

Malcolm Roberts - Commissioner &
Romlie Mokak - Commissioner
Productivity Commission
Australian Government
GPO Box 1428
Canberra City ACT 2601

18 March 2022

Dear Mr Roberts and Mr Mokak

We write to you to make a submission as part of the *National Housing and Homelessness Agreement (NHHA) Review*.

The Australian Alliance to End Homelessness (AAEH) is an independent champion for preventing and ending homelessness in Australia. We recognise that the scale of homelessness in Australia is both preventable and solvable and that despite the common misconception to the contrary, we can end homelessness in Australia.

The Advance to Zero Campaign is a groundbreaking national initiative of the AAEH that supports local collaborative efforts to end homelessness, starting with rough sleeping – one community at a time. Using a range of proven approaches from around the world communities are supported to not just address or even reduce homelessness, but to end it. In this context, what we mean by ending homelessness is that we can measure and demonstrate with real time data that homelessness has been made rare, brief and a one-time occurrence. Something that a growing number of communities in North America have been able to demonstrate.

Further information about the Advance to Zero (AtoZ) methodology can be found in the [Campaign Briefing](#) document attached.

AAEH is regularly contacted by local communities seeking support for working together to end homelessness by using the Advance to Zero methodology, pioneered successfully in over sixty communities in the United States of America (USA) and Canada so far.

We are entirely funded through philanthropy and the contributions of local collaborations – where they can. We believe that based on the similar success in the USA and Canada that a national effort is needed to support the continued adoption of the AtoZ methodology across Australia, as well as an acceleration of it.

Fulfilling the need for real time data

Ultimately you cannot manage what you do not measure, and in Australia, we estimate the number of people experiencing homelessness every five years through the census. The Australian Institute for Health and Welfare collects instances of service use by homelessness agencies across the country, but the data does not indicate how many people are experiencing homelessness at a given point in time. Various states and territories supplement this national data with point in time counts that are of limited use and questionable accuracy.

By establishing a real time and dynamic by-name list of everyone experiencing homelessness in a community, particularly those sleeping rough, we can better understand and seek to resolve it. In particular the by-name list enables:

- Improved access to, and the use of, the scarce housing resources available by triaging housing to those most vulnerable and ensuring that allocations made are done with the necessary support to enable the best chance for the tenancy being successful.
- efforts to prevent homelessness from occurring in the first place by holding a mirror up to the other service systems that fail and from which homelessness occurs i.e., health, corrections, drug and alcohol, child protection, mental health etc.
- Enabling data driven planning by government agencies and advocacy by the communities for exactly the amount of housing and support that is needed to meet the needs of a particular community.

A funding proposal to support the national roll out of this approach sought just \$3.5 million in funding and has been discussed with former Ministers for Homelessness and Veteran's Affairs, as well as put to the current Minister for Homelessness.

The case for this investment:

- Despite record investments in homelessness programs and services by Australian Governments homelessness is increasing.
- We know that a person uses \$13,100 less in government-funded services per year when securely housed compared to the services they used when they were chronically homeless.
- An unknown number of people are dying whilst sleeping rough.
- There is a lack of transparency about the outcomes that existing investments are delivering.

- There is a focus on measuring the services provided and program outcomes rather than a focus on population level reductions in homelessness by measuring system level outcomes.
- There is a lack of integration of local service systems such as health, housing, corrections, ex-service organisations, specialist homelessness services, employment, and other community services.
- When rough sleeping homelessness is left unaddressed, community demands often lead to a criminalisation of the issue rather than to solutions that address the root causes of the problem.

Deaths Data

The approach and proposal above have been taken because communities have not wanted to wait for governments to act to enumerate what is in urgent need of being enumerated. In fact, based on the research from Western Australia the Australian Health, Housing and Homelessness Network (A3HN) we have estimated that approximately 424 people die each year whilst experiencing rough sleeping. See the attached [Dying Homeless in Australia: We Must Measure It Better](#) article.

For a consistent national approach, we propose that the Commonwealth Government take a leadership role and commission the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW), to develop a national homelessness deaths and life expectancy gap reporting framework. Such a framework should:

- set out how we can improve data capture.
- drive more accurate measures of homelessness in hospital and coronial administrative data.
- articulate the number of deaths among people experiencing homelessness (all types of homelessness), the age of death, and cause of death (direct and indirect) at both the local, state/territory and national level, and;
- seek to report such data in as close to real time as possible.

The development of such a framework should also support the data capture efforts of the homeless sector and others in establishing by-name lists through the Advance to Zero Campaign.

State-Wide and National Data Collection Needed

The Advance to Zero Campaign is seeking to demonstrate that ending homelessness is possible, community by community. Ultimately, we want to be able to identify by-name everyone experiencing rough sleeping homelessness, and all forms of homelessness not just on a community by community basis, but on a state by state and ultimately national basis.

You cannot manage what you do not measure, and so it is the AAEH's view that the next NHHA should require, over time, for all states and territories to identify by-name, the number of people experiencing homelessness in their jurisdiction. Such state-wide by-name lists should:

- be dynamic real time lists – not static, point in time lists.

- capture the needs of those people experiencing homelessness consistently.
- be revealed via public dashboards in a de-identified way to enable transparency and a continued focus on driving improvements.
- ensure consistent data collection enabling a nationally consistent by-name list.
- significantly seek to build upon, rather than duplicate the existing community driven by-name lists.

Analysis of our data

The AAEH partnered with the Centre for Social Impact to analyse all the data being collected by communities utilising in the Advance to Zero methodology. The report [Ending Homelessness in Australia: An evidence and policy deep dive](#) sets out in detail what this data shows about the state of homelessness in Australia and its key drivers.

Housing First

The Advance to Zero methodology is a Housing First approach that connects people experiencing homelessness with long-term housing as quickly as possible and without preconditions. Housing First is guided by the belief that a safe home is a human right and a basic need that must be met before attending to personal issues. The model is based on evidence that people with long histories of homelessness, mental illness or addictions, can achieve housing stability in long-term housing if provided with the right supports.

Need for more permanent supportive housing

We know that just placing people with an experience of long term or chronic homelessness into social housing often does not work. The solution to this is permanent supportive housing, of which there are differing models – clustered models like [Common Ground](#) or scattered site models like [Journey to Social Inclusion](#).

Whilst supportive housing is more expensive than general social housing, what we know is that it is [actually cheaper](#) to provide permanent supportive housing to those experiencing chronic homelessness than it is to leave people cycling in and out crisis accommodation, hospitals, prisons and other government services.

Supportive housing fills a gap in housing options for the most vulnerable people through close integration of suitable housing and tailored support services. It saves resources, and when new supportive housing is brought online it helps reduce homelessness, as has been seen in several communities across Australia.

People who are chronically homeless experience long term or repeated homelessness and/or have a co-occurring disability, including a mental illness or addiction. There is no commonly agreed definition of chronic

homelessness in Australia, something that the next NHHA should seek to address.

Supportive housing, similarly, does not have a nationally agreed definition which needs to be resolved as part of the next NHHA, but the AAEH believes that a supportive housing unit is defined by the following elements:

- available to, and intended for, a person or family whose head of household requires support to sustain a tenancy and to have quality of life and has multiple barriers to employment and housing stability, which might include mental illness, addiction or other disabling or chronic health conditions.
- the tenant household ideally pays no more than 30% of household income towards rent and utilities and never pays more than 50% of income toward such housing expenses.
- all members of the tenant household have easy, facilitated access to a flexible and comprehensive array of support services designed to assist the tenants to achieve and sustain housing stability, but participation in such services is not a condition of ongoing tenancy.
- service and property management strategies include effective, coordinated approaches for addressing issues resulting from substance use, relapse and mental health crises, with a focus on fostering housing stability.

The next NHHA should require that a percentage of new social housing is dedicated supportive housing – to realise savings to taxpayers – but most importantly to better meet the needs of often the most vulnerable people experiencing homelessness.

Health equity and health agencies included in the next agreement

The AAEH has established the Australian Health, Housing & Homelessness Network (A3HN) to support a health-informed end to homelessness in Australia. We bring together experts, researchers, practitioners and people with a lived experience of these sectors to support each other's efforts to end homelessness through collaboration, advocacy, events and knowledge sharing. The network believes that the next NHHA should be broadened to include health agencies not just housing agencies, including reference to other health and mental health intergovernmental agreements, strategies and plans.

Health, housing and homelessness are all interconnected. We set this in further detail and have developed a set of recommendations that we are seeking the Commonwealth Government's adoption of as set out in the ['Leaving No-One Behind'](#) national policy document.

The next NHHA should include Health Departments at the Commonwealth, State and Territory Levels, in order to develop:

1. A Policy - The Federal Government should create a taskforce on health equity, housing and homelessness to develop a national policy response in collaboration with State Governments, Primary

Healthcare Networks and the community sector. Included in this policy should be a nationally consistent commitment of no exits into homelessness for people with mental illness who are discharged from institutional care, including hospitals and prisons.

2. A Network - The Federal Government should provide funding for the work of the AAEH to establish a Health, Housing and Homelessness network with a broad range of health, and community organisations, professionals and people with a lived experience.
3. A Pilot Project - The Federal Government should fund an Assertive Intervention pilot in every state and territory, featuring flexible medical and outreach service delivery – including primary healthcare and psychiatric response, 365 days a year. The pilot would cost \$2.5 million per city, plus evaluation costs.
4. Funding Certainty - Existing funding arrangements between Primary Healthcare Networks health, homelessness and vulnerably housed services should be secured a baseline commitment for a five-year period. This will give services the certainty they need to operate with the greatest effectiveness.
5. Funding Equity - The Federal Government widen policy provisions to allow medical practitioners to bulk bill patients who have no fixed address and enable bulk billing for street-based and outreach consultations.

Conclusion – National Plan

AAEH recognises that ending homelessness is possible. We believe that greater adoption of the Advance to Zero methodology by governments through the next *National Housing and Homelessness Agreement Review* is an essential step in making homelessness rare, brief and a one-time occurrence. This requires national leadership. We know that people experiencing homelessness are very mobile, particularly Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People who are disproportionately affected by homelessness and so a national approach is needed.

We believe that the next NHHA needs to be backed up by a National Housing and Homelessness Strategy that includes in it a plan to roll out the Advance to Zero methodology nationally.

We would be pleased to discuss this submission and provide any additional information you may need.

Sincerely,

David Pearson, CEO
Australian Alliance to End Homelessness

Attachments:

- Advance to Zero: Campaign Briefing

- Advance to Zero database factsheet
- Ending homelessness in Australia: An evidence and policy deep dive
- Housing First principles factsheet
- Leaving No-one Behind: A National Policy for Health Equity, Housing and Homelessness.
- Dying Homeless in Australia: We Must Measure It Better article