

Submission to the Productivity Commission Review of the National Housing and Homelessness Agreement

2022



Homelessness NSW (HNSW) is a not-for-profit organisation that operates as a peak agency for its member organisations to end homelessness across NSW. Our members include small, locally based community organisations, multiservice agencies with a regional reach and large state-wide service providers.

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Definitions

NHHA: National Housing and Homelessness Agreement

SHS: Specialist Homelessness Service

DFV: Domestic and Family Violence

People without PR: People without Permanent Residency

Key recommendations

Homelessness NSW recommends that the Productivity Commission Review of the NHHA implement the following recommendations.

The National Housing and Homelessness Agreement was created in 2018 and provided hope that there would be national attention paid to the homelessness crisis. The NHHA outlines the partnership between the Federal Government and states to fund social and affordable housing, and funding for homelessness services, which is matched by the states.

Recommendation 1: Establish a national housing and homeless strategy which aims to end homelessness through holistic solutions including investment in social housing stock and action to ensure housing affordability.

Recommendation 2: Continue a matched funding system between the Federal Government and the states.

Recommendation 3: Establish transparent shared outcomes across the Federal Government and the states connecting homelessness outcomes with the broader service system including housing availability, Centrelink entitlements and other social services.

Recommendation 4: Establish a governance structure to oversee the implementation of a national housing and homelessness strategy and include national, state, local government representatives and homelessness service stakeholders.

Recommendation 5: Fund an evidence based and data-informed comprehensive assessment of the Specialist Homelessness Service Program to determine investment increase as proportionate to need and cohort.

Recommendation 6: Increase Specialist Homelessness Service Program funding in NSW by 20% or approximately \$156 million over 3 years so that services can meet current demand.

Recommendation 7 The Federal Government and NSW Government should make a joint commitment to investing 2.6 billion ¹ per year in NSW for the next 10 years to grow social housing by 5,000 properties per year, including acquiring existing stock to fast-track housing of priority cohorts.

Recommendation 8: Commit an additional \$500 million to repair existing social housing stock in NSW.

Recommendation 9: Invest approximately \$108 million over 3 years to increase the number of Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations (ACCO) to ensure delivery of safe and appropriate services for Aboriginal people and meet current demand nationally.

¹ Equity Economics, 'A Wave of Disadvantage Across NSW: Impact of the Covid-19 Recession'. p.4

Recommendation 10: Create and implement a national supportive housing system including funding for longer-term housing and wrap-around supportive housing.

Recommendation 11: The Federal Government should match states for supportive housing programs to meet current demand.

Recommendation 12: Invest in a nation-wide program to provide Foyers in areas of high need to address housing demand for young people experiencing homelessness.

Recommendation 13: Invest in a nation-wide program to build social housing that meets the needs of people escaping domestic and family violence.

Recommendation 14: Invest in wrap around support supportive housing programs to meet the needs of people leaving domestic and family violence.

Recommendation 15: Instigate national reform to ensure Federal Government responsibility for people without permanent residency experiencing homelessness including rights to access to income support and Medicare.

Recommendation 16: Provide support for people without permanent residency experiencing homelessness, through funding for:

- Medium term supported accommodation services
- Access to social housing, including products such as private rental subsidies and Temporary Accommodation
- Housing First model accommodation programs for those rough sleeping longer term or with multiple support needs

Introduction

Homelessness NSW welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the Productivity Commission review of the National Housing and Homelessness Agreement.

As the NSW peak body for Specialist Homelessness Services and people experiencing homelessness, we provide valuable feedback from our work with member organisations in NSW. This ranges from feedback on the experience of people accessing services and organisations working on the frontline, to strategic perspectives on how to address homelessness at a Federal and State Government level.

As evidenced in our submission, key issues for consideration in review of the NHHA include:

- Increasing unmet demand for homelessness assistance alongside underfunding of service provision
- Declining investment in longer-term housing stock such as social housing
- Lack of targeted strategies for unique priority cohorts
- Lack of oversight and consultation to meet the needs of people experiencing homelessness

We welcome the opportunity to provide further feedback with our members services or lived experts to inform the review of the NHHA.

Implement a national housing and homeless strategy

The House of Representatives Standing Committee on Social Policy and Legal Affairs review into homelessness in Australia in 2020 received evidence across the housing and homelessness sectors and identified the need for a national homelessness strategy.²

Australia last had a national homelessness strategy, *The Road Home*, in 2008. The Road Home identified new ways of working that were then funded as pilot projects through the National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness (NPAH). While the current funding agreement, the National Housing and Homelessness Agreement (NHHA) has continued funding to programs that were established through the NPAH, these programs have not been implemented systematically across the country, that is, brought to scale. In addition, the Strategy has not been updated to reflect the changes to be found within the drivers of homelessness over the past 12 years.³

Homelessness NSW endorses Homelessness Australia's recommendation for a new national homelessness strategy that:

- Prevents homelessness by developing policies and programs across government and universal services to reduce the numbers of people becoming homeless
- Supports universal services to better meet the needs of people already experiencing homelessness or at risk of homelessness
- Creates a national framework for a homelessness service system with the appropriate resources and evidence-based programs to effectively prevent homelessness and support enduring pathways out of homelessness
- Set targets for ending rough sleeping in five years, halving homelessness in Australia in ten years and ending homelessness in 20 years.⁴

A national response is required to achieve each of these four elements and to have a bird's eye view of how a range of factors affect how many people will be pushed into homelessness. Some of these factors, like availability of social housing, are joint federal and state responsibilities, others, like Social Security are the sole responsibility of the Federal Government, and others are primarily the responsibility of state or local governments.

To achieve an end to homelessness, a national homelessness strategy needs to harness policy and programs at each level of government, so they work effectively to reduce homelessness. This would include supported service improvements in areas as diverse as income support, health, child protection,

² Parliament of Australia, 'Addressing Homelessness', https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/House/Social_Policy_and_Legal_Affairs/HomelessnessinAustralia/Report/section?id=committees%2freportrep%2f024522%2f75164

³ Homelessness Australia, 'Submission', p. 15

⁴ Ibid.

education, mental healthcare, family violence, and justice. Only the Federal Government can lead this kind of coordinated approach.

At the centre of any homelessness strategy is the provision of an adequate supply of decent housing that is affordable to people on the lowest incomes. Homelessness is at its very core, the experience of not having an adequate home. Rigorous research has shown that there is no single intervention more effective in ending homelessness. This places a primacy on an integration national strategy across all areas involved people experiencing homelessness.

Recommendation 1: Establish a national housing and homeless strategy which aims to end homelessness through holistic solutions including longer-term social housing stock and housing affordability

Joint responsibility for housing and homelessness is essential between the Federal Government and the states

The NHAA was seen by many as a first step in increased federal attention to the matter of homelessness, and the joint responsibility of Federal Government and the states must continue to deliver housing and homelessness to meet the growing crisis of homelessness.

Joint Federal Government and states collaboration to funding for housing and homelessness must continue and deliver increased funding to meet the national crisis of homelessness.

Homelessness has grown far more quickly than population growth over the last ten years.⁵ Without a commitment to a large increase in social housing, this trend will likely continue.

Homelessness Australia analysis of federal budget papers indicates that when population and inflation are considered, Federal Government funding of housing and homelessness services has decreased in real terms over the past six years.⁶

This declining Federal Government funding compounds the challenges for the homelessness sector of responding to the growing incidence of homelessness. Every year specialist homelessness services manage to support more people than the year before. Yet crucially, the number of people that they turn away, already at 92,300 households in 2018-19 in NSW, also continues to grow.

Joint funding solutions

The crisis in funding for social housing can only be solved by joint funding agreements that dramatically increase funding from both the Federal Government and the states.

Homelessness Australia analysis of federal budget papers indicates that when population and inflation are considered, Federal Government funding of housing and homelessness services has also decreased in real terms over the past six years.

As the table below indicates, Federal Government spending on housing and homelessness in 2014-15 was \$1.43 billion. Allowing for growth in the Australian population, this amount should have grown to \$1.65 billion in 2019-20 to have the same real value.⁷

But it only rose to \$1.56 billion, representing a shortfall of \$82 million in 2019-20 and \$96 million in 2020-21.

Table 1: Federal funding of housing and homelessness⁸

⁵ Productivity Commission, 2020, *Report on Government Services*, Australian Government, Canberra.

⁶ Homelessness Australia, 'Homelessness Australia Parliamentary Enquiry Submission', p.16, <https://homelessnessaustralia.org.au/our-advocacy/>

⁷ Homelessness Australia, Homelessness Australia, 'Homelessness Australia Parliamentary Enquiry Submission', p.16, <https://homelessnessaustralia.org.au/our-advocacy/>

⁸ Ibid.

	2014-15	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21
Social housing and homelessness spending needed to match population growth and inflation (\$ million)	1,432.5	1,471.3	1,514.3	1,552.5	1,602.3	1,646.6	1,693.7
Actual social housing and homelessness spending, nominal dollars (\$ million)	1,432.5	1,439.1	1,457.6	1,477.2	1,535.8	1,564.9	1,597.6
Loss in real value (\$ million)	-	- 32.2	- 56.7	- 75.3	- 66.5	- 81.7	- 96.1

The NSW Government is also spending much less now than 5 years ago, despite the continued and increasing need. Spending has decreased per capita, from \$180 per person in 2017-18; \$167 in 2018/19; and \$161 in 2019/2020. This is whittling away the safety net for us all.

Recommendation 2: Continue a matched funding system between the Federal Government and the states.

Establish transparent shared outcomes across the Federal Government and the states

National agreements should establish transparent shared outcomes between the Federal Government and the states to ensure that funding is meeting the needs of people experiencing homelessness. An ongoing issue for the SHS sector is the ongoing lack of transparency and shared outcomes from the NHHA.

A critical factor impacting the success of outcomes is adequate funding of housing stock.

Due to the continuing decline in rental affordability and social housing stock, many SHSs are unable to meet the needs of people experiencing homelessness as there are simply no longer-term housing options. A crucial connecting factor is the level of Federal Government support for people at risk of homelessness including the level of Centrelink entitlements and childcare subsidies. For example, when examining the homelessness cycle for the largest cohort of people experiencing homelessness, women and children leaving domestic and family violence, crucial factors exist beyond the control of SHSs including social housing stock and low rate of Centrelink entitlements or unaffordability of childcare meaning that the people they are assisting are likely unable to exit homelessness.

The homelessness service system exists within broader factors associated with welfare systems and housing markets. However, the homelessness system is not generally defined to include those sectors that could address structural factors, such as long-term housing.⁹ While it is recognised that homelessness is driven by both structural and individual factors, requiring housing and non-housing support across a range of sectors, this broad range of responses is not generally recognised as part of the homelessness system.¹⁰

The benefits of an integrated service system have been widely researched and documented.¹¹ The design, funding and implementation of an integrated system could be used to measure outcomes in a holistic and meaningful way, with the goal of ending homelessness in Australia. While outcomes and targets have been raised with the homelessness sector, to be an accurate measurement towards the goal of preventing and homelessness, there needs to be adequate funding for housing stock, SHSs connected to an integrated service system.

It is critical that leadership is provided by the Federal Government to coordinate national integration to deliver outcomes through funding and support for an integrated and holistic service system at all levels.

⁹ Valentine, k., Blunden, H., Zufferey, C., Spinney, A., and Zirakbash, F. (2020) *Supporting families effectively through the homelessness services system*, AHURI Final Report No. 330, Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute Limited, Melbourne, <https://www.ahuri.edu.au/research/final-reports/330>, doi:10.18408/ahuri-7119201.

¹⁰ Ibid. p.7

¹¹ Spinney, A., Beer, A., MacKenzie, D., McNelis, S., Meltzer, A., Muir, K., Peters, A. and valentine, k. (2020) *Ending homelessness in Australia: A redesigned homelessness service system*, AHURI Final Report No. 347, Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute Limited, Melbourne, <https://www.ahuri.edu.au/research/finalreports/347>, doi: 10.18408/ahuri5119001.

Recommendation 3: Establish transparent shared outcomes across the Federal Government and the states connecting homelessness outcomes with the broader service system including housing stock, Centrelink entitlements and other social services.

Establish a governance structure within a national homelessness strategy to monitor impact and outcomes

The outcomes of people experiencing homelessness should be seen as a critical issue for national and state stakeholders including the Federal Government and the states, housing and homelessness departments and social services departments across the states, and Specialist Homelessness Service providers. There is very little oversight or consultation with the needs of service providers and people with lived experience of homelessness.

Oversight on outcomes and consultation on policy need to be connected to all levels of government and service provision. This should occur from the level of small service providers and people with lived experience of homelessness, to national funding agreements such as NHHA and the decisions of the Federal Government and the states.

The responsibility for the creation, facilitation, and accountability of governance structure needs to be led by the Federal Government and the states due to the scale of the structure and consultation required to adequately inform national housing and homelessness outcomes. This can occur in consultation with state social services departments and housing and homelessness services.

Accountability should be ensured a targeted strategy and oversight in meeting targets and improving outcomes for people experiencing homelessness. This should include transparent reporting across all levels of service delivery and levels of Government.

Recommendation 4: Establish a governance structure to oversee the implementation of a national housing and homelessness strategy and include national, state, local government representatives and homelessness service stakeholders.

Fund Specialist Homelessness Services to meet demand

Specialist Homelessness Services (SHSs) operate as a crisis system, and as essential services have been placed under unprecedented strain during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Within the last few months, services are seeing increasing numbers of people rough sleeping and increasing numbers of people being turned away from homelessness or housing assistance as services have reached capacity.

This crisis has only increased in the Northern Rivers region as we see the impact of flooding alongside already almost zero vacancy rates for properties in the region.

Even prior to the surge of demand following the economic pressures of the COVID-19 pandemic, Specialist Homelessness Services were vastly underfunded.

Currently, services are supporting 27% more clients than funded for, and they have been doing so across many years.¹²

It has been almost a decade since services were funded at levels commensurate with the role tasked to them by government. And still demand grows, while funding doesn't. Since 2011 there has been a 42% rise in demand for Specialist Homelessness Services, but far too many people are unable to get the assistance they need.

NSW is by far the state with the most acute issue of unmet need.¹³ There is an increasing number of people experiencing homelessness in NSW who are unable to access accommodation (an increase from 15,471 in 2015-16 to 22,709 in 2020-21). Data shows that 48.2% of those who needed accommodation did not receive it, an increase from 5 years ago when 37.2% didn't receive the services they needed.

These figures do not account for the real need in the broader population, only for those who made it to and approached a homelessness service. COVID-19 and the effects of lockdowns have been felt throughout the community.

In 2020 and 2021 there was a surge in demand for homelessness services, and as NSW eases restrictions services are under increasing strain. The financial stability of homelessness services has taken a hit during the pandemic. Many services rely on philanthropic and community donations to supplement their service delivery, but it is anticipated that this will diminish significantly.

Given that services are already supporting 27% more clients than funded for and demand is expected to increase, a minimum and permanent increase of 20% for Specialist Homelessness Services baseline recurrent funding per year for 3 years, would enable services to better meet real need in the community, better manage risks and costs incurred due to:

¹² Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2020, Specialist Homelessness Services Annual Report, cat. No. HOU 322.

¹³ Steering Committee for the Review of Government Service Provision, '18 Housing, 18 Housing Data Tables, Table 18A.7', in Report on Government Services 2021 (Canberra: Productivity Commission, 2022), <https://www.pc.gov.au/research/ongoing/report-ongovernment-services/2021/housing-and-homelessness/housing>.

- rising demand and cost of service provision
- increased data collection and reporting requirements by funding agencies
- increased responsibility in the level, type, complexity, and location of service deliverables
- more onerous contract terms with no guarantee of annual indexation or growth funding.

Recommendation 5: Fund an evidence based and data-informed comprehensive assessment of the Specialist Homelessness Service Program to determine investment increase as proportionate to need and cohort

Recommendation 6: Increase Specialist Homelessness Service Program funding in NSW by 20% or approximately \$156 million over 3 years so that services can meet current demand.

Fund social housing

Increasing the availability of safe, secure, and affordable housing is critical to solving homelessness, and social housing is a key component. There is an urgent need to substantially increase the investment in social and affordable housing to ensure homes for all people. Never has this been more important than now, as the COVID-19 pandemic coupled with a lack of safe, secure, and affordable housing has left far too many exposed.

Homelessness can require an urgent need for accommodation. While there will always be a place for crisis and short-term accommodation, there needs to be housing pathways out of such accommodation to end homelessness. Right now, even if a person can gain access and support from a homelessness service, the majority (59%) will be unable to find long term accommodation or housing by the end of their support period.¹⁴ This holds true even as the social housing that is available is tightly targeted and rationed to 'priority groups' with complex needs.

The ongoing state of homelessness for many is clearly not an issue in the quality of crisis support provided. When housing is available to those at-risk of homelessness the most recent release of data found that 90% were able to maintain housing with support from a SHS.¹⁵

It is, however, by and large because there are no exit options – there is no housing that is affordable and suitable for everyone in NSW. This is a policy choice Federal and NSW Government has made in how it invests in (or fails to invest in) critical social housing infrastructure. This in turn perpetuates crises.

While little is formally known about those who are waiting to access social housing, it is thought that they are most likely to be unable to sustain a private rental and in insecure situations including couch-surfing, living in improvised, temporary, or below-standard accommodation or sleeping rough. What's more is that we know that violence against women is perpetuated by the lack of investment in social housing because women will return to a violent partner when there are no other housing alternatives.¹⁶ In NSW it is estimated that there are over 2,400 women currently living with a violent partner who had returned after escaping because they could not find nor afford alternative accommodation; and a further 2,410 who are homeless because they too could not find secure and permanent housing after leaving a violent partner.¹⁷

It's Homelessness NSW's assessment that the NHHA has been unable to meet the needs of people experiencing homelessness in NSW, and a critical component is ensuring proper investment into social housing.

¹⁵ NSW Department of Communities and Justice, 'Specialist Homelessness Services 2020 -21: Overview of the NSW Data in Report by Australian Institute Health & Welfare'. Presentation, not published.

¹⁶ Equity Economics, 'Rebuilding for Women's Economic Security: Investing in Social Housing in New South Wales' (Sydney: New South Wales Council of Social Service (NCOSS), with support from Community Housing Industry Association NSW; Domestic Violence NSW; and Homelessness NSW, October 2021), p.18

¹⁷ Ibid.p.19

The gap

There is an immediate shortfall of 70,000 housing units in NSW, by OECD average, and yet others would say the real shortage is 135,000. If only to account for population growth, recent analysis shows that 300,000 properties will need to be delivered by 2050, and this gap can be bridged by building an additional 5000 properties per year.¹⁸

Yet over the last 5 years the NSW Government has committed to just 9386 new social housing properties when the real need was closer to 25,000 at least. What's more is that in just one year (2019-2020) there was a decline of 700 dwellings.¹⁹

It should be noted that these estimates are based solely on population growth and do not include contemporary events in NSW including the impact of drought, bushfires, and COVID-19 on the community, and now floods.

Modelling to investigate the impact of COVID-19 on housing and homelessness has estimated some steep increases, including housing stress.²⁰

This surge is also evidence in the social housing waitlist figures which, in the last two years, have seen the single largest jump in demand in at least 7 years, if not more – for both the tightly targeted priority list and the general waitlist.²¹ In June 2019 the priority waitlist was 4,484, in June 2020 it was 5,308 and in June 2021, it was 5801. The general waitlist for social housing also jumped from 46,982²² households in June 2020 to 49,982 households in June 2021.²³

There are also regional disparities in the delivery of social housing when compared to need. Analysis by St Vincent De Paul in NSW notes that the largest social housing commitment – Communities Plus – will only deliver 4.3% or 319 new social housing properties in regional NSW, despite 40% of social housing applicants, or more than 44,000 people, being located in regional NSW.²⁴ Once again, after the diaspora from city centres to regional NSW resulting in the total decimation of rental vacancies and rapidly rising rents would again have changed the profile of housing need in the typically more affordable regions.

For Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in NSW, the needs are estimated to be 10,855 social housing properties and 13,506 affordable homes currently. This shortfall is

¹⁸ Equity Economics, 'A Wave of Disadvantage Across NSW: Impact of the Covid-19 Recession' (Sydney: A report prepared for New South Wales Council of Social Service (NCOSS), with support from Community Housing Industry Association NSW; Domestic Violence NSW; Fams; Youth Action; Homelessness NSW; and Shelter NSW., 2020). p.9

¹⁹ Steering Committee for the Review of Government Service Provision, '18 Housing, 18 Housing Data Tables, Table 18A.1', in *Report on Government Services 2021* (Canberra: Productivity Commission, 2021), <https://www.pc.gov.au/research/ongoing/report-ongovernment-services/2021/housing-and-homelessness/housing>.

²⁰ Equity Economics, 'A Wave of Disadvantage Across NSW: Impact of the Covid-19 Recession'

²¹ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2021. Housing assistance in Australia. Cat. no. HOU 325. Canberra: AIHW. Viewed 09 October 2021, <https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/housing-assistance/housing-assistance-in-australia>

²² Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2021. Housing assistance in Australia. Cat. no. HOU 325. Canberra: AIHW. Viewed 09 October 2021, <https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/housing-assistance/housing-assistance-in-australia>

²³ Portfolio Committee No. 5 - Legal Affairs, 'Answers to Questions Taken on Notice', *NSW Budget Estimates, 2021*, <https://www.parliament.nsw.gov.au/lcdocs/other/16385/Answers%20to%20QON%20-%20The%20Hon.%20Alister%20Henskens%20MP%20-%20Received%2025%20Nov%202021.pdf>.

²⁴ St Vincent de Paul Society NSW, 'Submission to the NSW Regional Housing Taskforce' (St Vincent de Paul Society NSW, August 2021),

https://www.vinnies.org.au/content/Document/NSW/Social%20Justice/Submission_Regional_Housing_Taskforce.pdf.

projected to grow by 62% by 2031, the gap estimated to be 30,124 social and 34,924 affordable housing properties.²⁵

The change required

We need enough housing available that people can truly afford, including those who are homeless. We need a system that can cope when disaster strikes. This means building social and affordable housing and building **enough** of it.

Social and affordable housing is a good investment. Building social and affordable housing costs money, but it also saves money. People do far better with stable housing than without it – it is the foundation to overcome all kinds of serious challenges and rebuild lives. They are also less likely to become homeless because of the stability, affordability, and support systems of social housing.²⁶ There is a wealth of research to back this up²⁷, including a recent report on the gendered impacts of COVID-19, commissioned by Homelessness NSW and other state peaks, demonstrates that building an additional 5,000 social housing units would:

Deliver immediate economic benefits of \$4.5 billion and create 14,000 jobs across the NSW economy.

Cost up to \$2.6 billion, with costs lower through the use of community housing providers and other innovative financing models;

Avoid \$38.5 million a year in costs from women returning to a violent partner; and

Avoid \$68 million a year in costs due to women experiencing homelessness after leaving their homes due to family and domestic violence.

Aside from the direct benefits to government coffers, and personal dividends to those who are able to rebuild their life, there are significant and obvious benefits to the broader economy. It has been done before when the economy needed to be revived, and it can be done again. KPMG reported that an equivalent stimulus program after GFC delivered an increase of 14,000 FTE jobs, with a \$1.30 generated in the economy for every \$1 of construction activity. Given the dearth of social housing in regional NSW compared with need, a social housing stimulus ‘shovel ready’ projects can be spread, generating employment in regional economies.

²⁵ Nicola Brackertz, Jim Davison, and Alex Wilkinson, ‘How Can Aboriginal Housing in NSW and the Aboriginal Housing Office Provide the Best Opportunity for Aboriginal People?’, Report prepared by AHURI Professional Services for the Aboriginal Housing Office, NSW, (Melbourne: AHURI, 1 October 2017), <https://www.ahuri.edu.au/research/research-papers/how-can-aboriginal-housing-in-nsw-and-the-aboriginal-housing-office-provide-the-best-opportunity-for-aboriginal-people>.

²⁶ Guy Johnson et al., ‘How Do Housing and Labour Markets Affect Individual Homelessness?’, *Housing Studies* 34, no. 7 (9 August 2019): 1089–1116, <https://doi.org/10.1080/02673037.2018.1520819>.

²⁷ See, for example: <https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/rethinking-costs-homelessness-jeremy-thorpe/>; Zaretsky, K., et al. (2013) The cost of homelessness and the net benefit of homelessness programs: a national study, AHURI Final Report No.205. Melbourne: Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute; Equity Economics, ‘Nowhere To Go: The benefits of providing long-term social housing to women that have experienced domestic and family violence’, July 2021, Melbourne: Everybody’s Home; Pascual Juanola, Marta, ‘The cost of homelessness in WA’s public hospitals and how the state could save millions’, July 8 2021, Sydney Morning Herald, online via smh.com.au/national/western-australia/the-cost-of-homelessness-in-wa-s-public-hospitals-and-how-the-state-could-save-millions-20210703-p586k7.html

This social housing investment is possible through joint Federal Government and State Government funding to ensure that basic housing and homelessness support can be met and provide economic benefits to the NSW economy.

Recommendation 7: The Federal Government and NSW Government should make a joint commitment to investing 2.6 billion ²⁸ per year in NSW for the next 10 years to grow social housing by 5,000 properties per year, including acquiring existing stock to fast-track housing of priority cohorts.

Recommendation 8: Commit an additional \$500 million to repair existing social housing stock in NSW.

²⁸ Equity Economics, 'A Wave of Disadvantage Across NSW: Impact of the Covid-19 Recession'. p.4

Prioritise Aboriginal Community Controlled organisations and housing

The crisis of homelessness for Aboriginal people nationally, and severe rates of homelessness in NSW, requires a targeted separate funding stream to prioritise Aboriginal Community Controlled organisations and housing to deliver real outcomes for Aboriginal people experiencing homelessness. This separate funding stream should be led through consultation with local communities and ACCOs.

ACCOs are best placed with adequate resourcing to deliver culturally safe housing and homelessness services that can account for the depth and complexity of Aboriginal homelessness.

Aboriginal people are over-represented in the homelessness population, as well as users presenting to Specialist Homelessness Services (SHS). Even then, exact figures are difficult to ascertain, but it is likely higher than reported and recorded rates. Of many reasons NACCHO reports this may include those such as some Aboriginal peoples may not perceive themselves to be homeless if they are on Country, regardless of how and where they are sleeping.²⁹

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples experience significantly higher rates of homelessness, overcrowded housing, and insecure housing tenure. Despite comprising just 3.1% of the population,³⁰ Aboriginal peoples represent 31% of clients in NSW³¹, above the national average. And again, for major cities, this increases once again, where Aboriginal peoples comprise 36% of those seeking services.³² This is supported by the advice and information given to Homelessness NSW from services, who estimate Aboriginal peoples represent between 30-40% of people accessing SHSs in inner city Sydney. It should be noted that anecdotal evidence from services also indicate that the inner-city Sydney is amid an influx of Aboriginal people experiencing homelessness, largely due to the scarcity of appropriate services in regional NSW. Services continue to experience high demand, above and beyond their capacity to meet it.

Key findings from the 2020-21 report on Specialist Homelessness Services show the extent of the disparity:

In NSW there was a 5% increase in Aboriginal clients from 2019-20 to 2020-21

Aboriginal clients continue to increase by an average of 5.9% per year over the last ten years, three times faster than non-Aboriginal clients

²⁹ Homelessness NSW uses 'Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people' first, and 'Aboriginal people' thereafter in an attempt to both recognise the distinct and diverse nations, clans and tribes within Australia and the Torres Strait, and be pragmatic. We do not use 'Indigenous' but where it is a direct representation of other publications and data sets.

³⁰ Australian Bureau of Statistics, 'Australian Demographic Statistics', ABS Cat. no. 3101.0. (Canberra: ABS, March 2019).

³¹ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 'Specialist Homelessness Services 2020-21: New South Wales. Fact Sheet' (Canberra: AIHW, Australian Government, 2021), https://www.aihw.gov.au/getmedia/a095ab32-cd30-45af-9469-74f2b6ee6316/NSW_factsheet.pdf.aspx.

³² Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 'Specialist Homelessness Services Annual Report 2018-19', Cat No. HOU 318 (Canberra: AIHW, Australian Government, 2019), <https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/homelessness-services/shs-annual-report-18-19/contents/summary> and <https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/homelessness-services/shs-annual-report-18-19/contents/client-groups-of-interest/indigenous-clients>.

Aboriginal people are 10 times more likely to use SHS than non-indigenous people, a rate that is increasing each year.

It is impacting heavily upon children and young people. Over half (52%) of clients are under the age of 25

Aboriginal children aged 0 – 14 are 8 times more likely to access SHSs than non-indigenous children.³³

When compared with other states and territories:

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples housing and homelessness								
	NSW	VIC	QLD	SA	WA	Tas	NT	ACT
Overcrowded Indigenous households	7823	1802	7593	1221	3013	663	4087	174
Number experiencing homelessness	2278	783	4450	936	2618	130	12131	95
SHS Indigenous clients	19914	9428	13887	4741	9580	925	7485	671

(Source: Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2019. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people: a focus report on housing and homelessness. Cat. no. HOU 301. Canberra: AIHW)

It is important to note that the gap in outcomes for Aboriginal peoples includes causes such as ‘...policies and services that conflict with Indigenous values and culture.’³⁴ As such lasting and durable solutions to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander experiences of homelessness can be found within the community itself. Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations are well placed to deliver them.

Despite 31% of clients accessing SHS’s identifying as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, just 6% of contracts delivering specialist homelessness services involve Aboriginal providers, meaning there are less than 10 specialist funded organisations in NSW.³⁵

In the most part, no matter where you are in NSW there is likely no Aboriginal-led service for Aboriginal people to work with and the levels of Aboriginal staff across the sector doesn’t reflect the scope of demand. As of early 2019, 9 out of 15 DCJ district had no Aboriginal homelessness service provider.³⁶ The Cox Inall Ridgeway report found that “...Aboriginal staff comprise 9% of the workforce delivering specialist homelessness

³³ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, ‘Australia’s Children’ (Canberra: AIHW, Australian Government, 2019), <<https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/children-youth/australias-children>>.

³⁴ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, ‘Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People: A Focus Report on Housing and Homelessness’, Cat. no. HOU 301 (Canberra: AIHW, Australian Government, 2019).

³⁵ Cox Inall Ridgeway, ‘Consultation Report and Strategic Advice for Improving the Provision of Specialist Homelessness Services for Aboriginal People in NSW’, Report prepared for the Department of Communities and Justice (NSW Department of Communities and Justice, February 2020), p. 1, <https://www.facs.nsw.gov.au/download?file=790682>.

³⁶ Ibid., p. 34

services in NSW across both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal homelessness service providers. This is significantly above the percentage of the NSW Aboriginal population (3.5%), and the percentage of Aboriginal people in the public service workforce (3.2%), but significantly below the percentage of clients who access specialist homelessness services in NSW (28.9%).³⁷

Increasing recurrent funding for Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations will mean there are more culturally safe services. Without ACCOs, the NSW Government is providing essential crisis services to only some people, while Aboriginal communities go without.

Recommendation 9: Invest approximately \$108 million over 3 years in NSW to increase the number of Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations (ACCO) to ensure delivery of safe and appropriate services for Aboriginal people and meet current demand nationally.

³⁷ Ibid.

Create a national supportive housing system whilst continuing to fund the existing crisis system

The SHS system largely assists people when they are at a point of crisis, in contrast to a prevention or long-term rights-based approach to supportive housing. The crisis system needs to continue to be funded and funding increased to meet increasing need. However, a long-term holistic approach to supportive housing should be implemented, including Housing First models.

A holistic and integrated support system is demonstrated to change the outcomes of people experiencing homelessness. Supportive housing can benefit those who need multiple or ongoing support to exit homelessness and provide people with the support at their doorstep to navigate complex service systems.

This long-term holistic approach would include funding for longer-term housing, not just support. AHURI research demonstrates that while non-housing support is very important to meet the needs of families at risk of homelessness, capital investment for housing, rather than just recurrent funding for services, is needed to address families' needs. A lack of long-term and affordable housing in many locations can make it difficult to help a family in crisis beyond provision of crisis and temporary accommodation.³⁸ Homelessness should be a whole-of-government issue, including the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS), housing and health systems.³⁹

For those with the most chronic and complex experiences of homelessness, Housing First is a demonstrated program that can reduce homelessness with excellent outcomes. It is the basis on which homelessness strategies have succeeded worldwide. As has been demonstrated internationally, it can be powerful in changing both individual lives and systems responding to homelessness.

There is strong international evidence that Housing First ends homelessness for most people who have such complex needs.⁴⁰ Across several countries with very diverse contexts Housing First services are reporting the end of homelessness for between 7 – 9 out of 10 clients, with twice the success rate when compared with earlier models.⁴¹

The Housing First approach moves away from earlier 'housing ready' models where housing was contingent on a person meeting treatment or other goals, often resulting in a churn of people through short-term or temporary accommodation if and when they didn't meet goals. Housing First model provides independent and **permanent** housing to people alongside non-compulsory support.

³⁸ Valentine, Blunden et. Al. 'Supporting families effectively', p.4

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ See for example: Nicholas Pleace, 'Effective Services for Substance Misuse and Homelessness in Scotland: Evidence from an International Review', Scottish Government Social Research (York: Centre for Housing Policy, Scottish Government, 2008), <https://www.york.ac.uk/media/chp/documents/2008/substancemisuse.pdf>; Nicholas Pleace, 'Housing First Guide Europe', 2016, https://housingfirsteurope.eu/assets/files/2017/03/HFG_full_Digital.pdf; Deborah Padgett, Benjamin F. Henwood, and Sam J. Tsemberis, *Housing First: Ending Homelessness, Transforming Systems, and Changing Lives* (Oxford University Press, USA, 2016).

⁴¹ Blood, Imogen, Ian Copeman, Mark Goldup, Nicholas Pleace, Joanne Bretherton, and Shelly Dulson. 'Housing first feasibility study for the Liverpool city region.' (2017), p. 37.

Critical to the success of the model, is the implementation of core principles⁴²:

- A right to a home
- Flexible support, for as long as needed
- Housing and support/treatment are separated
- Active engagement, without coercion
- Individuals have choice and control
- The service is person centred, based on strengths and aspirations
- A harm reduction approach is used.
- Recovery orientated

It should be noted that there is research to support the ill effects of delayed access to housing, including the development of new problems, while exacerbating existing vulnerabilities.⁴³

The NSW Together Home program, established June 2020 after advice from Homelessness NSW and its supporters to minimise spread of COVID-19 amongst those most exposed, has longer-term accommodation housing with support, targeted to people entrenched in rough sleeping.

Together Home has largely been very successful. By mid-2022 it will have housed and be actively supporting 1050 people, previously sleeping rough.

It has been heralded as 'Housing First philosophy' and in its intent to resolve rough sleeping has been incredibly successful, with over 1000 people housing longer-term with support packages. But with support and housing due to collapse after 24 months, the hard-won gains could be lost given the complexity of experience within the program.

There should be a nationally funded Housing First program that includes permanent housing. The states should match their investment such as expanding Together Home in NSW with Federal investment.

Recommendation 10: Create and implement a national supportive housing system including funding for longer-term housing and wrap-around supportive housing.

Recommendation 11: The Federal Government should match states for supportive housing programs to meet current demand. In NSW the Together Home program needs to expand by 50 packages of permanent supportive housing per year in NSW to meet the needs of existing clients.

⁴² Pleace, 'Housing First Guide Europe'.; Council to Homeless Persons, 'Housing First, Permanent Support Housing: Ending Chronic Homelessness' (Melbourne: Council to Homeless Persons, 6 June 2018), <http://chp.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/FINAL-180606-Housing-First-2018-6-June.pdf>.

⁴³ Jane Bullen and Eileen Baldry, "I Waited 12 Months": How Does a Lack of Access to Housing Undermine Housing First?, *International Journal of Housing Policy* 19, no. 1 (2 January 2019): 120–30, <https://doi.org/10.1080/19491247.2018.1521187>.

Implement trauma-informed strategy for assisting specific cohorts such as Aboriginal communities, young people, domestic and family violence victim/survivors and people without permanent residency

People seeking assistance with housing and homelessness often enter the system with very different experiences and require different support needs. At its worst, support systems can retraumatise and exclude people who come to the very system needing help due to inappropriate support and housing.

This places a primacy on a homelessness and housing system that is suitable to supporting people from diverse cohorts. Homelessness NSW has identified key priority cohorts including Aboriginal people, young people, domestic and family violence victim/survivors and people without permanent residency.

This submission addresses the specific needs of Aboriginal people for culturally safe and supported housing and Aboriginal Controlled Community Organisations for homelessness services delivery in the earlier section above. This is a critical area given the level of homelessness experienced by Aboriginal and the overrepresentation of Aboriginal homelessness service users.

Young people

In a state like New South Wales, every young person should have what they need to thrive and to make good transitions into adulthood and for young people to pursue lives of value to them, to avoid chronic homelessness and exclusion, the government has a role to play in providing support, stability, and opportunity.

In 2020-21, 13,507 young people aged 15-24 presented alone to homelessness services in NSW.⁴⁴ This represents 20% of all people experiencing homelessness in NSW. It's well established that this figure doesn't represent the true extent of youth homelessness, such as those couch surfing. It also doesn't account for those who are under the age of 15 and presenting alone to homelessness services, nor does it account for young parents.

Young people have unique and different needs to adults. When considering key budget measures to address homelessness, young people require a different, youth-specific approach. And this includes housing pathways and options that cater to young people generally, and the diversity within 'young people' – diversity of age, gender, sexual orientation, culture, experience of marginalisation, exclusion and trauma. Data demonstrates that in 2020-21, 40% of young people in NSW who exited a homelessness service were unable to find housing and instead, their situation of homelessness or unstable housing was perpetuated.⁴⁵ This is largely due to the housing situation for

⁴⁴ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 'Specialist Homelessness Services Annual Report 2020–21' (Canberra: AIHW, Australian Government, 2021), <https://www.aihw.gov.au/getmedia/95657e24-6730-4249-93cf-64d1d284baad/Specialist-homelessness-services-annual-report-2020-21.pdf.aspx?inline=true>.

⁴⁵ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 'Supplementary Tables - Historical Tables SHSC 2011–12 to 2020–21', in *Specialist Homelessness Services Annual Report 2020–21* (Canberra: AIHW, Australian Government, 2021),

young people in NSW, including the lack of age-appropriate social and affordable housing. The most recent rental affordability snapshot identified that there was not a single affordable rental property in Australia for a person reliant on Youth Allowance.⁴⁶ It's clear that young people need more housing options that meet their needs and given both the rate of youth homelessness and the amount of young people who cannot find a positive housing solution a range of social and affordable housing solutions are required.

While there are pockets of innovation, many places in Australia still employ a 'stepping stone' approach to youth homelessness '...intended to transition young people from short-term crisis assistance to medium-term transitional housing and independent living.'⁴⁷ In NSW refuge hopping is endemic, and early experiences of homelessness are likely to lead to homelessness later in life. A system focused on managing crisis, and with short periods of support, compounded by the neglect of the Child Protection system, don't do much to support young people navigating such a critical phase of life with the structural barriers that impede sustained exits from homelessness. The question is not of the quality and nature of the crisis accommodation and supports for young people so much as it is question of appropriate and affordable housing options out of homelessness.

Housing initiatives that that are specific to and appropriate for young people and that act to centre positive youth development are present in NSW. But given the size of youth homelessness in NSW, and the need to shift from crisis and 'stepping stone' like systems, the housing mix for young people needs to grow.

Housing First for Youth (HF4Y) has been developed and executed across the world, an adaptation specifically for young people. A randomised controlled trial undertaken in Canada of HF4Y involving 4 sites – one which targets transition from care, another focusing on 'Indigenous' youth (with both the program model design and research agenda being indigenous led) - show promising early results.⁴⁸ First year results found '...significant improvements in housing stability, engagement in education and employment, and in terms of quality of life — particularly in the areas of psychological wellbeing and social relationships'.⁴⁹

In Australia, to date, there seems to be very little social housing purely for young people to exit homelessness, if any, without pre-conditions that includes young people with high and complex needs who may not be ready to engage in education, training and/or employment. What does exist in NSW shares elements of Housing First but has requirements to commit to education, training and/or employment, known as Foyers.

Foyers are a key option to improve housing pathways, with sufficient evidence of positive outcomes for vulnerable young people, and while trialled and tested in the NSW

<https://www.aihw.gov.au/getmedia/95657e24-6730-4249-93cf-64d1d284baad/Specialist-homelessness-services-annual-report-2020-21.pdf.aspx?inline=true>.

⁴⁶ Anglicare Australia, 'Rental Affordability Snapshot', National Report (Australian Capital Territory: Anglicare Australia, April 2021)

⁴⁷ Marion Coddou, Joseph Borlagdan, and Shelley Mallett, *Starting a Future That Means Something to You: Outcomes from a Longitudinal Study of Education First Youth Foyers* (Melbourne: Brotherhood of St Laurence, 2019). p.8

⁴⁸ Stephen Gaetz et al., 'Housing First for Youth in Australia', *Parity* 34, no. 3 (2021): 58–60.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

context, there are too few. Despite NSW holding the most amount of young people experiencing homelessness when compared with other states and territories, NSW is lagging in its development of Foyer-specific dwellings.

Foyer dwellings and capacity per state and territory								
	NSW	Vic	Qld	WA	SA	Tas	ACT	NT
YP presenting alone	13507	13192	5553	2872	3318	1470	757	1465
Foyer projects	2	7	3	1	1	3	1	0
Foyer dwellings/capacity	113	191	120	98	23	101	26	0

(Source: Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (2021) Specialist homelessness services annual report 2020–21., AIHW, Australian Government, accessed 09 December 2021; <https://foyer.org.au/foyers-in-australia/foyer-listing/#1637207507224-efb82131-1f0c>)

Foyers were not, historically, a response to youth homelessness and in Australia they do respond to a broader population of young people. According to research conducted by AHURI, Australia foyers in fact explicitly state they are not rapid rehousing.⁵⁰ There are suggestions that Foyers could be linked more directly to the SHS system and operate better as a housing pathway out of homelessness.⁵¹

There is evidence to suggest the expansion of Foyers in NSW would likely be suitable to a wide range of young people who experience homelessness in this state. A longitudinal study commissioned by Launch Housing and The Brotherhood of St Laurence to measure the outcomes of Education First Foyers in Victoria indicated that this model, which prioritises education, is targeted to young people who are committed to pursuing education but are ‘hindered by of personal, social and economic factors. They are more likely to be enrolled in education or training than the broader cohort of young people seeking Specialist Homelessness Services, but otherwise report similar experiences associated with homelessness.’⁵² Data from the AIHW shows that in 2020-21, 29% of NSW young people presenting to SHS’s were engaged in education and training.⁵³ This would indicate that rather a large portion of young people in SHS’s in NSW could be suitable for Foyers, and youth specialists in homelessness services would also be well placed to indicate suitability.

⁵⁰ David MacKenzie et al., ‘Redesign of a Homelessness Service System for Young People’, AHURI Final Report 327 (Me: Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute Limited, 2020), p.60, via <http://www.ahuri.edu.au/research/final-reports/327>.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Coddou, Borlagdan, and Mallett, *Starting a Future That Means Something to You: Outcomes from a Longitudinal Study of Education First Youth Foyers*.

⁵³ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, ‘Data Tables 2020–21’, in *Specialist Homelessness Services Annual Report 2020–21* (Canberra: AIHW, Australian Government, 2021), <https://www.aihw.gov.au/getmedia/95657e24-6730-4249-93cf-64d1d284baad/Specialist-homelessness-services-annual-report-2020-21.pdf.aspx?inline=true>.

What is made clear by the recent report on foyers, commissioned by Shelter NSW, is that proliferation of will not happen without investment from governments.⁵⁴

There is a need for a deliberate and planned approach to scaling nationally, including NSW, that is better linked to the SHS system and meets the support and housing needs of young people who experience or are at risk of homelessness.

As stated earlier, Foyers are critical to expand, but sit within a mix of options including extending the leaving care age to 21, better leaving care planning and execution.

Recommendation 12: Invest in a nation-wide program to provide Foyers in areas of high need to address housing demand for young people experiencing homelessness.

Domestic and Family Violence victim/survivors

A determining factor impacting on Victim/survivors of domestic and family violence is the lack of available social housing and wrap-around supportive housing. In 2019-20 over 27,000 people experiencing family and domestic violence in NSW sought the services of a specialist homelessness service (SHS) providers.⁴⁰ Based on national data it was found that 32 per cent of all clients that presented to SHS experiencing domestic family violence sought but did not receive long term housing. Equity Economics estimated that 8,794 clients experiencing domestic and family violence sought long term housing, but did not receive it, this is referred to subsequently as the 'gap'.

Some of these people will become or stay homeless because of the lack of social housing. Others will choose to stay in a violent home to avoid homelessness. Slightly different approaches are taken to estimate the social housing needs for these two cohorts. In 2019-20, nationally 30 per cent of the people seeking long-term housing assistance and experiencing domestic and family violence were already homeless, with the remaining 70 per cent at risk of becoming homeless. At the NSW level, of those that began the reporting period in homelessness, 56 per cent were still homeless. Of those that were at risk of homeless, 15 per cent became homeless. Pulling all the above data together, we estimate that 2,410 clients experience homelessness due to the lack of social housing.

Everybody's home estimated in 2016 that between 7 and 13 per cent returned to a violent partner because of a lack of financial support or because they had nowhere else to go – it is assumed that these people would not have done so if suitable long term social housing were available to them. Based on these figures we estimate that in NSW 2,402 people would have permanently left their violent home if greater social housing were available to them. Combined with the estimated 2,410 people experiencing homelessness, a total of 4,812 social housing units are required to meet the current demand for social housing from people experiencing domestic and family violence in NSW.

⁵⁴ Insight Consulting Australia, 'Scaling Youth Foyers for NSW', Policy Brief (Sydney: Shelter NSW, November 2021), <https://sheltersnsw.org.au/scaling-youth-foyers-for-nsw/>.

Recommendation 13: Invest in a nation-wide program to build social housing that meets the needs of people escaping domestic and family violence.

Recommendation 14: Invest in wrap around support supportive housing programs to meet the needs of people leaving domestic and family violence.

People without Permanent Residency

People in NSW without permanent residency (PR) are in a particularly precarious position with regards to homelessness. This includes women and their children who are victim-survivors of domestic and family violence. Their experience of homelessness is directly related to discrimination on the basis of visa status and mode of arrival to Australia, and exclusion from the basic safety net available to other people in New South Wales. This area is a Federal Government responsibility and requires national action to address vast barriers to access which have resulted in homelessness and trauma.

Domestic Violence NSW and the National Advocacy Group on Women on Temporary Visas Experiencing Violence⁵⁵ found that people on temporary visas face a range of barriers when at risk of and facing homelessness including:

- inability to access housing (NSW Housing policy prevents people on temporary visas from accessing transitional, social and public housing and rental assistance).
- inability to access healthcare (NSW Health policy excludes people without Medicare from accessing public hospitals except in limited circumstances; Commonwealth policy prevents people on temporary visas from accessing Medicare except in limited circumstances).
- inability to access income (Commonwealth policy prevents people on temporary visas from accessing Centrelink; People on temporary visas may have no or limited work rights depending on the visa type and conditions, and childcare responsibilities).
- challenges in accessing crisis accommodation (Service providers do not receive specific funding to assist people on temporary visas. Some service providers limit the number of people on temporary visas they support due to the high costs of supporting people without income for extended periods and their inability to access long-term housing).
- risk, fear and threats of deportation and separation from their children (People on temporary visas face complex intersecting legal issues relating to domestic violence, immigration, family, and child protection law and require legal advice and representations).
- lack of culturally safe and accessible services and free interpreting services.

⁵⁵ National Advocacy Group on Women on Temporary Visas Experiencing Violence, 'Path to Nowhere: Women on Temporary Visas Experiencing Violence and Their Children' (Australian Women Against Violence Alliance, 2018), <https://awava.org.au/2018/12/11/research-and-reports/path-to-nowhere-report-women-on-temporary-visas-experiencing-violence-and-their-children>.

- limited social networks and access to support, lack of understanding of their rights.
- inability to return to country of origin due to pandemic conditions
- inability to leave Australia with children due to complex and contradictory legal systems

Homelessness is often the result. A recently released report regarding people seeking asylum, living predominantly in West and Southwest Sydney, and their housing, homelessness, income, and employment experiences since arriving in Australia, found:⁵⁶

- 55% had experienced some form of homelessness since arriving in Australia,
- 9% of respondents had slept rough, in a car, or in another improvised dwelling, and
- 14% had stayed in emergency accommodation since arrival.

Further, a study conducted by Foundations Housing found that 29% of crisis accommodation in Sydney based domestic and family violence services were occupied by women seeking asylum and on temporary visas, and their children.⁵⁷ This is similar to findings in one of the first large scale studies of migrant and refugee women in Australia, where one third of women surveyed said they experienced domestic and family violence and nearly a quarter reported increasing severity during COVID-19 lockdowns.⁵⁸ It is incredibly hard for services to support such women and their families, as when there are no other alternatives for them, they often result in very long stays in what is temporary or transitional settings.

Work by Homelessness NSW also estimated approximately 20% of people sleeping rough in inner-city Sydney do not have permanent residency.⁵⁹

The stripping back of access to any kind of income support in 2018 has likely resulted in increases to homelessness, compounded by the pandemic. The Status Resolution Support Service (SRSS) was one of the very few options available and enabled people to access roughly \$35 per day, a rate of 89% of JobSeeker. However, in 2020-2021 the Federal Government cut the SRSS funding by 85%, and the number of people receiving SRSS dropped from 13,299 in February 2018 to 3,159 in January 2021.⁶⁰ This has had a direct and large impact on homelessness, with the Asylum Seeker Resource Centre reporting that since the cuts came into effect, accommodation assistance provided by

⁵⁶ Anjali Roberts, Nishadh Rego, and Dr. Elizabeth Conroy, 'A Place to Call Home: A Report on the Experiences of Homelessness and Housing Exclusion among People Seeking Asylum in Greater Sydney' (Sydney: Jesuit Refugee Service and Western Sydney University, 10 December 2021), <https://aus.jrs.net/wp-content/uploads/sites/20/2021/08/A-Place-to-Call-Home-Survey-Findings.pdf>.

⁵⁷ Anjali Roberts, 'Foundations Housing Project: A Scoping Study on Housing for People Seeking Asylum & Strategic Areas of Action towards Housing for All' (Sydney: Jesuit Refugee Service, Life Without Barriers, Asylum Seeker Centre, March 2020), <https://aus.jrs.net/wp-content/uploads/sites/20/2020/06/FoundationsHousingReport-for-WEB.pdf>.

⁵⁸ Marie Segrave, Rebecca Wickes, and Chloe Keel, 'Migrant and Refugee Women in Australia: The Safety and Security Study' (Monash University, 2021).

⁵⁹ Homelessness NSW, 'The Experience of People without Australian Permanent Residency Accessing Emergency Accommodation in Inner City Sydney' (Sydney: Homelessness NSW, December 2021), <https://homelessnessnsw.org.au/our-work/reports/>.

⁶⁰ Anjali Roberts, Nishadh Rego, and Dr. Elizabeth Conroy, 'A Place to Call Home'.

them increased by 265%.⁶¹ For NSW this means that of the estimated 40,000 people seeking asylum in NSW, roughly 95% do not have access to any income support when they are not in work.⁶²

This is significant, particularly considering the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on work. A survey of 101 people seeking asylum in Western Sydney found that all participants who had work prior to March 2020 lost work completely or had hours reduced following the pandemic. As people seeking asylum were excluded from JobKeeper, they were often the first to lose work and the last to re-gain it.⁶³

A survey from the Refugee Council of Australia (RCOA) on homelessness and hunger amongst people seeking asylum during COVID-19 found:

Over 88% of people seeking asylum asking for assistance from the service agencies and charitable groups had difficulty paying rent due to COVID-19.

55% are at risk of homelessness

Over 14% are already currently experiencing homelessness (in a car, on the streets or in emergency accommodation).

The RCOA survey included reports of ‘treating young children in this group for malnourishment and related diseases’ and further reported the likely inability of this cohort to recover without support “people have exhausted their Super, savings, and other supports. There are debts being accumulated, which are likely to result in substantial hardship and destitution for some time to come.”⁶⁴

The consequences of widespread exclusion by the Federal Government have largely fallen to the states to repair.

To date, there has been very little relief to people without residency experiencing homelessness, and what support is available has been piecemeal and short-term. In 2020 and 2021 much-welcomed grants totalling \$6 million (temporary visa holders, asylum seekers and refugees) were delivered through Multicultural NSW for services to assist people with no permanent residency during the COVID-19 pandemic, however these were temporary in nature.

Of a \$11.3 million funding package for homelessness services and temporary accommodation on 30 June 2021, \$1 million was available to assist temporary visa holders, asylum seekers and refugees, again for a limited time only.

From the Federal Government, commitments have included \$10 million to trial the Temporary Visa Holders Experiencing Violence Pilot for one year and in the 2021-22 Budget they committed an additional \$10.3 million to extend the pilot for a further year,

⁶¹ House of Representatives Standing Committee on and Social Policy and Legal Affairs, ‘Inquiry into Homelessness in Australia’, Final Report (Canberra: Parliament of The Commonwealth of Australia, July 2021), https://parlinfo.aph.gov.au/parlInfo/download/committees/reportrep/024522/toc_pdf/Finalreport.pdf;fileType=application%2Fpdf.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Anjali Roberts, Nishadh Rego, and Dr. Elizabeth Conroy, ‘A Place to Call Home’. p.4

⁶⁴ Refugee Council of Australia, ‘Homelessness and Hunger among People Seeking Asylum during COVID-19’, Refugee Council of Australia, 2020, <https://www.refugeecouncil.org.au/homelessness-and-hunger-among-people-seeking-asylum-during-covid-19/>.

and \$13 million to the Red Cross to deliver relief and counselling to temporary migrants and people on bridging visas. These announcements while welcome are very limited in scope, considering the impacts of COVID on a very exposed group of people.

With the assistance of support services, in August 2021 the Emergency Accommodation program was been extended to 33 people without PR in inner city Sydney. While some people exited due to the short-term nature of the service or because they had higher support needs than the Program was able to provide, many people have stayed in the accommodation. Some people had previously been sleeping rough for 7-9 years and are now accommodated.

No person in Australia should have to live with violence, face separation from their children or experience homelessness on the basis of their visa status. People without permanent residency, and their children, should have basic protections in Australia. Homelessness NSW recommends, in the NSW 2022-23 Budget the NSW Government:

Recommendation 15: Instigate national reform to ensure Federal Government responsibility for people without permanent residency experiencing homelessness including rights to access to income support and Medicare

Recommendation 16: Provide support for people without permanent residency experiencing homelessness, through funding for:

- **Medium term supported accommodation services**
- **Access to social housing, including products such as private rental subsidies and Temporary Accommodation**
- **Housing First model accommodation programs for those rough sleeping longer term or with multiple support needs**