

A close-up photograph of a woman and a young child looking out of a window. The woman, on the left, has a worried expression on her face. The child, on the right, is leaning their head against the woman's face. The background shows a blurred view of a city street with buildings.

**MISSION  
AUSTRALIA**

# **A safe place to call home**

Mission Australia's Homelessness and  
Stable Housing Impact Report 2023



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# Acknowledgments

We acknowledge the traditional custodians of the land throughout Australia and we pay our respects to the Elders past, present and future for they hold memories, culture and dreams of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. We recognise and respect their cultural heritage, beliefs and continual relationship with the land and we recognise the importance of the young people who are our future leaders.

Our thanks to the Mission Australia staff who provide support every day to Australians in need and who are

committed to using evidence and insights to ensure they are delivering the best possible services. Our thanks also extend to our funders and supporters who enable us to deliver services across the country.

Finally, a special thank you to the people who shared with us their experiences of homelessness and housing instability via surveys, consultation<sup>1</sup> and information collected through our services. Your insights are invaluable to understand the human experience and devastating impacts of the national housing and homelessness emergency.

## About Mission Australia

Mission Australia is a national Christian charity that has been standing alongside Australians in need since 1859. Our vision is for an Australia where all of us have a safe home and can thrive. Backed by our supporters, funders and community and faith-based partners, we combat homelessness, provide housing, assist struggling families and children, address mental health issues, fight substance dependencies, support people with disability and much more.

**Given the right support, we believe everyone can reach their full potential. That's why we stand together with Australians in need, until they can stand for themselves.**

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<sup>1</sup> Names and images used in case studies have been changed to protect the identity of people we help.



# Executive summary

**This Homelessness Impact report presents a summary of the evidence that Mission Australia has been gathering over the last three years, including rich data from our services, experiences of our practitioners and the voices of people with a lived experience of homelessness.**

**We hope that by sharing our evidence we can shine a light on the experiences of individuals and families across the country who are facing the prospect of not having a safe or affordable home, reinforce what is working well in practice and illustrate where urgent action is needed to end the national housing and homelessness emergency.**





## Homelessness and stable housing support services

Mission Australia provides a range of services to support people experiencing or at risk of homelessness. This includes homelessness and stable housing support services, social and affordable housing, specialist residential aged care homes, and assertive outreach services, which are often complemented by other specialist support such

as mental health counselling, alcohol and drug rehabilitation, Domestic Family Violence (DFV) support or children and family services.

This report focuses on 63 of Mission Australia's homelessness and stable housing support services, which were delivered nationally from 2020 to 2022. These services include:



**Early intervention** services work with people to prevent them becoming homeless when staying at home is a risk



**Crisis** services support people who are currently homeless or would be homeless without immediate accommodation



**Recovery** services support people who have moved into stable accommodation but continue to require support to avoid re-occurrence

## Demand for our services

**Over the last three years there has been a critical need and growing demand for Mission Australia's homelessness and housing support services.**

Demand for Mission Australia's homelessness and stable housing support services has grown year on year. Since 2020, our services have supported 21,871 people, including 9,468 people who were

experiencing homelessness and 8,194 people who were risk of homelessness. Of most concern is the increase in the number of people experiencing homelessness who were either living in improvised homes, streets, parks, cars and tents, or experiencing hidden homelessness living in short-term temporary accommodation. For many people (22%) it had been more than a year since they had a permanent home when they requested a Mission Australia service for help with homelessness.

## Housing on entry: 2020 compared to 2022

**50%** **INCREASE** in people experiencing homelessness

**103%** **INCREASE** in people in improvised homes, tents and rough sleeping

**40%** **INCREASE** in people living in short-term temporary accommodation



# People accessing homelessness and housing support services

**Most people experiencing or at risk of homelessness had low incomes or were living in poverty.**

Low income support payments or low wages, combined with the stark shortage of social and affordable housing, skyrocketing rental stress and the rising cost of living, have escalated Australia's housing and homelessness situation into a national

emergency. Most of the people who sought help from Mission Australia's homelessness services relied on income support payments, which are often insufficient to meet the costs of living and are a risk factor for poverty.<sup>2</sup> Increasingly, we are also seeing a different group of people seek our help in homelessness services: people who are employed, but just cannot meet skyrocketing rents.

## Demographics

**57%** female

**43%** male

**0.4%** gender diverse

**0.1%** unknown







**27%**

Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander



**20%**

Culturally or linguistically diverse

	< 18 years	13.3%
	18-24 years	17.6%
	25-55 years	58.6%
	55+ years	10.5%



<sup>2</sup> Nationally, high proportions of people relying on income support payments live below the poverty line, including 60% of people receiving JobSeeker Payment, 72% of people receiving Parenting Payment and 43% of people receiving the Disability Support Pension (ACOSS & UNSW, 2023, *Poverty in Australia 2023: Who is affected?*).

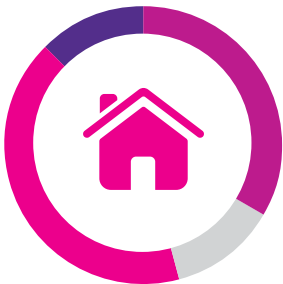
# People accessing homelessness and housing support services

Trying to cope with these compounding factors, people were experiencing a range of life challenges and/or vulnerabilities when presenting to a homelessness service.

People told us that they needed help to maintain their housing, improve their physical and mental health, navigate the service system, form connections with the wider community and to set and achieve their personal goals.

## Housing when presenting

Short-term or emergency accommodation	33.6%
Rough sleeping	12.3%
At risk of homelessness	41.6%
Unknown	12.5%



## Vulnerabilities



## Education and employment





## Our impact

**Mission Australia's homelessness and stable housing support services play a critical and effective role in ending homelessness. Over the last past three years, we found the following differences between when people first sought help from one of the services, and when they exited the service:**



### ACCESS TO SAFE HOUSING

- 94% of people at risk of homelessness remained living in their home and avoided homelessness. This highlights the importance of investment in early intervention and prevention to sustain tenancies.
- Only a third of people who were experiencing homelessness exited into a secure long-term home. And half could only be supported into short-term or emergency accommodation due to the severe lack of long-term housing.
- 66% of people experiencing and at risk of homelessness had improved satisfaction with their standard of living. At exit, almost half of people were within the Australian average, an increase of 127% compared to entry.

**Person-centred goal-based support, delivered by highly skilled staff and multi-disciplinary teams, is highly effective in improving wellbeing and supporting people to achieve their goals.**



### IMPROVED HEALTH AND WELLBEING

- 81% of people experienced improvements in their personal wellbeing. The average wellbeing score increased from 60.0 at entry to 73.1 at exit, a 144% increase in the number of people within the Australian average for overall wellbeing.
- More than half of people reported improvements in their health (60%), safety (58%) and personal relationships (56%).



### BETTER SUPPORT AND CONNECTIONS

- 79% of people who received goal-based support were connected to their community or with other services.
- 69% of people felt more confident in their ability to find services to meet their needs.
- 59% of people felt more satisfied with their community connectedness.



### INCREASED INDEPENDENCE

- 89% of people with a support plan made progress towards their goals at exit from a service, including those with education (80%) and employment goals (73%).
- 71% of people felt more in control of their lives, and most people felt more satisfied with their achievement in life (62%) and their future security (66%).

## What has been the most significant change for people experiencing homelessness and housing instability?

*"Getting a house, getting out of the situation I was in, as it wasn't good and wasn't safe. [This is important] because it made me happier, it made me heal more as a person. It kept me safe and gave me independence on my own."*



*"Guidance and support to make important decisions in my life. Increased awareness of services locally to support me with my tenancy...It has improved my confidence and ability to reach out for help when I need extra support."*



## What works in practice

- ✓ Genuine and effective relationships based on trust
- ✓ Person-centred and holistic support
- ✓ Assertive, proactive and responsive engagement
- ✓ Housing First approach
- ✓ Brokerage and emergency relief
- ✓ Highly skilled staff, specialist roles and multi-disciplinary teams
- ✓ Partnerships and collaboration



**Length, intensity of support and brokerage are critical service elements that contribute to positive housing outcomes for people experiencing homelessness.**

## What more needs to be done?

**Mission Australia's homelessness and stable housing support services, and others like ours, are finding it increasingly impossible to help vulnerable families and individuals to find safe long-term accommodation because the housing stock simply isn't there.**

Our finding that only a third of people who were experiencing homelessness were able to exit services into a secure long-term home is consistent with national data from other Specialist Homelessness Service providers.

This can only be remedied through increased investment in social and affordable housing, delivered alongside evidence-informed support models which address the range of complex systemic, structural and individual drivers of homelessness.

The following policy measures need to be put into place to better support people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness, so that together across all parts of Australian society we can end homelessness.



**1 Deliver a national plan to end homelessness**



**2 Increase social and affordable housing stock**



**3 Provide sufficient financial assistance to private renters**



**4 Boost income support to lift people out of poverty**



**5 Shift to a greater focus on prevention and early intervention**



**6 Support service and housing models must meet diverse needs**



**7 Adopt strategic commissioning approaches**



## Introduction

We believe that everyone needs a safe place to call home. Mission Australia, along with sector colleagues and housing experts, has long advocated for a national long-term strategy to end homelessness. Our *2020-25 Strategy* has adopted the goal of ending homelessness in Australia, which we believe to be an achievable objective if embraced across society and all levels of government, in recognition of their shared responsibility and the moral imperative to address the crisis of homelessness.

With at least 122,000 people who are homeless on any given night<sup>1</sup> and over 230,000 households on the social housing wait list Australia-wide,<sup>2</sup> now is the time for bold and urgent action. As we see all too often at Mission Australia, people living in poverty and low-income households are experiencing or are at risk of becoming homeless. The stark shortage of social and affordable housing, skyrocketing cost of renting and rental stress, rising cost of living, and inadequate levels of income support have combined to escalate Australia's housing and homelessness situation into a national emergency.

As a provider of both homelessness services and community housing, we have a strong commitment to sharing evidence to influence a national homelessness agenda. This Homelessness Impact report presents a summary of the evidence Mission Australia has been gathering over the last three years, including rich data from our services, the experiences of our practitioners and the voices of people with a lived experience of homelessness. The report reinforces the critical role that support services have in ending homelessness. Over the last three years, we have seen a substantial increase in the numbers of people seeking assistance, in particular people experiencing homelessness who are sleeping in improvised homes, tents or rough sleeping, as well as people experiencing hidden homelessness living in short-term or emergency accommodation.

Our evidence shows that our services are highly effective in supporting people to:

- sustain their tenancies, avoid homelessness, and remain living in their homes.
- have improved health and wellbeing.
- feel more connected within their community.
- feel more in control of their lives.
- to make progress towards their goals.

However, despite these positive outcomes, our services, and others like ours, are finding it increasingly impossible to help vulnerable families and individuals to find safe long-term accommodation because the housing stock simply isn't there. This can only be remedied through increased investment in social and affordable housing, delivered alongside evidence-informed support models which address the range of complex systemic, structural and individual drivers of homelessness - this is the only way that homelessness in Australia can be ended.

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<sup>1</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics (2021): Census of population and housing: Estimating homelessness, <https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/people/housing/estimating-homelessness-census/2021>.

<sup>2</sup> AIHW (2022), Housing assistance in Australia 2021, Supplementary data tables: Social housing dwellings, <https://www.aihw.gov.au/getmedia/1c4d25dd-102f-4cb8-bc3c-f20d92665d9f/AIHW-HOU-325-Datatables-Social-housing-dwellings-2.xlsx.aspx>.

## Australia's homelessness and housing emergency

The national homelessness and housing emergency is escalating. In Australia every night, more than 122,000 people experience homelessness,<sup>3</sup> which is nearly 1 in 200 people, and every hour 3,000 people seek help from homelessness services like those provided by Mission Australia. The Census data shows that, between 2016 and 2021, homelessness rates increased in Victoria, South Australia, Western Australia and Tasmania, while the Northern Territory has the highest rate of homelessness.

Homelessness is caused by a range of complex systemic, structural<sup>4</sup> and individual factors including housing affordability and availability and critical life events such as family breakdown, domestic and family violence, physical health, mental health or unemployment.<sup>5</sup> It is a problem that goes beyond 'rooflessness' and a lack of access to safe shelter.

Although the most visible experience of homelessness involves sleeping rough on the streets, this type of homelessness only represents 6% of the homeless population.<sup>6</sup> Thousands of men, women, young people and children are experiencing hidden homelessness when they are forced to 'couch surf', rely on temporary accommodation such as refuges or live in severely overcrowded, unsuitable or inadequate forms of shelter.

There simply isn't enough housing stock available at affordable rates, especially for people on very low to moderate incomes. Data from 2021 showed a 26% rise in regional house prices and 21% rise for house prices in capital cities, while rents across the nation rose about 9% on average.<sup>7</sup> These increases far outpaced growth in household incomes and are compounded by the skyrocketing cost-of-living pressures, putting renters on low to very low incomes in a precarious position without adequate financial support or heavily subsidised housing. Almost half of low-income households renting private homes are now in housing stress and at risk of being pushed into homelessness.<sup>8</sup> This environment has put further strain on the social housing system to be the safety net for many people in the community. Applications on the social housing waitlist have grown 11% to 230,000 over a three year period to July 2022, but at the same time social housing stock increased by only 1.4%.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics (2021). Census of population and housing: Estimating homelessness, <https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/people/housing/estimating-homelessness-census/2021>.

<sup>4</sup> Johnson et al. (2015). Entries and exits from homelessness: a dynamic analysis between structural conditions and individual characteristics. AHURI Final Report No.248, AHURI, Melbourne.

<sup>5</sup> Muir et al. (2020). A pathway to where? Inquiry into understanding and reimagining social housing pathways, AHURI Final Report No. 332, AHURI, Melbourne.

<sup>6</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics (2021). Census of population and housing: Estimating homelessness, <https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/people/housing/estimating-homelessness-census/2021>.

<sup>7</sup> NHFIC (2021). State of the nation's housing 2021-22, National Housing Finance and Investment Corporation, Australia.

<sup>8</sup> Productivity Commission (2023). Report on Government Service 2023: Housing and homelessness, <https://www.pc.gov.au/ongoing/report-on-government-services/2023/housing-and-homelessness>.

<sup>9</sup> Productivity Commission (2023). Report on Government Service 2023: Housing and homelessness, <https://www.pc.gov.au/ongoing/report-on-government-services/2023/housing-and-homelessness/housing>

## Homelessness and housing assistance

The need and demand for homelessness services is growing. More than 1.4 million people have been assisted by Specialist Homelessness Services in the last decade, with the number of people seeking support increasing each year since 2011-12.<sup>10</sup> Currently almost 1,700 services provide support and accommodation to people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness, including homelessness and stable housing support services provided by Mission Australia.

People seek support for a range of reasons including housing crisis, inadequate accommodation, financial difficulties, housing affordability stress, DFV and relationship breakdown. In 2021-22<sup>11</sup> across all Specialist Homelessness Services in Australia:

- young people aged 18-24 years had the highest rate of accessing service among all age groups;
- DFV was the main reason 108,000 people asked for help, with this number increasing by an annual average of 3.1% since 2011;
- older women over 55 years were the fastest growing group of people experiencing homelessness in Australia, with 13,868 older women seeking help;
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people continues to be disproportionately affected, with 28% of people accessing services; this equates to 798.7 Indigenous people per 10,000 Indigenous population compared with 79.0 for non-Indigenous clients.

Despite this increasing demand, more people needing help are being turned away from Specialist Homelessness Services, mainly because there was no accommodation available at the time. On average, 300 requests for assistance are turned away every day,<sup>12</sup> which is up from 260 unassisted requests in 2016-17.



<sup>10</sup> AIHW (2021). Specialist Homelessness Services annual report. Cat.no.HOU 327. AIHW, Canberra.

<sup>11</sup> AIHW (2022). Specialist Homelessness services annual report 2021-22. AIHW, Canberra.

<sup>12</sup> AIHW (2022). Specialist Homelessness services annual report 2021-22. AIHW, Canberra.



## This report

The evidence above shows the clear need for an increased supply of affordable housing, coupled with adequate and effective homelessness support services. This Homelessness Impact report shows the contributions being made by Mission Australia's homelessness and stable housing support services since 2020. We hope that by sharing our evidence we can shine light on the experiences of individuals and families across the country who are facing the prospect of not having a safe or affordable home, reinforce what is working well in practice and illustrate where urgent action is needed to end the housing and homelessness emergency.

The report contains the following sections:

**Section 1 Our homelessness and housing support services** – is an overview of the services Mission Australia provides to people who are at risk of homelessness or experiencing homelessness and housing instability.

**Section 2 Measuring our impact** – is an overview of our approach to Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning about our homelessness services.

**Section 3 Demand for our services** – provides insights into the needs and characteristics of people who accessed our services.

**Section 4 Our impact** – shows evidence of the impact of homelessness and stable housing support services across key outcome domains.

**Section 5 What works in practice?** - reflects on our experiences on what works well in practice, including insights from our data, external research, people with a lived experience and practitioner wisdom.

**Section 6 What more needs to be done?** – gives key recommendations for policy and practice based on the insights highlighted in this report.

**Appendix** – provides details of the sample and data analysis included in the report.

## Section 1 Our homelessness and housing support services

Mission Australia provides a range of services to support people experiencing or at risk of homelessness across the country. This includes:

- 73 homelessness and stable housing support services;
- over 3,800 social and affordable long-term homes in three jurisdictions through Mission Australia Housing;
- homes for frail or aged people who were formerly homeless or at risk, through our three specialist residential aged care homes;
- assertive outreach services such as YouthBeat and Missionbeat which operate in Tasmania, Sydney, Western Australia and the Northern Territory.

**This report focuses on 63 of Mission Australia's homelessness and stable housing support services, which were delivered nationally from 2020 to 2022.**

Mission Australia's homelessness and stable housing support services include:

- **Early intervention** services that prevent people from becoming homeless.
- **Crisis** services that support people who are currently homeless or would be homeless without the immediate provision of accommodation.
- **Recovery** services that support people who have moved from homelessness into stable accommodation but continue to require support to avoid re-occurrence.

Based on research, practitioner experience, and lived experience insights, our services are underpinned by seven key principles.

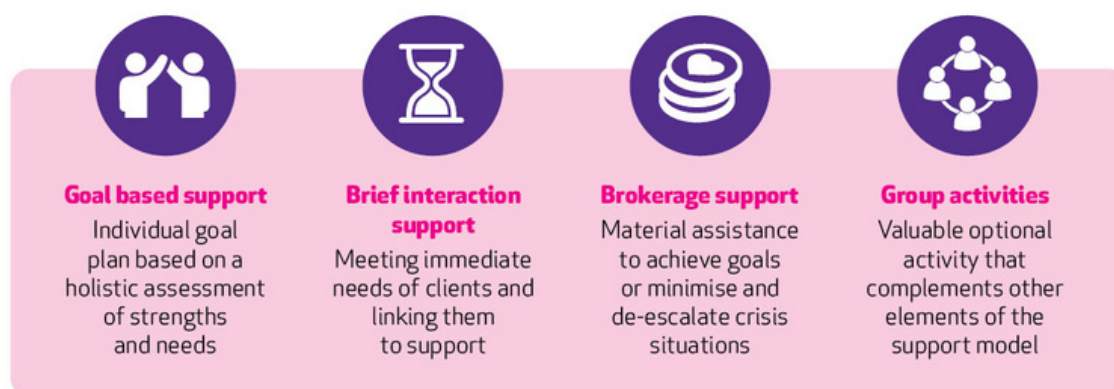


## What supports do we provide?

At the core of our homelessness services is goal-based individual support focussed on helping each person to identify their strengths and needs and set their own goals. This may take the form of case management or support coordination, depending on the needs of the individual. While support may range in intensity and duration, it aims to be holistic in nature providing assistance across a range of life domains including housing, physical and mental health and wellbeing, financial, material assistance, education, employment, family, social participation and spiritual or cultural support.

Our homelessness services work collaboratively across the service system to provide person-centred holistic support. For example, our services are often complemented by other specialist support provided by Mission Australia or other organisations, such as mental health counselling, alcohol and drug rehabilitation, DFV support or children and family services.

Similarly, our homelessness service staff work collaboratively with real estate agents, community housing providers and public housing officers to locate safe, secure, affordable and long-term housing.



## Who do we support?

Our services assist people to access or maintain housing and provide holistic goal-based support to address underlying concerns that are impacting housing stability. We support:

- **People at risk of homelessness** who are living in public, community, private or other housing. Our services support people at risk to avoid homelessness and remain living in their home or transition to more appropriate accommodation.
- **People experiencing homelessness**, who have no shelter or are sleeping in improvised and/or inadequate dwellings, short-term temporary or emergency accommodation, or are couch surfing. Our services support people to exit homelessness and transition to public or community housing, private or other housing.

Across both cohorts, people have a range of individual characteristics and needs, for example:

- People experiencing chronic or long-term homelessness
- Young people (aged <24 years)
- People living with mental health and/or substance use issues
- Older people (aged 55+)
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people
- People from Culturally and Linguistically Diverse backgrounds
- People and families who have experienced DFV
- People who identify as LGBTQIA+

## What impact do we want to have?

The objectives of our homelessness and stable housing services are to support people to:

1

### ACCESS SAFE AND STABLE HOUSING

We support people to access safe and stable housing that is sustainable and meets their needs.

This includes rapid access to ensure experiences of homelessness do not become entrenched, and access to long term housing for those exiting periods of homelessness.



2

### SUSTAIN THEIR HOUSING

We support people to address factors contributing to their risk of homelessness and build protective factors that will help them sustain their housing over the long term.

This includes supporting them to build the skills and capacity to sustain their housing and ensuring they can access any ongoing support they require.



3

### THRIVE IN THE COMMUNITY

We support people to build their capacity to thrive in the community through strengthened personal and community connections and increased capacity to self-care and self-manage their own access to any supports required.

For some this may include access to ongoing supports that are needed to enable them to live independently.





## Section 2 Measuring our impact

Mission Australia gathers and shares evidence and insights to measure our impact, find out what works to inform and continuously improve our service design and delivery, and bolster our advocacy efforts to speak up courageously for people in need.

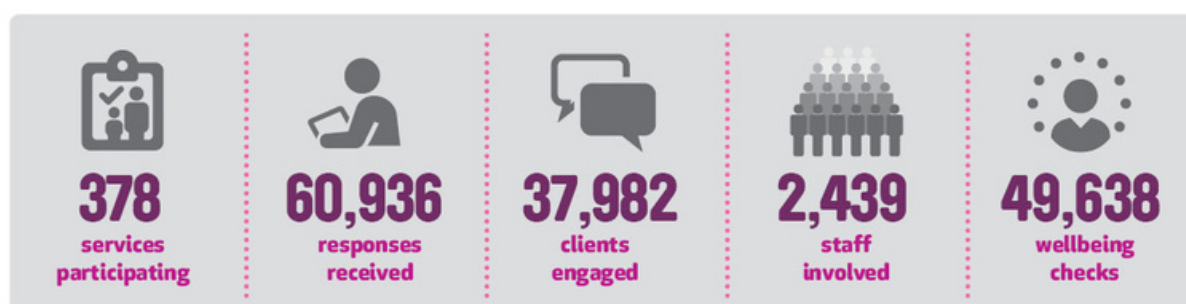
Our Centre for Evidence and Insights aims to inspire curiosity for evidence that leads to learning and action to increase the impact and effectiveness of our work. We multiply our impact by sharing with others. Through our integrated Impact Measurement and Evaluation program we:

- **Measure impact** to understand the contribution our services make towards improving outcomes for individuals, families and communities.
- **Drive excellence** by identifying critical success factors and using data to improve effectiveness and efficiency of our services.
- **Build the evidence base** through rigorous internal and independent evaluations to support decision making and investment in services that can have the greatest impact.
- **Spark action** by sharing insights to support our advocacy efforts, and feed into regular evidence-to-action learning cycles within the organisation and with the wider sector.

Our national Impact Measurement program is the organisational process we use to collect and report on outcomes. We invite people who use our services to answer questions about their wellbeing, using the Personal Wellbeing Index (PWI)<sup>13</sup> and additional outcome measures, at the beginning and end of their journey with us. The PWI is a validated multi-item scale which measures subjective wellbeing across seven quality of life domains: standard of living, health, achieving in life, relationships, safety, community-connectedness, and future security. The average score of the domains is summed to provide an overall wellbeing score out of 100, with higher scores representing higher levels of wellbeing.

Using outcomes measurement as part of the case management process provides people with an opportunity to reflect on their wellbeing and what support they request. The information is then used to develop and review individualised support plans and to document what changes occur in wellbeing over time.

### Our impact measurement journey so far



<sup>13</sup> International Wellbeing Group (2013). Personal Wellbeing Index: 5<sup>th</sup> Edition. Melbourne: Australian Centre on Quality of Life, Deakin University, <http://www.acqol.com.au/instruments#measures>.

### **Satisfaction with spirituality and cultural connections**

In late 2022, we expanded the PWI to include items to measure a person's satisfaction with their spirituality and cultural connections. The pilot conducted across 28 services sites in New South Wales, Northern Territory, Tasmania and Western Australia showed that these domains were relevant and useful for practice.

- A third of people who accessed our services reported that they had spirituality or cultural beliefs (n=534).
- Most staff felt that the questions were relevant and useful to provide holistic support to people who had spiritual or cultural beliefs.
- Cultural connections were a core aspect of social and emotional wellbeing for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and therefore important to measure.
- Understanding our organisational impact on spirituality and connection to culture will enable us to track progress towards our strategic goals and Founding Purpose.

### **What are we measuring for our homelessness services?**

Based on a Theory of Change, service-specific program logics and consultations with people with a lived experience of homelessness, we have developed a holistic Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (MEL) framework. The MEL framework is used to monitor program inputs, activities, outputs and outcomes, using data that is linked from Mission Australia's client information system and Impact Measurement surveys. This data set includes client demographics, reason for seeking assistance, service activities, reasons for exit, accommodation types and outcomes across each domain.

We use this data to monitor the effectiveness of our services at an individual service-level, as well as across different homelessness service types and models. The ability to segment data and undertake aggregate analysis provides rich insights and a holistic understanding of Mission Australia's services, and our organisational impact. This is important as, once we know the outcomes we have contributed to, what works well and where we can improve, we are one step closer to our goal of ending homelessness.





### **What data is included in this report?**

This report presents mixed methods data from January 2020 to December 2022 from 63 of Mission Australia's homelessness and stable housing support services.

- 21,871 times when an individual or family accessed a homelessness services.
  - 17,775 people who exited a service, to measure housing outcomes. This section of the report includes data from our 49 Specialist Homelessness Services which are required to collect and report ongoing data to the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare.
  - 3,252 people who completed an Impact Measurement survey, to measure wellbeing at their entry to services.
  - 771 people who completed both an entry and exit Impact Measurement survey (matched sample), to measure changes in outcomes over time.
- In-depth interviews with people with a lived experience of homelessness.

As part of the MEL cycle, Evidence-to-Action workshops were conducted with Mission Australia staff. Using service-level data, these workshops focussed on identifying practice elements that were working well and areas for improvements. These reflections are incorporated in Section 5 and 6 of this report. The Appendix provides information on data analysis, statistical and practical significance and details of the sample. Any notable difference in sample sizes are detailed in the footnotes.

**Table 1: Homelessness and Stable Housing Support outcome domains and headline indicators**

Outcome	Our impact	What we measure
<b>SAFE HOUSING</b> 	<b>People have a long-term affordable home, enough money to meet their needs and the skills and resources to keep their housing.</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Number of people experiencing homelessness who are not homeless at exit</li> <li>• Number of people who are at risk of homelessness who maintain their housing</li> <li>• Increased satisfaction with standard of living</li> <li>• Number of people whose tenancy support needs are met</li> <li>• Number of people who are living in housing that meets their needs</li> </ul>
<b>HEALTH &amp; WELLBEING</b> 	<b>People feel safe at home and in the community, have healthy relationships and good physical health and wellbeing.</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increased satisfaction with safety</li> <li>• Increased satisfaction with health</li> <li>• Increased satisfaction with overall wellbeing</li> <li>• Increased satisfaction with personal relationships</li> </ul>
<b>SUPPORT AND CONNECTIONS</b> 	<b>People have access to supports when they need it and are happy with their connections to community.</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Number of people who can find support when needed</li> <li>• Number of people who received community and/or service linkage support</li> <li>• Increased satisfaction with community connections</li> </ul>
<b>INDEPENDENCE</b> 	<b>People feel in control of their lives, set and achieve their own goals and have the opportunity to connect with education and employment.</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increased satisfaction with future security</li> <li>• Number of people who feel more in control of their life</li> <li>• Number of people who exit with goals achieved</li> <li>• Increased satisfaction with achievement in life</li> <li>• Number of people with goals who are engaged in education or employment</li> </ul>

## Section 3 Demand for our services

This section provides an overview of the demand for Mission Australia's homelessness and stable housing support services, and of the needs and characteristics of people who accessed our services.

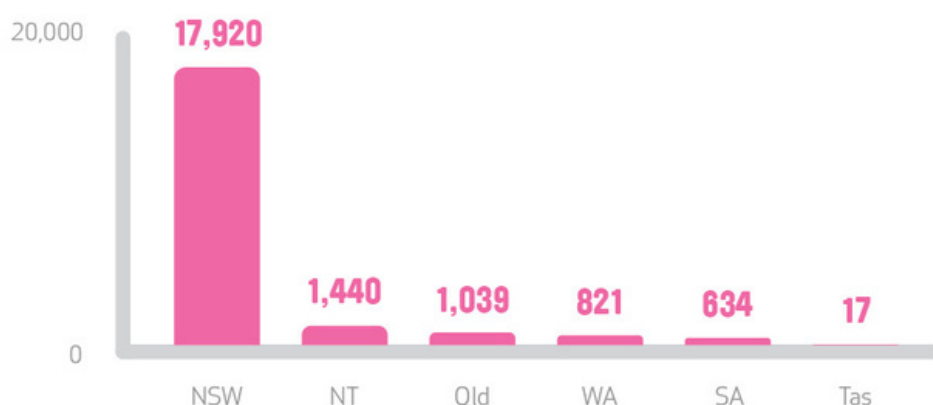
### KEY INSIGHT

**There is a critical need and growing demand for Mission Australia's homelessness and stable housing support services.**



Over the last three years, Mission Australia has provided a range of homelessness and stable housing support services across the country. While most services were in New South Wales, we also delivered services in the Northern Territory, Queensland, Western Australia, South Australia

### Number of people who accessed services by jurisdiction



### Housing on entry: 2020 compared to 2022

Demand for homelessness and stable housing support has grown year on year. The number of people who accessed the services increased by 26% from 5,874 in 2020 to 7,378 in 2022. Of those, the number of people experiencing homelessness (as opposed to people at risk of homelessness) increased by 50% from 2,447 (42%) in 2020 to 3,662 (50%) in 2022. In particular, the number of people sleeping in improvised homes, tents, cars and rough sleeping has increased by 103%; from 314 in 2020 to 640 in 2022. The number of people experiencing hidden homelessness who were living in short-term temporary accommodation also increased by 40% from 1062 (18%) in 2020 to 1456 (20%) in 2022.



## Service locations and reach

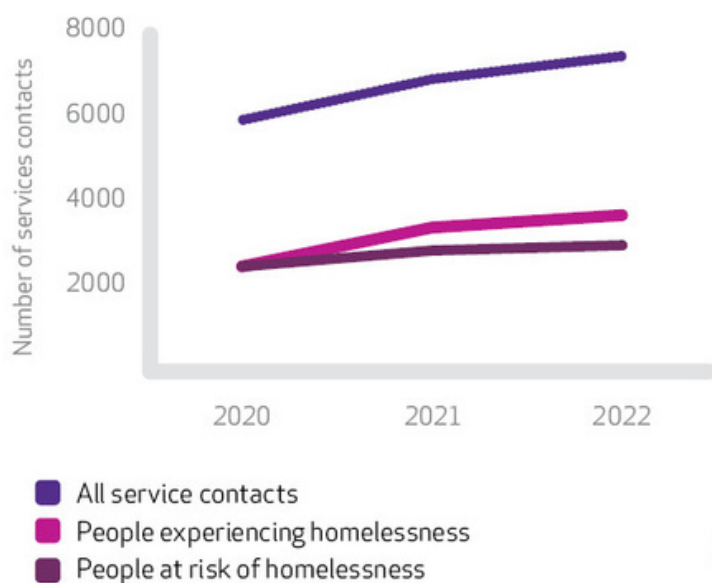


**63**  
services

**21,871**  
service contacts

**17,656**  
primary clients

## Number of people accessing services



## Housing when presenting



## Housing on entry: 2020 compared to 2022

**50% INCREASE** in people experiencing homelessness

**103% INCREASE** in people in improvised homes, tents and rough sleepers

**40% INCREASE** in people living in short-term temporary accommodation



### Fastest growing groups of people accessing services

People experiencing DFV was the fastest growing group of people who accessed the services. Since January 2020, the number of such people has increased significantly by 203%, from 717 people in 2020 to 2,175 people in 2022. Whilst some of this increase may be explained by improved recording and the greater identification of people who require DFV support, the increased numbers are an alarming concern.

More older people, especially older women, sought support from the services. In 2020, 546 older people accessed support services, including 221 older women. In 2022, the number of older people accessing services increased to 875 (60% increase), including 404 older women (83% increase).



## KEY INSIGHT

People sought help from Mission Australia's homelessness and stable housing support services for many different life challenges and vulnerabilities, reflecting the range of personal drivers that contribute to housing instability.



## Demographics

Just over half of people who sought help from the services were female (57%) and aged between 25 and 55 years (59%). Almost one third were young people (31%) and one in ten were over the age of 55 years (11%). Just over a quarter of people identified as being Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander (27%) and a further one in five were from Culturally and Linguistically Diverse backgrounds (20%). Overall, two in five people who accessed the services were experiencing mental health issues (41%) and a quarter of people had experienced DFV (24%).

### Demographics

57% female

43% male

0.4% gender diverse

0.1% unknown



27%

Aboriginal or  
Torres Strait Islander



20%

Culturally or  
linguistically diverse

< 18 years	13.3%
18-24 years	17.6%
25-55 years	58.6%
55+ years	10.5%



### Vulnerabilities



41%

experiencing  
mental health  
issues



24%

Experiencing  
Domestic or  
Family Violence



6%

disability  
that impacts  
daily tasks



4%

Alcohol  
or Other  
Drugs



## Housing on entry

The profile of the 42% of people who were at risk of homelessness was different to the 46% of people who were experiencing homelessness on entry to the services:

- **People at risk of homelessness** were more likely to be female (66%), presenting alone (40%) or with a child (31%), an older person (14%) and/or from a Culturally and Linguistically Diverse background.
- **People experiencing homelessness** were more likely to be male (51%), presenting as a individual (64%), Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander (33%) and/or experiencing mental health issues (45%) of DFV (26%). For many people (22%) it had been more than a year since they had a permanent home when they requested a Mission Australia service for help with homelessness.

### People at risk of homelessness

  
**66%**  
Female

  
**30%**  
Single parent  
with a child

 55+  
**14%**  
Older  
people

  
**27%**  
Culturally or  
Linguistically  
Diverse

  
**57%**  
Seeking help  
for housing

  
**14%**  
Seeking help  
for financial  
difficulties

### People experiencing homelessness

  
**51%**  
Male

  
**64%**  
Presenting  
alone

  
**33%**  
Aboriginal or  
Torres Strait  
Islander

  
**26%**  
Family or  
Domestic  
Violence

  
**76%**  
Sought help  
for housing

  
**22%**  
More than  
1 year without  
a home

## Education and employment

Most of the people who sought help relied on income support payments (69%), which are often insufficient to meet the costs of living and are a risk factor for poverty.<sup>14</sup> While most people were unemployed (60%) the number of people who were employed who sought support increased by 80%; from 476 in 2020 to 858 in 2022. In terms of education, 11% of people were undertaking formal studies when they presented to one of the services.

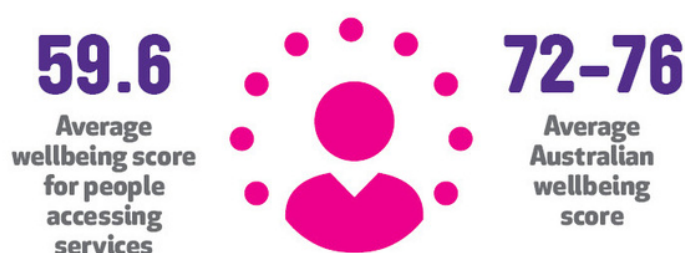
<sup>14</sup> Nationally, high proportions of people relying on income support payments live below the poverty line, including 60% of people receiving JobSeeker Payment, 72% of people receiving Parenting Payment and 43% of people receiving the Disability Support Pension (ACOSS & UNSW, 2023, Poverty in Australia 2023: Who is affected?).



## Personal wellbeing

Overall, people who were experiencing or at risk of homelessness had much lower levels of wellbeing<sup>15</sup> (59.6 out of 100) when they entered our services, in comparison to the Australian average population (72-76 normative range). The lowest rated domains were standard of living, future security and achieving in life.

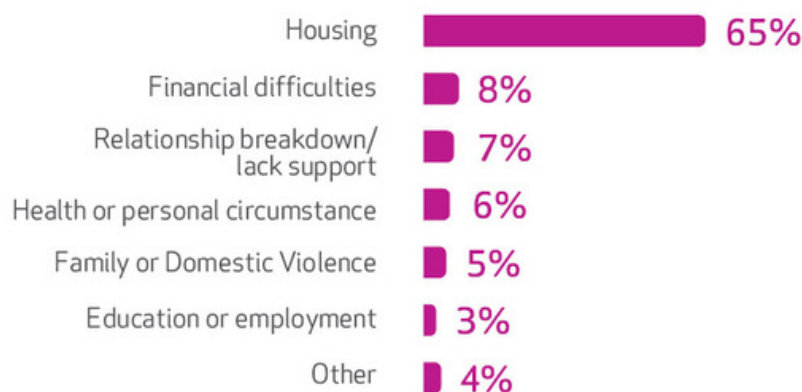
### Overall wellbeing



## Reason for seeking support

When asked why they were seeking help, almost two thirds of people reported the main reason as being a housing crisis, inadequate accommodation or housing affordability (65%).

### Reasons for seeking support



<sup>15</sup> Source: Impact Measurement Survey: Personal Wellbeing Index Entry surveys (n=3,252). Deakin University and Australian Unity Limited, Australian Unity Wellbeing Index, Survey 37: Subjective Wellbeing during COVID-19, Normative ranges (-2SD; +2SD) based on surveys 3-37.

## What people experiencing housing instability say matters to them



**A safe &  
long-term home**



**A good standard  
of living**



**Skills to  
maintain housing**



**Access to services**



**Health & wellbeing**



**Community  
connections**



**Independence  
& control**



**Personal goals**





## What people experiencing housing instability say matters to them

People with a lived experience of housing instability told us that they needed help for a range of reasons: to build skills to maintain housing; to improve their standard of living, physical and mental health; to navigate the service system; to form connections with the wider community; and to set and achieve their personal goals.

**I want to have a good future. My goal is to live in a house of my own where I can be happy with my paintings and maybe some gardening. It's important for me to get help with this.**

*Having somewhere to live and enough money is very important. Living in poverty, or not having money, creates pressures on me and my family. More pressure affects my ability to cope day to day. I feel like I never have enough money to get by, even to have food in the house is hard.*

*It's not until you are in one of the services that you realise there are other services available, because it's not made common knowledge.*

**In order to move forward, your mental health has to be the number one priority. Because if you're unbalanced in your mental health, how could you have balance with anything else in your life? You can't because the mental health is not there.**

*Connection to community is very important to me and my cultures and peoples*

*Setting and achieving your own goals also plays another big role in your life. It will, within yourself, boost your self-esteem knowing that you're doing something right and each way you're making another step.*

**To be independent and take control of my own life**

*It's important to keep people safe and having food on their plate*

**Everyone needs a house. Everyone needs a home... money is a big thing and you need skills to get work and that to keep your housing.**

*You've got to participate and use your skills at the finest. Personally, it's going to be a big step for myself getting a house on my own considering I don't know how to cook or anything. That's why I'm happy to have you guys here to help me.*

**It's important because not every knows what services are out there and where to go, but if you continue to support them in those areas it will improve their situation a lot better.**

*Achieving your goals in getting a job or whatever is also getting you out in the community, also socialising with people. In a lot of ways it will also help your mental health without you knowing. You'll see yourself shine and glow.*

**[Going back into the workforce] will allow me to save money, to have my own income.... Put food on my table...and just give me that freedom of having the simple things in life. Even just treating myself to just going to the movies and having an ice cream. Things like that.**

## Section 4 Our impact

This section describes the impact of Mission Australia's homelessness and stable housing support services across key outcome domains.

### Access to safe housing

Mission Australia supports people to access long-term affordable housing and develop the skills and resources to keep their housing. Information on housing is collected monthly from people who access our Specialist Homelessness Services<sup>16</sup>. Housing outcomes described below compare a person's housing situation at the start and end of their time with a services, in addition to the PWI and questions about housing adequacy<sup>17</sup>.

#### KEY INSIGHT

**Mission Australia services supported people to sustain their housing and either exit homelessness or access short-term emergency accommodation due to lack of other housing options.**



### People at risk of homelessness

Most people (94%) who were at risk of homelessness when they entered a Mission Australia service avoided homelessness and remained living in public, community or private housing<sup>18</sup>.



<sup>16</sup> Sample closed SHS interactions n=17,775, people at risk of homelessness at entry n=8289, homeless at entry n=8771, housing unknown n=695.

<sup>17</sup> Source: Impact Measurement matched surveys for people experiencing homelessness at entry, n=201-212.

<sup>18</sup> SHS Annual Report 2021-22. At risk of homelessness at entry n=97,218, remained living in public, community or private housing n=83104 (85%), <https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/homelessness-services/specialist-homelessness-services-annual-report/contents/clients-services-and-outcomes>



## People experiencing homelessness

A third (31%) of people who were experiencing homelessness at service entry and received goal-based support exited homelessness into a secure long-term home.<sup>19</sup> However, 54% of people could only be supported into short-term or emergency accommodation, as there was no long-term housing available.<sup>20</sup>



A higher proportion of older women (44%), people from Culturally and Linguistically Diverse backgrounds (38%), females (37%) and young people (35%) exited homelessness, in comparison to a smaller proportion of males (23%) and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people (29%).

Most people who were experiencing homelessness at entry and who completed a matched Impact Measurement survey reported that their housing at exit from the service was adequate in terms of safety and security (84%), affordability (79%) and access to services (79%). A smaller proportion felt that access to transport (71%) and distance to family and friends (56%) was adequate.

### What has been the most significant change?

*"Getting a house, getting out of the situation I was in, as it wasn't good and wasn't safe. [This is important] because it made me happier, it made me heal more as a person. It kept me safe and gain independence on my own."*

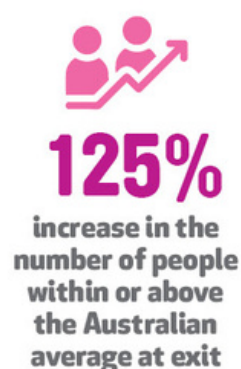


<sup>19</sup> Sample closed SHS interactions who were experiencing homelessness and received case management support n=6060.

<sup>20</sup> SHS Annual Report 2021-22. Homelessness at entry n=75,010, exited homelessness n=22,955 (31%), supported into short-term temporary accommodation n=19,779 (26%), <https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/homelessness-services/specialist-homelessness-services-annual-report/contents/clients-services-and-outcomes>

## Standard of living

Overall, at exit from the service two thirds of people experiencing and at risk of homelessness reported significant improvements in their standard of living (66%), which was the lowest rated wellbeing domain at entry. Almost half of people were within the Australian average at exit, an increase of 127% compared to entry - the largest increase across all wellbeing domains.



### KEY INSIGHT

**Length of support, frequency of support and brokerage are critical factors that contribute to positive housing outcomes for people experiencing homelessness.**



## Modifiable service elements

The effectiveness of services to support people to exit homelessness can be influenced by a wide range of factors such as geographic location, housing stock availability and the complexity of each individual's needs. Most of these are outside the control of services, however we wanted to understand if there were any critical service-level factors that contribute to positive housing outcomes for people experiencing homelessness.

Firstly, we explored if there were any significant differences in the types of support a person received and whether they exited homelessness. Our data shows that people who were able to exit homelessness received on average significantly longer periods of support, more frequent support and more hours of support than those who remained homeless after leaving a service. In addition, a significantly higher proportion of people who exited homelessness received brokerage, compared to people who remained homelessness.

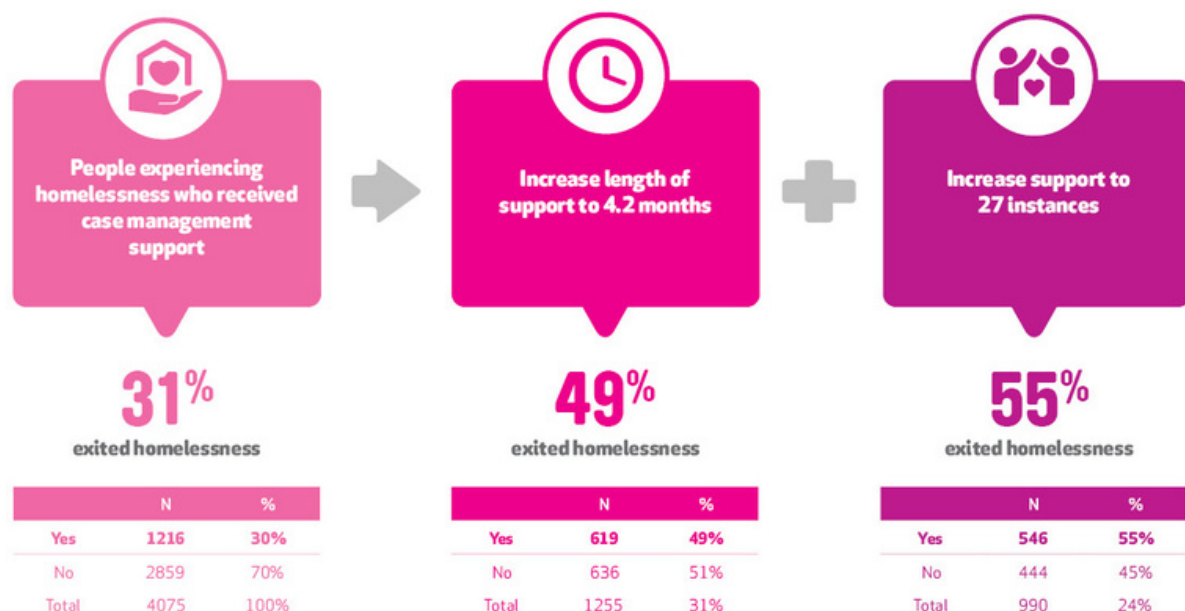
**Table 1: Modifiable service elements and housing outcomes for people experiencing homelessness and received case management support<sup>21</sup>**

Modifiable service elements	Exit homelessness (n=1216)	Remained homelessness (n=2859)
Instances of support (median)	37.5	18.0
Hours of support (median)	15.4	6.8
Support length (median months)	4.3	2.6
Received brokerage	553 (45%)	713 (25%)

All differences between groups were statistically significant ( $p < 0.05$ )

Secondly, machine learning was used to generate a regression decision tree to determine, based on our historic data, if there were any predictive factors that would increase the probability of a person exiting homelessness. Independent factors included service elements, such as length and intensity of support and a range of different support types. The analysis showed that the strongest predictive factors were length and intensity of support. If a person experiencing homelessness received:

- more than 4.2 months of support - the probability of exiting homelessness increased from 31% to 49%.
- at least 4 months of support and 27 or more instances of support - the probability of exiting homelessness increased to 55%.



<sup>21</sup> Source: Housing Outcomes for closed SHS for people experiencing homelessness at entry from July 2020 to July 2022, n=4075.



## Overcoming homelessness and finding hope

**Jenny had endured and escaped an abusive relationship and was ready to start a new life. During the pandemic she lost her job and could no longer afford the apartment she was renting. She found herself homeless with her young children.**

When Jenny reached out to Mission Australia for support she was struggling with emotional trauma, had lost all confidence in herself and was feeling hopeless about her future.

Through her engagement in the service, Jenny was able to have her immediate needs met to alleviate the family's financial strain. She accessed brokerage to pay for weekly groceries and essential items for herself and children. The support workers found Jenny a temporary apartment, then a long-term home close to her children's school.

With a safe and secure home, Jenny started to attend regular counselling sessions with a case worker. Slowly, she stopped feeling shame and she started to regain hope and strength to turn her life around. She enrolled in a TAFE course and hopes to become a lawyer one day and help others in situations like hers. Jenny's life changes also had a direct impact on her two children who now have a safe home where they can learn, grow and thrive.

"I didn't know if there was a way out for me and the kids. Everything I tried felt like a dead end,"

"For the first time in years, I felt positive about life and extremely hopeful for the future. Thank you for giving my family a fresh start."

- Jenny



Dear Mission Australia,  
My name is Sora. I am 8 years old.  
Mum always cried at our old house.  
It made me sad and I was ~~scared~~ scared.  
I miss my best friends a lot. But I started a new school and I love  
our new house. I am excited because I  
have my own bedroom!!!!!!  
Thank you for helping my mum and me and  
my big brothers.  
My mum is happy and we are happy.  
Love from Sora.





## Improved health and wellbeing

Mission Australia supports people to feel safe at home and in their community, have healthy relationships, and good physical health and wellbeing. These outcomes are measured using the PWI which is completed at the start and end of an individual's experience with a service.

### KEY INSIGHT

**People experienced improved satisfaction with their personal safety, personal health and overall wellbeing while engaged with a Mission Australia service.**



### Overall wellbeing

Most people (81%) experienced improvements in their overall wellbeing at exit from a service. The average wellbeing score increased significantly from 60.0 at entry to 73.1 at exit, a 144% increase in the number of people within the Australian average for overall wellbeing.

### Safety and health

Almost three in five people had improved satisfaction with their personal safety (58%) and health (60%) at exit from a service. Around two thirds of people were within or above the Australian average for both personal safety (68%) and health (66%) when they exited, an increase of 62% and 58% respectively.



**3 in 5**

people were more satisfied with their personal safety and health



**2 in 3**

people were within or above the Australian average at exit



**62%**

increase in the number of people within or above the Australian average at exit

### Personal relationships

More than half of people also rated their relationships more positively (56%) with 62% within or above the Australian average at exit from the service.



**1 in 2**

people were more satisfied with their personal relationships



**58%**

increase in the number of people within or above the Australian average at exit



**3 in 5**

people were within the Australian average at exit

## Impact on health and wellbeing

### Improved overall personal wellbeing



#### Overall wellbeing

**1 in 5**  
ENTRY



**1 in 2**  
EXIT

**144%**

increase in people within or above the Australian average at exit

MISSION AUSTRALIA

### What has been the most significant change?

*Finding accommodation, finding support and help. For my wellbeing and my daughter's wellbeing and stability.*

*My health has improved... Compared to how I felt when I first moved in, I'm less stressed now. I have more support around me now. I'm less worried.*





## Having a fresh start — hidden homelessness

**Terri's home was burnt down in a fire. Her husband of 35 years had gone back into their burning home to rescue their dogs and hadn't come out. At 55 years old Terri had lost her husband, home, dogs and all of her belongings. For the first time in her life she was alone and homeless.**

When Terri was discharged from the hospital she had no documents, photos, or clothes. When she made contact with Mission Australia, she was living in temporary accommodation but struggling with grief and trauma. She had lost a lot of weight and her health was suffering.

Immediately through support she was able to access clean clothes, toiletries and personal care. Terri's case worker was able to support her to find stable accommodation in a public housing unit. Terri was provided with material assistance to set up her new home with appliances for the kitchen and a food hamper.

Terri could have ended up on the street. Instead now, with a safe and stable house, she can start to plan for a new future and focus on her health and wellbeing, knowing she is able to access support when she needs it.

**"My case worker, Darlene, she stayed with me through my darkest times. Darlene saved my life."**

- Terri





## Better support and connections

Mission Australia helps people to access other services when they need it and connect with their community. Connections to other services and community groups are recorded throughout a person's engagement with the service<sup>22</sup>. The PWI is used to measure people's satisfaction with their community connectedness at the start and end of a service, in addition to a separate survey item which measures people's self-reported ability to find services to meet their needs<sup>23</sup>.

### KEY INSIGHT

**People had improved access to support services and felt more connected to their community through their engagement with a Mission Australia service.**



## Connection to services

Most people who received case management were provided with support to connect to their community and/or other community services (79%). As a result, most people who completed an Impact Measurement survey felt more confident in their ability to find services to meet their needs (69%) when they exited a service.

### Improved access to support services



<sup>22</sup> Source: Service interactions who received case management support, n=13,982.

<sup>23</sup> Source: Impact Measurement PWI entry and exit- ability to find services n=276.

## Community connection

People also felt significantly more satisfied with their connection to their community. When people exited the service, 7 in 10 people (72%) were within or above the Australian average for community connectedness, an increase of 43% compared to entry.



**3 in 5**

people were more satisfied with feeling part of their community



**7 in 10**

people were within or above the Australian average at exit



**43%**

increase in the number of people within or above the Australian average at exit

### What has been the most significant change?

*"Guidance and support to make important decisions in my life. Increased awareness of services locally to support me with my tenancy...It has improved my confidence and ability to reach out for help when I need extra support."*



### What has been the most significant change?

*"Gaining independence, stronger connection to community and mindset is better. If I didn't have those changes I wouldn't feel independent and good about myself."*



## Increased independence

Mission Australia helps people to feel more in control of their lives, set and achieve their personal goals, and have opportunities to connect with education and employment. Information on goals and progress towards goals is recorded throughout a person's engagement with a service<sup>24</sup>. The PWI is used to measure satisfaction with achievement in life and future security and an additional survey item measures people's self-reported control over their own lives<sup>25</sup>.

### KEY INSIGHT

**People engaging with a Mission Australia service felt more in control of their lives and made progress towards their personal goals, including education and employment.**



## Future security and achievement in life

At exit, most people felt significantly more in control of their lives (71%) and satisfied with their achievement in life (62%) and future security (66%). Additionally, two thirds of people (67%) were within or above the Australian average for the achievement in life and future security domains, an increase of 86% compared to entry.



## Progress towards goals

Most people who had a support plan made progress towards their goals (89%) with almost 2 in 5 fully achieving all their personal goals at exit from a service. Further, around half (52%) of people who had either education or employment goals had fully achieved their goals at exit.

- 900 people had an education goal/s. Of those, 80% made progress towards their goals at exit.
- 1095 people had an employment goal/s. Of those, 73% made progress towards their employment at exit.

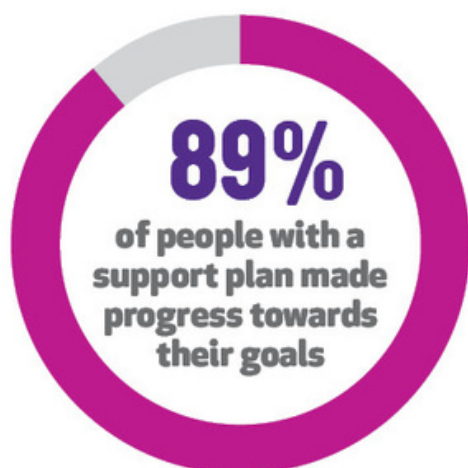
<sup>24</sup> Sources: Service interactions who received case management support with goal progress recorded n=10,662.

<sup>25</sup> Source: Impact Measurement entry and exit n=609.



## Impact on independence

### People set and achieve their goals



**4 in 5**

people with  
education goals  
had made progress  
towards their  
goals at exit



**7 in 10**

people with  
employment goals  
had made progress  
towards their  
goals at exit

### What has been the most significant change?

*"It has helped my confidence and independence... being able to do things for myself... I had the opportunity to go and try out using transport and I was too scared to and this week I wanted to try because it could help me in the future. It has helped me a lot personally, physically, and mentally."*

## Section 5 What works in practice?

Homelessness and housing support services are critical to meet the growing number of people experiencing homelessness and housing instability. This section describes some of the success factors, based on our data, external research, consultations with people with a lived experience and practitioner wisdom. Quotes from people who accessed our homelessness and stable housing support services and case studies of how Mission Australia is using evidence and insights are provided to illustrate the common themes.

### Housing First

People should be given access to stable long-term housing as soon as possible combined with the support that they need to sustain it. A Housing First approach means that people should not be required to be “housing ready” before being given the opportunity to access long-term stable housing. This is particularly important for successful outcomes for people who have addiction or complex mental health needs or have experienced long-term homelessness. But adoption of a Housing First approach, the effectiveness which is supported by Australia and international evidence, depends on sufficient stock of housing that is safe, suitable and affordable.

### Genuine and effective case management relationship

There is growing evidence through research<sup>26</sup> and the experiences of our front-line staff and people with a lived experience, that genuine relationships with support staff increase the effectiveness of services. Not only do people who access services overwhelmingly place great importance on the quality of relationships with staff, but that relationship has also been correlated with reductions in homelessness and greater life satisfaction for the service user<sup>27</sup>.

From the first intake conversation, which sets the tone and foundation for a successful service engagement, relationships should be characterised by respect, understanding, trust, collaboration, commitment, empowerment and

#### **What is important to people accessing services?**

*Putting forward my values, insights, is actually very empowering...it makes me feel like I'm being acknowledged....we deserve to be heard and we deserve to be respected and to have those life experiences acknowledged.*

#### **What is important to people accessing services?**

*Everyone should have someone to feel comfortable and to help support them along the way.*

continuity, while being managed with professional boundaries. This is important not only in providing direct support, but in building hope and capacity for individuals to self-manage their access to supports and to plan to achieve their own goals.

<sup>26</sup> Bell, K., & Smerdon, M. (2011) Deep Value: A literature review of the role of effective relationships in public services, Community Links, Deep value: a literature review of the role of effective relationships in public services | The British Library.

<sup>27</sup> Gronda, H. (2009) What makes case management work for people experiencing homelessness?, AHURI Final Report No.127, AHURI, Melbourne, <https://www.ahuri.edu.au/research/final-reports/127>.



## Person-centred and strengths based support

Our data showed that homelessness and stable housing support services were effectively supporting people to make progress towards their goals. People experiencing homelessness and housing instability told us that setting small short-term goals was important to make progress towards long-term goals.

### **What is important to people accessing services?**

*Setting goals. Little steps at a time but in the end it's going to make one big change.*

Staff recognised that people and their circumstances are unique, and the underlying structural and personal drivers of housing instability and homelessness are complex and inter-related. They identified that the best outcomes are achieved when working with people holistically in a way that responds to their personal situation across a range of domains, rather than focusing on their presenting issues or needs. This strengths-based approach builds from a person's capabilities to help them achieve success, rather than focussing on deficits, in turn building their belief that they can create change in their lives and achieve their goals.



### **Celebrating small wins and planning for the future**

**The Youth Accommodation Support Service (YASS) supports young people living in Perth who are homeless or at risk of homelessness, by providing crisis accommodation for 15-18 year olds, and transitional accommodation to young people aged 16-25 for up to 12 months.**

**The service supports young people to develop independent living skills, provides emotional support and informal counselling for mental health, alcohol and other drug use, and connects young people to education and employment opportunities.**

Through the Evidence-to-Action process, the YASS team reviewed their data to share practice and identify areas for action. Positive outcomes

included improvements in young people's wellbeing and participation in education and employment. However, young people rated their satisfaction with achievement in life and future security lower at exit compared to entry. To address this, the YASS staff developed an action plan which included celebrating the achievements of young people during their stay and focusing on exit planning, such as providing more information about service and community linkages.

Following these changes, young people's satisfaction with their achievement in life and future security increased from entry to exit across both domains. These changes highlight the importance of setting short and long term goals, and celebrating progress along the journey.



## Assertive, proactive and responsive engagement

Time is important to establish genuine trust-based and effective relationships between the people requesting our help and support staff. We know from our experience that length of engagement will vary between cohorts. People with complex needs often require longer to develop trust with the homelessness and stable housing support services. Our data also provides evidence that longer periods of engagement and greater intensity of support, are critical to support people who are experiencing homelessness to have a positive housing outcome.

Assertive engagement through outreach services and community settings, as well as support coordination, is also critical to reduce engagement barriers, for example for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and young people.



### How are we using this insight?

**With this knowledge, we can modify our services to help more people to exit homelessness. But in some cases, systemic barriers prevent us implementing changes. Government contracts and funding levels can limit our ability to employ more staff, provide more intensive support for longer, and/or supply brokerage funding. In addition, the lack of housing availability is a fundamental barrier on our ability to find suitable homes for people to exit homelessness.**

Nevertheless, there are some changes that Mission Australia is making within program guidelines and funding levels. For example, we can identify which

cohorts of people are most likely to disengage early and provide them with more tailored support to keep them engaged for longer.

We have built a dashboard to monitor service-based performance to identify services which require additional support. We are also leveraging this evidence when designing our own new service models and are advocating for these changes in government program design consultations, the recommissioning of existing services and/or new tendering opportunities.

## Brokerage and emergency relief

The findings in this report data demonstrate that access to brokerage funding is critical to effectively minimise and de-escalate crisis situations, in particular for people who are experiencing homelessness. Brokerage provides material assistance to complement case management support and is generally short-term, with a view to building people's capacity and networks so they do not need it in the longer term. Examples of brokerage uses include payments to:

- achieve goals, including educational or employment requirements such as buying uniforms or work gear, or paying course fees.
- address crisis situations, such as transport expenses, paying phone credit bills or removalist expenses.
- establish a new home, such as buying mattresses or fridges.



### Wellbeing and connections matter: using impact measurement in practice

**Karlie, a 23 year old Aboriginal mother entered the Bogan Homelessness and Housing Support Service in western NSW, seeking support with accommodation. She was ineligible for public housing due to previous issues with her tenancies, had a history of substance abuse and had experienced DFV.**

**The Bogan Homelessness Service assists women with or without children who are homeless, in unsafe housing, or at risk of homelessness because they are experiencing domestic and family violence.**

When she entered the program, Karlie had low levels of satisfaction with her personal wellbeing, in particular satisfaction with achievement in life, standard of living, relationships and life as a whole.

Karlie and her support worker developed a plan focusing on health, housing, relationships and finance to address these needs. Karlie's worker

introduced her to a range of supports such as health services, employment providers and parenting programs.

One important linkage was with an Aboriginal Community Health worker who supported Karlie to attend antenatal appointments and access mental health support.

With support of the service Karlie moved into secure housing and was provided with brokerage to establish the tenancy and create a home.

By the end of her engagement with the service, Karlie reported improvements across all wellbeing domains. Her largest improvements were for achievement in life (0 to 5), standard of living (2 to 6), relationships (2 to 6) and life as a whole (2 to 6).

This highlights the important role partnerships and collaborations play in supporting people to achieve housing and wellbeing outcomes.



## Highly skilled staff, specialist roles and multi-disciplinary teams

Access to appropriate specialist supports within multi-disciplinary teams is critical to achieving successful outcomes. Staff require a range of capabilities including: high level relational and communication skills; the ability to sustain a genuine connection with people including those who have complex needs or may display challenging behaviours; comprehensive assessment skills; and extensive knowledge of the local service system and community resources.

These include staff who are specially trained in gambling/financial counselling, therapeutic or clinical techniques, employment or education support and DFV. Our workforce also includes designated multi-cultural worker roles, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander identified positions and peer worker roles, which can create greater empathy, build stronger individual and community relationships and provide culturally appropriate practice, all of which are critical to deepen our impact.



### Improving outcomes through responsive engagement and genuine relationships

**The Townsville Sustaining Tenancies Service provides mobile support and case management to young people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness, including mentoring and coaching, independent living and tenancy management skills and opportunities to connect to education and employment.**

The Evidence-to-Action process identified that the service was highly effective; it supported 68% of young people to exit homelessness (n=68) and 96% to sustain their tenancies (n=25). Critical success factors were: assertive outreach strategies; clear expectations expressed upfront that young people would engage with support; strong partnerships with external organisations;

the provision of brokerage for essential items; and building the capacity of young people to understand and navigate the housing system.

The diversity of the support team was also a critical success factor. Team members came from a variety of backgrounds, including having lived experience and cultural expertise, which was important to establish strong, respectful, and genuine relationships with young people.

The delivery of culturally appropriate practice was also essential to reduce engagement barriers and strengthen and repair young people's relationships within their community, leading to positive housing outcomes.



## Partnerships and collaboration

Lastly, strong collaborative formal and informal partnerships with other local support providers, community resources and other stakeholders are critical given the shortage of affordable housing options. Key partnerships and collaborations include:

- strong referral and outreach pathways to engage people who are at risk or experiencing homelessness;
- partnering with Community Housing Providers and Real Estate Agents who may be the first to identify signs of tenancy failure risk and who can play a role in providing access to long-term stable housing;
- formal referral pathways to help people access holistic support and achieve their goals, and to provide ongoing support once a person exits a service;
- partnering and connecting to Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations and Culturally and Linguistically Diverse organisations and workers, to provide culturally sensitive and safe services and connections; and
- informal community and support groups that increase people's own social and community connections (e.g. churches and other faith-based organisations, sporting or cultural groups).

## Section 6 What more needs to be done?

Mission Australia's staff in our homelessness and stable housing services do everything possible to support people seeking our help, within the limits of our funding and government program requirements. This report demonstrates how our staff walk alongside people in need and help them achieve stable housing and their other life goals, and thus our organisational effectiveness in achieving impact.

However, our services' impact is significantly impeded by current broken structures and systems that affect people experiencing or at risk of homelessness. We cannot make a difference to the long-term outcomes of many of those we serve within the current context of inadequate housing supply, insufficient income support payment rates, deficient policy settings and failing program structures. This section of the report looks at what needs to be done at the systems-level to address rising homelessness and housing instability.

### Deliver a national plan to end homelessness

A national approach, with Federal Government leadership, is vital to efforts to end homelessness in Australia. A national approach is necessary to ensure that efforts are coordinated, best practice ideas and resources are shared, and policy levers at all levels of government are targeted to the same goals.

The Federal Government has made strong commitments to housing and homelessness reform including through the introduction of Housing Australia, the Housing Australia Future Fund (HAFF), the National Housing Accord and the National Housing Supply and Affordability Council.

It is also developing a National Housing and Homelessness Plan. We believe this Plan should include concrete actions backed by the necessary investment and should be designed in consultation with all levels of government, people who have lived experience and expertise, the not-for-profit sector which is responsible for most service delivery, relevant industry sectors, researchers and other experts.

These commitments are an important foundation, and present a significant opportunity for major reform and investment that can end homelessness and secure affordable housing for all Australians. Mission Australia will continue to offer our homelessness expertise, evidence and access to our practitioners and service users, to help shape the development and implementation of these important reforms.

### Increase social and affordable housing stock

Australia's stock of social and affordable housing falls vastly short of what is required to ensure that everyone has a safe and affordable home. As evidenced by this report's analysis and Australian Institute of Health and Welfare data, without sufficient housing stock, only a third of people who received support from homelessness services exit into affordable and secure long-term housing. Further, our analyses show that an increasing proportion of people can only be accommodated in short-term or emergency facilities, which is inconsistent with Housing First principles and ineffective in breaking homelessness cycles. Both of these alarming trends are due to the lack of social housing and affordable private housing.

Further investment in social and affordable housing needs to be made to meet current and future demand, which is almost one million homes over 20 years.<sup>28</sup> We cannot end homelessness without increasing the availability of affordable, long-term housing stock.

### **Provide sufficient financial assistance to private renters**

The reality of a lack of social homes is that people who would otherwise be eligible for social housing based on their income level are instead left to struggle in tight and unaffordable private rental markets. The primary financial assistance available to them is the Commonwealth Rent Assistance (CRA) payment. However, CRA provides little relief for a significant proportion of recipients; over 40% of private rental households are in rental stress despite receiving CRA.<sup>29</sup> That means people are spending over 30% of their gross household income on housing costs – leaving little left over for other daily costs of living and exposing them to the risk of homelessness.

The increase to CRA of 15% introduced in the 2023-24 Federal Budget will result in a fortnightly increase of \$15-31 – a welcome increase, but not nearly enough to keep up with rental inflation in many cases. CRA needs to be further increased and better targeted to make sure it is providing real relief to those who need it.

### **Boost income support to lift people out of poverty**

Most of the people we work with across Mission Australia services are on very low or low incomes. This report shows that 69% of people accessing our homelessness and housing support services received some form of income support. Many are completely reliant on income support payments, while others are in low-paid, insecure work or are underemployed and rely on income support payments from time to time.

Currently, the rate for JobSeeker is set at \$48 a day which is wholly inadequate to meet basic needs, including housing. An ACOSS survey of 449 people living on JobSeeker, Youth Allowance and Parenting Payment between July and August 2022 found that many had difficulty getting medication and medical care (62%), ate less or skipped meals (62%) and experienced rental stress (96% of those privately renting).<sup>30</sup> An increase of \$40/fortnight to these payments – set to begin in September 2023 – will see the daily rate rise to \$52.85, which is still inadequate to meet need and ensure that people can afford the essentials of life. The income support system needs to be redesigned to provide a permanent boost to payments to keep Australians out of poverty, and therefore to be better positioned to meet housing and other essential costs.

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<sup>28</sup> This figure is based on analysis from the 2021 review of NHFIC (891,000 dwellings) and by the University of NSW City Futures Research Centre (940,000 low-income households with unmet housing need). See: Australian Government (2021) Statutory review of the operation of the National Housing Finance and Investment Corporation Act 2018 – final report, accessible at: <https://treasury.gov.au/sites/default/files/2021-10/p2021-217760.pdf>; and Quantifying Australia's unmet housing need A national snapshot, <https://cityfutures.adfa.unsw.edu.au/social-and-affordable-housing-needs-costs-and-subsidy-gaps-by-region/>.

<sup>29</sup> Productivity Commission (2023), Report on Government Services 2023 G Housing and homelessness, accessible at: <https://www.pc.gov.au/ongoing/report-on-government-services/2023/housing-and-homelessness>.

<sup>30</sup> [https://www.acoss.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/ACOSS-cost-of-living-report\\_web\\_v02.pdf](https://www.acoss.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/ACOSS-cost-of-living-report_web_v02.pdf)



## Shift to a greater focus on prevention and early intervention

Prevention and early intervention are key to addressing homelessness in Australia, as they help people to stay in their homes (where it is safe to do so) and stop housing risks or life challenges escalating to the point where they become homeless. Government agencies currently allocate a large proportion of homelessness funding to crisis programs, rather than a balanced funding mix which also funds prevention programs (designed to prevent people from becoming homeless in the first place) and early intervention programs (designed to assist people at imminent risk of homelessness to retain their housing).

Significant effort is required to transform the homelessness service system from its current focus on crisis responses to one focused on prevention and early intervention. A wholesale resource reallocation and a culture shift by both government funding/commissioning agencies and the community services sector would see the scaling up of evidence-based prevention and early intervention programs. The challenge is to shift to a greater systemic investment in prevention and early intervention while at the same time continuing to respond to the immediate presenting issues of those seeking assistance.

A precedent for this is the National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness, which provided a funding injection of \$800 million over 2009-10 to 2012-13 (which was eventually increased to \$1.1 billion incorporating an existing initiative), half of which came from the Federal Government. This funded a suite of prevention and early intervention programs, which operated alongside the regular crisis-focused homelessness programs, and which proved highly effective.

Mission Australia advocates strongly for a dedicated fund to support the transition of the homelessness service system to a greater focus on prevention and early intervention. The amount of funding should be commensurate with the need for expanding and enhancing current service capacity and capability, supporting workforce growth, and scaling up evidence-based prevention and early intervention programs.

## Support service and housing models must meet diverse needs

There are numerous structural, social, economic and policy factors that impact on homelessness. People experiencing or at risk of homelessness are not a homogenous group. There is no one approach that works for all people at risk of homelessness. Support service and housing models must be flexible to meet the diverse needs and issues faced by particular groups. For example, this report shows that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and single males are more likely to experience homelessness and less likely to secure long-term housing than other groups.

This points to the need for:

- a person-led approach, where people experiencing or at risk of homelessness can have their views and aspirations actively listened to and responded to;
- flexibility built-in to service design, housing models and program design, to enable such person-led support, without ineffective contractual restrictions; and
- a full understanding of the factors driving and sustaining homelessness at the place/community and systems levels – through research and analysis such as in this report.

In particular, there must be investment and implementation in integrated housing and support models, where housing is provided alongside whatever support is needed to help tenants maintain their housing. Key models include Common Ground, Youth Foyers, supportive homes for people leaving psychiatric institutions, specialist aged care for people who were formerly homeless, and programs like HASI in NSW which provide in-reach support for people with mental illness living in social housing.

## **Adopt strategic commissioning approaches**

Strategic commissioning approaches are an important part of reforms that are needed to drive improvements in the human services system. Done well, commissioning practices can ensure the active participation of communities in developing solutions to issues including homelessness, and draw on the expertise of people who have used services as well as people who have delivered services in the design of needed responses.

Strategic commissioning includes:

- co-designing programs, services and models to achieve those outcomes in a joint process with people with lived experience, practitioners, evidence holders such as researchers, affected community groups and government commissioners;
- setting clear desired outcomes;
- applying special procurement methods and contract terms that are fit for the human services sector;
- shifting to long-term funding contracts which would more effectively support organisations to develop and deliver services for individuals, families and communities experiencing disadvantage.

Often programs and initiatives are funded on a short-term basis and while many produce promising outcomes, they may not result in lasting changes due to discontinued funding, or ad hoc extensions for as short as six to 12 months.

This funding environment is detrimental to service delivery with implications for retaining/hiring qualified staff and continuity of care for service users. A commissioning approach and guaranteed long-term investment in services with a minimum of seven-year funding contracts, would maximise efficiency, realise the full benefits of programs, give service providers and staff greater certainty and deepen the impact for service users.

## Appendix

The Appendix provides technical information on data analysis, statistical and practical significance and the sample presented in this report.

### Quantitative data

Cross program quantitative descriptive statistics were run using SPSS, to understand the characteristics and needs of people accessing our services. It included 21,871 times when an individual or family accessed one of the in-scope 63 homelessness and stable housing support services delivered by Mission Australia. Housing outcomes are presented for 49 Specialist Homelessness Services (n=17,775) who are required to collect and report ongoing data to the Australia Institute of Health and Welfare. Housing outcomes compare a person's housing situation at the start and end of a service. Changes in wellbeing outcomes are presented for a cross section of 771 people who completed both an entry and exit Impact Measurement survey. The Impact Measurement sample included a higher proportion of people who received case management support and a greater spread of responses across each jurisdiction apart from Tasmania.

**Table 2. Homelessness and Stable Housing and Support Sample**

Variable	Response Option	Homelessness services		SHS closed cases		Impact Measurement	
		N	%	N	%	N	%
<b>Responses</b>	Total	21,871	-	17,775	-	771	-
<b>Service Category</b>	Case Management	14,896	68.1	12,217	68.7	629	81.6
	Crisis and Transitional Accommodation	4,487	20.5	3,902	22.0	66	8.6
	Support Coordination	198	0.9	46	0.3	2	0.3
	Tenancy Support	2,290	10.5	1,610	9.1	74	9.6
<b>Jurisdiction</b>	New South Wales	17,920	81.9	15,694	88.3	526	68.2
	Northern Territory	1,440	6.6	1,117	6.3	-	-
	Queensland	1,039	4.8	536	3.0	61	7.9
	South Australia	634	2.9	428	2.4	100	13.0
	Tasmania	17	0.1	-	-	-	-
	Western Australia	821	3.8	428	2.4	84	10.9
<b>Service Contacts</b>	Service Interactions	21,871	100	17,775	100	771	-
	Primary Clients	17,656	80.7	13,982	78.7	698	89.9
	Repeat Clients	4,215	19.3	3,793	21.3	78	10.1



As a second step, non parametric Wilcoxon Signed Rants Tests were carried out, where appropriate, to determine whether there were any significant differences between outcome variables and client characteristics, as well as changes in outcomes over time. A p-value of 0.05 was the threshold to determine statistical significance. Practical significance was calculated using Spearman's rho correlation coefficient to determine effect size.

**Table 3. Impact Measurement changes in Personal Wellbeing (matched entry and exit sample)**

PWI item	Timepoint	N	Mean	Median	SD	P value	Effect size
<b>Total PWI score</b>	Entry	730	59.75	59.97	17.11	0.000*	0.490 <sup>M</sup>
	Exit		73.05	74.27	15.50		
<b>Life as a whole</b>	Entry	765	5.41	5	2.25	0.000*	0.388 <sup>M</sup>
	Exit		7.21	7	2.04		
<b>Standard of Living</b>	Entry	767	5.42	5	2.41	0.000*	0.416 <sup>M</sup>
	Exit		7.02	7	2.19		
<b>Personal Health</b>	Entry	767	5.83	6	2.40	0.000*	0.476 <sup>M</sup>
	Exit		7.07	7	2.11		
<b>Achieving in Life</b>	Entry	766	5.77	6	2.19	0.000*	0.440 <sup>M</sup>
	Exit		7.10	7	2.01		
<b>Personal Relationships</b>	Entry	767	6.62	7	2.40	0.000*	0.395 <sup>M</sup>
	Exit		7.76	8	2.00		
<b>Personal safety</b>	Entry	767	6.67	7	2.54	0.000*	0.396 <sup>M</sup>
	Exit		8.08	8	1.90		
<b>Community Connectedness</b>	Entry	767	6.37	7	2.54	0.000*	0.458 <sup>M</sup>
	Exit		7.57	8	2.10		
<b>Future Security</b>	Entry	760	5.63	5	2.29	0.000*	0.395 <sup>M</sup>
	Exit		7.12	7	2.11		

PWI item	Timepoint	N	Mean	Median	SD	P value	Effect size
<b>Control over life</b>	Entry	609	5.47	5	2.40	0.000*	0.357 <sup>M</sup>
	Exit		7.38	8	2.04		

P value= \*statistically significant (<0.05), \*\*highly significant (<0.01)

Effect size= <sup>S</sup>Small effect (0.1 to 0.3), <sup>M</sup>Medium effect (0.3-0.5), <sup>L</sup>Large effect (0.5 or greater)

Finally, MiniTab was used to undertake a CART classification to generate a regression decision tree. This was used to determine, based on our historic data, if there were any predictive factors that would increase the probability of a person experiencing homelessness having a positive housing outcome. Independent factors included modifiable service elements, such as length and intensity of support and a range of different support types.

### Qualitative data

As part of the development of the MEL framework, we conducted eight semi-structured interviews with people who had accessed our services. Participants represented every jurisdiction where Mission Australia provides services and included a range of ages, genders and people living in both metropolitan and regional areas. Quotes in the report demonstrate the reasons why people accessed support, what support is critical and the outcomes they had experienced while engaged with a homelessness and stable housing support service.



**We stand together  
with Australians in  
need, until they can  
stand for themselves**

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