



Government of **Western Australia**  
Department of **Communities**

# All Paths Lead to a Home



Western Australia's  
10-Year Strategy on Homelessness  
2020–2030





### **Acknowledgement of Country**

The Western Australian Government proudly acknowledges the First Nations people and recognises their continuing connection to their lands, families and communities. We pay our respects to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures, and to Elders both past and present.

The first step in living alongside and working with the Aboriginal community is built upon establishing respectful relationships. Crucial to these respectful relationships is acknowledging the history of Aboriginal people and recognising the importance of connection to family, culture and country.

## Contents

04

Minister's foreword

05

Joint foreword

06

Where we will  
focus our efforts

08

What's the  
evidence?

08

Where we are going

10

How we got here

11

How we will get there

12

Next steps

13

Our context

17

Understanding our  
different roles

22

Homelessness  
in WA

23

Understanding  
homelessness

24

Improving Aboriginal  
wellbeing

30

Providing safe, secure  
and stable homes

36

Preventing  
homelessness

42

Strengthening and  
coordinating our  
responses and impact





**Hon Simone McGurk MLA**  
Minister for Community Services

**“Homelessness is not who people are – it is something people experience at a specific point in time.”**

## Minister's foreword

The following words, shared by Ben in a storybook of experiences about homelessness, summarise why the McGowan Government has undertaken this landmark piece of work.

Ben simply says: “You’re stuck with nothing.”

This sentiment has been echoed throughout the development of this Strategy by people with similar experiences. Yet as the research clearly demonstrates, with an evidence based response, we can change stories like Ben’s.

The research informing this Strategy has not only included input from academics, but has also included consultation with service providers around the State, input from Government agencies, engagement with the community, and insights from people with lived experience.

This collective knowledge, incorporated into the Strategy, provides an important pathway forward to increase the effectiveness of our efforts, and build on what we know is working.

However, this work will require all of us – community services, Government, business and the public – to work together in support of those in the community experiencing homelessness.

The McGowan Government will ensure that this important work goes hand-in-hand with broader social policy reform through strategic projects like *Our Priorities: Sharing Prosperity*, the *Sustainable Health Review*, and the *WA Housing Strategy 2020-2030*.

With a whole-of-community response led by the Department of Communities, we are poised to tackle the complex issue of homelessness around the State effectively.

I thank the members of the Supporting Communities Forum, Government agencies, the Western Australian Alliance to End Homelessness, the Western Australian Council on Homelessness, the Department of Communities, and the organisations and individuals who have contributed to this strategy.

Your partnership in the development of Western Australia’s first 10-Year Strategy places us in a strong position to end homelessness.



**Michelle Andrews** (left)

Director General, Department of Communities  
Co-Chair, Supporting Communities Forum  
Homelessness Working Group

**Debra Zanella** (right)

Chief Executive Officer, RUAH Community Services  
Co-Chair, Supporting Communities Forum  
Homelessness Working Group

**“We are proud to introduce the 10-Year Strategy on Homelessness for Western Australia, which will improve outcomes for vulnerable Western Australians experiencing, or at risk of, homelessness.”**

## Joint foreword

Many people are quick to blame homelessness on the individual experiencing it rather than the countless reasons that put a person at risk. Any one of us could find ourselves facing these devastating circumstances. It can happen as the result of an unexpected life event, tragedy, illness and through no fault of the person or family. Homelessness is a symptom of many and varied underlying factors and drivers.

Sometimes, with good data and information, we can intervene early to prevent it occurring. It is our expectation that we strengthen our early intervention and preventive responses over the next ten years. When homelessness is avoided, the impacts of experiencing homelessness are also avoided, including acute health issues and trauma that can remain with a person long after their homelessness is ended, and passed through generations.

We recognise, however, that what is needed now and over the next five years is a sustained focus on people who are rough sleeping in inner Perth and other parts of Western Australia. Through a collective response, facilitated through this strategy, we will seek innovative and collaborative responses to rough sleeping that take a Housing First approach.

This strategy is the result of an ongoing and genuine partnership between government agencies, the community services sector, local government authorities and the wider community. It listened deeply to the voices of lived experience and will continue to do so during implementation.

It was guided by the Supporting Communities Forum, which supports the directions of Western Australian Government reform to deliver better outcomes for Western Australians. The Supporting Communities Forum provided an important source of validation and oversight through its remit of working with the community services sector. This way of working, and the learnings from the process, are critical as we move into the next phases, including the development of detailed Action Plans and the Outcomes Measurement Framework.

This strategy is a truly whole-of-community plan that reflects the complex nature of homelessness – there is no one cause or solution for everyone and it cannot be solved by government or the community services sector alone. We are committed to working together to achieve our bold vision for everyone in Western Australia to have a safe place to call home with the supports needed to sustain it.



# Where we will focus our efforts



## Vision

Everyone has a safe place to call home and is supported to achieve stable and independent lives.



## Outcomes

### 1. Improving Aboriginal wellbeing

- Aboriginal people have safe, secure and stable housing that is culturally appropriate.
- Aboriginal communities and organisations design and deliver services primarily affecting Aboriginal people.
- Social housing policies and practices are flexible and culturally responsive.

### 2. Providing safe, secure and stable homes

- Chronic homelessness is ended.
- Diverse and appropriate housing options are available and accessible.
- Access to safe and permanent housing is the first priority for people experiencing homelessness.
- Individualised support services are available to help people maintain long term housing and achieve their goals.

### 3. Preventing homelessness

- People at risk of homelessness are supported to continue living in their homes.
- Young people at risk are identified early and connected to appropriate supports.
- People exit government services with stable housing and support.

### 4. Strengthening and coordinating our responses and impact

- Responses are flexible to accommodate individual need.
- Services are coordinated and easy to access.
- Responsibility for preventing and responding to homelessness is shared across all levels of government and the community sector.

## Principles

Ending homelessness  
is everyone's responsibility

People are at the heart of  
our responses

There is a No Wrong Door  
approach to service delivery

The right solutions are  
delivered in the right places by  
the right people

We do what we know works

We hold ourselves accountable  
for achieving outcomes

The Strategy sets out a ten year vision for how all levels of government, the community sector and the wider community can work together in Western Australia towards ending homelessness.



## What's the evidence?

This strategy is informed by a strong evidence base including *Homelessness in Western Australia: A review of the research and statistical evidence* report, which is a synopsis of rigorous expert research covering health, housing and other relevant data.

Broad consultation was held across Western Australia with service providers, local governments, government agencies and local communities. This process captured a diverse range of insights about homelessness and how it differs throughout the state.

Conversations and interviews with people with lived experience have also formed a key part of the evidence base to ensure the voices of these people are heard and elevated, and that their individual experiences inform our policy and service responses.

**They were brave enough to share their stories and we must be brave enough to listen and act.**

These processes resulted in the development of the publicly released Directions Paper which outlined proposed reform directions and sought feedback.

The depth and breadth of feedback received, the time taken by those who provided feedback, and the thoughtful consideration of the issues raised by people from a wide range of backgrounds has shaped this strategy and strengthens the validity and resolve of its directions and priorities.

## Where we are going

*All Paths Lead to a Home: Western Australia's 10-Year Strategy on Homelessness 2020–2030* (the Strategy) sets out a vision for Western Australia where everyone has a safe place to call home and is supported to achieve stable and independent lives.

We will achieve this by doing more of what is working well, recognising and building on our strengths and finding new ways to improve our collective response to homelessness.



## What are the priorities?



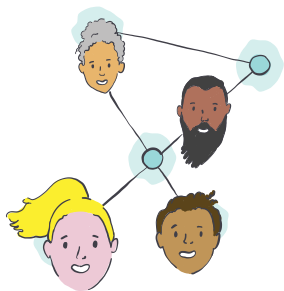
### Housing First

The first and primary goal is to provide people access to safe and stable housing without preconditions or judgement. Once housing is secured, individual supports can then be provided as required, to address other needs. To enable this approach, the system must be supported by low-barrier and low-threshold accommodation and housing options as well as flexible and appropriate services that are tailored to individual needs, acknowledging that for some people these may be needed long-term.



### No Wrong Door

We will create and implement a No Wrong Door approach, where people experiencing or at risk of homelessness can get help to find appropriate long-term housing and support regardless of which service or agency they connect with.



### Whole-of-community approach

By collaborating and co-designing with people with lived experience, the community services sector, business and philanthropy, the community and other levels of government, we can better design and deliver appropriate and flexible housing options and services that respond to the diverse needs of vulnerable people in our community.



### Place-based response

Homelessness looks very different across Western Australia and between metropolitan, regional and remote areas. Appropriate place-based responses need to be developed, which are informed by local needs, context and capacity. Enhancing the role and capacity for regional and local decision making is important to help make sure the right responses are delivered in the right places.



### Rough sleeping

We will initially target rough sleeping, as the most vulnerable cohort, with the intention that future action plans across the ten years will have an increased focus on prevention and embedding system changes to improve and sustain our efforts to end homelessness.

# How we got here

August 2018  
—  
September 2019

15

Face-to-face consultations



300+

People — across —

16

Supporting Communities Forum  
Working Group meetings



60

People with lived experience interviewed



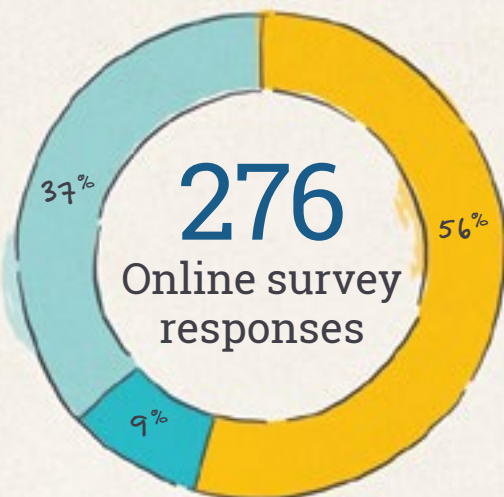
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Partner agencies in the development of the Strategy



3

Publications released



Jul 2018



Apr 2019



Aug 2019

54

Submissions received for the Directions Paper



- People working in service delivery
- Lived experience of homelessness
- Other

# How we will get there

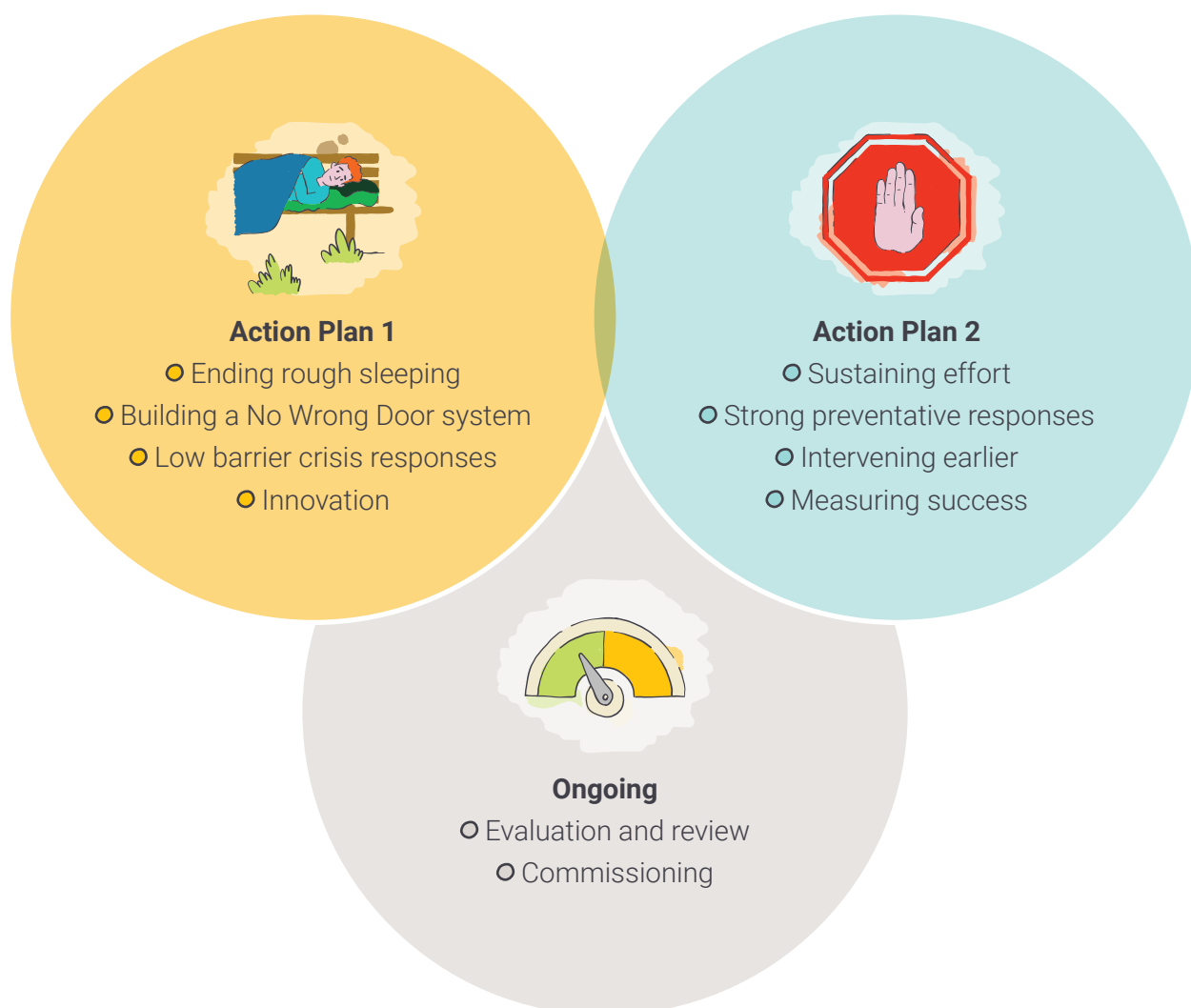
The Strategy will be implemented through two Action Plans that will move us towards our ten-year vision.

These Action Plans will guide implementation and provide detail on how priority actions will progress, including who is responsible for delivering what and by when.

The Action Plans will support collaboration across government and the community services sector and help align activities across a number of strategies to maximise outcomes and effort. A flexible and phased approach will ensure future action plans are responsive to outcomes achieved, new challenges and priorities, emerging evidence, innovation and opportunities.

High-level priority actions are identified under each focus area. Implementing these high-level actions will involve a range of activities that will be coordinated across government and the community sector and will collectively contribute to the achievement of outcomes under the Strategy and *Our Priorities: Sharing Prosperity*.

2020 ————— 2025 ————— 2030



# Next steps

The Strategy provides an overarching framework to set new directions, guide investment, identify new ways of working, introduce innovation and improve service systems so that they are human centred – all with the aim of working towards ending homelessness and better meeting the needs of people experiencing, or at risk of, homelessness.

## Measuring our success and transparent reporting

An Outcomes Measurement Framework will be developed to make sure the Strategy is achieving its intended goals and to enable progress to be measured against outcomes.

This framework will 'lean on' and fit with the *Whole-of-Sector Outcomes Measurement Framework for Western Australia*.

Integration points will also be established with *The Western Australian Alliance to End Homelessness Outcomes Measurement and Evaluation Framework* developed by the Centre for Social Impact at the University of Western Australia.

## Governance for the Strategy

Robust governance is key to providing accountability, supporting implementation and providing an ongoing mechanism for coordination and delivery of actions.

The Supporting Communities Forum will guide implementation of the Strategy and will consider ways to improve joint implementation processes and strengthen ongoing engagement and partnerships.

Progress and outcomes will be reported on annually to the Premier, Minister for Community Services, Minister for Housing, the Supporting Communities Forum and the Cabinet Sub Committee for Community Safety and Family Support.

Public facing reporting will be provided throughout the life of the Strategy to ensure further transparency and accountability.



Effort will be directed at hearing and presenting voices of lived experience in reporting, in partnership with peak organisations.



Homelessness is a complex challenge that is often a driver, cause or symptom of other social issues.

## Our context

Ensuring alignment in the practical implementation of our strategic priorities and initiatives across government and the community sector is critical to achieving our vision.

As we collectively move towards more integrated service systems and whole-of-community approaches, the practical aspects of how we work together for better outcomes and person-centred responses will be established. Through the development of the detailed Action Plans, opportunities for alignment and collaboration will be further identified to bring together activity across sectors.

Partnered activity, collaborative implementation and shared responsibility for outcomes exemplify better ways of working and are implicit in the Strategy.



The Strategy will impact whole-of-government priority targets, including:



**Aboriginal wellbeing**



**A bright future**



**A safer community**



**A liveable environment**

*Our Priorities: Sharing Prosperity*

The Aboriginal Empowerment Framework

*10-Year Strategy on Homelessness*

*The 10-Year Strategy to reduce Family and Domestic Violence*

*The West Australian Alliance to End Homelessness: 10-Year Plan to End Homelessness in Western Australia 2018–28*

*The Western Australian Housing Strategy 2020–2030*

*Mental Health, Alcohol and Other Drug Accommodation Support Strategy*

*Sustainable Health Review*

*Residential Tenancies Act 1987*



The following pieces of work are strongly connected to the outcomes we want the Strategy to achieve:

<p><b><i>Our Priorities: Sharing Prosperity</i></b></p>	<p>Sets out whole-of-government targets to deliver better outcomes for all Western Australians. The Strategy will impact priority targets, including 'A bright future' by ensuring homelessness does not impact children in the early years through early intervention and prevention; and 'A safer community', through harm minimisation for those sleeping rough and by enabling support to address issues such as alcohol and other drug use, once people are safely housed. This will impact youth reoffending and illicit drug use. The Strategy's focus on improving Aboriginal wellbeing and preventing exits to homelessness from the justice system, are aligned and will impact on 'Aboriginal wellbeing' targets. Actions under the 'A liveable environment' targets will also support the Strategy, including METRONET and increasing the number of homes near transport nodes, which must include social housing.</p>
<p><b><i>Aboriginal Empowerment Framework</i></b> Department of the Premier and Cabinet</p>	<p>Will enable and facilitate better outcomes for Aboriginal people by reframing the way government works with Aboriginal people. Empowering greater control over the design and delivery of services aligns with priorities under the Strategy.</p>
<p><b><i>10-Year Strategy to Reduce Family and Domestic Violence</i></b> Department of Communities</p>	<p>Will target the causes and effects of family and domestic violence, which is a key driver of homelessness in Western Australia.</p>
<p><b><i>Western Australian Alliance to End Homelessness: 10-Year Plan to End Homelessness in Western Australia 2018–2028</i></b></p>	<p>A community-led plan that provides a whole-of-society response, including targets to end homelessness. In developing this plan, the Western Australian Alliance to End Homelessness have played a key role in galvanising momentum in the sector to take action and shift away from managing homelessness to ending it. Members of the Alliance have had an ongoing role in the development of the Strategy to ensure our efforts are complementary and aligned.</p>

**Western Australian  
Housing Strategy  
2020–2030**

Department of  
Communities

Will look at ways of increasing the supply of social and affordable housing, which is critical for preventing homelessness and for providing sustainable pathways out of homelessness. A key focus is on delivering more homes and better outcomes through reforming what doesn't work, making better use of existing land and housing, trying new things, and creating opportunities in new developments including METRONET precincts.

The Strategy builds on the work happening under the *Affordable Housing Action Plan*, released in 2018, which is led by the Department of Communities and backed by cross-government action including initiatives across the whole system and housing continuum.

The Plan increased the previous target of 30,000 homes for people on low to moderate incomes to over 35,000, and invested in new construction supporting \$2.3 billion in economic activity and almost 6,000 jobs. As part of this Plan, the government also invested over \$150 million in social housing and expansion to crisis accommodation, along with targeted initiatives for people currently in, or waiting for, social housing.

A centrepiece of the Plan is the investment in the \$394 million Social and Affordable Housing and Jobs package to deliver 1,390 new medium density homes in METRONET precincts. 750 sites have been identified on Communities' owned land for the development and redevelopment of social housing and market-value dwellings.

**Sustainable  
Health Review**

Department of Health

Outlines a shift to patient-centred, high quality and financially sustainable healthcare across the state. Key priorities and recommendations of the review intersect with, and will impact, outcomes under the Homelessness Strategy, including specific initiatives targeting people experiencing homelessness.

**Mental Health,  
Alcohol and Other  
Drug Accommodation  
Support Strategy**

Mental Health  
Commission

Provides a framework for stakeholders to align housing and support responses for people with mental health, alcohol and other drug issues, including those who have experienced homelessness.

<p><b>Review of the Residential Tenancies Act 1987</b></p> <p>Department of Mines, Industry Regulation and Safety</p>	<p>May impact the Strategy through changes to private rentals and social housing, including increasing rental opportunities, reducing exits to homelessness and providing pathways out of homelessness.</p>
<p><b>National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS)</b></p> <p>Commonwealth Government</p>	<p>Presents a significant opportunity for people with disability who may experience, or are at risk of, homelessness to be provided with supports and services, and to get the additional day-to-day costs of living funded. However, disability is not often captured as the primary reason for homelessness and can be difficult to identify. The introduction of the NDIS presents a unique opportunity to collectively respond to people with disability across all areas of life and access to these supports for people experiencing homelessness will be further examined. An intergovernmental committee, the NDIS Interface Steering Committee, has been set up for this purpose.</p>
<p><b>National Housing and Homelessness Agreement (NHHA)</b></p> <p>Commonwealth Government</p>	<p>Includes agreed activities to prevent and address homelessness and is supported by a bilateral agreement between the Commonwealth and Western Australian Governments. Commonwealth funding is provided on this basis and having a current strategy in place is a requirement of the agreement.</p> <p>The Strategy meets and exceeds the requirements of the NHHA, as it is publicly available and includes a focus on key cohorts aligning with those highlighted in the NHHA:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Women and children affected by family and domestic violence</li> <li>• Children and young people</li> <li>• Aboriginal Australians</li> <li>• People experiencing repeat homelessness</li> <li>• People exiting institutions and care into homelessness</li> <li>• Older people</li> </ul>

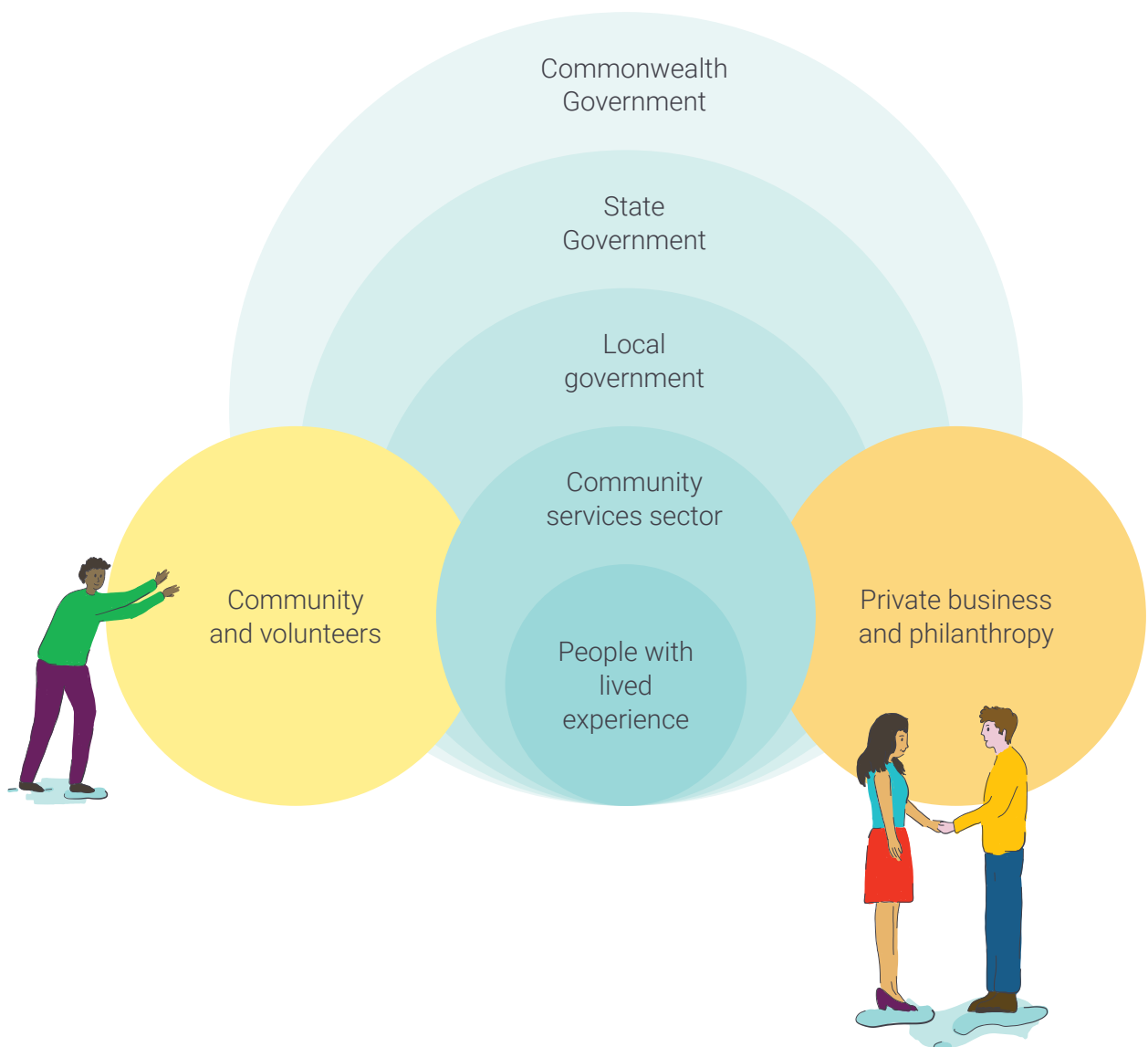
The strengths of the homelessness sector are enduring and encouraging and shine most brightly when all levels of government, community services sector, private business and communities work together.



## Understanding our different roles

By defining and understanding our respective roles, we can achieve greater clarity about how we will work together to reach our vision and where we can affect the greatest positive change.

While acknowledging our roles vary by location and need a place-based lens, this understanding will enable better coordination and utilisation of the many strengths that are apparent in various sectors and at different levels of government.



## Commonwealth Government

The Commonwealth Government has significant roles in funding and managing national systems and allocating funds through National Partnership Agreements to achieve portfolio specific outcomes.

The Commonwealth Government contributes funds to the homelessness sector through the National Housing and Homelessness Agreement, which includes an allocation for specialist homelessness services as well as funding for the social housing system.

Responsibility for welfare and income support systems sit with the Commonwealth Government. Multiple sources of evidence highlight that income support levels are not adequate for most people and the basic cost of living means that many people subsist near or below the poverty line.

Other areas of Commonwealth responsibility have a direct impact on homelessness include housing market levers, tax system incentives (and disincentives) and immigration.

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## State Government

The Department of Communities is the lead agency for homelessness in Western Australia, but it cannot work alone. Homelessness is an issue that intersects with many government departments and services. People experiencing or at risk of homelessness use other services across government including those funded or directly provided by Justice, Mental Health, Health, Education and WA Police Force.

The Department of Communities has a broader role as the provider of social housing and as a supplier and driver of affordable housing and community housing.

Recent Machinery of Government changes in Western Australia have resulted in the amalgamation of a range of public sector agencies. This has provided an opportunity for an increased focus on whole-of-government objectives and for departments to align strategic priorities, streamline how they operate and enhance collaboration to solve complex problems.

Opportunities to better integrate responses and share information and data must continue to be identified and leveraged. By breaking down silos and better working together, we can improve our responses to make sure people do not fall through the gaps. This will be supported by better coordination of activities and initiatives, as well as collaboration and possible pooling of resources and funding.

**Achieving change is dependent on the Commonwealth leading reform in many areas to alleviate acute poverty and disadvantage and to improve the cost of living for vulnerable people.**



# \$89m

**Approximate yearly spend by the Department of Communities on homelessness and family and domestic violence services.**



## Local government

Local governments vary significantly in terms of size, rate payer base and the nature of issues in the local government area. In some regions, local governments are directly involved in the provision of homelessness services and accommodation services.

All local government authorities are well positioned, and some are adept, at facilitating local partnerships and coordinating place-based responses to homelessness in their community. They have crucial local knowledge and a key role in local planning decisions.

Local governments have frontline workers, including rangers, library staff and customer service officers who interact with and provide assistance to people who are at risk of, or experiencing homelessness.

Although these workers may not necessarily have the specialist skills required to address the complex issues people experiencing homelessness face, there is an opportunity for the interaction with frontline workers to be a key point of referral to local homelessness and accommodation services. They can provide information to assist people to access State and Commonwealth funded services through local libraries, for example, which are often frequented by vulnerable people seeking a safe place to access the internet and use facilities.

Local governments know their locally based community or communities. They have an integral role in identifying people who are sleeping rough or experiencing other forms of homelessness and facilitating connections to help and support through information.

The knowledge of place that sits with local government can be better used to inform resourcing decisions by State Government and to create places that are safe for people experiencing homelessness.

Local government authorities can contribute to the vision of the Strategy in the following ways:

Making information on local services and supports available and accessible.

Ensuring Rangers and front-line staff are informed and supported to interact with people experiencing homelessness and, where appropriate, refer them to local services.

Working with Police to support and refer people experiencing homelessness to local services and supports.

Coordinating volunteer and charity groups through a place-based approach that better meets the needs of people experiencing homelessness.

Utilising land and assets to create places that are inclusive and can support vulnerable people.

## Community services sector

The community services sector undertakes considerable investment in homelessness services and has significant strengths in service design and the delivery of homelessness services, as well as providing advocacy.

The sector is also skilled at developing important partnerships, including engaging business and philanthropy to drive innovation and leverage resources beyond those of government.

Peak bodies also play a lead role in building the capability of the community services sector.

## Private business and philanthropy

The corporate and philanthropic sectors are passionate about creating positive change and can play a powerful role in contributing to activities to address homelessness in Western Australia and drive and support innovation. Philanthropic organisations and individual philanthropists have an important role in supporting the operation of evidence-based homelessness services and related programs that contribute towards ending homelessness.

Evaluation of programs and initiatives, through different and innovative approaches to evaluation where applicable, are needed to provide greater opportunities for corporate and philanthropic investment.

Evidence-based services and programs give surety to attract investors while also enabling reporting on the outcomes achieved by this investment.

## Community and volunteers

We have heard through the development of this strategy that the community is the most powerful source of change.

People helping others is fundamental to our society and there is significant potential in the goodwill that we naturally have as Western Australians to help out. It is a matter of making the opportunities to volunteer and contribute through the many existing homelessness organisations, which are already making a real difference, clearer and more easily accessible for those with the time and ability.

The community services sector contributes to achieving the vision of the Strategy in the following ways:

Developing and delivering specialist homelessness services.

Developing innovative service models and approaches to service delivery that achieve better outcomes for people experiencing, or at risk of, homelessness.

Implementing collective impact and Housing First models of service delivery and initiatives.

Utilising assets and self-funding services that are intrinsic parts of local communities.

Working with government to better design and deliver services in partnership.

Private business and philanthropy contributes to the vision of the Strategy in the following ways:

Increasing the overall resources available.

Leveraging other investment opportunities.

Creating opportunities for innovation.

Maximising social and community outcomes.

## Community and volunteers (cntd)

Increasing volunteer participation will significantly strengthen the ability of community services sector organisations to deliver on their strategic intent and organisational missions, including to collectively work towards ending homelessness.

There are significant opportunities to enable peer-to-peer mentoring and to facilitate greater community contributions, which are more coordinated and aligned to the principles and directions of the Strategy.

For those that own investment properties there is also an opportunity to act as 'ethical landlords' and make rental properties available to those that suffer discrimination or bias in the broader private rental market. There will be ongoing work to unlock private rental opportunities where there is capacity and willingness from private investors and landlords.

Communities and volunteers will contribute to achieving the vision of the Strategy in the following ways:

Supporting people to prevent homelessness by creating socially supportive and connected communities.

Working with local government authorities, community sector organisations and government to support effective and coordinated activities and responses that meet the needs of people experiencing, or at risk of, homelessness.

## People with lived experience

People who have experienced or been at risk of homelessness play a pivotal role in our efforts to address homelessness. Often, system design is focused on efficiency, rather than designing the system with the people who will experience and navigate it, so that it works for them.

The voices of lived experience offer a unique contribution to understanding service delivery and what it feels like to use a service system. Providing opportunities for people with lived experience to be involved in decisions that affect them can help ensure that supports and services are relevant and of value.

People with lived experience also take on more formal roles through advocacy and peer support or mentoring services.

People with lived experience can contribute to achieving the vision of the Strategy in the following ways:

Sharing their experiences and enabling increased awareness and understanding of the issues.

Providing unique insights into the service system that can lead to continuous improvement of service delivery.

Highlighting personal stories of the causes of homelessness that can enable better preventative responses.

**Individual voices and stories provide valuable insights around what the system looks like from within.**

# Homelessness in WA



On Census night in 2016,  
an estimated

## 9,005

people were  
experiencing  
homelessness in  
Western Australia



## 1,083

Sleeping rough



## 1,042

Living in  
boarding houses  
or temporary  
lodgings



## 1,950

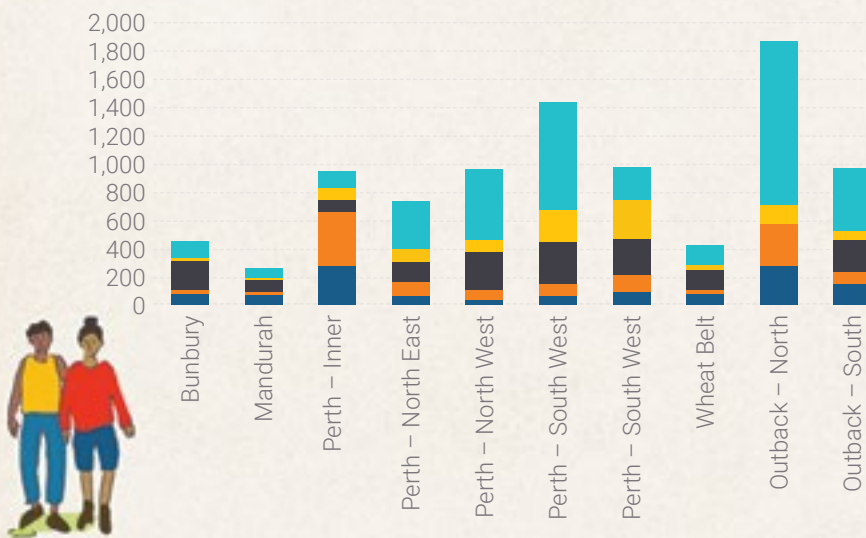
Staying with  
others temporarily



## 3,871

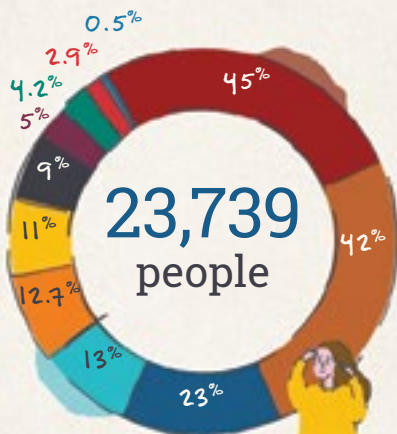
Living in severely  
crowded dwellings

## Homelessness across the regions



- Persons living in 'severely' crowded dwellings
- Persons living in boarding houses
- Persons staying temporarily with other households
- Persons in supported accommodation for the homeless
- Persons in other temporary lodgings

In 2017–2018  
specialist homelessness  
services assisted



- were aged 55 years and older
- experienced homelessness more than once in the reporting year
- were leaving care or exiting custodial arrangements
- had a disability or long-term health issue
- identified as current or former members of the Australian Defence Force

The increase in people sleeping rough on the streets of our urban and regional centres is particularly acute and visible. The Strategy is our response to this challenge.



# Understanding homelessness

There are many accepted definitions of the term ‘homelessness’. The Strategy adopts the definition used by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) to produce official statistics including the Census of Population and Housing.

Under the ABS definition a person is considered homeless if they do not have suitable accommodation alternatives and their current living arrangement:

- is in a dwelling that is inadequate
- has no tenure, or if their initial tenure is short and not extendable
- does not allow them to have control of space for social relations.

According to the ABS definition people who fall into the following categories are considered homeless: people living in improvised dwellings, tents to sleeping out; people in supported accommodation for the homeless; people staying temporarily with other households; people living in boarding houses; people in other temporary lodgings; and people living in severely crowded dwellings.

Although the number of people experiencing homelessness in Western Australia remained steady between the 2011 and 2016 Census, anecdotal evidence from community members and service providers suggests that the number of people who are experiencing homelessness in our community is increasing.

Some of the key drivers of homelessness are outside the scope of this strategy to directly influence, including poverty which is acknowledged as a core factor driving homelessness. By taking a whole-of-community and cross-sector approach it is hoped that where issues cannot be directly impacted, they can more effectively be called out to accelerate change.

**In 2017–18, the top five reasons for seeking assistance from specialist homelessness services were:**







# 1. Improving Aboriginal wellbeing

## Priority actions

Strengthen the role of Aboriginal organisations and communities in designing and delivering culturally appropriate responses for Aboriginal people.

Ensure government policies and practices impacting homelessness reflect an understanding of Aboriginal culture and values.

Ensure homelessness response services are culturally responsive and flexible to better meet the needs of Aboriginal people.

Increase the availability of appropriate accommodation and service options for Aboriginal people and families.



**Meanings of 'home' vary for different people and cultures throughout our state. We may all have a different understanding of what 'home' is. Some people associate it with having a house and shelter, others with being close to family and loved ones.**

Through our consultation with Aboriginal communities, organisations and individuals experiencing homelessness, we have heard that for many Aboriginal people 'home' also means connection to country and extended kinship systems.

This is an outstanding strength within Aboriginal communities and it points to a level of care for family and spiritual appreciation of the land and place that creates wellbeing. It must be front and centre of our responses to addressing Aboriginal homelessness.

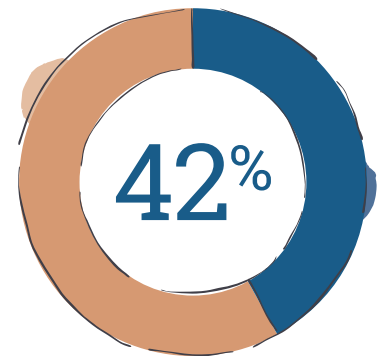
On Census night in 2016, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people made up only 3.1% of the total population of Western Australia, yet 29% of people experiencing homelessness identified as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander.

It is likely that these figures are underestimated as some Aboriginal people may not consider themselves as homeless for various reasons such as if they are visiting family or are on country for a period of time.

Responding to this disproportionate rate is a specific focus of this strategy. There is a whole-of-sector commitment through the Strategy to real and sustainable improvements for Aboriginal people experiencing or at risk of homelessness. To support this there is a need to design and deliver culturally sensitive responses with Aboriginal people, communities, organisations and businesses and further work will occur in partnership with Aboriginal people to determine action and implementation activities over the next ten years.

**"We have been homeless four years now. There are eight of us – me, my husband and our six kids. We have been faced with so much discrimination in the private rental market. No one wants to house a family of eight. We have applied for so many houses, even the scummiest of places where no one would want to live. But we still get rejected and we don't get reasons why."**

**Kelly**



Of people supported by specialist homelessness services identified as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander (2017–18)

## Service profile

### Broome Aboriginal Short Stay Accommodation Services (BASSA)

The Broome Aboriginal Short Stay Accommodation facility opened on 3 December 2018 and is available to Aboriginal people needing accommodation in Broome for a short period of time (maximum of 28 days).

The facility was designed in partnership with local traditional owners Nyamba Buru Yawuru, the Shire of Broome and members of the Broome community. Extensive community consultation with a broad range of stakeholders was undertaken over several years to ensure the facility met the needs of the community. It is operated by MercyCare and provides Aboriginal visitors with safe, secure, affordable short-term accommodation and ancillary support services.

There is capacity for up to 100 guests, and facilities include family units as well as laundry, BBQ area, children's playground and a basketball court.

BASSA provides an important short-term accommodation option for Aboriginal people and families visiting Broome, who may otherwise have no accommodation and end up sleeping rough or staying with family members – potentially increasing overcrowding or putting pressure on tenancies. This responds to the needs of Aboriginal people who may be travelling to Broome from remote communities, including for business, medical, cultural, judicial or family reasons.

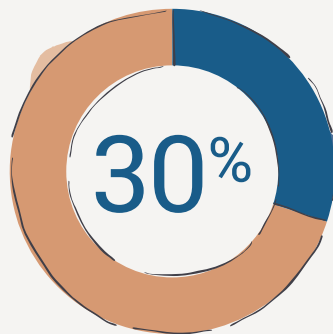
**“Not having a stable home has stopped me from knowing more about my culture. I’m Noongar-Yamatji and I want to know more to help me understand.”**

**Aaliya**



**1,960+**

People have stayed at BASSA since the facility opened.



Listed medical issues as their reason for staying.

**For Aboriginal people, homelessness is not only the result of too few houses. The causes are many and varied, with intergenerational disadvantage and trauma and discrimination being significant contributing factors.**

Many of the drivers of homelessness affect the Aboriginal community at far greater proportions including shortages of affordable housing, family and domestic violence, unemployment, mental health issues, family breakdown, and alcohol and other drug use problems.

In Western Australia the main type of homelessness experienced by Aboriginal people is living in severely crowded dwellings. This form of homelessness is most prevalent in regional and remote areas. Living in overcrowded conditions has many negative impacts on individuals and families and may make it harder to get to school or work, health and safety can put at risk and relationships strained. Overcrowding may also jeopardise stable housing as it can cause conflict, complaints from neighbours and high maintenance bills that put residents at high risk of eviction.

Discrimination in the rental market and lack of culturally appropriate housing stock also contribute significantly to the overrepresentation of Aboriginal people experiencing different forms of homelessness.

High levels of mobility and travel from regional and remote areas also contribute to homelessness, including overcrowding. This may occur when Aboriginal people are required to travel to access health services or are fulfilling cultural obligations, such as sorry business.

Compared to other households, Indigenous households are less than half as likely to own their own home, more than twice as likely to rent, more than seven times as likely to live in social housing and more than three times as likely to live in overcrowded dwellings

Not having a safe and stable place to live can also be a key driver of Aboriginal children entering the child protection and youth detention systems.

Reducing barriers and increasing opportunities for safe and secure housing for Aboriginal people and families, including short-term accommodation, social housing and in private rentals, is a high priority for the Strategy.

The Strategy recognises that Aboriginal people know place and have significant local knowledge that can help support the particular needs of their communities. In developing local responses to address homelessness, Aboriginal people and organisations must be included in these conversations and be involved in local decision making.

**“Intergenerational trauma is real. I’ve had to cope through domestic violence, foster care, poverty and spiritual stresses. You can’t even begin to imagine what this does to your mental health. I also dealt with lots of discrimination from the private rental market and it was hard to find someone who would give us a chance.”**

**Naydeene**

## Service profile

### Wongee Mia

Wongee Mia supports Aboriginal people who are chronic rough sleepers experiencing intergenerational homelessness, trauma and poverty. This action learning project by Ruah Community Services works in partnership with a specific family to develop a model that meets their needs.

The casework focuses on a single identified individual and expands to support other extended family members who are also homeless, who they have family obligations to and who potentially pose a risk to their tenancy because of their own unmet needs, including homelessness. The work is embedded within the extended family system where outcomes for one person positively affect the rest of the family.

The project works closely with family elders, seeking their guidance about the family, including them in interviews for staff and engaging their influence to achieve outcomes. The project also follows the family's lead on how the worker organises their time, use of yarning sessions and which other services to collaborate with.

The project has seen many successes:

**An individual the project started working with has now been housed for three times longer than he has ever maintained a tenancy in his adult life.**

**A cousin and young son have been permanently housed and of the 16 people who were street homeless at the start of the project, only six are still sleeping rough.**

**By taking a culturally responsive approach, this service is able to work with an individual to address their complex needs, and to help support broader outcomes for their extended family.**

### An Aboriginal perspective on homelessness

**This section looks at the drivers, impacts and experiences of homelessness through a cultural and historical lens and was written from the perspective of a local Noongar person.**

It could be argued that prior to European settlement homelessness was an unknown concept for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. However, today it is a major issue and has been for some time despite efforts to address this. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people experience much higher rates of homelessness than non-Aboriginal people.

The lasting impacts of colonisation and historical experiences of Aboriginal people in Australia have had a significant impact on Aboriginal housing conditions and homelessness.

This has included displacement of Aboriginal people from their traditional lands, separation of children from their families, and policies and services that conflict with Aboriginal values and culture. This has led to disconnection and displacement from home, family, culture, land, language, lore, customs and spiritual beliefs, and in some cases loss of identity.



## An Aboriginal perspective on homelessness (cntd)

The impact of these experiences transcends generations and includes poverty, low self-esteem, poor physical, mental health and social and emotional well-being, welfare dependency, poor living skills, high levels of domestic violence and alcohol and other drug issues, high incarceration rates and low levels of educational attainment. In addition, communities and kinship networks which previously provided protection from harm have also been weakened.

There is another form of homelessness experienced by Aboriginal people, 'spiritual homelessness'. That is being off Country either because of past removal policies and practices or being unable to return to one's own homelands.

Homelessness cannot be seen as an isolated factor but the result of many issues that impact Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Today in Western Australia, Aboriginal men are incarcerated at far greater rates than any other state as well as the proportion of Aboriginal children in out-of-home care is higher in Western Australia than elsewhere.

Aboriginal people are disadvantaged in all social indicators from past and ongoing policies that continue to impact disproportionately today. For example, the 'three strikes policy' for public housing has significantly impacted Aboriginal tenancies. It could be argued that this is also an example of indirect discrimination and cultural bias. The Aboriginal cultural obligation of caring for extended family if they have nowhere to live can result in overcrowding which is a breach of the tenancy agreement.

Research provides further detail stating that Aboriginal-specific cultural norms, such as high levels of mobility, cultural obligations to accommodate kin and other visitors and connection to country are critically important. However, influences such as severe overcrowding, complaints from neighbours, larger maintenance bills, pressure on dwellings and amenities, and paying rent consistently may act as barriers to accessing housing and managing tenancies. The housing system is set up for the dominant culture and cultures that do not fit in will struggle to access suitable and appropriate housing. Discrimination in the rental market and lack of culturally appropriate housing stock also contribute significantly to the overrepresentation of Aboriginal people experiencing homelessness.

The ways forward to address homelessness are complex and is not a one size fit all solution. What has been proven is that the non-Aboriginal people ways are not culturally effective and do not offer long term solutions for addressing homelessness in Aboriginal communities. Self-determination and self-management are still relevant today as when it was first proposed in the 1970s to empower and take control to overcome homelessness.

Aboriginal culture is a strength, and acts as a protective force for our children and families. The values of kinship, interdependence, group cohesion and community loyalty are key strengths of Aboriginal family and community life and need to be central in our solutions to homelessness.



## 2. Providing safe, secure and stable homes

### Priority actions

Embed a Housing First approach in the homelessness response system.

Ensure people sleeping rough have immediate access to shelter free from harm and are connected to appropriate supports.

Identify and develop innovative housing options suitable to the Western Australian context.

Identify and introduce innovative funding opportunities to drive and deliver responses to homelessness.



People experiencing homelessness, particularly those sleeping rough or couch surfing, are in a highly vulnerable position and have told us their immediate safety and finding appropriate accommodation are their highest priorities. We have heard that access to safe accommodation and supports can be difficult due to the barriers created by existing service entry requirements, which include restrictions around age, particularly for young people; availability of current identification; current mental health or alcohol and other drug issues; and mixed family groups (including women with older male children).

Without a home it is much harder for people experiencing homelessness to address other issues impacting wellbeing. The *Homelessness in Western Australia: A review of the research and statistical evidence* report highlighted the direct links between homelessness and poor outcomes in numerous domains including health, education, employment and ability to participate in the community.

**Safe homes** are places that are free from violence, fear and danger and where people can grow and thrive.

**Secure homes** are places where people are free to exercise choice over themselves, their possessions and their environment.

**Stable homes** are places where people are free from uncertainty over the security of their tenancy, on either a fixed or ongoing basis.

### Housing First is based on the following core principles:

Access to housing without preconditions	Choice and self determination	Recovery orientation	Individualised supports	Social and community integration
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### Application of Housing First

While the core principles guide its application, Housing First can be delivered in different models for different contexts. These models can be distinguished in terms of a philosophy, a systems approach and as a program model:

- As a philosophy, Housing First can be a guiding principle for an organisation or community that prioritises getting people into permanent housing with supports to follow. As a philosophy, it can underlie the work that an agency does, or that of a whole community. It can inform how outreach is conducted, or the mandate of crisis accommodation.
- Housing First can be considered embedded within a systems approach when the foundational philosophy and core principles of Housing First are applied across integrated systems of service delivery. Within a systems approach, all services and program elements within the homelessness sector – including many mainstream services - are guided by the principles of the model. While the service providers are not Housing First programs on their own, they form different parts of a larger system that works towards achieving the goals of a Housing First program.
- Housing First can be considered more specifically as a program when it is operationalised as a service delivery model or set of activities provided by an agency or government body. It is important to note that there is not a single program model for Housing First. It can take many forms and is applied in new ways across different contexts.

**The Strategy seeks to introduce a Housing First approach to homelessness that prioritises getting people into permanent housing with flexible and tailored supports to follow. This is seen as a key foundation of the system change needed to end chronic homelessness.**

As an approach, it differs substantially from the traditional model where people experiencing homelessness generally move through levels of time-limited or transitional housing options. They are required to meet certain criteria before they are considered 'ready' for independent housing, such as undertaking employment or treatment for alcohol or other drug issues.

Research and international practice demonstrates that putting people into housing and then addressing their specific needs through support services is far more effective than traditional models of service provision without the corner stone of housing.

It is acknowledged that introducing a Housing First approach is a significant change from the established system structures. It will take time to embed this shift and to develop supporting program and service models suitable for the Western Australian context. Data collection, analysis and evaluation will be critical for designing and implementing responses that are effective, sustainable and able to deliver long-term improved outcomes and housing for vulnerable people.

#### **50 Lives 50 Homes – data, information and evaluation**

While the aim of 50 Lives 50 Homes is to house and support people sleeping rough to improve their quality of life, a key feature of the initiative is a robust evidence base that demonstrates the outcomes achieved by this approach.

50 Lives 50 Homes has the following key benefits enabled through the collective impact approach:

- Data and information is collected across multiple organisations.
- Regular information is collected and updated on numbers of people housed.
- Analysis and evaluation maps the impact of housing and support on health, justice and other areas.
- Longer term outcomes are identified as information is retained and utilised.
- Preventative outcomes are identified as data is collected to show, not just when people are housed, but confirming that they continued to be housed.

The initiative has been evaluated by the Centre for Social Impact at the University of Western Australia. A rigorous analysis of the economic benefits of such targeted interventions shows the potential cost savings associated with reduced use of health and justice services.

This evaluation provides a basis for investment and expansion by articulating what has been achieved, what works and what can be improved.

Specific Housing First programs, which typically target people who are chronically sleeping rough, cannot end homelessness alone. They are part of a broader system response to homelessness and other support and accommodation options will always be needed to meet the diverse needs of people who experience homelessness. However, it is essential that the core principles of Housing First are applied across, and infused throughout different models of service delivery.

For example, crisis accommodation options need to be low-barrier and low-threshold so that all vulnerable cohorts can access safe spaces free from harm and be connected to critical supports. While this may not directly link to longer-term housing, these services need to be low-threshold to align with a core Housing First principle of providing access to accommodation that accepts people as they are, without preconditions or judgement.

### **Low-threshold accommodation**

Low-threshold accommodation reduces barriers to accessing services and supports people who are the most vulnerable. It is non-judgemental and does not exclude people on the basis of past challenging behaviours, drug use or criminal activity, presenting issues or service compliance.

Low-threshold accommodation provides a safe place for people with challenges or high needs who may be disconnected from the community, providing a level of support and acceptance they are generally not able to access elsewhere. This approach is a high-risk environment of service delivery, requiring skilled staff who use trauma informed and therapeutic crisis intervention practices in their work.

To support this system shift to Housing First in Western Australia, a more coordinated and strengthened response is required in terms of making diverse housing options and types available and linking these to flexible wrap-around services. We have heard that current support service periods are too short to meet the needs of some individuals, particularly those with complex needs or exiting long-term homelessness. Different models of support to flexibly meet the varying needs and personal circumstances of those experiencing, or at risk of, homelessness.

We recognise that alternative longer-term housing options based on the needs of different cohorts is required and we will look to evidence-based and innovative housing models, rental programs and alternative housing and service design.

We have also heard current transitional program responses often require people to move to different accommodation or housing after fixed periods based on the program or service being provided and not their individual needs, and ways to provide greater stability of housing where people are already settled will be explored.



## Service profile

### Common Ground

Common Ground is a model of permanent, supportive housing for vulnerable individuals that is based on a Housing First approach and designed to end long-term, chronic homelessness. It offers apartment-style affordable housing and a range of on-site services, providing people with a safe place to live and the support to help them permanently exit homelessness.

The model houses a social mix of homeless and low-income tenants who may not have a history of homelessness but who need affordable housing, such as low-income earners. The on-site services are specifically designed to sustain people in their tenancies and maximise their ability to live independently and may include support for physical and mental illnesses and/or substance use through to linking people with training, education and employment opportunities, depending on the needs of the individual.

Common Ground models have been built in several locations around Australia. One of the largest, the Elizabeth Street Common Ground, is an 11-storey facility located on the fringe of the Melbourne CBD. The Elizabeth Street Common Ground project was completed as a partnership between the Victorian and Commonwealth Governments, Yarra Community Housing (who own and manage the building), HomeGround Services (who provide the onsite support and concierge service) and Grocon, a private sector philanthropic partner who built the facility at cost.

### Elizabeth Street Common Ground



11

Storey facility with roof-top garden, communal areas and wheelchair access



131

Studio apartments



30

Two bedroom apartments



The Common Ground model is a powerful example of how community organisations can form effective and innovative partnerships with government and the private sector to help house the most vulnerable members of our community.

**“I have lots of anxiety and stress when it comes to the end of all my stays. I start sleeping on the floor in the room just so I can prepare myself for the next day or so. And I also stop having coffees and eating food at night because I know I won’t get it when I am back on the street.”**

**Murray**

## Service profile

**20 Lives 20 Homes**

20 Lives 20 Homes is a two-year place-based initiative in Fremantle that will use a Housing First approach to provide a pathway for vulnerable people experiencing homelessness into sustainable housing. It is based on the successful 50 Lives, 50 Homes program that housed more than 147 rough sleepers in Perth over three years.

An independent evaluation of that program, which began in 2015, found 88% of participants were still in housing three years later, they spent less time in hospital and – among those who had offended prior to being housed – the number of offences committed fell significantly.

The 20 Lives 20 Homes initiative is supported by a partnership between state and local government, the private sector and community sector providers. The innovative funding model includes almost \$1 million which was raised by the private sector, sourced from a small number of individuals with a local Fremantle connection. The Western Australian Government will contribute \$395,000 to support a private rental subsidy, to give people experiencing homelessness a new way to access housing.

Key to the program is the provision of wraparound services once a person has been housed, with outreach and intensive support to be delivered as part of the initiative. The program will be coordinated by Ruah Community Services in conjunction with St Patrick's Community Support Centre, Fremantle Foundation and the City of Fremantle.

The 20 Lives 20 Homes initiative demonstrates what can be achieved when governments and the private and community services sectors work together to make a difference for people experiencing homelessness.

**New ways of funding**

To drive innovation and increase housing and support options, innovative funding options will be explored. To effect real change, alliances, partnership and pooled funding are critical.

One option could include exploring social impact investing, where investor capital would be used to design and fund solutions to complex social problems, with a return based on agreed achieved social outcomes. This model promotes new partnerships, innovation and cross-sector collaboration.

The community services sector has a strong role in driving innovation and in identifying new funding sources, including engaging philanthropy.

**“That’s one of the biggest things out there – you’re so vulnerable. And unless you’re on the other side of the fence, you have no idea how soul destroying it really is.”**

**George**



## 3. Preventing homelessness

### Priority actions

Develop tailored responses for vulnerable cohorts at risk of homelessness.

Ensure people exiting government services are better connected to housing and appropriate support services.

Develop social reinvestment initiatives that recognise the value of diverting someone from a life of homelessness.

Strengthen community education about homelessness and available supports to enable early intervention for those at risk and to positively influence community attitudes and behaviours.



## **We know our current system response puts a significant amount of effort and resources into responding to people in crisis situations.**

With the right investment and targeted approaches initially focusing on reducing rough sleeping, by 2030 the system will be refocused to have a greater emphasis on prevention and early intervention to ensure we can sustain our efforts to end homelessness.

We have a good understanding of the key pathways into homelessness and the significant long-term and intergenerational impact when we do not intervene early. There are a number of critical points where targeted support will help prevent people from experiencing homelessness.

There are significant opportunities for mainstream government services to identify people who are at risk early and to use targeted approaches and support to minimise negative impacts.

To help families and individuals break the cycle of homelessness, we need to recognise resilience and adopt a strengths-based approach where services can focus on building on characteristics that are already present in individuals and families.



## **Early intervention for young people**

Helping children and young people experiencing, or at risk of experiencing, homelessness is a priority for the Strategy. This aligns with *Our Priorities: Sharing Prosperity* to improve the health and wellbeing of children, by setting young people and families on positive trajectories to have happy and healthy lives.

Early intervention can reduce homelessness and the associated social, emotional and health problems. Research shows a large proportion of people who go on to become chronically homeless (defined as being consistently homeless for more than six months) had their first experience of homelessness before they were 18.

In order to develop effective prevention and early intervention approaches, we need to recognise and address the main drivers that lead young people to a life without a home and build on protective factors of the individual and family.

Drivers are often complex and interrelated and include social and structural determinants such as family and domestic violence, unemployment, mental health issues, alcohol and other drug issues, a lack of affordable housing and experiences with justice and child protection systems. This highlights the need of a whole-of-community response to homelessness.

Actions to connect with young people and provide early intervention support and education to prevent homelessness will be implemented.

This will be supported through community education and awareness raising to help those working with children and young people to recognise the risk factors of homelessness and equipping them with information and connections to early intervention supports.

School settings, and youth engagement and support services provide a critical opportunity for distributing information and increasing awareness.

## Service profile

**Foyer Oxford**

Foyer Oxford is an independent living program that provides young people who have no stable place to call home with their own apartment for two years. The international Foyer movement is founded on the idea that ending homelessness can be achieved through education, training and sustainable employment once stable, appropriate housing has been attained. Delivered by a consortium of Anglicare WA, Foundation Housing, and North Metropolitan TAFE, the combination of housing, support and access to diverse education and work opportunities allows Foyer Oxford to deliver significant outcomes for the young people who choose to make it their home.

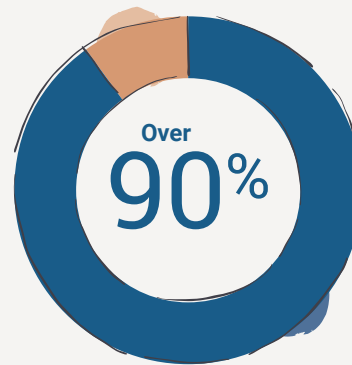
Foyer Oxford has 98 self-contained apartments, including 24 apartments for young parents and their children. Every young person is supported by a case manager to plan and achieve their goals. Supports are individualised and suited to the varied strengths and talents of young people. Residential youth workers provide opportunities for residents to develop their living skills and independence, through the provision of high quality, diverse youth work interventions that are often designed and led by young people for their peers. Foyer Oxford offers supports for young people to develop skills across seven key areas: housing, personal development, finance, social skills, health, earning, and learning. Through strong community partnerships, young people can access counselling, support managing alcohol and other drugs, therapeutic programs, and recreation activities.



Since opening in  
February 2014

**442**

young people have been  
housed at Foyer Oxford.



of residents left to  
stable, secure housing  
and maintained  
their housing option  
12 months after exit.

By providing appropriate  
stable housing and  
supports, the Foyer  
model is successfully  
changing the trajectory  
of lives for very  
vulnerable young people  
in Western Australia.

**“If we help the youth, it’ll stop. I’ve seen people go in and out and if they get help, they’ll get out.”**

**Lucas**



## Older people

There has been a sharp increase in homelessness in those aged between 65 and 74 and there are high levels of housing stress and extreme housing stress in those aged 65 and over. Targeted strategies are needed to prevent homelessness in this cohort.

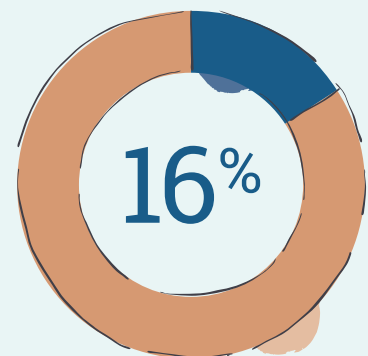
### Ageing on the edge

In August 2019, the summary report *One increase from disaster: Older renters living on the edge in Western Australia* was released. Funded by the Wicking Trust, the report was produced in partnership by Dr Debbie Faulkner from the University of Adelaide and Jeff Fiedler from the Housing for the Aged Action Group. It was also produced in collaboration with Council on the Ageing WA and a Reference Group of key WA agencies and individuals and highlights the rapidly growing problems facing many older people in WA. Similar reports are being produced across Australia.

It highlights key issues, such as the 16% increase in homelessness in WA for those aged 65–74 between 2011–2016 census; and the over 12,000 people aged 65 and over in housing stress paying more than 30% of their income in rent in housing that is insecure, unaffordable and may not be adaptable as they age.



Between the 2011–2016 census there was a



increase in homelessness in WA for those aged 65–74.

Homelessness is a growing problem for people over the age of 55, and will likely continue to increase over time due to an ageing population.

Factors such as rent increases, insecure tenure, financial difficulty, health issues, and family and relationship breakdown, put older people at risk of experiencing homelessness. Housing stress and homelessness have significant impacts on older people, particularly on their physical and emotional wellbeing.

Our communities are strengthened by the contribution of older people, as neighbours, family members, carers, volunteers, consumers and in the workforce. We recognise that supporting older people to remain socially and economically engaged has many benefits for both them and the wider community.

Older people, particularly older women, are recognised as a priority cohort. Targeted strategies that focus on early intervention rather than crisis responses is required to help older people maintain or access housing appropriate to their individual needs.

## Better transitions from government services

When people transition from institutional settings to the community, including justice and juvenile justice, child protection, and acute mental health facilities, they experience high levels of vulnerability and are at increased risk of homelessness.

To improve outcomes, it is critical that integrated systems and services are in place to assist people into secure housing and appropriate support services during these transitions. Better exit planning that is tailored to individual need is key to reducing exits to homelessness.

### Service profile

#### Justice reintegration services

The Department of Justice, Corrective Services Division, prioritises support for offenders reentering the community to reduce reoffending and recognises the contribution of other government agencies and non-government organisations in this area. The provision of practical advice and support to coordinate the prisoner's individual needs for housing, employment, education and health is considered vital to their successful reintegration.

Corrective Services Transition Managers work with non-government organisations contracted by the Department to provide state-wide reintegration services to prisoners that address the complex and diverse needs of cohorts including Aboriginal, culturally and linguistically diverse and women offenders.

Service providers engage with prisoners six months prior to release and provide support up to twelve months post-release for adult offenders reintegrating to the community from prison. These services include housing services including linkages and referrals to relevant accommodation services, pre-release tenancy skills and post-release tenancy support. Corrective Services' Adult Community Corrections branch assists offenders under supervision in the community to engage with emergency accommodation services as the need arises.

These services exemplify opportunities to improve service integration and collaboration across government and the community services sector to achieve better outcomes for people exiting corrective services, but also importantly for future generations to break cycles of disadvantage.

**“When I left prison, there was no support. They just came and told me I was being released, with no notice, and I was walked out with no nowhere go. What really would have helped me earlier on is better exit planning. I needed support to be more prepared leaving prison. If I had that, I probably would have been much better off.”**

**Derek**

## Young people leaving out-of-home care

Young people moving from out-of-home care to independence may benefit over their lifetime from access to services and supports to facilitate a gradual and supported transition.

Early planning for this transition is essential and relies on the right supports being in place to ensure they have stable and safe accommodation, are engaged in education, training or employment and can access the resources and practical assistance they need to build positive futures.

We have heard that more needs to be done to support young people in leaving out-of-home care and transitioning into adulthood.

Many young people exit out-of-home-care into unstable accommodation or homelessness, are unable to complete their education, may become young parents, or suffer from health or mental health concerns. Strong connections with family, culture, significant others and their communities are integral to moving forward in a positive way.

Building on existing programs and strengthening service delivery models to better cater for this vulnerable cohort is a preventative approach to homelessness.



## Supporting at-risk tenancies

Supporting at-risk tenancies provides an important opportunity to prevent homelessness. This applies to tenancies in the private market and in social housing and is particularly important for vulnerable cohorts such as older people or families with children. Secure and stable housing is also a key consideration in children entering care and for the reunification of children and families. Finding ways to support and stabilise tenancies for households with children is critical to improving outcomes.

These supports need to be tailored to individual need. They may include options such as rental subsidies, financial counselling, advocacy support or assistance with employment and education pathways. To improve outcomes, it is key that policies and practices support at-risk tenancies and prevent exits to homelessness, particularly for vulnerable people and families.

**“Back when things are good you don’t think about where you would go if you needed help because you think it’d never happen to you. It happened to me.”**

**Lisa**



## 4. Strengthening and coordinating our responses and impact

### Priority actions

Enable connected, coordinated and collaborative responses to homelessness that put people at the centre.

Strengthen the integration of responses to prevent and end homelessness for key systems including, health, mental health, corrective services, education, housing and child protection.

Develop innovative tools and systems to support and enable a No Wrong Door approach to the service system.

Improve collection, sharing and use of data, information and intelligence.

Strengthen commissioning and contracting to make sure responses align with the Strategy and drive positive outcomes.



**Homelessness intersects with many portfolios. To better support people who are homeless, or at risk of experiencing homelessness, we need to work together towards ending homelessness, instead of managing it.**

Achieving long-term social and cultural change requires concerted and sustained effort through shared responsibility and partnerships.

We know people don't fit into systems – systems need to be flexible and adaptable to fit people and their unique needs. Better coordination will enable person-centred responses that better meet individual needs.

### Service profile

#### Homeless healthcare

As part of a collaboration between the Royal Perth Hospital (RPH) and Homeless Healthcare, the RPH Homeless Team was established in June 2016 comprising a Clinical Lead, Administration Assistant, Homeless Healthcare GPs and Nurses, and a Caseworker. The aim of the team is to meet the primary healthcare needs of people who are homeless, while assisting patients to access housing and other support to break the cycle of homelessness. The model applies a 'social determinants of health' ethos, with strong collaborative partnerships with homelessness, housing and social sector organisations.

Most emergency departments are only resourced to respond to immediate medical issues, with homeless people then discharged back to the streets. The RPH Homeless team visits homeless patients in the hospital, helps with their discharge and is proactive in connecting them to stable housing and ongoing support for their health. As part of its collaboration with the community services sector, they refer patients to the 50 Lives 50 Homes program.

The Homeless Healthcare partnership is succeeding in improving both in-hospital treatment and post-hospital support for homeless people, while reducing the cost burden on the public health system. The Homeless Healthcare approach recognises that the causes of homelessness and associated poor health are complex and that innovative and people-centred solutions are necessary.



**In its first two and a half years of service delivery, the RPH Homeless Team provided support to**

**1,014**

**patients, many with multiple complex health issues exacerbated by surviving on the streets.**



Better coordination requires place-based responses, not just metro-centric coordination. Coordination occurs more easily in places where people know each other, and the service landscape is smaller. In regional areas, we have heard that there is often better coordination occurring than in the metropolitan area.

To achieve the change signalled in the Strategy, there is a need to coordinate better across Western Australia, including across state government agencies, local government, business, industry, philanthropy and with local communities, elders and leaders.

#### **Connections Week – Indigo Junction and City of Swan**

Connections Week is a partnership between the City of Swan and Indigo Junction to identify and address the needs of people experiencing homelessness in Midland and surrounding suburbs. It is an example of how local government and local services can partner to identify place-based needs and responses to homelessness.

During the first Connections Week (20–24 May 2019) individuals and families experiencing homelessness in the Midland area were surveyed using the Vulnerability Index – Service Prioritisation Decision Assistance Tool (VI-SPDAT). In total, 97 people were surveyed, including 71 individuals and 26 families. Information gathered from the survey was used to develop a report that builds a profile of the unique characteristics of homelessness and vulnerability in Midland.

**The information collected from Connections Week provides an evidence base that can be used to develop tailored solutions for individuals and families experiencing homelessness in the Midland area, inform future service delivery and help build a case for increased resources for homelessness services.**

To enable implementation of a coordinated system, government needs to align policy settings, strategic directions and procurement practices across agencies and portfolios. Links to other strategies must be clear and signal an overarching approach that is focused on the achievement of government priorities and better outcomes for the people it services.

Data is key to designing and delivering responses that work well. Improving collection, quality and sharing of information will provide a more complete picture of homelessness in Western Australia. This will provide the evidence base for strengthening and coordinating the response to homelessness and improving outcomes.

**“Through some friends, I heard about crisis accommodation services, but I struggled to find information online. You have to be so specific with what you’re searching for to find the right service. This type of information should definitely be more accessible, maybe taught through schools or something like that.”**

**Mackenzie**

## Service profile

**Target 120**

Target 120 is a new and effective way of working with young offenders and their families. It focuses on early intervention to address the issues that increase a young person's likelihood of offending, including substance abuse, lack of housing, domestic violence, trauma, mental health issues, and poor attendance at school.

For each young person and their family, a dedicated service worker works in partnership with multiple agencies including police, health, education, child protection and justice, as well as non-government service providers. This ensures that there is a coordinated and well-managed response to each young person and their family to get them back on track.

The Social Investment Data Resource was created by the Department of Treasury, with the support of the Department of Health and other partner agencies, to provide the evidence base for the initiative, candidate selection and evaluation of program. The resource is a large linked administrative database with information from key government agencies.

**By sharing, linking and analysing data gathered across several agencies, vulnerable individuals and groups can be identified earlier, and their current and future needs better understood.**

Harnessing the data and knowledge held by different parties will improve our coordinated response to homelessness, support collective decision making on where we focus our efforts across the system and enable better individual responses. This requires better information sharing, including with the community services sector and between organisations, and across all levels of government. Information needs to be broader than specialist homelessness services and include health, justice, mental health and housing. This will link into policy and practice as well as service design and improve person-centred responses.

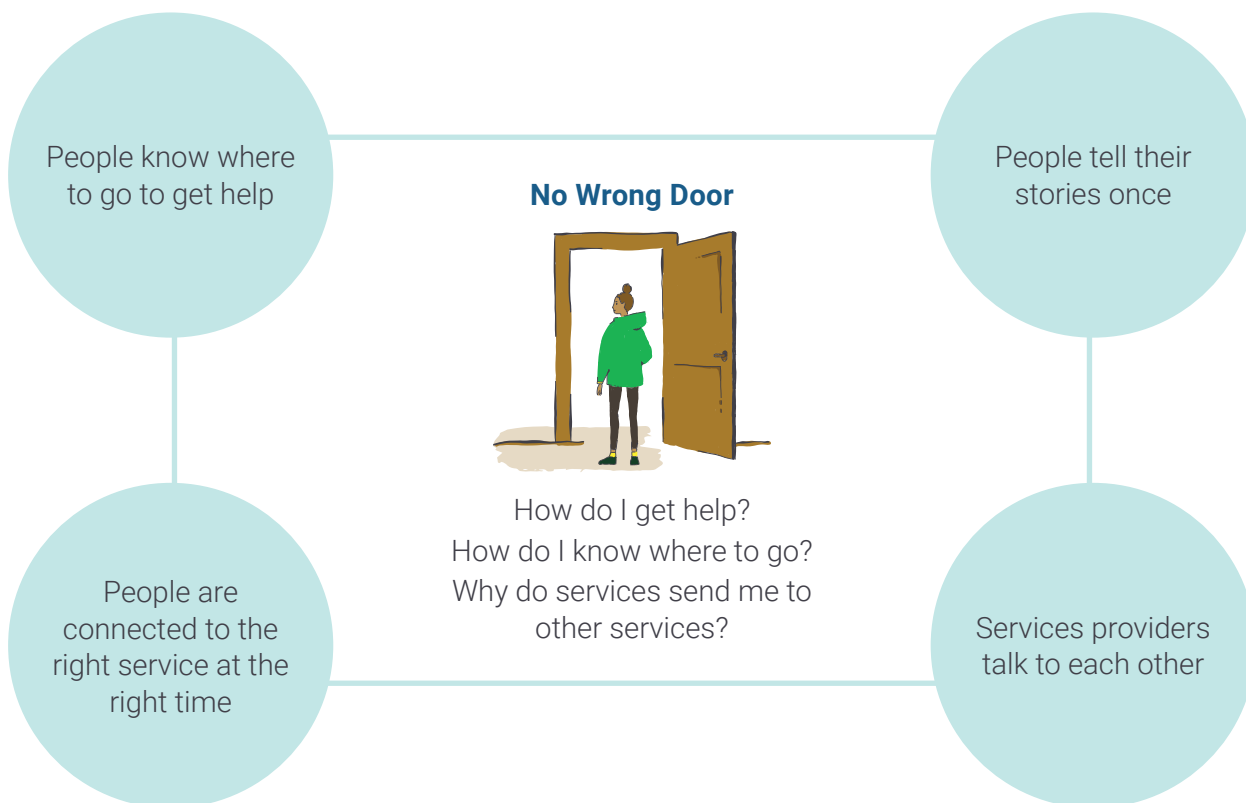
Better information sharing about individuals is critical to improving tailored and coordinated responses, without requiring vulnerable people to repeatedly share their stories. Detailed information also helps to inform and shape system responses. Ways to improve sharing of individual information will be pursued in collaboration with the community services sector, including consideration of the systems needed to support the collection and sharing of information and issues of consent.

## No Wrong Door

A No Wrong Door approach is a key principle of the Strategy and our approach to this whole-of-system change will be designed in partnership with people with lived experience and the community services sector.

A No Wrong Door approach means that whenever or wherever a person presents with an identified need within the homelessness response system, they will be supported to find the help they need and want, and not be turned away.

This shifts our service response to better address individual needs either through direct provision of services or connections into appropriate services, complimented by case coordination, rather than sending a person from one organisation to another.



In order to be effective, this approach needs a range of supporting systems and mechanisms, including:

**A common assessment tool**

**Accessible and effective referrals**

**Improved information availability and sharing, including access to live bed vacancy data**

Effective referrals to help people access the right supports when they are needed is key to a coordinated system and a No Wrong Door approach. To facilitate smooth transfers, service providers need to know who to refer to, and for there to be a diverse and flexible range of services. It requires service providers to acknowledge their strengths and be enabled to collaborate to ensure people receive the service that best meets their need. It is important that vulnerable people experiencing homelessness or at risk of homelessness are not required to shop around the system and coordinate their own care or face barriers when reaching out for help.

**Every door in the homelessness response service system should be the right door.**

### Queensland Homelessness Information Platform (QHIP)

The Queensland Homelessness Information Platform (QHIP) is the homelessness assessment and vacancy management system for funded homelessness and domestic and family violence services in Queensland.

The secure system allows funded services to access client information and to manage referrals for homeless people, people at risk of homelessness and women and children experiencing domestic and family violence.

The QHIP includes:

- A Vacancy Capacity Management System tool to list and search for vacancies and non-accommodation support agencies within the sector.
- A Common Homelessness Assessment and Referral Tool for assessing, prioritising and referring people to services based on their individual needs.

**QHIP is intended to help services provide improved services and pathways for clients; reduce the number of referrals; use clear, transparent and consistent processes for prioritising clients; use a consistent approach to initial assessment across the service system; and provide efficient yet secure processes to share client assessment information.**

We have heard there is an urgent need for better visibility of services across the community sector that is openly and transparently accessible for people who are experiencing homeless and for those providing services. To support the Strategy, we will work with the sector to design an improved information system to support and facilitate referrals and information sharing.

Information should help people to find services based on their individual needs including their age, location or accommodation needs. It also needs to be available through multiple platforms including online and through telephone services.

There is a corresponding requirement for funding through contracts to encourage and enable service providers to support people through the system to the right services.

Coordination needs to be improved across the community and government sectors so that we can work together to meet the specific needs of people. This leads to better outcomes for vulnerable people, drives efficiencies and has potential to lower costs over the long term. As we collectively work towards a person-centred system, we must acknowledge that this is underpinned by coordination, collaboration and shared information.

**The homeless response system must be easily accessible, and people should be provided with information to enable them to know where to go in the first instance, with service providers adding the expertise to facilitate further direction to the right services as needed.**

### By Name List

The development of By Name Lists is being used in a number of countries, as a way of providing accurate and real-time information on the number of people experiencing homelessness at any given time in a community. These lists are developed and maintained for a clearly identified area to enable a better understanding of the unique needs and circumstances of people experiencing homelessness in that community.

By Name Lists provide a key data source to better understand the risk factors driving homelessness and can help us identify the key barriers to goal attainment and opportunities to resolve them. It can also help us target and coordinate our responses for each individual.

## Commissioning the right services

Commissioning provides a key mechanism to deliver the coordinated and collaborative service system needed to end homelessness. By using a strong evidence base, co-designing with the sector and system users and focusing on outcomes, there is an opportunity to re-invigorate the service mix, drive innovation and partnerships and to improve design and delivery of our responses over the ten years of the Strategy.

A staged approach is planned for commissioning services to support the Strategy in order to prioritise stabilising the homelessness services sector and introduce better ways of working together. This will assist the currently funded community services organisations to plan for and deliver services that meet the needs of people experiencing, or at risk of, homelessness.

The Delivering Community Services in Partnership Policy (DCSP Policy) is the framework for commissioning and has a strong focus on early planning and engagement with stakeholders. The DCSP Policy acknowledges that to ensure services reach those in need, we must continue to break down the barriers between government and the not-for-profit community services sector and deliver services that support a vision of safe, resilient communities connected by strong families who feel they belong.

Under the DSCP Policy, commissioning processes to address homelessness will:

- focus on the achievement of outcomes and improving services and support
- be done in partnership with the not-for-profit sector in the planning, co-design and delivery of human services
- display an enduring commitment to the sustainability of community services.

It is acknowledged that services are currently doing a significant amount with often limited resources and ongoing uncertainty has made it more difficult for services to meet the needs of vulnerable members of the community.

Working with service providers and users to improve coordination within the system will be an initial priority to ensure that people experiencing homelessness can access the assistance they need. In addition, early focus will be given to ensuring high quality contract management practices and systems to shift service approaches to align with the Strategy and to contribute to the achievement of identified outcomes.



### Designing responses in partnership: HYAC and the Youth Plan

As part of a joint initiative between the Youth Affairs Council of Western Australia (YACWA) and the WA Alliance to End Homelessness, a design team came together to develop a Youth Homelessness Action Plan to prevent and end youth homelessness in Western Australia. The design team consisted of: the Homelessness Youth Advisory Council, a group of nine young people with lived experience of homelessness; a group of diverse professionals from key youth sector organisations and government agencies; and a small design squad who facilitated the process.

Throughout April and June 2019, the team participated in several workshops where they followed a co-design process to co-develop the youth-specific action plan. The group used various design tools like 'system maps,' 'journey maps,' and 'future narratives' to empathise, discover, analyse and gain new insights together.

**This process resulted in the development of a plan that was genuinely driven by the voices of young people and the youth sector that supports them.**

The service system and mix will be considered over the life of the Strategy, in partnership with service providers (existing and potential) and service users, to ensure the right services are being delivered in the right places at the right times.

Commissioning and contracting processes will be undertaken with a view to improving the sustainability of services. Longer contract periods will be implemented to support funding for outcomes, rather than grant funding that is time limited.

Data, including needs and demands modelling, is critical to build a strong evidence base and to inform commissioning.

Priority will be given to services that align with the priorities and principles of the Strategy, including those that are culturally competent, drive innovation of partnerships and design, and those delivering flexible and responsive services.

Commissioning services based on securing the best outcomes, at the best value and ensuring continuous review of whether services achieve success in addressing the needs of their clients will be prioritised.

An outcome-based approach to commissioning will be established to enable a broader focus and transparent assessment of whether services are responding to individual needs flexibly and making optimal use of available assets including accommodation and potential housing options.

Co-investment across government, the community and private sectors and philanthropy is encouraged to improve coordination and effectiveness of resources to meet outcomes, and drive innovation. This recognises that the community services sector, private business and philanthropy and local government authorities own and control assets and contribute significantly to community level outcomes.





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