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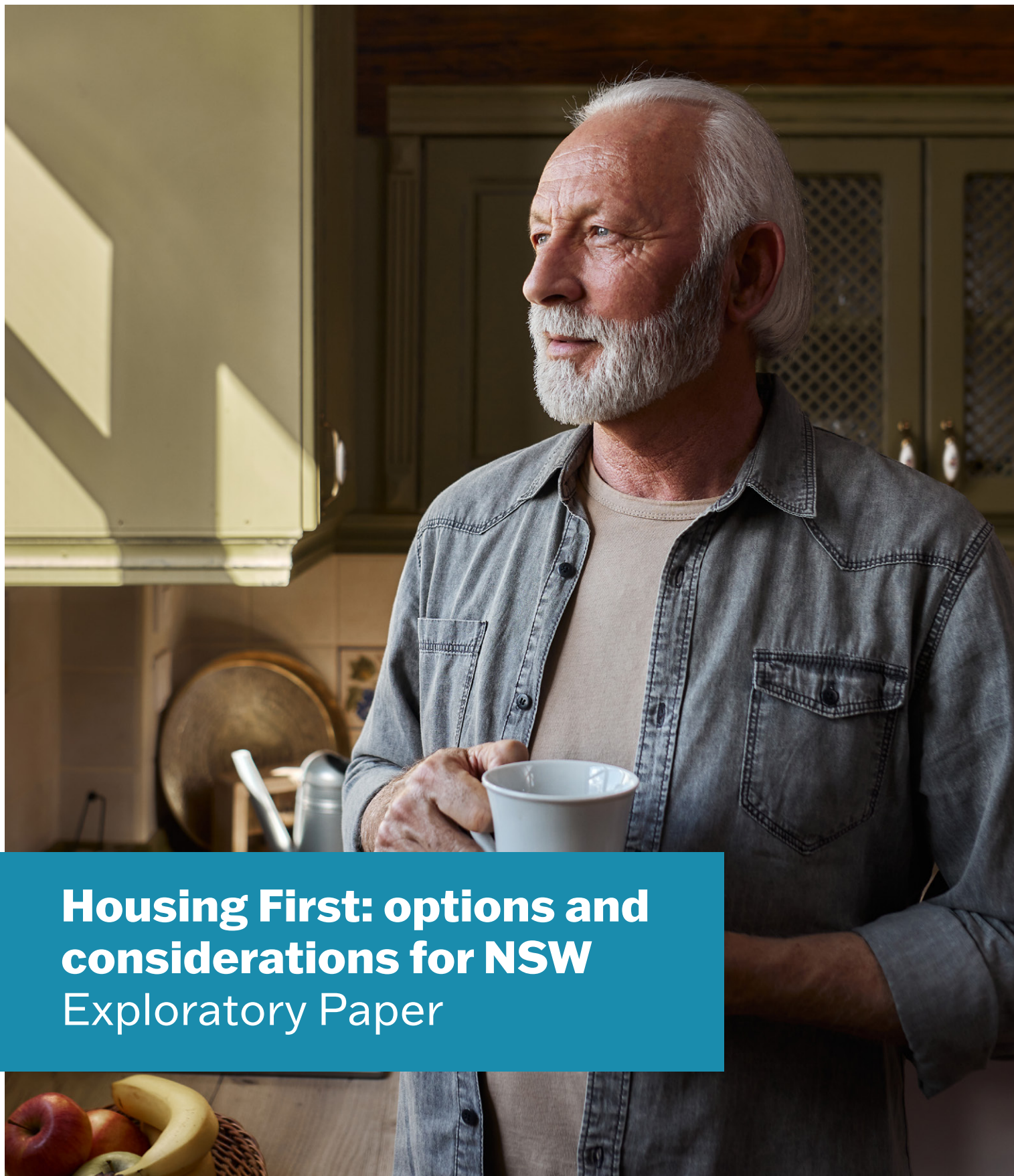
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FOR

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**Housing First: options and
considerations for NSW
Exploratory Paper**

Acknowledgement of country

AHURI acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of country throughout our nation, and we pay our respect to Elders past and present. We acknowledge Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' connections to land, sea and community, and respect their cultural, spiritual and educational practices.

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Acronyms and abbreviations used in this report

ACCO	Aboriginal Community-Controlled Organisation
AHURI	Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute Limited
BNL	By-Name List
CALD	Culturally and Linguistically Diverse
CHP	Community Housing Provider
DCJ	Department of Communities and Justice
FACSIAR	Family and Community Services Insights, Analysis and Research
H2H	Homelessness to a Home
H4F	Homes for Families
HF4Y	Housing First for Youth
KPI	Key Performance Indicator
NHHA	National Housing and Homelessness Agreement
NSW	New South Wales
SHS	Specialist Homelessness Services
Strategy	NSW Homelessness Strategy 2024-2034
THP	Together Home Program
Vic	Victoria

Executive Summary

The NSW Government is facilitating the development of a new Homelessness Strategy 2024–2034 (Strategy). It aims to make homelessness in NSW rare, brief and not repeated because people have a safe home and the support to keep it. This means shifting the NSW homelessness service system from:

- predominantly crisis responses to prevention
- service or program led responses to person-centred responses
- district led commissioning to localised planning design and delivery.

A Housing First approach will be a central pillar of the reformed service system for NSW.

The purpose of this exploratory paper is to support the development of a Housing First approach for NSW. It draws on national and international evidence on Housing First, and consultation with key stakeholders in NSW housing and homelessness sectors, including people with lived experience of homelessness (see Appendix 1 and Appendix 2).

Why Housing First?

Housing First is an internationally recognised, evidence based, person-centred approach for the delivery of housing and support for people experiencing homelessness. Housing First can be a philosophy, a programmatic approach or a whole of systems approach. In this paper Housing First is positioned as a philosophical approach as this best aligns with the desired direction of the new NSW homelessness strategy. To date, Housing First has only been embedded at a program level rather than a system level in NSW, through initiatives such as the Together Home Program. There is strong support for Housing First from the NSW homelessness sector.

Evidence shows that Housing First is highly effective in facilitating housing stability, enabling access to services, improving some non-housing outcomes (e.g. service utilisation, quality of life, and

reduction in hospitalisations), and is a cost-effective form of support for people experiencing chronic homelessness with a high complexity of need. Most evidence on Housing First is drawn from evaluations of programs that embed Housing First principles, and the effectiveness of such programs is limited by the wider systems within which they operate. Use of the Housing First philosophy to inform a systems approach to homelessness provides the opportunity to address these wider system constraints.

A Housing First approach for NSW

In alignment with the new Strategy, this paper sets out a ‘whole-of-system’ Housing First approach for NSW.

This approach involves coordinated efforts between the homelessness sector and other human service sectors and requires the reorganisation of service delivery, and policy coordination and integration around the high-level principles of Housing First.

The paper proposes the following definition of Housing First for NSW that will need to be refined and operationalised through consultation with the sector:

Housing First – An approach that prioritises and provides or maintains access to safe, appropriate and stable housing without preconditions for people experiencing or at risk of homelessness with wraparound support to maintain it for as long as required. This is delivered through an integrated person and family-centred service approach, recognising that housing is a human right.

The Housing First philosophy is built on the foundation of housing as a human right. International human rights law recognises that every person has the right to an adequate standard of living, including the right to adequate housing, noting that whether or not housing is adequate depends on a range of factors. While Australian governments have an obligation to progressively implement the right to adequate housing, it is not currently legislated in NSW. The recognition of housing as a human right, and integration of homelessness with housing and other human services systems will be required to support the whole-of-systems Housing First approach in NSW, ideally with a longer term view to formalising this rights based approach in legislation.

The following key elements have been identified for the NSW Housing First approach:



Housing

A range of housing types; housing to meet the needs of different cohorts; development of new housing; and involvement of communities and those with lived experience in design and planning of housing.
(See pages 10-12 for further details)



Workforce

Adequately skilled workforce; extension of training to the housing workforce; adequate resourcing; development of consistent service standards; expansion of peer and lived experience workforce.
(See pages 17-18 for further details)



Supports

Person-centred and individually tailored supports; supports tailored to different cohorts; increased involvement of local government in delivering and coordinating supports; localised approaches to funding and delivering services.
(See pages 13-16 for further details)



Data and targets

Collection and management of appropriate data as supported by an adequate data infrastructure.
(See page 19 for further details)

These key elements are accompanied by implications and risks for the NSW Government, Community Housing Providers and SHS sector/agencies that will need to be considered by the sector as they further refine the definition and design the Housing First approach for NSW.



1. Introduction

The NSW Government is facilitating the development of a new Homelessness Strategy 2024–2034 (Strategy). It aims to make homelessness in NSW rare, brief and not repeated because people have a safe home and the support to keep it. This means shifting the NSW homelessness service system from:

- predominantly crisis responses to prevention
- service or program led responses to person centred responses
- district led commissioning to local planning design and delivery.

An embedded 'Housing First' approach will be a central pillar of the reformed system for NSW.

The NSW Department of Communities and Justice (DCJ) engaged the Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute (AHURI) to develop this exploratory paper to support the design and implementation of a whole-of-system Housing First approach for NSW under the 10-year Strategy. The purpose of this exploratory paper is to support the development of a Housing First approach for NSW.

The paper has two parts. The first part provides a brief overview of the Housing First philosophy. The second part presents key considerations for a Housing First approach for NSW, including alignment with key principles of the Strategy, how Housing First could be operationalised in NSW, and identifies what key elements of a system approach to Housing First in NSW could be (housing, support, workforce, data and targets). It also considers the implications for government, community housing organisations and the specialist homelessness sector of transitioning to a whole-of-system Housing First approach for NSW.



2. What is Housing First and how is it defined?

Housing First is an internationally recognised, evidence based, person-centred approach for the delivery of housing and support for people experiencing homelessness. Housing First can be a philosophy, a programmatic approach of a whole of systems approach. In this paper Housing First is positioned as a philosophical approach as this best aligns with the desired direction the new NSW homelessness strategy. Housing First was founded in the notion of housing as a human right. Housing First offers people with high and complex needs experiencing homelessness immediate access to permanent housing and voluntary wrap around support with no preconditions.¹ Housing First contrasts with continuum or staircase approaches that require people to demonstrate housing readiness (e.g. continuum of care and linear residential housing models) before being accommodated in permanent and independent housing.²

The Housing First philosophy or approach can be understood in the context of both programs and service systems. At a programmatic level, Housing First is operationalised as a service delivery model or set of activities provided by an agency or organisation that are designed and/or delivered in line with the Housing First principles. At the systems level, the application of the Housing First philosophy can range from principles embedded at a local system level to provide integrated responses, to a service system response where secure housing and choice over one's housing and use of support services are acknowledged as a human right which drives action across the broader human service system.³

Figure 1: Different approaches to implementing Housing First

Programmatic approach

- Housing First as a set of principles embedded in a specific program model of housing and wrap around supports guided by consumer choice.
- Adaptations of Housing First programs to meet the needs of different cohorts whilst aligning to Housing First principles.

Singular system approach

- Individual organisations providing Housing First coordinate into a single system at a local level with centralised intake, and data management systems.

Whole-of-system approach

- The homelessness sector and other public systems/human services (health, child protection, justice, welfare, housing) reorganise service delivery, policy coordination and integration around high-level principles of Housing First.

Note – mandating the participation of human service agencies to support Housing First and prevention activities has been shown to be most effective in removing the structural challenges that undermine a Housing First approach.

Note: The original typology of Housing First approaches refers to a 'multiple systems approach' rather than a whole-of-system approach. For clarity, and to align with terminology being used in NSW, the term whole-of-system approach is used in replacement of a multiple systems approach.

Source: authors as adapted from Gaetz and Buchnea (2023)⁴

Figure 1 demonstrates the key approaches to implementing Housing First. To date Housing First has only been embedded at a program level rather than a system level in NSW, through initiatives such as the Together Home Program (THP). Approaches in Canada and the United States (US) reflect the singular system approach, and evidence on its ability to reduce overall levels of homelessness or to 'end' homelessness has been slim. Challenges in the Canadian and US policy approaches include a lack of focus on prevention within the homelessness system and lack of effort across multiple systems to support people's housing rights, with the exception of the response to veteran homelessness in the US which saw a 50 per cent reduction between 2010 and 2020 due to increased investment and systems integration within US Veterans Affairs. The Housing First approach in Finland developed independently from the Pathways Housing First model in the US. The Finnish Housing First approach has been successful and is the only one that has demonstrably reduced homelessness.⁴ It is characterised by a different social welfare system around which the Housing First response was designed, the Housing First model is based on understanding homelessness extensively and is not restricted to those sleeping rough, and residents access support via services that already exist for the wider population. However, the approach has not been replicated elsewhere.⁵

Homelessness Australia, the national peak body for homelessness, has developed eight Housing First principles to provide a level of consistency across Housing First programs in Australia (see Appendix 3).⁶ This programmatic approach to principles contrasts with Finland which outlines only four higher-level principles to guide their Housing First approach:

1. housing enables independent lives
2. respect of choice
3. rehabilitation and empowerment of the resident
4. integration into the community and society.⁷

2.1 What is Rapid Rehousing?

Rapid rehousing is a component of a Housing First system response. Rapid rehousing aims to identify people as soon as they become homeless and respond quickly to stabilise their housing situation to prevent the accumulation of disadvantage. Core components include housing identification, rent and move-in assistance, case management and services. Rapid rehousing interventions are time-limited (three to six months). Rapid rehousing focuses on exiting families and individuals from temporary accommodation into permanent housing quickly. Rapid rehousing is promoted by some practitioners as being similar to Housing First but with individuals or families experiencing episodic or transitional homelessness as the target group.⁸

2.2 Who can benefit from Housing First?

Housing First programs have been historically targeted at those with a long term and recurring experience of homelessness (e.g. people experiencing rough sleeping) but are increasingly used for other cohorts (e.g. women and young people).⁹

Whilst pathways into homelessness are complex and varied, there are often common needs within cohorts. This means that Housing First responses tailored to specific cohorts are required. Emerging Housing First responses have targeted cohort needs include those for Aboriginal people, young people, women and families.

In following the Housing First philosophy, the NSW whole-of-system approach will apply to all those at risk of, or experiencing homelessness and realise the right to housing, rather than targeting only rough sleepers, those experiencing chronic homelessness and those with multiple and complex needs. A successful Housing First approach for NSW will need to consider tailored responses for different cohorts that are particularly at risk of homelessness such as women and children experiencing family and domestic violence, Aboriginal people and young people.

2.3 What does the evidence tell us about the effectiveness of Housing First?

The evidence shows that Housing First is highly effective in facilitating housing stability, enabling access to services, improving some non-housing outcomes, and is a cost effective form of support for people experiencing chronic homelessness with a high complexity of need.¹⁰ Though most evidence is based on programs targeted towards chronic homelessness, emerging programs and evidence show effectiveness for other cohorts.¹¹ The effectiveness of Housing First programs is attributed to the provision of housing, length of support and intensity of support which provides stability for those experiencing homelessness to address other support needs.

Though Housing First programs can be effective in a range of different system contexts, time-limited Housing First programs leave clients vulnerable to repeat homelessness by requiring them to navigate and re-enter the broader housing and homelessness systems.¹² Additionally, exclusively resourcing Housing First programmatic responses (in the absence of preventative measures) has shown to be ineffective in 'ending homelessness' or reaching functional zero. The literature identifies the need for major public systems to be required or mandated to participate in addressing homelessness through supporting Housing First and the prevention of homelessness to ensure interventions can be taken to scale.⁴

2.4 Why do we need a NSW-specific Housing First approach?

The effectiveness of Housing First programs depends on sufficient housing and service supports that can be accessed within the wider system.¹³ Finland is unique in its system-wide Housing First response and is the only country evidenced to have reduced homelessness. Finland's experience supports the rationale for NSW taking a Housing First whole-of-systems approach.¹⁰ In Finland, Housing First takes advantage of the high standard of social and health services, and clients access services available to everyone else. This is in contrast to a multi-disciplinary professional group being put together around a client as is prevalent in Australia.

As the limitations of programmatic responses and the success of the approach in Finland show, addressing homelessness requires broad system reform where Housing First programs are not merely provided as an addendum to existing systems that are struggling to address homelessness. The implementation of a Housing First systems approach in NSW is outlined in section 3.

If an end to homelessness is merely understood as optimising our ability to use Housing First to rectify failures of other systems to keep people housed, we would fall short of fully realising people's social and economic rights. (Gaetz and Buchnea 2023:86)

2.5 How should we define Housing First for NSW?

The new Strategy will require a clear and operationalisable definition for a whole-of-system Housing First approach for NSW – a point that was also emphasised by the stakeholders consulted for this paper. Consistent with the literature, stakeholders also emphasised the importance of designing a Housing First approach to suit the NSW context, rather than unquestioningly adopting an overseas model.¹⁴ For the purposes of this paper, the following definition of Housing First is proposed as a working definition to guide future planning and design with the sector:

Housing First – An approach that prioritises and provides or maintains access to safe, appropriate and stable housing without preconditions for people experiencing or at risk of homelessness with wraparound support to maintain it for as long as required. This is delivered through an integrated person and family-centred service approach, recognising that housing is a human right.

The proposed definition captures the core components of the Housing First philosophy rather than defining various principles as typically applied to Housing First programs.

Section 3 of this paper provides an approach for further refining and operationalising this definition with the sector in NSW.

3. Considerations for a Housing First Approach in NSW

A whole-of-system Housing First approach needs to be **defined** and **operationalised** in NSW

Definition: An approach that prioritises and maintains access to safe, appropriate, and stable housing without preconditions for people experiencing or at risk of homelessness with wraparound support to maintain it for as long as required. This is delivered through an integrated, person and family-centred service approach, recognising that housing is a human right.

“...here we are thinking it's not our human right.
(StreetCare consultation)

Action: Consult with the sector to refine the proposed definition and undertake a process to develop and implement an approach to Housing First in NSW. Implementation of the approach will need to include assessment of how existing policies and programs do and do not align with the Housing First approach to determine changes required. The Housing First assessment and implications matrix may be useful for understandings, and aligning practice to the new definition and approach in NSW (see Appendix 4).

Homelessness needs to be **integrated** with the broader housing and human services systems

Whilst integration of homelessness and housing at the policy and department level is already in progress, homelessness responses should also be integrated with the wider human services system to enable a Housing First systems approach in NSW; the literature identifies the need to mandate the involvement of such systems in solutions to homelessness.⁴ Cross sector service integration is required because homelessness is driven by and intersects with a range of issues that are within

the remit of different human services agencies and sectors (income support, housing, health, employment, education and justice).

Formalising a **rights based approach** will anchor policy and ensure commitment from government

Formal acknowledgement of housing as a human right is a way to anchor policy and deliver commitment by government. Hardwiring prevention into the Strategy can be achieved through legislating 'the right to housing' or a 'Duty to Assist'. A Duty to Assist creates a statutory obligation for local authorities to make reasonable efforts to end a person's homelessness or stabilise them in permanent housing.¹⁵ Governments in Wales, England and Scotland have implemented a duty to assist – in Wales this has successfully reduced homelessness.¹⁵

“...having to jump through hoops to keep a home when it should be a basic human right...
(StreetCare consultation)

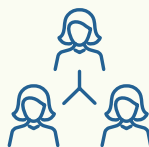
Housing as a human right

While the Australian Government has legislated to resource an Australian Human Rights Commission and parliamentary scrutiny of all federal legislation around existing rights, Australia has no human rights legislation or charter which explicitly codifies and protects human rights, including in relation to housing, and provide for remedies when human rights are breached.¹⁶

Key elements of the Housing First approach



Housing: a range of housing types; housing that meets the needs of different cohorts; development of new housing; involvement of communities and those with lived experience in design and planning of housing.



Workforce: adequately skilled workforce; extension of training to housing workforce; adequate resourcing; development of consistent service standards; expansion of peer and lived experience workforce.



Supports: person-centred and individually tailored supports; supports tailored to different cohorts; increased involvement of local government in delivering and coordinating supports; localised approaches to funding and delivering services.



Data and targets: collection and management of appropriate data that is supported by adequate data infrastructure.

Alignment of Housing First with the principles in the new Strategy

Prevention

A whole-of-system Housing First approach is both: a form of tertiary prevention where the aim is to prevent homelessness from occurring again for those with recurrent experiences of homelessness; and a form of secondary prevention where those who are at risk of homelessness or recently experiencing homelessness are quickly supported into stable permanent accommodation. A whole-of-system approach then aligns with homelessness being rare as it is prevented in the first place for those who are considered 'at-risk', 'brief' as it quickly supports those experiencing homelessness, and 'non-recurring' as it prevents repeat episodes for those experiencing homelessness.

Person and family-centred system

Operationalisation of a whole-of-system Housing First approach requires the provision of housing and supports based on the needs of individuals and families. A person and family-centred system as targeted towards both those at risk of and experiencing homelessness works to make homelessness rare, brief and non-recurrent.

Localised approach to service planning design and delivery

A whole-of-system Housing First approach needs to be supported by local service systems that have a shared vision and strong commitment to outcomes. This requires strong collaboration, partnerships and governance at the local level.

3.1 Housing considerations for a whole-of-system Housing First approach for NSW

3.1.1 A range of housing options

A whole-of-system Housing First approach for NSW needs to deliver a range of housing options to effectively meet the needs and preferences of different individuals and cohorts. Housing options might include public housing, community housing, spot purchasing, head leasing, permanent supportive housing, and congregate housing. The aim would be to reduce reliance on emergency and crisis accommodation over time as more permanent housing options are delivered. The current lack of housing requires a long-term strategy and plan with intermittent goals, and a government strategy for capital investment in housing to be addressed. Use of head leasing in markets of sufficient size and vacancy, and spot purchasing offer a more immediate avenue through which additional housing stock can be acquired.

3.1.2 Additional housing

Developing appropriate housing stock to support a whole-of-system Housing First approach will require building on the capacity of the community housing sector to deliver housing at scale (e.g. additional and continued investment through the Community Housing Innovation Fund (CHIF), Housing Australia, and the Housing Affordability Fund (HAF)) – as well as continued government investment in new social housing. Partnerships between state government, large not-for-profit organisations, charities and local governments to develop land for social housing can create additional avenues to increase housing stock.

“The type of housing we build and location of it is important. If we don't look at who is going to be using those properties, if we don't think about what they need and involve them in the design and planning of them then we will replicate systemic discrimination that is happening in the homelessness system right now.”
(Stakeholder consultation)

Consultations highlighted the importance of developing housing stock that is sustainable. Involving tenants, those with lived experience of homelessness, and Aboriginal communities in planning and design will ensure that social housing meets their needs.

Making sure that it [the system] is client centred ... because if you meet the clients' needs they're more likely to stay in the house that they're at.
(StreetCare consultation)

A range of housing options

Clients who have limited independent living skills and who are living with a range of complexities are not well suited to living in head leased properties and have more success sustaining tenancies in social housing or supported housing. Cohorts, such as women fleeing domestic and family violence may have particular requirements around safety, but may have lower support needs. Subsequently, large blocks of flats that have a mix of single mothers and young men with mental health issues are not safe.

Table 1: Housing options and key considerations for implementation as part of a Housing First systems approach

Housing type, target group, description and example	Opportunities	Risks
<p>Public housing</p> <p>People on low incomes and/or those in selected equity groups that meet eligibility criteria.</p> <p>Housing (owned or leased) that is managed by government directly.¹⁷</p>	<p>Provides a safety net of secure long term housing for those with high and complex needs who struggle to sustain other tenancies.</p> <p>Additional public housing will deliver new tangible public assets that will enhance NSW residents' social and economic wellbeing and will provide secure affordable shelter.</p>	<p>Insufficient supply of appropriate and fit-for-purpose public housing in NSW and nationally. A large percentage of public housing is ageing and is costly to maintain.</p> <p>The risks to government are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • long timelines to increase public housing stock to meet the additional demand created by a system wide Housing First approach • high cost of direct capital investment.
<p>Community housing</p> <p>People on low incomes and/or those in selected equity groups that meet eligibility criteria.</p> <p>Housing that is managed, or owned and managed, by CHPs. Access and rent are determined on tenant income and sometimes other eligibility criteria.</p> <p>CHPs delivering the THP are successfully delivering Housing First.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CHPs are well positioned to deliver additional social housing, and many are already doing so. • Modelling shows direct capital investment (capital grant funding) in social housing as the most economical way to develop new social housing. Debt based approaches have a lower impact on public expenditure only in the short term and will increase to a size commensurate with a capital investment approach over time¹⁸. • Produces tangible assets which can deliver key societal objectives— economic productivity, social wellbeing and environmental sustainability • Many NSW CHPs already deliver housing as well as support services (either in-house or by contracting support services). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Concentration of very low-income tenants may put financial viability of CHPs at risk. • Not all CHPs have the capacity to work with complex high needs tenants and would need to build the skills and capacity to do so. • Some CHPs are primarily housing providers and would need to develop the capacity to provide in-house support or partner with external support providers.
<p>Head leasing</p> <p>People who are approved for and unable to access social housing due to excess demand, unsuitable stock or urgent need.</p> <p>Private rental housing that is rented from the landlord/ owner by a legal entity (e.g., CHP) or a government agency.</p> <p>The Together Home Program (NSW), and Homelessness to a Home program (Vic), CHLP (NSW).</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can flexibly deliver a range of dwelling types and in a range of locations. • Has good potential to deliver additional social housing in locations where there are private rental markets of sufficient size and vacancy rates. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not effective in small rental markets that have low vacancy rates. • Does not deliver the same level of housing stability as social housing. • Not suited to all cohorts (e.g. those with limited living skills, those with high and complex needs). • Reputational risk to Government (or CHPs where relevant) as renters can create property damage and disturbances due to behavioural issues. • Creates competition between headlease programs and other low-income private renters.
<p>Spot purchasing</p> <p>Government purchasing of properties from the private market for use as social housing to be managed by a community housing organisation.</p> <p>Homelessness to a Home program (Vic)</p>	<p>*As above, in addition to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Secure form of accommodation for tenants. • Flexibly deliver a range of dwelling types in a range of locations in housing markets with a low vacancy rate. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Costly solution that does not increase overall housing supply, creates competition with other home buyers.

Housing type, target group, description and example	Opportunities	Risks
<p>Long term lease</p> <p>Government long-term lease of commercial properties (e.g. hotels) to provide crisis accommodation.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can flexibly deliver accommodation in a range of locations. • Delivers housing supply quickly. • Opportunities to save costs and increase the appropriateness and quality in the provision of crisis accommodation. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not suited to all cohorts. • Requires the correct client mix to be a safe and appropriate accommodation option. • Does not provide long-term housing options and success is contingent on delivery of pathways to long-term housing to comply with Housing First approach and end homelessness.
<p>Permanent supportive housing (PSH)</p> <p>People at risk of experiencing homelessness who require ongoing support (e.g. have complex needs, have experience chronic homelessness)</p> <p>Affordable housing with intensive tenancy management designed to support tenancy sustainment, that is integrated with health and social support services, including tailored case management; it can be single site or scattered housing.¹⁹</p> <p>Common Ground²⁰ is a supportive housing model that accommodates people experiencing chronic homelessness with complex needs in a congregate setting.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Suited to address the needs of cohorts who require ongoing support. • Opportunities to develop effective models for different cohorts, e.g. severe mental illness; psychosocial supports; youth. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Costly to provide. • Limited evidence on positive impact of PSH on psychiatric symptoms, substance use and employment.¹⁴
<p>Congregate housing</p> <p>Different models cater to different target groups (e.g., survivors of DFV, young people, those recovering from substance misuse).</p> <p>Multi-unit housing with shared communal facilities designed to cater for support needs of residents. Support services are provided on site²¹ – it is usually transitional housing.</p> <p>Common Ground models, Youth Foyers, Ozanam House (Vic).</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Suited to address the needs of cohorts who do not require ongoing support. • Varying models exist to meet the needs of specific cohorts, such as young people or women. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • People may remain in congregate housing for longer than anticipated due to the lack of long term independent housing options. • Some people may not be suited to congregate housing due to the complexity of their needs or behavioural issues. • Can be expensive to provide. • Requires the right mix of tenants.

Housing type, target group, description and example	Opportunities	Risks
<p>Housing for young people</p> <p>Young people (<24 years of age) who are homeless or at risk of homelessness.</p> <p>Housing specifically provided to cater to the age related needs of young people; most do not require permanent housing.²²</p> <p>Youth Foyer is an integrated service model that provides transitional housing for young people (primarily under the age of 24) with support, emphasising education, employment and training.²³</p> <p>Housing First for young people²⁵ Youth Housing Initiative (YHI) - MCM²⁴</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Early intervention and prevention of homelessness. • Avoided costs to government by diverting young people from homelessness and fostering their independence. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Requirements around commitment to education/ training/ employment may exclude some youth. • Requires integration with the child protection system, schools and other education providers, as well as health, mental health, addiction and other services.
<p>Aboriginal Housing First models</p> <p>Aboriginal people experiencing long-term homelessness</p> <p>Housing First models modified to meet the needs of Aboriginal people characterised by: localised approaches, relationships and partnership with local communities, Aboriginal understandings and practices around home, utilisation of Aboriginal concepts of wellbeing to provide Aboriginal focused support.</p> <p>Boorloo Bidee Mia (WA), THP Aboriginal-led model (NSW)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Considerable opportunity to harness the capacity and knowledge of ACCOs and the Aboriginal housing sector to develop and implement culturally appropriate Housing First models. • Considerable opportunity to empower and recognise the skills and capacity of Aboriginal organisations in NSW. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Similar to CHPs, some ACCOs and Aboriginal housing providers need to develop their capacity to deliver Housing First. • Will take time to develop and implement as each iteration is likely to be unique to local communities and their needs.
<p>Housing First for women</p> <p>Women and women with dependent children</p> <p>Housing First models that integrate gender specific dimensions of homelessness and acknowledge the different pathways into homelessness and specific needs for women compared to men (e.g., histories of violence, trauma and abuse, caring for children).</p> <p>Homes for Families (Vic) takes a family centred approach with a strong focus on safety and family reconnection.</p> <p>Women's Housing Company highlights that women only blocks for older women work well and are cost effective.</p> <p>For international examples see FEANSTA (2022).³⁷</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create greater equity within the homelessness system by developing responses that match the pathways and needs of homeless women. • Intervene early in child homelessness. • Upskill the SHS workforce with training in domestic abuse and sexual violence support and complex trauma-informed care. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Need to develop capacity with the SHS and social housing sectors to develop the needed skills.

3.2 Support service considerations for a whole-of-system Housing First approach for NSW

To be consistent with and support the whole-of-system Housing First approach for NSW, support services need to be enduring and person-centered. Providing support alongside permanent housing enables tenancy sustainment. Continuity of support is important for building client trust with workers and reducing distrust in the service system.

The system needs to deliver the supports that people require (including services to meet cohort specific needs) and reduce barriers to accessing support. Housing provision should not be contingent on clients' engagement with support services, nor should support service eligibility be dependent on the type of housing occupied.

Case management and case coordination are key instruments to delivering a person-centered approach.

Service system design needs to be localised, collaborative, flexible, and integrated with the wider human services system.

Additional funding is required to increase both access points to support services and workforce capacity.

Funding is required for person-centered and localised approaches.

Because service system design centers on collaboration and partnerships between different services and sectors at a local level, guidance and funding are required to support partnership establishment and maintenance.

“*Man: ... when I first moved into my accommodation, after spending 20 years on the streets and going inside, I wasn't used to it. I'd sleep on the floor for the first six months so I felt comfortable. Interviewer: Did you have someone who came in and helped you? Man: No, I just stayed there. Forced myself to stay there, but it took me an easy 12 months to feel comfortable there. It was a big struggle actually to stay there after so long on the streets.*

(StreetCare consultation)

Service principles to inform the provision of support services include person-centered, recovery oriented, trauma informed approaches where participation in support is voluntary.

SHS already provide good support services, however some limitations include:

- a one size fits all model
- inadequate levels of funding for support
- a funding structure that provides time limited support
- limited workforce capacity (see section 3.1.3 for further information)
- the need for integration across the wider housing system.

The whole-of-system Housing First approach in NSW will address many of the current limitations.

3.2.1 Service system design

The following elements are key to service system design.

Localised approach – local service providers assist in developing and implementing service design for a whole-of-system Housing First approach.

Collaborative/partnerships – supports are designed and delivered as a collaboration between government, local government, community organisations (including Aboriginal organisations), and local communities.

Integration with wider human services system – both the localised and partnerships elements of the service system involve agencies across the human services sector to improve access to services and prevent exits into homelessness from institutional settings.

We need to also talk about the services provided by other parts of government. Mental health and health is a big block in NSW and a big frustration in NSW. They [SHS] can't get services linked to clients at the right time. To support a move to Housing First, we need to work on that nexus between homelessness and mental health support, yes it's resources, but it's critical to a homelessness strategy moving forward. (Stakeholder consultation)

Flexible – access to support and services is not contingent on the client's housing tenure or homelessness status and supports can be scaled up and down according to individual need.

Non-conditional – services and supports do not have eligibility requirements that exclude people from assistance.

3.2.2 Service principles

Supports take a person-centered approach with specific responses available to meet the needs of different cohorts. Support provision should include a range of individually tailored supports that can be scaled up and down. There are clear standards and expectations around the level and type of support provided. Whilst the following service principles are already utilised within current service provision by some providers, these need to be applied to all services.

Person-centered approaches place the client at the centre and determine the service response by considering the individual's circumstances and needs. Person centred approaches can be extended to work with the individuals' family and friendship network (a common approach in working with Aboriginal clients).

Key instruments to achieve a person-centered approach are case management and case coordination. Under case management, a practitioner/case manager provides individualised intensive support for clients who have high needs, working alongside an individual to identify their goals and service needs. Within an effective Housing First approach, individuals/families identified as having high needs should be able to access case management support. Once less direct involvement from a case manager is needed, or a client presents with moderate needs, case coordination assists clients by arranging and coordinating access to the range of required supports.

Separation of support services and housing means that housing and support are provided independently of one another, ideally by separate organisations. The rationale for this is that if there is a breakdown in housing, this will not affect the client's ability to access services and vice versa.

Recovery oriented means that the service system is oriented towards a positive approach that emphasises and builds on people's strengths. Recovery oriented practices aim to build hope, social inclusion, goal-setting and self-management.

Trauma informed approaches recognise the impact of trauma and commit to 'do no harm'. A trauma informed service system is holistic, strengths-focused and collaborative to acknowledge and work with individuals.

...and just having to retell your story time and time again is not very – for me it just re-traumatised me and set me up to fail again (StreetCare consultation)

Voluntary (choice of individual) means that the decision to engage with support services is at the discretion of the client and/or their family.

Supports to meet the needs of different cohorts

Supporting Aboriginal people

Distinctive spatial, social and spiritual aspects of home for First Nations populations points to the need to address the cultural needs of Aboriginal people in order to fulfil principles of person-centred, trauma informed and recovery-oriented practice.²⁵ This may include (re-) establishing connections to Country and kinship and supporting cultural healing.

Literature available on First Nations-specific Housing First models of provision from Australia, Canada and Aotearoa New Zealand highlights that 'standard' Housing First approaches may not be appropriate for Aboriginal people and identifies key principles identified as underpinning Housing First responses for Aboriginal people:

- localised approaches
- provided by Aboriginal people
- relationships and partnership with local communities
- embedded with Aboriginal understandings of and practices around home
- utilise Aboriginal concepts of wellbeing to provide Aboriginal focused support.

In addition to these principles, self-determination and responsive services were enabled by strong Aboriginal leadership and governance, buy-in from local communities, and communities having a say in what the provision of Housing First looks like. Successful approaches were enabled by secure long-term income streams.

Together Home Program Aboriginal-led model

The Aboriginal-led model of the Together Home Program (THP) is a NSW example of a successful Housing First model that is informed by cultural principles and led by the ACCO *Yerin Eleanor Duncan Aboriginal Health Service* (Yerin) in the Central Coast area. Positioning the ACCO as the lead has two key benefits: it prioritises a culturally safe operational framework and it has helped to build the capacity of the ACCO.²⁶ Yerin employs a transdisciplinary model of care, where the client has direct input into driving the direction of supports to meet their needs.

The model is a three way partnership between DCJ, Yerin and the CHP, Home in Place. According to Yerin, the relationship with DCJ is positive, and as the lead agency, Yerin self-determined ways of operating that best fits their model and organisation (transdisciplinary model). This empowered Yerin to establish a culturally safe operational framework from the very beginning. Yerin identified that a strength of their organisation is that they had staff with a broad range of skills and experiences. Yerin emphasises the importance of peer connections and strives to provide these, even when it was beyond that program team's immediate reach. This means that in almost all instances there is a person to whom clients could relate to on a personal level. Importantly, the model put clients' voice first and foremost and clients are involved in decisions about their services and housing. The approach taken is to understand clients and their needs within the context of their families, friends and connections (a group model, rather than an individualistic model).

Supporting young people

Effective responses for young people include approaches that are person and family centred, that address the needs for practical, emotional, and social support regardless of a young person's housing situation.²⁷ Collaborative, local approaches are also effective for young people experiencing homelessness. These involve multi-disciplinary services that connect programs and organisations as part of a network at a local area level. An example of this is the Coalition of Schools and Services model which is a localised or 'place-based' model for supporting vulnerable young people and families to reduce disengagement from education and early school leaving, and to help where family issues are heading towards a crisis and possible homelessness—as well as other adverse outcomes.²⁸

Housing First for youth models, such as HF4Y as developed by Stephen Gaetz in Canada, provide another example of supports to meet the specific needs of youth. H4FY aims to facilitate independence and enable the transition into adulthood. HF4Y is a rapid re-housing option for young people who are homeless. It is distinct from Youth Foyers in that HF4Y prioritises housing, whereas foyers require commitment to education, training or employment.²⁹

When I was in the Youth Foyer, they shove those skills [living skills] down your throat. It was summer school and we weren't studying... so we had to do living skills or employment courses. We had to do something to maintain our tenancy. All young people were treated as if they didn't know how to maintain a home and that there were something wrong with them from that. (StreetCare consultation)

Supporting women and families

To meet the specific needs of women experiencing homelessness, a whole-of-system Housing First approach in NSW needs to support women in accommodation where women feel safe, and if applicable, provide women with space to live with their family. Inclusion and availability of specialist and gender responsive services, as well as training workers in domestic abuse and sexual violence support will be required as well as working with protection systems for victims of gender violence as well as the childcare system. While a much smaller and under-researched cohort, the needs of single fathers must also be addressed.²⁹

Housing For Families

The Housing for Families (H4F) program in Victoria demonstrates that Housing First approaches can be effective responses for families experiencing homelessness such as women with children who are experiencing homelessness due to domestic violence. H4F takes a family centred (rather than individualised) approach to housing and support and has a strong focus of safety and family reconnection. H4F incorporates wrap-around supports and models of care across the health, child protection, human and justice service systems to meet the needs of a family unit.³⁰ Key to the provision of a Housing First model for families, as evidenced by the H4F program is the inclusion and central role of family service providers.

Supporting LGBTQIA+ and gender diverse people

The evidence demonstrates that LGBTQIA+ and gender diverse people experiencing homelessness have heightened risk factors around stigma and discrimination, barriers and invisibility, and specific needs around safety and health. Addressing this requires intersectional approaches in service delivery and training and specialised responses in the SHS sector.³¹

3.3 Workforce considerations for a whole-of-system Housing First approach for NSW

It baffles me that there are people who have chosen to work in that field of housing people, yet they lack practical skills of referring. They cannot identify co-dependency, addiction, mental health. The way that they treat people who front up to the office is just deplorable. There's no excuse for it

(StreetCare consultation)

A system approach to Housing First in NSW will need to be supported by an adequately skilled workforce. This includes the ability to work with increasingly complex clients, and capability to deliver the support approach outlined in section 3.2. It will also be necessary to train housing workers in the skills needed to work with and sustain the tenancies of clients who are living with complex needs (e.g. trauma informed approaches) – skills which are not currently considered to be within their remit.

I would like to ring up, just once in my life, ring up and ask to speak to my client service officer and them ring me back. Or return my emails.

(StreetCare consultation)

The evidence shows that at present, SHS workers have heavy workloads, face taxing emotional demands, but are not well remunerated and have low job security.³² The sector struggles to attract, develop and retain an effective workforce; while formal pathways into the sector exist, they are not mandatory.³³ While staff in the homelessness sector work with clients experiencing very high degrees of complexity, staffing structures and resourcing are not designed accordingly. Lack of adequate resourcing is the root cause of many issues relating to staff retention, training, vicarious trauma and skills within the sector.

I'm preaching to the converted here with you guys, but just the whole lived experience thing really needs to be embedded in policy and government, and the public service and all that sort of stuff. (StreetCare consultation)

There is an opportunity to increase the role of the local government workforce in the delivery and coordination of homelessness support. Many local government workers are already actively involved in the homelessness space, for example by undertaking street counts of the homeless population, BNL and commitments to Functional Zero. Local governments also have the capacity to develop social and affordable housing, and to influence the development of social and affordable housing through their planning levers.

“Resourcing issues are the root cause of limited training, poor staff retention, vicarious trauma, and the skill levels of workforce. All of these things are related. We need proper resourcing for the sector who has to do some of the hardest work. Complexity in health is studied to a T and supported in guidelines and by a complex staffing structure, but in the homelessness system, the resourcing is paper thin for high complexity and I think it's a deep systemic problem.

(Stakeholder consultation)

“... sometimes I can talk well, so I present and they go, “No, you're fine.” I was told before by one service that I'm just an ordinary middle aged man having a midlife crisis. That was a few days after I tried to take my life. And that was a housing service. These kind of things are very, very dangerous.

(StreetCare consultation)

3.3.1 Implications for workforce development

Aligning the SHS and social housing workforce with the needs of a Housing First informed system has a range of implications, which are set out below.

- Adequately resourced homelessness services: longer funding timeframes; dedicated funding for training; funding for Aboriginal, CALD and peer workforce development; localised funding to recognise local differences.
- Training and development: broaden access to Homelessness NSW training to those SHS not funded under the NHHA; for housing workers, develop and implement training that aligns with Housing First support principles; ensure workers have time and support to attend training and professional development.
- Attract and retain a highly skilled workforce: increase awareness of the sector; recruit strategically to attract high quality workers (skilled and qualified); develop career progression pathways that are supported by funding and training; increase job security and wages (longer funding timeframes and pay aligned with other government sectors); deliver targeted training to upskill the existing workforce in the needed skills (trauma informed, person-centered, harm reduction, recovery oriented etc.).

I [was] treated like a number, and I have been disrespected.. (StreetCare consultation)

- Develop and expand the lived experience and peer workforce: lived experience and peer workers can relate to clients on a personal level; many SHS workers are motivated by their own experiences and the desire to help.
- Develop consistent service standards across the sector: adopt a workforce capability framework that sets out and describes the different levels, roles, skills and capabilities required, including staffing structure and caseloads that are aligned with complexity of need ; develop standards (similar to the health system) to ensure people who seek support and assistance can be clear about what to expect.

A caseload of 30, that should stop. That's where you get people saying that they can't live in the community. We need appropriate support services otherwise tenancies will be at risk. We need realistic allocation of caseloads for those working with Homeless or those at risk of homelessness and we need to put a threshold on number of workers in organisation. (Stakeholder consultation)

Land and Housing Corporation Cadetship Program

StreetCare participants and Stakeholders pointed to the success of the cadetship program funded by the Land and Housing Corporation (LAHC). Each year, until 2024, the program provides 25 cadetships with paid employment and training across the areas of application, allocation, tenancy management and property management and 12 months of paid employment plus study for the CHC42221 Certificate IV in Housing. The Cadetship Program is for residents of NSW who are social housing tenants and clients aged 25 years or older and unemployed and aged 21 years or older. The program has shown high completion rates and is a mechanism to build a social housing workforce with peer experience. It could serve as a model for the SHS sector.

There is a need for agreed standards of what someone who comes to us for support can expect. It's inconsistent at the moment, too many services with inconsistent triage processes and opening times. The Australian Service Excellence Standards for SHS – worth thinking about what are the standards, what is the experience of people and what should they expect? It happens in health, we have timeframes and expectations. Everywhere you work and having a dedicated trainer to support staff – we can look to that model for homelessness...currently there is the view that SHS meant to achieve ASES by 2015 but don't have resources to do it. (Stakeholder consultation)

“I've had support, it's not the right kind of support sometimes because it hasn't had the lived experience led – it's not designed by lived experience or co-designed or implemented by lived experience. It's somebody saying, “This is what best practice is. (StreetCare consultation)

3.4 Considerations around data and targets to support a whole-of-system Housing First approach for NSW

Appropriate data and data infrastructure is required to support a system wide Housing First approach for NSW. This will enable:

- **tracking of targets and KPIs across areas of housing, support and workforce**
- **tracking of clients' service usage across the human services system.**

The NSW Government has a central role in driving data requirements and providing the data infrastructure to support organisations to meet data requirements.

Collection and management of appropriate data as supported by adequate data infrastructure is required to support the Strategy and implementation of a whole-of-system Housing First approach. To be successful and to track progress, the Strategy will need to set targets and KPIs for the measurement of those targets across all key elements of the Housing First approach (housing, support, workforce).

In addition to supporting the Strategy, data systems can facilitate a better understanding of the impact specific interventions and services have on client outcomes, enable tracking of clients' service use and supports received, and can assist in identifying critical intervention points. The development of data systems that enable the tracking of client journey through the human services sectors would facilitate the identification of such intervention points across the broader system. The foundations for utilising a data linkage approach are already in development by Family and Community Services Insights, Analysis and Research (FACSIAR).



By-Name Lists and Functional Zero

By-Name-Lists (BNL) are often the 'feeders' that identify people experiencing rough sleeping who need support through Housing First programs. They are developed by a multi-agency team and list all known people experiencing homelessness in a community. A BNL includes a set of data points that support coordinated access and prioritisation and understanding of homelessness inflow and outflow at a system level to measure progress. BNL are used to find tailored housing and support solutions and bring together local service systems to support each individual, with the aim of moving them into a home and ending rough sleeping.³⁴

“We rely so much on ABS data and the data is out of date before we can work out our impact. In lieu of being able to fix that, what targets can we use in a place based approach?”
(Stakeholder consultation)

Whilst BNL are typically utilised for the rough sleeping population only, BNL can still comprise part of the NSW Housing First approach, such as supporting a Functional Zero target. Functional Zero is a concept and approach that is achieved through Housing First. It 'describes the situation in a community where homelessness has become a manageable problem'. Functional Zero means that service availability and resources, keep pace with, match or exceed the demand for them from the population experiencing homelessness.³⁵

Many local governments in Australia have played significant roles in BNL and other similar activities, supported by the Australian Alliance to End Homelessness. The Adelaide City Council is cited as an early example with establishment of the Adelaide Zero project in 2018.³⁶

4. Implications and risks in a Housing First approach for NSW

Table 2 sets out the implications and risks that incur with the implementation of whole-of-system Housing First approach in NSW.

Table 2: Implications and risks associated with the implementation of a whole-of-system Housing First approach in NSW

Government/ DCJ	CHPs	SHS sector/agencies
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Long timelines to deliver the additional social housing stock needed to meet the additional demand generated by a system wide Housing First approach. • Delivery of housing will incur a high cost of direct capital investment. • Additional resources required to train frontline workers in the housing sector. • Additional resources required for other human service agencies to expand existing and/or establish new measures to coordinate supports and prevent exits into homelessness. • Additional resources are required to support and resource genuine partnerships with ACCOs to deliver housing and support services that meet the needs of Aboriginal people and builds capacity. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Concentration of high-needs clients places undue burden on CHPs (operationally / financial viability). • CHP housing is not suited to all cohorts, evidence supports that public housing is more suited for those with high complexity of need. • Increased partnerships with local government and large NFP organisations to develop land for social housing. • A reliance on CHPs to create the additional housing needed could, without adequate financial and capability building support, place undue burden on CHPs (shifting of responsibility). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SHS funding – additional funding required to support coordination with other services and sectors. • SHS funding – for person-centred and localised approaches. • SHS funding – funding needs to be predictable and longer term (5-10 years to align with the strategic cycle) to enable SHSs to plan services and retain workers. • SHS workforce – requires adequate resourcing and supportive working conditions for the sector to retain required and sustained workforce. • Develop and expand lived experience and peer workforce. • Develop consistent service standards across the sector.

“...not helpful to kind of say we're shifting to a Housing First model if there isn't the increased resourcing to back that up. There's only so many things that we can achieve by better leveraging existing resources and creating efficiencies and without the increased investment...

(Stakeholder consultation)



Appendix 1: Method

This paper draws on a review of the national and international evidence on Housing First and homelessness. It includes examples and evidence from existing AHURI reports and publications.

In addition, two consultations were conducted. One with key stakeholders in the housing and homelessness space (Stakeholder consultation), and one with people with lived experience of homelessness (StreetCare consultation).

The Stakeholder consultation was held online with a total of 16 participants (excluding DCJ and AHURI staff) on the 13th of December 2023. Participants included representatives from NSW homelessness and community housing peak organisations, experts from the community housing and service providers sectors, academics and NSW government department representatives. The discussion was recorded and transcribed. In addition, researcher notes taken during the consultation were used for analysis.

The StreetCare consultation was a hybrid of in person and online consultation and was held in Sydney on 14 December 2023 with people with a lived experience of homelessness. A total of eight participants attended in person and four online. Participants included members from StreetCare lived experience committee and from the Housing and Mental Health Agreement Lived Experience Committee (HMHA LEC) groups. All participants provided consent for their participation and were compensated for their participation by the Public Interest Advocacy Centre with funding from DCJ.

Following the consultation, StreetCare participants were provided with a two page summary of key points raised during the workshop (called 'What we heard you say') to feed back to participants what researchers understood about their experiences.

The consultation was audio recorded and transcribed. In addition, researcher notes were used for analysis.

Appendix 2: Research approach statement

The content and findings of this paper draw heavily from evidence and insights gleaned through prior work carried out by AHURI Professional Services staff over the course of the last five years. This has enabled a very quick turnaround in the development of this paper, the timing of which has permitted only very minimal new research, in the form of two consultation sessions (with professional stakeholders and people with lived experience of homelessness).

AHURI Professional Services has been evaluating the two major statewide Housing First programs implemented in Australia since the COVID-19 pandemic:

- **Together Home program** (NSW)
- **From Homelessness to a Home** (H2H) program, and the associated **Homes for Families** (H4F) program (Victoria)

These large program evaluations have involved mixed methods research that includes extensive consultation with government departments and delivery agencies in the respective states and with community housing and homelessness service providers engaged to provide services, client interviews and surveys, program administrative data analysis, data linkage and linked data analysis, and cost effectiveness and cost-benefit analysis.

AHURI has also evaluated two other more localised programs, that are based on similar principles and that offer 'low threshold and change' supported accommodation, with an integrated health or healing focus:

- **Boorloo Bidee Mia** (Perth, WA)
- **Housing for Health** (H4H) pilot program (Adelaide, SA).

Through each of these five unpublished program evaluations, AHURI has gained a wide breadth of understanding and insight concerning not only the operation of these specific Housing First interventions and their impacts but also the implications for homelessness, housing, and other systems (e.g. health) of moving towards a Housing First model at a state or whole-of-system level.

This paper benefits from these prior learnings and AHURI would like to thank the many public servants, service providers, and program clients whose input to these evaluations has helped to shape and inform our thinking.

All these evaluations have included a focus on the experience of homelessness for Aboriginal people, and the provision of culturally safe and appropriate Housing First models. This has been particularly informative for the section of this paper that considers how a Housing First informed homelessness system can address the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in NSW. Once again, we would like to thank the Aboriginal people and organisations who contributed their insights to these program evaluations, and especially Paula Coghill and Ken Zulumovski, who worked with us on the Victorian and NSW evaluations respectively.

Our evaluation of the NSW Homelessness Industry and Workforce Development Strategy (2021), for Homelessness NSW, included a comprehensive survey of the NSW homelessness sector, giving us strong insight into sector readiness, training, and workforce development needs. Working again with Aboriginal adviser Paula Coghill, we explored culturally safe and appropriate models needed to support Aboriginal people experiencing homelessness and Aboriginal service providers. The results of this evaluation have been published by Homelessness NSW and AHURI: [Evaluation of the Homelessness Industry and Workforce Development Strategy | AHURI](#).

Other research informing this paper is our 2022 review of the Australian and international evidence on Housing First: [Housing First: An evidence review of implementation, effectiveness and outcomes | AHURI](#), and the 2021 Best Practice Manual produced for Inner Metro Partnership (Melbourne): [Common Ground Housing Model Practice Manual | AHURI](#). The evidence review synthesises the Australian and international literature on Housing First and its implementation, effectiveness, and outcomes.

Building on both this research and the involvement of AHURI Professional Services in the evaluation of Housing First programs in four Australian states, AHURI organised and chaired a National Policy Roundtable for senior housing officials from all Australian states and territories, and the Commonwealth government, to share experiences and lessons learned from implementing Housing First responses to address chronic homelessness in the period since the pandemic. The roundtable was also attended by a senior government official from Finland, where Housing First policies have been effective in reducing homelessness. Once again, the insights gained and shared in this forum have informed this paper.

Appendix 3: Housing First principles for Australia

Table 3: Housing First principles for Australia

People have a right to a home	Immediate access to permanent, suitable, safe and secure housing without demonstrating housing readiness, with security of tenure and in housing that will be sustained in the event of temporary absences.
Housing and support are separated	Functional separation of housing and support, with no requirements to participate in support or treatment to retain housing, where support follows the client, and people are supported to maintain their tenancy.
Flexible support for as long as it is needed	Supports directed by the recipient, are flexible in level of support provided, do not have a fixed end date and is built from an authentic relationship to respond to individual circumstances as required.
Choice and self-determination	People exercise choice and self-determination in what makes a place a home, where they live, who they live with, the support they receive and how.
Social and community inclusion	Centres on rebuilding a sense of belonging, where people are supported to build relationships, to participate in a wide range of pursuits and connect to community.
Active engagement without coercion	Voluntary participation and client choice in the services they prefer, without this affecting their tenure. Relationships with clients built on trust, where workers maintain the relationship to support engagement with services. Supports designed to fit the individual, small caseloads, and support that is available outside working hours.
Recovery oriented practice	Recognises that while recovery is a goal, people may be at different stages along the continuum of behaviour change. It focuses on people developing a sense of self and place, offers hope, takes a strengths-based approach and is appropriate to a person's developmental stage, cultural and gender identities.
Harm reduction approach	Assists people to reduce the negative impact of high-risk behaviours, provide information to enable people to make informed decisions, acknowledges recovery is not a linear journey and where housing and support is provided regardless of participation in high-risk behaviours.

Source: Dodd, Rodrigues et al. 2020. Note: authors have condensed the principle descriptions.

Appendix 4: Housing First assessment and implications matrix

Table 4: Housing First assessment and implications matrix

	Individual/program: housing and service models, service delivery and individual interventions	Agency: interagency collaboration and ability to collectively support a client	System: federal, state, local laws, policies and funding
1. How does your community understand Housing First currently?	What are the practical elements of a Housing First system for the client?	What are the key requirements of a Housing First system?	What are the key policy outcomes Housing First aims to achieve?
2. Does your community have a Housing First services system in line with your understanding of Housing First?	Yes/ No/ Working towards/ Don't know	Yes/ No/ Working towards/ Don't know	Yes/ No/ Working towards/ Don't know
3. What elements of your system exist that support Housing First?	What service models exist for implementing individualised Housing First outcomes?	How does your organisation and system currently collaborate with other sectors and services towards Housing First?	What policies allow you to implement a whole-of-system Housing First approach?
4. Where does your current understanding of Housing First diverge from the NSW specific definition of Housing First and the whole-of-system Housing First approach?	Describe key differences: Describe implications: (program design, criteria)	Describe key differences: Describe implications: (agency practices)	Describe key differences:
5. What opportunities exist in your system and beyond to make changes in each of these levels to move towards the whole-of-system Housing First approach?	What elements of housing and service models can be improved for better Housing First client outcomes?	Which connections between services and sectors can be strengthened?	What advocacy opportunities do you have?

Adapted from Tually, McKinley et al. (2021).

Endnotes

- 1 Tsemberis, S. (1999) 'From streets to homes: an innovative approach to supported housing for homeless adults with psychiatric disabilities', *Journal of Community Psychology*, vol. 27, no. 2: 225-241.
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