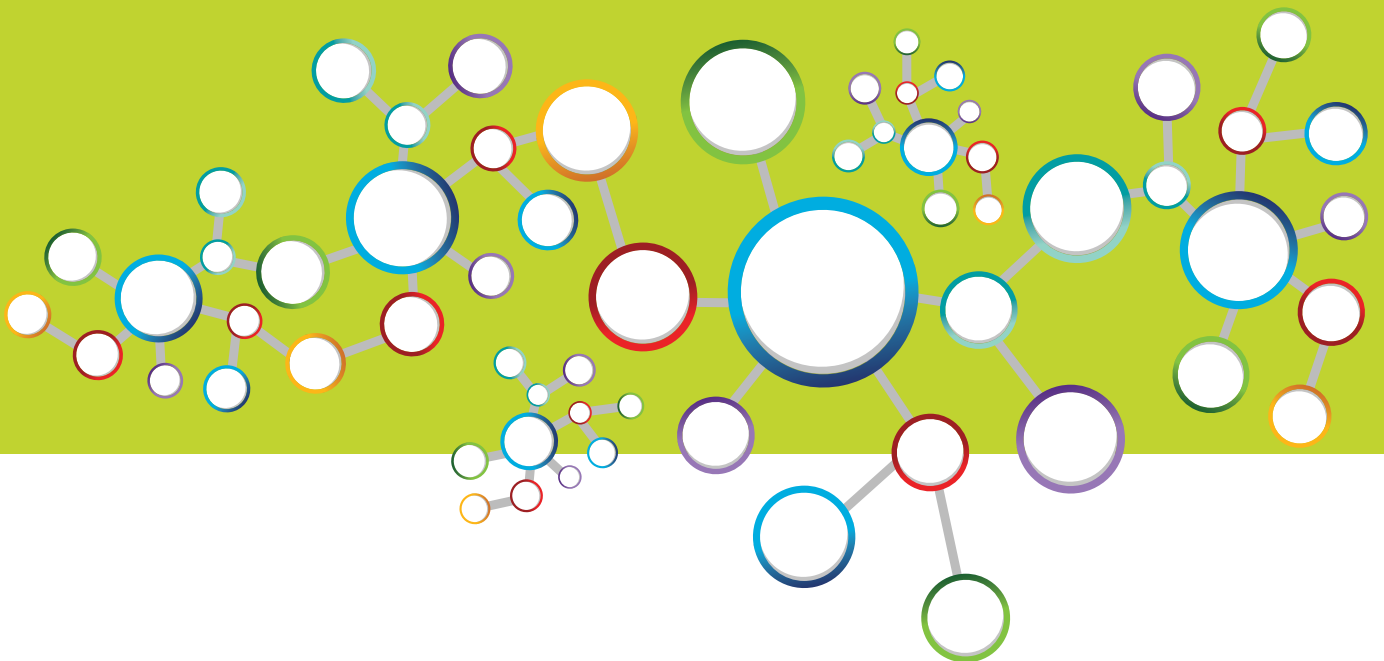


Bunbury Connections Week Report










Bunbury Connections Week partners:

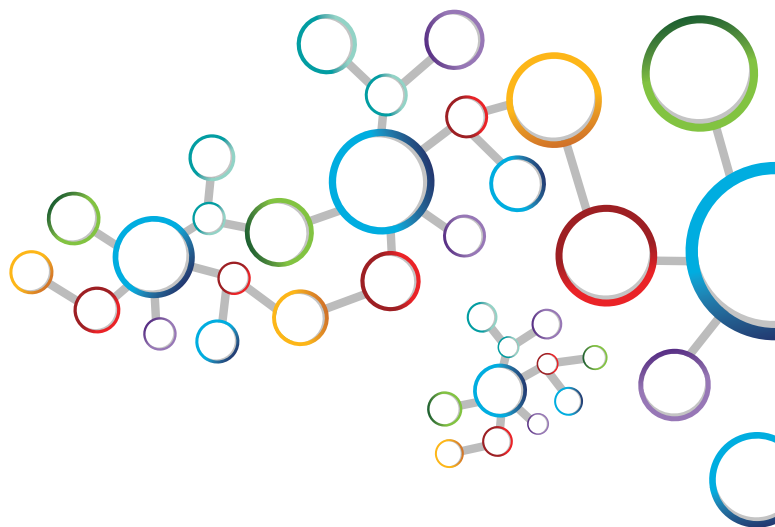


With funding from:



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Executive Summary

Between Friday 5 and Monday 8 March 2021, the City of Bunbury hosted its first Connections Week. This was a collaboration between 11 partners: Milligan Community Centre, headspace, Anglicare WA, City of Bunbury, South West Aboriginal Medical Service (SWAMS), Accordwest, Centrecare, Salvation Army, Doors Wide Open, the In Town Lunch Centre and Ruah Community Services. The Connections Week identified 33 people experiencing homelessness, completing 12 surveys.

Key findings

- With a small number of people experiencing homelessness in Bunbury, the outlook for achieving functional zero is hopeful.
- Achieving functional zero will require the development of tailored Housing First interventions utilising the Vulnerability Index - Service Prioritisation Decision Assistance Tool (VI-SPDAT) insights to provide targeted person-centred supports alongside housing for as long as needed.
- A group of people with unique needs in Bunbury are individuals experiencing intellectual disability and/or acquired brain injury or head trauma.
- People experiencing homelessness in Bunbury often had mental health and/or alcohol and other drug (AOD) challenges, co-occurring in some instances.
- Debt and inadequate income are impacting the ability of some people experiencing homelessness in Bunbury to find and secure long-term housing.
- More than half of the rough sleepers in Bunbury had at least one medical condition that required treatment.

Next steps

Bunbury was selected for a Connections Week event as it is one of the targeted communities that will receive additional resources from the State Government's Housing First Homelessness Initiative (HFHI). Ruah Community Services received Lotterywest funding to support local agencies to conduct Connections Week as this provides baseline data on local homelessness and builds on interagency collaboration. Ruah's Zero Project has been funded under the HFHI to undertake a systems coordination role to support these communities to target rough sleeping and chronic homelessness.

The Connections Week kicks off the Bunbury By Name List and the Zero Project and local services will be continuing this work through:

- Local service providers participated in an action lab in December to learn the Advance to Zero methodology used to end rough sleeping and chronic homelessness in local communities (the By Name List is the key tool used in this approach).
- Local services will all be trained so they can continue to add new people to the By Name List as they become homeless in Bunbury and provide month by month updates on their progress to reducing rough sleeping and chronic homelessness.
- An interagency coordinated access working group will be established that will use the By Name List to collaboratively allocate their housing and support.

Once the local By Name List has reached data quality standards (ie. has full coverage of services updating and people experiencing homelessness included), it will be used to understand the local service system and identify local improvement projects to further reduce rough sleeping and chronic homelessness in Bunbury.

1. Introduction

This report presents the data of the Bunbury Connections Week held between Friday 5 and Monday 8 March 2021. During this weekend, individuals and families experiencing homelessness in Bunbury were surveyed using the VI-SPDAT. In total, 33 people were surveyed in 12 surveys. This report presents a profile of homelessness in Bunbury, exploring the themes of health, justice, risk and vulnerability. The report also compares the profile of homelessness in Bunbury, to Geraldton (2020), Mandurah (2021), Rockingham (2020) and Midland (2019).

VI-SPDAT

First developed in the United States, the VI-SPDAT is a pre-screening tool used to better understand the housing and support needs of individuals or families experiencing homelessness. It combines a Vulnerability Index and a triaging tool, the Service Prioritisation Decision Assistance Tool (SP-DAT), which is designed to measure acuity.¹

The scores represent the following assessment of vulnerability and need:

1. A score between 0 and 4 corresponds to a need for long-term affordable housing alongside brief intervention support for instance, provision of information or onward referral.
2. A score between 5 and 9 corresponds to a need for long-term affordable housing plus some short term supports, for instance support with mental health, physical health or substance abuse issues.
3. A score of above 10 corresponds to the highest level of vulnerability needing long-term housing and ongoing case management supports.

The primary purpose of the VI-SPDAT is to address homelessness and help people access appropriate housing. Likewise, the purpose of this Connections Week report is to begin to tell the stories of the people experiencing homelessness in Bunbury, so that we can design and implement Housing First interventions to meet people's needs.

This Connections Week report represents the perspectives of the people engaged and is not a data collection or research exercise in and of itself. The descriptive statistics and case studies presented paint a picture of homelessness in Bunbury and should not be used to infer exact population estimates or prevalence.

¹ U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. 2016 Making PIT Counts Work for your Community. Integrating the Registry Week Methodology into your Point in time Count.

Previous Connections and Registry Weeks in WA used version 1 of the VI-SPDAT. Rockingham, Geraldton, Mandurah and Bunbury are the first WA communities to use the Australian version 3, which has been designed specifically for the Australian context.² Future Connections Weeks in other areas and existing communities in metropolitan Perth are also moving to this new version.

Bunbury

The City of Bunbury is located 170km south of Perth in Western Australia. It is home to 71,000 people, with 2.8% of the population identifying as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander.³ The majority of people in Bunbury were born in Australia (72%) and English is the main language spoken at home by 85% of residents.

The median weekly personal income in Bunbury is \$667. There are 20% of households on low income, which is 2% higher than the rest of Western Australia, and 3% higher than Perth. The unemployment rate in Bunbury is 8.2%, compared to 7.8% for the rest of the State.

Like the rest of Western Australia, rental vacancies have been affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. At the time of the last census, in 2016, 29% of occupied dwellings were rented, this has now increased to 38%.⁴ As of January 2021, the tenancy rate in Bunbury was reported at 0.6%, with the average price for a one-bedroom unit rented at \$225 per week.⁵

Case Study Methodology

Due to the low number of surveys completed only one case study has been presented in this report. This has been compiled by presenting an average trend across the whole group, where more than half of the group evidenced the experience. This has been done to protect the confidentiality of the individuals surveyed. A pseudonym has been used to replace the true names of the participants. Furthermore, each experience is unique and this case study does not represent the experience of all people experiencing homelessness in Bunbury.

2 For more information see Australian Alliance to End Homelessness, Memo to the Movement, 11 February 2021.

Available: <https://aaeh.org.au/assets/docs/Memo-VI-SPDAT.pdf>

3 Bunbury Quick Stats: ABS Census Data 2016.

4 REIWA Bunbury Suburb Profile <https://reiwa.com.au/suburb/bunbury/>

5 REIWA Vacancy Rates: <https://reiwa.com.au/the-wa-market/rental-vacancy-rates/>

Bunbury Neighbourhood profile <https://www.realestate.com.au/neighbourhoods/bunbury-6230-wa>

2. Homelessness in Bunbury

2.1 Who is experiencing homelessness in Bunbury?

There were 12 people who completed VI-SPDAT surveys in Bunbury: three females and nine males. The oldest person was 66 and the youngest person was 23. None of the people engaged identified as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander and there were no family VI-SPDATs completed. The average age of the males was 47 and the average age of the females was 43.

FIGURE 1. Age breakdown of people experiencing homelessness in Bunbury (N=12)

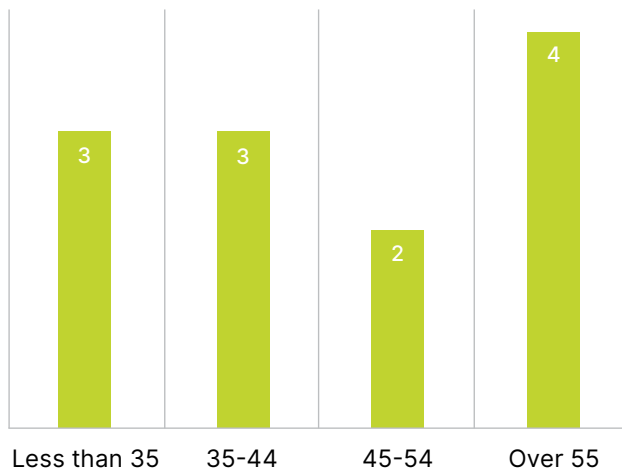


FIGURE 2. Gender breakdown of people experiencing homelessness in Bunbury

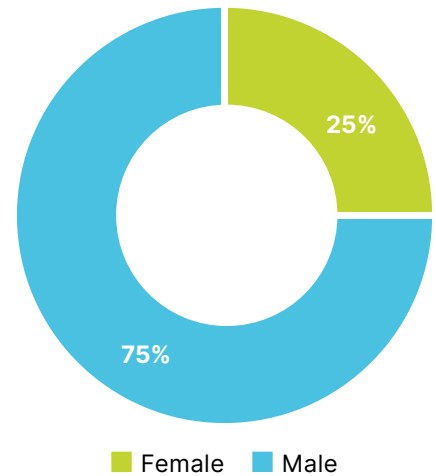


TABLE 1. Median age of rough sleepers in Bunbury compared to Mandurah, Geraldton, Rockingham and Midland

	Bunbury (2021)	Mandurah (2021)	Geraldton (2020)	Rockingham (2020)	Midland (2019)
Age	46	44	38	45	39
Rough sleepers under 25 (%)	NA	29%	20%	8%	23%

Alex's story

Alex is a 47-year-old man currently couch surfing or rough sleeping in bushland in and around Bunbury. Five years ago, Alex started to miss his rental payments. He got into debt, could no longer pay for his housing and became homeless.

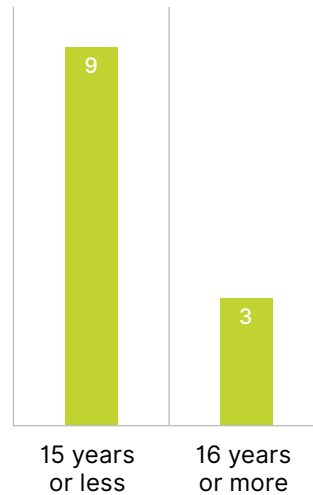
Alex has a learning disability and receives a disability payment. He does not typically use crisis services or consume drugs or alcohol daily. He is connected to a GP for support with a diagnosed medical condition and anxiety, however he frequently does not visit the GP when he needs to. In the last six months, he has accessed the emergency department once. He has experienced violence and verbal abuse while rough sleeping.

2.2 Length of time spent homeless

In total, the people experiencing homelessness in Bunbury had a total of 99 years rough sleeping – with three people accounting for 78% of the 99 years. Five of the people engaged had been homeless for five years or less and four people had been homeless for between six and fifteen years.

FIGURE 3. Number of years experiencing homelessness in Bunbury

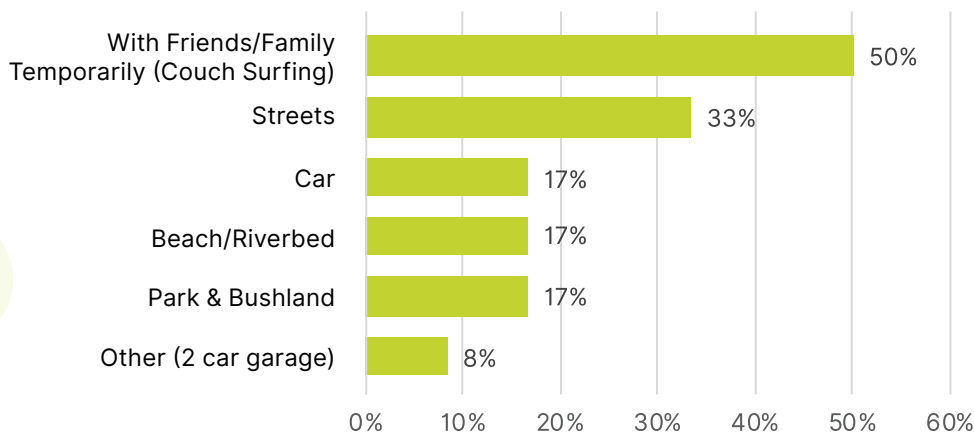
(These categories have been chosen to protect confidentiality given the low number of people engaged.)



2.3 Where rough sleepers in Bunbury are sleeping

People experiencing homelessness in Bunbury in the week before the Connections Week had been most frequently couch surfing (50%). One third had been rough sleeping on the streets (33%). Other locations people named were in their cars (17%), parks and bushland (17%) and on the beach (17%).

FIGURE 4. Where people experiencing homelessness in Bunbury slept in the last week



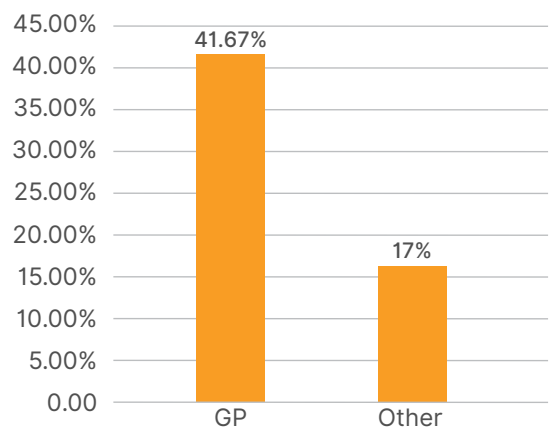
3. The health of people experiencing homelessness in Bunbury

It is well known that homelessness is a key contributor to chronic disease and long-term chronic health issues. Of the people experiencing homelessness in Bunbury, seven people (58%) identified that they had at least one medical condition. These included medical conditions that require long-term treatment: liver disease, heart disease, kidney disease, diabetes and hepatitis C.

3.1 Use of health care services

More than half of the rough sleepers in Bunbury (58%) were not connected to any health care services, and just under half (42%) were connected to a GP.

FIGURE 5. Self-reported GP access of the people experiencing homelessness in Bunbury



Half of the people experiencing homelessness indicated that when they felt unwell they either avoided or were unable to access healthcare. A third of the people experiencing homelessness in Bunbury had received healthcare in a hospital emergency department in the last six months. The mean number of visits to hospital emergency department was one. This average number of visits was skewed by a small number of people accounting for the largest number of visits.

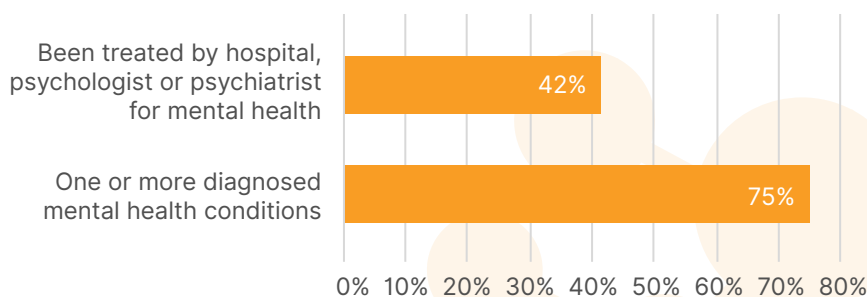
TABLE 2. Average number of times people experiencing homelessness had received emergency department health care in the last six months – in Bunbury, Mandurah, Geraldton, Rockingham and Midland

	Bunbury (2021)	Mandurah (2021)	Geraldton (2020)	Rockingham (2020)	Midland, Individuals (2019)	Midland, Families (2019)
Average number of visits to a hospital emergency department in the last six months ⁶	1	2	1	1	3	2

3.2 Social and emotional health and wellbeing

Three in four of the people experiencing homelessness in Bunbury indicated they had a diagnosed mental health condition. The most frequently reported were anxiety disorders, including Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (58%) and mood disorders, including depression and bipolar disorder (67%). Some of the rough sleepers also reported being diagnosed with Schizophrenia and psychosis. Of the 12 people experiencing homelessness, just under half (42%) had at some point been treated by a mental health professional, psychologist or psychiatrist either in the community or in the hospital (see Figure 6).

FIGURE 6. Social and emotional wellbeing of people experiencing homelessness in Bunbury



⁶ The wording of this question has changed in the VI-SPDAT version 3 that is used in the Geraldton and Rockingham Connections Week.

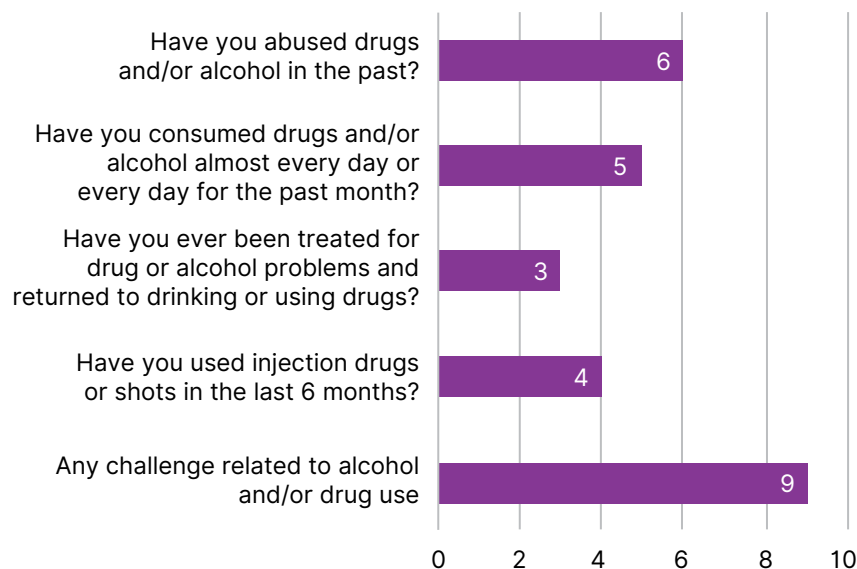
4. Risk and vulnerability among rough sleepers in Bunbury

4.1 Alcohol and drug use

Alcohol and drug use challenges were present among more than half of the people experiencing homelessness in Bunbury. Half of the people experiencing homelessness in Bunbury expressed they had alcohol and/or drug use problems and just under half had consumed drugs and/or alcohol every day for the past month (see Figure 7).

The majority of the people experiencing homelessness in Bunbury had not received treatment for alcohol and drug use issues. A small number of people have used injection drugs or shots. However, 10 of the 12 people engaged did not believe that their alcohol or drug use had resulted in them being kicked out or becoming homeless.

FIGURE 7. Alcohol and drug use among rough sleepers in Bunbury



4.2 Justice and legal issues

Interactions of people experiencing homelessness with legal and justice systems are well documented.⁷ However, only a small number of people experiencing homelessness in Bunbury (<5), indicated that they had current or historical legal issue that they thought might impact their tenancy.

4.3 Income and debt

Among those engaged, income to secure long-term accommodation was a key issue. Whilst regular income was received by all 12 people, almost half of the 12 (42%) expressed they had a current debt that was impacting their ability to find a home. Four of the people engaged received an unemployment benefit and the rest received a government pension – either aged, disability or other.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the Coronavirus supplement (\$550 per

fortnight) substantially increased income support for people on Job Seeker payments. As of April 2021, all additional supplements ended and the base rate of the Job Seeker allowance for a single adult with no children has reduced to \$620.80 per fortnight or \$310 per week.⁸

In contrast, median rent for a one-bedroom unit in Bunbury is \$450 per fortnight (\$225 per week).⁹ This only leaves \$171 per fortnight (\$85.50 per week) to cover all other necessities such as insurance, health care, utility bills, food, clothes, internet access and transport costs.

A study by a coalition of service providers in Western Australia highlights most people believe they need more than \$1,000 per fortnight (\$500 per week) to cover living costs.¹⁰ This leaves a gap in \$379, which is a clear challenge to addressing homelessness in Bunbury.

TABLE 3. Income and rental costs in Bunbury for people receiving Job Seeker

	Job Seeker base rate - Single adult no children	Median private rental – one bedroom unit Bunbury	Difference left over to cover all over expenses	WA Perceptions of Poverty – public perception	Difference between Job Seeker and Public Perception
\$AUD per fortnight	\$620.80	\$450	-\$171	\$1000	-\$379.20

7 Wood L, Vallesi S, Kragt D, Flatau P, Wood N, Gazey A. 50 Lives 50 Homes: A Housing First Response to Ending Homelessness. First Evaluation Report. Perth, Western Australia: Centre for Social Impact: University of Western Australia, 2017.

Flatau P, Tyson K, Callis Z, et al. The State of Homelessness in Australia's Cities: A Health and Social Cost Too High. Perth, Western Australia: Centre for Social Impact. The University of Western Australia, 2018.

Bramley, G., and Fitzpatrick, S., Homelessness in the UK: Who is most at risk? Housing Studies 2018. 33(1): 96-116.

8 How much can you get? Australian Government: Services Australia. Accessed 24 April 2021. <https://www.servicesaustralia.gov.au/individuals/services/centrelink/jobseeker-payment/how-much-you-can-get>

9 Median Property Price <https://www.realestate.com.au/neighbourhoods/bunbury-6230-wa>

10 Above the live, Perceptions of Poverty Report August 2020. Anglicare WA, Communicare, Food Bank, Ruah, Uniting WA and WACOSS. https://www.anglicarewa.org.au/docs/default-source/advocacy/above-the-line---perceptions-of-poverty-in-wa-report.pdf?sfvrsn=9c65bb47_4

4.4 Disability

Five of the 12 people experiencing homelessness in Bunbury indicated they had either a learning disability or an intellectual/developmental disability. Research on homelessness and disability demonstrates that people experiencing intellectual or physical disability are at disproportionate risk of homelessness and have unique housing and long-term support needs.¹¹

Often these unique experiences are frequently overlooked, however, successful long-term housing outcomes requires that issues such as housing location, accessibility, eligibility and access to NDIS and long-term supports are addressed.

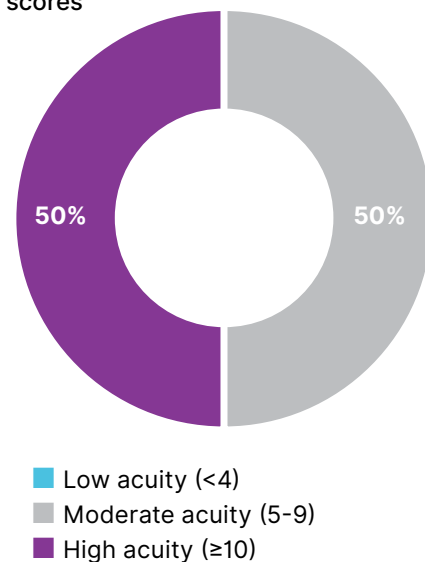
4.5 Vulnerability

The vulnerability score of the VI-SPDAT is a measure of acuity based on depth of need.¹² The score considers a range of vulnerability indicators, including length of time spent homeless, information on physical and mental health and other factors such as debt, income and legal issues, violence, trauma and safety. The higher the score, the more long-term support the person needs:

1. A score between 0 and 4 corresponds to a need for long-term affordable housing alongside brief intervention support such as information or onward referral.

2. A score between 5 and 9 corresponds to a need for long-term affordable housing plus some short term supports, such as mental health supports, physical health or around substance abuse issues.
3. A score of above 10 corresponds to the highest level of vulnerability needing long-term housing and ongoing case management supports.

FIGURE 8. Acuity of people experiencing homelessness in Bunbury, based on VI-SPDAT scores



In Bunbury, an equal proportion of people were in the medium and high acuity group, with an average vulnerability score of 10. This indicates that alongside long-term affordable housing, half of the 12 people experiencing homelessness required ongoing case management. This suggests that with some swift and targeted action – achieving functional zero homelessness in Bunbury is achievable.

¹¹ Beer, A., Baker, E., Lester, L., and Daniel, L., 2019. The relative risk of homelessness among persons with a disability: New methods and policy insights. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*.

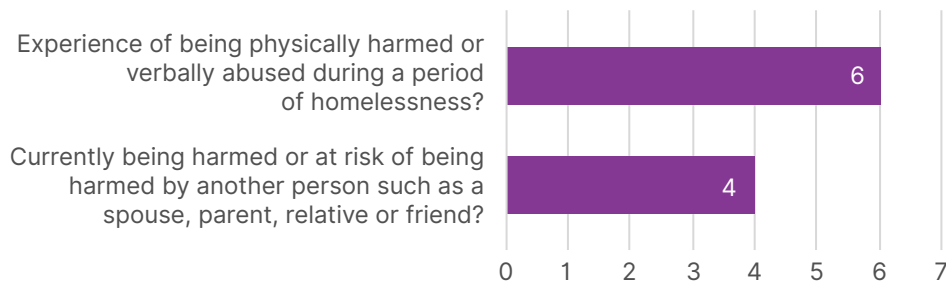
¹² De Jong, 2019. *The Book on Ending Homelessness*. Friesen Press.

TABLE 4. Proportion of people experiencing homelessness in Bunbury scoring 10 or above, compared to other Connections Week locations.¹³

	Bunbury (2021)	Mandurah (2021)	Geraldton (2020)	Rockingham (2020) ¹⁴	Midland, Individuals (2019)	Midland, Families (2019)
% scoring 10 or above	50% (N = 6)	74%	64%	65%	62%	54%

For the 12 people experiencing homelessness in Bunbury, vulnerability and exposure to harm is increased while they are on the streets. Six of the 12 people had experienced physical harm or verbal abuse and four were either currently being harmed or felt they were at risk of being harmed by another person: spouse, parent, relative or friend. As mentioned, five of the rough sleepers have identified they have an intellectual disability, and this group are disproportionately vulnerable to violence and abuse.

FIGURE 9. Experiences of harm among people experiencing homelessness in Bunbury



¹³ It should be noted that the Rockingham and Geraldton VI-SPDAT scores have been calculated using the VI-SPDAT tool version 3, which is a different version to Midland and calculates vulnerability in a slightly different way.

¹⁴ For more information see: Australian Alliance to End Homelessness Advance to Zero The Australian VI-SPDAT Version 3: Vulnerability Index-Service Prioritisation Decision Assistance Tool FAQs Available: <https://aaeh.org.au/assets/docs/Long-VI-SPDAT-FAQs-FINAL-19-October-2020.pdf>

4.5 Co-morbidities

A small number of people experiencing homelessness in Bunbury had multiple morbidities: co-occurring mental health, alcohol and drug use and chronic health challenges (see Table 5). Again, the relatively small number of people with multiple co-occurring needs indicates that with some rapid targeted support, functional zero homelessness in Bunbury can be achieved.

TABLE 5. Multiple morbidities among people experiencing homelessness in Bunbury compared to other areas

	Bunbury (2021)	Mandurah (2021)	Geraldton (2020)	Rockingham (2020)	Midland, Individuals (2019)	Midland, Families (2019)
Co-morbidities: Mental Health and AOD¹⁵	4 (33%)	21 (60%)	20 (44%)	5 (19%)	86%	19%
Tri-morbidities (mental health, AOD and chronic health)	4 (33%)	19 (54%)	10 (22%)	4 (15%)	56%	19%
Mental health, AOD, chronic health and justice	-	9 (26%)	6 (13%)	2 (8%)	-	-

¹⁵ To be consistent with other places Mental Health is given through the following questions (1) Been hospitalised against will; or Gone to A&E for emotions / nerves; or spoken to a psychiatrist, psychologist or mental health professional in the last six months.

5. Conclusion – Quick effective action to achieve functional zero homelessness

In conclusion, the relatively small numbers of people experiencing homelessness in Bunbury indicates a hopeful outlook for achieving functional zero homelessness. To achieve functional zero, Housing First projects in Bunbury should be targeted at the unique needs identified, harnessing the information gathered through the VI-SPDAT triaging tool.

For instance, help accessing appropriate housing alongside targeted person-centred supports for people with disability, and those who experience mental health challenges, alcohol and/or drug use issues and where these are co-occurring.

In addition, many of the people experiencing homelessness in Bunbury expressed they had chronic medical conditions that needed treatment. With rapid action, risks of further decline in individual health, social and emotional wellbeing can be prevented, which will have substantial downstream economic and social benefits to the City of Bunbury, as well the individuals engaged.

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