First Nations Homelessness in Queensland—

Drivers and Solutions

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Our approach – A shared learning journey

A research partnership between ATSIHQ and ISSR, UQ drawing on:

- National homelessness data
- Research and policy evidence
- Community and practice perspectives (interviews).

Emerging insights:

- Different evidence sources reveal different parts of the story
- Understanding homelessness requires multiple perspectives
- Multiple levers exist to prevent and address homelessness
- Diverse pathways into (and out of) homelessness require tailored responses for different cohorts, places and contexts.

What do we know? Evidence from national datasets

ABS Census, 2021

24,930 Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people were estimated to be experiencing homelessness – up 6.4% from 23,437 in 2016.

This represents one in five (20.4%) of people experiencing homelessness in Australia.



What do we know? Evidence from national datasets

Specialist Homelessness Services (SHS) Data (AIHW) 2024–25

82,900 First Nations clients assisted over the course of the year:

- 62% female
- 47% under 25 years
- 34% single parents with children

Table INDIGENOUS.1: First Nations clients, by client group type 2024–25

Client group type	Clients (number)	Per cent of First Nations clients	First Nations clients as a per cent of specific client group
All First Nations SHS clients	82,900	—	100
Clients who have experienced family and domestic violence	34,100	41	29
Clients with a current mental health issue	20,900	25	24
Children and young people receiving support alone	13,500	16	33
Clients with problematic drug or alcohol issues	8,400	10	34
Older clients	5,800	7.0	18
Children on care and protection orders	3,000	3.6	35
Clients exiting custodial arrangements	2,500	3.0	28
Clients with disability	2,400	2.9	26
Clients leaving care (e.g. foster/residential, hospitals, psychiatric, rehab, aged care)	1,700	2.1	28
Clients who are current or former members of the Australian Defence Force	300	0.4	20

Notes: Sum of client group types will not add to the total, as clients may be in more than one client group type.

Building a richer understanding of homelessness

Policy and systems intelligence – Understanding policy and market changes helps explain homelessness trends over time.

Program and practice-based evidence – Provides insight into lived experience, local context, housing pathways, and how different responses address different needs and circumstances.

Understanding homelessness through a cultural lens

Experiences of homelessness for First Nations clients cannot be separated from the enduring impacts of colonisation, including displacement from land, family separation, and the disruption of kinship and cultural practices (Birdsall-Jones & Shaw 2008; Habibis 2013), many of which contribute to difficulties in engaging with services (Memmott 2012).

FIRST NATIONS HOMELESSNESS

First Nations homelessness emerges through the interaction of structural, social, cultural and housing factors.
Pathways into and out of homelessness vary across places, cohorts and life circumstances.

HOUSING SECURITY + BELONGING → **HOUSING EXCLUSION + DISCONNECTION**

1. SECURE & CONNECTED
2. HOUSING STRESS
3. HOUSING INSTABILITY
4. HIDDEN HOMELESSNESS
5. VISIBLE HOMELESSNESS
6. CHRONIC EXCLUSION

Prevention → **Early intervention** → **Tenancy sustainment** → **Housing access** → **Housing + support** → **Intensive wraparound support**

HOW PLACE SHAPES PATHWAYS

	URBAN	REGIONAL	REMOTE
Context			
Dominant pressures	Affordability, rental exclusion, institutional exits	Mobility, crowding, service access, violence	Housing shortages, overcrowding, mobility between communities
Common pathways	Eviction, rough sleeping, MH/AOD pathways	Movement between households, public place dwelling	Crowding and housing availability pathways
Implications	Housing access + support integration	Place-based responses and flexible housing	Supply, culturally informed housing and community responses

DIFFERENT COHORTS, DIFFERENT JOURNEYS

- Young people
- Families
- Women escaping violence
- Public place dwellers
- Mental health / AOD cohorts
- People exiting institutions

STRUCTURAL CONDITIONS | Housing supply | Affordability & cost of living | Poverty | Employment | Service access | Racism | Colonisation

SOCIAL & WELLBEING FACTORS | Family violence | Mental health | Institutional exits | Alcohol and other drugs | Social support

CULTURE & CONNECTION Connection to Country | Kinship | Cultural identity | Community belonging | Cultural obligations

HOUSING ADEQUACY | Availability | Suitability | Quality

Strong, culturally safe, community-controlled solutions across the continuum can prevent homelessness and strengthen wellbeing, belonging, connection to Country, culture and community.

Multiple levers for preventing and ending homelessness

- Policy with purpose
- Systems working together
- Program design for impact
- Community-led and placed-based solutions

Multiple levers for preventing and ending homelessness

1. Expand Affordable Housing and Support the "Housing First" Approach

- **Build more affordable units:** Increasing the overall supply of low-income housing stops the flow of First Nations people into homelessness.
- **Implement Housing First models:** Provide permanent, stable housing immediately to First Nations people without preconditions like sobriety or employment, then offer voluntary supportive care.
- **Streamline approvals:** Speed up the development pipeline for affordable housing by cutting unnecessary zoning and funding barriers.

Multiple levers for preventing and ending homelessness

2. Provide Comprehensive Supportive Services

- **Integrate healthcare and housing:** Use funding sources (e.g. PHNs) to cover First Nations behavioural health, mental health treatment, and addiction recovery services alongside housing.
- **Offer income and employment support:** Connect unhoused First Nations people to job training, unemployment benefits, and disability support programs to ensure long-term stability.
- **Deliver basic hygiene:** Ensure equitable access to public restrooms, rubbish collection, and safe sanitation sites for unsheltered First Nations people.

Multiple levers for preventing and ending homelessness

3. Strengthen Early Intervention and Prevention

- **Enforce tenant protections:** Enact strong eviction diversion programs, legal representation rights, and rent stabilisation policies to keep First Nations people in their current homes.
- **Target high-risk groups:** Provide direct assistance, emergency rental assistance, and specialised aid for vulnerable First Nations cohorts like domestic violence victims, women and young people.

Discussion