

# Ending Homelessness in Western Australia

## Housing First is the key to achieving a functional end to homelessness

**Shelter WA believes that everyone has a right to a home and that a functional end to homelessness, where episodes are rare, brief and one-off, is achievable.**

**We know that the key to ending homelessness is prevention, early intervention and a rapid response, informed by a strong evidence base of what works.**

According to 2016 census data, on any given night in Western Australia, approximately 9,000 people could be considered homeless.<sup>1</sup> On any given day, 201 Specialist Homelessness Services in WA were assisting 4600 clients in 2021.<sup>2</sup>

Government data also highlights the significant over-representation of Aboriginal people accessing specialist homelessness services in Western Australia. **While Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people represent just 3.3% of the WA population, they represented 64% of met demand for accommodation services** in 2020-21, and 50.5% of Specialist Homelessness Services (SHS) clients.<sup>3</sup>

*"The causes of homelessness are complex and encompass a broad range of individual and structural determinants, including housing availability and affordability, economic and employment opportunities (or lack thereof), physical and mental health outcomes, domestic and family violence, and social and community connections".<sup>4</sup>*

We do, however, have the evidence and solutions to achieve a functional end to homelessness. **This is a collective responsibility of all levels of government.**

Research has shown that 80 per cent of the homeless population experience only transitional homelessness, with a further 20 per cent experiencing repeat or chronic homelessness.<sup>5</sup> **Therefore, increasing the supply of social and affordable housing and strengthening private rental support and tenancy regulation is critical for ending homelessness.**

For those with complex needs or reoccurring homelessness, **Shelter WA endorses the principles of Housing First.** The implementation of Housing First principles should be informed by the Advance to Zero methodology that sets out a collaborative, evidence-based approach to ending homelessness.<sup>6</sup>

State and territory governments have increasingly embraced the Housing First model, including the *All Paths Lead to Home: Western Australia's 10 Year Strategy on Homelessness 2020-2030*. There remain gaps, however, in implementing the approach at scale and ensuring targeted supportive housing options are available for all those who need it.

More work and investment are required to embed Housing First into everyday service delivery and design in WA. This requires a strategic and systemic investment response, in partnership with the community services sector. It also requires consistent and robust data management across the sector to enable a coordinated response and continuous learning.

<sup>1</sup> ABS (2016) Census of Population and Housing: Estimating Homelessness. Note: 2021 Census figures for homelessness will be released in 2023.

<sup>2</sup> AIHW (2022) Specialist Homelessness Services: monthly data. Released 25 May 2022.

<sup>3</sup> Productivity Commission (2022) Report on Government Services. Part G: Housing and Homelessness. Table 194.A

<sup>4</sup> Flatau, P et al (2021), Ending homelessness in Australia: an evidence and policy deep dive. Centre for Social Impact, UWA, p.xxi

<sup>5</sup> Presentation by Mr Bob Jordan, National Director of Housing First Republic of Ireland, WA Homelessness Week 2019 – Data cited from Dublin Regional Homelessness Executive from: <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0264275118314045>

<sup>6</sup> For more detail, please see: <https://aaeh.org.au/atoz>

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## What is Housing First?

Housing First is an international model for housing and supporting people who have experienced long term and reoccurring homelessness and who face a range of complex challenges. Taking a Housing First approach involves providing housing upfront without conditions while also providing individualised, recovery-focused, wrap-around support services for those who need it.<sup>7</sup>

## Shelter WA recommendations:

- That the Commonwealth, state and local governments, including government agencies, commit to ending homelessness, not just managing it.
- That the Commonwealth Government develop and implement a national housing and homelessness strategy to drive a coordinated, evidence-based approach to ending homelessness, and which adopts and embeds the principles of Housing First.
- That the WA State Government revise the social housing targets in the *WA Housing Strategy 2020-2030* to reflect current and projected evidence-based need over the next decade, including a range of supportive housing options to meet the diverse needs of the population. These targets should compliment Commonwealth Government policy and strategies.
- That the WA State Government implement system reform and increase investment to ensure WA homelessness services are aligned with Housing First principles, as outlined in the *All Paths Lead to a Home* strategy.
- That the Commonwealth Government and WA State Government increase investment in evidence-based prevention and early intervention initiatives to end homelessness.
- That the WA State Government commit to improving the quality and consistency of service data to track homelessness, including ongoing support for the roll-out of By Name Lists, using the Advance to Zero methodology.
- That the Commonwealth Government and WA State Government adopt a principle of self-determination and embed this principle across housing and homelessness services for Aboriginal people.
- That all governments ensure people with lived experience of homelessness are central to the design and delivery of homelessness services.

<sup>7</sup> For more details about the principles of Housing First see: <https://homelessnessaustralia.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/Housing-First-Principles.pdf>