waaeh

western australian alliance to end homelessness

New WA AtoZ Database - Memo

To:	Western Australian Advance to Zero Partners
From:	David Pearson, EO WAAEH
Date:	31/05/2024
Subject:	**A new AtoZ Database (also known as the By-Name-List) for WA.**

Dear Advance to Zero Colleague,

We write to you with an update on our work to end homelessness in Western Australia. Your commitment to collaboration and your championing of the necessity of accurate and comprehensive data have each proven invaluable. Please accept our gratitude for your ongoing support.

Over the past few months, our team has been working to enhance our ability to understand the needs of those experiencing homelessness, strengthening our collective capacity to make these experiences rare, brief and once-off. With the efficiency and effectiveness of the AtoZ database held as a key focus throughout, we would like to share that we will be transitioning to a new database system that is specifically designed to bolster these efforts.

Background

The AtoZ database is a national resource for local communities that are working to end homelessness. The database enables the following key functions for the WA AtoZ initiative and local Zero Projects:

- Creation of local By-Name Lists operated by the community seeking to end homelessness
- Collation of a common dataset based on a common triage tool (currently the VI-SPDAT but will be replaced by the Australian Homelessness Vulnerability Triage Tool - AHVTT)
- Local management and analysis of data in support of systems planning/advocacy
- Aggregate data from the local context to national impact, which is used to promote and advocate Advance to Zero to key policymakers, funders, and stakeholders.

To date, the AAEH and Micah Projects on their behalf have generously provided the Microsoft Dynamics database for AtoZ communities outside of Metro Melbourne and NSW at little to no cost for a number of years. However, due to changes in data and cyber security requirements and as the database continues to expand, this has led to increased costs. As a result, the current database arrangements no longer meet our

present or future needs in Western Australia and a replacement therefore needs to be identified.

Western Australian communities have benefited from current arrangements for a number of years without any charges being passed on to members and users, as Ruah, the AAEH and Micah Projects have covered the majority of these costs. However, due to the need to transition to a more functional and purpose-built platform and the issue of increasing expenses and data security needs, the AAEH and Micah are unable to maintain this arrangement. It's essential to source a more suitable platform that meets both present and future needs that will lead to improved functionality and better support for all members.

What does this mean for WA?

As a result, the WAAEH and AAEH have explored replacement database solutions to accommodate ongoing growth across Australia, meet increasingly complex data security requirements, improve the user interface, integrate the new AHVTT tool and provide greater functionality for users.

The transition to a customisable database tailored to the specific needs of our state will ensure the continuation of the four regional WA Zero Projects (Bunbury, Mandurah, Rockingham, and Geraldton). Furthermore, it will enable the division of the metro area into distinct zones, such as Perth and Fremantle, as approved by the WAAEH Steering Committee and recommended by the Housing First Homelessness Advisory Group (HFHAG) to the Minister. This approach will help us better understand the nature of homelessness in each area, rather than treating the Perth metro area as one homogeneous entity.

Costs

Earlier this year we wrote to the WA Government seeking the funds needed to enable the transition to the new database without needing to pass these costs onto the end users - frontline homelessness services - given the in-kind support is coming to an end.

The transition to a new database will incur additional costs, including establishment and migration as well as hosting and maintenance of a new system. The funding the WAAEH receives from the WA Government is not enough to shield the sector from these costs. For WA these costs total approximately $298k for the 2024/25 year alone.

The WA Government has indicated they will consider this request in future budget processes, but for now, the **state budget announcement released on 9th May 2024, did not include any new funds** for the WA AtoZ Database to enable the strengthening and continuation of the BNL in WA. **As a result, the costs associated with the operation of the database for the next 12 months will need to be passed onto individual organisations whose users access and utilise the platform - for hopefully no more than one year.** We understand that this represents a significant shift from the current arrangements.

We understand that these costs will be challenging to bear for all agencies, and we are and will continue to seek philanthropic support to shield frontline agencies from these costs.

We strongly believe system-level data like the by-name list should be government-funded, so we are pursuing support from local, state, and Commonwealth governments for this important piece of national homelessness data infrastructure. We hope the WA Government will help cover these costs in the future, making sector contributions a one-time expense rather than ongoing.

For now, we are left with no choice but to seek contributions to these costs from WAAEH partners / AtoZ Members, or else face having to shut down the by-name list.

If and when funding is secured, these costs will be reduced immediately. *If costs are a barrier to continued participation or future participation, we encourage you to discuss that with us.* We have very limited flexibility, but we are grateful that some agencies have already expressed a willingness to contribute more than their share of the costs, in order to shield smaller agencies.

Next Steps & Thanks

The WAAEH Alliance Steering Committee has created an inter-agency data sub-committee to review shortlisted database providers, guide our decision-making process, and balance various costs and functionalities. Once details of the database rollout are finalised, **we will write to individual agencies to inform them of the specific cost implications** and provide an opportunity for questions and discussion on how we can collaboratively manage this shared challenge. We will be sending these letters as soon as possible.

This memo and future updates will be on the WAAEH [website](#). Please share them with your colleagues and encourage them to [sign up](#) for updates.

For questions or more information about the new AtoZ database or cost, please feel free to contact either of us.

We thank Micah Projects for their extraordinary support and all of you for demonstrating that ending homelessness is possible and for valuing the role of data in this effort.

If you have further questions, please don't hesitate to contact us.

Sincerely,

David Pearson - Executive Officer &
Michala McMahon - Director, Practice and Improvement