Australian Homelessness Conference 2026 · Darwin

WomBot

Disrupting access pathways through ethical, frontline-led AI



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We acknowledge the Larrakia people, the Traditional Owners of the land we meet on today, and pay our respects to Elders past and present.

We also acknowledge the Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung people of the Kulin Nation, on whose Country WomBot was created.

Artwork by Maddison Dunkley and Kevyn Manning, Wombat Housing Support Services, used with permission.

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We design homelessness services as if people look for help by phone or in person, between 9 and 5.

WomBot's data says many people don't — and some never would.

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“Not homeless enough”

Two weeks from losing their housing. Unsure they qualify. Worried they'd take help from someone who needs it more.

They were never going to call.

Shared with identifying details removed.

Housing information and also emergency accommodation. I'm not sure about my eligibility

I have 2 weeks

I don't know if I'm eligible... I have savings

Feel bad calling homelessness line. Don't know if I'm eligible or taking resources from people who need it more

I'm nervous to call

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It met them where they were

1 · Checked safety first

"…could you please let me know if you currently have a safe place to stay tonight…"

2 · Planned ahead, not crisis triage

"Since you have about two weeks before your current accommodation ends, I can help you plan ahead…"

3 · Corrected the eligibility myth

"Having some savings doesn't automatically rule you out…"

4 · Named the worry, offered a softer door

"…the homelessness line is there for anyone who needs support—no matter your situation…"

Outcome: they used the online referral form, and a caseworker picked it up before it became a crisis.

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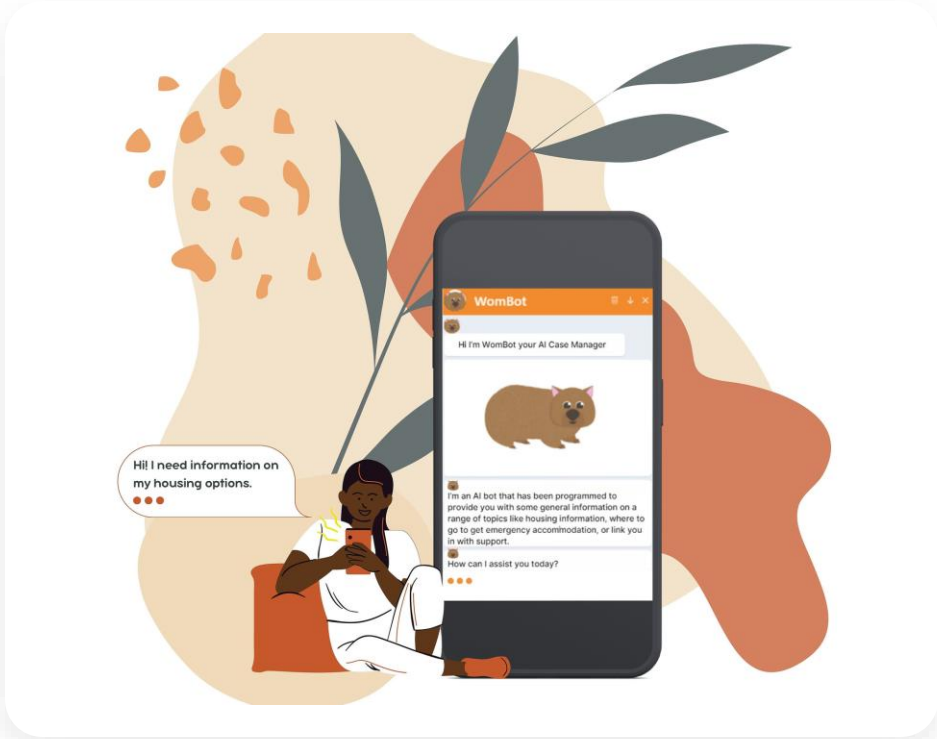
AI was never the goal

01 **A service problem.** Rising demand, and help that assumed phone or in-person contact in business hours.

02 **An online referral form.** Six self-referrals in the first week, with no promotion.

03 **A decision-tree bot.** Safe and predictable, but “it didn't feel like it was answering my situation.”

04 **AI WomBot.** Co-designed with staff and clients, built on our Ethical AI Framework.



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64%

of conversations happen after hours, when services are closed.

Busiest between 8pm and 2am.

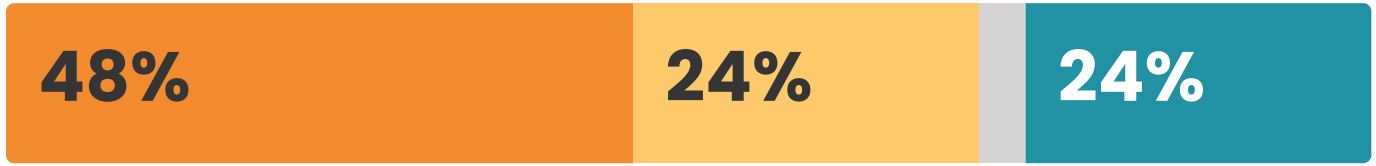
> *"...I woke up and couldn't get back to sleep. It was approx 1.30am. I could still get some answers I needed without having to wait for office hours..."*
>
> — WomBot user

A first step, not a replacement

85%

used WomBot **before** contacting a caseworker

How would you prefer to get support?



Grey: 4% chose another mix. Survey of WomBot users.

20,000+

messages since Oct 2024, with no promotion

90%

of routine enquiries handled without a caseworker

89%

said WomBot answered their question

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Taming the AI

The AI talks. Verified data answers.

Consent first

People are told it's AI, and agree, before the chat starts.

Safety check

It asks if you're safe tonight. Crisis lines are fixed, never generated.

No made-up contacts

Every phone number and address comes from verified lookup tables.

No personal details in chat

Referrals go through a separate, secure form. Identifying details are redacted.

Identity is a choice

Specialist services are offered as an option, not asked as an identity question.

Shared-device safety

The chat clears itself, so no one else on the device can read it.

Governed by our Ethical AI Framework, AI Policy and AI Use Case Register. A second AI agent checks every answer; staff review conversations.

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Four assumptions we got wrong

WE ASSUMED…	WHAT WE LEARNED
We were building for young people.	People of every age came. **The people who use your service may not be the people you expected.**
Smarter AI would be safer.	Early on it made things up. **We learned that reliability matters more than creativity**.
The risk was what the AI would say.	People still share personal information**. Every conversation is a chance to reinforce safe AI habits.**
Once it was built, it was done.	Services, eligibility and AI policy keep moving. **It's not set and forget: AI is a service, not a product.**

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WomBot is one door, not the only door

THE NEW DOOR

WomBot

24/7 · anonymous

For people who aren't ready to talk to anyone yet

STILL OPEN

Online referral

A form, any time

For people who want a caseworker to reach out to them

STILL OPEN

Phone

A voice, in real time

For people who want to talk it through

STILL OPEN

In person

Face to face

For complex needs, or anyone who prefers it

Nearly half want WomBot first, then a person. **A quarter want a person only.**

WomBot adds a door. It doesn't replace one.

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The technology isn't the innovation.

Reaching people we weren't reaching before is.

> The question we keep coming back to: **who isn't reaching us & why?**

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