

LIVED EXPERIENCE HOMELESSNESS FORUM 2025: PEER-LED SYSTEMS CHANGE

Connection is Prevention



Written by: Emily Elliott – Lived Experience Event Coordinator – Shelter WA

Abstract

The Forum was held on 30 July 2025 at Manning Community Hall in Manning, WA, as part of Homelessness Week.

Hosted by Shelter WA and co-designed by Brian Eckersley, Emily Elliott, Lana Moon, and Wendy Wright, the forum centred on the theme 'Connection is Prevention'.

This peer-led event aimed to drive systems change by elevating the voices of those with lived experience of homelessness, highlighting the critical role of connection in preventing homelessness and fostered community-driven solutions.

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Acknowledgement of Country

Ngany kaaditj Whadjuk Noongar moor kaadak boojar.

We acknowledge the Whadjuk people of the Noongar Nation as the Traditional Custodians of the land on which this report was developed and shared.

We acknowledge that sovereignty was never ceded, and that this land was, is, and always will be Aboriginal land.

Ngany kaaditj moorditj, keyen kaadak, ngalak wer yangal.

We pay our respects to Whadjuk Elders past, present, and future, and recognise the deep and ongoing connection they hold to land, waters, skies, and community.

We extend this respect to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

Recognition of Lived and Lived Experience

We recognise and honour the lived and living experience of people impacted by homelessness and housing insecurity.

We acknowledge the strength, insight, and resilience of individuals, families, and communities who navigate these challenges every day. Your voices, knowledge, and advocacy are essential in shaping better systems, services, and support.

This report is informed by, and dedicated to, those with lived and living experience of homelessness and housing insecurity.

We thank you. We see you. We walk alongside you.

Introduction

The *Lived Experience Homelessness Forum 2025: Peer-led Systems Change* was a landmark event advancing systemic change through lived experience leadership. Building on the *2024 Lived Experience Homelessness Advocacy Forum*, this year expanded its reach – bringing together advocates, service providers, and policymakers from housing, mental health, government, and beyond.

Centred on the theme *Connection is Prevention*, the forum challenged systems to move beyond crisis response and embrace early, collaborative action. People with lived and living experience were not just included – they led. Their insights shaped every session, offering not only personal narratives but policy critiques, service design ideas, and strategies for systemic reform.

A key message echoed throughout: homelessness is not inevitable – it is preventable. But prevention requires honest cross-sector reflection, shared accountability, and decision-making spaces where lived experience holds power.

The forum also produced tangible outcomes, including a live-drafted **Cross-Sector Homelessness Prevention Charter** and a **Lived Experience Insights Report** attached to this report.

Together, we reimagined a future where housing is a right, support systems are accessible and equitable, and lived experience is recognised as a vital force for change – not just in storytelling, but in leadership, policy, and design.

Core Themes

Embedding Voices with Lived and Living Experience

This forum reaffirmed that lived and living experience must be *central*, not peripheral, to systems design. Co-facilitators with lived experience guided the day, grounding discussions in truth, strength, and personal insight. Their involvement was not tokenistic but structural – setting the tone for how WA's homelessness sector must move forward.

Prevention Through Collaborative Action

Rather than reacting to crises, the forum emphasised upstream prevention. Through multi-sector conversations, attendees mapped out practical, sector-specific actions that could prevent people from entering or re-entering homelessness.

Cross-Sector Responsiveness and Advocacy

Homelessness cannot be solved by the housing sector alone. The forum promoted shared responsibility, drawing participants from health, justice, mental health, education, and beyond. Each was called on to identify and commit to their role in prevention and systems change.

Navigation Equity – Making Services Accessible and Understandable

Many attendees spoke about the challenge of navigating services – especially during times of crisis. Whether due to bureaucracy, confusing eligibility criteria, or systemic racism, the forum highlighted the urgent need for services to be not just available, but genuinely *accessible* and culturally safe.

Forum Attendee Overview

Total Attendees: 38 in-person, 16 online

Lived Experience Representatives: 13

Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander Attendees: 3

Regional Attendees: 17

Forum Sessions and Activities

Breaking Barriers, Designing Solutions

Overview: This cross-sector panel featured representatives from key services who were invited to honestly assess their own limitations and envision how to eliminate the need for crisis response altogether. Participants engaged in *real-time solution mapping*, identifying system-wide challenges and proposing actionable reforms.



Panellists:

Danni Evans – Senior Manager Homelessness Support at Uniting WA.

Reece Davis – Lived Experience Member of the Youth Homelessness Advisory Council.

Simon Lane – Board Chair of the Homelessness Support Group.

Guiding Questions:

- What is one systemic or social barrier to homelessness prevention, and how can your service help remove it?
- Which systems and policies need to change so that someone wouldn't need to access your service?
- What supports and funding are needed to improve accessibility pathways?

Barriers Identified:

- Complex, siloed funding systems.
- Rigid eligibility criteria preventing early intervention.
- Lack of culturally safe, trauma-informed services.
- Chronic underfunding of wraparound supports.
- Invisibility of people in 'hidden homelessness'.

Key Solutions Proposed:

- Co-designed, flexible service models.
- Increased investment in early intervention and prevention.
- Legislative reform to prevent housing discrimination.
- Integration of lived experience into service design teams.
- Cross-sector data-sharing agreements to flag early risk indicators.

Quote Highlights:

Homelessness Prevention:

'There's a lot of new groups of people that are experiencing homelessness, particularly families. Services need to be able to grab these people quickly and support them quickly through the system.'

Systems and Policy Change:

'Ideally, services like the Youth Homelessness Advisory Council shouldn't have to exist because young people shouldn't be falling into homelessness to begin with. To get to that point, we need systems and policies that focus on prevention, not just crisis response. This means fixing things like the education system, so schools are trained to recognise the early signs of homelessness or instability and know how to link students to help, and definitely not punish them for falling behind. It means making sure GPs and mental health professionals are trained to respond when a young person discloses risk, and to connect them with youth specific housing services. We also need a housing system that includes early intervention and supportive pathways like more transitional housing and housing first for young people, not just emergency beds. But, most of all, I think we need young people with lived experience at the table when these systems are being designed. Because if services had been built around what young people need and experience, we might not have ended up with so much hidden youth homelessness in the first place.'

Improving Pathway Accessibility:

'You shouldn't need a referral from 10 different places or have to prove that you're "homeless enough" just to get any help. The pathway should feel safe,

simple and human, where other services talk to each other. Where the people accessing these services feel supported, not just to find a bed for the night, but to actually stay housed, finish school, and build a future.'

Key Takeaway: This panel highlighted the urgent need to shift from crisis response to prevention in addressing homelessness. Key barriers include fragmented systems, strict eligibility criteria, and underfunded supports. Solutions centred on co-designed, trauma-informed services, early intervention, and systemic reform – especially embedding lived experience into service design to create accessible, human-centred pathways.

From Story to Strategy: Lived Experience Panel

Overview: This panel centred lived experience voices to explore barriers to accessing homelessness services, failures in prevention, and necessary systemic reforms. Speakers highlighted discrimination, rigid eligibility criteria, and service gaps for marginalised groups. The lived experience advocates called for trauma-informed, inclusive approaches and policies that prioritise prevention over crisis, dignity over gatekeeping.



Panellists: Brian Eckersley, Lana Moon, and Wendy Wright.

Topics Explored:

- Barriers they faced when accessing services and/or what stopped them from accessing services.
- What didn't work in prevention.
- Which systems and policies need to change so that someone wouldn't even need to access a homelessness service.

Barriers Identified:

- Services deciding who is 'homeless enough' to access their service.
- Mistrust of systems due to past trauma and/or discrimination.
- Systemic gaps for older women, youth, and people with disabilities.
- The need for advocacy pathways that go beyond 'sharing your story'.

Key Solutions Proposed:

- Redesign eligibility criteria to remove gatekeeping and ensure timely access to support.
- Invest in inclusive, trauma-informed services that are safe for all.
- Strengthen early intervention pathways to prevent homelessness.
- Incorporate lived experience into system design beyond storytelling.

Quote Highlights:

Service Access Barriers:

'There's been organisations, at times, that don't perceive you to be in need as you are. You can present to some organisations and if you're in relatively clean clothes, you'll get a third degree on whether or not you're homeless or how homeless you are.'

'Going to places like foodbank or charities that hold foodbank and not being able to go regularly. So, I'm forced to only be able to attend once a month and supposed to be able to get everything I need. How would I be doing that if I didn't have a fridge? If I didn't have a place to store perishable food?'

Failed Homelessness Prevention:

'When I ended up on the street again about 6 years ago, I was also in a mental health crisis and when I presented to services when I became street present I would be able to drop in to services to get a bite to eat and try and engage with some sort of support, but it's like I was invisible. I was put in the "too hard" basket, and nobody would bother even trying to liaise with me or try to help me in any sort of way.'

'I was relatively new to being out as trans and when I first started trying to access where I could get housing or shelter, most places that I'd try and call up would hang up on me straight away as soon as they heard my voice. The only place that ended up being able to take me was a men's home.'

'One of the main issues I've had over the years was having a guide dog, but the first guide dog did not look like a labrador. So that dog was not allowed into the services that I would go and try to attend.'

Systems and Policy Change:

'A number of people are working, not very many hours, but enough hours to come up against the earning cap in Department of Housing. That means they're not earning anywhere near enough to face the private rental market, but they are being told by Department of Housing that they'll have to move out soon because they're earning too much ... People need an opportunity to heal and get ahead, and that requires more than just saving up for a bond for the private market – it requires dealing with your debt, paying for your medical stuff, dental stuff, getting back on your feet in general.'

'I remember trying to access a service to see if I can get some support around accommodation and being told that I can't get help until I'm street present again. The fact the systems are overburdened and the services that are working in the frontlines are so overburdened to the point that they can't help people who are at risk, they're trying frantically to maintain some semblance of progress with the people that are already are street present, it just shows that there's not enough funding, not enough support.'

Key Takeaway: This panel exposed how service gatekeeping, discrimination, and rigid systems leave many at risk unseen and unsupported. Speakers reiterated that true advocacy must move beyond storytelling to genuine decision-making power for those with lived experience. This session's insights are explored in more depth in the *Lived Experience Insights Report*.

What Can *We* Do Differently?

Format: Forum attendees broke into small, cross-sector working groups with facilitators and notetakers. The prompts they were given to answer included:

- What role do you/your service/your organisation play in preventing homelessness?
- What changes can you commit to over the next 12 months?



Common Micro-Actions Identified:

1. Centre Lived Experience and Community Voice.
2. Provide Holistic, Individualised, and Culturally Appropriate Support.
3. Ensure Early Intervention and Continuity of Care.
4. Advocate for Systems Reform and Policy Change.
5. Improve Access to Safe, Affordable, and Appropriate Housing.
6. Build Strong, Connected Communities.
7. Strengthen Collaboration and Shared Impact.
8. Invest in Workforce Capacity and Leadership.

This workshop shaped the *Homelessness Prevention Charter* attached with this report.

Blueprints for Change: Embedding Lived Experience in Design

Overview: This panel explored how regulatory, design, and engagement barriers in WA hinder sustainable housing solutions for people experiencing homelessness and housing insecurity. Panellists emphasised universal design, lived experience integration throughout project lifecycles, and system-wide reform. They called for funding models and planning processes that prioritise liveability, inclusion, and climate-appropriate, long-term housing outcomes.



Panellists:

Jonathan Lake – Director and Design Leader for Gresley Abas Architecture Environment Design.

Norm Roberts – Executive Chairman at Offsite.

Guiding Questions:

- What are the primary structural and regulatory barriers in WA that hinder the development of accessible and sustainable housing for people experiencing homelessness?
- How can the principles of universal design and personal sustainability be integrated into housing projects to ensure they are both accessible and liveable, especially in the context of WA's unique climate and resource constraints?
- In your experience, how can the voices of people with lived experience of homelessness be effectively incorporated into design and planning stages of housing projects to ensure the outcomes truly meet their needs?
- Are there pathway opportunities for people with lived experience to engage in the design, planning, and construction stages of housing projects that go beyond consultation?

Barriers Identified:

- Inadequate government understanding and funding.
- Industry lag on universal design.
- Lived experience input is often tokenistic.
- Lack of structured roles for lived experience.

Key Solutions Proposed:

- Reform funding models to meet the specific needs of homelessness housing.
- Integrate universal design early to ensure cost-effective accessibility.
- Sustain lived experience input throughout the entire project lifecycle.
- Create formal roles for lived experience in design and construction teams.

Quotes from Panellists:

Regulatory Barriers:

'I genuinely don't think treasury, when it comes to funding homeless housing, understands anything about it. They see it as being just housing. So, when it comes to government agencies and organisations putting business cases together for funding, they get smashed. Then subsequently only get funding that is really only appropriate or equivalent to develop the driven models, which we know is tragically inappropriate and unsuitable.'

Sustainability Concerns:

'There are universal designs available, it's just the industry in Australia and Western Australia hasn't caught up yet. The key is to design, from concept, for liveability. And the pleasing thing is, if it's done at the design implementation stage, it doesn't cost anymore because it's designed. And the cost of wider doors and strengthened bathrooms, no cost in real terms.'

Lived Experience Embedment:

'Often it only happens during the design phase or at the very beginning of a project. Our experience, and building and construction traditionally, it's a very slow, long, drawn out process. And along that pathway there are huge moments where cost, time, all sorts of things are being interrogated over and over again. So, what happens is that over those 2 or 3 years of design and documentation then construction, it's very easy for a lot of that intent and understanding that comes out of the engagement with people with lived experience becomes watered down or lost ... We need to modify engagement to be something that happens throughout the project, and we need to find a way so that people with a

lived experience are there when the builder is engaged so that the builder has a better understanding of what is really significant in this project.'

Pathway Opportunities:

'There's no reason that you couldn't have a client and a person with lived experience as part of the project team that is there during fortnightly meetings ... There's so many selections and so many decisions that are made in partnership with the owner – finishes, colours, furnishing, fittings, and fixtures – there is no reason at all that a person with lived experience can't be involved all the way through that process as well.'

Key Takeaway: Current systems for funding and designing homeless housing are hindered by regulatory misunderstandings and outdated practices, leading to inadequate solutions. Embedding people with lived experience throughout the entire project, not just at the start, ensures that housing is truly functional, sustainable, and responsive to real needs.

Advocacy Mentoring Marketplace

Activity Features:

- Homelessness Advocacy Collective soft launch.
- Mentoring roundtables with experienced advocates.

Homelessness Advocacy Collective Soft Launch:

The Homelessness Advocacy Collective is a new grassroots group led by lived experience voiced, launched to challenge homelessness and housing insecurity through peer-to-peer workshops, sector training, media engagement, and advocacy. The collective aims to shift narratives, influence policy, and build a more inclusive, accountable housing system from the ground up.



Mentoring Roundtables Purpose:

To create a tangible pathway for emerging advocates to connect with opportunities, roles, and advisory groups and to understand how advocacy can look across systems.



Roundtable Themes:

Consumers of Mental Health WA – Collaborate to Connect (C2C).

Shelter WA – homelessness and housing policy and advocacy.

St Pat's – Homelessness Support Services.

Outcomes:

- New connections made between people with lived experience and sector leaders.
- Increased interest in joining advisory groups, reference panels, and project teams.

'This was the first time I saw people like me leading the room. I now know there's a place for my voice in this space.' – Participant.

Forum Outputs and Legacy

Lived Experience Insights Report

- A synthesis of themes, quotes, and recommendations backed by research.
- Will inform Shelter WA's advocacy, funding proposals, and sector engagement.
- Includes direct 'calls to action' from lived experience participants.

Cross-Sector Homelessness Prevention Charter

- Co-designed by lived experience leaders and sector reps.
- Outlines joint values and sector-specific action commitments.
- Will be circulated for endorsement and ongoing updates.

Commitments to Accessibility and Equity

- Honorariums were provided to all lived experience participants.
- Lived experience co-facilitators led all key discussions.
- The forum ensured Easy Read formats and a sound loop throughout the venue.
- Invitations were intentionally extended to people with diverse experiences, including:
 - Aboriginal people.
 - LGBTQIA+ people.
 - Aging people.
 - Young people.
 - Regional Communities.
 - Migrants and refugees.

Evaluation & Feedback

Participant Feedback Themes:

- The embedment of lived experience into systems and policy design is crucial to creating meaningful change.
- Homelessness is a whole community problem requiring a whole community solution.
- Organisations and services need to be communicating with each other and there should be 'no wrong door'.

Accessibility & Inclusion Feedback:

- Provide forum speakers with suggestions of how to speak about people who experience homelessness to ensure there is no unintentional stereotyping and marginalising.
- Suggestions to engage more Aboriginal voices in the conversations to reflect the disproportionate rate at which Indigenous peoples experience homelessness and housing insecurity.

Conclusion

The *Lived Experience Homelessness Forum 2025* marked a powerful and necessary shift – from viewing homelessness as a housing issue to recognising it as a systemic failure requiring shared responsibility and bold action. The central question was not ‘What’s wrong with people experiencing homelessness?’ but ‘What’s wrong with the systems that allow homelessness? And crucially, ‘What are we willing to do differently?’.

At the heart of every session were voices with lived experience – not as tokens, but as leaders. Their insights reframed the conversation, moving beyond hardship to spotlight resistance, strength, and systems knowledge. They offered practical, grounded strategies born from navigating complex services, and called for early, accessible, trauma-informed support.

The forum emphasised that true prevention means funding early, listening early, and embedding equity into every system – housing, health, mental health, justice, education, and child protection. It also challenged sectors to move beyond consultation toward co-leadership, where lived experience informs design, governance, and advocacy.

As one advocate powerfully stated during the Lived Experience Panel:

‘We don’t need saving – we need seats at the table, power in the process, and respect for what we already know.’

This forum was a step toward that vision. It set the groundwork for a future where lived experience leads – not just in name, but in structure, in funding, in policy, and in practice. From the *Advocacy Mentoring Marketplace* to real-time solution mapping, the forum was a call to action. It affirmed that homelessness is preventable – and that lived experience is not just part of the solution; it *is* the solution.

Moving forward, the call is clear: keep lived experience central, fund prevention not crisis, and work *together* to create a WA where housing is a right, not a reward – and where connection truly *is* prevention.

Appendices

- Lived Experience Insights Report.
- Cross-Sector Homelessness Prevention Charter.