jurisdiction in Australia seeking to end homelessness.
- **Recommendation 7: Co-Labs** - Consider working with the AAEH to establish state based Collaboration Laboratories (or Co-Labs) for ending homelessness, building the capacity for advocacy, research and collaboration in Australia across research, teaching and local Advance to Zero efforts to end homelessness.

- Some effort could focus on students being paired up to help with delivering pro bono communications services to local community efforts to end homelessness, similar to the work Chicago Funders Together to End Homelessness have supported.
- **Recommendation 8: Prevention** - We still know too little about the interventions needed to drive prevention. Greater research in this space would have a significant impact, particularly research that supports AtoZ community efforts to stem the inflow of people onto by-name lists.
- **Recommendation 9: History of Homelessness** - Support further research to make the history of homelessness in Australia more accessible, to help key stakeholders understand and communicate this, so that we can learn from history and not repeat it.
  - Homelessness is not an individual choice, it is the result of the choices we make as a society expressed through public policy. As Tim Richter from the Canadian Alliance to End Homelessness said to me, “Homelessness was created by public policy; it can be solved by public policy”.
  - There is a need to better understand the historical context of the present situation regarding homelessness - in particular the neoliberal economic policies popularised by the UK Thatcher Government and the Reagan Administration in the USA.
  - The other key policy that has significantly contributed to the current challenges of homelessness is the well intentioned but poorly implemented deinstitutionalisation policies that started in the 1960s in Australia and even earlier in some of the countries I visited. It has been surprising to me how little this is talked about or understood - particularly amongst stakeholders who are interested in ending homelessness, but not deeply engaged in it.
  - Universities are uniquely suited to help change this, and better place into the historical context, where the current challenge of homelessness has come from.



*(Image: The Centre For Homelessness Impact, London, UK, 2022)<sup>53</sup>*

<sup>53</sup> <https://www.homelessnessimpact.org/post/could-universities-do-more-to-prevent-homelessness>

## Business Recommendations For Action

I've had the opportunity to meet with many business leaders all over the world who are helping to end homelessness in their communities.

Business leaders have a role in ending homelessness because homelessness is a human tragedy, a community disaster, and an economic problem, too. In terms of lives and community resources, it is a problem that is more costly to ignore than to solve. As both citizens and economic players, business leaders have a stake in ending homelessness.



*(Image: Community Solutions, USA, 2022)*

To support the implementation of strategies to prevent, reduce and end homelessness, businesses and business representatives from small, medium, and big enterprises should:

- **Recommendation 1: Support systemic change** - Business leaders, chambers of commerce, and local trader groups are all playing a key role by endorsing changes at the system level in the efforts to end homelessness. In some communities, business communities have mobilised to organise for systems change and created pressure and provided funding for the policies, practices, and support needed to move the community toward its shared aim. Charitable arms of businesses and philanthropic organisations can also leverage their investments and resources by ensuring that they help drive system change as well as support the individuals who receive the support and/or housing.
- **Recommendation 2: Champion the collection and use of quality data** - People in business are familiar with the idea that “what gets measured gets managed”. The same is true of homelessness. Before homelessness can be solved, it’s necessary to know who is experiencing homelessness. That requires knowing the names and needs of every individual experiencing homelessness in a local community. Once a community has established reliable data, it can systematically address the needs of each individual. At the same time, it is important to track the changing size, composition, and dynamics of the homeless population.
- **Recommendation 3: Understand your community’s specific goals** - Advance to Zero communities focus on establishing a shared aim, called functional zero, to create accountability for reducing and ending homelessness for different populations such as chronic homelessness, veterans or Aboriginal

and Torres Strait Islander people. Business leaders also have a role in supporting activities that can prevent people from becoming homeless in the first place.

- **Recommendation 4: Identify Champions** - Business leaders, allies and champions who partner with local Advance to Zero communities to support their efforts including through increased awareness not of the problem, but of the solutions, can be enormously helpful. Business champions can help:
  - build understanding that ending homelessness is possible.
  - tackle stigma and false notions that homelessness is a choice.
  - support the development of business cases for local data driven efforts to end homelessness.
- **Recommendation 5: Support Social Enterprise** - Businesses can support events and other efforts to enable greater collaboration and partnerships between homelessness agencies, employment service organisations and the social enterprise sector.
- **Recommendation 6: Use Social Procurement** - Consider the ways in which procurement activities can be better leveraged to support local efforts to prevent, reduce and end homelessness.
- **Recommendation 7: Learn More** - Find out more about efforts to end homelessness in Australia by getting in touch with local zero projects or collaborations and reading more about business leaders working to end homelessness in other places.<sup>54</sup>
- **Recommendation 8: Develop a Toolkit to Make it Easier** - Ending homelessness is complex, it can be difficult to know where to start. Businesses could support the development of an ending homelessness and business engagement toolkit that integrates shared value strategies<sup>55</sup> and makes it clear to businesses, of various types (small, medium and big), how they can most helpfully support the efforts to end homelessness.
- **Recommendation 9: Social Impact Investment** - Become a social impact investor, these types of investments can play an important role in increasing access to affordable housing for those experiencing homelessness.
- **Recommendation 10: Engage Your Team** - Be an employer that helps end homelessness. Engaging employees in your philanthropic work creates meaningful experiences for employees that boosts team morale, connects your company's mission to meaningful change, and makes employee donations go even further.

A reminder that further context and background on these recommendations can be found in the Meeting Notes and Key Concepts and Further Background sections of this report.



(Image: Community Solutions, USA, 2022)<sup>56</sup>

<sup>54</sup> For more information about efforts in the USA see: <https://community.solutions/get-involved/business-leaders/>

<sup>55</sup> See the Chicago, Community Solutions Discussion Meeting notes for further background on Shared Value

<sup>56</sup> <https://changeplease.org/>

## Philanthropy Recommendations for Action

I recognise that the philanthropic sector in Australia is very different from many of the countries I visited - no greater example of this is the fact that Community Solutions, the organisation that has supported 14 communities so far to end homelessness received a US\$100 million grant from the MacArthur Foundation.

That said, the philanthropic sector in Australia still plays a crucial role in efforts to end homelessness, including beyond just being a funder. In fact, much of the progress in establishing a movement to end homelessness in Australia is due to the dedicated efforts of philanthropy. My first year as CEO of the AAEH was funded through a Kenneth Myer Innovation Fellowship, from the Myer Foundation. This report and Fellowship were supported by the Churchill Trust and every one of the Advance to Zero communities in Australia has received philanthropic funding in some form.

To continue to improve and support the implementation of strategies to prevent, reduce and end homelessness in Australia the philanthropic sector should:

- **Recommendation 1: Focus More on Systemic Change** - Philanthropic organisations should leverage their unique position and resources to support efforts that go beyond crisis responses. Crisis responses quite literally keep people alive, reduce human suffering and are absolutely crucial, but this shouldn't be the only focus, yet for many funders it is.
  - The short term nature of the way politics increasingly works in Western democracies pulls governments towards ever increasing investments in the crisis end of service systems. These same forces don't pull at philanthropy and so it is uniquely suited to supporting systemic efforts to end homelessness.
  - In particular where it can philanthropy should support local Advance to Zero backbone efforts. This collaborative whole of society coordination is widely recognised but struggles to find funding, less so at the establishment phase (everyone likes new things), but more so as efforts need to be sustained - arguably the hardest part.
- **Recommendation 2: Consistently Show Up** - Funding is essential, but so too is your time, networks and perspective. Philanthropy should use its influence to consistently show up to support collaboration and be an active voice if focusing efforts on ending homelessness.
  - So many forces pull people and organisations back into their own silos often driving competition, we need more voices at the table driving person centred collaborative efforts.
  - The number of independent voices calling for efforts to end homelessness, as opposed to advocating for the needs of those doing their best to respond to day-to-day needs, are too few on the ground. It's understandable that services get pulled back into the day-to-day crisis response needs of systems that are fundamentally broken. We need more voices, leaders, and organisations maintaining a laser focus on what it would take to end homelessness, and philanthropy is uniquely positioned to help hold the vision for this specific goal.
- **Recommendation 3: Leverage Investment** - To maximise its impact philanthropy should strategically utilise additional investments in support and housing within local communities to leverage systemic change in these local systems. A particularly effective approach to this would be to direct new housing and support investments through local Advance to Zero efforts, that have strategies to end homelessness and are backed up by quality data and collaborative system wide efforts. By directing funding through these initiatives, philanthropy can increase its impact and accelerate progress towards ending homelessness at the community level.
- **Recommendation 4: Support Impact Investing** - In particular to support greater affordable, social and permanent supportive housing supply.
- **Recommendation 5: Network** - Consider the creation of an annual Australian Funders Together to End Homelessness gathering - with a focus on building understanding and capacity to support efforts to end homelessness, including sharing, implementing and refining the philanthropic sector recommendations made in this report.



## Citizens and Civil Society Recommendations

*“Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it’s the only thing that ever has” - Margaret Mead, anthropologist.*

I wholeheartedly agree with this sentiment, I would add “Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed and organised citizens can change the world; indeed, it’s the only thing that ever has”.

Civil society represents the ways in which people work collectively to achieve their aims. Civil society refers to the diverse range of voluntary associations, community groups, and non-governmental organisations that operate independently from the government and the private sector, working collectively to address social issues, advocate for public interests, and foster civic engagement in a democratic society. It plays a crucial role in mobilising people, promoting social cohesion, and advocating for positive change, contributing significantly to the well-being and progress of communities and societies.

To support the implementation of strategies to prevent, reduce and end homelessness citizens and civil society should:

- **Recommendation 1: Be the Change** - Ending homelessness is everyone's business, as a society, we need to make our elected representatives, through the questions we ask and the way we vote, deliver on the leadership, reform and funding needed to ensure all citizens have access to a home.
- **Recommendation 2: Be Positive** - Help create a sense of the possible. Hand wringing in the pages of newspapers, journals, social media, newsletters and other public media about the supposed indifference of the public or elected representatives is of little value, however true it might feel from time to time.
- **Recommendation 3: Promote a New Understanding of Homelessness** - including but not limited to recognising that:
  - Ending homelessness is possible;
  - Housing is not just an asset or investment class, but also a basic human need;
  - Homelessness is not an individual problem but a systems problem;
  - Homelessness is not an individual choice, but a choice by society for allowing the rising inequality that drives so much of it; and
  - Ending homelessness is also about racial equity, justice and reconciliation.
- **Recommendation 4: Engage Political Leaders in Ending Homelessness** - Create accountability for measurably and equitably ending homelessness. Find out if your local, state or territory government has a commitment to measurably and equitably ending homelessness, and hold them accountable for making progress toward that goal. Also support associated campaigns such as:
  - Raise the Rate - the campaign calling for increased levels of income support payments.
  - Everyone’s Home - the campaign calling for greater investment in social housing.
  - Close the Gap - the nationwide effort aimed at eliminating the health and life expectancy gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians.
  - Many other campaigns calling for reform to drug and alcohol, justice and incarceration, mental health, rental rights and others.
- **Recommendation 5: YIMBY Campaigns** - Support or set up Yes In My Back Yard or YIMBY campaigns, to support efforts to end homelessness, including building more affordable, social and permanent supportive housing in your community.<sup>57</sup>
- **Recommendation 6: Volunteer and Donate** - Support the efforts of local homelessness agencies, and/or support the efforts of local collaborations, ask them what you can do to help and if you can,

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<sup>57</sup> For further information about such campaigns in Canada see:

<https://redwoodparkcommunities.com/yimby/>

donate to both efforts to meet the crisis needs of people experiencing homelessness and systemic efforts to end it.

- **Recommendation 7: Support Community Wealth Building** - In order to demand action on wealth inequality and poverty, citizens and civil society need an alternative to the neoliberal economic policies that are the cause of so much of the rising inequality that has driven much of the poverty and homelessness that communities witness today. Community wealth building provides an alternative that civil society could learn more about and champion.<sup>58</sup>
  - The reality is our economy is not working well, for people, places, or the planet, yet there is no shortage of wealth. Wages are low, work and housing are increasingly insecure, and poverty and inequality between the rich and the poor are on the rise. Inequality has been on steroids in Australia over the last decade with data showing the bottom 90% of Australians received just 7% of economic growth per person since 2009, while the top 10% of income earners reap 93% of the benefits.<sup>59</sup>
  - This needs to change. Governments need to lead this change, and communities and citizens need to demand they do it. At the heart of this is the need to stop treating housing solely as a vehicle for wealth creation, increasingly for the most well-off, and ensure it is something that is available to everyone.

Ultimately the only thing that has ever created lasting change has been an organised and committed group of citizens standing up and demanding it.

A reminder that further context and background on these recommendations can be found in the Meeting Notes and Key Concepts and Further Background sections of this report.



*(Image: The Dianna Award, Quote of the Data, Twitter, 2015)<sup>60</sup>*

<sup>58</sup> Further information about Community Wealth Building can be found in Appendix D of this report and here: <https://cles.org.uk/what-is-community-wealth-building/>

<sup>59</sup> <https://australiainstitute.org.au/post/inequality-on-steroids-as-bottom-90-get-just-7-of-economic-growth-since-2009/>

<sup>60</sup> <https://twitter.com/DianaAward/status/658901001852841984>

## AAEH Recommendations For Action

The following are recommendations for the AAEH to adopt. Some will take some time to complete, some we have already started on and others will be subject to resources and/or funding being available.

Whilst many of these might seem quite operational, I thought it useful to share some of the insights that my Churchill Fellowship has resulted in for the AAEH organisationally, but also because of the inherently collaborative nature of the AAEHs work. None of these recommendations can be implemented by the AAEH alone, because of the innate collaborative nature of our work, they require the involvement and support of a broad range of stakeholders.

### *Underway*

- **Recommendation 1: PSH Needs Analysis** - Work with the Corporation for Supportive Housing (USA) to develop a Permanent Supportive Housing Needs Analysis toolkit for Australia, to help local communities do cost benefit analysis regarding the amount of Permanent Supportive Housing their community needs to end homelessness.
- **Recommendation 2: Racial Justice** - Develop a statement of intent regarding racial equality, racial justice and reconciliation in relation to the AtoZ Campaign, including how we plan to better address these matters in our collective work.
- **Recommendation 3: Data Dictionary** - Publish or make more publicly accessible the working definitions it uses as part of the AtoZ campaign and work with Commonwealth agencies, researchers and others to develop more broadly understood or agreed definitions in Australia.
- **Recommendation 4: Explain How We Work** - Develop a 'how we work' fact sheet, drawing heavily on the efforts of Results for America: to not just describe what we do, but to describe how we do it.
- **Recommendation 5: Systems Training** - The AAEH should incorporate more systems thinking training (including mental models, psychology of change, etc.) into the existing training.
- **Recommendation 6: Impact Measurement** - Seek to measure, evaluate and report on its impact against the world's to-do list, the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals.
- **Recommendation 7: Mindsets** - Develop an agreed set of mindsets that underpin the efforts to end homelessness through the Advance to Zero Campaign.

### *Under Consideration*

- **Recommendation 8: Champions Strategy** - Develop a strategy for engaging those who truly 'get' the work of ending homelessness - including by recognising and supporting community champions, as well as developing a faculty of Fellows, or people who are recognised as being able to train, coach and mentor communities that are seeking to end homelessness in Australia.
- **Recommendation 9: Grow Improvement Capability** - Partner with the Institute for Healthcare Improvement in Australia to seek state government support to build capacity in the homelessness and health sectors to utilise the model for improvement.
- **Recommendation 10: Lived Experience Network** - Consider supporting the development of a "Street Voices for Change: Lived Experience Network" - not just as a consultation forum but as a community organising network that supports the development of advocates, establishes a paid speaker service, provides training about working in a person-centred way, campaigns to reduce stigma and other associated activities.
- **Recommendation 11: Prevention Data Reporting** - Support AtoZ communities to benchmark, track and publicly report their system's performance in reducing the number of people newly identified or returning to homelessness - i.e. prevention.
- **Recommendation 12: Winter Solstice** - Encourage the winter solstice to be a focal point in better recognising the estimated 424 people whose lives are lost whilst homeless each year in Australia.
- **Recommendation 13: Prevalence Milestones** - Incorporate homelessness prevalence reduction milestones into its Advance to Zero campaign milestones guide.

### *Subject to Resources/Funding*

- **Recommendation 14: Prospectus** - Develop a prospectus of all the things the AAEH would like to do to support an end to homelessness in Australia. Including the following recommendations:
  - **Recommendation 15: Better Meetings and Backbones Guide** - Develop a better meetings and backbones guide providing templates and other training materials - including how to best facilitate collaboration, have more effective meetings and utilise technology.
  - **Recommendation 16: Community Organising** - Partner with the Chicago Coalition for the Homeless to deliver community organising/advocacy training for interested parties in Australia and/or the establishment of a Fellowship model.
  - **Recommendation 17: Business Case** - Develop a detailed business case to consider what it would take to support the adoption of the Advance to Zero Framework across Australia, with the eventual goal of an integrated nationwide network of locally controlled and developed by-name lists. Setting out:
    - Why there is a risk in rolling out too quickly;
    - Understanding which communities are most in need of support;
    - The technology requirements to support this; and
    - Developing the workforce capability to deliver it.
  - **Recommendation 18: Support Youth BNLs** - Develop resources and toolkits to support communities who wish to seek to end youth homelessness, through the Advance to Zero Framework.
  - **Recommendation 19: Prevention Legislation** - Commission an issues paper on the merits of dedicated preventing homelessness legislation in Australia.
  - **Recommendation 20: Person Centred Training** - Partner with organisations like the Mayday Trust to deliver more person-centred training in Australia.
  - **Recommendation 21: Deaths Data Media Campaign** - The Health, Housing and Homelessness Network should consider partnering with the Guardian Australia to undertake a similar campaign in Australia.
  - **Recommendation 22: Better Communication and Fundraising Guide** - Develop a 'better communication and fundraising guide for ending homelessness' modelled on similar resources that have been developed in Europe to help better understand and manage the tensions between fundraising and seeking to change community attitudes about the nature of homelessness and how it is solvable.
  - **Recommendation 23: Improve PSH Understanding** - Bring representatives of the Corporation for Supportive Housing to Australia to:
    - Raise awareness of what PSH is and the need for Permanent Supportive Housing Systems;
    - Facilitate the integration of the corporation's FUSE program lessons into the AtoZ tools relating to coordinated systems; and
    - Help develop Australian Supportive Housing Standards.
  - **Recommendation 24: Communications** - Establish an ending homelessness communications toolkit and community of practice to develop and champion best practice efforts to frame, communicate, and talk about ending homelessness.

## Conclusion

My Churchill Fellowship has given me the opportunity to better understand what it would take to demonstrate that ending homelessness is possible in Australia. It seems strange to sum up the lessons from eight weeks of travel through six countries and 12 cities, in 81+ meetings, visits, and events with over 112 people as simply as this - if you want to end homelessness:

1. Have a strategy to end homelessness.
2. Define clear indicators of success and regularly measure progress.
3. Foster collaborative effort, learning from others' experiences.
4. Commit and believe that it is possible to end homelessness.

It's that simple. There is so much more to it than that, but it's also that simple.

No matter what sector readers of this report are from, government, community services, philanthropy, universities or business, I have proposed a framework and a range of recommendations to support action by you!

## Implementation and Dissemination

A core element of a Churchill Fellowship is sharing the knowledge of what has been learned - this report has been structured to be a resource for people and organisations from across governments and across society.

Through my work with the Australian Alliance to End Homelessness, I look forward to working with our numerous partners to drive the implementation of many of these recommendations. A number of these are already underway or have been integrated into our planning efforts.

I will work with all of the other stakeholders to encourage the consideration and implementation of these recommendations too - in particular with the Commonwealth Government.

I'll continue to share the insights from this Fellowship through all the communication channels and opportunities available to me. See Appendix C for the summary of my social media reflections so far.

The comprehensive meeting notes set out in Appendix A are also I hope a lasting legacy of the knowledge and insights I picked up throughout my Fellowship. I hope one day to distil them into a book and/or a documentary. Please get in touch if you want to collaborate on that.

One personal reflection I have had on this Fellowship has been that I do need to make greater time to share what I've been learning - on my journey as the CEO of the AAEH as well as part of the Churchill Fellowship - about what communities are achieving, and most importantly how we can use this to demonstrate that solving homelessness is possible in Australia.

## Homelessness is Solvable

Homelessness is a complex problem, one that does not lend itself to simple or short-term solutions.

It is not a problem that can be solved by one agency, individual or organisation alone.

Nothing proposed in this report recommends a one size fits all approach or suggests that there are any silver bullets that can solve this problem.

Yet, homelessness is a solvable problem. I am convinced that this will be achieved in Australia when there is sustained and collaborative local and large scale efforts.



If the intent is there, in the strategies of governments, communities and organisations, if the ability is there to measure progress and if the willingness to share and learn is part of that journey, ending homelessness is not only possible, it is necessary, and it is deadly urgent.

I think Iain De Jong from Canada, who wrote the book on ending homelessness literally called “The Book on Ending Homelessness”, beautifully captures the essence of the challenge. “What it takes to end homelessness is the difference between bacon and eggs. For the chicken, it was a passing moment of interest, for the pig it was a lifetime commitment”.

Which will you be - interested or committed?

**NOTE: The Following Amendix’s can be found in the Extended version of this report available on the AAEH website at: [www.aeah.org.au](http://www.aeah.org.au)**

**Appendix A - Meeting Notes**

**Appendix B - The Itinerary**

**Appendix C - Social Media Blog**

**Appendix D - Key Concepts and Further Background**

**Appendix E - Recommendations Index**