



WA ALLIANCE TO END HOMELESSNESS

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Using Evidence to End Homelessness

IMMEDIATE RELEASE

The WA Alliance to End Homelessness (“WAAEH”) wishes to respond to the recent comments of the Assistant Minister for Homelessness Luke Howarth and to the Morrison Government. We challenge the Minister and the Morrison Government to look for long-term solutions that will end homelessness rather than short-term responses that will just manage it.

Increasingly, the national and international evidence points to the fact that the most effective way to respond to homelessness is to:-

1. Provide long term stable, safe and affordable housing
2. Provide tailored support matched to the individual (family) needs that will ensure that they sustain their housing.
3. Know by name at the local level those who have entered into homelessness or are still experiencing homelessness and understand their needs so that rapid tailored responses can be made on the best evidence.

This approach is known as ‘Housing First’ where rapid provision of stable, long-term housing with support and the direct engagement of those experiencing homelessness in all decisions made around housing is the foundation to rebuilding a person’s life and ending their experience of homelessness.

We know that the current system of temporary or transitional housing does not guarantee to end a person’s experience of homelessness. In fact, we know the current system cannot manage the overwhelming demand for services (given high levels of unmet demand), let alone be able to respond to the individual needs of those needing assistance. The current system has to change as homelessness is on the rise.

If we look internationally, Finland made the decision to shift its focus from providing temporary (including emergency) housing towards taking a 'Housing First' approach by the provision of long term stable housing and individual support. While the effects of this change took some time to see its benefits, Finland is one of a few countries that can claim to have reduced homelessness over the past two decades. Fundamental to this was the commitment to 'Housing First' and their experience of reducing the need to provide temporary shelter – many of their short-term and emergency facilities have been converted into long term stable housing.

Locally, the NGO sector with support from Government funded services has been trialling a 'Housing First' approach over the past few years with great success. Known as the 50 Lives 50 Homes (50L 50H) project which initially sought to house 50 of the most vulnerable people experiencing homelessness in the Perth CBD has gone onto housing over 215 people experiencing long-term homelessness often with significant health needs and deemed 'unhousable'. Evaluation of the project has demonstrated a success rate currently at 81% of people sustaining their housing beyond a twelve month period. This success is consistent with the international and national evidence of the 'Housing First' approach.

The current homelessness response system of temporary housing does not achieve this level of success in sustaining long term housing outcomes.

When you examine the case studies of the 'lived experience' of people experiencing homelessness we know the following:-

1. People can often cycle in and out of temporary housing services and back into rough sleeping
2. This cycle can continue for extended periods – it is not uncommon to learn that people have been homeless for 5-10 years
3. This pattern can often traumatise and re-traumatise individuals to the point where they refuse assistance
4. That even when individuals achieve long term housing, they can fall back into homelessness and restart the cycle. People who have experienced homelessness talk about the 'snakes and ladders' journey where you can take one step forward and then end up five steps behind.

Some three years ago a number of CEOs/Leaders and academics within the homelessness sector came together to say enough is enough – we need to end homelessness and not just respond or manage it.

In April 2018, we launched the [WA Strategy to End Homelessness](#) – a 10 year Strategy to end homelessness in WA.

Our hope and intention of this Strategy is that it will provide the 'blueprint' to take action towards ending homelessness and that this approach requires a whole of community response.

While we have five pillars for action – ‘Housing First’ is central to our efforts and focus. We know that being part of the current homelessness system we need to reform our approach and move towards achieving long-term stable housing outcomes for those experiencing homelessness.

We are seeking to engage the whole community, including government, the corporate sector and the Not for Profit Sector to work towards those solutions that will end homelessness. Fundamental to this is the need for stable, affordable and safe housing options.

We know that the numbers of social housing properties in Australia has been declining for the past two decades and this exacerbates the current state of homelessness. Our housing system for people on low incomes is ‘broken’. AHURI released a report – Social Housing as Infrastructure: an Investment Pathway citing the immediate need for at least 400 000 social housing dwellings and the long term need for a total of 727 300 over the next two decades to keep pace with demand.

We have a crisis in the supply of social housing and urge the Federal and State Governments to commit to the development of more social and affordable housing. We urge the Assistant Minister and the Morrison Government to commit to creating a ‘Housing Led’ recovery to not only stimulate the economy but to ensure we have adequate stocks of affordable housing for those who need it. We need long-term outcomes for those experiencing homelessness not more temporary solutions.

End.

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Independent Chair of the Western Australian Alliance to End Homelessness.

The WA Alliance to End Homelessness (“WAAEH”) is comprised of a group of individuals and organisations that have come together to end homelessness in Western Australia. Following an 18-month community engagement and consultation process, the Alliance developed the WA Strategy to End Homelessness (the “Strategy”), collectively developed by representatives from homelessness services, people experiencing homelessness, service funders, and members of our community. The Strategy seeks to provide a framework to inform the process of ending homelessness, and providing signposts for action.