

# parity

AUGUST 2024 VOLUME 37 – ISSUE 7

ISSN 1032-6170



Council  
to Homeless  
Persons

## Local Government and Homelessness



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## Parity

Australia's national  
homelessness publication

Published by Council to Homeless Persons

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Proposed 2024 Parity Publication Schedule

September: The NDIS, Disability Housing and Homelessness

October: After the Voice:  
First Nations Responses to Homelessness

November: Histories of Homelessness

Cover art

Rodney Gardner, Launceston Chalmers Church,  
[watercolour].

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# Editorial

Deborah Di Natale, Chief Executive Officer, Council to Homeless Persons



It is 20 years since the first Local Government and Homelessness' edition of *Parity* examined and discussed the role of local government in responding to homelessness. Since then, there have been several editions that talk to the significant role of local government in both the policy and service response to homelessness.

The 2004 edition was largely made up of contributions from capital city local governments, with a small number from a few inner-city local governments in Melbourne. One of the most notable features of the present edition is local government authorities in both urban and regional locations have initiated and developed homelessness and housing policies that are innovative and effective. Certainly, expanding beyond the traditional remit of roads, rates and rubbish.

Local governments and their peak advocacy bodies are taking an increasingly assertive position as the third tier of government, one that needs to be involved and integrated as a full partner in both national, state and territory homelessness and housing policies. Local government is the level of government closest to the concerns and interests of their communities and in some cases housing options are designed to actively mitigate and alleviate the issues of homelessness itself.

The majority of local governments have embraced the responsibility and accept that all levels of government must develop and implement meaningful and effective homelessness policies and services.

A number of these initiatives are highlighted in this edition, initiatives that demonstrate in many respects, local government is leading the way in providing community-based local solutions to homelessness.

The Council to Homeless Persons (CHP) looks forward to working with local government and their peak bodies to advocate for both National and State/Territory governments to work on social housing solutions that is required to both prevent and end homelessness.

## Acknowledgements

This edition was made possible thanks to the input and work of our Guest Editor, Leanne Mitchell, whose groundbreaking research undertaken for her Churchill Fellowship, underpinned the development and framework for this edition.

This edition was only made possible thanks to the support of edition co-sponsors. CHP would like to acknowledge and thank, The City of Port Phillip, The City of Melbourne, The City of Sydney, The City of Adelaide, Hobart City Council, Launceston City Council, Brimbank City Council, Sunshine Coast Council, Gawler City Council, The City of Marion, The City of Holdfast Bay, Port Adelaide Enfield Council and the Local Government Association of South Australia, for their sponsorship support for this edition.



# Homelessness Australia Update

Kate Colvin, Chief Executive Officer, Homelessness Australia



## Homelessness Week 2024 Launch and a new Minister for Housing and Homelessness

The past month has seen a Ministerial reshuffle result in the appointment of a new Minister for Housing and Homelessness, The Hon Clare O'Neil.

After only a week in the role, Minister O'Neil joined Homelessness Australia's national Homelessness Week launch, and expressed a strong commitment to use her time in the role to make a difference.



You can read excerpts of these reflections from the Minister below. To catch the whole presentation watch the recording of the launch event on the Homelessness Australia YouTube <https://www.youtube.com/@HomelessnessAus>.

Minister O'Neil said:

*'I take on these portfolios at a critical moment for our country,' 'the homes that we do have are no longer accessible to ordinary working people.*

*'This is a really deep problem ... which is really about what does it mean to be Australian and what are the legitimate entitlements of Australian citizens? It is about young people in our country and their legitimate expectation for the kind of adulthood that they should be allowed to have. It is about the way that wealth is distributed in our country between the generations in our country, but also the people who will inherit housing wealth and those who will not.*

*'Housing and having a house is not just about practicalities ... about the nuts and bolts of infrastructure. Housing is the foundation for the life experience of every citizen in our country.*

*'It is a deep question about what we are willing to do to help the most disadvantaged.*

*'Homelessness is going to be a pivotal part of the work I will do in this portfolio.*

*'It is very obvious to me that the current big crisis that we're having in housing in Australia is feeding into our homelessness population. Very clearly there is no distinction between the big problems we have in the commercial housing market and the experience of people who are experiencing homelessness.*

*'All of the workers who I have talked to are seeing people who are coming into homelessness services, who would never have come through the doors 10 years ago.'*



Caption to be supplied



Minister for Housing and Homelessness, The Hon Clare O'Neil

She spoke also about what she has heard talking to the homelessness sector and people with a lived experience since taking the role and reflected that what she has learnt is that:

*'For that group of people who are recurrently experiencing homelessness, housing is an absolutely necessary starting point for their journey to living a fulfilling and safe life in our country, but it's not the end of their journey.'*

*'The housing is the foundation, but ... once someone gets a house, that's actually often when those problems they've been trying to manage their whole life start to bubble up, and that's when they are going to need lots of support.'*

In conclusion, the Minister accepted Homelessness Australia CEO, Kate Colvin's offer to stand shoulder to shoulder with the Minister to tackle the changes needed to end homelessness, and said:

*'There is a huge task ahead of us here.'*

*'One of my main goals is to make sure that the homelessness sector gets as much public exposure and*

*attention as possible. We need to make this a really big issue for the country, and we're going to get lots of focus and eyes on this.*

*'Our housing market has cracked. We need to do some big things to make sure that not only we're addressing homelessness, but that the dream of home ownership doesn't disappear for two generations of Australians.'*

*'We're going to raise awareness together.'*

*'This is a really important time.'*

The launch also included a compelling keynote presentation from national children's commissioner, Anne Hollonds about the impact of homelessness on children, and the changes needed to end child homelessness.

Kate Colvin, Homelessness Australia CEO, introduced the event and spoke about the crisis in homelessness services and housing, which results in more than a third of over 88,000 parents and children using homelessness services remaining homeless even after receiving some support.

Kate also welcomed the new Minister, and expressed the sector's hopes and aspirations for the upcoming 10-year National Housing and Homelessness Plan to map out a path for the transformative change needed to end homelessness.

A panel including Dom Rowe, CEO of Homelessness NSW, Frances Crimmins, Homelessness Australia Chair and CEO of YWCA Canberra and John Leha, CEO of AbSec explored the impact and solutions in relation to child and family homelessness for First Nations communities, and the impact of domestic and family violence.



Kate Colvin



## Introduction

# Why Local Councils are the Missing Link in Australia's Efforts to End Homelessness

Leanne Mitchell, Guest Editor\*



Homelessness in Australia is getting worse.<sup>1</sup> It's no longer just city centres where people are forced to sleep rough, live in their cars or rely on temporary shelter. The most recent Census shows<sup>2</sup> outer suburbs and regional areas are feeling housing pressures like never before.

More often than not, communities in these areas just don't know what to do. Increasingly, residents are asking small, stretched local councils to go beyond their traditional responsibilities of rates, roads and rubbish<sup>3</sup> and do more to tackle homelessness.

Yet local government lacks the mandate or the money to do so. Often, the only tool at local councils' disposal is enforcement of local laws on behaviour in public places.

And when councils do get involved in the problem of homelessness, it's often too late. They are reacting when homelessness has reached crisis point, instead of working to prevent it.

As the closest level of government to the people, councils have

a unique perspective on homelessness that other levels of government are just too far away to see. Executed properly, this national plan could be the biggest opportunity we have ever seen to not only address homelessness, but also for local councils to help prevent the problem at its roots.

### Housing everyone isn't a simple task

The causes and manifestations of homelessness are complex. We know from experience that it can't be 'fixed' by the action of one group. Collaboration is key.

We also know Australia needs more social and affordable housing. As of June 2022, there were 174,624 households<sup>4</sup> on waiting lists for public housing, 13,724 for Indigenous housing and 41,906 for community housing. And the waiting lists don't include everyone<sup>5</sup> who needs housing.

But houses can't be built overnight. Even with the best efforts to increase the supply of social housing, we will likely remain in deficit for a long time. This is why we need local government involvement to prevent homelessness in the first place.

Yet too often we see reluctant councils explaining that homelessness is not their issue to solve. But, when we see it on local streets, in public parks and other shared spaces, this is a flimsy argument.

### We can learn from the successes overseas

Prevention is tricky. It takes many partners and many types of effort to implement, and it is difficult to measure. But, as my Churchill

Fellowship Report<sup>6</sup> shows, we can learn from the successful efforts of local governments overseas.

For example, in less than ten years, Newcastle City Council in the United Kingdom has prevented homelessness in more than 24,000 households.<sup>7</sup> It has achieved this by working with local government workers and services to identify the triggers leading to homelessness and the opportunities to intervene before a person loses their home.

And in United States cities, including San Francisco, Washington DC and Baltimore, social workers and people with past experience of homelessness, mental ill-health and drug and alcohol use are successfully working<sup>8</sup> in public libraries to help people at risk access support and services.

Identifying potential homelessness before it turns into crisis is something that well-connected and informed Australian council workers can do too. Working deeply in communities, they often know their customers and can see early warning signs.

Concerted efforts are needed to educate local council workers so they know how to connect into specialist services that might help someone find housing, get emergency funds to cover bills, or access health services. These actions could stop homelessness before it happens.

### But, first, councils need to be part of the plan

The Federal Government seems to have taken on board recommendations from the 2021 parliamentary inquiry into



homelessness<sup>9</sup> in Australia and identified local government as an untapped resource and partner.

A national plan that recognises and defines the unique contribution that local councils can make to preventing homelessness, and puts some money behind it, could be a game-changer.

Local government does not have to be the ambulance at the bottom of the cliff, or the cleaning crew.

If councils are truly recognised, ready and resourced to take on this role in preventing homelessness, it might also reduce the amount of social, temporary and emergency housing needed further along the line. It might even bring about an end to homelessness in Australia.

\* Leanne Mitchell is a Churchill Fellow and PhD candidate at Charles Sturt University. This article was first published in *The Conversation*.

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# The Local Government Response to Homelessness

## Establishing Local Government's Role in Ending Homelessness

Deborah Wilkinson, Executive Director, Council of Capital City Lord Mayors (CCCLM)

Australia's 537 city, regional and rural councils have an important role to play in ending our country's homelessness crisis. But, to date, only a few have the resources, knowledge, systems, or the finances to make a real difference.

Australia's housing and homelessness policies, along with financial control, are primarily in the hands of the Commonwealth, State, and Territory governments. Nevertheless, as living expenses soar and housing challenges intensify, communities increasingly look to their local councils for solutions.

During Homelessness Week 2023, the Council of Capital City Lord Mayors (CCCLM) and Local Government Professionals (LG Pro) hosted a national event — Local Government Community of Practice: Housing and Homelessness.

With more than 120 participants from over 40 Councils and 15 allied associations gathering at Melbourne Town Hall on August 7-8, this was the first time that Australian local government practitioners, from capital cities, urban, regional and rural locations, had come together at an event to share knowledge, information and best practice about housing and homelessness responses.

Focusing on the unique experience of local government, the event provided an opportunity for leaders and practitioners working across diverse roles to present, share their experiences and knowledge, and plan for future action.

Through presentations and panel discussions, sharing best practice case studies and participating in group activities, participants planned

for a future where local government takes a seat at the national table in homelessness and housing responses.

The group considered what action councils can take within their own locations as well as how, as a group, the sector can participate and influence state and national policy and practice.

Group activities and discussion highlighted five key themes relating to local government's role in housing and homelessness response, namely recognising that:

1. Local government has valuable local insights, data and connections with community that Federal and State/Territory governments can draw upon to shape housing and homelessness policy and practice.







2. Opportunities exist to explore and embed local government's specific role in homelessness prevention.
3. Social and affordable housing should be prioritised as essential infrastructure.
4. Mandatory inclusionary zoning can enable ongoing sustainable funding streams and equitable cost sharing.
5. A clear mandate is needed for federal, state and territory

governments to deliver ongoing funding streams for local government in their homelessness and housing response.

In workshops, participants examined together the roles local government could play in efforts to end homelessness, considering why local government should get involved and the contribution local government can make. This included in responding to First Nations homelessness, managing homelessness crisis, initiating early

interventions, collaborating to address safety and amenity, leading homelessness narratives, and establishing housing responses.

Importantly, this event took a vital first step towards establishing a national community of practice, focused on the unique role that local government can play to end homelessness in Australia.

The full report is available at: <https://www.lordmayors.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/housing-homelessness-digital.pdf>



# Collaboration as a Cornerstone: The Critical Role of Local Government in Addressing Homelessness

Orla Doyle, Senior Project Coordinator, Homes Melbourne, City of Melbourne

## Introduction

As an individual with extensive experience in frontline homelessness services for over 20 years in Scotland, Ireland, and Australia, across various roles and managerial positions within non-profit organisations and Local Government Authorities (LGAs), I have gained substantial insight into the multifaceted causes of homelessness. Over the years, I have had the privilege of engaging with and supporting numerous individuals and families, who have shared their individual journeys into homelessness with me. My current role as a Senior Project Coordinator within the City of Melbourne's Homes Melbourne Branch affords me a unique position to work closely with frontline services to support those experiencing homelessness within the municipality.

Homelessness is not just a statistic; it is a stark daily reality for many individuals and families in our city. It encompasses a range of factors, from economic hardship and family breakdowns to mental health challenges and systemic inequalities. Each story is unique, yet interconnected within a broader social and economic context that demands our attention and action.

LGAs are the closest government to the community, they are pivotal in the fight against homelessness due to their local knowledge, legal responsibilities, integrated service capabilities, advocacy power, community leadership, and ethical obligations. By prioritising homelessness response strategies, LGAs can contribute significantly to creating inclusive, supportive, and thriving communities for all residents.

## The Legislative, Moral and Economic Imperative of Responding to Homelessness

Our community rightfully expects us to act. We have an explicit legislative, moral, ethical, and leadership responsibility to create a city where every person has a safe home and to provide the necessary support to break the cycle of homelessness. Adequate housing is a fundamental human right and essential infrastructure critical to health and wellbeing.

Investing in affordable housing also makes economic sense. Our research shows that, for every \$1 invested in affordable housing, \$3 worth of community benefit is provided due to educational benefits, enhanced human capital, health cost savings, and reduced family violence and





crime. This return on investment is much greater than most other essential infrastructure projects.

Over the past two decades, The City of Melbourne has invested in housing solutions and coordinated and funded services for people in need. Recognising the complexity and extent of the housing crisis, we established Homes Melbourne in early 2022 to provide a comprehensive, targeted response. The team brings housing, homelessness and policy experts together to innovate, advocate, and collaborate with partners across the housing spectrum.

### Challenges in Affordable Housing

Despite our efforts, the shortfall of more than 6,000 affordable homes in the city undermines our ability to transition individuals into long-term, safe, and secure housing. Without intervention, this shortfall of affordable housing is likely to increase to 23,200 households by 2036.

The City of Melbourne is a city of renters. In 2021, 67 per cent of households rented their home compared to 30 per cent across Greater Melbourne. In the past, renting has been viewed as a step towards home ownership, but this is changing. The increasing cost of homes has meant more households remain in the rental sector for longer periods of time. Rental prices are exceeding wages growth, which is severely affecting very low to moderate income households.

Without access to appropriate housing, people are caught in a cycle of homelessness. The Melbourne Homelessness Service Coordination Project (MHSCP), established in 2015, aims to improve outcomes for people sleeping rough in the City of Melbourne, using a Housing First Principles base for how we collectively work with people seeking supports, by planning and integrating services and undertaking systems-level advocacy. It was the first dedicated service coordination project in Victoria — providing an initial blueprint for other LGAs.



### The Role of the Melbourne Homelessness Service Coordination Project (MHSCP)

Within our LGA, we recognise our pivotal role in responding to homelessness. It goes beyond providing temporary shelters or basic services; it involves a commitment to sustainable solutions and systemic change.

#### A Snapshot of Homelessness in Our City:

- 130 people sleeping rough, 1,163 people experiencing homelessness in total
- Five per cent were First Nations peoples (First Nations peoples only comprise 0.5 per cent of our population)
- 15 per cent were young people aged 15 to 25
- 36 per cent of all people experiencing homelessness were women, and 20 per cent of women were young women aged 20 to 24.<sup>1</sup>

Through initiatives like Melbourne Homelessness Service Coordination Project (MHSCP) that I lead, we have been able to coordinate responses

to support people sleeping rough in the City of Melbourne, bringing together 17 service and support agencies, under a collective impact approach. Each service brings different expertise and perspectives, sharing knowledge and resources to offer tailored housing and service support. The MHSCP's purpose is to enable agencies to work collectively to provide appropriate and coordinated services to people experiencing chronic homelessness and sleeping rough. This is achieved by identifying and sharing complex cases, collaborating across service systems, connecting individuals with stable housing, and advocating for systemic change. This project focuses on primary rough sleeping, but we recognise more widely the hidden aspect of homelessness in Australia and our municipality.

A particular highlight for me every week has been to watch the incredible work of the frontline Service Coordination Team (Team) who come together each week to workshop and plan for their clients. Watching specialists from a range of backgrounds support each other to navigate complex systems so that their clients can access the most appropriate support and housing options is extremely impressive.

## Collaboration and Impact

The MHSCP comprises three governance groups with distinct roles, organised under a common framework. This structure leverages the skills, resources, and expertise of different services to address the multiple and complex needs of people sleeping rough, enabling pathways out of homelessness into — ideally — long-term housing. The MHSCP builds relationships between partner agencies, ensuring better coordination of the sector within and outside formal MHSCP forums. It provides a platform to escalate clients with multiple and complex needs, coordinating service delivery and achieving outcomes that would not have been possible otherwise.

Our efforts have not been without impact. Below is one case that illustrates the collective impact approach in practice.

## John's Journey from Homelessness to Stability

### Background

*John arrived at the Salvation Army Flagstaff Accommodation in early 2023 after five years of sleeping rough and short stays in emergency accommodations. He lives with a complex psychosocial*

*disability, epilepsy, and an acquired brain injury from the removal of a tumour in his frontal lobe. John also faces significant literacy barriers, complicating his ability to access appropriate services while living on the streets.*

*During his time sleeping rough, John's mental and physical health deteriorated significantly. He experienced multiple inpatient admissions to hospitals across Melbourne. Without access to his prescribed medication, he endured regular seizures. Additionally, John suffered numerous physical assaults, attributing these attacks to being taken advantage of by others in the community.*

*Upon entering Flagstaff, John received immediate and comprehensive support:*

- **Healthcare Access:** John was supported to access both primary and secondary healthcare services.
- **NDIS Application:** Clinicians helped him with his application to the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS).
- **Legal Assistance:** Inner Melbourne Community Legal assisted John with outstanding legal matters.

- **Cultural and General Counselling:** John engaged with culturally specific community supports through Dardi Munwurro and began general counselling to address his trauma.

*These supports led to a significant improvement in John's outlook on life, reducing the frequency of his chronic suicidal ideation, a condition worsened by his years of homelessness. With a robust support network, John felt confident to move from Flagstaff into more independent living.*

*This transition was facilitated by the Melbourne Homelessness Service Coordination Project and leveraged partnerships to identify and refer to a direct allocation for public housing. John was successful and received a two-bedroom property in Richmond, suited to his support and care needs. John now has appropriate supports for daily living and a strong positive social friendship group. He is driven to achieve long-term goals to improve his life further:*

- **Education:** John has enrolled in an adult literacy course at Melbourne Polytechnic.
- **Community Engagement:** He hopes to begin volunteering, giving back to a community he now feels supported by.

*John's journey from homelessness to stability showcases the impact of coordinated support systems. Without this approach of comprehensive and individualised support facilitated by the MHSCP partnership, John might have remained trapped in a cycle of homelessness, with deteriorating health, unresolved legal issues, and ongoing instability. His story highlights the critical role that coordinated and holistic approaches play in helping individuals experiencing homelessness to rebuild their lives. Through healthcare access, legal assistance, culturally safe supports, counselling, and stable housing, John has been able to rebuild his life. His story underscores the importance of comprehensive, individualised support for individuals experiencing homelessness.*





## The By-Name List (BNL)

On 1 April 2020, the City of Melbourne's By-Name list (BNL) by-name list was established to enable appropriate coordination of services to people experiencing homelessness and plan the homelessness emergency response to COVID-19. This list, introduced in June 2020, was collated to accurately know who and how many people were currently sleeping rough within a defined geographic area, providing up-to-date data on the homelessness landscape in the City of Melbourne. The BNL has been instrumental in understanding service needs of individuals, highlighting gaps in service delivery, and informing policy change and systems-level advocacy.

Through data-driven approaches and community engagement, we have seen the project reach a milestone of 250 long term housing outcomes for people on the BNL and, as of June 2024, the number is now 272 people with a history of homelessness in homes.

## Make Room

Make Room is a unique partnership between City of Melbourne, the Victorian Government, housing providers, corporate and philanthropic organisations. City of Melbourne is converting a Council-owned building at 602 Little Bourke Street — valued at \$12 million — into specialist supported accommodation and onsite services for people experiencing homelessness and sleeping rough, in the City of Melbourne area.

Unison Housing, a registered community housing provider, is refurbishing the property, including up to 50 studio apartments, living areas, wrap-around support provided by cohealth and a social

enterprise. Residents will stay for up to 12 months or until they are connected with long-term housing.

Through the MHSCP and using By-Name List Data, we will be referring people directly experiencing homelessness in the City of Melbourne into the Make Room project. We hope to see people moving into their new homes by the end of 2024.

## The Melbourne Zero Network

The City of Melbourne Council is also a proud partner of, The Melbourne Zero (21) Network, an alliance of diverse Melbourne-based businesses, organisations, and community groups, which advocates for real change to make zero homelessness a reality. This coalition unites to end the stigma around street homelessness and position Melbourne as one of the most liveable cities for everyone.

## A Call for Systemic Change

We have a unique position of closeness to the people in our municipality, as such we have a duty to listen and act upon the advice from those with a lived experience of homelessness. We should shift our focus from merely addressing the consequences of homelessness and we should aim to provide a lens on the underlying systems that contribute to it. Lack of access to long-term housing with support continues to be the greatest barrier to reducing rough sleeping. While it is not the Council's role to tackle this single-handedly, our response to the homelessness crisis must recognise this. We must continue to be a leader and advocate for ongoing investment in safe, long term, affordable housing. By working together to understand these system gaps, we can empower individuals to regain control over their lives.

## Conclusion

Everyone has a role to play in tackling this housing and homelessness crisis: all levels of government, the private property and development sectors, homelessness and health services, community and housing organisations, and the broader community. A collective response is needed, and the success of this depends on the involvement of residents, visitors, and businesses. Through collaboration, advocacy, and a commitment to systemic change, we can work towards a future where homelessness is a rarity and everyone in our city has a place to call home.

## Endnotes

1. Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) 2023, *Estimating Homelessness: Census*, <https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/people/housing/estimating-homelessness-census/latest-release>



# Local Government, Extreme Weather and Homelessness

Jon Swain, Manager Homelessness, Social City, City of Sydney



Australia is experiencing an emerging twin crisis in the form of extreme weather events and increasing levels of homelessness.

New South Wales (NSW) saw a 23 per cent increase in the number of people sleeping rough in 2023,<sup>1</sup> which was one of Australia's hottest years on record<sup>2</sup> and globally the hottest year on record.<sup>3</sup> Together, these factors not only place more strain on an already exhausted homelessness support sector but have the potential for a devastating impact on people sleeping rough or those living in unsafe or inappropriate homes and shelters.

Recent investigations into natural disasters found local government is often best placed to coordinate and plan responses to local crises and emergencies. Local government is often trusted, well connected to essential services and able to set up key networks quicker than other government entities. As a result, local government could be well positioned to help take on the challenges that homelessness and climate change present.

The City of Sydney's dedicated homelessness unit was one of the first of its kind at a local government level in Australia. Each year we invest more than \$2.4 million to address homelessness and its impacts, and to support specialist homelessness services in the local area. We also make further funding available to organisations working to support people experiencing or at risk of homelessness through numerous grants programs and accommodation and planning initiatives.

In recent years our focus has also included how best to coordinate and support timely, effective and purposeful responses to reduce the impact of extreme weather events on people experiencing homelessness.

In 2016, we worked with the NSW Government and St Vincent's Health Network to develop the inner-city emergency response protocol for people sleeping rough. The protocol provides a framework that outlines:

- roles and responsibilities for key agencies in extreme weather and other emergency events
- tiered trigger points (yellow, orange and red) for responses

- identifying strategies and resources that improve support for people sleeping rough in the event of extreme weather and other emergency events.

Driving the emergency response protocol is the principle that:

*'People sleeping rough in the City of Sydney local government area have the same rights as any member of the community to a safe and secure place to live. Where this safety is impacted by significant changes to the environment, they have the same right to protection from these impacts as any other member of the community.'*

The protocol also provides a strong framework for homelessness and health services in the City of Sydney local area to develop more resources to enhance emergency responses.

One of these projects is the mobile cooling hub, developed and designed by the University of Sydney, St Vincent's Hospital and the City of Sydney. The hub aims to provide immediate heat relief in extreme conditions for people sleeping rough or in other temporary shelters. Launched last summer, the hub is codesigned to ensure it meets the needs of the people





it's built to assist in times of extreme heat. Early indicators show the hub has been effective in reducing the impacts of heat-related illness.

The City of Sydney is strengthening its ability to support inner-city communities for hotter summers, including those experiencing homelessness, by deploying 200 temperature sensors across the local area.

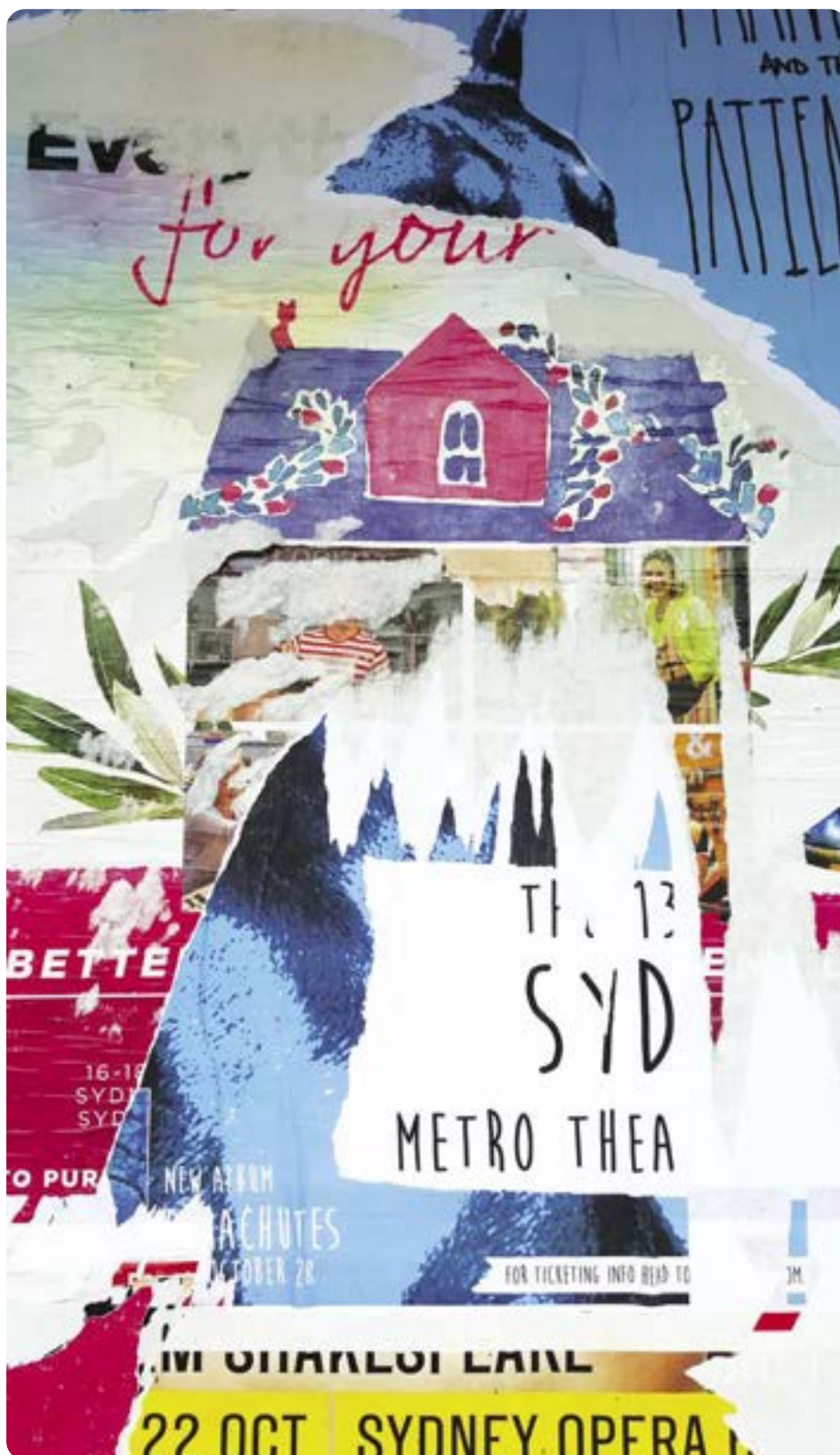
We know buildings, roads and other infrastructure absorb and re-emit the sun's heat more than natural landscapes, creating a 'heat island' effect.

The study is being carried out with Western Sydney University and will focus on mapping air temperatures across the local area during summer. The evidence from the readings will help identify microclimates and where to concentrate the most appropriate heat adaptation actions including mobile cooling hubs. It will also help determine what is working already and inform the development of more cooling strategies to help communities, including those experiencing homelessness, to mitigate the worst impacts of rising temperatures.

All this work is underpinned by the City of Sydney's resilience strategy,<sup>4</sup> which sets out key directions to adapt and respond including:

- *An equitable, inclusive and connected community* – collaborate with partners and community to increase equity and create connected communities that are more resilient to shocks and stresses.
- *A climate resilient city* – adapt to a changing climate by understanding risks and creating equitable solutions.
- *A prepared community* – work with communities and government to prepare organisations, services and people to respond to and recover from shock events.

Extreme weather events are not going away. Our resilience strategy best captures how the City of Sydney can support people



experiencing homelessness from extreme weather events.

The way forward relies on partnerships between government, business and community organisations, and investments in physical infrastructure and social systems.

Only by working together will we create a city that is prepared to adapt, for the future challenges we will all face.

#### Endnotes

1. 2024 NSW Street Count Technical Paper. [https://www.facs.nsw.gov.au/\\_\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0003/856614/2024-nsw-street-count-technical-paper.pdf](https://www.facs.nsw.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0003/856614/2024-nsw-street-count-technical-paper.pdf)
2. <http://www.bom.gov.au/climate/current/annual/aus/2023/#:~:text=2023%20was%20Australia's%20equal%20Deighth,above%20the%201961%E2%80%931990%20average>
3. <https://www.csiro.au/en/news/all/news/2024/january/expert-commentary-2023-warmest-year-on-record>
4. <https://www.cityofsydney.nsw.gov.au/strategies-action-plans/resilience-strategy>

# The Community's Experience Guiding Council's Action on Homelessness

Mark Joseph, Inclusive City Program Leader, Connected City Division, City of Hobart

As the closest level of government to the community, the City of Hobart has long engaged with the local community, the housing and homelessness sectors, and all levels of government, towards making a difference and having a positive impact on the issue of homelessness.

Rising housing and rental costs, short supply of social and affordable housing, and rental availability continues to be at the root of the nationwide housing and homelessness crisis. There continues to be a strong expectation from those in the community, that local government has the levers and the power to fix homelessness.

The role and capacity of local government to impact on homelessness is limited, particularly in smaller sized councils. The Council's ability to

respond is impacted by global financial and political influences, state approved planning schemes, local bylaws, diminishing resources for social support services, as well as no single level of government having full responsibility for the complexity of issues that result in someone becoming homeless.

A multifaceted issue such as homelessness cannot be addressed through one simple response and requires a range of actions to meet the multiple challenges presented by homelessness. The City of Hobart, guided by the Affordable Housing and Homeless Commitment, has delivered the following key actions.

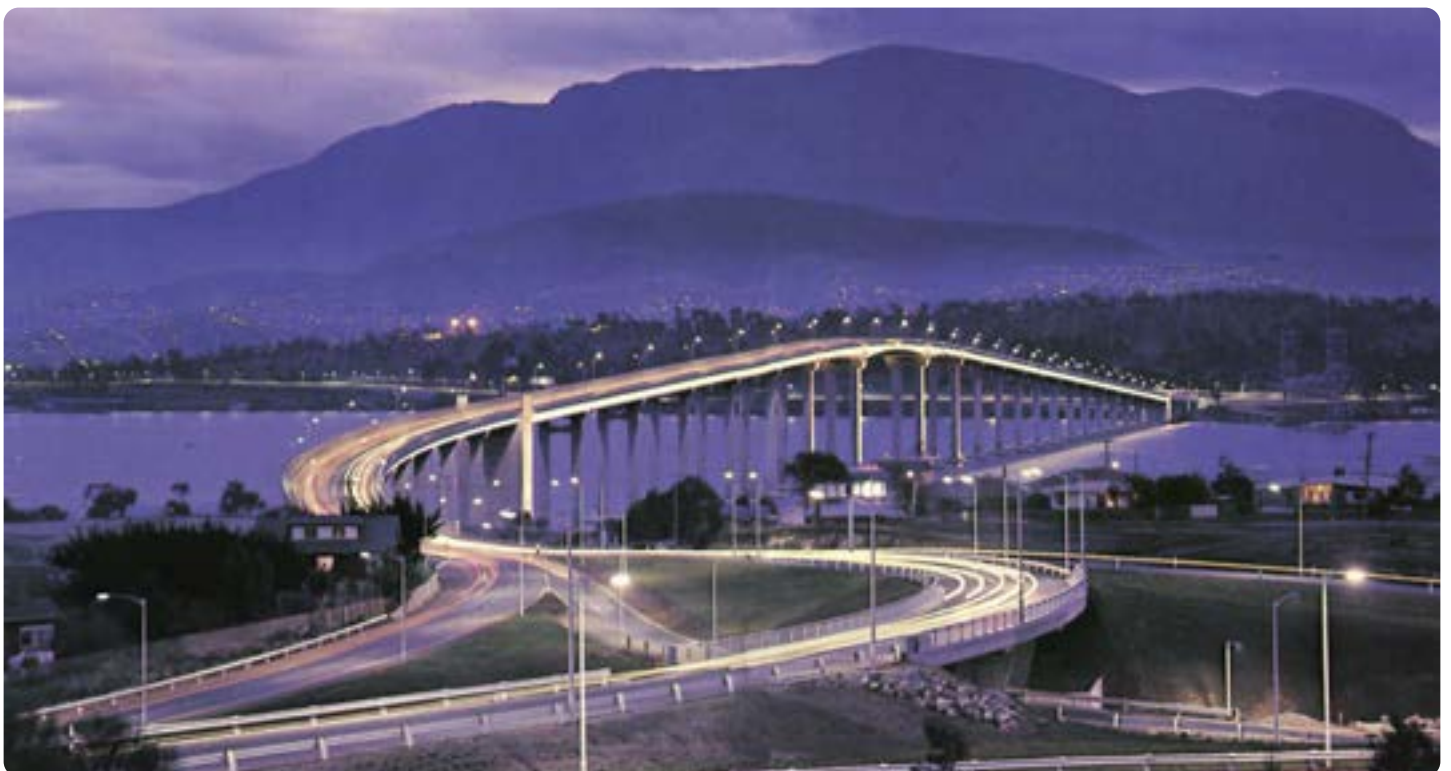
**Housing with Dignity Reference Group:** Since 2019 the City of Hobart has coordinated a lived experience community reference group where diverse members provide advice, review strategic direction, and help to

deliver projects that are focussed on people experiencing homelessness.

In a few short years, the group has initiated the following projects that have had tangible results for people experiencing homelessness, as well as raising the awareness of the broader community of the complexity of issues impacting homelessness.

**Hobart Helps Card:** An online and pocket resource connecting people in need with emergency accommodation, food and health relief and support options within Hobart that is regularly updated.

**Health with Dignity:** Coordinated with a local General Practitioner and The Salvation Army, and initially co-funded by the City of Hobart and the Hobart Airport Staff Fund, this project provides three free GP visits for community members in extreme need.





**Street to Stage:** Reinforcing the power of creativity to connect us all, this live performance project offers a safe and supportive concert experience for people with a lived experience of homelessness. The project aims to build confidence and contacts within the local music industry, offers a professional recording session, whilst also raising funds for Health with Dignity.

**I am Somebody:** An audiovisual project, that is now in its fourth year, gives a name and a face to people's experience of homelessness. It explores the different causes and impacts of homelessness, and how connection and support help people to navigate their way through this experience.

In the words of Kate Kelly, a founding member of the City's Housing with Dignity Reference Group and one of the key drivers of the project, I am Somebody *'...restores the core issue of dignity and autonomy to the discussion and subjects, and quantifies the damage done when we rob people of it through portrayals that are paternalistic, disconnected, or diminish the subjects of homelessness to objects of it.'*<sup>1</sup>

As well as the actions delivered with the Housing with Dignity Reference Group, the City of Hobart undertakes the following actions to address homelessness.

### **Supporting Specialist Homelessness**

**Services:** Support for the local sector has included funding the purchase and installation of lockers, telephone charging stations in key council and community facilities, metro cards and emergency backpacks.

**Venue Provision:** The City provides a Central Business District venue free of charge (out of hours) to grass roots community groups and local charities that provide weekly food, clothing and other emergency supplies and support.

**Greater Hobart Homelessness Alliance (GHHA):** The GHHA brings specialist homelessness services, other councils, and state government together to identify greater Hobart homelessness issues. The Alliance has undertaken successful advocacy that included support for the



establishment and ongoing funding for the Safe Space emergency accommodation shelter within Hobart.

### **Council of Capital City Lord Mayors:**

Staff are actively involved in the CCCLM Housing and Homelessness Working Groups. The City uses this platform to advocate collectively to the Federal Government for funding and recognition of the role of local government in homelessness support.

### **Short Stay Accommodation**

**Differential Rate:** In 2024 the City of Hobart adopted a differential general rate for properties used as short stay visitor accommodation. The differential rate, which is twice the general rate for residential properties with the Hobart Local Government Area, aims to retain rental stock and ensure an equitable contribution

to Council services from owners of residential land used for commercial short stay visitor accommodation.

A genuine and collaborative approach between all levels of government, key stakeholders and the community is required if we are to see better outcomes for the whole community.

The City of Hobart will continue to work in collaboration with our community and stakeholders to address the complexity of homelessness, to reduce and hopefully eliminate the impacts of homelessness on our families, friends, and neighbours.

### **Endnote**

1. Kelly K 2020, *I Am Somebody: 'The Beginnings of the Project'*, City of Hobart, <https://www.hobartcity.com.au/Community/Action-on-homelessness/I-Am-Somebody>

# The City of Adelaide Homelessness Strategy

Sarah Cleggett, Senior Social Planner, Social Planning and Reconciliation, the City of Adelaide

The City of Adelaide has a long history of working with government and non-government organisations to support people experiencing or at risk of homelessness. Here we provide a summary of the key aspects of our homelessness response, underpinned by our Homelessness Strategy,<sup>1</sup> endorsed by Council in February 2024.

Both the City of Adelaide's Homelessness Strategy<sup>2</sup> and Housing Strategy<sup>3</sup> include strategies for addressing housing supply and homelessness through a housing first, early intervention and community development approach.

A new commitment from our Homelessness Strategy is to implement a social work in libraries service, based on the evidence<sup>4</sup> of the value of this approach. The library social work service goals include:

- support patrons with multiple and complex needs
- support library staff in their place of work
- create safe library spaces
- enable collaboration across the City of Adelaide.

Outside libraries, the City of Adelaide supports people experiencing homelessness or at risk of homelessness through the activities of multiple teams and programs including:

- *Social Planning and Reconciliation* is the team responsible for leading homelessness policy and program development.

This team works with the State Government which contributes capacity through the Homeless and Vulnerable People Project (0.4 FTE). The Social Planning and Reconciliation and Community Safety teams provide referrals and linkages of people sleeping rough in the city and the Adelaide Park Lands, and work to build relationships between stakeholders including residents, businesses and service providers with the aim to achieve a more cohesive community response to homelessness.

- *Community Safety Officers* ensure the use of public space, including the Adelaide Park Lands, are safe and that public facilities are accessible for the whole community. This can involve education and enforcement of by-laws, which may at times require officers to issue cease-camping notices in the Adelaide Park Lands and connect people to the State Government's Street Connect<sup>5</sup> program — an outreach service that connects people to services. The Regulatory, Cleansing and Community Connections teams also provide support to Community Safety Officers when required.
- *Place Coordinators* provide a conduit to businesses and community members. Through the Social Planning and Reconciliation team, they also provide education on how they can support people experiencing homelessness or at risk of homelessness through connecting people to existing outreach services, the Department for Human Services, and SA Police.

- *Advocacy and broader stakeholder engagement* is conducted by the City of Adelaide across key government and non-government agencies on behalf of people experiencing homelessness or at risk of homelessness on, specific areas of concern in the community, and supports the development of innovative responses to homelessness.
- *Community Centres and Libraries* provide welcoming spaces. These community facilities provide public computers, Wi-Fi, borrowing services, a place to rest/chat and information about emergency assistance and accommodation. A range of programs provide community connections and mental health information and support. These community facilities are important during inclement weather.
- *Code Red and Blue support* — Code Red and Blue is the term used by the State Government to enact heightened service responses in extreme weather events to support and care for those experiencing homelessness. When the State Government declares a Code Red or Blue, Council Administration communicates this to external networks. The City of Adelaide is exploring the current codes to ensure they can capture the changes in extreme weather resulting from climate change.
- *Resource development* — Council designs and prints 'A quick guide to homelessness services in the city'<sup>6</sup> which lists services





available in the city and is made available at key locations such as libraries, community centres and city services.

While the City of Adelaide is not responsible for direct specialist homelessness support, we do have financial levers available to support organisations:

- *Rate rebates* — Ratepayers can apply for a reduced rate if they directly support homelessness.

- *Community Impact Grants* — Grants are awarded to a range of community partners including those who support prevention of homelessness and those supporting people experiencing or at risk of experiencing homelessness.

#### Vanguard City

In November 2017, the City of Adelaide signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the Institute of Global Homelessness (IGH)<sup>7</sup>

to become a Vanguard City. As one of 13 Vanguard Cities, the Premier of South Australia, Minister for Human Services, The Lord Mayor of the City of Adelaide and the Australian Alliance to End Homelessness (AAEH) are committed to working in partnership with the Institute for Global Homelessness and willing partners to build sector capacity, collaboration and exchange of ideas to achieve rare, brief and non-recurring homelessness state-wide by 2025.

## Adelaide Zero Project — Strategic Partnership

The City of Adelaide has been a major partner of the Adelaide Zero Project<sup>8</sup> since 2018. This originated through the City of Adelaide's former partnership with the Don Dunstan Foundation. The South Australian Alliance to End Homelessness is the backbone team for the Adelaide Zero Project partnership.

Council approved a partnership agreement with the Australian Alliance to End Homelessness to enable the City of Adelaide to provide a primary coordination role for the Adelaide Zero Project. Through this partnership, the State Government has matched City of Adelaide funding since 2018. In addition, the State Government supports a 0.4 FTE as the data lead and aims to contribute 20 properties per month through the Integrated Homelessness Program (funded under the National Housing and Homelessness Agreement).

The Adelaide Zero Partnership supports the Toward Zero methodology to reach Functional Zero — *'A community reaches Functional Zero when the average capacity of its housing system is greater than the existing need'*.

Adelaide Zero Project implements the Toward Zero methodology through:

- Tracking levels of homelessness through regular updates on key metrics, operational data, outcomes, challenges and opportunities of the project.
- Identifying existing, future and potential partners in the Adelaide Zero Project, including the role and reporting requirements required by the South Australian Housing Authority.
- Using the data generated by the Adelaide Zero Project from the 'By Name' list to understand the drivers of movement of people experiencing homelessness from the regions into the city.

- Advocacy for the prevention of homelessness broadly and to the Toward Home Alliance and the State and Federal Government to inform system advocacy to bring in partners to stem the inflow into homelessness.

The Adelaide Zero Project provides a comprehensive data dashboard providing month to month information on the numbers of people experiencing homelessness in the City of Adelaide.

The Adelaide Zero Project uses a 'By-Name' list to understand homelessness and uses three categories to understand people experiencing homelessness.

These categories are:

- inactive — not currently engaged with services
- not homeless — known to be housed
- actively homeless — currently known to services to be homeless.

## SA Homelessness Alliances

In 2021, the South Australian Housing Authority established five alliances to service the complex and evolving needs of people experiencing or at risk of homelessness across South Australia. These include four regional homelessness alliances and one state-wide domestic and family violence alliance.

The alliance approach involves multiple non-government partners coming together to develop integrated service networks, with supporting behaviours and practices. The alliance approach transformed a fragmented system with many program-based contracts to alliance-based contracts comprised of providers working together in a formal and structured way, both at a system and geographical level. The Adelaide South Alliance covers the City of Adelaide, with five organisations operating as part of this funded alliance. These organisations are Lutheran Care as the lead, Baptist Care SA, Mission Australia, The Salvation Army and Sonder Care.

## Specialist Homelessness Services

There are specialist homelessness services in the City of Adelaide which are not funded through the SA Homelessness Alliance. The City of Adelaide collaborates with all service providers to support outcomes in the city including through Community Impacts Grants. Examples of these collaborations include:

### Catherine House — Strategic Partnership

*Build Your Tribe:* Support women to build, maintain, and strengthen a safe community network (their 'tribe') to reduce social isolation and loneliness.

### Adelaide Day Centre — Community Impact Grants

*Connected Communities and Local Linkages:* Connect individuals with social programs or activities within their local area to help them overcome their isolation. Offer an inclusive, holistic program of homelessness and welfare support.

### Baptist Care SA — Community Impact Grant

*Gym for People Experiencing Homelessness:* Post-Covid relaunch of gym and group fitness activities for visitors to Baptist Care site who are experiencing, or at risk of, homelessness. The project partnered with Pushing Performance and the University of South Australia.

## Endnotes

1. City of Adelaide, *Homelessness Services and Support for Vulnerable People*, <https://www.cityofadelaide.com.au/community/homelessness-support/>
2. Ibid.
3. City of Adelaide 2024, *Investing in our Housing Future Housing Strategy*, <https://d31atr86jnqrq2.cloudfront.net/docs/housing-strategy-investing-in-our-housing-future.pdf>
4. Mitchell L 2019, *Everybody's Business: What local Government Can Do to End Homelessness*, Winston Churchill Trust, <https://www.churchilltrust.com.au/fellow/leanne-mitchell-vic-2019/>
5. Government of South Australia, *Street Connect*, <https://www.streetconnect.sa.gov.au/home/launch>
6. City of Adelaide, *A Quick Guide to Homelessness Services in the City*, <https://d31atr86jnqrq2.cloudfront.net/docs/quick-guide-to-homelessness.pdf>
7. Ruff Institute of Global Homelessness, <https://ighomelessness.org/>
8. Don Dunstan Foundation, *Adelaide Zero Project*, <https://www.dunstan.org.au/adelaide-zero-project/>



# Local Councils' New Tool to Help Tackle Homelessness in Communities

Associate Professor Selina Tually, Deputy Director, Centre for Social Impact, Flinders University

As the housing and homelessness crisis deepens across Australia's suburbs, local councils are increasingly relied upon to provide services and support to those who need it most.

To respond to this growing challenge, Flinders University's Centre for Social Impact — with support of LGA South Australia, councils, the South Australian Alliance to End Homelessness and other stakeholders advancing efforts to end homelessness — has developed a new toolkit to help local governments in their efforts to tackle homelessness within their communities.

The *Ending homelessness: a toolkit for local government* is an evidence-based resource offering guidance for regional and metropolitan councils.

It outlines an approach to address homelessness, including responding to disaster-related homelessness, culturally safe practices, and ideas on how local government can play a proactive role in ending homelessness.

The toolkit comprises nine fact sheets, each with a different focus designed to assist councils with their thinking, actions and advocacy as they navigate this complex issue in their communities.

Fact sheets focus on topics including understanding homelessness, what it means to end homelessness, how councils can partner with other stakeholders for collective impact, the role councils can take in tackling

homelessness, and ideas councils can consider or implement to assist in preventing homelessness in their communities.

A key benefit of the toolkit is the inclusion of real-world case studies, from both national and international contexts.

Such examples demonstrate how local governments can successfully implement initiatives to reduce homelessness and provide a roadmap for other councils to replicate.

Highlighting the experiences of City of Adelaide, Port Adelaide Enfield, City of Fremantle and City of Manchester, the toolkit illustrates the diverse strategies being employed at a local level.





Associate Professor Selina Tually, Deputy Director of Centre for Social Impact Flinders, said rising financial stress and lack of affordable housing had driven levels of homelessness to new heights across Australia.

She said the toolkit was created to help guide councils' response to homelessness challenges in their areas, given they are the closest level of government to communities.

*'The significant scale of Australia's current housing crisis means councils are seeing more people experiencing or at risk of homelessness — often in areas where this was not seen before,' Associate Professor Tually said.*

*'While you may see some people sleeping rough, others aren't as visible — they hide themselves away, out of sight.*

*'Most people experiencing homelessness in Australia are invisible to some extent, but they are there and need support.*

*'The fact sheets that comprise the new local government toolkit synthesise what we know from the ever-evolving academic and practice evidence about homelessness and how we can end it.'*

On any given night, 122,494 people in Australia are experiencing homelessness.

One in seven people experiencing homelessness are children aged under 12, and 23 per cent of people experiencing homelessness —

almost one in four — are children and young people between 12 and 24.

With more adults and children sleeping rough or in their cars or couch surfing than ever before, homelessness services are often overstretched and are reporting increased numbers of people seeking assistance being turned away due to lack of capacity.

Individually, and collectively alongside State Government and other support agencies, local councils have a key role to play in ending homelessness within their communities.

Councils have a deep understanding of their community's needs, they can advocate across multiple levels of government, and they have input into creating and maintaining the right enabling environment for efforts to end homelessness through regulation and driving local economic development.

LGA South Australia CEO Clinton Jury said the toolkit was a valuable new resource for councils seeking more information and ideas on tackling homelessness in their suburbs and regions.

*'Having safe, stable and appropriate housing is the foundation for good physical and mental health, employment, education and family, but the research tells us more and more people no longer have the means to afford a home due to the current crisis,' Mr Jury said.*

*'Of all the levels of government, local councils are closest to the communities they serve and have a deep understanding of the needs of their community.*

*'Councils have limited funding and don't have a legislative mandate to address homelessness, but they recognise the devastating community need and growing visibility of homelessness and are responding.*

*'Equipping councils with information and resources in this toolkit can help ensure they are well-positioned to advocate for support and policy-making based on local priorities and needs.*

*'This builds even stronger communities and enables councils to join alongside other levels of government to tackle homelessness from multiple angles.'*

CEO of the Australian Alliance to End Homelessness David Pearson reflected that the role everyone has to play to address homelessness.

*'Homelessness is a solvable problem. This has been proven by local communities around the world, but there is no one program, policy, building, agency, organisation or level of government that can solve it on their own,' Mr Pearson said.*

*'It takes everyone in local communities working together to do that.'*

*Ending homelessness: a toolkit for local government* was officially launched in Adelaide earlier this month following National Homelessness Week and to coincide with the Lord Mayor of Adelaide's Homelessness Roundtable.

It has been designed with both regional and metropolitan councils in mind and can be used by councils right across Australia.

The toolkit is available to all councils across Australia and can be accessed by visiting: [www.lga.sa.gov.au/homelessness-toolkit](http://www.lga.sa.gov.au/homelessness-toolkit)

For further information about the toolkit, please contact Associate Professor Selina Tually, Deputy Director, Centre for Social Impact Flinders: [selina.tually@flinders.edu.au](mailto:selina.tually@flinders.edu.au)



# The Long Road Home: Can Local Government Play a Role in Enabling Housing and Homelessness Solutions?

Glenn Menner, Coordinator, Social Policy and Research, Brimbank City Council

This edition of *Parity* is timely in more ways than one.

1. We have a full-blown housing crisis across Australia.
2. Housing supply shortages are unlikely to be resolved in the short term.
3. There is a recognition that local governments have a role to play in housing (but not necessarily in homelessness).

Some of the insights I have gathered over almost 30 years working in both community and local government sectors as a social planner may be useful in seeing where local government can best add value within the limits of its ability to intervene.

Way back (in 1996 to be precise), I graduated as a town planner from RMIT but intentionally decided to pursue a different career path. At the time I was working in housing policy at Victorian Council of Social Services (VCOSS) and then took up differing roles at two regional housing councils in Victoria. These entities at the time were responsible for needs-based research, policy and sector development.

During the 1990s, economic rationalist ideology was in vogue and Australian governments were willing participants. We saw a shift away from publicly funded and managed social housing (that is, public housing) to community-managed housing provision, albeit from a low base. More broadly, however, government policy was primarily focused on generating market driven solutions to housing through fiscal policy and the taxation system.

This was the era of the former *Commonwealth State Housing Agreement (CSHA)*<sup>1</sup> — this had been in place since 1945 as the primary mechanism for government regulation, funding and management of social housing. Alongside the CSHA, the former *Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP)*<sup>2</sup> provided funding to not for profit agencies to deliver services and programs aimed at assisting people at risk of homelessness.

Neither program really saw local government as an active player, other than through short term initiatives such as the former Local Government Community Housing Program, whereby councils would lease or hand over land or assets to community housing providers to leverage funding to build and manage community housing.

Fast forward to 2024 —  
*what has changed since then?*

We have had many 'housing crises' over this period, most notably in terms of the failure to uphold the right to housing under the *UN International*

*Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights*,<sup>3</sup> to which the Australian government is a signatory.

We have a situation where access to private market housing that is affordable and suitable to the needs of a range of households is virtually unobtainable in all of Australia's capital cities and major regional centres.

We have a social housing sector that has radically changed over the decades to focus increasingly on community housing providers as the preferred mode of delivery, even though state housing authorities who manage public housing are still the biggest landlord overall.

State housing authorities are now focused on urban renewal of existing public housing assets to increase yield through leveraging private sector investment and creating mixed tenure (public/community/private) communities.

We now have a commitment from federal and state/territory governments to substantially increase funding to address chronic housing





supply shortages. This is, however, on the back of decades of government under-investment in both housing and homelessness programs and largely leaving it to the market to address supply issues. There is still a substantial shortfall in the level of government investment required to address housing need across Australia.<sup>4</sup>

Most of all, the level and extent of homelessness has shifted from people living on the margins to encompass wider social groups who in the past have been able to access private market housing.

So where does local government fit into the picture? Broadly, there is no clear mandated role, given the wide variation in scale and size of councils and the populations they serve. However, there are some broadly common functions of local governments,<sup>5</sup> principally in the area of land use planning, infrastructure planning and provision (physical and community), and levying of rates.

While typically governments have a fairly narrow view of council's role to increase the supply of social and affordable housing beyond its planning function, I argue that with government support it can be expanded through the following:

- identification of local housing needs and suitable sites
- enabling mandatory planning contributions through inclusionary zoning
- treating housing as essential infrastructure and by extension the requirement for developer contributions or levies.

However, a 'supply side' focus is not, in itself, going to provide an effective response to homelessness.

We know that the causes and manifestations of homelessness are complex and often arise from family violence, poor mental and physical health, alcohol and other drug use and social exclusion. These are expressed at a local level, both in public spaces and in 'third spaces' such as libraries, neighbourhood houses and community centres.

Local governments are increasingly becoming first responders to people who are rough sleeping or at risk, but lack the skills, resources or mandate to effectively intervene.

While other articles in this edition of *Parity* will explore in more detail what is needed to support local government to undertake 'demand side' responses, councils have a unique local perspective in terms of collaboration and partnerships with housing and homelessness support and health and community service providers, as well as being an important provider of life-stage services and community facilities.

I see local government's ability to work both upstream (prevention) as well as downstream (early intervention) as critical to creating pathways to achieving a housing outcome. This can only be effective if there is a formal commitment from federal and state/territory governments to both fund and enable local governments to leverage their existing roles, functions and relationships.

The long mooted *National Housing and Homelessness Plan* presents an opportunity for this to happen.

In other words, a strategic approach involving all tiers of government to support locally based interventions that both facilitate increased supply whilst preventing homelessness and enabling early intervention.

My 30-year widescreen view of the state of housing is now at the point where, more than ever, a change in approach is needed which is both responsive and adaptable to local needs and priorities. More social and affordable housing is part of the solution but so are assertive outreach programs that connect people to the supports that they need which can ultimately lead to a successful housing outcome.

Local government has to have more than just a seat at the table for meaningful change to occur and ultimately play their part in upholding the right for all people to housing, by enabling locally based responses to the latest housing crisis our country is facing.

Disclaimer: This article represents the personal views and observations of the author and should not be seen as an official position of Brimbank City Council.

I acknowledge and recognise the Kulin Nation including the Wurundjeri, Bunurong and Boon Wurrung Peoples as the Traditional Owners of the land in the City of Brimbank, and pay respect to Elders past, present and future. For the Traditional Owners, the lands in the City of Brimbank have always been a significant trading and meeting place.

## Endnotes

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# Empowering Change: Fremantle's Holistic Strategy for Homelessness and Community Support

Evie Devitt-Rix, Community Development Officer, City of Fremantle

The City of Fremantle is a welcoming and compassionate place to live and visit. Fremantle is home to a number of services, including St Patrick's Community Support Centre (St Pat's), which provides support and housing for people facing homelessness in south metropolitan Perth. Due to these factors, Fremantle accommodates a high number of people experiencing homelessness, with early 2024 By-Name List data showing approximately 250 people experiencing homelessness in the area, including 110 rough sleeping.<sup>1</sup>

Given that Western Australia is experiencing affordable housing shortages, this situation is likely to remain for some time. Anglicare's *2024 Rental Affordability Snapshot* for Australia found that in WA 17 rentals (1 per cent) were affordable for a person earning a full-time minimum wage, and 0 per cent of rentals were affordable for a person on Jobseeker benefits.<sup>2</sup>

The City has a number of initiatives which aim to assist people experiencing homelessness and disadvantage and align with *All Paths Lead to a Home – Western Australia's 10-Year Strategy on Homelessness*. The Strategy encourages Local Governments to provide the community with information on services and supports, ensure Rangers and front-line staff are informed and supported to interact with people experiencing homelessness, and coordinate and work with volunteer and charity groups.<sup>3</sup>

## Library Connect

The Library Connect program is a partnership between the City of Fremantle and St Pat's. The project commenced in late 2020, providing support to the community during a time that COVID-19 restrictions

were impacting Australia socially and economically. Although travel and other restrictions were preventing COVID from spreading in the community at that time, Fremantle residents were more impacted by the restrictions due to the higher proportion of lone person households, lower median household weekly income and impact on the Fremantle industries such as tourism, arts and higher education.<sup>4</sup> This program is the first of its kind in Western Australia, and demonstrates Local Government's ability to not only support State Government strategy, but to also partner in innovative solutions.

Library Connect involves a St Pat's support worker based at the Fremantle library four days per week, who engages and connects with people in a safe and welcoming environment, providing free advice, referrals and support in a welcoming and non-confrontational environment.<sup>5</sup>

The University of Notre Dame Institute for Health Research conducted an evaluation of the Library Connect program after the first two years. At that time 68 per cent of the clients supported were women. This number has changed over the last two years with men making up 53 per cent of those seeking support 2022-23 and in 2023-24 women in a slight majority of 55 per cent. Numbers of clients with culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds have also fluctuated, making up 25 per cent of all clients in 2020-2022, and 18 per cent in 2023-24. Aboriginal people are using the service more frequently, with 30 per cent of all clients in the last year, up from 18 per cent across 2020-2023.<sup>6</sup>

The Library Connect clients are strongly affected by the escalating

cost of living and housing crises. People presenting with financial difficulties made up 52 per cent of contacts in October-December 2020, rising to 97 per cent of contacts by April-June 2022. This continues in 2023-2024 with 96 per cent of client engagements related to financial hardship and housing crisis. Additionally, 62 per cent of people visiting the Library Connect have a lack of social connection or family support. The Library Connect worker links these clients with affordable community activities.

People attending Library Connect due to Family and Domestic Violence have also increased, from 16 per cent in 2022 to 29 per cent in 2024. This reflects the increase in Family Assault and Threatening behaviour offences reported to police, which has increased by 41 per cent across WA over the last five years.<sup>6</sup>

One of the aims of Library Connect has been to engage with people requiring support who might not have previously needed support from community services. As part of the 2020-2022 review, St Pat's compared those who had sought support at Library Connect against the Emergency Relief database for the region. For two thirds of this client group, this was the first time they had engaged with community support services in the local area.<sup>7</sup>



This highlights how crucial services like Library Connect are, offering vital early intervention and preventing further difficulties for individuals who are not connected to other services.

### Mental Health Outreach Project

In 2021, the Department of Communities opened the Local Government Partnership Fund for Homelessness. The grant program aims to enable place-based responses to homelessness, create

opportunities for collaborations between Local Governments and the community sector, and encourage innovative initiatives that support implementation of the State Strategy.<sup>8</sup>

The City was successful in an application for this grant, based on proposal for a Mental Health Outreach Worker for the local area. The application outlined the difficulties of navigating the

housing system for people with mental health conditions and recommended that successful outcomes are more likely if there is an established outreach role.

The City hosted a co-design workshop for key staff and stakeholders to develop the outreach role. Workshop participants recommended that clinical qualifications are desirable to providing this service. Follow-up interviews suggested that Nurse Practitioner qualifications would be ideal, as they would be able to administer Depot injections, prescribe medication and hold individuals under the *Mental Health Act 2014*.

The City put out a request for quotation inviting organisations to apply to host a clinical position and Homeless Healthcare were successful in receiving the contract to engage a Mental Health outreach service.

Homeless Healthcare has an existing outreach service in Fremantle, operating within the CBD and surrounds since 2019. This team comprises a Registered Nurse and Level 6 caseworker who provide medical care at known hotspots in the CBD and around South Beach every Tuesday.

To complement this schedule, the Mental Health Outreach team works across the CBD on Monday and Wednesday. The team started with both a Nurse Practitioner and Mental Health Nurse working each outreach shift. From January, the team changed and there is currently a Nurse Practitioner on Monday and Mental Health Nurse on Wednesday, accompanied by a case worker on both days. The case workers are familiar with the Fremantle community and the housing system, working well with the clinical practitioners to provide an optimal service to clients.

This service has operated within Fremantle for 12 months, and during this time have had over 300 engagements with more than one hundred individuals. As part of the program, the team liaise with local services including





Police, the Library Connect Worker, City of Fremantle Community Safety team, St Pats Day Centre nurses, clinic and outreach team to ensure the best outcomes for people experiencing homelessness and mental health conditions.

To respond to the necessity to provide mental health assessments in a private space, the Mental Health Outreach team set up a drop-in clinic in the City's Walyalup Civic Centre which runs each Monday between 9am and 1pm. The clinic's clientele has been slow to build over the early months of the year but recently has increased rapidly as clients have become more familiar with the team.

### Community Support Map

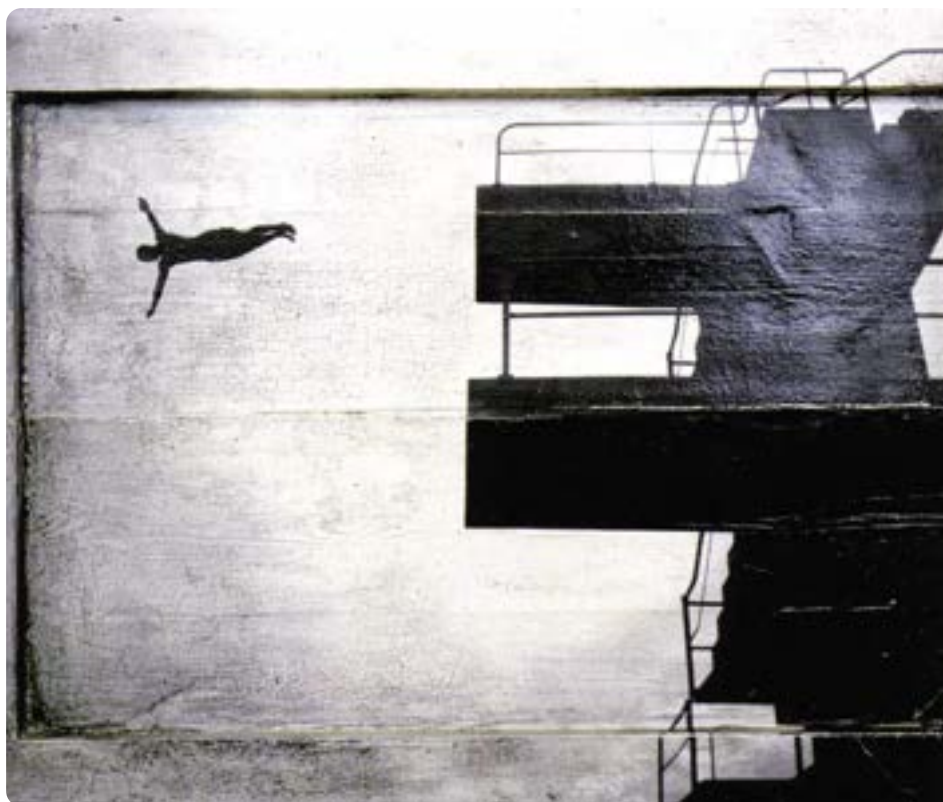
In 2021, in conjunction with the Partnership Fund application, the City also developed Homelessness Action Plan document to address homelessness. The Plan addresses three key focus areas — Accessible Information, Support and Assist and Advocate.

One of the actions for accessible information was the development of a Community Support map, which assists people experiencing homelessness or hardship to find out about local services that could assist them. The map includes the listing and accessible location of services in the Fremantle CBD including health and dental services, meals, showers, laundry, financial counselling and emergency relief. It is available in digital and hard-copy form and is updated regularly. The digital format is available here: <https://www.fremantle.wa.gov.au/supportmap>

Two thousand copies are printed and distributed in the Fremantle area each year through the City's facilities and service providers.

### Beach Street Services and shelter

The City has a history of hosting mobile charity services which provide people with medical support and meals as well as showers, laundry, books and blankets. The Freo Street Doctor has been operating since 2004 and currently attends the City four times per week at various locations.



The majority of charity services currently operate from the City's Beach Street Car Park. The City of Fremantle has a Voluntary Goodwill Service Providers policy to aid in the coordination of the location and times of services available within Fremantle. At the car park the Red Cross soup patrol operate every evening with one other food service on most evenings. Meals are also served on weekend mornings and Orange Sky Laundry attend on weekends and one evening per week.

This area catches the rain and wind from the west and the City are working with charity services to provide a shelter, storage container for tables and chairs and additional lighting in the area. Council approved funding for this project in mid-2024. The shelter design captures the surrounding port landscape and will create an attractive place to gather, and there is also the opportunity for the storage container to be decorated by the community. The shelter is expected to be fully installed by the second quarter of 2024.

The City of Fremantle continues to provide both direct services and support to other services as part of the Homelessness Action Plan. For more information on the City's work in homelessness please visit our website <https://www.fremantle.wa.gov.au/helping-end-homelessness-0>

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# From Little Things Big Things Grow: How a Council Building is Changing a Community

Leanne Mitchell, Leanne Mitchell Consulting\*

In Kings Meadows, Tasmania, a collaboration between the Launceston City Council and the local community has opened new opportunities to assist people experiencing homelessness.

At the heart of this success story is Rodney Spinks, a dedicated community leader whose journey working with the Council has led to remarkable benefits for local

people who are experiencing or at risk of homelessness.

Rodney, formerly the CEO of the Benevolent Society in Kings Meadows, took one suggestion to a Council-run community development program: to provide local people experiencing homelessness with access to a shower.

*'People hadn't associated homelessness with this area, and most of the services, including showers, were in town,' Rodney explained. 'We had homeless people coming to our service who were living locally with nowhere to shower or get something to eat.'*

This need for local services initiated a critical conversation with the Council. Rodney's search for a mobile shower service or an additional facility led him to Council's Community Connector, Sarah McCormack, who was initiating the ABCDE Learning Site program from the YMCA site in Kings Meadows.

Sarah introduced Rodney to the venue manager, and together, they launched a shower service at the YMCA, available from 12:30 to 2:30 pm, Monday to Friday. The Benevolent Society provided the towels which were washed by the YMCA, while the YMCA offered the location.

The service operated smoothly for about a month before the YMCA lost State Government funding and was forced to close down.

Recognising the importance of this initiative, Rodney leveraged his new connections and approached Launceston Council to keep the service alive. The Benevolent Society leased a spot in the council-owned building, hosting breakfast and showers.



Rodney Spinks



When the Benevolent Society indicated it could no longer support the program from late March 2023, Rodney continued his passion for this project.

The St Vincent de Paul Society (Vinnies) was recruiting for a new community development role and Rod brought ideal skills. After gaining employment with Vinnies he was able to provide key assistance in securing a new funder.

This new partnership ensured continuation of the service that was already being relied on by many in the community experiencing homelessness.

*'Council staff told me if we could get a new funder involved, they'd keep the building open — and we did. The service closed down for the Benevolent Society on Friday and reopened as a new part of the Vinnies' community program on Monday,' Rodney says.*

With Vinnies on board, the service has expanded to include breakfast, laundry, and showers five days a week, Monday to Friday.

The partnership between Vinnies and the Council, which owns the building, demonstrates how councils can implement placed-based responses to homelessness by listening to local needs and taking action.

That partnership is now growing further. Vinnies and the City of Launceston Council have developed a Memorandum of Understanding to maintain the location as a community hub in the long-term.

The Council's Community Development Team Leader, Linda Page, said the MoU would ensure the building remained a community hub for Kings Meadows into the future.

*'With Vinnies coming on board in partnership with the City of Launceston, it's heralding a new lease on life for this building,' Ms Page said.*

*'There could have been a danger that this building was shut, but instead there's a new energy in this place which is assisting those in our*

*community doing it tough, but also creating a new social hub for people from a variety of backgrounds.*

*'It's exciting to see and I'm optimistic about what the future holds for the building and the Kings Meadows community.'*

In the mornings, the site welcomes people experiencing or at risk of homelessness, offering a warm space, showers, meals and time to connect. As the service expands, it will serve as a connection point for older and younger people engaging in various planned activities.

*'We have people sleeping rough in tents, cars and vans. Women in their 70s are living with their cat in their car. They come here and become part of a community,' Rodney says.*

*'They get something to eat. Volunteers play cards and eight ball with them and have conversations. Outside of here, the conversations they experience are often derogatory, but here they can have normal conversations about normal things. They can come here and have a shower, do their washing and even get it dried.'*

While providing housing is a challenge due to long waiting lists, Rodney says the Council and its partners have succeeded in offering dignity and respect. *'You just have to come in here to see the difference it makes,' Rodney says.*

Rodney notes that the skills development extends to the program's dedicated volunteer base as well. *'I can definitely see growth in our Vinnies volunteers and their ability to interact with the people they serve,' he observes. 'I see people gaining confidence from doing something like this.'*

Through the Council, Rodney and Vinnies has also established a connection with the University of Tasmania, for its Youth Hub program and other future initiatives which will focus on food security and financial literacy for people who are housed but living on very low incomes.

*'The program will give people the skills to help themselves. It's not about a handout; it's a hand up,' he says.*

\* Leanne is currently working with the City of Launceston on an impact assessment of their ABCDE Learning Sites Program.



# The Role of Local Government in Responding to Homelessness

Nathan March, Acting Placemaking and Activation Leader, City of Port Adelaide Enfield

High house prices relative to income, record low rental availability and ongoing issues relating to rental affordability across all Local Government Areas (LGAs) in South Australia (SA) are driving an increase in overall homelessness. Historically in SA, the Adelaide CBD has seen the largest population of people experiencing street homelessness and, while that is still true, there are growing populations of people experiencing street homelessness in many LGAs, in the cities and regions. Regional and rural councils are particularly impacted by the lack of Government funded support services to assist in managing issues relating to homelessness, leaving councils to provide some of these critical services. This is contributing to greater pressure for councils to manage community expectation, public safety and amenity. Councils are also noting that community facilities such as libraries and community centres are increasingly being called on to support users with complex needs. This places a greater pressure on resourcing these services and additional support to a workforce that has not traditionally been required to provide such supports.

Funding for Homelessness Services are provided by the Commonwealth and State and Territory Governments under the National Housing and Homelessness Agreement (NHHA). The NHHA outlines Roles of Government and notes that:

*Local governments operate under State regulation and are not Parties to this Agreement. Local governments, and the Australian Capital Territory*

*and the Northern Territory Governments, are responsible for:*

- a) building approval processes;*
- b) local urban planning and development approval processes; and*
- c) rates and charges that influence housing affordability.*

This outline misses a key responsibility of councils to foster community wellbeing as articulated in the *South Australian Local Government Act 1999*, Section 6 — Principal role of a council.

*A council is, under the system of local government established by this Act, established to provide for the government and management of its area at the local level and, in particular:*

- a) to act as a representative, informed and responsible decision-maker in the interests of its community; and*
- b) to provide and co-ordinate various public services and facilities and to develop its community and resources in a socially just and ecologically sustainable manner; and*
- c) to encourage and develop initiatives within its community for improving the quality of life of the community; and*
- d) to represent the interests of its community to the wider community; and*

- e) to exercise, perform and discharge the powers, functions and duties of local government under this and other Acts in relation to the area for which it is constituted.*

There is no doubt that increasing rates of homelessness is having a deleterious impact on community wellbeing at the council level. As homelessness becomes more visible in the community, residents and businesses expect someone to do something and their first call is often to the local council. Although the remit to Local Government outlined in the Act is general in nature, community members still expect councils to respond to homelessness. Community expectations of councils responding to homelessness range from moving people on so that they are out of sight right through to providing transitional or permanent housing for people experiencing homelessness.

The people experiencing homelessness that have the most obvious impact on local communities are often not well served by the funded homelessness services. It is self-evident that people with co-morbidities including mental health needs, alcohol and other drugs use, extreme poverty, and other physical health needs, require a sophisticated service response that takes time to develop. While the homelessness service system attempts to put strategies in place for this cohort, they remain precariously sheltered in community spaces. There are many people experiencing chronic homelessness who have not engaged with service providers and who remain invisible to the service system, but not the community.



Both the Act and community expectations suggest that councils have a role to play in homelessness. What that role is, is a frequent topic of discussion for council administrations and elected councillors. How homelessness responses are funded is a large part of that discussion.

The cost to councils associated with homelessness includes staff resourcing across multiple sections: street regulatory teams, street clean up, social planning, customer services, community services, and libraries among others. Additional costs include storage of abandoned goods, rubbish disposal, and repairing street furniture. These costs are difficult to quantify as they comprise a component of many different budgets. As well as the impact on general budgets, some councils directly fund homelessness services and provide grants to community groups to deliver programs and activities to people who may be experiencing homelessness.

### Examples of South Australian Council Investment in Responses to Homelessness

The following are examples of homelessness responses provided by larger councils that have the budget capacity to allocate funds. Although there is some great work being done by councils to address the need, this is a discretionary expense and not core business.

If State and Federal Government believe that all councils should be doing the same with dedicated resources, there would need to be funding made available for this.

The City of Port Adelaide Enfield funds and employs a Homelessness Connections Officer to identify people experiencing street homelessness and refer to specialist services. The Officer also supports the service sector to identify gaps and develop new initiatives.

The City of Port Adelaide Enfield has run the Reconnect Program for young people experiencing homelessness for 20 years. This is funded by the Australian Government Department of Social Services.

The City of Salisbury funds and employs a full time Social Planner whose focus is on homelessness responses, connection and coordination with the homelessness sector, and developing policy and strategy responses to homelessness. The development of a homelessness strategy has been identified by the council as a critical action in its draft City Plan 2040. This strategy will be a key focus for the City of Salisbury over the next 12 months.

The City of Adelaide has had a long partnership with the State Government and receives a contribution of NHHA funding towards a project officer that has coordinated rough sleeping responses across the city and Park Lands. The City of Adelaide has also been a major partner of the Adelaide Zero Project to End Homelessness since inception and has been providing funding for this project for over six years.

### Social Workers in Council Community Spaces

Council run libraries and community centres are spaces where people can come to access free facilities, participate in free or low-cost programs and connect with people. These spaces are increasingly being called on to support users with complex needs through the provision of tailored resources, spaces and services and these can be valuable connection points for community members who may not be accessing the specialist services they need.

In response, a range of public libraries, including the City of Melbourne (VIC) and City of Fremantle (WA) have begun employing social workers to work within the library to advise and support staff, and support library patrons with complex needs, many experiencing or at risk of homelessness, through brief intervention, referral, and advocacy.

Recently, the City of Adelaide adopted a Homelessness Strategy that includes resourcing social workers in their libraries to provide services to vulnerable community members.

In 2024/25, the City of Salisbury will be piloting a social worker in libraries model in partnership with a non-government organisation partner to identify and support library users who may not be accessing other support services and help to refer people to appropriate services.

The City of Victor Harbor receives grant funding, outside of the NHHA, from Federal and State governments to provide early intervention services for children and families. This funding contributes to the employment of social workers and a Nunga Family worker. As a regional council, this supports the entire council workforce to respond to those who might present as homeless and particularly supports regulatory staff who deal with public complaints and safety. This is an incredibly valuable role that Council has led in partnership with government to provide a holistic approach where there are few choices for support services for vulnerable people in the community.

To recognise the growing impact of homelessness on local communities and increasing demands on the budgets of councils, the Local Government sector needs to be included as a stakeholder in homelessness discussions at all levels. Councils are well placed to understand what is happening in the local community. They are the level of Government closest to the people and have many touch points with vulnerable community members. To ensure better community outcomes and long-term sustainability for councils, the Commonwealth can include Local Government in discussions and provide more options for funding. Funding options need to recognise that council engages with people experiencing homelessness in a different way to the specialist homelessness sector. Funding for data collection, service coordination, wayfinding, and referral services will support place-based responses to homelessness by councils.

Increased State and Federal investment in housing is critical and urgent. Provision of transitional and supported accommodation would also support local communities in responding to homelessness.

# The Byron Shire Ending Rough Sleeping Collaboration: A Collective Impact Initiative

Anna Lockwood, Backbone Lead, Ending Rough Sleeping Collaboration Byron Shire Council

## Introduction

The Byron Shire has witnessed a growing number of people sleeping rough, increasing house prices and rents, as well as a lack of government funded temporary, transitional, and social housing. Despite limited resources and funding constraints, the Byron Shire Council has stepped into a non-traditional role, to work collaboratively with a range of individuals and organisations to address local homelessness. This article describes Byron Shire Council's role in a local Collective Impact Initiative, the 'Byron Shire Ending Rough Sleeping Collaboration'.

## How can people exit homelessness without housing pathways?

The Byron Shire has been in the grip of a housing crisis, accelerated by a wide range of factors, making it nearly impossible for individuals and families on very low, low, and moderate incomes to remain living in the area — leaving those who do stay, at risk of entering insecure housing or homelessness.

The Shelter New South Wales (NSW) *Regional Housing Need Report 2023* reveals that the Byron Shire had the second highest and most pronounced 'housing need' out of 96 Regional Local Government Areas (LGA) assessed.<sup>1</sup> Household loan repayments and housing rental payments are substantially higher in the Byron Shire than the remainder of regional NSW. 50.2 per cent of renters report being in rental stress, while mortgage stress impacts 20.3 per cent of the Shire, almost double the regional NSW average.<sup>2</sup>

Between 2018 and 2022, the Byron Shire LGA experienced a 76 per cent growth in land value.<sup>3</sup> The number of unoccupied homes also increased

from 2,057 in 2016 to 2,348 in 2021.<sup>4</sup> This means 15.4 per cent of overall housing stock is either vacant or used for short-term rental accommodation such as Airbnb, placing significant pressure on an already limited long-term rental market.

In addition, the Covid-19 Pandemic saw the migration of individuals and families from cities to the regions, like the Byron Shire in search of a 'sea'/tree-change'. The 2022 floods also had a devastating impact on the local community and its housing supply — 60 homes were destroyed or severely damaged and 2,000 properties were directly impacted across the Shire. Across the Northern Rivers moreover, 10,000 people were displaced from their homes.<sup>5</sup> In response, three Pod Villages were set up in Mullumbimby and Brunswick Heads with the NSW Government's Reconstruction Authority tasked with transitioning people into housing. And yet with no affordable housing pathways, people risk being exited back into homelessness.

There are just three temporary accommodation providers in the Byron Shire and no (State Government funded) dedicated refuge or safe housing for women and children escaping domestic and family violence. Out of the three options available, none accept males, despite men being a significant proportion of the rough sleeping population. Often people are offered Temporary Accommodation out of area, up to one hour away and without support. Inconsistent or non-existent public transport is another barrier. The sector rates the capacity of Byron Shire (Temporary Accommodation) supply to meet demand 1.2 out of five.<sup>6</sup>

There are anecdotal reports on how the inability of the system to meet people's housing needs, causes fatigue, damages rapport, and instils a lack of trust in services, preventing meaningful engagement.

Social housing is also scarce, constituting only 1.8 per cent (303 properties) of overall housing stock in the Byron Shire, compared with the national average (four per cent).<sup>7</sup> According to Everybody's Home, the estimated unmet social housing need for the Richmond Electorate, (covering the Byron Shire LGA) is 5,800.<sup>8</sup> As of January 2024, there were 39 people on the 'priority' waitlist and 169 people in total waiting for social housing in the 'Byron Bay Allocation Zone'. Expected wait times for 'General Applicants' is 10+ years.<sup>9</sup>

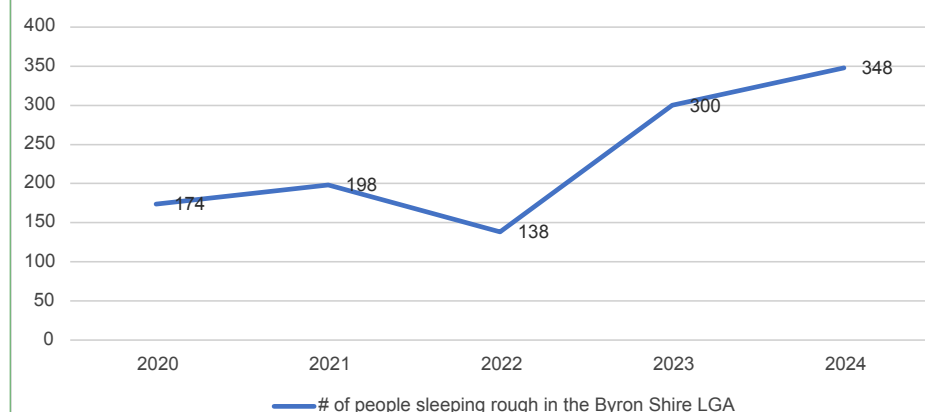
According to the NSW Government Department of Communities and Justice's (DCJ) *Annual Point in Time Street Count 2024*, the Byron Shire LGA recorded 348 people sleeping rough — the highest number recorded in the State, equalling 17 per cent of the entire NSW State Street Count Population.<sup>10</sup> The graph below, shows the increase in the number of people sleeping rough in the Byron Shire, since 2020.

This supplements the 2021 Census data, that recorded 250 people to be experiencing homelessness and 194 people who were marginally housed (for example, in overcrowded properties), equalling 445 people.<sup>11</sup>

This unfolding situation in the Byron Shire is occurring in various forms across many coastal and regional areas around Australia, resulting in coastlines, becoming enclaves for the wealthy. As a result, communities on low and even



# of people sleeping rough in the Byron Shire LGA according to DCJ's Point in Time Street Count



Number of people sleeping rough in the Byron Shire LGA according to DCJ's Point in Time Street Count

middle incomes are forced to live in other areas. These issues go beyond being just about social justice, to being about spatial justice.

### The Byron Shire Ending Rough Sleeping Collaboration (Project), a Collective Impact Initiative

Over the years, many individuals, community groups and organisations across the Byron Shire have been coming together in a range of forums to work on local solutions to the increasing housing stress, lack of social and affordable housing, and high numbers of people sleeping rough in the community. But in late 2020, following the sharp increase in homelessness, particularly rough sleeping, combined with calls from the community for the Council to do more, the Byron Shire Council began working with End Street Sleeping Collaboration (ESSC), Collaboration for Impact, the Australian Alliance to End Homelessness (AAEH), and 11 not-for-profit organisations and government departments. A Collective Impact Project was initiated, called the *Byron Shire Ending Rough Sleeping Collaboration*, part of the Advance to Zero movement of Australian communities seeking to end ending local homelessness.

'Collective Impact' is a collaborative approach to addressing complex social issues, whereby cross-sector and community leaders come together and strategically align the efforts of relevant groups to accomplish social impact at the population scale.<sup>12</sup>

The Advance to Zero methodology is a groundbreaking initiative of the AAEH that supports local collaborative efforts to end rough sleeping using a range of evidenced-based approaches from around the world.<sup>13</sup>

The shared aim of the *Byron Shire Ending Rough Sleeping Collaboration* (Project) is to end homelessness in the Byron Shire, starting with rough sleeping.

For each Collective Impact effort, a Backbone support infrastructure is needed. The key functions of the Backbone are to:

- guide vision and strategy
- support high leverage activities
- help with strategic learning
- cultivate inclusive community engagement
- advance policy as well as mobilise resources.<sup>14</sup>

Byron Shire Council adopts the backbone role for the Project, carrying out these functions and enabling the work of the Collaboration to move towards ending rough sleeping.

The Byron Shire Council has established a small team, made possible by matched funding from a philanthropic foundation. The Backbone Team sits within the Social and Cultural Planning Department and includes, a Manager, a Backbone Lead, a Rough Sleeping Project Officer, as well as a Data and

Learning Officer. A Lived Experience Consultant is also contracted to provide advice and help guide the work. Two Public Space Liaison Officers are also involved in the work. Crucial to the effectiveness of this Project is having dedicated support from both the Executive Team and Councillors.

Early wins of the Collaboration include initiating a Service Coordination Project, that operates monthly and is attended by 17 representatives from local organisations. A By-Name List has also been established in the area, with End Street Sleeping Collaboration hosting the backend infrastructure, and with 280 people active on this list.

The Collaboration's advocacy has resulted in funding for a Homeless Health Outreach Team, delivered by Northern NSW Local Health District (State Government). The Homeless Health Outreach Team operates from Tweed Shire to Byron Shire. The establishment of the Homeless Health Outreach Team has coincided with reduced acute mental health service usage via Emergency Department and inpatient Mental Health Units.<sup>15</sup>

In response to the Byron Shire having the highest number of people sleeping rough in the State (and based on the success of the Tweed Assertive Outreach model that has been operating since 2019), in March 2024 the NSW Government's Department of Communities and Justice invested in a 12-month Assertive Outreach Pilot Programme involving, Homes NSW, Momentum Collective and Social Futures. A nurse from a local practice, which is commissioned by Healthy North Coast Primary Health Network, will also join the team three days per week. The Council has provided office space for the Assertive Outreach Program me staff to be located.

Council's Backbone Team also facilitates an Internal Homelessness Working Group, involving all tiers of the organisation, to enable cross-directorate collaboration amongst staff to see how, regardless of their position, they can work within their sphere of influence to address homelessness. To support these aims, in September 2024 next month we are delivering homelessness training to internal staff, with both a presentation and activities.

We are currently working on formalising the Collaborative Governance Group with individuals and organisations who have been critical to the progression of the local work. This group involves members from Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations, Community Housing Providers, Specialist Homelessness Services, non-government community organisations, Neighbourhood and Community Centres, faith-based organisations and charities, Primary Health Network, NSW government departments, other local governments, peak bodies, philanthropic bodies, as well as others. This group will come together for the purpose of setting the strategic direction of the Collaboration (Project). It is our role (as the Backbone) to support the leadership of this group through enabling and resourcing it, including the development of its strategic documentation.

Alongside the Project, the Byron Shire Council has drafted a *Residential Housing Strategy 2041*<sup>16</sup> and *Implementation and Delivery Plan*, providing a vision and framework for how housing will be delivered across the LGA over the next 20 years. Even though Federal and State Governments are largely responsible for the funding and provision of social housing, this Strategy demonstrates how local government can increase affordable housing through amending local planning laws and by advocating to the State Planning Minister to amend NSW planning policies.

Two of the initiatives in this Strategy include the *Affordable Housing Contribution Scheme* and the regulation of short-term rental accommodation that are briefly outlined below.

The *Affordable Housing Contribution Scheme* enables the Byron Shire Council to collect contributions from developers where land has been upzoned. These contributions will be put toward affordable housing in the local area. Contributions will be determined by Council and may be in the form of a monetary contribution or land or dwellings within the development.

In January 2022, Statewide Planning Policy took effect for the Byron Shire which applied a 180-day limit on non-hosted short-term rental accommodation. In response, the Byron Shire Council put forward a proposal to the NSW Planning Minister to shorten the 180-day limit within the LGA. The NSW Planning Minister referred to the Independent Planning Commission, which who reviewed the proposed changes and put forward recommendations. The Review found that non-hosted short-term rental accommodation is contributing to the lack of affordable and available long-term rental housing in the Byron Shire. As a result, the cap on non-hosted short-term rental accommodation will be reduced from 180 to 60 days across the local government area, while some areas in and around Byron's town centre and Brunswick Heads will operate without a cap, allowing for non-hosted, short-term rental accommodation for the full year. The new 60-day non-hosted short-term rental accommodation provisions in the Byron Shire LGA will come into effect on 23rd September 2024.

## Conclusion

Local governments can respond to local needs and work collaboratively with individuals, organisations, and communities to address homelessness. High rates of homelessness and a lack of available affordable and social housing are key issues for the Byron Shire. In response, the Byron Shire Council has taken on the Backbone role, for a Collective Impact Initiative, the *Byron Shire Ending Rough Sleeping Collaboration* (Project), and is also working innovatively to increase affordable housing from a planning perspective. As housing and homelessness issues impact a larger and larger cross section of society, it is an opportune time to come together locally to dream up a different way of doing things, because the status quo is not working and no one individual or institution can solve homelessness on their own.

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# The Council *in* The Community

Bradley Lougheed, Coordinator Housing, Safety and Reconciliation, Community Building and Inclusion, City of Port Phillip

The City of Port Phillip takes a 'whole of council' and 'whole of community' response to homelessness, so responding to homelessness is built in across council areas. From our local laws and the specialised response of our and amenity officers specialised response, to our Port Phillip Zero Project, to our Homelessness Team providing case management, to people over 50 years who are homeless or at risk of homelessness, our response is integrated.

At Port Phillip we recognise housing as a human right and understand homelessness as a housing issue that can usually be solved with the right housing and support. Our work at council is underpinned by endorsement in our council plan and our municipal health and wellbeing plan which understands homelessness as being on the spectrum of social determinants of health. Also underpinning our work are our Council endorsed strategies — 'Think and Act', our homelessness strategy, and 'In Our Backyard', our affordable housing strategy. These two strategies have guided our work for the past 10 years and now we are at the stage where we are looking to develop a new strategy integrating affordable housing and homelessness into one strategy that recognises a continuum of housing and homelessness.

## Port Phillip Zero

In 2018, local agencies and council came together at a CEO's breakfast to brainstorm what to do about the number of people rough sleeping across the City of Port Phillip. The recent Census had counted over 200 people. Out of this breakfast a project officer position was funded by Council for 12 months to form up a project to address rough sleeping homelessness.

This project officer position explored the variety of ways different regions had responded to rough sleeping and came across the 'Functional Zero' methodology that was being used by Community Solutions and the 'Adelaide Zero project'.

In July 2019, the project was launched and we developed our first 'By-Name List', a list of everyone we know that is experiencing rough sleeping, and our count was around 140 individuals. Since that time, we have come together weekly for 'service coordination, to work to move every individual on the. To work the By-Name List and work to move every individual closer to long-term housing. We have reduced the By-Name List and we currently have 29 people sleeping rough on our list.

But Port Phillip Zero is more than just a By-Name List — we meet fortnightly for our 'hotspots' meeting where we consider rough sleeping hotspots that are impacting amenity and we also consider other community safety and amenity issues that intersect with rough sleeping. In this meeting, individuals are not discussed in an identifiable way, rather we focus on the impact upon the community.

We also have an 'Improvement Group' that meets quarterly and considers the strategic direction of Port Phillip Zero and develops 'change ideas' within a continuous improvement framework to develop ideas to trial as improvements. One of the improvements that has come out of this group is the idea to break the By-Name List down into target cohorts and priorities that we are seeing coming out of the By-Name List.

From this we have broken our list into three cohorts. The first priority is people who identify as Aboriginal

and Torres Strait Islander. The second priority is people who are over the age of 55. The remainder of individuals make up our 'non-target' cohort.

Finally, Port Phillip Zero has an executive group that is made up of Council General Managers and community agency CEOs and General Managers who meet quarterly to drive the strategic direction of the program and set the themes and focus for the coming quarter. The executive also has key themes and challenges funnelled up from service coordination, pointing to hotspots and improvement as possible advocacy topics that the executive can action.

## The Housing and Homelessness Service

The Housing and Homelessness Service at the City of Port Phillip aims to take a human rights approach to people sleeping rough and the management of public space. This means working in a coordinated way to ensure the rights and interests of vulnerable people sleeping rough are addressed. Homelessness, and especially rough sleeping, have devastating consequences on health and wellbeing. On any given night, around 25 people sleep on the streets, parks or foreshore in Port Phillip. There are, however, many more sleeping on someone's couch, in their cars, in crisis accommodation, rooming houses or overcrowded dwellings.

The Housing and Homelessness Service has a direct pathway for residents to access public housing called Sponsorship Housing. This pathway is possible due to an agreement between Council and Homes Victoria for Council to have sponsorship rights over 400 units of housing stock. Our service supports



older residents who are eligible for public housing remain in the local area of Port Phillip and nominate for specific public housing estates in St Kilda, Albert Park, Middle Park and Port Melbourne. Community members aged over 50 years that have lived in the City of Port Phillip area for three or more years may be eligible for this Sponsorship Housing.

### In Our Backyard Affordable Housing Strategy

In Our Backyard identifies Council's role and what actions it will take to grow the supply and diversity of affordable housing in the City of Port Phillip to address priority local housing needs. Affordable housing refers to housing that meets the needs of low to moderate income households unable to access suitable housing in the private market without assistance. In Our Backyard details the strategic approach and role of Council to grow the supply of affordable housing units in the City of Port Phillip.

### Wellington Street Common Ground

St Kilda Community Housing is delivering and will manage the Wellington Street Common Ground project. They will provide

26 self-contained permanent housing units, in-house support service facilities and a concierge service for single persons who had been sleeping rough in Port Phillip. This \$10.9 million project is being funded by both Council and Homes Victoria. Council is making a \$4.755 million capital contribution and is transferring a surplus, adjoining laneway valued at \$365,000 in 2022 to help St Kilda Community Housing deliver this project on the State Government owned site. Homes Victoria is making a \$6.113 million capital contribution and making an additional \$6 million in operating funding over four years.

The new project will use the evidence-based 'Housing First' approach. The approach addresses the multiple and complex needs of people who have been sleeping rough. It provides supported housing to help them maintain their housing and not return to homelessness. The project aims to house persons who are on the Port Phillip Zero Project's By-Name List. This will assist the Port Phillip Zero project to reduce rough sleeping homelessness

levels to a 'Functional Zero' level. This means the number of persons entering into homelessness (rough sleeping) in Port Phillip can equal the number who are housed or no longer are rough sleeping in Port Phillip. We aim to maintain the list at low numbers of approximately three to six people.

### Launch Housing Rough Sleepers Initiative

The City of Port Phillip has a funding agreement with Launch Housing Ltd for a full-time assertive outreach program called the Rough Sleepers Initiative. Launch Housing's Rough Sleepers Initiative (RSI) provides assertive outreach to help care for rough sleepers in Melbourne CBD, and the Cities of Port Phillip, Stonnington, Frankston and Dandenong. The initiative forms part of the efforts to end homelessness in Melbourne, starting with ending rough sleeping by 2030.

The Rough Sleepers Initiative offers assessments, case management, pathways into emergency and crisis accommodation and housing. The assertive outreach workers also refer individuals into other community services if needed.



# Highlighting Housing and Homelessness Issues During Local Government Elections

Lauren Kippin, Membership and Communications Coordinator, Queensland Shelter

As Queensland's peak body for housing and homelessness, Q Shelter devotes significant energy and resources to working with and making recommendations to Federal, State and local governments on policy development and investment solutions in collaboration with its members and sector stakeholders. With housing needs and homelessness pressures being felt sharply across Queensland and with local and state government elections scheduled in 2024, Q Shelter seized the opportunity to put the key issues and solutions into the public spotlight.

In an intentional move, Q Shelter developed a bespoke policy campaign devised in the lead-up to the local council elections held in March 2024, targeting all 77 council electorates across the entire state, deliberately calling out the different challenges in regional and remote communities compared to south-east Queensland.

Q Shelter Chief Executive Officer, Fiona Caniglia, said that as the challenges of housing insecurity and homelessness became more widespread and visible, pressure has been increasing on all three

tiers of government to act. She said Q Shelter's campaign was not only an opportunity for the peak body to inform candidates on the issues but also an invitation to candidates to consider their role and responsibilities in devising and delivering solutions.

In her words, the complexity of housing need and homelessness means that it is felt across all levels of government, but local councils are often 'at the coalface'.

*'Council services engage with people experiencing homelessness through front-line roles in managing public*





*spaces, libraries and other services, as well as through coordinated local responses with not-for-profit providers. They are also involved at all points of the housing continuum, from planning for housing diversity and future housing supply to meeting population demand and creating vibrant spaces for integrated communities to thrive.*

*'Beyond that, Q Shelter recognises that local councils, either individually or collectively, can have significant influence and large-scale impact and can lead the conversation on some of these key issues,' Ms Caniglia said.*

As part of the campaign, Q Shelter developed an engagement program linked to the Queensland local council elections. The objective was to bring awareness to the role local government areas (LGAs) can play in housing and homelessness matters, not by shifting the responsibility away from state and federal governments, but by leveraging powers in the existing LGA remit and the good work already happening across numerous local councils across Queensland.

This included the following key program elements:

- Targeted correspondence to all Mayors and mayoral candidates and known councillor candidates.

- Local Government Policy Platform document developed with 18 focus areas across three streams of local government work.
- Two online candidates' forums — one for SEQ councils and another for regional LGAs — open to any interested parties, including sector representatives, such as housing and service providers.
- Digital strategy to help promote key messages.
- Targeted media editorial for print media and radio into specific regions calling out the relevant local data and challenges faced.
- A range of direct meetings and briefings with candidates from all parties: Australian Labor Party, Liberal National Party, Greens, minors and independents.

Central to discussions and engagement during the campaign was Q Shelter's *Policy Platform Statement*, which was delivered to all candidates across the state (where possible) and made available online for public access.

As with all Q Shelter policy statements, this document was shaped through bottom-up engagement and

consultation with Q Shelter members and sector stakeholders throughout the year, facilitated through bi-annual Regional Representatives forums, policy working groups, direct consultation and online surveys. This ensures that all content Q Shelter puts forward is relevant and reflective of the real situations experienced across the state and in metropolitan and regional areas.

Grouped into three key focus areas, Q Shelter identified a range of key policy initiatives that either currently fall within the remit of local councils or could be driven further and more integrated at the local government level.

1. Policy and initiatives responding to homelessness.
2. Exploring all possible planning levers.
3. Further innovation and partnerships.

Q Shelter's experience in delivering a campaign at the local government level has proven so effective and worthwhile, that they encourage other peak bodies to consider similar campaigns in their own jurisdictions and sectors. The campaign attracted a healthy level of engagement from candidates across the state, sector stakeholders, and interested parties from the general public.

The multifaceted approach Q Shelter took in providing candidates with one-on-one meetings and open forums generated some productive discussions and sharing of ideas. A positive side-effect of the campaign was strengthened relationships between local governments, Q Shelter, and Q Shelter members and partners. The campaign also served as a prelude to October's Queensland State Government Elections, with Q Shelter setting out the policy platform for candidates at this election in July 2024.

The Q Shelter 2024 Queensland Local Council and State Election policy platforms, and other policy documents, can be accessed from the Q Shelter website: <https://qshelter.asn.au/what-we-do/influence/policy-statements>



# City of Canning, Close to Community

Courtney Roy, Safe Communities Advisor, City of Canning

The City of Canning recognises that, as the closest tier of government to the community, local governments are best placed to enact change at a grassroots level. Considering this, the City of Canning developed its first dedicated Homelessness Plan<sup>1</sup> in 2021 to respond to homelessness within our community.

The Plan was designed to complement — and align with — *All Paths Lead to a Home, Western Australia's 10-Year Strategy on Homelessness 2020-2030*,<sup>2</sup> working collaboratively with all tiers of government, community services, and the local community to provide those at risk of/experiencing homelessness with every opportunity to improve their circumstances.

The Plan focussed on three key outcomes areas:

1. Build capacity and understanding
2. Prevention and support
3. Advocacy

Concluding in June 2024, the progress and key achievements completed throughout the Plan's duration were collated into a Report Card,<sup>3</sup> including:

## Providing and Referring to Local Support Services

The City has developed a *Directory of Support Providers*,<sup>4</sup> which lists over 50 local support services, including providers of emergency accommodation, rental support, showers, laundry, food relief and more. To improve accessibility, these have also been placed onto an interactive map.<sup>5</sup> Hard copies of the Directory are available at all City Libraries and the Civic

and Administration Centre and are carried by all frontline staff. To date, over 10,000+ copies have been distributed to vulnerable members of the community.

## Primary Health Care for At Risk Groups

We've been working with Black Swan Health<sup>6</sup> to bring Freo Street Doctor<sup>7</sup> to Canning since 2022. Freo Street Doctor is a mobile medical health service that provides free, visible, easily accessible, and non-judgemental primary health care services to marginalised, disadvantaged and homeless people in our community. More information, clinic times and locations can be found at [canning.wa.gov.au/freostreetdoctor](http://canning.wa.gov.au/freostreetdoctor)

## Filling Service/Supply Gaps

We aim to support local support providers (for example not-for-profits) by filling gaps in available resources. Donations in our annual *Blanket Drive*<sup>8</sup> are happily received by local support providers, who are best placed to distribute them to those in need.

Our annual *Food Drive*<sup>9</sup> in partnership with Foodbank WA<sup>10</sup> aims to help provide meals for those doing it tough within our community. Over the last two years, City of Canning residents have donated a whopping 832 kilograms of food donations, the equivalent of 1,498 meals.

The City creates a dedicated Communications Plan each Homelessness Week, and in 2023 produced an educational video<sup>11</sup> featuring local providers such as the Shop Front, Foodbank WA and Black Swan Health (Freo Street Doctor).

## Building Capacity and Understanding

Our Ranger and Community Safety Service (RCSS) patrols the district

24 hours a day, seven days a week, and regularly engages with those experiencing homelessness to offer support, referral, and advice. RCSS Officers will also record these interactions on our internal By-Name-Register, which helps us gain a better understanding of the number of people rough sleeping/accessing support services within our district.

All Ranger and Community Safety vehicles are equipped with blankets and sleeping bags for Officers to distribute at their discretion, allowing them to offer practical, real-time support. The City also has Standard Operating Procedures in place to outline the steps staff can take when approaching someone experiencing rough sleeping, with the hope they feel informed and supported in approaching the individual to discuss their needs and refer them to support services.

As outlined in our *Support Providers Directory*, there are dedicated support hubs located in Bentley and Cannington. Depending on the person's[s] location, these walk-in hubs are often within reasonable walking distance and are a great place to start, given the co-location of services (warm meals, food relief, laundry services, blankets, etc.).

Representatives from our Ranger and Community Safety team also completed Shelter WA's Training Courses for frontline and office-based staff. The training looks at essential information about homelessness in WA and the role and function of local, state, and federal governments in ending homelessness.

More information about what the City does in this space, can be found on our Homelessness and Crisis Support Web page.<sup>12</sup>



### Preparing a Research Report

As stipulated in our *Homelessness Plan (2021-2024)* actions, the City developed a Research Report Research Report<sup>13</sup> to explore the causal factors, impacts, and opportunities associated with homelessness, as well as looking at the latest trends and opportunities in the social housing space. The report is available at [canning.wa.gov.au/homelessness](https://canning.wa.gov.au/homelessness).<sup>14</sup>

It is hoped that the report will contribute to community education and awareness around homelessness and support positive and effective outcomes.

### Next Steps

The City is currently revising its strategic approach to homelessness. Whilst the previous Plan was delivered across four years (2021-2024), the City is now looking to develop an overarching Homelessness Plan, and subsequent annual Action Plan. This model has proven

effective via the successful delivery of the *Safe Canning Strategy*<sup>15</sup> and annual Action Plans.<sup>16</sup>

The Homelessness Plan will function as the guiding framework to support the implementation of initiatives and programs that support those experiencing/at risk of homelessness. The annual Action Plan affords the opportunity to regroup and ensure any emerging community concerns and needs are effectively captured and considered.

This approach prevents actions becoming repetitive and stagnant, and instead remain relevant and in line with community sentiment and the City's values of respect, working together, and inclusivity.

The City is currently drafting the *2024-2025 Homelessness Action Plan*, which will be available on our Homelessness and Crisis Support webpage.<sup>17</sup> Visit [canning.wa.gov.au/homelessness](https://canning.wa.gov.au/homelessness)<sup>18</sup> to learn more.

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# The Power of Lived Experience: Local Government Response to Homelessness from a Community Development Perspective

PJ Humphreys, Community Development Officer, Sunshine Coast Council

## Introduction

Homelessness in the regions of Australia has increased including in the Sunshine Coast in Queensland. The 2021 Census data indicates homelessness has increased by 54 per cent and rough sleeping by 43 per cent.<sup>1</sup> Thus, homelessness is much more visible and is pressing Sunshine Coast Council to reimagine its role in responding to homelessness.

As a Community Development practitioner holding the homelessness portfolio, new to local government and the region, holding the homelessness portfolio, I took the time to look, listen and learn. Key takeaways included:

1. I was hearing that the community needed to know and understand the breadth and depth of the issue beyond the stereotypes.
2. That people with lived experience needed to be part of the education process.

3. I attended the National Homelessness Conference in 2022, and was inspired by the Peer Education Support Program (PESP) run by the Council to Homeless Persons. This seemed like a model we could learn from on the Sunshine Coast.

## *Lived Experience Inclusion Project*

The *Lived Experience Inclusion Project* was developed and facilitated by Council in partnership with Caloundra Community Centre, Nambour Community Centre and The Shack Community Centre.

The core premise is being that people with living and lived experience of homelessness are to be recognised and valued as people with expertise, that are involved in decisions that impact them the most and remunerated for their participation.

While a common approach in local government is to set up reference or advisory groups that are determined by council, a community development

approach, seeks to foreground the voices and ideas of citizens, develop mutual and reciprocal relationships, and share power and decision making, without a pre-determined agenda or outcome.<sup>2</sup> Following the National Homelessness Conference, I started sharing what I had learnt with managers, community partners and people with living and lived experience. There was enough interest and support to develop a pilot *Lived Experience Inclusion Project* with six phases between December 2022 and June 2024.

## *Scoping and Design Phase: December 2022 - February 2023*

Council engaged a community development consultant whose practice framework centres on elevating the voice of lived experience. This voice and this phase involved people with lived experience<sup>3</sup> from the beginning through existing relationships with community centres. The initial hurdle within Council, was the value for money concern and the resources required to undertake and evaluate





the project within the homelessness portfolio. However, given the strong alignment with the *Sunshine Coast Community Strategy* and commitment to build capacity and knowledge of staff and the community to respond to homelessness, the broader community benefit was acknowledged. Additional funding was also sourced to partner with the University of the Sunshine Coast to undertake an evaluation of the pilot.

### Recruitment Phase: March 2022

The position description and application form were co-designed with people with lived experience, and we engaged with community centres to assist in the identifying and supporting potential participants. Key recruitment decisions included: participants could have either living or lived experience; have a current connection with a community centre to provide support and paid participation payments; be able to effectively participate. Ten people applied, six started and four completed the training and graduated as Lived Experience Leaders (Leaders).

### Training Phase: April – May 2023

The trauma-informed leadership training took place at a community

centre over five weeks for five hours per session. The purpose was to value everyone's experience and start with their knowledge and build on this with various topics. For example, safe storytelling, public speaking skills, about the housing and homelessness sector, role of governments, and structural causes of homelessness. This phase was challenging due to the uncertainty of what it was all about, as well as the tension between responding to the immediate needs versus a community education focus. We were fortunate to have a social worker in the community development team who assisted during the training and engagement phases, and we learnt very quickly that this role was essential to provide emotional support and trauma-informed practice.

### Council Engagement Phase: June – September 2023

In this phase, the leaders met with various council teams and attended the Council meeting that adopted the Sunshine Coast Housing and Homelessness Action Plan, and were consulted about Council plans, policies, and resource materials. This phase was an extension of the training phase and was helpful for participants to get a good understanding of how Council operates, including the limitations and challenges.

### Engagement Phase: July 2023 – June 2024

The Leaders have participated in 17 activities across three local government areas: Sunshine Coast, Moreton Bay, and Noosa. Their input has included panel presentations at homelessness awareness training for council staff and community groups, providing policy and practice input and reviewing resource materials. The Leaders have been remunerated for each engagement by the relevant council or organisation.

*This is an excellent example of an initiative that has taken a new and different approach to community programs. It builds the capacity of participants and has the potential to provide long-term benefits to the organisations who collaborate with them. This program is already having a positive impact.*

– Staff member,  
City of Moreton Bay

### Structuring Phase: October 2023 – June 2024

The Leaders who completed the training have been part of a co-design process with Council and two community centres to form a group, called Street Up, that was launched on 6th August 2024 during Homelessness Week.



Street Up is Council funded and supported and operates as a collaborative partnership with consensus decision making amongst the Co-Design Team.<sup>4</sup>) This project moved beyond consumer participation, consultations and feedback loops into co-design, where power and decision making, is shared. Lived Experience Leader, Ian Campbell, stated, *'Participation in the group has been positive for me; it feels equal and balanced.'*<sup>5</sup>

To see people with lived experience as partners, also means valuing their time and expertise in remuneration terms. The Leaders have received a participation payment from Council, throughout the phases.

### Outcomes

The opportunity to partner with Council has shifted how people with lived experience are seen and view themselves, as leaders with lived expertise, and not via negative stereotypes. as often is the stereotype, a deviant population group. This has permeated throughout Council and enabled greater access, connection, and trust to include lived experience voices in various policy and practice settings. Feedback has been overwhelmingly positive and demonstrates greater understanding of the causes and, impacts of homelessness as well as increased empathy and willingness to change.

*Hearing someone's experience better helps us to understand those experiences, adapt our service and delivery and maintain empathy, kindness and compassion.*

— Sunshine Coast Council Libraries Staff Forum, October 2023

This greater understanding has influenced policy and practice such as:

- The development of Housing and Homelessness Action Plans
- The review of the *Sunshine Coast Community Strategy Action Plan 2024-2029*
- Development of a community education video
- Initiatives to support staff experiencing housing stress
- Improved responses to people sleeping in public spaces
- Provision of free showers at Council-owned aquatic centres
- Noosa Shire Council implemented an inclusive Library membership for people without a fixed address and/or limited personal identification implemented by Noosa Shire Council.

### Personal Outcomes

It was anticipated that being listened to and respected, for the experience of homelessness would have a positive impact on self-worth and confidence. A Lived Experience Leader who is 65 years of age said, *'I have not felt this confident since I was in high school'*. There has been a greater understanding of the structural causes of homelessness, and thus less personal shame and feeling alone. There have also been housing outcomes and access to services and programs.

*Listening to my peers, being listened to, and connecting with service providers, policy and decision makers has given me a space to raise awareness and influence change which is very satisfying and meaningful.*  
— Kim, Lived Experience Leader)

*These projects have been good for my mental health as I feel valued, which has improved my sense of self-worth and I feel like I am contributing to something important.*  
— Ian, Lived Experience Leader).

### Unintended Outcome

It was not intended that the project would help to humanise Council. The Leaders are a bridge between Council and people currently experiencing homelessness, as they share what Council is doing, how they are being included and listened to, and what changes are being made. This is giving people a sense of hope beyond the usual Council staff interactions of compliance-based responses.

### Conclusion

The supportive and trusting leadership within Council enabled this pilot project<sup>6</sup> and will continue through Street Up with opportunities for others with lived experience to be involved. There is an understanding at Sunshine Coast Council of working alongside people and a mandate to undertake emergent projects where the outcome is not pre-determined. Local government can think and act differently and include people with lived experience to improve responses to homelessness.

### Endnotes

1. Australian Bureau of Statistics 2021, *Estimating Homelessness: Census*, ABS Website, accessed on 15th July 2024. [www.abs.gov.au/statistics/people/housing/estimating-homelessness-census/latest-release#state-and-territories](http://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/people/housing/estimating-homelessness-census/latest-release#state-and-territories)
2. Kelly, A and Westoby P 2018, *Participatory Development Practice: Using Traditional and Contemporary Frameworks*, Practical Action Publishing, Rugby, UK.
3. 'Lived Experience' refers to people with living and lived experience of homelessness.
4. The Street Up Co-Design Team is made up of Lived Experience Leaders, Sunshine Coast Council, Caloundra Community Centre and Nambour Community Centre.
5. Donovan R, Humphreys PJ, Blackburn J, Greenfield A, Romanova K, Campbell I, Lathouras A 2024, 'Nothing About Us, Without Us: Lived Experience at the Heart of Community Development', *New Community Journal*, vol. 22, no. 2, Issue 86, pp. 74-80.
6. Gratitude and thanks to Cr Tim Burns, former Community Development Team Lead and Kerrie Forrest, Manager, Community Planning and Development for their unwavering support and encouragement.



# Local Government Homelessness Knowledge Hub, Western Australia

Johanna Mitchell, Policy Officer, Shelter WA

Local governments are increasingly being called upon — and choosing to act — to prevent and end homelessness in their communities. There is growing recognition that local governments play a critical frontline role in this space; however, expertise, resources and capacity across the local government landscape vary considerably. This is especially the case in Western Australia, (WA), where the size and scale of local governments is hugely diverse.

In recent years, more and more community members have been reaching out to their local governments with questions about homelessness and what to do about it. At the same time, Shelter WA had been receiving a growing number of requests from local governments for help in responding to homelessness in their community.

In response, and with support from a Lotterywest grant, Shelter WA, the WA Local Government Association (WALGA) and Local Government Professionals (LGPro) got together to create an online hub for local governments to share information and inform evidence-based homelessness solutions that respond to local community needs.

## The Hub

The Hub was launched in 2022 and brings together a range of resources to support and equip local government across WA to end homelessness.

The Hub is a free information sharing platform that relies on local governments across WA to submit their current resources on homelessness.

The Hub includes information on the drivers of homelessness, case studies, guiding documents, and examples of good practice in strategic, policy and operational responses from a range of local governments to inform local approaches. This information supports staff working across a range of areas such as urban planning, community safety, community development, libraries, customer service, and other frontline staff, to set policy, strategy and good practice based on evidence of what is needed to end homelessness.

Another key component of the Hub has been the training packages. Designed for local governments in WA that want to know more about homelessness, the open-source training packages support both frontline and office-based staff to better understand homelessness and local government's role in ending homelessness. The training includes practical activities and examples of what other local governments are doing in this space.

## Outcomes

This project has been a great example of what can be achieved when the homelessness and local government sectors come together with a spirit of collaboration.

The sharing of resources between local governments has contributed to collective knowledge gain and prevents local government staff from reinventing the wheel when developing responses to homelessness. With effective management of the Hub, the platform has been able to

ensure that local government actions are informed by the latest evidence of what works.

The Hub has also proven to be effective at breaking down silos within local government as resources and examples of good practice are provided across a variety of different departmental areas. This elevates the task of preventing and ending homelessness to a whole-of-organisation effort where everyone has an important role to play, and homelessness is 'everybody's business'.<sup>1</sup> Ongoing management of the Hub also helps in breaking down silos between the local government and homelessness sectors, ensuring regular opportunities for high level information sharing between the two sectors.

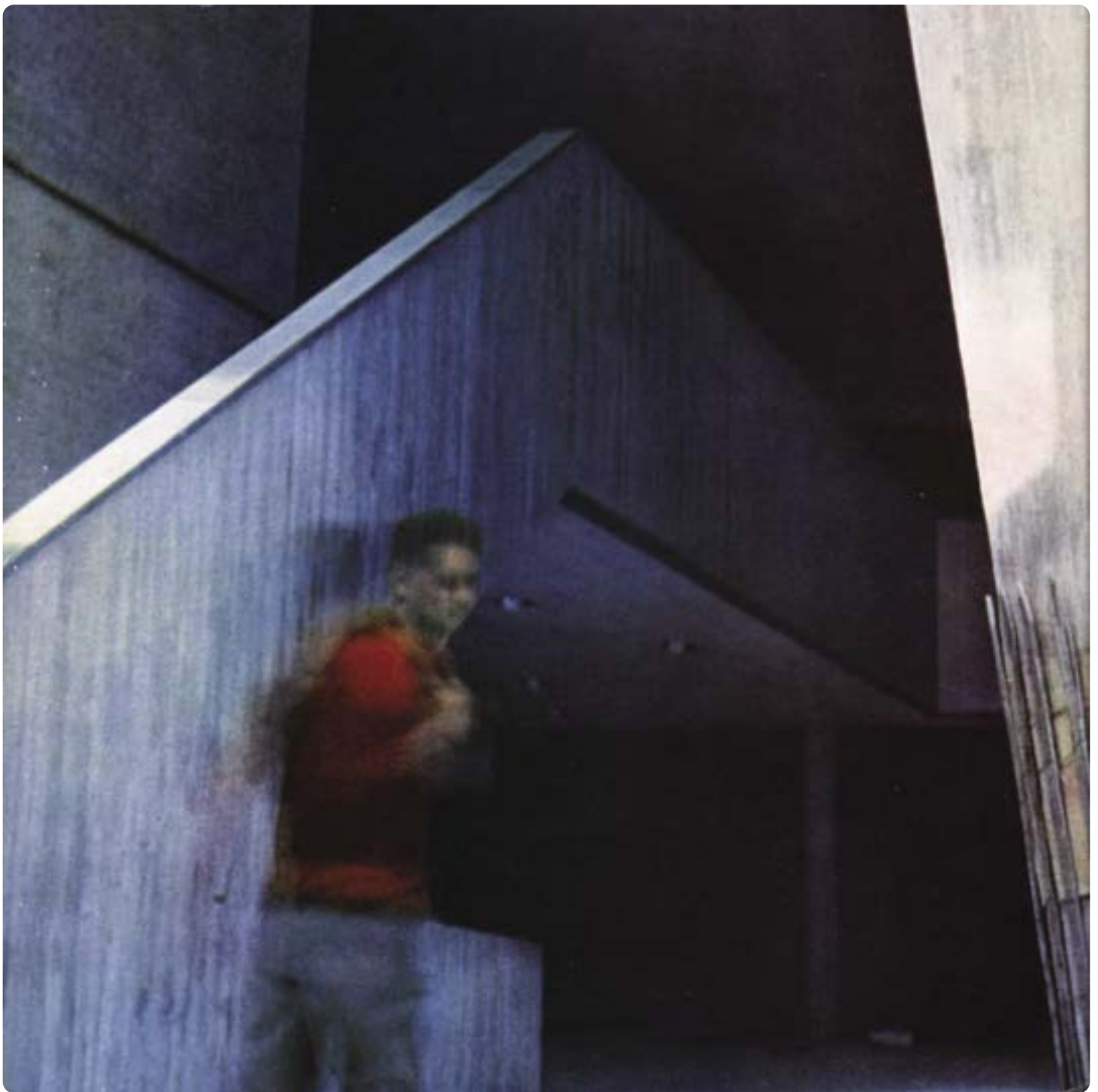
## Lessons Learned

The project of developing and operating the Hub has yielded a few key insights that could assist those interested in developing similar platforms elsewhere.

### Local government approaches to ending homelessness remain significantly varied

Ongoing management of the Hub and the broad variety of resources contributed by local governments reveal that that there is still no real consensus on the role of local government in ending homelessness in WA and the ability for local governments to implement best practice approaches is highly dependent on available resources. Further work is needed to both clarify what local governments can or should be doing to end homelessness in their local communities, and to ensure they





are properly resourced to be able to undertake that work.

#### There is an increasingly strong appetite for local government training:

There is ongoing work needed to develop more tailored, practical training packages for all local government staff — from frontline staff to elected members — providing key information on what homelessness looks like in practice, clarifying the role of local government in ending homelessness and providing practical skills and information that is applicable during everyday practice.

#### Collaboration is key to success

The project was a collaborative effort from the beginning. The first step in developing the Hub included forming a reference group of local government practitioners, peak bodies and the Department of Communities, who provided unique guidance and advice that informed the content and format. The collaborative approach has led to greater buy-in from local government staff, which is essential for the ongoing growth and relevance of the platform.

#### Ongoing management planning is essential

While the establishment of the Hub required the bulk of project resources, the need

for ongoing maintenance and management of the platform must also be factored into project planning. Regular reminders to local governments to contribute resources to the Hub have also been crucial to ensure the platform remains visible and relevant.

A link to the WA Local Government Homelessness Hub can be found at: [www.lghomelessnesshub.com.au](http://www.lghomelessnesshub.com.au)

#### Endnote

1. Mitchell L 2023, *Everybody's Business: What Local Government Can Do to End Homelessness*, Winston Churchill Trust. <https://www.churchilltrust.com.au/fellow/leanne-mitchell-vic-2019/>

# Turning a Full Circle: Launceston's Journey to Build a Statement of Commitment on Homelessness

Linda Page

Linda Page is an academic and Launnie born. For the last 18 months she has led the Community Development team at Launceston City Council. The Council's new Homelessness Statement of Commitment on Homelessness, launched in 2024, marks a new direction for a caring community that has witnessed a growing homelessness problem.

Linda spoke to Leanne Mitchell about how the City of Launceston's response turned full circle.

*Q: Can you tell me a little about the homelessness situation in Launnie?*

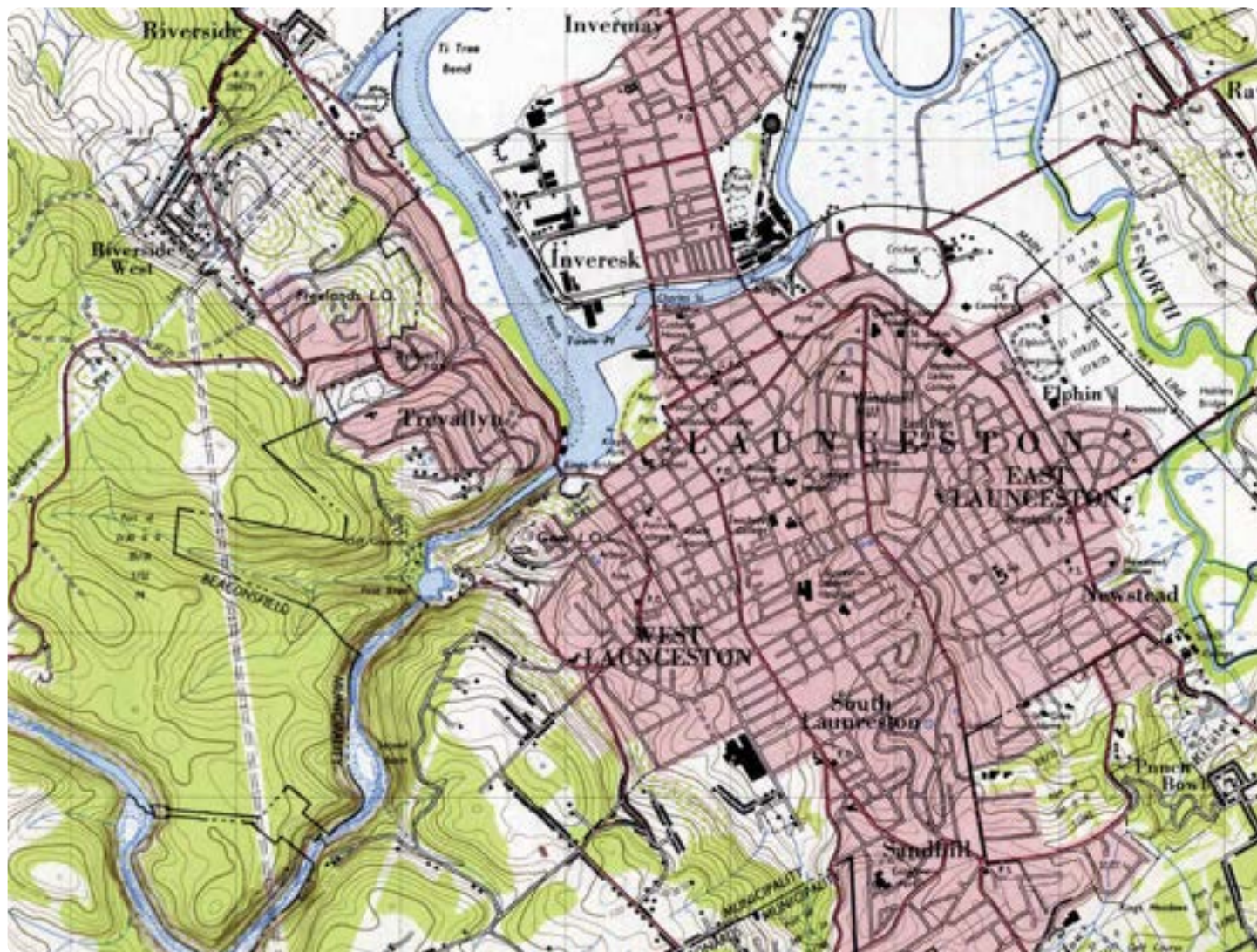
Clearly, homelessness has always been an issue across Australia and in regional areas as well. Two key changes brought it to the fore in Launceston and got Council to really think about its position and its responsibility to the community.

The first was broader economic changes as well as the social impacts of COVID-19 and the second was a significant flood in 2022 for which Council

had a major responsibility in managing the response.

Both raised a whole bunch of questions about how we best support and communicate with our people, particularly those who don't have homes.

I think, one of the Launceston community's strengths is community cohesion, it's sense of self and sense of place. People within Launceston really strongly identify with being Tasmanian and being a Launnie person.





So, when drastic changes occur in society and particularly social economic changes become more visible, people are rather shocked.

With homelessness, I think, for community members, seeing fellow community members visibly sleeping rough in large numbers has been particularly confronting.

It didn't take much for the lever to be pushed over to the edge. Even though we know that Census figures are a little bit woolly, with regards to our homeless community, we look at changes from 2016 to 2021 and we registered an 87 per cent increase in homelessness and a 759 per cent increase in severely crowded dwellings.

And between those two Census periods we saw a 375 per cent increase in rough sleeping.

So, we are not only coping with a much larger number of people facing complex issues, but also community members who are seeing a real visible change in the landscape and how they interact with each other.

*Q. Had the council been doing anything in homelessness response before 2022?*

We've always had an incredibly strong, passionate, smart driven group of both volunteers and service provider organisations. But Council had taken a back foot.

Post-2022 we started seeing incoming feedback and requests from community via the regulations team.

This was about increases in people sleeping rough in particular and an increase in antisocial behaviour and other challenging behaviours within the municipality, particularly in CBD hotspots as well as particular parks.

The regulations team had the responsibility of following up on those requests and those people were not in a position to empathetically respond or support community members in that space.

It was really managing a complaints process and regulating space. So that was the previous position of Council, which was really

antithetical to the values that Council held. Those values are that we care for our community. That is one of our core values.

And really, while the regulations team did their very best, they came from a regulatory framework, using various acts and legislative levers to prosecute any action in that space.

It was a Councillor who raised the issue and said they would like to see something different in this space.

They said this is not the way we want to treat community members. This is not how we care for our community.

As a result, there was a refresh and the Community Development team was asked to lead that response. There was a general consensus among officers and councillors that that was more in line with Council values and how Council wanted to behave in that space.

When Community Development started managing this response, we were very lucky in that, during the flood, an ad hoc group had formed with service providers and Council to discuss operational matters relating to homelessness, and so we decided to reconvene that.

From that position we collectively agreed to proceed with two groups — one with a strategic focus advising Council, and an operational group led by a community member, with Council as a participating member.

We included four neighbouring councils, service providers, allied health, state government representatives from housing and police, and people with a lived experience of homelessness. This became an official advisory group to Council and that group helped co-design what is now our homeless statement of commitment.

We also have an operational group which is now led by a member of the community, with the Council as one member. All of our local outreach workers from different organisations are involved and they work together to get to know and respond to the needs of people who are sleeping rough.

Our operations are nowhere near of the scale of some other larger metropolitan areas, but we're lucky enough to have service provision in the north of the state.

We are small enough to make a real impact and have personal interactions, to know our people and know their service providers. We may not have a lot, but if we are able to successfully coordinate, we can leverage our strengths. That's really the driving arm of our approach and why we have a Statement of Commitment rather than a strategy.

*Q. A lot of councils write strategies — why did you decide on a statement of commitment? What makes this different?*

It started out as a strategy like anywhere else, I guess, within that typical local government framework.

However, it evolved as we got community feedback. People were asking Council to actively step up.

I think that, particularly for rural and regional communities, local government is a highly visible manifestation of governance and there is potentially an onus on Council to represent the community, evolving from the old kind of traditional space of roads, rates and rubbish.

And so, yeah, the community expected us to commit to something and say we're going to play a role.

So, we said, well, what's the point of doing a strategy. How about we actually say this is what we believe. This is where Council stands. We're going to make a statement to commit to this space because it is about caring for our community.

Hence, it evolved into a Statement of Commitment and from there a really important facet was that it's not a strategic document that sits in the back of anyone's cupboards and every four years gets reviewed.

A really key part of our Statement of Commitment is that we have committed to quarterly reviews, which sounds relatively onerous, but actually it's not.

It's designed to be alive. It is designed to be a document that has overarching principles and we have evolving and rapidly changing action items that respond to changing needs.

We get input from our community — members of the strategic and operational groups, which includes elected members, representatives of our neighbouring councils — because we know people move between all these places. They come to Launceston for services and then return to a rural area.

We also draw on the expertise of our lived community. Lived experienced community members understand what is actually occurring.

*Q. What has been the reaction of your Council to all of this work?*

Homelessness is not without its challenges, and there can be quite fractious relationships. I can't pretend that's not the case.

We don't get everything right all of the time, but that's why

we're constantly in a process of checking in or responding or reviewing and then feeding that information up to Councillors.

Council members are on the ground, they hear from their community members, they hear whether or not what we are doing is making an impact and they also are the people that community members go to when they don't like something.

There is an element of NIMBY-ism locally and we work with councillors to develop public education around the cultural shift, to develop empathy and acceptance.

By and large, our community has embraced the approach and appreciates that local government has chosen to step up in this space in a proactive way. If anything, they're asking for us to do more.

And that's a balance that we're constantly trying to calibrate. And I think that our Councillors appreciate that we have a position now which is community centred.

They can also stand behind the Statement of Commitment to say yes, we will make decisions on behalf of our community that are person centred, that are dignity focused.

*Q. You have made quite a shift in a few short years. What are you most proud of?*

This is probably a really boring answer, but I think what I'm really proud of is the fact that, while we are working through the machinations of local government processes, we are using consultation and feedback to develop an agreed position on homelessness that the community acts on.

The Statement of Commitment was only endorsed by Council in June 2024, but we've been working in this space for over 18 months now, and what I'm really proud of is the collaboration we have achieved between Council, services and across the community.

We are all resource stretched, but every single day, what we're really good at is asking: *What is what's happening? Who's where? Where have they moved? Has anyone checked in on this person?* We know our people. We share the resources as best we can.

And now we are also training council officers — the ones who are not the homelessness experts — to understand homelessness and what they can do.

Every single officer has the ability to share a resource. We have little pocket-sized, reach-out cards that list all of our service provision across the network. All of our food services, all of our health services, all of our access services. We are consistently running out of these cards, we have distributed over 20,000 in the last year and just printed another 10,000.

And the positive interactions people experiencing homelessness are having with council staff is building trust.

It all started with complaints and compliance, and I think now we have turned a full circle.





# Making the Case for a Library Social Worker

Leanne Mitchell\*

## The Sanctuary of Libraries: A New Frontier in Social Work

Have you ever thought about what you might do if you had exhausted every option for a place to go and just needed somewhere to fill a few hours? Somewhere free and quiet, where you could sit and blend in? A place where nobody would try to sell you something, convert your soul, or question your presence?

In our bustling cities, such sanctuaries are rare. Yet, despite the digital age's sweeping changes, traditional public libraries have endured. Predicted by some to face extinction, libraries have instead evolved, thriving as community hubs where people find not just books but connection, creativity, and learning opportunities.

More than one-third of Australians are library members, and, in 2021–22, we borrowed nearly 150 million items, from books to e-books and audiobooks, across over 1,700 public library service points. These libraries welcomed around 56 million visits. Beyond borrowing items, visitors attended learning programs, playgroups, and social clubs; they explored art galleries and theatres, utilised study spaces, meeting rooms, recording studios, and makerspaces.

## Bringing it All Together for Local Government

In Australia, most public libraries are council-run assets, integral to local communities and supported by local government. When you ask them, many people feel quite nostalgic about libraries — recalling what these locations meant to them when they were young, or how they rediscovered public libraries with their children or grandchildren.

To be honest, I had not thought much about the libraries within the capital city where I worked until I was seconded to manage the department where they were located for a short time in 2018. Up to that point I had been running our city's ever increasing homelessness response, setting up new services, including an assertive outreach team who walked the streets daily, directly assisting a growing number of people sleeping rough in the city.

My ears pricked immediately when I heard very early on in my secondment that library staff were increasingly challenged by the need to assist people experiencing homelessness. They said that numbers had been growing and library staff were conflicted — either because they felt that they were not doing enough to help, or the situation was completely out of their comfort zone, causing uncertainty and stress.

The penny dropped — the libraries were seeing and working with many of the same people as we were assisting through our homelessness response. In fact, our library staff knew a number of these people better than most. They had built long and trusted relationships. Our libraries were safe, comfortable and welcoming (if you followed a few rules) and many people who had nowhere else to go were taking refuge.

With a bit more research into reports and interviews with staff we were able to build a fuller picture of the situation and learned that library customers were experiencing more than homelessness. Library staff were working with and supporting people with complex mental health and health needs,

people using alcohol and other drugs, people who were looking for employment, or were excluded because they lacked the digital skills needed to manage modern life, or were simply lonely or isolated.

## The Australian Experience

The library social work program, established in Melbourne in 2019 was an Australian first and aimed to meet a number of needs, supporting library staff and customers, building opportunities for collaboration across the city and creating safe library spaces.<sup>1</sup>

The initiative was modelled on and mentored by the San Francisco Library service, who are recognised as the pioneers in establishing an in-house social work program.

In 2008, Leah Esguerra became the world's first library social worker, working across 27 branches and leading a team of workers with lived experiences of homelessness to engage with and support customers and staff.

Additional assistance was provided by Denver Public Library and the founder and author of Whole Person Librarianship, Sara Zetterval, who had published a comprehensive guide on the practice.<sup>2</sup>

## An Emerging International Practice

Today, library social work is a rapidly growing practice worldwide. In this evolving landscape, the social work profession, dedicated to improving personal and social well-being, has found a new niche.

Moving from traditional settings like government agencies, community services, hospitals, and schools, the practice has

expanded into places that include courts, law firms, and libraries. In these settings, social workers collaborate closely with other professionals to build relationships with clients, emphasising their strengths and capabilities.

Libraries are increasingly seen as crucial spaces to address the new pressures brought on by changing social, health, and economic circumstances.

In many ways, the COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated these issues, with more people relying on libraries as some of the only free and accessible community spaces available in a rapidly changing and transactional world.

Libraries are now more frequently interacting with customers experiencing or at risk of homelessness, in mental health crises, displaying signs of substance abuse, or reporting family and domestic violence.

Additionally, digital exclusion, loneliness, and isolation are significant challenges that many library visitors face.

Travelling through the United States in 2022,<sup>3</sup> I got to meet a number of social workers and peer support workers who were operating in many different ways.

- In Washington DC, the public library built strong connections with the district government, linking homelessness and mental health services in the place where many shelter residents came to spend their days — the Martin Luther King Jr. Public Library.
- In Baltimore, a drug and alcohol peer worker, who had experienced extreme personal loss, gained vital skills through a training program linked to the library and established an in-house library service offering substance use, homelessness, mental health and domestic violence support.
- And in San Francisco, the world's first library social worker and her team of

lived experience workers (called health and safety associates) engaged directly with library customers, offering referrals into key services.

All of these roles acknowledged and focused on addressing the complex and varied needs of patrons that too often challenge library staff — many of whom had entered their profession without even considering that these responses would be part of their daily jobs.

### The Advantages of Social Work in Libraries

Although library social work is an emerging field, several studies<sup>4</sup> highlight its benefits, including:

#### Aligned values

Libraries and social workers share a commitment to serving communities and supporting the complex needs of their patrons.

#### Greater reach

Combined practices address a wide range of issues such as mental health, domestic violence, homelessness, loneliness, and isolation, enhancing library operations.

#### Neutral and welcoming spaces

Libraries offer safe, welcoming, and neutral environments, making them ideal for engaging with vulnerable or isolated community members.

#### Ensuring safer workplaces

Staff support and training activities enhance knowledge, resilience, and care levels, contributing to a safer workplace.

#### Establishing stronger partnerships

Libraries can build wider community connections and strategic partnerships, amplifying their local impact.

#### Enhancing professional knowledge

Opportunities for social work students, lived experience practitioners, and librarians to build professional knowledge improve future service delivery.

Following Melbourne's lead, several libraries across Australia, including Fremantle, Darwin, Merri-Bek (Melbourne), and Bendigo, have adopted social

work practices.<sup>5</sup> Each library has tailored its approach to reflect its unique needs and funding streams, leading to diverse implementations of library social work. These varied approaches include:

#### Role positioning

Employing either a qualified social worker or a skilled community service practitioner/ community connector who works across libraries and other front-end council locations.

#### Delivery partnerships

Libraries either directly employ their social worker or collaborate with a specialist social service organisation.

#### Role support

Engaging social work students (interns) required to complete mandatory practice hours, sometimes alongside a qualified social worker, and other times independently.

#### Delivery Model

Varying approaches to the scope of social work practice, from a service referral emphasis to intensive case management.

Despite the differences in implementation, there is general agreement that a well-planned program based on a thorough understanding of staff and customer needs, with strong organisational and staff support, is key to success.

While the alignment between library and social work professions is beneficial, success also depends on clear understanding and respect for roles and responsibilities.

Social workers can significantly assist library staff but should not replace the need for staff and management to expand their own knowledge and skills, build resilience, and maintain responsibilities for workplace health and safety.

### The Case for Social Workers in Libraries

The City of Melbourne's library social work program has seen many positive outcomes, both in improving the welfare of library patrons and in building knowledge, confidence and resilience among library staff.<sup>6</sup>



Experience points to the many untapped opportunities available in integrating social work into library practice, to establish rapport and link people into services. It also highlights the benefits in lifting the skills of library staff to respond to people with high needs.

#### Of particular note

- The library proved to be a safe and welcoming place that allowed for more positive interactions than in other locations.
- The relationships and trust built between library staff and their patrons contributed significantly to in breaking barriers and made it easier for the social worker to provide support.
- The setting provided increased opportunities to engage with people who had high support needs but little connection into the service sector.

#### Do You Need a Social Worker? What Next?

A successful library social work program will not sit alone and will ideally be part of a larger body of work that addresses health and safety within a library service.

The program will take time to establish, and the ongoing costs can be considerable, particularly for a library service (and local government) with limited funds.

Before rushing into recruitment, it is worthwhile fully understand the local situation — to know and articulate what your library workers' and customers' experiences are like on a day-to-day basis. Consider what you want to achieve through the social work program and ensure that the program you build meets all those needs.

Making sure internal and external partners — including Council management, other departments and external community service operators — understand what you aim to achieve and are committed to support and collaborate on your efforts, is a key success factor.

Clear protocols, processes and procedures to guide staff in managing customer interactions, the completion of safety audits and upgrades to equipment and signage, as well as specific scenario training, may be necessary to round off the offering.

In planning future interventions, library services might consider the following as a start:

#### Understand the need

What is your data telling you? How many incidents and/or interactions are you experiencing? How are your staff feeling about their working environment? What do your customers need from you?

#### Survey your service — and others

How well are you meeting the needs that your staff and customers value? What are your knowledge gaps? What are other services offering? And remember look locally, nationally and internationally — you never know what you will find.

#### Set your baseline

How will you track and evaluate so that you can understand change and continuously improve?

#### Secure your partnerships

Are you in the position to recruit and support your social worker directly, or will you engage a specialist service? Who will your social support partners be?

#### Keep staff involved

What are the best ways to bring your staff along on the journey? How will you build support and ensure buy-in? Remember, this work depends on a collaborative approach.

#### Set your library social worker up for success

Think about what practice mechanisms you will put in place to support your future social worker for long term success.

As trusted and accessible locations where people can learn, connect and feel welcome, the role of public libraries is constantly evolving. The introduction of

in-house social workers is one way that libraries, and in fact local government authorities, can utilise the close ties they hold with communities to prevent and end homelessness and other complex needs that customers may present with.

While the opportunity exists to intervene, it is important to remember that libraries are not social support centres, and while library workers are often incredibly versatile, they are not trained support workers. Recognising limitations and keeping boundaries will be essential for success.

Nevertheless, with the existing infrastructure, public libraries serve as perfect initial contact points to connect with a variety of community members with complex needs. This relatively untapped channel of connection could help deliver support directly to those in the community who might otherwise miss out.

\* Leanne Mitchell was part of the team at City of Melbourne Libraries that established Australia's first Library social work program and now assists libraries across the country to do the same.

#### Endnotes

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# Wyndham Health, Homelessness and Housing Alliance

Councillor Jennie Barrera, Wyndham City Mayor

The City of Wyndham is a municipality in Melbourne's western growth corridor. Wyndham is a rapidly growing municipality with forecast growth to 512,591 by 2041. Over the next 30 to 40 years, this growth corridor needs to plan to provide for housing, jobs, transport, town centres, open space, and key infrastructure.

Wyndham City is funded by the Victorian Government to provide the backbone support and local area coordination of the Wyndham Health, Homelessness and Housing (H3) Alliance, partnership of eleven service providers delivering a collective impact model across Wyndham, Victoria.

Information about the Wyndham Health, Homelessness and Housing (H3) Alliance can be found here: <https://www.wyndham.vic.gov.au/sites/default/files/2024-05/About%20the%20H3%20Alliance%20-%20final.pdf>

## Why does Wyndham City Council convene the H3 Alliance?

Wyndham City recognises the importance of local partnerships and the collective impact benefits this can have for the local community. The *Wyndham Affordable Housing Strategy 2022-2025* recognises housing as a basic human right and essential community infrastructure.

Respondents to Council's 2019 *Affordable Housing Survey* viewed housing affordability as a significant issue impacting on Wyndham's social and economic sustainability (81 per cent). Seventy-three percent of respondents indicated housing affordability was an issue that impacted on them personally.

## How is Wyndham City Council able to do this work?

In 2020 and again in 2022, Homes Victoria evaluated the Wyndham H3 Alliance model, finding that it delivered significant housing outcomes, reduced homelessness, and enhanced service delivery across Wyndham. With support from Homes Victoria, the Alliance secured ongoing funding for the current service model. This includes Wyndham City as the backbone support and local area coordinator.

## What does it look like and mean to support this partnership?

The *Wyndham H3 Alliance Strategic Plan 2024-2027* was endorsed by all member organisations at the highest level of authority. Council chairs and provides the backbone and local area coordination for the Alliance's two main guiding bodies, the Strategic Partnership Group, and the Operational Partnership Group (OPG), as well as coordinating related projects and managing stakeholder relationships. The great value of the Wyndham H3 Alliance is in its ability to coordinate responses when dealing with the complexities of people at risk of or experiencing homelessness in Wyndham.

Additional key stakeholders supporting the partnership are:

- The Victorian Government: Department of Families, Fairness and Housing, and Homes Victoria
- The Western Homelessness Local Area Services Network
- The Western Assertive Outreach Network.

## How does Wyndham City integrate universal services with the Wyndham H3 Alliance?

The Wyndham H3 Alliance OPG meets monthly with representation from all member organisations including Council. This regular engagement strengthens referral pathways and helps in identifying the issues relevant to each Alliance member in seeking responses to housing and homelessness in Wyndham. This demonstrates the value of coordination and the collective impact of the Alliance.

Together, Alliance members can support prevention, early intervention, and recovery from homelessness by connecting clients to services that reduce isolation, promote belonging and seek to improve health and wellbeing in line with the *Wyndham Municipal Public Health and Wellbeing Plan 2021-2025*.

## How does Wyndham City respond to people experiencing homelessness?

In 2024, the Wyndham H3 Alliance and the Council to Homeless Persons adapted the Connect Respect training program for Council staff to equip officers in the field. This includes an internal working group to support respectful and safe operational responses to people experiencing homelessness.

Wyndham City works with the Wyndham H3 Alliance to identify opportunities to build resilience and ensure safety during climate emergencies, for example. Flooding can occur at the Werribee River in a local area known as Bungies Hole. Anyone sleeping out in the area is in danger when flooding occurs.



During heat waves, the Wyndham H3 Alliance Outreach Program workers provide bottled water and wet towels in advance of heat waves.

### How does Wyndham City seek to address housing supply?

Currently, Wyndham's housing stock lacks diversity, consisting mainly of large freestanding dwellings:

- 86 per cent of homes have three or more bedrooms
- less than one per cent (0.8 per cent) have one-bedroom
- less than seven per cent have two-bedrooms

- Wyndham has little social housing (1.1 per cent),

Council encourages developments that include a mix of lot sizes to increase housing diversity and choice. We also encourage urban consolidation by identifying areas for greater housing density, emphasising delivery of one- and two-bedroom dwellings, such as apartments and townhouses, through the planning scheme.

Council has adopted a suite of consistent policies that set the context for social and affordable housing development in Wyndham.

- *Wyndham Affordable Housing Strategy 2022-2025*, Council's first affordable housing strategy encourages greater diversity of housing, especially one- and two-bedroom homes.

- The Wyndham Plan, which encourages development in locations that are well supported by infrastructure and services.

- *Wyndham Housing and Neighbourhood Character Strategy 2023*, which proposes a 15-year plan to manage housing growth and change across the municipality.



# Emma Greenhalgh

Chief Executive Officer, National Shelter



## Searching for an ALL of Government Approach: Local Government Responses to Homelessness Two Decades On

Twenty years ago, *Parity* released its first ever edition of focusing on/ examine the role of and responses of local government in Australia to homelessness. There was a further edition focusing on local government responses in October 2013.

When the 2004 edition was released, I was a policy officer in Brisbane City Council (BCC) cutting my teeth as a member of the social policy team tasked with delivering BCC's homelessness strategy.

I contributed two articles to the 2004 edition based on the responses from the Council's strategy. The priorities in the strategy at that time included outreach services, after hours youth services, boarding house and caravan park safety, advocacy and awareness, public space

liaison officers, park infrastructure, and a brokerage program.

The content in that edition was provided predominantly by Councillors and officers from capital city local governments. This reflected who was sponsoring the edition (capital city local governments).

It also possibly reflected a view at that time that homelessness was an 'issue' for urban local governments, and particularly a matter for the capital cities — seen to be places of public facing street homelessness, better resourced to respond to the issue, and possibly more socially progressive.

The outlier was the City of Port Phillip — adjacent to the capital and with a history of housing and homelessness responses.

The editor at the time reflected that capital city local government had *'taken a leadership role in the development of the role of local government in responding to homelessness and particularly in the provision of social housing and in the recognition of the need for affordable housing'*.

It is worth recognising contextually two issues that may have played some role in informing and influencing the capital city local government responses of the time.

One was greater sophistication in counting the number of people experiencing homelessness. From 1996, the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) had commenced its first enumeration strategy to 'count' the number of people experiencing homelessness in Australia. This provided a greater understanding of not only who was homeless and where, but also the

'type' of homelessness people are experiencing. This was previously the domain of street counts. The new data provided a greater understanding of the problem.

The second element was that capital cities were grappling with the aftermath of significant changes arising from industry relocation, resulting in decline and later urban renewal and gentrification. This evolution was supported by policy including the Building Better Cities program. Inner urban areas underwent urban consolidation, and the renewal process resulted in the loss of the *'more affordable housing for very low-income households'*, namely boarding and rooming houses, and flats.

Brisbane City Council acknowledged the impact of gentrification in the inner city on low-income households. In its submission to the Productivity Commission in 2003, it noted that between 1991 and 2001, inner city Brisbane had lost more than 1,200 affordable rental dwellings for very low-income households.<sup>1</sup>

Reading through the 2004 edition of *Parity*, I am struck by the similarity in approach by the capital city local government at that time. Keywords include partnerships and strategic approaches. There was a focus on the management of public spaces that was inclusive and not punitive. Councils wanted to raise awareness of homelessness in the community. The need for responses that include social and affordable housing and counter the rise of NIMBYs (yes, even then).

Here we are 20 years later and what has changed, but also, what has also remained the same, is striking.



The most significant change from 2004 is that more local governments from all parts of the country see that they have a role in responding to homelessness in their community and also a deeper understanding of housing outcomes.

We do not have to look far to see local governments actively confronting and considering their role in the context of the current housing crisis and the members of their communities who are having to sleep rough because no other options are available.

Additionally, we are seeing local government confront the issue of housing affordability and availability in the context of their own economic productivity and social wellbeing.

This is occurring across a wide range of local governments of varying locations, sizes, approaches, and resources. Not just in capital cities. This edition of *Parity* reflects this diversity.

When we consider what has remained the same, it is the fundamental question of understanding the role of local government responding to housing and homelessness within the context of three tiers of government, and within the context of cost shifting.



I also feel that the role local government can play is still not fully appreciated by the other levels of government and the expectations are higher.

I searched the articles in the 2004 edition for an appropriate quote to end on, and found the editorial by the then CEO of Council to Homeless Persons editorial appropriate; '[t]he catchphrase of a 'whole of government' response to homelessness needs to be wedded to an 'all of government' response to homelessness'.

While the 2004 local government edition reflected that the capital cities saw themselves at the table of an 'all of government' response to homelessness, what we see and need to do now is continually support and resource the inclusion of all local government to be included in this 'all of government' response.

#### Endnote

1. Australian Government 2003, *Submission to the Productivity Commission I, Enquiry into First Home Ownership*, Submission by Brisbane City Council (#165). <https://www.pc.gov.au/inquiries/completed/first-home-ownership/submissions/sub165/sub165.pdf>

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