



Regional Local Government Homelessness and Social Housing Group Charter - Housing First for people sleeping rough project

Literature Review March 2020

The **Housing First for People Sleeping Rough** project is one of three action areas identified by the Regional Local Government Homelessness and Social Housing Charter Group:

By engaging with multi-sectoral agencies, services and specialist housing services to support alignment and collaboration - contribute to and prepare for a 'Housing First' transition for people sleeping rough (improvised dwellings, tents, cars and parks) in the south and east

The project aims to identify the role of Councils to support and enable a housing first approach in each of the 13 municipalities, through the development of a 'Housing First Practice Guide'.

The purpose of this Literature review is to build an understanding of Housing First, current responses to rough sleepers and the application of Housing First principles to inform local government responses to rough sleeping. Drawing on current research and government policy, this review will also provide an overview of the application of Functional Zero, Youth Foyers and the impact of COVID 19 in responding to homelessness.

What is Housing First?

'**Housing First**' - is a strategic response to homelessness that prioritises permanent and stable housing for people experiencing homelessness.¹ The economic costs of homelessness has significant impacts on the individuals and their families and the broader community. The annual cost to the community of rough sleeping has been estimated as exceeding \$25 000 per person, while the cost of youth homelessness in Australia, in terms of additional health and criminal justice costs, has been calculated to be \$626 million per year.²

Housing First was developed by Dr. Sam Tsemberis, at Pathways to Housing in New York, in the early 1990s³. Housing First was originally developed to help people with mental health problems who were living on the streets; many of whom experienced frequent stays in psychiatric hospitals. The target populations entering Housing First later grew to include people making long stays in homelessness shelters and those at risk of homelessness who were discharged from psychiatric hospitals or released from prison.

Once housing is secured, a multidisciplinary team of support workers can address complex needs through services like drug and alcohol counselling or mental health treatment. However, an

¹ [AHURI - What is the Housing First model and how does it help those experiencing homelessness?](#)

² Steen, A The many costs of homelessness 2018, Med J Aust: quoting Witte E. The case for investing in last resort housing (MSSI Issues Paper No. 10). Melbourne Sustainable Society Institute/The University of Melbourne, 2017. and MacKenzie D, Flatau P, Steen A, Thielking M. The cost of youth homelessness in Australia. Research briefing. 2016.

³ Tsemberis, S.J. (2010) Housing First: The Pathways Model to End Homelessness for People with Mental Illness and Addiction Minneapolis: Hazelden.

individual's engagement with these support services is not required for them to maintain accommodation. Each individual is assisted in sustaining their housing as they work towards recovery and reintegration with the community at their own pace. Housing First is predominantly designed for helping those who are sleeping rough (i.e. those sleeping in improvised dwellings, tents, cars and parks).⁴

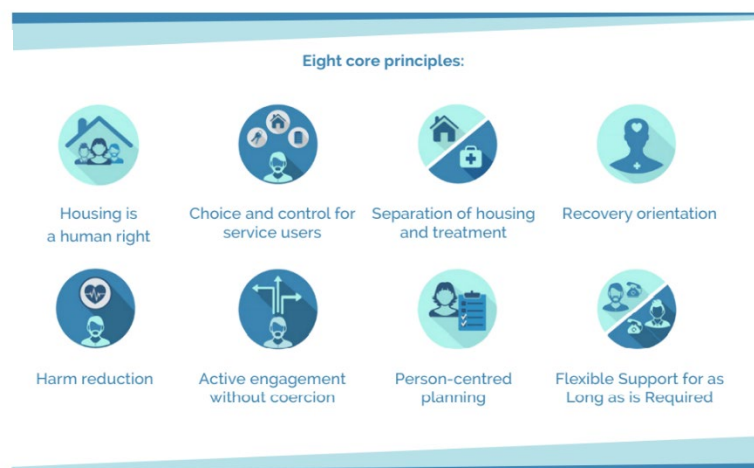
In March 2020, Homelessness Australia endorsed The Housing First Principles for Australia to promote the implementation of Housing First Australia-wide.

- ✓ People have a right to a home
- ✓ Flexible support for as long as it is needed
- ✓ Housing and support are separated
- ✓ Choice and self-determination
- ✓ Active engagement without coercion
- ✓ Recovery orientated practice
- ✓ Social and community inclusion
- ✓ Harm reduction approach

A full statement of the principles can be found at [Housing First Australia | Homelessness Australia](#)

Housing First is also described as “a rights-based intervention rooted in the philosophy that all people deserve housing, and that adequate housing is a *precondition* for recovery. The approach affirms that stable housing is a primary need, and that issues, such as addictions or mental health, can be better addressed once this need is fulfilled.

**‘Housing First’ can be utilized and understood in 3 different ways:
 as a foundational philosophy embedded within a systems approach;
 as a specific program provided by an agency or government body;
 as a team designed to meet the needs of specific target populations⁵ “**



Housing First description from Housing First Guide Europe Nicholas Pleace, University of York, February, 2016

⁴ [AHURI - What is the Housing First model and how does it help those experiencing homelessness?](#)

⁵ [Housing First | The Homeless Hub](#) Canada www.homelesshub.ca

“A Housing First systems approach focuses on cohesive community planning to develop coordinated, complementary programs and policies to end homelessness that are consistent with Housing First principles and practice. These feature a common intake system to Housing First programs, whether from the street, from emergency shelters, or people coming out of institutions who are at risk of becoming homeless”.⁶

The Canadian Housing First Tool Kit describes Housing First as “a program model, a systems approach, as well as a philosophy”.⁷ The tool kit also provides a table that describes this relationship.

Table 1.2

Systems Intervention	Philosophical Principles	Program Intervention
Planning immediate access to barrier-free housing for people who are chronically or episodically homeless;	Immediate access to housing with no housing readiness requirements	Clinical or support services are provided by individuals or teams that are separate from the consumer’s housing
coordinating the housing and support sectors with funding sources; inclusion of housing procurement specialists and clinical service-providers with distinct roles in housing and service systems planning and provision	—	—
Strong emphasis on the participation of people with lived experience in housing and service systems planning	Consumer-choice and self-determination	Consumers are not required to participate in clinical services; consumers have choice over the intensity and types of services in which they participate (including ACT, ICM, and other services); service-providers do not work in the consumer’s housing
Service systems planning focuses on the development of or collaboration with existing services that are oriented towards consumers’ strengths; development of peer support and self-help	Individual, recovery-oriented, and client-driven services	Rather than focus on consumer deficits or problems, the focus of services is on the promotion of recovery; inclusion of peer support;
Planning focuses on new services designed to reduce harm rather than cure addictions	Harm reduction	Clinical and support services take a harm reduction approach with consumers
Housing and service systems planning focuses on how to provide access to normal market housing, rather than the building or appropriation of congregate housing in which formerly homeless people live together with on-site support services	Social and community integration	Consumers have access to housing subsidies to enable them to live in normal, rental market housing, if that is their choice; the focus is on scattered site housing and the promotion of integration into typical community settings and networks of support

Source Canadian Housing First Tool Kit [Housing First Toolkit - Home](#) Polvere, L., MacLeod, T., Macnaughton, E., Caplan, R., Piat, M., Nelson, G., Gaetz, S., & Goering, P. (2014). *Canadian Housing First toolkit: The At Home/Chez Soi experience*. Calgary and Toronto: Mental Health Commission of Canada and the Homeless Hub.

⁶ [Housing First Toolkit - Home](#)

⁷ [Housing First Toolkit - Home](#)

This framework may be useful when categorising responses within a municipal setting particularly systems intervention through advocacy efforts and partnership facilitation.

The Housing First Model in Australia

There are a number of programs in Australia that integrate many of the principals of a Housing First approach however to find one program that meets all of the principals is more difficult to assess. In 2018, AHURI described the development of Housing First in Australia has been constrained by the lack of appropriate affordable housing stock necessary to quickly house those experiencing homelessness.⁸

The following provides a description of programs that respond to people sleeping rough rather than an evaluation of their compliance to Housing First principals.

Rough sleeping responses in Victoria

In 2017, the Department of Health and Human Services published the report, *Rough Sleeping in Victoria - Situation appraisal*, as part of the development of a Victorian Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Action Plan. The report found that rough sleeping can occur anywhere across Victoria, with less than 9% of those rough sleeping helped as clients at services located in central Melbourne. The table below from the report provides some insight into the experience of people sleeping rough who received support between 2015 -2017.⁹ This was reflected in the development of the Homelessness and Rough Sleeper Action Plan that acknowledged the need to provide services outside the central and inner suburbs of Melbourne.

Table 8: Location of most recent service providing support to rough sleeping clients by their period since last permanent address, July 2015 – January 2017

Location of most recent service	Time period since last permanent address, %		
	Newly homeless (<1 week)	Long-term homeless (>1 year)	All rough sleeping clients
Central Melbourne	9.0	12.0	8.6
Inner suburbs	22.0	34.3	26.9
Middle suburbs	18.8	14.2	18.5
Outer suburbs	23.6	10.3	18.5
Regional Victoria	26.6	29.2	27.4
Total	3,440	1,340	13,607

Missing data excluded

The data indicated that people sleeping rough in the outer and middle suburbs were more likely to be homeless for less than one week with inner suburbs and regional Victoria more likely to be homeless for greater period than one year. The report also recognised that people who are released or discharged from settings that are known pathways to rough sleeping – including prisons, youth justice centres, inpatient health facilities and out-of-home care need to be targeted for early intervention strategies such as a risk assessment and case management prior to discharge.

⁸ [AHURI - What is the Housing First model and how does it help those experiencing homelessness?](#)

⁹ [Microsoft Word - 20170607 Situation Appraisal FINAL_09_06_17_v2.docx \(dhhs.vic.gov.au\)](#)

Homelessness and Rough Sleeper Action Plan (HRSAP)

The objective of HRSAP is to reduce the incidence and impacts of rough sleeping and is based on the Housing first model¹⁰. It aims to provide tailored support to people experiencing homelessness.

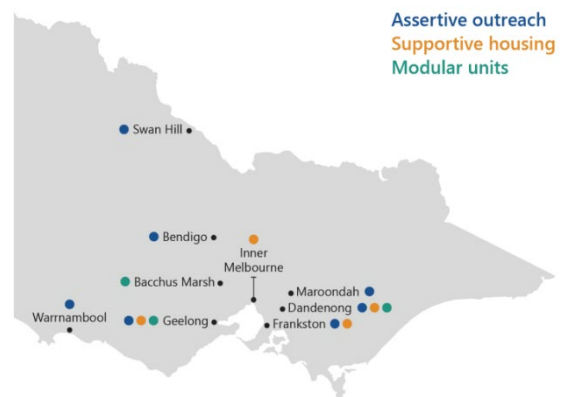
There are three key components of HRSAP which DHHS funded for two years:

- assertive outreach
- supportive housing teams
- 12 modular units and onsite support.

Three specialist homelessness services (homelessness services) were funded by DHHS to deliver HRSAP programs:

- Haven; Home, Safe (Haven)
- Launch Housing (Launch)
- Neami National (Neami).

FIGURE 1H: Location of HRSAP-funded service locations



Source: VAGO, based on DHHS data.

The HRAP also states that it *will ensure a Housing First approach is delivered to ensure people experiencing chronic homelessness or who are at risk of doing so become resilient to future housing loss.*¹¹

In September 2020, Victorian Auditor-General's Report released a report that examined implementation of key elements of the state government's \$45 million Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Action Plan¹². Services identified a lack of permanent housing options limited the application of housing first principles with the majority of clients provided with transitional and crisis accommodation. This program was funded for a period of two years until the end of 2020 however at the time of writing this report an extension of 6 months has been granted until June 2021.

In March 2021, the Victorian Parliamentary Inquiry into Homelessness Final Report also recognised that the delivery of Housing First was limited due to the lack of permanent housing options. Recommendations were made to address this issue through building long term housing stock and the expansion of Housing First programs.¹³

FINDING 25: Victoria's Housing First programs are significantly handicapped by a lack of affordable long-term accommodation to house participants.

Recommendation 44: That the Victorian Government ensure there is long-term housing stock available from Victoria's Big Housing Build for participants of Housing First programs operating in metropolitan, regional and rural Victoria.

Recommendation 45: That the Victorian Government expand Housing First programs throughout metropolitan, regional and rural areas to include further cohorts of people experiencing homelessness, in addition to rough sleepers.

¹⁰ [Victoria's Homelessness Response \(audit.vic.gov.au\)](https://audit.vic.gov.au/reports/2019-2020/victoria-homelessness-response)

¹¹ [Victoria's homelessness and rough sleeping action plan \(dhhs.vic.gov.au\)](https://www.dhhs.vic.gov.au/homelessness-rough-sleeping-action-plan)

¹² [Victoria's Homelessness Response \(audit.vic.gov.au\)](https://audit.vic.gov.au/reports/2019-2020/victoria-homelessness-response)

¹³ Inquiry into homelessness in Victoria Final report

Melbourne Street to Home (MS2H)

Melbourne Street to Home is based on the Housing First approach and is an intensive outreach program that provides housing support, advice, long-term case management and ongoing tenancy support to Melbourne's most vulnerable rough sleepers.

Melbourne Street to Home works with rough sleepers who have extremely complex physical and mental health needs. The Melbourne Street to Home service is led by Launch Housing and delivered in partnership with The Salvation Army and Bolton Clarke.

Rough Sleeper Initiative (RSI) The Rough Sleeper Initiative (RSI) is an assertive outreach, initial engagement and short-term support program across the cities of Melbourne, Port Phillip, Stonnington and Yarra, with exits to other support programs at Launch Housing or other organisations.

Elizabeth Street Common Ground (ESCG)

Elizabeth Street Common Ground is a supportive housing model for people with a history of long-term homelessness. Based on the US Common Ground model, it uses a congregate facility of 131 units with on-site concierge support (24/7) and a range of co-located services and recreational opportunities for residents.

Functional Zero - Australian Response

Functional Zero — often referred to simply as 'zero' — is an approach being adopted in a range of communities internationally as a means for ending homelessness, often focussed on street homelessness. It was developed by Community Solutions (US). Functional Zero is reached when the number of people who are homeless in a city at any point in time is no greater than the average housing placement rate for that same period (usually a month). In other words, a community reaches Functional Zero when 'the average capacity of your housing system is greater than the existing need and you can prove that with data' (Community Solutions 2016b).

However, reaching Functional Zero doesn't mean that there are no longer any people experiencing homelessness in the region, it just means that the numbers of a specific group of people who are experiencing homelessness hasn't increased in a region.¹⁴ A community can still have 500 homeless people, for example, but if that community can say the number of people entering homelessness is equal to the number exiting- they have reached "functional zero".¹⁵

By-Name List (BNL) is a tool that is used to manage Functional Zero - A database capturing key person-specific housing and support information and used as the basis for prioritising assistance.

The Institute of Global Homelessness (IGH) drives a global movement to end street homelessness and has developed a framework to end homelessness through collaboration from researchers, policy experts and on-the-ground leaders in six continents. The Framework includes a common definition of homelessness: "lacking access to minimally adequate housing."

[globalframeworkforundertanding.pdf \(ighomelessness.org\)](https://www.ighomelessness.org/globalframeworkforundertanding.pdf)

Adelaide CBD joined 10 cities on six continents to partner with the IGH in setting "ambitious but achievable goals" to solve the problem of homelessness as part of a campaign called A Place to Call Home. Adelaide inner city councils and community agencies developed the collective impact,

¹⁴ [AHURI - What does 'Functional Zero' mean in relation to homelessness?](#)

¹⁵ <https://www.neoch.org/cleveland-homeless-blog/2015/7/18/functional-zero-for-homeless-veterans-confuses-public.html>

alliance-based Adelaide Zero Project. The Adelaide Zero Project aims to establish Adelaide as Australia's first 'Zero city': the first Australian city to achieve 'Functional Zero'. Videos that explain this further are available at <https://youtu.be/2z0ALrHodjQ> and <https://youtu.be/4O8mEwbF0ps>

The Brisbane Alliance to End Homelessness (BAEH) is a community-based consortium aimed at building public support to end homelessness and is implementing a collective impact Brisbane Zero project. Locally, in 2017 Port Phillip Zero was initiated as a collective impact program, where the By-Name List is being used (with client consent) to support the most vulnerable to find safe housing¹⁶. Both programs are supported by health and homelessness organisations, state government, police, housing providers, lived experience experts, businesses, philanthropy and residents.¹⁷

Housing First for Young People? The Education First Youth Foyer model.

In Australia there are currently at least 14 Foyers or Foyer-type services across all States and Territories except Tasmania and the Northern Territory.¹⁸ Through a partnership between the Brotherhood of St Laurence, Launch Housing and the Victorian State Government, Youth Foyers were established at Holmesglen in Glen Waverly, Youth Foyer GOTAFE in Shepparton and Youth Foyer Kangan in Broadmeadows. The programs accommodate 40 young people between 16 and 24 years in studio style apartments with communal living and support service areas supervised by trained staff 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Key services include life skills development, mental and physical health support, drug and alcohol support, mentoring and employment assistance.

To be eligible for the Education First Youth Foyers in Victoria, you must be:

- aged 16 to 24 years
- unable to live at home
- keen to get into education and training
- willing to make a commitment to stay in education and/or training.

A [recent longitudinal study](#),¹⁹ based on over 100 interviews and 1000 surveys with young people over a five year period was conducted by the Brotherhood of St Laurence and Launch Housing and indicated positive results in educational and housing outcomes for the participants. The study also found that a year after leaving the Youth Foyer, outcomes for social connection and civic participation were less likely. Transition Coordinators were subsequently introduced into the program to support clients after exiting the program.

The Education First Youth Foyer model has similarities with the Housing First approach in relation to developing the capability of clients however the "deal" process that is fundamental to young persons' eligibility for the program is a distinct difference. *The Deal upholds the rights and responsibilities of both students and Foyer staff, promoting a culture of mutual investment for mutual gain.*²⁰ Also, the service is offered on a temporary basis with the focus on the development of life skills and achieving educational and employment outcomes during this time that will lead to long term independence. A Housing First approach separates the engagement of support services from housing tenure.

¹⁶ [What is Functional Zero? \(launchhousing.org.au\)](https://www.launchhousing.org.au)

¹⁷ <https://aaeh.org.au/>

¹⁸ <https://www.efyfoyers.org.au/>

¹⁹ [Starting a future that means something to you: outcomes from a longitudinal study of Education First Youth Foyers \(bsl.org.au\)](https://www.bsl.org.au)

²⁰ [How Foyers Work – The Foyer Foundation](https://www.foyerfoundation.org.au)

An alternative example can be found in Scotland with Foyer Aberdeen, as service for young people based on the Youth Foyer model through their HF4Y (Housing First for Youth) program.

The core principles of HF4Y are:

1. A right to housing with no preconditions
2. Youth choice, youth voice and self-determination
3. Positive youth development and wellness orientation
4. Individualised, client-driven supports with no time limits
5. Social inclusion and community integration.

The following extracts also highlight the different approaches used in the delivery of Youth Foyers in relation to Housing First principles.

Education First Youth Foyer	Housing First for Youth
<p>Source: Starting a future that means something to you: outcomes from a longitudinal study of Education First Youth Foyers (bsl.org.au)</p> <p>A Housing First approach has been advanced as a means of enabling agency and developing capability (Evangelista 2010; Verdouw & Habibis 2018). Under this approach, people experiencing homelessness are provided with permanent housing integrated into private, mainstream structures with tailored support services and minimal conditions, such as regular meetings with a caseworker or acceptance of treatment services. Support services are separate from housing so that they survive housing loss or change. While the approach has demonstrated effectiveness in reducing chronic homelessness among older people, evidence suggests it is less appropriate for preparing young people to live independently (Verdouw & Habibis 2018).</p>	<p>Source: Housing First Aberdeen Foyer</p> <p>Housing First for Youth acknowledges that the roots and circumstances of youth homelessness are distinct from adults, and therefore the solutions must be youth focused. Housing First has predominantly been used to support adults with chronic life challenges and has a strong evidence base to support the model. It is only in the last 5 years this model has been applied to young people who are homeless or at risk. This is an opportunity to build on the emerging understanding around HF4Y and draw directly from the Foyer Housing model. HF4Y is grounded in the belief that all young people have a right to housing and that those who have experienced homelessness will do better and recover more effectively if they are first provided with housing.</p>

Impact of COVID 19

To prevent the spread of COVID-19, many people sleeping rough on the streets were moved into hotel accommodation. In its submission to the National Inquiry into Homelessness²¹, the Centre for Social Impact estimated that at least 2,200 homeless people had been accommodated in this way, although the submission noted that this figure could possibly be up to 10,000 people. The submission added that this ‘would represent the largest transition from the streets to housing we have ever seen in Australia’.

²¹ [1. COVID-19 and homelessness – Parliament of Australia \(aph.gov.au\)](#)

In March the Victorian government provided \$15 million to homelessness organisations to find people who were sleeping in the street temporary accommodation in hotels.

Other submissions to the enquiry highlighted a number of issues that have impacted on the delivery of housing services during this period that include:

- Crisis accommodation facilities that were not fit for purpose in the context of the pandemic leading to a reduction of capacity and increased costs for cleaning (Salvation Army)
- Adaption of services such as take away meals from dining indoors
- Closure of shower and laundry facilities. (Sacred Heart Mission)

The Australian Homelessness Monitor 2020 commissioned by Launch Housing found that *in the four-year period to 2018–19, the number of people seeking help from specialist homelessness services (SHS) increased by 14% to some 290,000, while the number judged as actually ‘homeless’ by SHS providers rose by 16%.* The report found that the impact of the response to COVID 19 has led to a temporary reduction in homelessness however without an increase in longer term housing options this cannot be sustained.²²

Exit strategies

Exit strategies for people in crisis accommodation include transitional and long-term housing however services utilise rooming houses, supported residential services and caravan parks as alternatives. The submission to the **Inquiry on Homelessness** by the Regional Local Government Homelessness and Social Housing Charter Group identified that reliance on Rooming House accommodation is increasing across our region.

Other submissions to the **Inquiry on Homelessness** provided an insight into the impact of a lack of exit strategies:

The Community Housing Industry Association²³:

“...there appears to be no comprehensive exit strategies in place in any jurisdiction. Existing social housing will be unable to accommodate any urgent need to evacuate this cohort from hotels. ... Furthermore, as temporary income supports (e.g. JobKeeper payments) are reduced and job protections withdrawn, we can anticipate more people will be pushed into housing stress and homelessness. ... With these being lifted at the same time as the stimulus payments are withdrawn Australia faces a probable major spike in homelessness”

Bolton Clarke²⁴:

“...The ‘Housing first’ model with rapid access to long term housing and multidisciplinary support is an evidence-based strategy. However, availability of timely and suitable housing is essential to engage. Many people may choose rough sleeping when offered sub-standard forms of housing such as private rooming houses due to affordability, safety, lack of privacy and other factors.

Some residents of Supported Residential Services (SRS) are in a cycle of eviction, crisis housing responses and movement between different SRS, rooming houses and periods of sleeping rough. They

²² <https://cms.launchhousing.org.au/app/uploads/2020/10/AHM-Executive-Summary-2020.pdf>

²³ Enquiry into Homelessness in Australia submission No 89 <https://www.aph.gov.au/DocumentStore.ashx?id=82156b5e-c310-4750-b12b-b4d5f0880734&subId=684577>

²⁴ Inquiry into homelessness in Australia Submission 17 <https://www.aph.gov.au/DocumentStore.ashx?id=08dafa84-c2c4-4b21-80db-450af1de96b8&subId=680608>

can be evicted from SRS due to behaviour, substance use or leave due to wanting more autonomy around their life choices and finances.”

Homelessness and Mental Health

The Royal Commission into Victoria’s Mental Health system recognised that mental illness can be compounded by housing instability and that many living with a mental illness live in substandard accommodation. Recommendations from the final report include that people living with a mental illness are a priority group in the developing Victorian 10-Year Social and Affordable Housing Strategy and the Victorian Housing Register.²⁵

The Role of Local Government

In 2013, a report by the University of Adelaide reviewed the role of local government across Australia in addressing homelessness. The report recognised the role of councils as public space managers that used both formal and informal methods to address the impact of rough sleeping in their municipalities. The method varied - some inner-city councils tended to enforce by-laws, outer metropolitan and rural councils did not consider by-laws effective.²⁶ Local Government contributions included advocacy, community awareness raising, partnership facilitation and planning regulation to influence housing supply. The paper also proposed more robust responses that include the setting of targets, development of formal protocols, provision of land and the repealing of by- laws that adversely affect the homeless.

The report prepared by the Council for Homeless Persons for the City of Monash also supports this approach. There are opportunities to work through the interface points for local government with people that experience homelessness including by-laws officers, parks staff or contractors who are more likely to interact with people sleeping rough using public land and facilities.

Often out of concern for the person or for perceived safety reasons businesses and community members are also likely to contact customer service to report people experiencing homelessness. The report supports the design of internal work-flow processes, the designation of a staff member to coordinate an appropriate response and partnerships with local specialist housing services to strengthen local responses to people sleeping rough²⁷

Conclusion

The literature review highlights that Housing First is a strategic response based on principles of consumer choice, harm minimisation, human rights and collaboration. It also relies on the availability of exit points through adequate housing supply and coordination of support services.

A systems intervention approach grounded in Housing First principles can play an essential role for organisations to build a more effective response to rough sleeping. The role of local government, as both facilitator and responder, could enable an improved response to rough sleeping in a municipality if supported consistently across the organisation and developed in partnership with specialist housing services. Opportunities for local government to build and participate in collective impact process that build effective local responses are also evident.

²⁵Royal Commission into Victoria’s Mental Health System Final Report Feb 2020

²⁶ Local Government and Homelessness in Australia: Understanding the Big Picture Andrew Beer and Felicity Prance, Centre for Housing, Urban and Regional Planning, The University of Adelaide 2013

²⁷ [Making a Difference – effective local government responses to homelessness \(pdf, 795KB\) \(monash.vic.gov.au\)](https://www.monash.vic.gov.au/files/2013/06/making-a-difference-effective-local-government-responses-to-homelessness.pdf)

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