Student Information Resource:
An Analysis of Homelessness

Information package for tertiary students

Updated August 2019

About Us

Launch Housing

Launch Housing is a Melbourne based, secular and independent community agency formed in July 2015. Our mission is to end homelessness. We believe housing is a basic human right that affords people dignity. Everyone has a right to a home and it is our job to make this happen. With a combined history of over 75 years serving Melbourne's community, we provide high quality housing, support, education and employment services to over 18,000 people across 14 sites in metropolitan Melbourne. We also drive social policy change, advocacy, research and innovation.

Launch Housing provides affordable housing and homelessness support services. The housing component includes crisis accommodation, medium-term and long-term housing options, as well as access to private rental through brokerage. The support component varies from generalist to specialist, such as crisis intervention, medium-term/long-term case management, family violence assistance, access to education and employment, access to health services, and living skills support (budgeting, cooking, personal hygiene, cleaning etc.).

> We recommend watching the "We are Launch Housing" video for a summary of our organisation and services.

- *To be advised:* this video discusses attempted suicide and may be triggering to some viewers. If you are affected by this video, please call Lifeline at 13 11 14 or message the team at Beyond Blue.

For more information, visit www.launchhousing.org.au

HomeGround Real Estate

HomeGround Real Estate, a non-profit real estate agency, was founded in 2014 and now manages hundreds of properties, with revenues going back into the Launch Housing mission. HomeGround Real Estate, a social enterprise of Launch Housing, is an innovative option to help end homelessness. There is also a HomeGround Real Estate in Sydney and Canberra.

For lower income earners the lack of affordable housing can lead to stress, with the pressure of unsustainable rental payments and the uncertainty of temporary living arrangements. There are a few ways landlords work with us to increase the availability of affordable housing in Melbourne. Landlords can list their properties at full market rent, and the property management fees go back into the Launch Housing mission. HomeGround Real Estate also gives socially conscious landlords the opportunity to offer a discount on the market rent to low income households while receiving professional property management services. People interested in learning more can contact HomeGround Real Estate at 9288 9600, realestate@homeground.org.au or see www.homegroundrealestate.com.au.

Our Annual Reports and Newsletters provide updated information on Launch Housing's initiatives, achievements and the latest research in the homelessness sector. It has a wealth of information and is a great starting point to learning about homelessness in Australia.

Contents

Student Resource

The Launch Housing Student Information Resource was created in response to requests for information we receive from student journalists or tertiary students working on school projects. We have tailored this resource to provide a range of information from lived experience stories to research finding.

Some of the prevalent themes are sensitive, including family violence, mental health challenges and substance misuse.

This resource is intended to provide university students with the facts and figures about homelessness, but also to empower young people to take action towards preventing and ending homelessness.

Need Help?

Free call. 24 hour. Opening Doors on 1800 825 955

If you're experiencing homelessness, at risk of losing your home, or you need to escape family violence, call Opening Doors on 1800 825 955 (free call, open 24/7).

Launch Housing takes referrals from Opening Doors, a state wide program which coordinates support to people experiencing homelessness.

Domestic Violence Call 1800 015 188

If you are experiencing domestic violence call the Women's Domestic Violence Crisis Service 24/7 on (03) 9373 0123 or toll-free 1800 015 188.

Launch Housing Entry Points

Launch Housing has three homelessness entry points providing support services in the Melbourne Metropolitan area. You can drop into any of these 3 sites in person Monday to Friday 9am – 5pm.

Entry points are located at:

- 68 Oxford St, Collingwood
- 11 Chesterville Rd, Cheltenham; and
- 122 Chapel St, St Kilda.

When accessing our entry points an individual, couple or family will start an Initial Assessment and Planning (IAP) process to help us find the right support program or services.

The Australian Homelessness Monitor found in the 'Publications on Homelessness' of this resource provides a holistic picture of the changes in scale and nature of homelessness in Australia and is a great resource for information and statistics.

What is Homelessness?

Homelessness affects more than 116,000 Australians every day of the year. In Victoria, more than 24,800 Victorians were found as homeless in the 2016 Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) Census. We have seen an increase in demand on our services as rising rents and shrinking affordable and social housing stock force people into homelessness.

Only 1 in 14 people experiencing homelessness sleep rough. While rough sleepers are the most visible in our community, the vast majority of people experiencing homelessness live in rooming houses, crisis accommodation, or couch-surf with friends and family.

The ABS definition of homelessness has six operational groups:

1. Persons living in improvised dwellings, tents, or sleeping out (rough sleeping)
2. Persons in supported accommodation for the homeless
3. Persons staying temporarily with other households
4. Persons living in boarding houses
5. Persons in other temporary lodgings, and
6. Persons living in severely crowded dwellings.

Facts and Figures

- Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW):
  - 288,800 Australians sought assistance from Specialist Homelessness Services in 2017-2018. This is an increase of 34,800 people from the 2013-14 data.
  - The main causes of homelessness are domestic and family violence, unaffordable housing, and financial difficulties.

- ABS 2016 Census:
  - On any given night in Australia, 1 in 200 people are homeless.
  - 60% of people experiencing homelessness are under 35 years old.
  - The number of older people experiencing homelessness has increased 28% in four years, making it the fastest growing demographic.

- Australian Homelessness Monitor:
  - Australia has skyrocketing housing costs and a lack of social and affordable housing. Over 200,000 Australians are on housing waiting lists; 24% experiencing homelessness are affected by this housing crisis.
  - 613,000 people have fallen below the poverty line due to high housing costs, 229,000 of whom are children.
  - Policy inaction on housing affordability is responsible for increasing homelessness. There has been a 29% increase in spending on homelessness services but a 7% drop in investment in affordable and social housing from 2011-2016.

- To end homelessness, we need more affordable housing. Full stop.

Talking About Homelessness

Do:

- ✓ Refer to 'people experiencing homelessness' not 'homeless people'

- ✓ Take into account the broader social and economic causes of homelessness

- ✓ Give a balanced view of the range of homelessness experiences, not just rough sleeping

Don't:

- ✗ Blame the individual for systematic failures

- ✗ Use imagery that reinforces stereotypes or inaccurate opinions of homelessness

- ✗ Perpetuate fear of people who are experiencing homelessness; they are 11 times more likely to be the victim of violence than the perpetrator

Source: Council to Homeless Persons

Housing is a human right

Housing is a human right, recognised under the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenant of Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR). Every person has 'the right to live somewhere in security, peace and dignity', which takes into account indictors such as tenure and affordability. The ICESCR also states that forced evictions are a violation of their covenant and should not leave a person homeless.

Public housing is not free. The Victorian Department of Health and Human Services states that "rent is…25% of your total household income, for household member 18 years of age of over". Public housing is a safety net for people on low incomes who cannot afford to pay full, market-priced rent and are most in need of secure, affordable housing. In Victoria there is a chronic shortage of public housing and wait lists are long.

The importance of support in resolving homelessness

Support needs to be tailored as experiences of homelessness are diverse, but housing, safety, health and income are paramount. Once we engage with a person for a while, we may work with them more on long-term goals like engagement with education or employment, community participation, and relationships.

We recommend taking a look at some of the blog posts from our website. The stories are shared by people who have accessed our services. They can be quite revealing and offer a unique perspective on what it's like to be at risk of or experience homelessness:

https://www.launchhousing.org.au/blog/

Length of time experiencing homelessness

It really depends on the person and the challenges they are facing. Some people experience chronic homelessness, and may cycle in and out of the homelessness service sector for some years due to complex histories of trauma, family violence, challenging behaviours, social isolation and/or poverty. In other cases, a person or household may need a short period of support and/or funding (such as first month's rent) to transition into private rental, where they can live independently.

Homelessness throughout Australia

As we are still expanding our national reach, most of our research is founded in metropolitan Melbourne, Victoria. Our Australian Homelessness Monitor provides an in-depth analysis of homelessness on a national scale with state and territory breakdown of statistics.

We do know that across Australia, homelessness in increasingly concentrated in our capital cities, where nearly two in every three people experiencing homelessness are now found. You can read more about how this is driven by rising inequality since 2001 in an article authored by our own Deb Batterham.

The University of New South Wales, in association with the Homelessness Monitor, has also created a map visualisation that allows users to zoom into specific areas of Australia to view local statistics:

https://cityfutures.be.unsw.edu.au/cityviz/australian-homelessness-monitor/

The changing geography of homelessness: a spatial analysis from 2001 to 2016 found in the 'Publications on Homelessness' of this resource outlines the extent to which homelessness has become more spatially concentrated over time; where it has risen and fallen; and the importance that housing affordability, poverty and labour market opportunities play in reshaping its distribution.

Homelessness can happen to anyone

No-one chooses homelessness but it can happen to anyone. As demonstrated in the Australian Homelessness Monitor, those in low income, vulnerable households are the most at risk of experiencing homelessness. Launch Housing supports thousands of people of all genders, all ages, individuals and families every year, from diverse cultural and socio-economic backgrounds, age groups and living situations.

Many people who experience homelessness have had serious disadvantages throughout their lives, including long-term unemployment, poor education, violence, mental health problems, disability and substance use problems. Homelessness can also occur due to a specific event, such as losing a job, domestic violence, being evicted from stable accommodation, suffering a major health condition or experiencing a high level of financial stress. Perhaps most important to note, is homelessness is not an individual failing. Government policies, housing affordability and other systemic factors all influence the dire state of homelessness in Australia.

Homelessness and Children

Across Australia 65,236 children accessed Specialist Homelessness Services in 2016-17, according to the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW). Of those accessing support 47,325 children were under 9 years old.

Studies into families and homelessness have revealed a variety of detrimental effects on a child's health, education, and future socioeconomic status, which can perpetuate the cycle of homelessness in adulthood.

Launch Housing has been actively involved in studying children and homelessness for 25 years. We commissioned the first Australian research into family homelessness in 1992, undertaken by Jean McCaughey (from the Australian Institute of Family Studies).

This study found that preventing homelessness is better than trying to find a cure, and a lack of affordable housing is the main cause of homelessness.

Nearly three decades later, these facts about children and homelessness unfortunately remain clear, consistent and unequivocally alarming.

Why do children experience homelessness?

There are a range of reasons children experience homelessness and the latest statistics reveal a continuing rise. In the past five years, the AIHW revealed a startling 67.8% increase in children experiencing homelessness in Victoria. The AIHW recorded 19,847 children under 14 years old accessed Specialist Homelessness Services in 2016-17.

The reasons why children experience homelessness are varied and can include domestic and family violence, a housing crisis, financial crisis, poverty, and mental health challenges. However, the primary reason women and children experience a housing crisis is due to domestic and family violence. Childhood homelessness can adversely affect health, education, family relationships and community connectedness.

The first 1,000 days

Research by The Royal Children's Hospital Melbourne revealed that
what happens during the first 1,000 days of a child's life, when the majority of critical
development occurs, affects the whole body with profound lifelong implications.

Children need green space, opportunities to learn and play, nutritious food, and safe and
supportive families and communities to thrive. Compared to those in stable housing situations,
children experiencing homelessness are at greater risk of experiencing disadvantage over their
lifetime.

Health and wellbeing

It's challenging to find housing, maintain health, a routine, education and manage medical
needs when families experience homelessness. An experience of homelessness is highly
destabilising and traumatising and the impact can continue even after moving into stable
housing. It can make children feel unsafe, sad and angry. Family routines provide children with
stability, control and a sense of security.

Studies show that the impact of childhood homelessness means children are more likely to require
clinical care for health issues such as:

- Ear infections

- Gastrointestinal problems

- Asthma

- Dental problems

- Nutritional deficits

- Emergency room use and hospitalisation

- Developmental delays

- Mental health diagnoses

(Image by Unsplash)

However, they are less likely to have access to health services to address these issues—usually as
a result of increased mobility, lack of transport, and financial difficulties.

Prevention through education

A child's learning and development is integral to their overall health and wellbeing, as well as
ensures stable, happy, and productive lives. There is a strong connection between
intergenerational poverty, and educational attainment. It's also widely recognised that low
levels of academic achievement is common in Australia's most disadvantaged communities.

**'What works for children experiencing homelessness and/or family/domestic
violence?'** found in the 'Publications on Homelessness' of this resource examines the
range of interventions designed to support and improve outcomes for children affected
by homelessness and/ or family/domestic violence.

Childhood homelessness makes it difficult to maintain attendance and academic levels in school, and transiency has lasting implications. The consequence of each school change can result in a dramatic six-month learning gap, which can contribute to fewer employment opportunities in future.

This can perpetuate the cycle of intergenerational poverty, leading to an experience of homelessness later in life. Youth can also face a range of other difficulties including:

- Instability and emotional isolation

- Difficulty establishing and maintaining friendships

- Discrimination and stigma in the schoolyard or playground

- Stress and reduced concentration skills

- Learning delays

- Increased likelihood to leave school early

A child cannot be expected to thrive if they are transient, which is why early intervention is imperative.

What can we do to help?

The service system has not been adequately designed to respond to families experiencing homelessness. Families with children have extreme difficulties accessing Specialist Homelessness Services. Studies have shown that children need coordinated prevention, early intervention, and better crisis support.

Launch Housing offers a range of programs and supports to prevent homelessness for families. We intervene early to stabilise housing and offer crisis support

The Children's Specialist Support Service (CSSS) at Launch Housing's South Melbourne office supports children (up to 18 years old) and their families who are experiencing homelessness and/or dealing with family violence. CSSS is a broad service which aims to help children reconnect with education, overcome trauma, build resilience and improve their long term outcomes. CSSS includes access to education pathways, educational assessments, access to psychologists, intensive case management, case planning and a group work program.

Already, CSSS's philanthropically funded Education Pathways Program has supported 260 children to re-engage with their education.

The Empty Lunchbox Report found in the 'Publications on Homelessness' of this resource provides further understanding of homelessness in schooling communities and offers advice in terms of detecting children at risk of homelessness, providing safer environments, and services/organisations schools can contact for support.

Youth Homelessness

Youth homelessness matters. According to the 2016 ABS Census figures of the 116,000, 42% of Australians experiencing homelessness are under 25 years old and 70% of young people experiencing homelessness were escaping violence, abuse or family breakdown.

Visibility and support for young people at risk of or experiencing homelessness is more important than ever. We give a special focus to youth homelessness in April during Victorian Youth Week, and Youth Homelessness Matters Day (#YHMD). The national #YHMD campaign has been held by the National Youth Coalition for Housing (NYCH) annually since 1990 and is aimed at raising awareness of youth homelessness amongst decision makers and the wider community.

To show your support in Youth Week, you can support the #YHMD campaign by liking their Facebook page, sharing stories of youth homelessness from the page or even holding an awareness event in your community. For more information on this national campaign search for their main website which is updated annually.

Launch Housing's Services for Young People

Launch Housing continuously seeks to provide innovative responses to youth homelessness by increasing the reach and quality of our services for young people, as well as making improvements based on what works.

South Yarra Young Adult Services

Launch Housing's youth-specific site in South Yarra offers support to young people aged 16-25 who are either unable to live at home or are experiencing difficulties maintaining housing.

In 2016-17, we supported 231 people, a majority of whom were aged 18-24 years.

The site provides a Life and Living Skills program facilitating activities which focus on building health, wellbeing and independent living skills. The program enables young people to learn a range of practical skills, explore new interests and engage positively with one another.

We've had incredibly positive feedback from the young people engaging with the program who talk about building their confidence, making friends and learning important skills to maintain balanced healthy lives.

Education First Youth Foyers

Launch Housing in partnership with the Brotherhood of St Laurence established two Education First Youth Foyers (EFYF) in 2014. The first of their kind in Victoria, EFYFs provide young people aged 15 to 26 with access to accommodation, education, training and employment.

The Foyers are based on an innovative model that originated in the UK, resulting in more than 75% of people who leave the program becoming engaged in employment or further education, or both.

Students from the Education First Youth Foyers

Our foyers are based at Holmesglen Institute's Glen Waverley campus and the Kangan Institute, Broadmeadows.

Since 2014 the Foyers have led to improved education, housing and employment outcomes:

- 81% of participants have completed a Certificate I course

- Year 12 completions increased from 33% at baseline to 43% at exit

- Reduction in those in crisis accommodation from 32% to 1%

- Substantial increase in those living in their own home from 5% to 41%

- Participants engaged in full-time employment increased from 1% to 11%

We're proud of the progress we have made in innovating services to support young people experiencing homelessness.

The Impact

Homelessness is a traumatic experience. It puts extra strain on people's relationships and on their mental and emotional health. Many who experience homelessness have already endured significant stress in addition to their homelessness – this may be long running financial hardship, domestic violence, the loss of a job or the breakdown of a relationship.

For many people the first point of call is family or friends. They move in with a family member who wants to help but may be struggling themselves. Overcrowding and relationship breakdowns can often result, leading to further trauma and heartache.

A Lived Experience

Humans behind Homelessness

The insights from the following stories are from our Lived Experience Advisory Group (LEAG) who have each experienced homelessness in its various forms. The members have chosen to publish this article, keeping their individual identities in relation to specific quotes anonymous.

The Lived Experience Advisory Group (LEAG) was established in June 2016 and is part of Launch Housing's broader Participation strategy, involving our clients and residents in the shaping of services delivered on their behalf.

We recognise that people are diverse and that everyone has unique life experiences and perspectives, and we value the contribution that this diversity can bring to our organisation. We will not discriminate on the basis of having a disability, mental illness, low literacy, alcohol and other drug use, or other issues.

We aim for LEAG members to be broadly representative of the clients we serve, and therefore may include young people, LGBTI and gender diverse people, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders, parents and carers, people experiencing mental ill health, alcohol and other drug issues, migrants, older people, and victim survivors of family or domestic violence. The group is a safe, inclusive and non-judgmental space, where everyone has a right to be heard, and equal access to opportunity.

The LEAG is predominantly an advocacy group. Its members also contribute to Launch Housing's practices and services, and participate in media interviews and community engagement. The voices of lived experience are central to informing Launch Housing's services and crucial to achieving our mission to end homelessness.

The following articles share insights from people who have experienced homelessness and are a reminder that no person moves through their homelessness journey in the same way as another.

'You can't plan forward when you have to watch your back': Navigating the Service System.

We forget to remember the incapacitating effects of homelessness. Those who are sleeping rough are often told to 'plan forwards', as though strategising is possible whilst your basic needs are not being met.

"Every service wants you to prioritise their service, but you can only be at one place at one time. So many people have competing, intersectional issues. How can you prioritise housing over health? All this while you are trying to find a place to sleep or even stay awake. Wilful blindness."

"How can you operate on a schedule when you don't even have a base?"

"Having to study or work to continue to even receive payments and how difficult that is — the near impossibility of keeping up with Centrelink appointments and paperwork. People ask me why I would give my money to those who are sleeping rough and it's because I know they aren't always guaranteed support or even have access to Centrelink payments. I understand the constant fear they're experiencing."

"Becoming so severely sleep deprived and also having to wait such incredible amounts of time to just be seen. I thought it was ironic that I was constantly asked what my 'recovery goals' were. The system is well intentioned but they do not understand. For example, I was often told by workers, 'make sure you keep up fluids'. They couldn't grasp that I would have to measure how much water I drank to make sure I could find and access a toilet when I needed one."

"You do not really know what it is like until you have been there yourself. It is common for the general public to place blame on those experiencing homelessness for their individual decisions without understanding the outside forces and systemic barriers that have contributed to their experience."

"Knowing the extraordinary amount of middle-class bias I had towards people, such as drug-users, until I experienced [homelessness] up-front. Now I know, 'no wonder' [they take drugs] — to escape."

"My whole life became completely measured. I was considered asset rich and cash poor and so I had to wait for over six weeks for any money – that was when I had to rely on true charity and I felt so embarrassed."

"I remember my first visit to a crisis access point. I went up to the front desk and said, "I've been a taxpayer — house me!""

Knowing where and when to access crisis and housing support services is not always obvious. It is a common experience for those at risk of and already experiencing homelessness not to know where to access support or how to navigate the complexity of services.

"I got help by chancing upon a mobile van that provided access to services. Without that, I had no idea how or where to go. There was no consideration of how far away certain services are between each other. There was no assistance to help get to all the meetings or consideration about the fact that you're human."

'A frozen trauma': The Ongoing Impact.

What is often not spoken of is the myriad and ongoing affects after experiencing homelessness.

Often, the emotional impact of a traumatic experience, such as homelessness, is unable to be dealt with until the crisis is averted — for some, it may take years to realise and unpack the impact homelessness has had.

"After being laughed at and made fun of in such a public, humiliating and destructive way, it takes a long time to rebuild trust with people. The complexity of the trauma and shame is completely misunderstood and not taken into account. The shame is debilitating."

"The capacity to catastrophize when you've dealt with crisis is so much higher than average. You know what's possible and that most people's worst fears have been your reality."

"I had to block out the emotions at the time to get through the experience. From going from living in wealth, to being sexually assaulted and having absolutely nothing with no support. Looking back to when I was sleeping in my car, I think how helpful having tinted windows would have been."

"Homelessness changes your life for the worse, forever. The ongoing fear of going to the mailbox, even after the crisis is over."

"I had to be really strategic: trying to find safety at the centre of risk. Reflecting on how to find and create situations that are somehow more 'safe' — even when finding yourself experiencing such a high-risk issue."

"I felt safer sleeping in the city — there's more people, there's movement and you don't feel so alone. I preferred this to sitting alone in a park in the suburbs somewhere, where you're completely isolated. There's also more services in the city. For example, where I was in my suburb, I didn't know of any food vans."

"When I was sleeping in my car, I had to be really strategic about where I parked. I was always having to think and worry about this stuff."

"The helpfulness of having other people around in the city who were having a similar experience. The importance of outreach teams, specifically in the CBD, for those who are sleeping rough."

"When I was really vulnerable, I would fall into housing with people who were predators and not know it until it was too late."

"It didn't make sense for me to sleep in a group when I was sleeping rough, it felt counter-intuitive."

'Packing up your life': The Invisible Forms of Homelessness

There is a consistent invisibility, even for those who experience rough sleeping — they are often hidden. Although this may be helpful for privacy, ultimately — the full extent of homelessness is unknown. The experience of homelessness exists on a continuum — it is fluid and has varying degrees of permanence and impermanence.

"You don't always physically see the people who are sleeping rough. Packing up your life belongings and constantly moving them, having to relying on services to access your basic needs."

"Having time for myself": seeking privacy in public spaces. What is often unacknowledged is the ways those experiencing crisis are forced to spend their time, with little to no access to resources or money, and a continuous search in obtaining basic needs.

When experiencing homelessness, there are a great deal of obstacles for those to get by day-to-day, including and especially trying to find public spaces where some kind of peace can be had. It is crucial, especially for those in crisis, to spend time doing activities that are somewhat enjoyable and meaningful, and being able to have down time — rather than spending every ounce of energy purely surviving.

"I could make a cup of tea in a café last for three hours."

"I would read the paper to pass time. I'd pretty much read the whole paper from front to back and put so much focus into it because it was something to do."

Marginalised Identities and Compounding Issues LGBTQ people often have complex and interacting pathways to homelessness. These are driven by unique vulnerabilities around experiences of family rejection, discrimination, and marginalisation. These issues need specific policy and service responses.

"Living in high-risk dwellings with no family support. Incredible amounts of emotional, mental and psychological distress. You learn not to trust people. I have a friend who is a Trans woman and is currently experiencing homelessness. She is really struggling."

The ongoing and everlasting effects of homelessness are devastating and something not always accurately captured by research reports and statistical analysis. We believe in the strength and ability of every person who has experienced homelessness, and also believe that as a sector we should seek not to forget the human indignity of having to experience it at all.

Ultimately, we strongly believe that we, as a community and a sector, must move away from punitive action that acts to further compound indignity, towards more compassionate approaches to those experiencing homelessness.

Providing respect and accessibility to basic needs to those who have been shown so little helps to restore dignity, and assists with having a sense of ownership and autonomy — rather than being punished for circumstance.

The Causes

According to the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW 2017),
the top three reasons for clients seeking assistance across Victoria are:

1. Domestic and family violence (44%)
2. Housing crisis (40%)
3. Financial difficulties (39%)

The causes of homelessness are complex, with no single trigger. Individual, interpersonal and structural factors all play a role – and interact with each other. The Australian Homelessness Monitor shows the overall changing level of homelessness is an outcome of socio-economic and housing market trends.

Domestic Violence

There are significant links between homelessness and domestic violence. At the same time, there has been an increase in the reported incidences of domestic violence in recent years, as evident in the graph below.

Figure 1: The changing incidence of recorded domestic/family violence in NSW and Victoria, 2012-2017
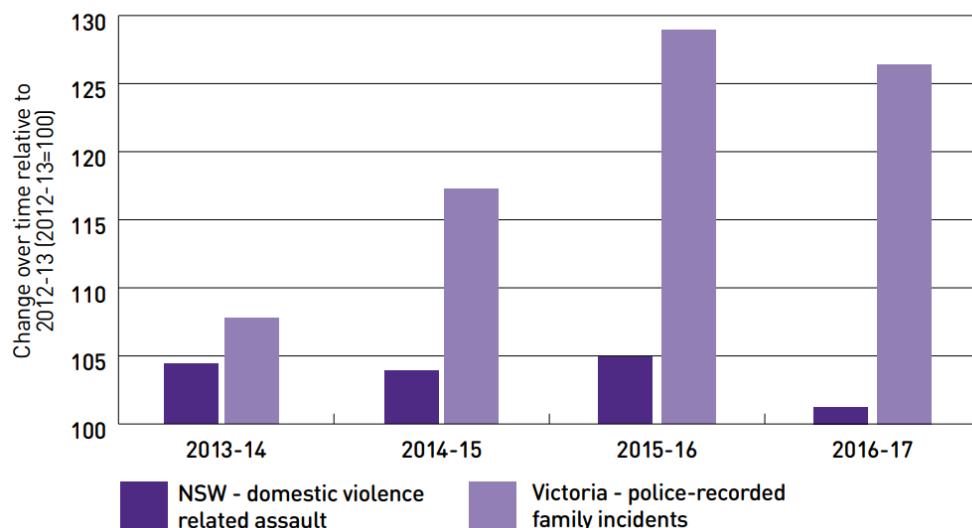
Sources: NSW Bureau of Crime Statistics Analysis and Research (2017); Victoria Crime Statistics Agency (2017)

Housing demand outstrips supply

Changes in housing market conditions are liable to have a stronger and more immediate impact on homelessness rates than other economic trends. Lower income renters have experienced increased pressure in the past decade. Housing affordability stress among lower income renters has tended to increase much more substantially in capital cities than in regional Australia – although this may be to some extent a Sydney/Melbourne effect. A particularly notable trend is the steep, continuing rise in the incidence of rental stress among lower-income renters in Western Australia.

There are ongoing changes in the structure of Australia's private rental market as lower rent housing supply continues to dwindle. There is a shrinking supply of lower price rental

properties for lower income groups, which places many at risk of homelessness and erodes the capacities of already-homeless people to recover from their situation.

*Figure 2: Lower income renters paying unaffordable rents – selected states, 2007-2016*
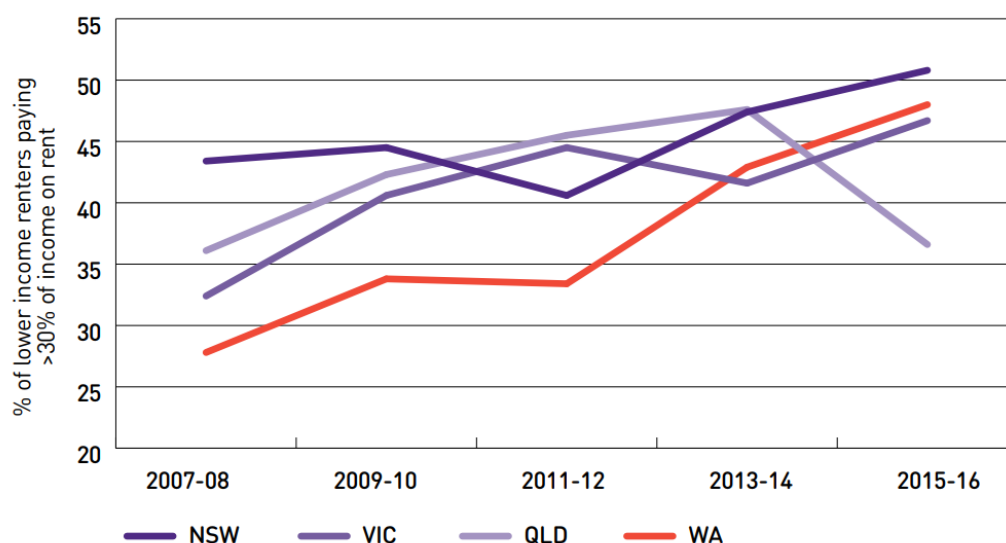
Source: ABS Survey of Housing Occupancy and Costs, Cat 4130.0

Poverty is a key contributor

Poverty underpins the risk of homelessness and can lead to an increase in factors that influence pathways into homelessness. Housing costs can impact poverty levels for low income households, and exacerbate the risk of becoming homeless. In particular, there are substantial poverty rate differences (after housing costs) between those mainly reliant on a social security payment due to the type of payment received, as shown in the following graph.

Figure 3: Incidence of income poverty (after housing costs), 2013-14 - selected groups
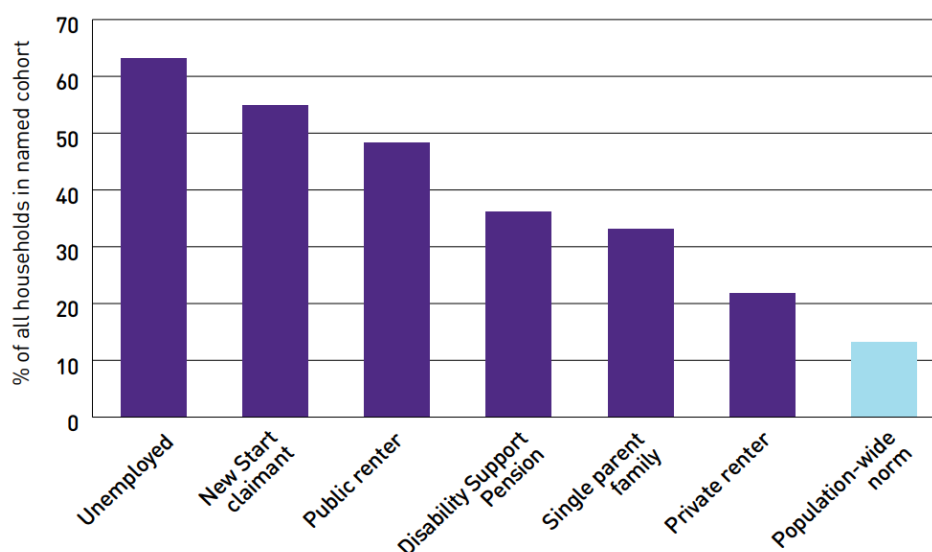
*Source Australian Council of Social Service (ACOSS) 2016 Table 4*

Notes: 1. Percentages of individuals in households below poverty lines set at 50% of median before housing costs (BHC) and after housing costs (AHC) income, 2007-8 basis. 2. Identified groups not mutually exclusive.

Changes in income support measures

There has been a sharp rise in the numbers of people receiving Newstart Allowance (NSA).

This is due, in part, to successive government policies that have tightened eligibility for Disability Support Pension (DSP) and some changes in conditions for (Single) Parenting Payments. Many recipients have been transferred to a lower payment (and more stringent participation requirements) associated with the Newstart Allowance. Newstart recipients receive $341 per fortnight less than the equivalent DSP payment, a rate inadequate when private rents are increasing.

Figure 4: Number of recipients of selected income support payments, 2005-2016
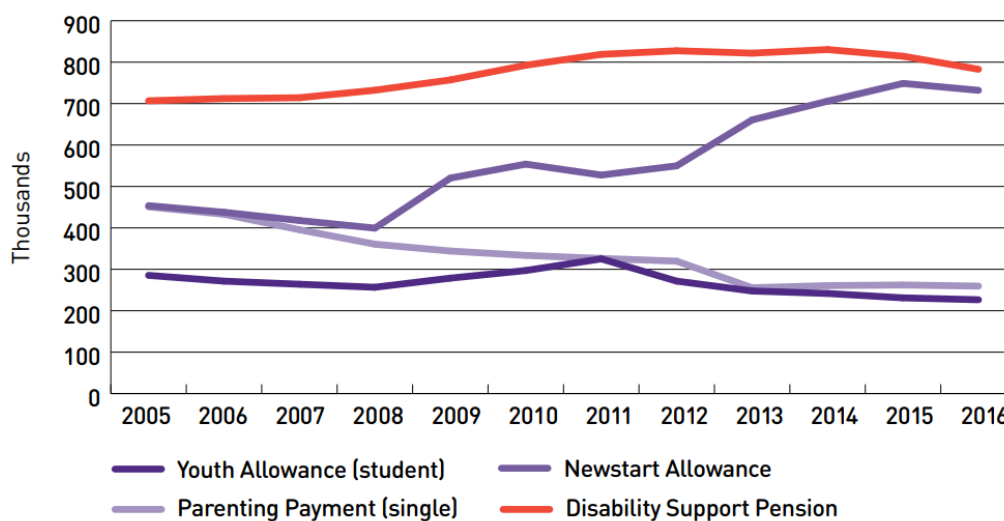

Source: 2005-2013 Department of Social Services (DSS 2013) Statistical Paper No 12 Income support customers: a statistical overview 2013. Table 1 Summary of income support recipients by payment type, 2003 to 2013. DSS Demographics June 2014, June 2015, and June 2016 from totals column in table: Payment recipients by payment type by State and territory by sex. Accessed [21/08/17]

Income payment penalties

Governments have imposed increasingly restrictive compliance conditions to those on Newstart Allowance. This means recipients are at greater risk of being penalised for things like missing appointments or activities, meaning they are more likely to have their income support cut or restricted. This puts them at risk of homelessness. There has been a fivefold increase in the number of benefit sanctions recorded between 2011 and 2016; these can involve complete cessation of payments when a claimant breaches Centrelink conditions. For people on low incomes, such penalties are likely to have a significant negative impact on their overall financial circumstances.

Figure 5: Number of quarterly payment suspensions, 2012-2017
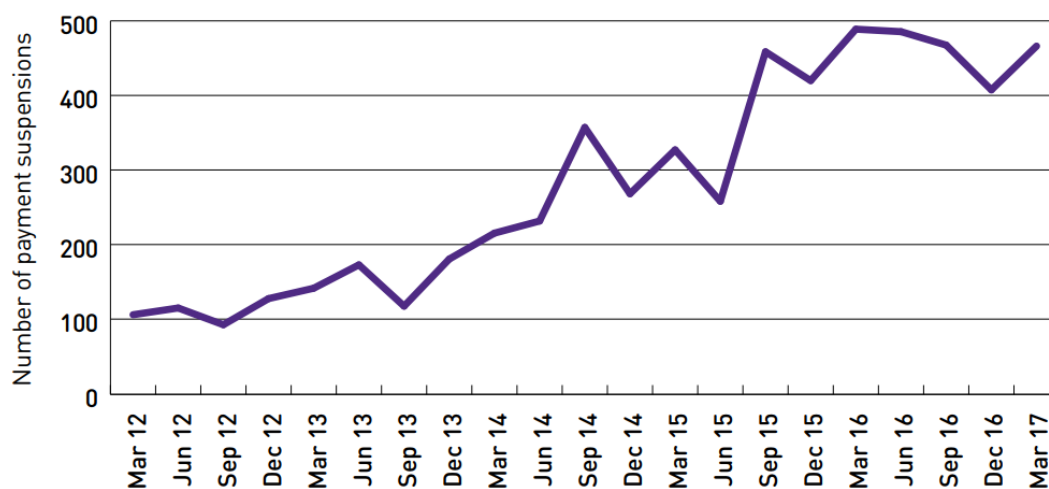
Source: Job seeker compliance data, Department of Employment, data.gov.au website. March 2012 to March 2017

The Solutions

Homelessness is not inevitable, and we believe it can be solved. The solutions are common sense, practical and cost effective. Trauma can be averted and lives can be transformed with the right combination of housing and support.

The best solution to homelessness is to address its causes and prevent people from experiencing homelessness in the first place. This involves ensuring sufficient affordable housing, providing people with access to education, training and employment opportunities, preventing ill health and ensuring everyone has someone they can turn to in times of need.

We must see a shared effort from the Australian Government, the states and territories to address housing affordability. The Australian Homelessness Monitor shows us there has been a period of inaction that has led to increasing numbers of people experiencing homelessness.

Housing, welfare and employment support policy and homelessness programs represent significant opportunities to demonstrably reduce homelessness, and improve the housing and life outcomes of people who are at risk of, or experiencing, homelessness.

The Benefits of Permanent Supportive Housing

A 2016 study, _Housing First: permanent supported accommodation for people with psychosis who have experienced chronic homelessness_, evaluated the model of permanent supportive housing (PSH) and its effectiveness in improving housing stability, continuity of care and reducing mental health admissions for persons experiencing chronic homelessness with psychosis.

The findings are from one of the first studies to test this innovative approach to housing in Australia. The study focused on a group of people who have experienced long-term (or chronic) homelessness with co-occurring mental ill-health.

The study looked at people who were living in or had recently moved out of Elizabeth Street Common Ground (ESCG), a unique purpose-built building providing PSH.
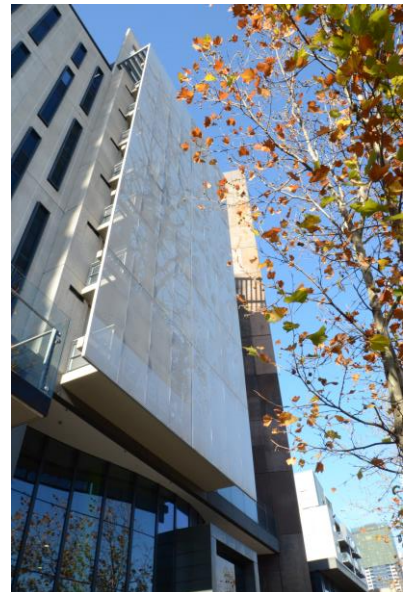
What is housing first?

Housing first is the rapid and direct placement of people experiencing homelessness into PSH. It typically has supportive services available, but no requirement to use those services as a condition of living there.

This approach rejects the idea that people with a long-term experience of homelessness, even when experiencing complex mental health issues, need to be 'housing ready', an approach that requires other issues to be addressed or resolved prior to being considered suitable for housing.

Through ESCG, Launch Housing offers a 'housing first' model to people who have experienced chronic homelessness.

What is permanent supportive housing (PSH)?

PSH supportive housing either co-locates support services on-site or ensures that support is available as and when required, but is usually delivered by outreach workers based at other locations. It can take the form of multiple 'cluster' housing sites, with small groups of people living together, in typical suburban houses. Or it can be provided in group settings, where many tens of people share one, usually purpose-built, building.

ESCG is such a building. It has 60 single self-contained units over multiple floors with 24-hour on-site support and built in security features to ensure only approved people enter the building.

What were the findings of the research?

The research found residents were far less likely to use mental health inpatient units than they had prior to being housed. Mental health inpatient units provide 24-hour patient assessment and treatment services for those experiencing severe mental health challenges, and who cannot be adequately supported in the regular community environment.

The study also found that people who were housed were admitted to mental health inpatient units at half the rate of those who had left. Those who left within two years of residency were more likely to have additional complexities, including diagnoses of personality disorder, substance use disorder or significant links to the criminal justice system.

In addition to a decrease in the use of inpatient units, the study found that being housed did not lead to increased use of mental health services over what had previously occurred.

Why does it work?

The reduction in mental health admissions is likely to be a result of housing stability which supports the development of long-term, trusted relationships between clients and clinicians. This means that residents of supportive housing are more likely to stick with their treatment plans. Most people in this study were very happy with the quality of their housing, indicated by their high wellbeing scores shortly after moving in to ESCG. The findings suggest that maintaining treatment in a setting that the person enjoys living in improves their mental health. This was further enhanced by the support provided by a team of workers based on-site who were able to develop long-lasting relationships with individuals.

Difficulties can and do arise in settings where many people with complex experiences of life are housed together. However the provision of PSH provides a secure foundation for the development of relationships with support staff who have an understanding of the person and their strengths and difficulties. In particular, when difficulties arose, admission to hospital or eviction was not the default option, as might have occurred under other housing models.

Learnings from the model

Group living does not work for everyone. A number of people were unable to stay despite the best efforts of their care teams. The absence of other PSH models meant that many of these people re-experienced homelessness. This led to a worsening in their mental health and an increase in their hospital admissions.

PSH developments, from group to much smaller 'cluster' models, provides sustainable housing and we need more of it to ensure that this highly vulnerable group of individuals is provided with the housing and care they need to successfully put an end to their homelessness.

Extra Resources

Act like an Activist!

Below is a list of examples in which staff, students and entire schools can get involved in raising awareness and encouraging action towards ending homelessness in Australia.

Launch Housing Donation Drives

Launch Housing hold three donation drives a year; one for Easter, winter and the festive season in December. Our Easter drive collects chocolate donations to give to families and children experiencing homelessness who would otherwise miss out. Our winter drive is focused on delivering blankets and other warm provisions to those experiencing homelessness on the cold winter nights in Melbourne. Our festive drive aims to deliver toys to the children who are experiencing homelessness and whose parents are unable to provide gifts from 'Santa'.

If your school is interested in getting involved in one or all of these drives, contact us for more information. You can call the Fundraising and Business Development team on 1800 720 660 or email supporters@launchhousing.org.au.

Write to your local Member of Parliament

Encourage your school and/or class to write a letter to a local MP. Activism is the best way to create change and by having mass groups of people highlighting homelessness as a concern, politicians will need to respond. The Council to Homeless Persons (CHP) provides resources for contacting your state MP and an example letter at http://chp.org.au/take-action/resources-for-visiting-your-state-mp/

Create a Petition

Similar to writing to a local MP, a petition is a simple way that a community can come together to raise their concern towards homelessness and demand the government help those experiencing homelessness. If you would instead prefer to sign one already created, the 'Everybody's Home' petition can be found at https://everybodyshome.com.au/petition/

National Days of Awareness

Get involved in national awareness events such as Youth Homelessness Matters Day (April) and Homelessness Week (August). As homelessness is particularly topical during these times, it may be the best time for your school to raise awareness and become an activist in ending homelessness.

A Day in Their Shoes

Organise a day at school you, peers and friends give up something in solidarity with those experiencing homelessness. This allows students to empathise and understand the meaning of losing something dear to them. An example of what they could give up include:

- Furniture and technology such as desks, chairs and computers

- Food (with exceptions),

- Indoor activities (i.e. the school day spent outside the classroom)

Publications on Homelessness

Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW)

The AIHW has provided several reports and publications on the situation of homelessness in Australia and the services which support these communities. They can be found here:

https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports-data/health-welfare-services/homelessness-services/overview

Australian Homelessness Monitor

Launch Housing has commissioned the Australian Homelessness Monitor 2018, for this first-of-its-kind authoritative insight into the current state of homelessness in Australia. The monitor is an in-depth, independent longitudinal analysis examining the changes in the scale and nature of homelessness in Australia, as well as how social, economic and policy drivers influence these changes

https://www.launchhousing.org.au/australianhomelessnessmonitor/

Empty Lunchbox Report

This exploratory study is the first time that the point of view of primary schools and their day-to-day experiences of dealing with student homelessness have been investigated. The findings make an important contribution to the broader evidence base on the detrimental impact of homelessness on children's education. Engagement and wellbeing are fundamental to learning. Given that homelessness can interfere with school engagement and wellbeing, it poses a major obstacle to learning.

https://www.launchhousing.org.au/site/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/Research_The-Empty-Lunchbox-report_Final.pdf

Housing First: Permanent Supportive Housing

An introduction and analysis to permanent supportive housing provided by the Council to Homeless Persons

http://chp.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/FINAL-180606-Housing-First-2018-6-June.pdf

The changing geography of homelessness: a spatial analysis from 2001 to 2016

This study examined the changing geography of homelessness. It outlines the extent to which homelessness has become more spatially concentrated over time; where it has risen and fallen; and the importance that housing affordability, poverty and labour market opportunities play in reshaping its distribution.

https://www.ahuri.edu.au/research/final-reports/313

What works for children experiencing homelessness and/or family/domestic violence?

This report examines the range of interventions designed to support and improve outcomes for children affected by homelessness and/or family/domestic violence.

https://www.acu.edu.au/-/media/feature/pagecontent/richtext/about-acu/institutes-academies-and-centres/icps/_docs/part1_literaturesynthesis_march2013.pdf?la=en&hash=BD2594BD402017EF7C5FC13C6DC4C6AA

'How to' Guides

Fundraising

Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission

https://www.acnc.gov.au/tools/topic-guides/fundraising

Petition Writing

Legislative Assembly – Parliament of Australia

https://www.parliament.vic.gov.au/assembly/petitions

Volunteering

Volunteering Australia

https://www.volunteeringaustralia.org/resources/australian-curriculum/