

# POLICY FUTURES

## *A Reform Agenda*



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*The Jack Brockhoff Foundation Churchill Fellowship to investigate how councils respond to rough sleeping while balancing responsibilities to the wider community - Finland, UK, USA.*

### Place-based homelessness prevention – a role for local government

Homelessness in Australia – in public places, cars, couch surfing, in places of insecure tenure and overcrowded facilities – is getting worse.

While the Commonwealth, states and territories hold legislated responsibilities and contribute significant funds towards ending homelessness, more communities are turning to their local councils, who have no mandate to act and little money to spend, to ‘do something’ about it.

As the closest level of government to the community, local governments possess untapped expertise, resources and levers to address homelessness proactively. Still, in many circumstances, their potential role is undervalued and overlooked.

Drawing on local knowledge, deep connections into community and a proven ability to drive collaboration, councils are well placed to initiate prevention and upstream interventions – and engage in crisis response when absolutely necessary.

As Australia develops a National Housing and Homelessness Plan, the time to articulate local government’s role and support place-based efforts through dedicated funding is now.

### Key Policy Recommendations

The Australian Government can recognise local government by articulating its role in the National Housing and Homelessness Plan, enabling place-based initiatives and establishing direct funding mechanisms to support local government efforts in ending homelessness.

1

**Acknowledge the cumulative impact of three levels of government collaborating to end homelessness and recognise local government as a key response partner in the upcoming National Housing and Homelessness Plan.**

The new national plan provides an opportunity to articulate local governments’ role in place-based prevention and early intervention. This includes recognising the close connections that councils have into local communities to help identify, inform and educate before homelessness hits crisis point, as well as their ability to influence public perceptions.

2

**In partnership with Australian councils (through ALGA and/or state-based municipal associations) initiate direct funding mechanisms to support local government responses to homelessness.**

Short, medium and long-term opportunities could include recognising and funding local government through existing channels including the National Housing and Homelessness Agreement; piloting direct funding streams through a local government-specific grants program and including local government in any future Commonwealth-funded homelessness prevention initiatives (such as a Prevention Transformation Fund as advocated by Homelessness Australia).

3

**Initiate and pilot placed-based initiatives to address homelessness, involving local government and key community partners.**

Work with local councils to fund and implement a pilot program testing place-based homelessness prevention initiatives, modelled off, or implemented as part of the Australian Government’s Stronger Places, Stronger People program.

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# Policy Snapshot



## Current snapshot

- No agreed definition
- No national plan
- 170,000 households on social housing waiting lists across the country
- More areas - including regional locations - are feeling the impacts of homelessness for the first time
- Funding agreements are between federal and state governments only
- No defined role for local government
- Communities expect their councils to 'do something'



## 2021 Census estimates of people experiencing homelessness or marginally housed

Type of accommodation	Total numbers 2021	% of homeless people in Australia	%increase between 2016-2021
People sleeping rough	7,636	6%	-6.9%
Person in supported accommodation for the homeless	24,291	20%	+14.4%
Person staying temporarily with other household	16,597	14%	-6.4%
Persons living in boarding houses	22,137	18%	+26.5%
Persons in other temporary lodgings	3,934	3%	+3%
Persons in severely crowded dwellings	47,895	39%	-6.3%



## What can local government do?

Local government can play a role in ending homelessness, but most Australian councils are under-funded, under-resourced and not equipped to act.

With recognition, support and funding, Councils could contribute significantly to national efforts to end homelessness. Councils are well equipped to:



**KNOW local homelessness situations.** Councils are well placed to gather data and create information sources to enable targeted, locally focused program design and interventions.



**RECOGNISE triggers into homelessness.** Through programs and services, frontline council staff, like librarians, park rangers and family nurses, can identify triggers and provide referral pathways to people who may not be actively seeking assistance.



**COLLABORATE and build partnerships.** Councils are trusted partners, able to collaborate with multiple stakeholders in delivering locally focused response efforts.



**LEAD the narrative.** Local government is well positioned to build community understanding regarding homelessness and housing response efforts. Education can eliminate misinformation that may lead to oppositional stances.