



Transforming the 'system' mindset:

Reducing Homelessness by implementing an Early Intervention and Prevention Systems Approach



May 2026

On behalf of



Acknowledgement

PIVOT Movement Queensland acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of the lands and waters on which we work, engage and travel.

We pay our respects to their Elders past, present and emerging, and recognise their continuing connection to Country, lores, customs and ceremonies.

We acknowledge all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples and affirm their inherent right to self-determination.



Content

Pivot Movement	4
Executive Summary	5
Introduction	7
Why system transformation is needed	8
Early Intervention and Prevention across all cohorts	9
Young people and education linked prevention	9
Families, domestic and family violence and women	10
Older people and first-time homelessness	12
Institutional exits and transitions	13
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples	14
Rapid Rehousing, Housing First, Permanent Supportive Housing and Youth Foyers	15
Rapid Rehousing	15
Housing First	16
Permanent Supportive Housing	16
Youth Foyers	16
System and commissioning implications	16
Workforce benefits	17
Financial benefits and avoided costs	17
At a glance: Evidence supporting preventative measures	18
How the evidence supports commissioning choices	19
Summary	19
Recommendations	20
References	21

PIVOT Movement Queensland

Vision

Homelessness is prevented before it begins, with people holistically supported in ways that reflect their circumstances, culture, and community.

Mission

A ROADMAP FOR REFORM: To develop the 'Queensland Homelessness Prevention and Early Intervention Roadmap' through a consultative process to map systems and pathways, providing a shared set of prevention priorities for Queensland and laying the foundations for long-term strategic transformation.

Action

The 'PIVOT Movement Queensland' comprises stakeholders from across the human service system, not just the homelessness sector, who believe in the need to embed an 'all of systems' preventative approach that ultimately ends homelessness.

The roadmap will build on existing and emerging evidence of successful prevention and early intervention models and learn from place-based, multi-agency models that demonstrate how coordinated, earlier supports can prevent crises from occurring in the first place.



Executive Summary

This report presents a clear, evidence-rich case for re-orienting Queensland's homelessness response from a predominantly crisis-driven system to a prevention-centred, early-intervention architecture. The analysis draws together global and domestic evidence to show that prevention works across cohorts and settings, reduces human harm, and delivers measurable whole of government savings when implemented at scale.

The central message of this report, and of the PIVOT Movement Queensland, is simple:

'The current system is expensive, crisis-driven and disconnected, while prevention is earlier, coordinated, fairer and fiscally stronger.'

Homelessness is not a single-problem issue; it is a system failure that sits at the intersection of housing shortage, poverty, family and domestic violence, poor health, caring responsibilities, institutional exits and uneven access to supports.

Key findings

- **Crisis systems are failing.** Current Specialist Homelessness Services data and sector analyses show persistent, broad demand and high unmet need for short-term and emergency accommodation; crisis responses manage symptoms rather than reduce inflows.
- **Prevention and early intervention are effective across cohorts.** School-linked screening and support models have reduced the inflow of young people into homelessness services by around 40% in evaluated sites; rapid tenancy supports keep older people housed; prerelease housing planning reduces homelessness and recidivism for people leaving institutions; culturally safe, place-based pilots reduce housing risk for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.
- **Housing-led models work when embedded in system redesign.** Rapid rehousing, Housing First, Permanent Supportive Housing and Youth Foyers each deliver strong tenancy outcomes and downstream reductions in health, justice and emergency service use when they are commissioned as part of a coherent, tiered system.
- **The fiscal case is compelling.** Multiple analyses show prevention generates whole of government savings, often exceeding program costs, and the failure to act will produce significant future fiscal and social costs.

Current system challenges

- **Fragmentation and siloed commissioning.** Services operate across disconnected portfolios (housing, health, justice, child protection, family violence), producing gaps, duplication and delayed responses.
- **Crisis throughput incentives.** Performance metrics and funding models prioritise emergency throughput rather than tenancy sustainment and early intervention.
- **Insufficient housing supply and brokerage.** Lack of affordable and social housing, and limited short-term brokerage, means many prevention opportunities cannot be realised.
- **Uneven cultural safety and place-based capacity.** First Nations communities and other marginalised groups face systemic barriers unless prevention is locally led and culturally grounded.
- **Weak upstream planning for institutional exits.** Discharge and release processes frequently lack guaranteed housing pathways and immediate post-exit supports.

Benefits of an early intervention and prevention framework

1. **Reduced human harm.** Early supports prevent trauma, school disengagement, health deterioration and family breakdown.
2. **Lower downstream public costs.** Evidence shows reductions in hospital use, policing, corrections and repeated emergency accommodation when prevention and housing-led models are scaled.
3. **Improved system coherence and workforce sustainability.** A tiered prevention system clarifies referral pathways, reduces repeated high intensity crises for frontline staff, and enables trauma-informed practice.
4. **Equity and cultural responsiveness.** Place-based, community-led prevention models deliver better outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples when resourced and designed with self-determination in mind.

What this means for government and commissioning

- **Reframe outcomes and incentives.** Move funding and performance measures from crisis throughput to tenancy sustainment, early intervention and cross-sector outcomes.
- **Adopt collaborative commissioning.** Pool incentives across housing, health, justice and family services to fund prevention where savings accrue across portfolios.
- **Scale core prevention functions.** Treat rapid rehousing, short term brokerage, tenancy sustainment and pre-release housing pathways as system level infrastructure, not pilot projects.
- **Invest in supply and place-based capacity.** Expand social and affordable housing alongside culturally safe, community-led prevention programs.
- **Embed screening and early-entry points.** Systematically screen for housing risk in schools, primary care, mental health, aged care and corrections, and ensure immediate referral to funded prevention responses.

Taking this work forward

The PIVOT Movement Queensland was formed in late 2025 and stands ready to serve as the vehicle to drive this transformational work. The Movement is formed of cross-sector representatives, with established governance arrangements and methodology for raising awareness and understanding, mapping systems, convening stakeholders, and contextualising Early Intervention and Prevention priorities. The Movement welcomes the opportunity to work with the government whilst developing the Roadmap.

The evidence assembled here is unequivocal: prevention is more humane, more effective and more fiscally responsible than continuing to rely on crisis responses alone. For the government, the choice is practical and urgent; invest now to confirm the development and adoption of an Early Intervention and Prevention Framework as a priority transformational agenda item.

The recommendations that follow translate this evidence into concrete steps to reconfigure systems, align incentives and scale proven interventions so Queensland can prevent homelessness before it begins.

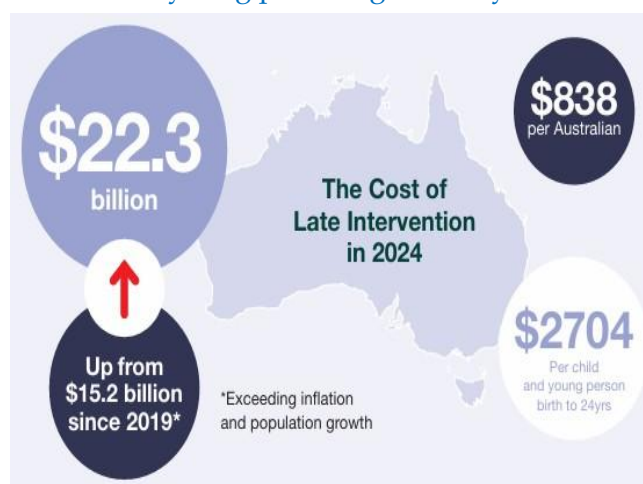
Introduction

Australia's homelessness system remains predominantly crisis-driven and siloed, producing limited long-term success. In 2024–25, almost 289,000 clients were assisted by Specialist Homelessness Services (SHS), and around one in three clients had an unmet need for short-term or emergency accommodation (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare [AIHW], 2025). Family and domestic violence was the largest client group, accounting for 40% of all clients (AIHW, 2025). These data show that demand is broad, complex and persistent; a narrow focus on one cohort or one service stream cannot resolve the problem.

The evidence points to a different direction: prevention, early intervention and a genuinely whole-of-system response. The Productivity Commission inquiry (2025), *'Delivering quality care more efficiently: Preventing harmful impacts'*, recommends a national framework to support government investment in prevention and early intervention, alongside collaborative commissioning to integrate services more effectively. Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute (AHURI) major homelessness redesign research reaches the same conclusion, arguing for prevention and early intervention, rapid access to assistance, Housing First responses, and a stronger supply of social and affordable housing (Spinney et al., 2020; Valentine et al., 2020).

The financial case is equally strong. The Front Project's Cost of Late Intervention (2024) estimates that governments spent \$22.3 billion on late intervention for children and young people alone, equal to about \$838 per Australian and \$2,704 per child and young person aged 0–24 years.

Earlier AHURI studies found that homelessness programs can generate whole-of-government savings at least twice their cost (Flatau et al., 2008) and that tenancy support, Housing First and related responses reduce health, justice and welfare costs materially (Zaretzky & Flatau, 2013, 2015; Roggenbuck, 2022). SGS Economics & Planning's *'Give Me Shelter'* analysis shows that adequate social and affordable housing can return around \$2 in benefits for every \$1 invested, while failure to act will cost the community about \$25 billion per year by 2051 (Spiller & Hobbs, 2022).



Source: The Front Project, (2024), p.i

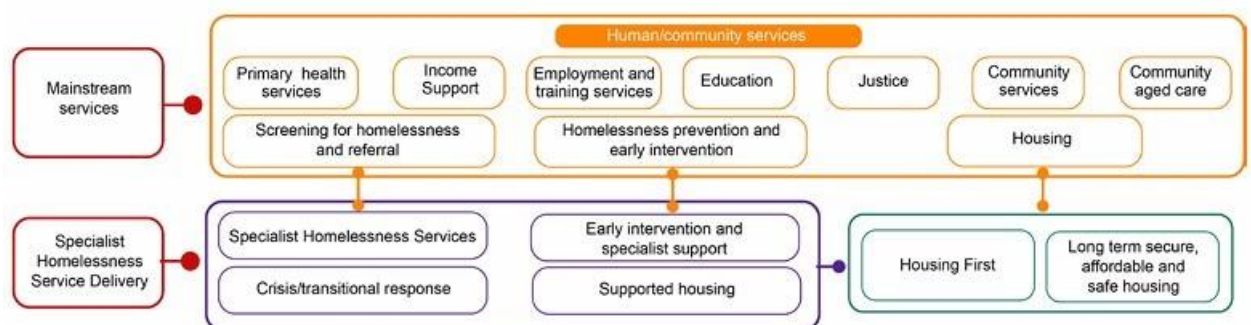
The central message of this report, and of the PIVOT Movement Queensland is simple:

'The current crisis system is expensive, reactive and incomplete, while prevention is broader, fairer and fiscally stronger. Transformation to prevention as a primary response measure attracts many benefits for communities, the workforce, the service system and government. Outcomes and impact are human, structural and financial.'

Why system transformation is needed

Homelessness is not a single-problem issue; it is a system failure that sits at the intersection of housing shortage, poverty, family and domestic violence, poor health, caring responsibilities, institutional exits and uneven access to support. Australia's homelessness service system is therefore required to respond to very different needs at once, from people escaping violence to people with chronic and complex support needs (AIHW, 2025; Spinney et al., 2020). When the system is organised primarily around crisis, it is inevitably more likely to manage symptoms than reduce the flow into homelessness.

Spinney et al. (2020) describe the current system as crisis-driven and too fragmented to rehouse people into long-term accommodation rapidly. This analysis shows that effective homelessness responses are not just about emergency beds; they require coordinated service pathways, a 'duty to assist', sustained case coordination and a much stronger supply of social and affordable housing. AHURI's family homelessness research makes the same point, showing that a '*no wrong door*' approach and streamlined access to services improve both intervention and outcomes (Valentine et al., 2020).



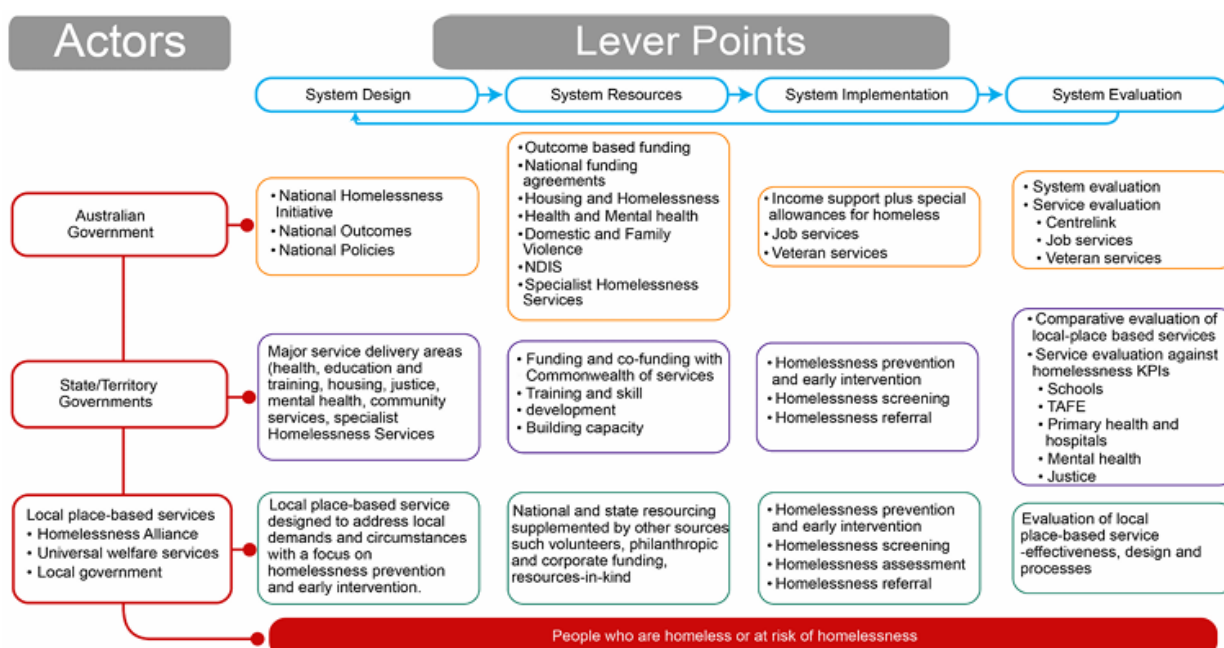
A blueprint for reconfiguring the institutional structure of the homelessness service system.

The Productivity Commission's inquiry (2025) strengthens this policy direction by arguing for a national framework that supports investment in prevention and early intervention and by emphasising collaborative commissioning across agencies. That matters because the costs of homelessness are not confined to SHS alone. They spill into health, policing, courts, child protection, family violence services, income support and emergency accommodation. A system that waits until homelessness has become entrenched is therefore both socially harmful and fiscally inefficient.

Evidence for an all-of-system approach

The evidence base consistently shows that homelessness is best addressed through coordinated, whole-of-government responses rather than isolated program fixes. Housing stability improves health, reduces the likelihood of repeated emergency department use, supports labour market participation and can reduce justice-system involvement (Productivity Commission, 2025; Roggenbuck, 2022). This is why the best-performing models do not treat housing as an endpoint. They treat it as the platform from which people can re-engage with education, work, family life and community.

AHURI's major redesign report argues that successful homelessness systems combine prevention, early intervention, Housing First responses and stronger links to mainstream services such as health, education and justice (Spinney et al., 2020). The same report recommends rapid



A blueprint for a reconfigured homelessness service system detailing actors and lever points

Source: Spinney et al.(2020), Figure 8, p.66

pathways to assistance rather than lengthy assessment and referral chains, because delays allow disadvantage to deepen. Valentine et al. (2020) similarly conclude that families need a more integrated response, including affordable housing supply, rapid rehousing and supportive permanent housing options. International evidence reinforces the same lesson. Roggenbuck (2022) reports that Housing First works best when it is embedded in a broader systemic response, and not left as an isolated pilot. It is noted that Finland's long-running Housing First strategy has been associated with substantial reductions in both chronic homelessness and overall homelessness over time. The implication for Australia is not to copy one program in isolation, but to redesign the full system around prevention, rapid access and long-term housing supply.

A genuine all-of-system approach also means moving beyond the idea that homelessness is only a housing problem. It is also a school disengagement problem, a family violence problem, a health problem, a justice problem and a poverty problem. A prevention-oriented response, therefore, requires shared accountability across all of those sectors, with housing stability treated as a core outcome rather than an incidental by-product.

Prevention and Early Intervention across all cohorts

Prevention must apply across the life course and across the different pathways that lead to homelessness. The point is not to prioritise one cohort at the expense of others, but to recognise that different groups need different entry points into a common system of early help.

Young people and education-linked prevention

Young people remain a critical prevention priority because early housing instability can shape a lifetime trajectory of poorer education, weaker employment attachment and repeated service use. Evidence from the Community of Schools and Services (COSS) model continues to demonstrate the population-level impact of early intervention. In Geelong, MacKenzie (2020) reported a 40% reduction in adolescents entering the SHS system following implementation of the COSS model, highlighting the value of systematic school-based screening and coordinated support.

More recent findings from the Albury COSS implementation reinforce and extend this evidence base: between 2019 and 2023, 40–50% of at-risk students were no longer at high risk 12 months after support, only 3–5% subsequently sought assistance from local SHS, and the flow of adolescents into the local homelessness system fell by 40% (MacKenzie et al., 2024). These results show that when communities adopt a structured early-intervention model that links schools, youth services and families, the trajectory into homelessness can be substantially disrupted.

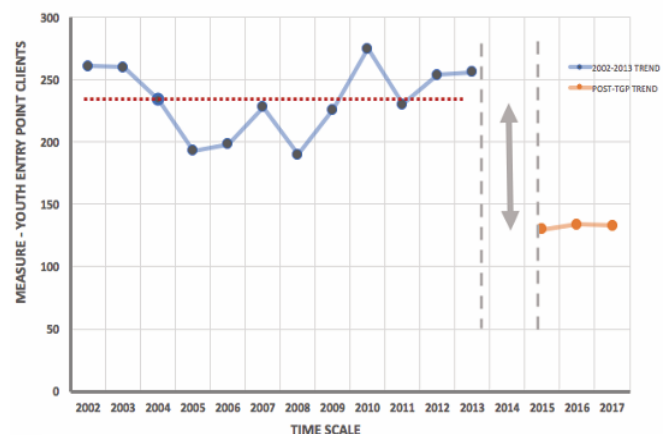
The lesson for policy writers is broader than youth homelessness alone. School attendance, early school leaving, learning difficulty, family stress and youth mental health are all warning signs that can be acted upon long before a homelessness episode begins. That is why school-linked prevention is not a narrow youth initiative; instead, it forms part of the general homelessness prevention architecture.

Families, domestic and family violence and women

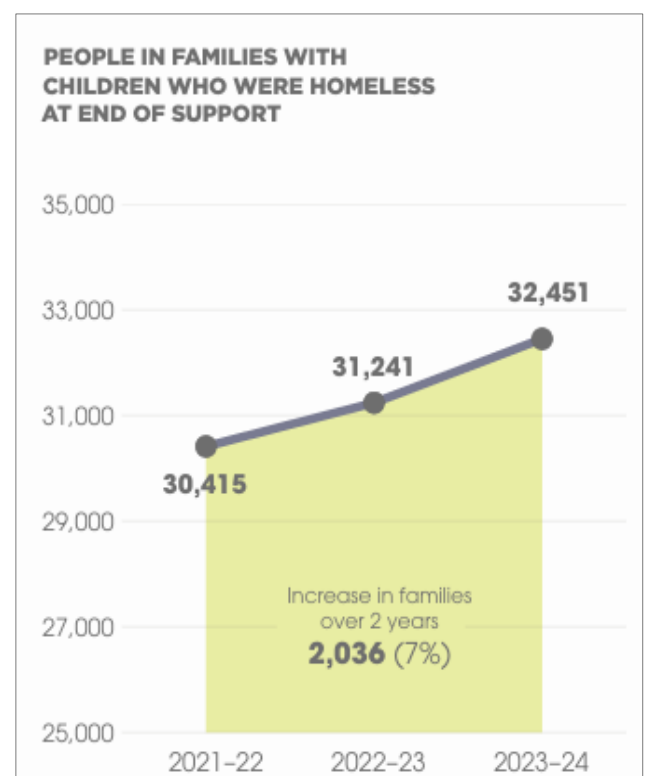
Families form a major part of homelessness service demand. Valentine et al. (2020) report that in 2017–18, 64% of people seeking support from SHS were in a family, often because of domestic and family violence (DFV), poverty or a lack of affordable and suitable accommodation. The report stresses that families experiencing homelessness are not a uniform group and need flexible responses that match their circumstances.

Valentine et al. (2020) recommended ongoing funding for rapid rehousing, prevention and early intervention responses, and supportive permanent housing combined with community-based services. Their “no wrong door” recommendation is especially important because families often move between family violence, housing and child and family services before getting a stable response. If services are not joined up, families repeatedly fall between gaps and the costs compound.

Recent national analysis reinforces Valentine et al. (2020) call for a systemic shift toward early intervention and prevention for families. The Homelessness Australia report ‘*Raising the alarm: Australia’s family homelessness emergency*’ (2025), finds that family homelessness has increased



12-18 year olds clients at Geelong Youth Entry Point, 2002-16. Source: MacKenzie (2018), Graph 1, p.34



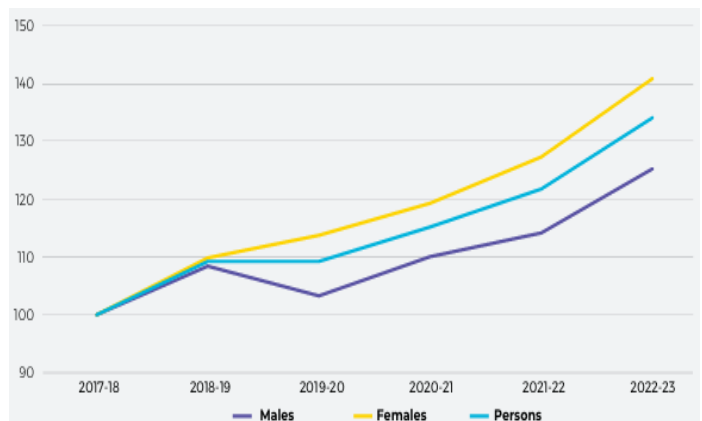
People in families with children who were homeless at end of support, Australia. Source: Homelessness Australia (2025), p.6

markedly in the early 2020s, with more families presenting to services already homeless and a growing number remaining homeless after receiving support. The report argues that these trends are symptoms of long-term policy failure and underinvestment in prevention, and it recommends immediate, coordinated government action to expand housing supply, strengthen early intervention programs, and properly fund frontline services so that families are diverted from homelessness before the crisis point. These recommendations mirror Valentine et al. (2020) emphasis on rapid rehousing, prevention, and joined-up ‘no wrong door’ responses, and provide up-to-date national data showing why prevention-focused reform is urgent.

Research focused on DFV reinforces the need to reorient homelessness systems toward prevention and early intervention. AHURI’s analysis (2022) highlights that DFV is a leading cause of homelessness for women and children, and that many people who present to SHS because of DFV are still in private housing when they seek help, but are at high risk of losing that housing without timely supports. AHURI argues that fast, targeted interventions, such as immediate access to safe, affordable private rental options, short-term financial assistance, and coordinated case management, can prevent escalation into longer-term homelessness. The brief emphasises that responses must be trauma-informed and integrated across housing, family violence and child-welfare services so that women do not cycle between systems; without such joined-up early intervention, families are more likely to experience repeated crises and poorer long-term outcomes. This evidence complements Valentine et al. (2020) recommendations by showing that prevention and rapid rehousing for women escaping DFV are both practicable and essential to reduce family homelessness at scale.

Women’s pathways into homelessness extend well beyond DFV and include poverty, mental ill-health, caregiving burdens, disability, insecure work and age-related housing disadvantage; contemporary research shows these intersecting risks create clear windows for early, targeted prevention such as short-term financial assistance, tenancy support, rapid rehousing and integrated health-housing case management (AIHW, 2024; YWCA Australia & UNSW City Futures Research Centre, 2023). While DFV remains a major driver, many women who later become homeless present to services while still housed and face multiple, interacting risks; financial insecurity, poor mental health and substance use, caregiving responsibilities, disability and age-related poverty that make eviction or hidden homelessness likely unless addressed early (AIHW, 2024). Health sector contact is a key prevention point; screening for housing risk in primary and mental-health services and linking people to rapid housing supports reduces downstream health harms and repeated homelessness, especially for women whose health and caregiving roles complicate access to stable housing (Wood & Villiers, 2024).

Gender-focused research and advocacy further documented how income-support gaps, insecure employment and shrinking affordable private-rental options disproportionately expose single mothers, older women and women from marginalised groups to housing loss, and call for

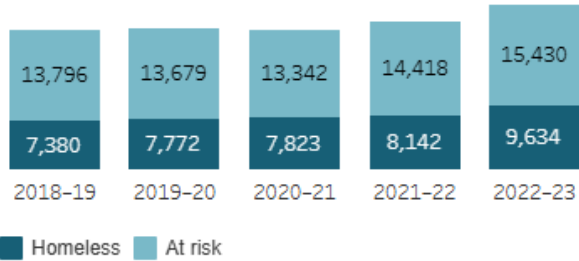


Persons assisted by SHS agencies: Average monthly caseload by gender; Qld. Source: YWCA Australia & UNSW City Futures Research Centre (2023), p.33

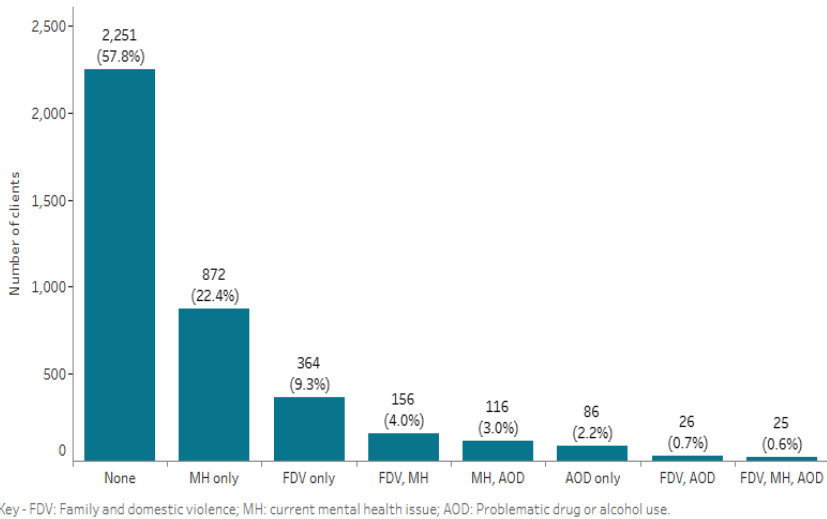
prevention measures such as targeted rental subsidies, tenancy sustainment services and age-sensitive housing pathways (YWCA Australia & UNSW City Futures Research Centre, 2023). Taken together, these sources make a consistent policy case: invest in early-intervention entry points (health and welfare screening), short-term financial and tenancy supports, rapid rehousing and cross-sector ‘no wrong door’ coordination so that women at imminent risk are diverted from crisis accommodation into stable, safe housing; doing so reduces repeated service use, improves health and safety outcomes, and is more cost-effective than responding only after homelessness is entrenched.

Older people and first-time homelessness

Older Australians are increasingly exposed to housing insecurity, particularly in private rental markets where rents can rise faster than pensions and savings buffers are limited. Thredgold et al. (2019) found that older Australians are increasingly represented in SHS and that the existing support system is fragmented and poorly integrated with aged care. The report calls for more public and affordable housing, better coordination across systems and stronger frontline support. This is important because older people often enter homelessness for the first time and are less likely to fit existing service pathways. Timely rental support, tenancy sustainment and transitions from hospital or aged care can prevent homelessness from becoming a later-life crisis. Again, the lesson is system design: prevention is not just for young people; it is relevant whenever housing insecurity is visible. Recent national data and sector analysis reinforce and update Thredgold et al. (2019) concerns, showing that older people are a growing share of those seeking homelessness assistance and that prevention-focused responses materially reduce later-life homelessness. The AIHW analysis of SHS (2022–23) documents rising numbers of older clients, high levels of rental stress among people on the age pension, and frequent co-occurrence of health, disability and income shocks that precipitate first-time homelessness in later life, and explicitly recommends early identification of housing risk, tenancy-sustainment programs, stronger links between SHS and aged-care/hospital discharge planning, and expanded affordable housing supply to prevent homelessness among older people (AIHW, 2024). Mission Australia’s Homelessness Impact Report (2023) provides complementary service-level evidence stating that when people at risk receive short-term financial assistance, rapid tenancy support



Proportion of older persons experiencing homelessness, nationally, by year. Source: Figure OLDER.1: Key demographics, older SHS clients, 2022–23. AIHW (2024).



Key - FDV: Family and domestic violence; MH: current mental health issue; AOD: Problematic drug or alcohol use.

Older SHS clients, by vulnerability characteristics 2022-23 (Qld). Source: Figure OLDER.2. AIHW (2024).

and outreach before eviction, the vast majority (94%) remain housed rather than entering crisis accommodation. The report also argues that scaling these prevention measures alongside investment in social and affordable housing would substantially reduce older people’s entry into homelessness (Pereth et al., 2023). Together, these sources make a clear, contemporary policy case; prevention for older people requires proactive screening in health and aged-care settings, rapid short-term financial and tenancy interventions, and system coordination so that hospital discharge, aged-care transitions and rental shocks do not become triggers for homelessness.

Institutional exits and transitions

Recent Australian research and program evaluations show that people exiting correctional settings face very high, but preventable homelessness risk, and that pre-release housing planning, rapid rehousing, and tailored supports substantially reduce homelessness and recidivism.

People leaving prison, hospital, out-of-home care, or other institutions are at high risk of homelessness if housing is not arranged before discharge or release. The clearest prevention point is before exit, not after the person has already cycled into crisis accommodation. The Productivity Commission’s prevention framework articulates upstream planning that reduces demand on future services while improving outcomes across the care system (Productivity Commission, 2025).

Contemporary evidence from Australia reinforces that prison release planning must include guaranteed housing pathways and immediate post-release supports to prevent homelessness and reduce reoffending. National monitoring and program evaluations show that many people released from custody enter short-term or emergency accommodation or have no accommodation to go to at all, and that enhanced housing pathways that provide coordinated health, substance-use and employment supports at release markedly improve housing stability and lower recidivism (Pawson et al., 2024). Service-level evaluations of targeted programs provide practical proof: the Australian Capital Territory (ACT) Justice Housing Program, which pairs secure transitional housing with intensive tailored supports, was found to improve housing outcomes and

Housing first approaches to homelessness

- Immediate, permanent housing with wrap-around supports
- Highly effective in helping participants sustain housing (66-90% success rate)
- In South Australia, the Aspire program was linked to avoided costs of **\$8.9 million** over 4 years of implementation



Example of cost saving prevention and early intervention. Source: Figure 3.4, Productivity Commission (2025), p.63.



Collaborative commissioning involves organisations working together in a continuous cycle . Source: Figure 2.1, Productivity Commission (2025), p.35.

	Count	Percentage
Unknown	55	31.6%
Family/partner/friend	52	29.9%
Support service or community housing	37	21.3%
Returned to custody	26	14.9%
Private rental	4	2.3%
Total	174	100%

Destination of former residents when they left the program (ACT). Source: Table 3.8, Taylor et al. (2023), p.28.

reduce factors associated with reoffending. The program evaluation argues that scaling pre-release housing interventions and ensuring continuity of supports on day one of release are cost-effective prevention measures (Taylor et al., 2023).

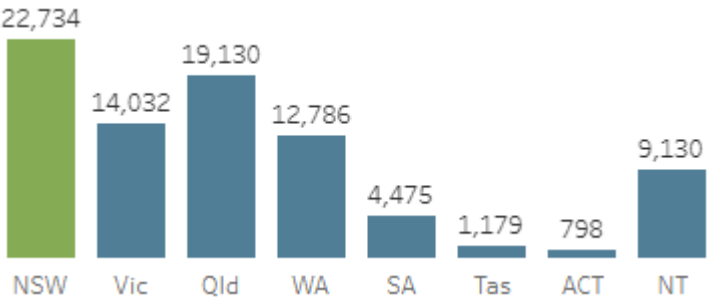
Sector analyses and practitioner accounts emphasise that timely identification of housing need, formalised housing referrals, provision of ID and bond/rental assistance, and coordinated case management across corrections, housing and community services are essential components of an effective prevention approach (Acone, 2024).

This section again acknowledges sources that make a clear policy case; prevention for people exiting correctional and other institutional settings requires mandated pre-release housing plans, funded rapid-rehousing pathways, and integrated post-release supports so that discharge is a point of stability rather than the trigger for homelessness and further system costs.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples

Recent evidence-informed evaluations show that culturally safe, community-led early-intervention pilots for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples both reduce immediate housing risk and explicitly recommend scaling prevention-focused, place-based responses.

Prevention needs to be culturally safe and grounded in the realities of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander households. Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) indicated that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples represented an estimated 5.3% of the Queensland population in 2021 (ABS, 2023). Looking at data for the 2024-25 period, Queensland SHS supported a total of 54,700 people, of which 19,130 (36%) were Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples (AIHW, 2025). With crowding and housing shortages playing a central role alongside domestic and family violence, this reinforces the need for prevention approaches that combine housing supply, place-based supports and culturally appropriate service design.



Key demographics, Indigenous SHS Clients 2024-25, by state.
Source: Figure INDIGENOUS.1, AIHW (2025).

- Increased investment in social, affordable and culturally appropriate housing stock
- A national housing and homelessness plan developed by and for First Nations people
- Shift to a greater focus on prevention and early intervention
- Culturally appropriate and safe homelessness and housing support services

Why are these findings important?
Source: Mission Australia (2024).

A growing body of evaluation evidence demonstrates how culturally safe early intervention pilots can operationalise those principles and prevent homelessness before it becomes entrenched. For example, Mission Australia’s evaluation of the Integrated Homelessness Supported Accommodation Program (IHSAP) reports that culturally appropriate, community-led outreach, tenancy brokerage and coordinated case management delivered in a place-based model improved housing stability, wellbeing and service connections for many First Nations participants and that when supports are provided at the point of housing instability, clients are more likely to secure a pathway to stable housing than to enter or remain in emergency accommodation (Mission Australia, 2024).

Complementing this program-level evidence, an AHURI analysis brief (2024) frames First Nations homelessness as a policy emergency and argues that empowerment, self-determination and cultural safety are core to prevention. AHURI recommends scaling community-controlled housing solutions, embedding cultural safety across organisations, investing in Aboriginal workforce capacity, and aligning prevention funding with place-based, First Nations-led service models so that housing risk is identified and addressed early rather than after crisis (AHURI, 2024).

This evidenced narrative reinforces and extends Cripps and Habibis's (2019) earlier findings that prevention for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples is not only a matter of increasing housing supply but also of designing and funding culturally safe, locally led early intervention pathways that include outreach, short-term brokerage, tenancy sustainment and integrated health and social supports, that should be scaled as part of a universal, adaptable 'no wrong door' prevention system.

Rapid Rehousing, Housing First, Permanent Supportive Housing and Youth Foyers

A growing evidence base shows that housing-led interventions work best when embedded in an early intervention and prevention framework; rapid, low-barrier responses stop immediate housing loss; medium-intensity, housing-first approaches stabilise people with complex needs, and longer-term, integrated supports prevent repeated crises for those with chronic needs.

When these models are commissioned as active parts of a single, adaptable system, several consistent benefits emerge. First, timeliness; rapid rehousing and short-term brokerage remove the immediate financial barriers that trigger homelessness, preventing escalation into emergency

accommodation. Second, stability; Housing First and permanent supportive housing deliver high tenancy retention and reduce downstream use of health, justice and emergency services. Thirdly, prevention of recurrence; by pairing housing with tailored supports (tenancy sustainment, support, employment and education pathways), programs reduce returns to crisis and the harm of repeated displacement. Fourth, cost-effectiveness; reduced hospitalisations, police and correctional contacts and emergency accommodation use translate into public sector savings over time. Fifth, systemic coherence; a tiered mix enables clearer referral pathways and fidelity to each model, so providers can match intensity to need rather than default to crisis throughput. Finally, workforce and wellbeing gains; when services can act early, staff face fewer repeated high-intensity crises, enabling trauma-informed practice and improving retention.

Rapid Rehousing

Rapid rehousing pairs short term rent assistance with supports so people can access and stabilise in private rental quickly; it is especially effective where the proximate barrier to housing is an immediate cost (bond, rent in advance or short-term affordability). Rapid rehousing shortens



Strategy for ending homelessness

Source: Housing First Europe Hub. (2023), p.6.

time in emergency accommodation, reduces trauma for families and children, and acts as a 'prevention-aware', first line of response when eviction or access costs precipitate homelessness (Launch Housing, 2025; Pawson et al., 2024). Commissioning implications are clear: treat rapid rehousing and short-term brokerage as core system functions, fund them to be widely available at the point of housing risk, and align performance metrics with tenancy sustainment rather than crisis throughput (Launch Housing, 2025; Pawson et al., 2024).

Housing First

Housing First is an integrated housing-led and support model for people with chronic homelessness and complex needs. Evidence reviews report consistently high housing-retention rates (commonly in the mid-range of 66%–90%) and associated reductions in hospital use and criminal justice contact, outcomes that both improve wellbeing and lower public costs (Roggenbuck, 2022; Housing First Europe Hub, 2023). Because Housing First provides immediate, permanent housing plus tailored supports, it is the appropriate intensive response for people whose needs cannot be met by short-term interventions. To note, fidelity to the model (rapid access to housing, choice, and tailored supports) is critical to achieving these outcomes (Roggenbuck, 2022).

Permanent Supportive Housing

Informed by Housing First principles, permanent supportive housing offers long-term, integrated clinical and social supports alongside secure housing and is suited to people with intersecting health, disability and substance-use needs. Evaluations show this preventative measure sustains tenancies and reduces repeated crises that are costly for the government and traumatic for individuals, making it a necessary component of a mixed system for chronic need (Roggenbuck, 2022). In practice, permanent supportive housing is complemented by Housing First and rapid rehousing by providing ongoing assistance where episodic or minimal, time limited supports are insufficient. Commissioning should therefore include long-term funding streams and clinical partnerships to maintain these tenancies.

Youth Foyers

Youth Foyers operationalise prevention for young people by combining stable transitional housing with education, training and intensive case management. Australian evaluations and economic analyses report higher rates of sustained tenancies, improved engagement with education and employment, reduced returns to crisis services, and promising cost-benefit outcomes when Foyer-style models are delivered with fidelity (Foyer Foundation, 2022; Pawson et al., 2024). Key implementation ingredients are



The potential of scaling up from 11 to 50 Foyers by 2030
Source: The Foyer Foundation (2022), p.7.

integrated on-site supports, strong links with local training and employers, and flexible brokerage for bonds and short-term living costs; features that allow Foyers to divert young people from entrenched homelessness and create a platform for participation.

System and commissioning implications

Serving as a tiered, 'prevention-aware' system: rapid rehousing and short-term brokerage as first-line responses to access barriers; Housing First for entrenched homelessness and complex needs; permanent supportive housing for those requiring ongoing clinical and social supports; and Youth Foyers for young people, require aligned funding and performance metrics, resourced

entry points (outreach, short-term brokerage, tenancy sustainment and Foyer pathways), that are delivered with collaborative fidelity. Doing so improves housing stability, reduces downstream public costs, and prevents repeated crisis responses.

Workforce benefits

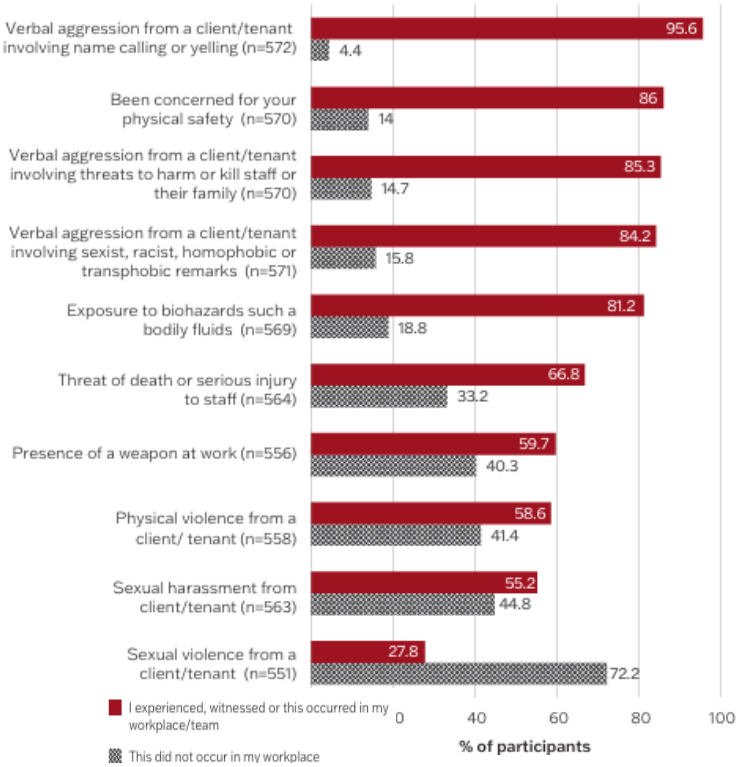
A prevention-oriented system benefits staff as well as people using services. When services shift upstream to early intervention and prevention, frontline workloads become more sustainable, exposure to repeated high-intensity crises falls, and organisations can support trauma-informed practice rather than crisis-driven responses. AHURI’s investigative panel (James et al., 2023) documented how heavy caseloads, administrative burdens, insecure short-term contracts and frequent exposure to trauma drove vicarious trauma, burnout and turnover across the homelessness workforce. Furthermore, the report linked these pressures to funding and performance frameworks that prioritised crisis-related outputs over outcomes and sustainment. The report recommended reorienting funding toward early intervention models, investing in secure staffing, supervision and trauma-informed training, and expanding place-based tenancy sustainment services so workers can spend more time on early engagement.

Building on that analysis, AHURI’s national study of workplace trauma (Batterham et al., 2026) provides more detailed evidence of the human cost. A large-scale survey and qualitative data identified universal

exposure to client distress and crisis among frontline staff, high rates of vicarious trauma and burnout, and clear organisational drivers (high emergency caseloads, fragmented cross-sector responses, and throughput-focused metrics). Crucially, the study found that services that implemented early identification and rapid response measures such as short-term brokerage (bonds, rent top-ups), tenancy sustainment, pre-emptive outreach and rapid rehousing, reported lower incidence of repeated emergency presentations and reduced cumulative trauma among staff, because fewer avoidable crises mean fewer traumatic incidents to manage (Batterham et al., 2026).

Both sets of findings converge on the same commissioning implications:

align funding and performance indicators with prevention and tenancy sustainment outcomes, resource longer term contracts and clinical supervision, and scale early intervention entry points (health and welfare screening, outreach, short-term financial assistance and tenancy support). Doing so not only prevents homelessness but also reduces recruitment and training costs, improves staff retention and wellbeing, and strengthens continuity of care, creating a healthier,



Percentage of participants who had experienced, witnessed or had occur in their workplace: Sources of direct trauma
Source: Batterham et al., (2026), p.30.

more effective workforce able to deliver trauma-informed, consistent support rather than perpetual crisis management (James et al., 2023; Batterham et al., 2026).

Financial benefits and avoided costs

The financial argument for prevention is strong. Contemporary evidence from Australia and internationally shows that investing upstream in housing-led prevention reduces immediate crisis spending and produces measurable downstream savings across health, justice, child protection, and welfare budgets. The Front Project's 2024 analysis powerfully illustrates the scale of late-intervention costs in child and youth systems and the lost opportunity when action is delayed (The Front Project, 2024). Australian program and modelling work then demonstrates how housing-led responses convert those avoided costs into observable fiscal offsets: Housing First and permanent supportive housing evaluations report substantial reductions in hospital, emergency department and criminal justice contact once people are stably housed, while rapid rehousing and tenancy-sustainment programs shorten time in emergency accommodation and avoid immediate crisis costs (Roggenbuck, 2022; Launch Housing, 2023; Pawson et al., 2024).

Global syntheses reinforce that these are not isolated or jurisdiction specific findings.

International and domestic reviews and comparative analyses find consistent patterns: (1) short-term, targeted interventions (rapid rehousing, brokerage, tenancy sustainment) often deliver quick cost avoidance in emergency accommodation and welfare spending; (2) Housing First and permanent supportive housing produce larger per person cost offsets where health and justice use had been high, typically becoming beneficial within one to five years; and (3) prevention multiplies returns because homelessness avoided reduces the simultaneous demand across multiple public systems. (Roggenbuck, 2002; Kongats et al., 2023; Housing First Europe Hub, 2023; Parsell et al., 2023).

Economic modelling also places housing investment in a long run productivity frame. Australian analyses estimate strong benefit cost ratios for social and affordable housing and particularly high returns from youth housing investments, because stable housing improves health, educational participation and labour market attachment while reducing demand on emergency and justice services (Spiller & Hobbs, 2022; Pawson et al., 2024). International cost-effectiveness literature reaches similar conclusions: when prevention and early-intervention measures are scaled and combined with cross-sector commissioning, governments can expect both near-term reductions in crisis spending and medium-term reductions in recurrent system costs (Kongats et al., 2023).

Two policy lessons follow directly from this evidence. First, commission a tiered, 'prevention-aware' system that matches intervention intensity to need; rapid rehousing and brokerage for access barriers; Housing First and permanent supportive housing for chronic, complex need, and prevention focused youth models (Foyers) for younger cohorts. Second, align governance and funding so savings and incentives are shared across sectors: cross-government commissioning, pooled budgets or shared outcome contracts are necessary to capture the multi-budget returns prevention produces (Productivity Commission, 2025; Pawson et al., 2024).

At a glance: Financial evidence supporting preventive measures

Source	Key finding	Policy implication
Flatau et al. (2008), pp. 12-13.	Reducing homelessness program clients' use of health and justice systems, savings would pay for homelessness programs several times over, as well as reduce budget outlays in other areas.	Prevention is fiscally preferable to repeated crisis response.
Mackenzie et al.(2016), p. 3	Cost of a homeless young person engaging with health and justice settings equates to \$17,878/yr, or \$747M (based on the >41,000 15-24 year olds using SHS during the 2014-15 period).	Prevention enables homelessness sector cost savings as well as in intersecting areas of the service system. Provides better opportunities.
Foyer Foundation (2022), p.7	Investment of \$408M to scale Youth Foyers to 50 by 2040, estimated to save the government \$2.9B by 2040	Priorities on housing, employment, education, health and disability provide an opportunity to scale up.
Roggenbuck (2022), p.26.	Housing First in Brisbane invested \$500,000 and avoided \$6.9 million in hospital and ED costs.	High need housing interventions can offset costs quickly.
Spiller & Hobbs (2022), p.10.	Adequate housing returns about \$2 for every \$1 invested.	Social and affordable housing should be treated as infrastructure.
The Front Project (2024), p.i.	Late intervention spending reached \$22.3 billion in 2024.	Upstream investment can reduce broad crisis system spending.

How the evidence strengthens commissioning choices

- Capture multi-budget savings through governance design. Because avoiding homelessness reduces costs across multiple portfolios. Pooled budgets, shared outcome contracts and/or cross-agency commissioning are needed to align incentives so the investor and the beneficiary are not misaligned (Productivity Commission, 2025).
- Scale prevention to multiply returns. Prevention and early intervention reduce the incidence of high-cost, recurrent episodes. Modelling and program data show that scaling rapid rehousing, tenancy sustainment, and youth prevention (Foyers) reduces immediate crisis spending and lowers medium term system costs (Spiller & Hobbs, 2022; Pawson et al., 2024).
- Prioritise fidelity and integration. Cost offsets are largest when models are delivered with fidelity (e.g., Housing First principles, integrated supports in Foyers) and when services are integrated across health, housing and social supports so that housing stability is accompanied by the supports that prevent returns to crisis.

The contemporary national and global evidence provides a robust fiscal rationale for investing in a prevention-oriented housing and homelessness system. It reduces multi-system costs, concentrates savings where need is greatest, and produces both near-term and medium-term fiscal returns when combined with governance arrangements that share benefits across sectors.

In short, global and domestic evidence shows prevention is not merely a moral or clinical imperative, but instead a fiscally prudent strategy that reduces multi-system costs, improves outcomes for people and communities, and strengthens the sustainability of the service system.

Summary

The evidence referred to in this report is clear and consistent. The current crisis-driven, siloed system is failing to stop people from falling into homelessness. With such evidence to hand, the central conclusion is simple: 'The current crisis system is expensive, reactive and disconnected, while prevention is broader, fairer and fiscally stronger.'

Homelessness arises where multiple systems intersect; housing supply, income support, health, family and domestic violence responses, education and institutional exits. The data show that acting earlier, in the right places, reduces both human harm and public cost. Prevention and early intervention across cohorts (young people, families, women escaping DFV, older people, people leaving institutions, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Nations Peoples) produce measurable reductions in service demand, better life outcomes, and fiscal offsets when delivered with fidelity and integrated commissioning.

A transformed system treats housing stability as a platform for recovery and participation rather than an end-point, and it matches intervention intensity to need. When these elements are funded, governed and measured together, the evidence shows improved tenancy sustainment, lower downstream health and justice costs, and a more sustainable workforce.

This conclusion cites one clear imperative: Shift from crisis-driven programmatic responses to prevention-centred system design, with cross-portfolio governance, pooled incentives, and resourced early-entry points, so that the system prevents homelessness before it becomes entrenched. The recommendations that follow set out how to operationalise that shift.

Recommendations

1. The Queensland Government formally acknowledges the need for an Early Intervention and Prevention Framework to be developed within a housing and homelessness context. Understanding the many cross-system intersects, this starting point is considered strongly positioned in order to engage and include the broader human service system.
2. Apply this need by supporting the PIVOT Movement Queensland to deliver a statewide initiative that will:
 - a. Undertake a formal review of the literature, including evaluation of findings from pilots undertaken globally and domestically.
 - b. Seek to understand and define Early Intervention and Prevention within a Queensland housing, homelessness and broader human service system context.
 - c. Develop the 'Queensland Early Intervention and Prevention Roadmap', through a co-design approach that will include regional sector, cross-government, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and Lived-Living Experience representatives.
3. Once developed, build the Roadmap into future-facing Government transformation strategies that will support the intentional move away from crisis-driven responses.
4. Champion the contextualisation of the Roadmap into other areas of the human service system within Queensland.
5. Amplify this work to support the advocacy of a National Early Intervention and Prevention framework for homelessness, aligned with the Productivity Commission's 2025 recommendations, including a shared outcomes measurement framework across housing, health, justice and social services.

References

- Acone, M. (2024). *Breaking the cycle: Addressing homelessness and recidivism for formerly incarcerated men through enhanced housing pathways*. Parity. Council to Homeless Persons. Breaking the Cycle: Addressing Homelessness and Recidivism for Formerly Incarcerated Men Through Enhanced Housing Pathways - Council to Homeless Persons website
- Australian Bureau of Statistics. (2023). *Estimates of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians*. ABS. Estimates of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians, 30 June 2021 | Australian Bureau of Statistics
- Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. (2024). *Specialist homelessness services client pathways: Female clients experiencing family and domestic violence and persistent homelessness in 2020–21*. AIHW. Specialist homelessness services client pathways: analysis insights: SHS: Female clients experiencing family and domestic violence and persistent homelessness in 2020–21 - Australian Institute of Health and Welfare
- Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. (2024). *Specialist homelessness services annual report 2022–23: Older clients* (web report). AIHW. Specialist homelessness services annual report 2022–23, Older clients - Australian Institute of Health and Welfare
- Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. (2025). *Specialist homelessness services annual report 2024–25: First Nations clients*. AIHW. Specialist homelessness services annual report 2024–25, First Nations clients - Australian Institute of Health and Welfare
- Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. (2025). *Specialist homelessness services annual report 2024–25*. AIHW. <https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/homelessness-services/specialist-homelessness-services-annual-report>
- Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute. (2022). *Housing, homelessness and domestic and family violence*. AHURI Analysis Brief. Housing, homelessness and domestic and family violence | AHURI
- Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute. (2024). *Empowering Indigenous communities to reduce homelessness is key to Closing the Gap*. AHURI. Empowering Indigenous communities to reduce homelessness is key to Closing the Gap | AHURI
- Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute. (2026). *Workplace trauma on the social housing and homelessness frontline* (AHURI Final Report No. 455). Workplace trauma on the social housing and homelessness frontline | AHURI
- Batterham, D., Barnes, E., Hartley, C., Flanagan, K., Veeroja, P., Robinson, C., & Mackelprang, J. (2026). *Workplace trauma on the social housing and homelessness frontline* (AHURI Final Report No. 455). Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute Limited. <https://www.ahuri.edu.au/research/final-reports/455>
- Cripps, K., & Habibis, D. (2019). Improving housing and service responses to domestic and family violence for Indigenous individuals and families. Cripps, K. and Habibis, D., *Improving housing and service responses to domestic and family violence for Indigenous individuals and families*, AHURI Final Report, (320). Improving housing and service responses to domestic and family violence for Indigenous individuals and families
- Culhane, D., Metraux, S., Byrne, T., Stino, M., & Bainbridge, J. (2019). The cost of homelessness: A summary of research results from New York City. *Journal of Social Distress and the Homeless*, 28(4), 376–391. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10530789.2019.1683899>

- Flatau, P., Zaretsky, K., Brady, M., Haigh, Y., & Martin, R. (2008). The cost-effectiveness of homelessness programs: A first assessment (AHURI Final Report No. 119). Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute. <https://www.ahuri.edu.au/research/final-reports/119>
- Homelessness Australia. (2025). *Raising the alarm: Australia's family homelessness emergency*. Homelessness Australia. HA-Raising-the-alarm-Australias-family-homelessness-emergency-v03.pdf
- Homelessness Queensland. (2025). *Homelessness responses in Queensland*. Homelessness Queensland. <https://thedeck.org.au/resource/tools-resources/policy-procedure/homelessness-responses-in-queensland/>
- Housing First Europe Hub. (2019). *Achieving a new systems perspective to ending homelessness through Housing First: A policy and practice guide* (Full Report). Housing First Europe Hub. https://housingfirsteurope.eu/wp-content/uploads/2025/06/2019-10-10-HFinEurope_Full-Report2019_final.pdf
- Housing First Europe Hub. (2022). *Achieving a new systems perspective to ending homelessness through Housing First: A policy and practice guide*. Housing First Europe Hub. [Systems_Perspective_Policy_and_Practice_Guide.pdf](#)
- James, A., Dunlop, P. D., Gilbert, C., Gilbert, J., Gagné, M., Parsell, C., Cawthray, J., & Muhammad Farid, H. (2023). *Investigative panel into building and retaining an effective homelessness sector workforce* (AHURI Final Report No. 409). Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute Limited. <https://www.ahuri.edu.au/research/final-reports/409>
- Kongats, K., Paulden, M., Pabayo, R., Campbell, S., & Nykiforuk, C. I. (2023). Housing for vulnerable populations – identifying system cost implications: an analytic literature review. *Health Promotion International*, 38(3), daad055. Housing for vulnerable populations-identifying system cost implications: an analytic literature review - PubMed
- Launch Housing. (2025). *2024–25 Impact Report*. Launch Housing. 2025 Impact Report - Launch Housing Impact Report
- MacKenzie, D., Flatau, P., Steen, A., & Thielking, M. (2016). The cost of youth homelessness in Australia: Research Briefing. 2016-mackenzie-cost_youth_homelessness (2).pdf
- Mackenzie, D. (2018). The Geelong Project: Interim Report 2016-2017. [TGP_Interim_Report_FINAL_e-PRINT.pdf](#)
- MacKenzie, D., Hand, T., & Gill, P. (2024). The 'Community of Schools and Services' (COSS) model of early intervention: A system-changing innovation for the prevention of youth homelessness. *Youth*, 4(3), Article 82. <https://doi.org/10.3390/youth4030082>
- Mission Australia. (2024). *IHSAP evaluation snapshot 2024 (Integrated Homelessness Supported Accommodation Program evaluation)*. Mission Australia. PowerPoint Presentation
- Parsell, C., Sharma, N., & Kuskoff, E. (2023). Ending homelessness through permanent supportive housing: a cost offset update. 2023-27-LCC-Working-Paper-Parsell-et-al.pdf
- Pawson, H., Parsell, C., Clarke, A., Moore, J., Hartley, C., Aminpour, F. and Eagles, K. (2024) Australian Homelessness Monitor 2024; Sydney: UNSW City Futures Research Centre. [AHM_Final_v3.pdf](#)

- Pereth, C., Jagatap, S., Baird, V., Kos, A., Di Nicola, K., & Sadler, P. (2023). *A Safe Place to Call Home: Mission Australia's Homelessness and Stable Housing Impact Report 2023*. Sydney, NSW: Mission Australia. 20d83790377511f084e4b2f076f46e3c
- Productivity Commission. (2020). *Mental health* (Report No. 95). Australian Government Productivity Commission. <https://www.pc.gov.au/inquiries-and-research/mental-health/report/>
- Productivity Commission. (2022). *Review of the National Housing and Homelessness Agreement* (Final Report). Australian Government Productivity Commission. <https://assets.pc.gov.au/inquiries/completed/housing-homelessness/report/housing-homelessness.pdf>
- Productivity Commission. (2025). *Delivering quality care more efficiently: Preventing harmful impacts* (Final Inquiry Report). Australian Government Productivity Commission. <https://assets.pc.gov.au/2025-12/quality-care.pdf>
- Roggenbuck, C. (2022). **Housing First: An evidence review of implementation, effectiveness and outcomes**. Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute. <https://www.ahuri.edu.au/research/research-papers/housing-first-an-evidence-review-of-implementation-effectiveness-and-outcomes>
- Spiller, M., & Hobbs, E. (2022). *Give Me Shelter: The long-term costs of underproviding public, social and affordable housing*. SGS Economics & Planning / Housing All Australians. https://sgsep.com.au/assets/main/SGS-Economics-and-Planning_Give-Me-Shelter.pdf
- Spinney, A., Beer, A., MacKenzie, D., McNelis, S., Meltzer, A., Muir, K., Peters, A., & Valentine, K. (2020). *Ending homelessness in Australia: A redesigned homelessness service system* (AHURI Final Report No. 347). Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute Limited. <https://www.ahuri.edu.au/research/final-reports/347>
- Taylor, H., Bartels, L., Rehill, P., Wong, G., & Liu, E. (2023). *Process evaluation of the Justice Housing Program*. Australian National University, Centre for Social Research & Methods. JHP Process Evaluation Final Report 122123
- The Foyer Foundation. (2022). *Under one roof: The social and economic impact of Youth Foyers*. Accenture Economic Insights. https://foyer.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/FoyerFoundation_UnderOneRoof_FULLReport2023.pdf
- The Front Project. (2024). *The cost of late intervention in 2024*. FINAL_4 SEPT_COLI -2024-report-e-version-FINAL.pdf
- Thredgold, C., Beer, A., Zufferey, C., Peters, A., & Spinney, A. (2019). *An effective homelessness services system for older Australians* (AHURI Final Report No. 322). Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute Limited. <https://www.ahuri.edu.au/research/final-reports/322>
- Valentine, K., Blunden, H., Zufferey, C., & Spinney, A. (2020). *Supporting families effectively through the homelessness services system* (AHURI Final Report No. 330). Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute Limited. <https://www.ahuri.edu.au/research/final-reports/330>
- Wood, L. J., & Villiers, R. C. (2024). *Leave no-one behind: reducing health disparities for women experiencing homelessness in Australia*. *Medical Journal of Australia*, 221(7), 354-

356. Leave no-one behind: reducing health disparities for women experiencing homelessness in Australia

YWCA Australia & UNSW City Futures Research Centre. (2023). *Gender, housing insecurity and homelessness in Australia: Data insights*. YWCA Australia.

https://www.ywca.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2024/09/Gender-Housing-Insecurity-and-Homelessness-in-Australia-Data-Insights_final.pdf

Zaretsky, K., & Flatau, P. (2013). The cost of homelessness and the net benefit of homelessness programs: A national study (AHURI Final Report No. 218). Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute. <https://www.ahuri.edu.au/research/final-reports/218>

Zaretsky, K., & Flatau, P. (2015). *The cost effectiveness of Australian tenancy support programs for formerly homeless people* (AHURI Final Report No. 252). Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute. <https://www.ahuri.edu.au/research/final-reports/252>