

COUNCIL TO HOMELESS PERSONS QUEENSLAND

We believe that responses to homelessness must respect the dignity of the person and that they embrace the diversity of service users' experiences.

SUBMISSION TO THE
FEDERAL BUDGET
2022-23



OVERVIEW

This document is the Council to Homeless Persons Queensland's submission to the Federal Budget 2022-23

The Council to Homeless Persons Queensland is a collaboration of homelessness services operating in Queensland. We are an Incorporated Association with a broad membership base and an active and committed Management Committee. We aim to represent the diversity of service providers in the homelessness sector and to use our combined voice to advocate for service users and their rights.

We believe that responses to homelessness must respect the dignity of the person and that it embraces the diversity of service users' experiences. This includes an empowering approach where people feel able to make their own choices with dignity and support and with an emphasis on achieving lasting positive outcomes.

The Council to Homeless Persons Queensland has continued to advocate for the creation of safe and affordable housing, and a strong mandate on improving the service and system interaction experience of those experiencing homelessness in Queensland.

WHAT WE KNOW

The rising rate of unemployment because of COVID-19 has only increased the number of those at risk of homelessness and experiencing housing stress. We are already seeing an increase in service users and a change in the age demographic to include many over 50s, and the growing middle ground of service users.

The current approach to addressing homeless is crisis driven, short-term and often only addresses the immediate needs of people experiencing poverty.

We also know that homeless people are over-represented in our prisons, and previously incarcerated people are over-represented among the homeless. Experiencing homelessness increases the risk of criminal justice system involvement, and experiencing imprisonment increases the likelihood of homelessness.

All Australians have the right to housing that is safe, appropriate, affordable, and sustainable. However, due to several factors, homelessness is now at a crisis point and in danger of becoming entrenched across our country and creating a further crisis for young Australians wanting to enter the housing market.

There are several factors contributing to the unprecedented levels of homelessness including increasing rental costs, low vacancy rates in the private rental market, income support failing to keep up with the growth in rents, and a proportionate decrease in investment in social and affordable housing. Homelessness is rising in areas with a shortage of affordable and private rental housing.

The most common issues affecting people are housing pressures, housing affordability stress, homelessness, and inadequate rates of income support. Levels of unmet need are high, particularly in regional and rural areas, where there are limited service providers but a growing population.

Even prior to the pandemic, demand for safe, secure, and affordable housing was not being met. There is currently a shortage of almost 430,000 homes that are affordable (**135,000 in NSW, 100,000 each in Vic and Qld, 38,500 in WA, 32,500 in SA, 11,400 in Tas, 7,700 in NT and, 3,000 in ACT**).

Social housing is important infrastructure that contributes to the effective functioning of our capital cities. It is an essential component of the housing spectrum, which prevents people experiencing

housing stress from falling into homelessness and supports people moving out of homelessness with stable and affordable accommodation.

The pandemic has highlighted the precarious financial and living situations of these cohorts. Without support, these groups are at ongoing risk of entrenched and extreme poverty.

The federally funded National Rental Affordability Scheme (NRAS) gives incentives to housing providers, which then rent properties out for at least 20 per cent below market rates. This was an important part of ensuring safe affordable housing was available for people on low income. With the news that this scheme is due end by 2026, investors are already selling properties and therefore creating a further crisis for many Australians. We call on the Federal Government to not only continue to fund this initiative past 2026, but to increase NRAS scheme across many of our regional locations.

COST OF HOMELESSNESS

A study for the Victorian Government conducted by SGS Economics and Planning, released in March 2017, found that “governments will save money by spending on accommodation services.”

The SGS report outlined the cost of homelessness has been calculated at \$25,615 per person per year covering health, crime, and other factors. Getting people off the streets was calculated to have the following benefits per person:

Area	Expense
Health	\$8,429
Reduced crime	\$6,182
Individual costs	\$6,500
Improved human capital	\$4,236
Other	\$268
Total	\$25,615 per year

Based on the Australian Bureau of Statistics 2016 Census figures, which are believed to have vastly undercounted the homelessness population, there are some 13,968 in Australia sleeping rough each night costing \$357.8 million each year based on the figures from the SGS study.

If you provide people with a roof over their head, we see savings in demand for health care, especially emergency department admissions; reduced crime rate – people who are homeless, particularly those sleeping rough, are more involved in crime both as victims and perpetrators – and importantly also improved human capital. Thus, people are better able, once they have a roof over their head, to re-engage with the workforce and education and contribute to society.

- SGS Principal and Partner Ellen Witte.

Paradoxically, despite being some of the most vulnerable in our community, being homeless decreases the likelihood of accessing appropriate care due to complex need, exclusion from services based on program criteria or inflexible methods of service delivery.

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Targeted prevention strategies with adequate resources to improve the support systems that act on the root causes of homelessness.
2. Increase the shift from crisis housing responses to ‘upstream’ interventions.
3. Enhance assertive early intervention responses such as private rental support packages and tenancy skills training.
4. The Federally funded National Rental Affordability Scheme (NRAS) to continue and be increased, ensuring housing stock is replaced as part of Federal and state housing plans.

5. Increased funding to the States for frontline specialist services with better system design between housing, child safety, mental health and AOD services.
6. Further investment in preventative programs that address the drivers of homelessness, including domestic and family violence, mental health, drug and alcohol use.
7. Incorporation of culturally appropriate housing and early intervention services that recognises issues that disproportionately affect First Nations people.
8. Federal and State governments, to review and inform the housing market and allocate funding incentives to stimulate provision of improved social and affordable housing outcomes.
9. Permanently increase social security income support payment rates and provide supplementary payments that reflect specific costs people face, as proposed by ACOSS.
10. Address overall social inequality through a whole of government approach. Like the Health in All Policy concept, apply a 'vulnerable person' lens to each government policy to ensure it does not have a negative impact.
11. An equity-based approach is required to address the extreme social exclusion that results in homelessness.
12. Increased funding for Specialist Homelessness Services, inclusive of ongoing mobile support to people who have transitioned from homelessness to housing to ensure tenancy sustainment to reduce the number of people cycling through the system.

CONCLUSION

Data on unmet needs can be limited by the assessment undertaken and category of data collected. If a holistic assessment is not undertaken by staff trained to recognise underlying disabilities and chronic health issues, then unmet needs are potentially not recognised or adequately reflected.

Many people experiencing homelessness live long term in marginalised housing such as rooming houses or sleep rough, without any connection to support services. They may only seek a service at a late stage, for example, once evicted or with a serious health issue. Those particularly marginalised and vulnerable individuals who do not seek services and their unmet needs are not generally recorded or recognised.

Assertive outreach approaches that engage with people experiencing homelessness in a variety of environments are essential. Assertive outreach is central to engaging those who do not request a service and who are not connected with the service system.

In conclusion, there are a wide range of measures that a courageous government can take in this Budget to make Australia a much more inclusive country for all. Numerous studies have shown addressing homelessness reduces costs to government in other areas. Specialist Homelessness Services provide the bulk of the service response for homelessness; however, current funding measures and funding indexation is not adequate to enable services to meet demand or cover the real costs of service delivery, currently and into the future.



Stephen Simpson

Executive Officer

Council to Homeless Persons Queensland

stephenjsimpson@chpq.org.au

References

Refugee Council of Australia. 18 December 2020. Homelessness and Hunger Among People Seeking Asylum During COVID-19. Accessed at: <https://www.refugeecouncil.org.au/homelessness-and-hunger-among-people-seeking-asylum-during-covid-19/>

Leishman, C., Ong, R., Lester, L. and Liang, W. 2020. Supporting Australia's housing system: modelling pandemic policy responses.

Sampson, R. Kunz, M. 2020. Covid-19 Impacts us all – Ensuring the safety and wellbeing of people on temporary visas during COVID-19. Accessed at: <https://www.redcross.org.au/getmedia/0a4ca4bb-c5b9-4b6b-89e9-ff90df3a01fc/Australian-Red-Cross-COVID-19-TempVisa-Report-web.pdf.aspx>

Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute report social housing as infrastructure: an investment pathway released in 2018 and detailed in the Everybody's Home heat maps released 3 August 2020

Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. Specialist homelessness services: On any given day, across Queensland 2020 [Available from: <https://www.aihw.gov.au/getmedia/386e854b-6ac5-49a6-842b-5d5eecfa3e3b/aihw-hou-322-Qld-infographic.pdf.aspx>.

Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. Specialised Homelessness Services 2019-20: Queensland 2020 [Available from: <https://www.aihw.gov.au/getmedia/48793adb-427b-441b-b7f0-9c87ee21e35f/aihw-hou-322-qld-factsheet.pdf.aspx>

Department of Social Services data, reported in ACOSS (2018) 'Faces of Unemployment' https://www.acoss.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/ACOSS_JA_Faces-of-Unemployment_14-September-2018_web.pdf p.8

ACOSS Raise the Rate Briefing Paper for Anti-Poverty Week 2019- <https://www.acoss.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/Anti-Poverty-Week-Raise-the-Rate-key-messages-and-stats.pdf>

Hwang S & Burns T (2014) 'Health interventions for people who are homeless' *Lancet* 384:1541-4.

Woodhall-Melnik J, Dunn J (2016) 'A systematic review of outcomes associated with participation in Housing First programs' *Housing Studies* 31: 287–304.

Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2018. Couch surfers: a profile of Specialist Homelessness Services clients. Cat. no. HOU 298. Canberra: AIHW.

Woodhall-Melnik J, Dunn J (2016) 'A systematic review of outcomes associated with participation in Housing First programs' *Housing Studies* 31: 287–304.