

MEDIA RELEASE
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Brain injury 13 times more common among people experiencing persistent homelessness, new data shows

Ahead of World Homeless Day (10 October), national alliance calls on governments to build a Supportive Housing system

New data released today by the Australian Alliance to End Homelessness (AAEH) shows that more than one in four people experiencing persistent homelessness live with a brain injury – more than 13 times the rate of the general population.

The previously unpublished figures, drawn from assessments of people experiencing persistent homelessness in Western Australia, also show 86% live with mental health issues compared with 22% of the general population. Rates of asthma, heart disease, diabetes and epilepsy are between two and eight times higher.¹

The data features in *Supportive Housing: The what, why and how*, a new position paper developed by an alliance of national homelessness and housing peak bodies, service providers and advocates. Launched ahead of World Homeless Day on Saturday 10 October, the paper calls on federal, state and territory governments to establish a national Supportive Housing system – a specialist type of housing offering ongoing housing combined with ongoing wraparound support – for the small but significant group of people whose needs cannot be met by conventional housing and support models.

“These figures show what persistent homelessness really looks like. This is a small group of people living with serious illness, disability and trauma, who keep cycling through emergency departments, crisis services and other government services because they don’t have access to the housing and healthcare they need,” said AAEH CEO David Pearson.

“We know how to fix this. Supportive Housing works – it keeps people housed, improves their health and saves governments money. What’s missing is a national system to deliver it at the scale it’s needed.”

Recent research from Per Capita’s Centre for Equitable Housing found that government savings from reduced health and justice costs alone are estimated at 1.44 times the cost of providing Supportive Housing – at least \$117.4 million in Perth and Bunbury and \$14.1 million in Adelaide in the first five years.²

Supportive Housing also reduces pressure on emergency departments, with presentations for people experiencing persistent homelessness reducing by 48% in the first year after being housed. People in this cohort are among the heaviest users of emergency departments, ambulances, mental health services, courts and corrections. In Perth, 412 people experiencing homelessness accounted for \$32 million in emergency presentations, ambulance arrivals and hospital stays over three years.³

Despite strong evidence and proven housing models such as Common Ground, Supportive Housing remains far too rare in Australia. Funding is usually short-term, and while housing budgets carry the cost, most of the savings flow to health and justice – so no single portfolio sees the full return.

The paper’s key recommendations call on governments to establish a nationally funded Supportive Housing system by:

- ring-fencing 15% of new social housing supply for Supportive Housing, including through the Housing Australia Future Fund (HAFF)
- developing a national Supportive Housing policy framework with shared accountability across housing, health, mental health, disability and justice sectors
- commissioning modelling of need for Supportive Housing across every state and territory
- boosting funding for existing Housing First services so support continues for as long as people need it.

The paper also marks the first time a shared definition of Supportive Housing has been developed together by a broad range of stakeholders across the housing, homelessness and health sectors. A common definition gives governments and services a clear basis to plan, fund and measure Supportive Housing consistently across the country – a foundation for any national system.

“People sleeping rough die at an average age of 46. Supportive Housing will save lives – providing people who are stuck in homelessness with urgently needed housing and support,” said Kate Colvin, CEO of Homelessness Australia.

“Supportive Housing gave me the opportunity to reintegrate into society by providing a stable home and ongoing support to maintain it. It was critical to saving my life,” said Duncan N. Bainbridge, former Supportive Housing resident and Lived Experience Advocate.

“We often talk about housing affordability and supply, but this paper reminds us that many people living in Australia face far more complex barriers. People experiencing persistent homelessness need a housing response that is integrated with health, mental health, and support services. A nationally funded Supportive Housing system would be a practical, evidence-based step towards ending persistent homelessness in Australia,” said Jackson Hills, CEO of National Shelter.

“Mission Australia’s workers see every day what happens when people experiencing persistent homelessness have access to a safe, secure home and the right support. People can remain housed, improve their wellbeing and build stability in their lives. We need greater investment in Supportive Housing to help end the cycle of homelessness for more people,” said Marion Bennett, Mission Australia Executive of Practice, Evidence & Impact.

“Homelessness is solvable, but only if the political will and investment are there. UK Prime Minister Andy Burnham has set a new benchmark for political leadership, making ending rough sleeping his first instruction in office. The Australian Government can show the same leadership, and a national Supportive Housing system is a critical part of the answer,” said Mr Pearson.

The paper is endorsed by Homelessness Australia, National Shelter, Accordwest, Anglicare WA, Centacare Family Services, Common Ground Queensland, Homelessness NSW, Housing Choices Australia, MercyCare, Micah Projects, Mission Australia, Ruah Community Services, Sacred Heart Mission, Shelter WA, Social Futures, St. Bart’s and The Salvation Army.

Read the paper: aaeh.org.au/supportive-housing-paper-2026

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David Pearson, CEO of AAEH, and Duncan N. Bainbridge, former Supportive Housing resident and Lived Experience Advocate, are available for interviews. Other spokespeople may be available by request.

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About the Australian Alliance to End Homelessness (AAEH):

The [AAEH](#) is an independent, non-partisan organisation working to prevent, reduce and end homelessness in Australia. We believe homelessness is solvable and that it requires collective, systemic action across sectors to make it happen.

We support local communities, governments and organisations to take practical action toward ending homelessness – not by managing it, but by addressing the systems that cause and sustain it. Through the Advance to Zero movement and other national initiatives, we help build a shared approach to achieving lasting change.

References

1. Health data is from [Vulnerability Index – Service Prioritisation Decision Assistance Tool \(VI-SPDAT\) assessments](#) collated by AAEH in Western Australia. Data was collected across 1,611 surveys.
2. Modelling is from Supportive Housing Needs Assessments, completed in 2025 by Per Capita's Centre for Equitable Housing. The research found that to meet current need, 1,279 Supportive Housing units are required by 2030 across metropolitan Perth and Bunbury, and 156 in inner-city Adelaide.
3. Hospital and emergency figures are from the 2022 evaluation of the 50 Lives 50 Homes program in Perth.