

Everybody's Business

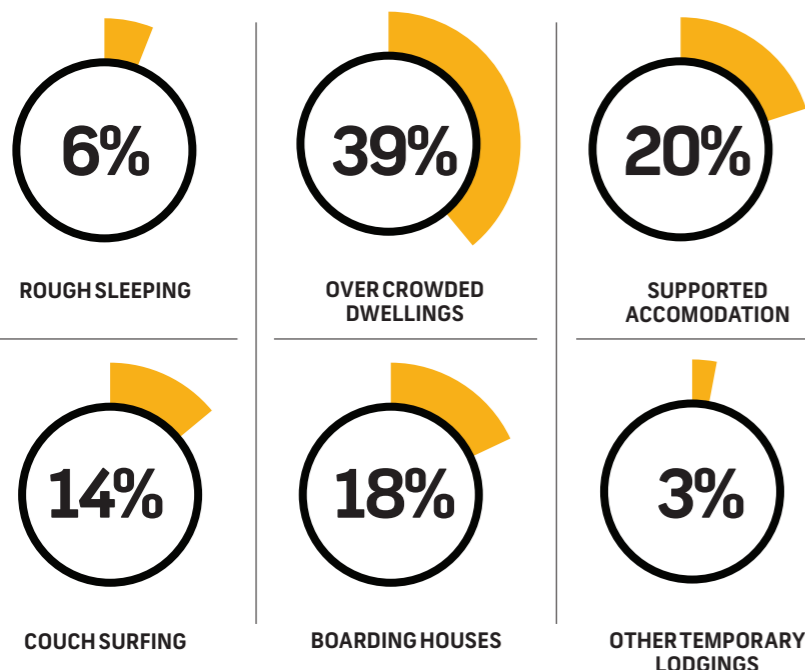


THE SITUATION

122,494

people estimated homeless in Australia

- Australia has no agreed definition of homelessness and no national plan.
- Social housing stock is low across the country.
- More parts of Australia- cities and regional areas - are feeling the impacts of homelessness.
- Major funding agreements on housing and homelessness are held between federal and state governments.
- Local government has no defined role in responding to homelessness.
- Communities often expect their councils to 'do something' about homelessness.



The challenges councils face

The pressures of managing multiple responsibilities and interests. Sometimes areas of responsibility conflict.

A lack of mandate and no guidance regarding the role councils can play

Limited access to funds

A focus on crisis and missing upstream prevention opportunities

Response activities and budgets are siloed, limiting the ability to respond effectively

Navigating politics and political cycles that don't necessarily align with the timeframes needed for effective homelessness response

Balancing the use of public spaces

The challenges government workers face

Staff carry high workloads and receive relatively low pay

Balancing the needs and rights of people experiencing homelessness against responsibilities to the wider community

Building understanding and managing expectations regarding homelessness and response activities

Navigating the politics and community expectations of politicians

Making hard decisions and fighting for them can be a challenge in a bureaucratic establishment



"Homelessness is just an experience and not who you are... it is not a criminal activity, not a misfortune. It is people who are going through an experience at a point in time."

JOSLYN CARTER, NEW YORK DEPARTMENT OF HOMELESS SERVICES

AT A GLANCE OF ALL PEOPLE ESTIMATED HOMELESS ON CENSUS NIGHT 2021:

23% were aged between 12 and 24

14% were children under 12

44% were women

One in five was Indigenous

GUIDELINES

What can local government do?

KNOW YOUR LOCAL HOMELESSNESS SITUATION

- **Collect local data:** Know your local homelessness situation. Collect data in your area and use that to make your decisions about what to do next.
- **Listen to your community:** Take time to listen and learn from your community. Know what they are doing and build your approach with them.
- **Establish a shared definition of homelessness:** Work with your partners and agree on how you jointly define homelessness. This will help align your work.

LEAD THE NARRATIVE AND DRIVE COLLABORATION

- **Nurture community alliances:** As a council, carefully consider your role in local collaborations. If the opportunity arises step back and let the community lead.
- **Embrace lived experiences:** Look to people with a lived experience of homelessness to partner in and inform your work. They will bring a perspective and an ability to connect that you may not be able to access in other ways.
- **Involve all parts of government:** Consider which government partners will be most important to you in addressing homelessness locally and bring those people together.
- **Collaborate to address welfare, safety and amenity:** Establish coordinated partnership responses with agreed goals and well-defined roles and responsibilities.
- **Communicate and educate for better outcomes:** Councils have the connections and the means to change perceptions of homeless. Make the time to tell the story.

ORGANISE YOUR APPROACH AND YOUR WORKFORCE

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

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better outcomes for the whole community.

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

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

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

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

ACT TO PREVENT AND END HOMELESSNESS

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

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

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

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

Full report available at: <https://www.churchilltrust.com.au/fellow/leanne-mitchell-vic-2019/>

Recommendations for local government

1 Make homelessness everyone's business. Utilise Local Government's ability to connect across sectors and bring together a community, recognising that not one group or person can solve a complex problem like homelessness. Rather, a collective approach will yield better results. This also recognises that there are diverse views about homelessness, and negotiation may be required to find acceptable ways to work together.

2 Focus on homelessness beyond rough sleeping. While street homelessness is the most visible and vulnerable experience of homelessness and obviously requires action, local government is equipped to respond to a broader experience of homelessness.

3 Recognise what you can do to prevent homelessness. Through its structure and close connections to community, Local Government can play a much wider role in homelessness prevention. Take time to identify what factors will most likely lead to homelessness in your community. Identify the customer service points - where connection with people at risk of homelessness might take place and connect with them before they hit crisis point.

4 Educate and change the narrative. Building understanding and empathy will go a long way. Local Government is in a good position to get the story straight on homelessness, its origins and how it impacts individuals, families and the broader community. Use your close connection to the community to educate people on the causes and impacts of homelessness on individuals and the community at-large.

5 Take your seat at the table. Lobby Commonwealth and State Governments to recognise Local Government's unique offering in responding to and ending homelessness. Future national and state level homelessness plans should include local government as a key partner. To back this up, funds need to be made available to local councils to coordinate data collection, prevention and collaboration efforts.