

ENDING HOMELESSNESS BRIGHTSPOTS

Ideas, innovations and good practices in ending homelessness

This fact sheet provides examples of partnerships, programs and policies councils have developed, driven, trialled and partnered in to work towards ending homelessness in their communities. Such efforts have been undertaken by councils individually, as part of regional collectives with other councils or as partners in other collectives. The examples (brightspots) span Australia and internationally, offering inspiration to councils and communities.

While the initiatives outlined are diverse, we know from profiling them that they are most impactful where they build on existing relationships and collaborations, and where they evolve or establish council culture and practices (including policies) around their role in ending homelessness.

Reports by Churchill Fellows Leanne Mitchell (2023) and David Pearson (2023) include other examples of actions involving councils both here and abroad which are also worth looking at. Other fact sheets in this series also feature examples of partnerships, programs or policies councils may look to adopt or evolve; scaling actions up or down to meet their specific local challenges.

Brightspot: Sharing knowledge and insights among local governments

In **Western Australia**, Shelter WA, the WA Local Government Association (WALGA) and Local Government Professionals WA joined forces to develop the **Local Government Homelessness Knowledge Hub**. The project was initiated in response to rising levels of homelessness and housing insecurity in WA, and associated expectations and need for local governments to respond. The Hub aims to better 'equip local governments across WA to end homelessness' with evidence-based solutions based on the needs of their community (Shelter WA 2024).



Materials shared through the Hub are intended to support both elected members and council staff across areas, including 'information on the drivers of homelessness, case studies, guiding documents, and examples of best practice in strategic, policy and operational responses from a range of local governments' (Shelter WA 2024). It is worth all councils regularly visiting the site.

Brightspot: Assertively tackling homelessness

Assertively tackling homelessness

While councils traditionally have not engaged in direct homelessness service delivery, there are a few councils nationally who are directly providing or contributing to resourcing assertive outreach. The **City of Melbourne**, for example, is the first council in Victoria to have a dedicated, in-house assertive outreach team to help people experiencing homelessness. The service is delivered in partnership with Launch Housing, a non-government housing and homelessness services provider in Victoria. The assertive outreach team works with people daily to find permanent pathways out of homelessness through referrals to 'support services and programs providing coordinated housing and health intervention' (City of Melbourne 2024).

The **City of Rockingham** (WA) has also recently contracted an assertive outreach service in response to increased need for support. The program has two clear aims: to gather data on the local situation and to provide outreach support to people within the area experiencing homelessness. Rockingham has identified early intervention and prevention programs as key to reducing the number of people 'likely to experience disadvantage and/or develop significant wellbeing issues impacting quality of life' (City of Rockingham 2022: 13).

Overcoming a common challenge: access to key documents

Some communities have been involved in collaborations to develop and trial solutions to the common problem of accessing and storing key documents (including identity documents) among people experiencing homelessness. **My Digital Data Locker Baltimore** (USA) is one such initiative, developed to provide a secure digital document storage and management option for people experiencing housing insecurity or homelessness and seeking permanent supportive housing through the Mayor's Office of Homelessness Services (MOHS). The tool allows a user to upload, store and share (e.g. with case managers) digital copies of their important documents in a cloud-based account which is free and accessible via mobile phone or computer. Realised through collaboration with service providers, private and for-purpose sector support and philanthropic funding, the tool was launched in 2021 by MOHS and the city's Continuum of Care (CoC). A member of Baltimore's CoC Lived Experience Advisory Committee notes: 'This solution is so empowering because it allows people to set up their own accounts, upload electronic copies of their vital records, and control who those documents are shared with' (Mayor Brandon M. Scott 2021).

Several Australia Post branches in Sydney (NSW) participate in a program that offers individuals experiencing homelessness access to a PO Box at no cost for 12 months. Additionally, people with email can receive notifications when mail is delivered to their PO box. Through providing people with a postal address, the initiative is intended to enable people to 'receive important documents and help re-establish connections' (Australia Post n.d.).

Brightspot: Managing 'hot spots' in the City of Port Phillip

As part of Port Phillip Zero, the **City of Port Phillip** (Melbourne, Victoria), resources and delivers a Hot Spots working group approach to provide focused attention and action to identified areas where groups of people sleeping rough are known to gather or where concerns for people's welfare or community safety have been flagged. The Hot Spots program was developed following an independently facilitated session, with learnings from the City of Melbourne and partners. The approach has clear protocols outlining agreed actions to support the needs of people experiencing homelessness, while also supporting the concerns/expectations of community, businesses and Council. A key stakeholder noted a core rationale for the approach and its success is how it 'brings together different arms of Council', with specialist homelessness services and other agencies (police, health, Aboriginal services) to enact 'collaborative actions to support people and respond to amenity issues that can often accompany rough sleeping.'

Meetings of the group are short (half-hour), focused and operate under the mantra 'that they should be the best, most effective meeting you attend this week'. Stakeholders 'ask the hard questions', considering the needs and perspectives of all groups, including amenity issues, community safety and antisocial behaviour. Discussions are not about people's individual needs, as connections are made to outreach and service coordination through Port Phillip Zero to meet individual needs.

Council City Amenity Officers, part of Local Laws (a local government regulatory instrument), provide important intelligence about Hot Spots, including information observed through daily patrols, rapid amenity responses and information garnered through interactions with people on the street. The Hot Spots model relies heavily on support across council, as well as brokering and maintenance of relationships with people experiencing homelessness and services.

Port Phillip Zero staff, First Peoples Community Broker, Housing and Homelessness, City Amenity and Community Safety are represented on the Hot Spots group, serving as a link between the group and Zero project, council and other actions for ending homelessness (operational and strategic actions). The approach achieves outcomes through relationships and common goals, not ordering people about what to do, when and how to do it.

Deep commitment to addressing Hot Spots, and to ending homelessness in the City of Port Phillip, are central to the success of the approach. Key people in council can and do speak to this regularly, dispelling myths, addressing concerns and promoting actions to end rough sleeping homelessness.

Brightspot: Co-producing local solutions to homelessness

An international example: Manchester Homelessness Partnership and Greater Manchester Homeless Action Network*

Concerns about increasing numbers of visible rough sleepers in the inner city and rising homelessness of all types across Greater Manchester (UK) drove the formation of the [Manchester Homelessness Partnership](#) (MHP) in 2016. The MHP 'unites people with personal experience of homelessness' with organisations from the for-purpose and voluntary, business, government/statutory and other sectors, including Manchester City Council and the Greater Manchester Combined Authority, to strategically 'co-produce solutions together to end homelessness' (MHP 2023). The vision and values at the heart of the partnership are expressed in the co-created [Manchester Homelessness Charter](#).

Publicly available MHP resources include:

- [good practice guidelines](#) for supporting and working with people experiencing homelessness, such as 'Sharing Spaces: A guide for city centre organisations', which includes advice on how to approach people experiencing homelessness and educates workers on available supports.
- '[Learning from the Manchester Homelessness Partnership](#)', a toolkit offering guidance on ideas and principles for establishing a 'grassroots partnership to address homelessness' based on the MHP model and experience, including the role of local government (Homeless Link 2017).

The MHP is linked into the [Greater Manchester Homeless Action Network](#) (GMHAN), a network 'for everyone working toward the 'common cause' of ending homelessness in 'all 10 boroughs of Greater Manchester' (GMHAN 2023). Leanne Mitchell's [Churchill report](#) also explores the Greater Manchester joint council commitment and responses to homelessness.

Brightspots: Embedding the ending homelessness ethos in council policies, practices and actions

Addressing homelessness is no doubt on the agenda of most if not all councils across South Australia. Actively working to prevent and end homelessness, though, is something different from mainstream approaches for councils. Several councils across Australia, metropolitan and regional, have taken further steps towards a commitment to ending homelessness. Some exemplars are outlined here. These examples build on what is seen as good practice for councils: understanding homelessness in their area; identifying what they are doing and could be doing to respond; and developing policies and strategies to 'fill the gaps' in action.

Coffs Harbour City Council (NSW)

The coastal city of Coffs Harbour in regional NSW endorsed its [Homelessness Policy](#) in 2022. Developed in response to rising levels of homelessness and increasing housing unaffordability, the policy establishes the role of Council and informs the actions it will take to prevent and reduce all types of homelessness.

Coffs Harbour's policy 'informs Council actions aimed at:

- a. Preventing, reducing and managing homelessness
- b. Supporting and building capacity within the community to address homelessness
- c. Developing the equity and prosperity of the city
- d. Designing, developing and managing public space
- e. Encouraging collaboration, community partnerships and evidence-based practices to prevent, reduce and manage homelessness' (Coffs Harbour City Council 2022: 5).

The policy lays out guiding principles in areas of accommodation; community partnerships; public space design, development and management; community perceptions and inclusion; and evidence-based advocacy. The work Coffs Harbour has undertaken toward these ends includes a collaboration with local homelessness services to develop a [Homelessness Sector Action Plan \(HSAP\)](#), based on Collective Impact principles (in development). The city provides backbone support to the HSAP.

The **Town of Victoria Park**, inner Perth (WA), offers another exemplar of policy. Alongside resourcing a project to document [lived experiences of homelessness](#) in 2022, the Town has a succinct policy – [Homelessness – The Town's role](#) – outlining policy principles, ** commitments and definitions (TVP c2023) . The Policy commits Council to roles as advocate, broker/linker, information gatherer and sharer and provider of safe and inclusive spaces. Council's commitments are enacted through their [Homelessness Implementation Plan \(2022-26\)](#), and linked through the [Safer Neighbourhoods Plan \(2022-2027\)](#).

The **City of Mandurah** (WA) has facilitated the development of the [Mandurah Homelessness & Street Presence Strategy](#) (CoM c2021), showing how community and Council understand their homelessness challenge. Strategy actions and objectives are structured around the areas of: accessible (and diverse) accommodation, effective support system, meaningful systemic change and community safety and security. Locally, the **City of Adelaide** has a newly released [Homelessness Strategy – Everyone's Business](#), also offering a template for communities in terms of approach, outcomes and actions (CoA 2024).

Relevant resources (see also References)

Australian Alliance to End Homelessness (2024) *local communities*.
Local Government Homelessness Knowledge Hub (WA): <https://www.lghomelessnesshub.com.au/>
Mitchell, L. (2023) *Everybody's Business: What local government can do to end homelessness*, Winston Churchill Fellow research report.
Pearson, D. (2023a) *Homelessness is solvable: How we can end it in Australia*, Winston Churchill Fellow research report.
South Australian Alliance to End Homelessness (2024) see relevant tabs at <https://saaeh.org.au/>
Western Australian Alliance to End Homelessness (2024) see Knowledge Hub tab via <https://www.endhomelessnesswa.com/>

References for fact sheet 4

Australia Post (n.d.) *Free PO Boxes for Sydney's homeless*.
City of Adelaide (2024) *Homelessness Strategy: Everyone's Business*.
City of Mandurah (c2021) *Mandurah Homelessness & Street Presence Strategy 2021-2023, A place for everyone*.
City of Melbourne (2024) *How we're connecting on homelessness*.
City of Rockingham (2022) *Community Safety and Support Services Strategy 2022-2027*.
Coffs Harbour City Council (2022) *Homelessness Policy*.
Greater Manchester Homeless Action Network (GMHAN) (2023) *About the GMHAN*.
Homeless Link (2017) *Learning from the Manchester Homeless Partnership: Guidance for grassroots responses to homelessness*.
Manchester Homelessness Partnership (MHP) (2023) *What is the Manchester Homelessness Partnership?*
Mayor Brandon M. Scott (2021) *Mayor Brandon M. Scott launches My Digital Data Locker to Help Vulnerable Residents Maintain Vital Documents*, 9 March 2021, City of Baltimore.
Shelter WA (2024) *About*, Local Government Homelessness Knowledge Hub.
Town of Victoria Park (c2023) *Policy 113, Homelessness – The Town's role*.

Fact sheet notes

* Councils have legislated responsibilities around homelessness in the UK. This is not currently the case in Australia.

** Compassion, respect, inclusiveness, right to housing, partnerships and collaboration and no wrong door.

About *Ending homelessness: a toolkit for local government*

This fact sheet is one in a suite which together makes up *Ending homelessness: a toolkit for local government*. *Ending homelessness: a toolkit for local government* has been funded by the LGA South Australia as a practical resource for councils across South Australia to refer to in supporting community and council efforts to end homelessness.

The toolkit has been developed in consultation with the LGA, councils and stakeholders advancing end homelessness efforts in SA, nationally and beyond. The fact sheets synthesise what we know from the ever evolving academic and practice evidence about homelessness and how we can end it. The toolkit has been designed with both regional and metropolitan councils in mind. The fact sheets are sensitive to the different contexts in which councils operate, the ways in which homelessness presents for people and within communities and knowing that councils and communities are all at different stages in their ending homelessness journeys.

Other fact sheets in *Ending homelessness: a toolkit for local government*

Ending homelessness: a toolkit for local government comprises nine fact sheets that work together to provide a practical guide for councils interested in or working towards ending homelessness with their communities.

Fact sheet 1: Understanding homelessness: A guide for local government
Fact sheet 2: Ending homelessness: Why and how?
Fact sheet 3: Partnering in efforts to end homelessness: Making and having collective impact
Fact sheet 4: Ending homelessness brightspots
Fact sheet 5: Ending homelessness: Culturally safe practices
Fact sheet 6: Local governments, advocacy and ending homelessness
Fact sheet 7: Local government, disaster resilience and homelessness
Fact sheet 8: The role of local government in preventing homelessness
Fact sheet 9: An ending homelessness glossary

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