

Housing Safety

Learning from co-design

AHURI Conference
7 October 2026

Presenters:
Bron Firman, Lived Experience Adviser, Women's Housing Alliance
Tanya Corrie, Chair, Women's Housing Alliance

Acknowledgment

We acknowledge the Larrakia Peoples as the traditional Custodians of the lands and waterways and pay our respects to Elders past and present.

We recognise the ongoing survival and cultural wisdom of all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, and other First Nations peoples around the world.

Always was, always will be, Aboriginal Land





About us

The Women's Housing Alliance (WHA) is a collective of 23 feminist organisations working together to advocate for a future where all women, trans and gender diverse people and their families have safe, secure and affordable housing.

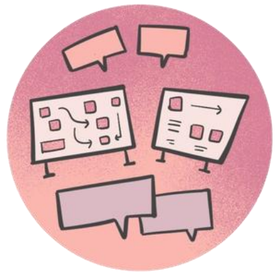
Our member organisations include:

- Annie North
- Council of Single Mothers and their Children
- Council to Homeless Persons
- Elizabeth Morgan House
- Flat Out
- Georgia Martina Inc.
- Good Samaritan Inn
- Housing for the Aged Action Group
- Juno
- Law and Advocacy Centre for Women
- McAuley Services
- Northern Community Legal Centre
- Refuge Victoria
- Safe and Equal
- Safe Steps
- VCOSS
- West Justice
- WIRE
- Women's Community Shelters
- Women's Health in the North
- Womens Housing Limited
- Women's Property Initiatives
- YWCA

WOMEN'S HOUSING ALLIANCE

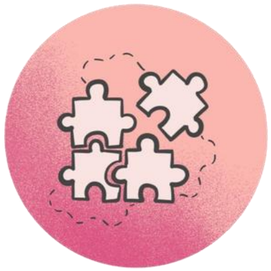
Housing Safety

Through a three-year project funded by Equity Trustees we:



RESEARCHED

Using the available literature, through consultations with Lived Experience Experts, Sector Experts and Government to identify and define the ‘problem’ we needed to solve.



CO-DESIGNED

A one-year, comprehensive co-design process with sector and lived experience experts to establish the ‘keys’ to a response.



MODELLED

Took the learning from the co-design process to develop a costed prototype.

Lived experience was involved throughout, rather than consulted at the end.

WOMEN'S HOUSING ALLIANCE

The problem: not ‘homeless enough’

Women, trans, gender diverse people and their children are falling through the gaps in homelessness and family violence responses because the system does not consider them **homeless enough.**

This is being driven by:

GENDER INEQUALITY



Gender inequality including **economic and social disadvantage**

GENDERED VIOLENCE



Lack of integrated system responses with the key driver of gendered homelessness: **domestic, family and gendered violence**

CRISIS FOCUS



Women, trans, gender diverse people and their children are **forced into crisis** before they get support

“ONE SIZE FITS ALL”



The system **filters people out,** not in. It is not designed with real people in mind.

WOMEN’S HOUSING ALLIANCE

Intersectional impacts

The research shows both higher risk and lower confidence that mainstream services will be safe.

2X

LGB people were at least twice as likely as heterosexual people to have ever experienced homelessness.

35%

of lesbian and gay respondents did not seek assistance from service organisations while homeless.

3X

Bisexual respondents were at least three times as likely as heterosexual respondents to stay in crisis accommodation or sleep rough.

The evidence base is still incomplete: Australian homelessness data largely uses binary gender categories and does not collect sexual orientation in core datasets.

WOMEN'S HOUSING ALLIANCE

The problem: not fitting the template

A system designed around the 'ideal' support seeker excludes people whose lives, identities or circumstances do not fit the template.

Rooflessness ≠ Homelessness

Unsafe, temporary, insecure or unaffordable housing is often not recognised early enough.

Rigid Pathways

Eligibility, catchments, waitlists and gendered offerings create barriers before people reach the door.

Re-traumatisation

People described services as confusing, disempowering and sometimes harmful.

Siloed Responses

Housing, family violence, health, disability and other needs are separated — people get 'handballed'.

WOMEN'S HOUSING ALLIANCE

For LGBTIQASB+ communities

DISCRIMINATION CAN BE A PATHWAY INTO HOMELESSNESS

Family rejection, violence, minority stress, poverty and employment discrimination intersect.

THE SERVICE ENVIRONMENT AND REPRODUCE HARM

Fear of discrimination, negative past experiences and lack of perceived safety can reduce disclosure and help-seeking.

BINARY HOUSING SYSTEMS CREATE PRACTICAL DANGER

Gendered accommodation can mean inappropriate placement, misgendering, harassment or violence.

IDENTITY, AUTONOMY AND CONNECTION MATTER

Pathways out include authentic self-expression, agency, autonomy and secure connection to LGBTQIA+ or mainstream communities.

WOMEN'S HOUSING ALLIANCE

The three big lessons

1

THE STATUS QUO IS UNSAFE

A crisis/rooflessness model misses unsafe, insecure and unaffordable housing and can create further harm.

2

HOUSING SAFETY IS BOTH PROCESS AND OUTCOME

Safety must shape how support is delivered as well as what a successful housing outcome looks like.

3

LIVED EXPERIENCE IS THE ENABLING FORCE

When people with lived experience hold real influence, assumptions are challenged and services become more accountable.

Co-design was not a consultation exercise. Lived experience shaped the problem, the solution and the final model.

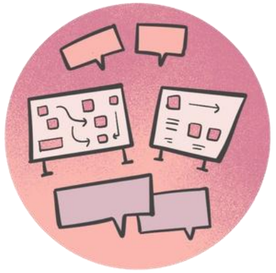
WOMEN'S HOUSING ALLIANCE

Learning from co-design



START WITH POWER, NOT ACTIVITIES
Treat lived experience as expertise and build influence in from conception to completion.

SLOW DOWN
Resist the rush to solutions; complexity is where important insights emerge.



HOLD PLANS LIGHTLY
Co-design is iterative. Be willing to change the question, process or output.

RESOURCE PARTICIPATION
Pay people, cover access and travel, provide care and create space to reflect.



CLOSE THE LOOP
Show what changed because people contributed — accountability is part of safety.

DON'T TRY TO DO EVERYTHING
Use scope and iterative synthesis to focus on what lived experience says matters most.

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Safety in Co-design



- Build relationships before asking people to do the work.
- Ask about access and participation needs — and act on them.
- Use a diversity and skills matrix to broaden representation.
- Co-create and revisit a group agreement.
- Pay people and cover accessibility and travel costs.
- Offer different ways to participate, reflect and pass.
- Create hospitality: food, breaks, quiet space and welcome.
- Protect confidentiality and seek consent before sharing stories.
- Allow people to be inarticulate — and allow 'not knowing'.
- Use feedback loops so people can see what changed because of their input.

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Did co-design influence the model?

9.6/10

Co-designers' rating of how much lived experience perspectives were reflected in the pilot model.

9.1/10

Rating from Lived Experience Advisers alone.

100%

Agreed/strongly agreed they felt respected, listened to and their voice was heard.

The prototype was unanimously endorsed by Lived Experience Advisers — including for its focus on wellbeing, individualisation, choice, hope and connection.

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The ‘keys’ to a better response



WOMEN'S HOUSING ALLIANCE

The Housing Safety Model

Co-designed by people with lived experience and provided by advocates at community touchpoints including health services, community centres and WIRE.



SHARING UNIVERSAL INFORMATION

Sharing rights-based information on housing, including housing that is safe, secure, accessible and meets their needs.



HOUSING SAFETY ADVOCATE

Advocates, preferably with lived experience, work with people using safety-focused approach to assist people to connect and settle into safe, affordable housing.

Underpinned by:



COMMUNITY ACTIVATION

Community activation coordinators work in local communities to build understanding of housing safety's role.

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What makes this different?

Fills the gap – support for those 'not homeless enough'



Non-stigmatising universal resources on Housing Safety



Housing Safety assessment including housing and gender-based violence risk



Housing Safety plan and dossier including housing and gender-based violence support



Scalable – can be replicated in other areas



Integrated early intervention approach to housing and family violence risk



Peer support roles for lived experience advocates



Community activation and collective action



Builds capacity in community in understanding gendered drivers of homelessness



A co-designed safety focused service for women, trans and gender diverse people



WOMEN'S HOUSING ALLIANCE

The takeaways



- Housing safety is more than a roof over someone's head
- Safety is a process and an outcome
- It is how we listen, how we design, how we share power, and whether people can live safely and authentically in their home and community.
- When lived experience leads, safety returns.
- Inclusion must be structural, not symbolic.

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THANK YOU



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LINKS TO FURTHER INFORMATION:
Women's Housing Alliance
Housing Safety Project
Discovery Insights Papers

SCAN TO LEARN MORE: