

# THE WESTERN AUSTRALIAN STRATEGY TO END HOMELESSNESS

## Youth Homelessness Action Plan

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Youth Affairs Council of WA  
WA Alliance to End Homelessness







The Youth Affairs Council of WA and The WA Alliance to End Homelessness acknowledge Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people as the Traditional Custodians of this land and its waters.

We wish to pay our respects to Elders past and present and extend this to all Aboriginal people seeing this message.

# The WA Alliance to End Homelessness

Following an 18-month community campaign the Western Australian Alliance to End Homeless (The Alliance) released a 10 Year Strategy to End Homelessness in Western Australia in April 2018 (The Strategy).

The Strategy heralded the arrival of a strong whole of community response to ending homelessness, one that is driven by the dedication of a robust community sector. The Alliance is comprised of a group of sector organisations that have come together to galvanise a community response to homelessness in Western Australia. It is hoped that as leaders in this space they can utilise The Strategy to foster a consistent approach to tackling homelessness across the state and across sectors.

The Strategy intended to provide a broad framework for the process of ending homelessness and create signposts for action. A critical component of these signposts was the development of further plans for specific communities, groups and regions. The Youth Homelessness Action Plan (The Plan) is

specifically tailored to addressing the needs of young people experiencing homelessness, not only those in crisis but as a holistic attempt to prevent and end youth homelessness in Western Australia. If we invest early enough, we can break the cycle for young people before it manifests into chronic homelessness that becomes entrenched well into adulthood.

The Youth Affairs Council of WA (YACWA) is the peak body that represents young people and the sector that supports them. Over the last few years, youth homelessness has increasingly become a priority issue for YACWA as the number of young people experiencing homelessness in Western Australia has increased and the main drivers of youth homelessness have worsened. As an organisation supporting the goals of

The Alliance, YACWA is committed to ensuring that this Plan provides a clear blueprint for any community organisation looking to contribute to ending youth homelessness.

To ensure that The Plan is tailored to the experiences of young people, we must ensure that The Plan is being driven by their voices and the voices of the youth sector that supports them. To this end, YACWA have developed The Plan in close consultation with a Homelessness Youth Advisory Council that comprises 10 young people with lived experience of homelessness, and a Co-Design Team that consists of key youth sector organisations and government agencies that work with young people experiencing homelessness.

## Connecting Sectors — The State Government's 10 Year Strategy on Homelessness

This Action Plan is a community-led initiative that intends to compliment the work done by the WA State Government, who are concurrently developing a 10-Year Strategy on Homelessness. Led by the Department of Communities, the Government's Strategy will expand and build on The Alliance's work as well as endeavour to establish a coordinated approach between government and the

community sector with the collective goal of ending homelessness. The role of The Plan in this process is to outline the youth sector's role in addressing youth homelessness and to highlight and establish how this role can intersect with the State Government and its upcoming Strategy as well as link into both the Federal Government and private sector.



# The Strategy to End Homelessness: Our 10-year Commitment

By 2028, the following 10-year targets will have been achieved:

1. Western Australia will have ended all forms of chronic homelessness including chronic rough sleeping.
2. No individual or family in Western Australia will sleep rough or stay in supported accommodation for longer than five nights before moving into an affordable, safe, decent, permanent home with the support required to sustain it.
3. The Western Australian rate of homelessness (including couch surfing and insecure tenure) will have been halved from its 2016 level.
4. The underlying causes that result in people becoming homeless have been met head-on, resulting in a reduction by more than half in the inflow of people and families into homelessness in any one year.
5. The current very large gap between the rate of Aboriginal homelessness and non-Aboriginal homelessness in Western Australia will be eliminated so that the rate of Aboriginal homelessness is no higher than the rate of non- Aboriginal homelessness.
6. Those experiencing homelessness and those exiting homelessness with physical health, mental health, and alcohol and other drug use dependence needs will have their needs addressed. This will result in a halving of mortality rates among those who have experienced homelessness and a halving in public hospital costs one year on for those exiting homelessness.
7. Those experiencing homelessness and those exiting homelessness will be supported to strengthen their economic, social, family and community connections leading to stronger well-being and quality of life outcomes. Employment among those experiencing homelessness will be significantly increased. Over half of those exiting homelessness will be employed within three years of moving into housing. Well-being and quality of life will equal those of the general population in the same timeframe.
8. A strong, collaborative and adaptive network of services and responses across the community services, health, mental health, justice and education sectors will exist working collectively to address the underlying causes of homelessness and meeting the needs of those who become homeless.
9. Measurement, accountability and governance mechanisms that are robust, transparent and open to external review will be operating, providing an ongoing means for assessing progress in meeting the goals of Ending Homelessness in Western Australia in 10 years.



# What We Know

## Defining Youth Homelessness

**Homelessness** is generally considered to be when a person does not have a home in which they have shelter, can exercise control over a physical area, can maintain privacy and enjoy social relations and have legal title through tenancy rights or ownership. It includes rough sleeping on the streets, parks, cars, squats, stays in supported accommodation for the homeless, couch surfing (individuals and families staying temporarily with others), living in boarding and rooming houses without private facilities and security of tenure, and heavy reliance on short-term stays in motels, hotels and other forms of temporary lodging.

**Rough sleeping** is living without shelter or improvised dwellings such as sleeping on the streets and parks, in tents, in caves, in cars and in squats or on buses and trains and in buildings not designed for residential use. Chronic homelessness is continuous homelessness for one year or more or four or more episodes of homelessness in the last three years where the combined length of time homeless on those occasions is at least 12 months.

**Youth homelessness** is very distinct from adult homelessness, however, in the sense that young people are often much less visible on the street, and more likely be couch surfing. This is considered the major form of youth homelessness in Western Australia. Youth homelessness is also predominantly caused or underlined by family and domestic violence, which can lead to more transient homelessness as young people search for a place to stay that is away from harm.

There is a misconception that couch surfing is a safer form of homelessness, or not even a form of homelessness at all. Whilst there is not a significant amount of data on couch surfing, research carried out in Queensland found that among young people accessing support from Brisbane Youth Services, couch surfers had higher rates of both suicide risk and rates of self-harming behaviour compared to those sleeping rough.<sup>1</sup> Couch surfers were also twice as likely to describe their mental health as poorer than the young people sleeping rough<sup>1</sup>. This research shows that couch surfing has the potential to be just as damaging as rough sleeping for young people.

## The State of Youth Homelessness in Western Australia

In Western Australia and nationwide the problem of youth homelessness is seemingly getting worse. In 2008 the National Youth Commission developed a Roadmap for Youth Homelessness which looked at the 10 'must do' strategic areas for action to address youth homelessness. In the 10 years since the roadmap was released, Australia has made little to developing progress on eight of the 10 strategic areas. As a result, the number of young people accessing homelessness services has drastically increased over the 10-year period in spite of these efforts.

It is critical that in tackling the broader issue of homelessness the unique needs of young people are taken into account. Young people currently make up a significant proportion (21%) of the homeless population in Western Australia, despite those aged 15-24 only making up 12.6% of the overall population. According to the 2016 census, there were 3,132 children and young people counted as homeless with 1,921 of those being aged 12-24. In 2017-18 young people aged 15-24 who presented alone made up 13% of clients assisted by specialist homelessness services in Western Australia.

These statistics may be misleading however, as homelessness among young people is often under-reported due to a tendency for young people to be staying in short-term or temporary accommodation i.e. couch surfing. Often for these young people, a usual address will be reported and so they will not be counted on the census as homeless, despite them experiencing couch surfing or other forms of short-stay accommodation.



# Key Facts around Youth Homelessness in Australia

Studies have shown that when compared to the general population, young people experiencing homelessness have higher levels of psychological distress, self-harm and attempted suicide, unemployment rates, lack of education, poorer health outcomes and higher prevalence of mental health conditions.

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The 2016 ABS Census estimates nearly 28,000 young Australians aged 12-24 years are homeless on any given night.<sup>2</sup>

2

21% of the entire homeless population in Western Australia are under 25.<sup>3</sup>

3

3,132 children and young people counted as homeless in WA in the 2016 census with 1,921 of those being aged 12-24.<sup>4</sup>

4

In 2017-18 young people aged 15-24 who presented alone made up 13% of clients assisted by specialist homelessness services in Western Australia.<sup>5</sup>

5

There are zero affordable houses in Western Australia for young people on Newstart or youth allowance.<sup>6</sup>

6

Those with a probable serious mental illness are 3.5 times more likely to have spent time away from home than those without a probable serious mental illness (32.2% versus 8.6%).<sup>7</sup>

7

In 2017-2018, Youth Futures had to turn away 65% of the young people approaching them for support with crisis accommodation and homelessness support.<sup>8</sup>

8

\$16.4 million - or \$4,846 per person per year - is saved following a person experiencing homelessness's entry into social housing, due to a reduced use of health services.<sup>9</sup>

9

Among those in youth homelessness services:

- Half had slept rough before the age of 18
- 63% had been in out-of-home care
- More than half had left home or run away from home because of violence between parents or guardians.<sup>10</sup>

10

Among those in adult services:

- 48.5% experience homelessness first before the age of 18
- 69% of Aboriginal respondents were affected by intergenerational homelessness<sup>11</sup>

# The Main Drivers of Youth Homelessness

*“The main drivers of youth homelessness have significantly increased; the number of children in Out of Home Care have increased by some 85 percent over a decade; family and domestic violence remains a significant issue for the community; housing affordability in Australia has worsened; and more young people experience homelessness than since the NYC Inquiry into Youth Homelessness and the 2008 White Paper, The Road Home.” – National Youth Homelessness Conference Communique*

Across the nation, the lack of investment in early intervention to address the key pathways into homelessness has been a major policy failure in efforts to prevent youth homelessness and has been a significant factor in worsening outcomes for young people.<sup>12</sup> The 2008 White Paper set out a comprehensive agenda for improvements in approaches to early-intervention nationwide. However, since then little investment has been made to reduce the flow of young people into homelessness.<sup>13</sup> One notable example of this lack of investment has been a longstanding unwillingness nationwide to extend support for young people leaving state care to the age of 21 and ensure strong wraparound leaving care support, thereby helping to ‘turn off the tap’ of young people exiting into homelessness. Lack of support for those leaving care has been a strongly identified driver into homelessness for a significant period of

time, however it is only recently that action has been undertaken to address this issue in Western Australia.

This Action Plan is about preventing young people from falling into homelessness. To do this we need to recognise and address the main drivers that lead to youth homelessness. Many of the pathways into homelessness that occur at a young age can lead to entrenched homelessness into adulthood.

Factors influencing these pathways are often complex and interrelated. They include social and structural determinants such as family and domestic violence, unemployment, mental health issues, experiences of institutionalisation, a lack of affordable housing, and inadequate and/or inaccessible support services. These should not be considered in isolation

as they are all often intrinsically interrelated when influencing homelessness. The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare reported that in 2014–2015, the most common reasons for accessing specialist homeless services for young people were: housing crisis (21%), family or domestic violence (15%), and relationship or family breakdown (12%).<sup>14</sup>

Some of the key drivers of homelessness include:

## **Family violence**

Once a young person experiences violence in a domestic setting remaining at home may become untenable, even if they have nowhere else to go. As a result, young people experiencing family violence are highly susceptible to homelessness, either by themselves or with an individual parent.







- In 2015-16 family and domestic violence was the leading cause of homelessness in Western Australia, with 8,388 people citing violence as the main reason for seeking support.
- Over one third of the homelessness youth surveyed in the Cost of Youth Homelessness in Australia Report reported that violence in the home had reached the point where police had to be called. Nearly two-thirds (63%) of the young people experiencing homelessness surveyed had been placed in some form of out-of-home care by the time that they had turned 18.<sup>15</sup>

#### **Mental Health issues**

Mental health issues are both a driver and symptom of youth homelessness. These also can often be comorbid with alcohol or drug issues. While having mental illness can increase the risk for a young person to become homeless, homelessness can also increase the risk of a young person to develop a mental illness.

- Young people experiencing homelessness are more likely to have a range of health issues to a much greater extent than the general population.
- The incidence of self-injury and attempted suicide is much higher than the general population or other disadvantaged young people.<sup>16</sup>

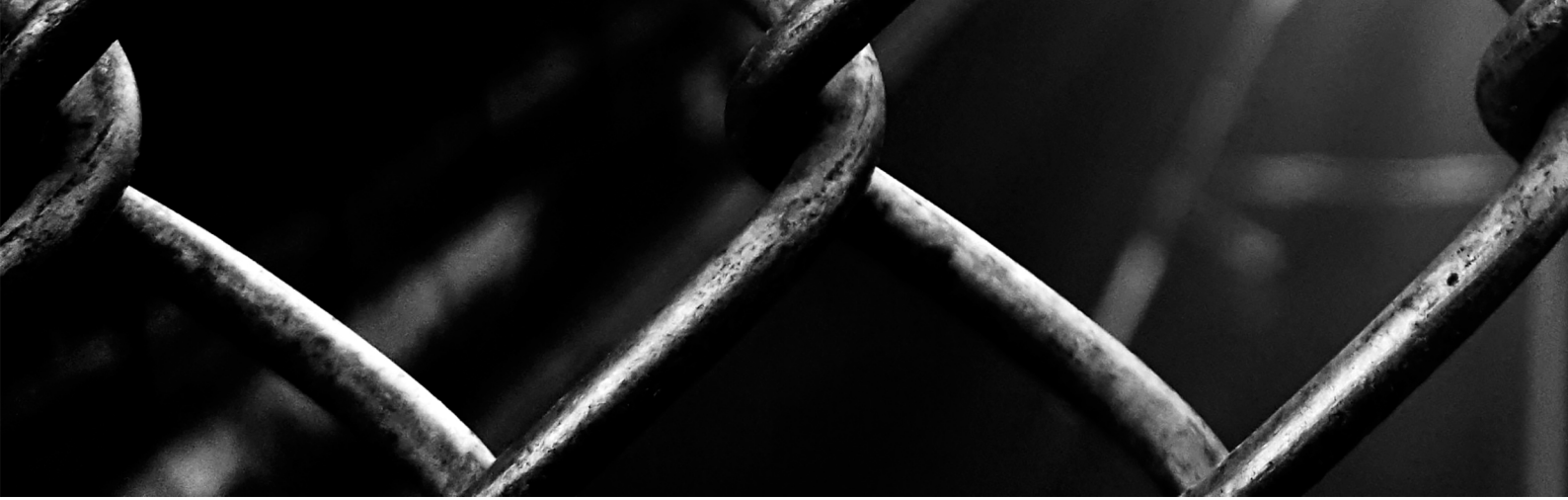
#### **Lack of affordable housing**

Secure, affordable and appropriate housing is both a basic human right and essential to provide a stable basis for young people. There are zero affordable houses available to young people on

Newstart or Youth Allowance in WA, and only two available nationally according to Anglicare's Rental Affordability Snapshot 2019. Many young people may enter homelessness simply because they cannot afford rent or other costs of living. The underfunding of social and affordable housing as well as inadequate rental subsidies means that more young people receiving welfare support are unable to enter the housing market and therefore often end up homeless. More than 142,500 Australians are on the waiting list for social housing and over 1.34 million Australians currently receive rent assistance but are still in severe housing stress.<sup>17</sup>

#### **Transitioning out of institutionalised care**

Transitions of any kind are a critical stage of a young person's life, so a young person transitioning out of an institutionalised setting is especially vulnerable to homelessness if not given adequate support. Young people leaving the juvenile justice system, acute mental health services and child protection are at significant risk of falling into homelessness. Failure to provide safe and secure housing, employment and/or educational opportunities and appropriate service support and networks for young people leaving institutionalised care can lead to entrenched disadvantage, leading into homelessness, poorer health outcomes and recidivism.



## Addressing the Needs of Vulnerable Cohorts

Particular groups of young people are especially vulnerable to homelessness and/or do not have the specialised services required to provide them with accessible support when homeless. These young people can face higher rates of societal and systemic discrimination and racism, a lack of familial support networks, physical and emotional abuse, mental illness and alcohol and drug addiction.

### LGBTQIA+ (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer/Questioning, Intersex, Asexual or otherwise diverse sexuality or gender) young people

LGBTQIA+ young people are an increasingly prevalent demographic experiencing homelessness in the Western Australian community and yet there is little information available about this especially vulnerable cohort. Statistics from the 2014 General Social Survey showed that gay or lesbian people (34%) and people with 'other' sexual orientations (21%) were more likely to report at least one experience of homelessness compared with heterosexual people (13%).

LGBTQIA+ young people are also at an increased risk of falling into homelessness following family rejection or a lack of support. This situation has the potential to be compounded for trans or gender diverse young people who could experience barriers in accessing suitable crisis accommodation or homelessness services due a lack of inclusivity and/or structural discrimination. The few services in Western that do fully accommodate transgender young people often have significant waitlists.<sup>18</sup> One Australian study showed that 22% of young trans and gender diverse respondents had experienced homelessness. Of those surveyed as part of the study, 93.9% had self-harmed and 77.5% had attempted suicide.





### **Young people leaving Out-of-home care**

The current state of young people leaving the care system into homelessness is at crisis point. In WA 75 per cent of young people experiencing homelessness have been in state care<sup>19</sup>. A significant cause of this is the fact that leaving care plans are inconsistently applied for young people in care. Around 65% of young people in care do not receive leaving care support early enough or at all and 43% of those surveyed did not have stable accommodation at the time of leaving care.<sup>20</sup> Young people with high and complex needs may be properly identified and targeted for extended support and therefore are highly vulnerable to homelessness upon leaving care.

### **Aboriginal young people**

Aboriginal young people are vastly overrepresented in homelessness statistics. Nationally, Aboriginal young people aged 12–18 are 11 times more likely than non-Aboriginal young people to experience homelessness. Additionally, the population of Aboriginal people in Western Australia experiencing homelessness is more likely to be younger than the population of non-Aboriginal people; 4 in 10 (42%) Aboriginal people experiencing homelessness are aged 18 or under compared to fewer than 1 in 4 (23%) non-Aboriginal people experiencing homelessness.<sup>21</sup>

In Western Australia the rate of Aboriginal homelessness in the 2016

census was 344.6 persons per 10,000: a rate more than 13 times the non-Aboriginal population.<sup>22</sup> Additionally, 41% of those receiving support from homelessness agencies are Aboriginal people, almost 10 times more than non-Aboriginal people. This high rate of homelessness is caused by longstanding socioeconomic disadvantage, a severe shortage of appropriate housing in remote locations and a history of dispossession.<sup>23</sup> Aboriginal young people are also significantly over-represented in out-of-home care and juvenile justice systems, which is a contributory factor to high rates of homelessness as many young people often exit these institutions into homelessness.

### **Children under 16**

There has been an increase in the need for services to support young people aged 10–15, and sometimes younger.<sup>24</sup> Despite this, there is a clear gap in adequate policy responses to meet the needs of this vulnerable population.<sup>25</sup> In Western Australia, most youth crisis accommodation services are funded to cater only for those aged 15 years or older, and others are unable to provide the flexible support which is required. Many issues presented by young people experiencing homelessness often emerge soon after they become homeless. By the time these young people are old enough to be eligible for services, their issues have become so entrenched or serious that they become much more difficult to support. Providing funding for services to young

people of this demographic is a critical element of early intervention, giving young people the support required before issues become further entrenched.

### **Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CaLD) young people**

Despite a clear lack of research into CaLD Youth Homelessness, it is evident that as a cohort they are at significant risk. The most recent study on the topic, conducted in 2002, identified that the risk of homelessness for young people from refugee backgrounds is at least 6 to 10 times greater than for other young people of school age.<sup>26</sup> Insecure housing is also identified as the greatest indicator of mental and physical health problems, with issues such as ‘affordability, the suitability of housing in relation to physical aspects such as condition and layout, and social aspects such as safety and belonging and issues around security of tenure’ all having a negative impact on health which could then lead to homelessness.<sup>27</sup> Given the vulnerability of CaLD young people to homelessness, it is imperative that they are explicitly recognised in this Action Plan and the implementation of any actions must be tailored to meet their unique needs.



# Influencing the Action Plan Case Studies of Best Practice

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There are many examples both nationally and internationally of Action Plans, Strategies and programs that have all shown some success in tackling the problem of youth homelessness. We know that other communities have come together to attempt a collective impact effort end homelessness and as a result have had a significant impact on improving outcomes for vulnerable young people, so we look at these examples as a useful source of knowledge that can be adapted into the Western Australian context.

# Collective Impact Strategies to End Homelessness

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## Calgary Plan to End Youth Homelessness

In 2011, Calgary became the first jurisdiction in Canada to launch a strategic plan to end youth homelessness as part of a broader ending homelessness strategy. It is a model that the Alliance has adapted to Western Australia, with the Calgary Homeless Foundation (CHF) and the Youth Sector partnering to develop innovative measures moving their collective efforts forward at both a systemic and programmatic level. The plan is a collaborative effort between the public, private and not-for-profit sectors in Calgary and places an emphasis on prevention, youth-centred solutions, housing first, and crosssectoral and cross-departmental collaboration.

Since the plan's development in 2011 key achievements have included:

- A slowed growth in homelessness despite an increasing population by housing over 6,000 people, of which 9%, or around 600, were young people;
- A commitment of around \$45 million from the Alberta Government to support the plan and;
- A coordinated homeless-serving system of care, that includes a Homeless Management Information System, enhanced service standards and performance management across providers.<sup>28</sup>

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## Finland Action Plan

In 2008 Finland developed and began implementing the first truly nationallevel integrated homelessness strategy using a Housing First model. In 2016 the model was reviewed and refined into an Action Plan. This Action Plan integrated local and global evidence and recognised the need for political and interagency coordination. It was broadly defined, tackling all aspects of homelessness and considered the role of housing supply to be essential in tackling homelessness. Over ten years since its implementation Finland has now nearly eradicated recurrent and long-term homelessness and experiencing of any form of homelessness is now fast becoming uncommon and temporary.<sup>29</sup>



# Early Intervention – Preventing Youth Homelessness

**Reconnect was established in 1998 in Australia as a program focused on community early intervention for young people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness**

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## **Reconnect Australia**

Reconnect was established in 1998 in Australia as a program focused on community early intervention for young people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness. Reconnect focuses on helping young people to access secure and stable accommodation, maintain family relationships and engage with employment, education, training and the community. The target group of Reconnect is young people aged 12-18 years who are experiencing homelessness or are at-risk of homelessness and their families. Reconnect uses strategies such as counselling, group work, mediation and practical support with both the young person and their family.

An evaluation of seven Reconnect sites in Western Australia demonstrated the significant effect it is having on improving the outcomes for young people experiencing homelessness and preventing those at-risk from falling into homelessness. Measured improvements were found in individual wellbeing, sense of control and support, housing permanency, family cohesion and financial condition of the family<sup>30</sup>. Reconnect shows that intervening early with intensive case management and stable accommodation can result in considerably improved outcomes for young people across a range of areas; preventing entrenched homelessness and the over-burdening of crisis services by addressing the main drivers of disadvantage.



# A Housing First Approach

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## 50 Lives 50 Homes

The 50 Lives 50 Homes project (50 Lives) is a Housing First and collective impact response to ending homelessness. The 50 Lives Project commenced in 2015 and takes a collaborative approach to house and provide support for Perth's most vulnerable people experiencing homelessness. The project is the first true housing first program in Western Australia and has been instrumental in paving the way for reform in the homelessness sector and the push for a state-wide Housing First approach.

The 50 Lives project has made significant steps towards effectively ending chronic rough sleeping amongst a small sample of individuals experiencing homelessness, with the goal of housing 50 people with complex and entrenched homelessness achieved in June 2017. Not only were these individuals housed, but the program saw a significant decrease in hospitalisation for six months or more, leading to savings on crisis care in the health system.<sup>31</sup> This success was only made possible however due to strong collaborative service support for the individuals that were housed. The After Hours Support Service utilised as part of the project aided individuals over 7,800 times between January 2017 and June 2018, with most of their clients housed as part of the 50 Lives project.<sup>32</sup>

The 50 Lives project has demonstrated unequivocally that combining wraparound support that is individualised to client need with stable housing significantly decreases the risk of an individual returning to homelessness. It is an example of successful practice of the Housing First approaching Western Australia that we can build on. Despite this success, the 50 Lives project designed to meet the need of adult rough sleepers and did not specifically target young people. so any model as part of this plan must be developed specifically as a Housing First program for Youth. A critical part of this model will need to include intensive support for young people with complex issues, as many will not have previous experience with living independently in a house and will therefore need support to adapt to the program.

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## Ireland Housing First Approach

The Dublin Region Housing First Model has operated since 2014 and has attempted to house those with a history of entrenched rough sleeping who have complex support needs and were reluctant to access emergency accommodation. As part of this project a total of 214 individuals have been housed in 250 tenancies, with 182 successfully retaining their tenancies (85.1% retention rate). Building on this success a National Implementation Plan of Housing First is currently in progress. This plan aims to reduce and end chronic homelessness in Ireland, and a key target in this is housing 1000 people by 2021.



# What We Have Now

**Western Australia has an interconnected system of specialist homeless services, including crisis, accommodation, transitional accommodation, tenancy support and wraparound support. They are largely funded by the National Housing Homelessness Agreement (NHHA), which is an ongoing collaborative partnership between the Federal and State.**

Western Australia has an interconnected system of specialist homeless services, including crisis accommodation, transitional accommodation, tenancy support and wraparound support. They are largely funded by the National Housing and Homelessness Agreement (NHHA), which is an ongoing collaborative partnership between the Federal and State governments. This agreement came into effect in 2018-19 and provides \$375 million of indexed funding nationally over three years, maintaining the \$115 million of annual homelessness funding provided under the National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness (NPAH). The Agreement covers the supply of new affordable housing and supporting the delivery of frontline services to improve outcomes for Australians experiencing homelessness.

The Department of Communities is the lead agency responsible for addressing housing and homelessness in Western Australia and spends around \$85 million dollars on specialist homelessness services each year. These services are available across all stages of homelessness, from prevention and early intervention for at-risk young people through to crisis support for young people with complex issues experiencing long-term homelessness. Despite early intervention being crucial to preventing entrenched homelessness, existing resources are often channelled towards the crisis end; providing invaluable support to vulnerable young people, but not breaking the cycle before it begins.

These services do not exist in isolation as they often interact and supplement 'mainstream' services, such as education, health and mental health, justice, legal and employment services. Young people experiencing homelessness will inevitably access some or all of these services, and they can often be crucial points in the system where the cycle can be broken. Despite this fact, it is often unclear just how well integrated specialist homelessness services are with the mainstream system and there are crucial gaps between the two service spheres that young people fall into.<sup>33</sup>

Evidence shows that services in Western Australia are not currently meeting the needs of individuals experiencing homelessness. On average 67 requests for help were unmet by homelessness services each day in Western Australia, which makes up roughly one quarter of all unmet requests in Australia.<sup>34</sup> The state also has the lowest rate (per 10,000 of the population) of persons in supported accommodation for people experiencing homelessness nationally, which may reflect a deficiency in service support to individuals experiencing homelessness compared to other states and territories.<sup>35</sup>





# What We Know We Need

**In order to truly end youth homelessness, we must address the underlying pathways that precede it, including poverty, family violence and transitions out of care.**

In order to truly end youth homelessness, we must address the underlying pathways that precede it, including poverty, family violence and transitions out of care. This is only possible by making comprehensive systemic change to ensure that early intervention is prioritised. We must also ensure those already experiencing homelessness are provided with safe and stable housing without any preconditions. Without accommodation, young people experiencing homelessness are expected to address mental health issues or addictions whilst sleeping rough, something that can be an incredibly traumatic and difficult experience. Western Australia must adopt a Housing First model if it is to make any significant progress in addressing the pathways into homelessness.

Our plan to end youth homelessness in 10 years and to significantly improve outcomes for vulnerable young people is only achievable through reinforcing the collaborative capability of the entire community; including the public, private and community services sectors, as well as the general public. This means that we must adopt an ecosystems approach when structuring our efforts, including housing young people experiencing homelessness in public and privately funded social housing and providing them with wraparound service support.



## Our Vision

A Western Australia where every young person has access to a safe and secure home with all the supports needed to live the life that they choose.

## Our Mission

To carry out a whole of community response which ends long-term homelessness for young people in Western Australia.

# Our Approach to Ending Homelessness

Let's end homelessness, not just manage it. Taking a coordinated and collaborative approach we can end homelessness in Western Australia

<p><b>OUR RESPONSIBILITY</b></p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Let's end homelessness, not just manage it. Taking a coordinated and collaborative approach we can end homelessness in Western Australia.</li> <li>2. Young people experiencing homelessness bring their collective knowledge and lived experience to effective solutions to homelessness and take personal ownership to ending their own homelessness.</li> </ol>
<p><b>OUR APPROACH TO HOUSING</b></p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>3. A primary driver of homelessness is housing affordability. Reducing housing affordability problems and increasing the availability of affordable housing targeted to those experiencing homelessness are fundamental to our approach of ending homelessness.</li> <li>4. The provision of services and housing should be guided by the person experiencing homelessness' choice and need. Housing should be safe, decent, readily attainable. A range of types of affordable housing options close to services and in differing communities is critical to addressing the various support needs of people experiencing homelessness.</li> <li>5. All young people experiencing homelessness are able to transition to immediate permanent housing, with supports as necessary. Our immediate objective is to help young people experiencing homelessness gain and maintain a permanent place to call home and meet ongoing health and social needs.</li> </ol>
<p><b>OUR APPROACH TO SUPPORT</b></p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>6. Young people experiencing homelessness are supported to address underlying health and social issues they face, and to gain employment so they can move to a position of long-term financial security.</li> <li>7. The most vulnerable populations are prioritised in actions to end homelessness. The very high rate of Aboriginal youth homelessness and women and children in domestic violence relationships in Western Australia and those experiencing long-term homelessness requires special attention and the reduction in homelessness in these groups is a major first priority.</li> <li>8. Resources will be concentrated on programs that offer longterm results and programs will be delivered through a network of collaborating services.</li> <li>9. Our progress in achieving our goals will be continually assessed in an open, transparent and accountable way.</li> </ol>
<p><b>OUR APPROACH TO FUNDING</b></p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>10. The Action Plan's funding should be sufficient to meet the objectives of the Action Plan and will be sought from diverse sources. The economic costs of homelessness will be reduced with the implementation of an effective plan that ends chronic homelessness and results in functional zero homelessness where inflows into homelessness approximate outflows into housing on a monthly basis.</li> <li>11. It will be essential to involve the private sector in the funding of the Action Plan through, public private funding models, corporate giving and the provision of affordable housing options including through impact investing options.</li> <li>12. A skilled and well-trained workforce and an adequately funded non-profit sector are central to the achievement of the objective of ending homelessness.</li> </ol>



# Our Five Core Strategic Areas:

Aligning with the broader Community Led 10 Year Strategy to End Homelessness, The Plan is organised into five core strategic areas:

<b>1</b> HOUSING	Ensure adequate and affordable housing. This means having a supply of housing that meets the needs of those who need it. It also means having multiple pathways into permanent housing and multiple housing options including 19 housing with support services that are all effective.
<b>2</b> PREVENTION	A focus on prevention and early intervention. Develop system, service and social responses that ensure people at risk of homelessness have the supports they need to prevent them entering homelessness. This will involve an improving recognition of the health value of a home.
<b>3</b> A STRONG AND COORDINATED RESPONSES	A 24/7 'no wrong door' system that delivers responsive action across different community and health support systems that are well coordinated and act quickly.
<b>4</b> DATA, RESEARCH AND TARGETS	Improve data, the evidence base on what works, systems knowledge, and the accountability of the health and social support system to achieve the goals of the Action Plan. Building the evidence base around the health value of a home. Set clear targets and ensure delivery.
<b>5</b> BUILDING COMMUNITY CAPACITY	Solutions are sourced from those who have experienced homelessness. All sectors that support those experiencing vulnerability and disadvantage deepen their capacity to end homelessness in WA. Developing a broad public movement, inclusive of all members of the community who have the desire to end homelessness brings more people and resources to ensure success.

Whilst The Plan is designed to cover what the community sector can achieve in efforts end youth homelessness in Western Australia, the actions outlined cannot be successful without meaningful contribution, resourcing, and partnerships with the State and Federal Governments as well as the private sector. It is because of this fact that we have included actions in this plan that are not directly the responsibility of the youth sector but are critical to our shared efforts to end homelessness.

We must also ensure that the voice of young people with lived experience continues to be integral to all our work moving forward. The implementation of this Action Plan will be place based, trauma informed

and youth-centred. It will emphasise collaborative action with strategies such as the WA State Government's 10-Year Strategy on Homelessness, the Affordable Housing Strategy as well as establish direct partnerships between the public, private and community sectors moving forward is the only way to ensure a truly collective contribution from all elements of the community to ending homelessness.



# The Action Plan

## Housing

### We as a Sector will:

1. Support the development of Housing First options that are specifically designed to meet the needs of young people experiencing homelessness, including intensive support for young people with complex issues.
2. Co-design state-wide low barrier crisis accommodation services that can respond to the diverse needs of vulnerable young people e.g. LGBTQIA+ young people, young people with complex mental health needs, and provide support and pathways as part of these services for young people to transition into long-term independent accommodation.
3. Develop a suite of specialist accommodation services for young people under 15, including housing options, crisis accommodation and targeted service support.

### We will work with the Government to:

1. Utilise a combination of rental subsidies and landlord insurance to recruit ethical landlords and increase accessibility to the private rental market for young people.
2. Fund specialist accommodation services for young people with complex mental health presentations in areas where this service is urgently needed, including youth-specific step up/step down accommodation services.
3. As part of a new State Affordable Housing Strategy, drastically increase the amount of social housing in Western Australia as well as designate a specific quota of housing for young people.
4. In partnership with Aboriginal communities, work to reduce overcrowding and homelessness in rural and remote Aboriginal communities by committing to a long-term funding agreement for accessible housing as well specialised support for young people and their families.

## Guiding Principles

- Immediate access - housing must be given with no readiness conditions.
- Recovery oriented - Once housed service supports must prioritise rehabilitation to prevent re-entry into homelessness.
- Individualising care - service support must be person-focused and tailored to need.
- Safe and non-discriminatory service - Housing and homelessness services must be accessible for young people of all backgrounds.
- Don't reinvent the wheel - utilise and build on current best practice in Western Australia.



# Prevention

## We as a Sector will:

1. In areas that have identified need, establish and trial a school-based program for homelessness prevention. These will aim to identify young people early, providing collaborative intervention in the form of family mediation in response to conflict and facilitating re-engagement with school.
2. Work with the State Government to redesign the structure and implementation of Leaving Care Plans so that they become a true mechanism for young people to have critical control and support during their care-leaving experiences.
3. Co-design a highly accessible and practical skills-building program for at-risk young people, particularly those leaving state care.
4. Develop a school-based program where support is provided to hosts of couch surfers in order to provide improved stability for a young person's accommodation and to facilitate a pathway into longer-term housing.

## We will work with the Government to:

1. Fund Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations to lead the support for Aboriginal young people leaving care across the state by developing place based models.
2. Following the trial of homestretch, enshrine the option for young people to extend the age at which they leave care to 21 into legislation.
3. Support the Commissioner for Children and Young People to report on the main drivers of youth homelessness and have oversight over the adequacy of interagency response to these issues.

## Guiding Principles

- Intervene early - The best way to end homelessness is to prevent it in youth.
- Supporting transitions - Transitions are key periods of instability in the lives of a young person and those most vulnerable must be given significant support during these times.
- Culturally safe - Prevention efforts for Aboriginal young people must be led by Aboriginal services.
- Service & education integration - Educational institutions are key point of intervention for at-risk young people and a good opportunity for service integration.
- Individualised support - Young people must be in charge of their care experience it should be tailored to their need of e.g. youth-led leaving care plan.



# Strong, Coordinated Response

## We as a Sector will:

1. Co-design and test a 'no-fail' system coordinated by regular meetings of service providers, across-government services, and those with lived experience. This will ensure that each young person receives appropriate and adequate support for their needs, regardless of whatever door or service they walk through and no vulnerable young person slips through the gaps between services.
2. Conduct an organisational review of all existing accommodation services in Western Australia to determine the barriers that currently exist to entry and develop methods to address them.
3. Establish clear and tangible links between education and employment providers and homelessness services in order to provide a pathway into stable employment and education for young people experiencing homelessness.

## We will work with the Government to:

1. Expand the integration of mental health and AoD supports into existing accommodation programs to ensure that young people are able to access stable support in one setting throughout their service experience.
2. Build on the success of existing outreach-based services to develop a more comprehensive state-wide service system that provides 24/7 form young people in Western Australia who may be sleeping rough or have high and complex needs.

## Guiding Principles

- Familial support - young people and their families must be assisted in navigating through the service system and to mediate conflict.
- Flexibility of service - Services must ensure that young people who cannot make it to a service are supported by outreach.
- Regional focus - Funding for services cannot be metro-centric and Government must ensure young people in rural and remote areas receive adequate and accessible support.
- Accessible to all - Services must be competent in accommodating for the diverse needs of different vulnerable cohorts to ensure no service is inaccessible.



# Data, Research and Targets

## We as a Sector will:

1. Develop an 'Acuity Scale' which is an evidence based shared assessment tool in order to give the sector a common language and framework to understand what kind of services young people might need, and how our system currently meet those needs.
2. Align with or improve on existing outcomes frameworks to provide an overarching compass for youth homelessness services to measure their progress and ensure constant improvement.
3. Build on existing digital tools to develop a mainstream online platform for young people to get information about homelessness services, social and affordable housing, and where best to find immediate safe and secure accommodation.
4. Develop a 'What Works' Centre as a way to identify and scale the practices and models that have the most impact and capacity to end homelessness for young people.

## We will work with the Government to:

1. Create a shared data system that eliminates, where possible, inconsistencies and inaccuracies in data reporting for homelessness services and facilitates better and more accessible support for young people.
2. Create a 'by name' model that allows for homelessness services to know the most vulnerable people in the system by name to ensure effective outreach can be undertaken to avoid crisis.
3. Develop and prototype a 'Youth Data Locker' that enables young people to control their personal information and determine when and where it should be shared across the system.

## Guiding Principles

- Streamlining and sharing data - Government and services must collaborate by sharing data to more effectively support young people.
- Building capacity - Any increase in reporting requirements as part of service contracts must coincide with matched funding for service providers to meet increased demand.
- Youth Empowerment - young people must be able to have control over their service story and control where, and how much of their data is shared.
- Protecting privacy - Young people must be kept informed of all changes to the storage of their data and all attempts must be made to ensure the data is kept private.
- Up to date - In order to remain useful, data and service directories must remain consistently moderated and up to date.





# Building Community Capacity

## We as a Sector will:

1. Improve our ability to be informed by young people with lived experience of homelessness by developing the Homelessness Youth Advisory Council as a permanent body with sustainable funding. This includes expanding its membership to include a more diverse range of cohorts, including ATSI young people, individuals with a care experience and young people from regional areas.
2. Rollout a grass roots community campaign around homelessness that is co-designed with the Homelessness Youth Advisory Council and other young people with lived experience of homelessness in order to alter community perceptions of homelessness, dispel
3. stigmatising myths and facilitate a collective community response to youth homelessness.  
  
Target corporate and philanthropic partners to provide support in raising awareness around the issue of youth homelessness and in providing funding and infrastructure to aid the actions outlined in the plan.
4. Build the capacity of youth homelessness services by utilising and improving on existing training for staff to increase their ability to create a safe and accessible environment for:
  - a. Aboriginal young people.
  - b. Young people from refugee or migrant backgrounds.
  - c. LGBTQIA+ young people.
  - d. Young people with disabilities.
  - e. Young people with complex mental health and/or addiction issues.
5. Work with local councils and consult with local communities to develop localised response strategies to youth homelessness.
6. Map existing youth homelessness services that are currently not funded by the Government so that unsustainable funding gaps can be addressed.

## Guiding Principles

- Amplifying the voice of young people - Any community led campaign must have the voice of young people at its heart. We must be committed to ensuring young people are empowered to act as leaders in the community.
- Collaborating with the private sector - To facilitate a true whole of community response the private sector must be engaged to provide financial and structural support and well as engaging their consumer base on the issue.
- Valuing peer-led initiatives - Community capacity is most effectively built when it is informed by the voice of those who have experience homelessness and they are also empowered to take the lead on developing initiatives addressing the issues that affect them.



# Our Approach to Resourcing, Implementing and Measuring the Progress of the Plan

This document is only the beginning of a long process on the journey towards ending youth homelessness in WA. It is a living document that will evolve as work towards implementing the key actions progresses. The Plan provides practical guidance for services to work with YACWA and the Alliance to actively support systemic and programmatic reform in the homelessness system in Western Australia.

## Our Approach to Funding the Action Plan

This Action Plan intends to source funding from a range of diverse sources in order to meet its objectives and align with the overall goals of the community-led 10-Year Strategy. In order to ensure that ending youth homelessness is a collective community responsibility, we will look to draw on the resources and capacity of the public, private and not-for-profit sector to contribute to implementing the actions.

We will utilise current funding that the Alliance has to implement the Strategy, align with the State Government's homelessness strategy so that actions can be funded collaboratively, and partner with private and philanthropic to provide support and infrastructure through public private funding models, corporate giving and the provision of affordable housing options including through impact investing options. Funding the implementation of an effective plan that ends chronic homelessness will result in significant economic benefits for Western Australia as inflows into homelessness will match outflows into housing on a monthly basis and therefore reduce the burden on service spending.

## Our Approach to Implementing the Plan

Following the rollout of the Action Plan, YACWA and the Alliance will look to establish working groups that will

collaborate to develop implementation plans for each section of the Action Plan. They will determine timelines for the actions and also where resources will need to be gained or distributed.

This Action Plan is not the panacea for ending Youth Homelessness. It is intended to serve as starting point and a guiding point for further targeted responses to be developed that address the unique needs of vulnerable cohorts as well as to adapt to region-specific issues. Alongside the Youth Homelessness Action Plan, Action Plans centring around Aboriginal people, and women and children experiencing family and domestic violence will align with actions outlined in this document. In working with the Aboriginal Action Plan, we will make sure that all measures taken to address homelessness in Aboriginal young people as led by the Aboriginal community and therefore has an inherent connection to culture and country. Local Action Plans will also be developed that will take into account the context, specific circumstances, resources, and networks of each region and location to provide more effective, tailored response to homelessness in each region and location.

The implementation plan will be progressed with input from the youth sector and young people with lived experience and as well as partnership with both the public and the private sector. Many of these actions are not achievable solely through the efforts of the youth sector alone, and so we

will continue to advocate around what we believe is the best way forward and work with the State Government through mechanisms such as the State Government's 10 Year Strategy on Homelessness to advance our common goal.

## Our Approach to Measuring the Action Plan

We also compliment this with the adoption of an outcomes framework to measure the progress of the actions in the Action Plan. The outcomes framework will provide a mechanism for accountability, continuous improvement and a holistic measurement of the improvements to the youth homelessness system in Western Australia as a result of the plan.

We hope that this plan will galvanise the community to carry out the collective impact needed to improve outcomes for young people currently experiencing homelessness and to prevent it for future generations.

**Everyone has a right to a home. Together we can end homelessness in WA.**

**Join us!**



# Contributing Organisations



YACWA would also like to thank in particular the Homelessness Youth Advisory Council, whose voice and experiences were integral in the development of this document.



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