

<https://doi.org/10.25957/qnky-sc45>

# HELPING TO PREVENT HOMELESSNESS: IDEAS FOR LOCAL GOVERNMENT

*'Identifying potential homelessness before it turns into crisis is something that well-connected and informed Australian council workers can do too. Working deeply in communities, they often know their customers and can see early warning signs.'* (Mitchell 2023)

## What is homelessness prevention and why does it matter?

An important part of work to end homelessness is work to *prevent* homelessness from occurring in the first place. But what does preventing homelessness mean? Why does it matter? What does homelessness prevention look like and how can councils help?

A helpful definition of the prevention of homelessness is offered in *A New Direction: A Framework for Homelessness Prevention* by Gaetz and Dej (2017: 35) for the Canadian Observatory on Homelessness:

*Homelessness prevention refers to policies, practices, and interventions that reduce the likelihood that someone will experience homelessness. It also means providing those who have been homeless with the necessary resources and supports to stabilize their housing, enhance integration and social inclusion, and ultimately reduce the risk of the recurrence of homelessness.*

*The causes of homelessness include individual and relational factors, broader population-based structural factors, and the failure of many public institutions to protect people from homelessness. This suggests that homelessness prevention must not only include interventions targeted at individuals, but broader structural reforms directed at addressing the drivers of homelessness. That not only communities but all orders of government, and most departments within have a responsibility to contribute to the prevention of homelessness is in keeping with a human rights perspective.'*

Homelessness prevention actions tend to be thought of in terms of primary, secondary and tertiary prevention, with primary prevention about reducing the likelihood of homelessness across the population, secondary homelessness about supporting people at imminent risk of homelessness and tertiary homelessness about preventing recurrence of homelessness. In Australia we generally do not do homelessness prevention well, largely because our system is crisis-driven; addressing homelessness has traditionally been seen as the sole responsibility of the homelessness sector (which has very limited homelessness prevention levers); proving the value or success of prevention activities can be difficult as by design they are about avoided scenarios and costs; and because our support system itself is in crisis. We miss many opportunities to intervene, particularly when the first signs of homelessness risk occur, e.g. violence within the home, disengagement from education, family or community, rental arrears, social isolation or substance misuse.

## Where and how can councils play a role in preventing homelessness?

The local government sector has not been seen as a key player in homelessness prevention in Australia, although it is often identified as a key sector for addressing (ending) homelessness. Councils are also increasingly recognising this role themselves.

Leanne Mitchell's recent Churchill Fellowship (2023a: 6), 'Everybody's Business: What local government can do to end homelessness', has re-energised conversations and thinking about councils and homelessness prevention. Her Churchill Fellowship findings point to clear areas of action (emphasised below):

- *'Know what you can do to influence housing supply': Use planning powers to control and direct influence over your housing supply. Ensure collaboration between council planners and homelessness service staff to align efforts and create more opportunities.*
- *Refocus prevention: Make the most of the community connection points that councils hold and build organisational-wide responsibility for upstream interventions that prevent homelessness.*
- *Bring in your libraries and other customer service staff: Recognise the value of your colleagues who work with your community but are not the homelessness "experts". With the right training and support they can help identify and respond to homelessness.*
- *Know what you can offer in crisis response: Local Government is in a good position to convene on-the-ground crisis response. Know where you can add value and take an informed, human rights approach that considers the needs of all members of your community.'*

Councils support, coordinate and/or operate a range of programs and services that provide an opportunity to identify or work with people experiencing or at risk of imminent homelessness. Such opportunities include: libraries and community/neighbourhood centres as safe spaces for people to spend their time and as places for the delivery of social support, health promotion and positive ageing programs, and through council safety officers looking after public spaces and community infrastructure. They also include services such as animal shelters/council pounds where pet relinquishment may

be a first or clear sign of financial or housing instability, or notifications of pet neglect, hoarding and environmental neglect (squalor). Conversations with council representatives for this toolkit noted council customer service staff as a point of contact with many people in or near to crisis, and in need of avenues for support, reinforcing Mitchell's points about the need for a range of council staff to be trained in how to identify and respond to homelessness.

## Council prevention efforts in action

### Frontline homelessness prevention: library social worker and peer worker programs

Council libraries play an important role as places of safety, refuge and connection (including digital connection) within communities. Because of this, a range of people use libraries, including people experiencing or at risk of homelessness (Garner et al. 2021).

Some councils have recognised the broad role libraries play within their communities, advocating for, trialling and/or engaging in frontline homelessness prevention work from such spaces, by:

- ensuring the welcoming and inclusive nature of libraries for all community members.
- providing resources about homelessness services and supports (council developed or externally developed guides, promoting navigation apps such as [Ask Izzy](#), etc).
- training library staff in trauma-informed practice and knowledge of homelessness services locally.
- supporting or directly resourcing the placement of social workers, peer workers or outreach workers in libraries to assist with homelessness and housing assistance and navigation (Mitchell 2023a).

See page 3 for an operating example in Fremantle (WA).

## Watch this space...

The City of Salisbury and the City of Adelaide are currently in the planning phase of initiatives to place social workers in some of their libraries. The councils involved are undertaking developmental evaluation of the initiatives in order to continuously improve the initiatives, understand their value and impact and share learnings.

# Council prevention efforts in action

## Libraries as frontline support and connection

In **Fremantle** (WA), the City of Fremantle and St Patrick's Community Support Centre deliver the **Library Connect Program**, a collaborative partnership initially launched as a pilot in September 2020. As part of the model, a St Pat's Library Connect Worker is based at (and integrated within) Fremantle Library at set days and times, including when other services are closed. The support worker connects with people on a walk-in basis 'in a safe and welcoming environment, providing free advice, referrals and support on the ground where it is needed' (City of Fremantle 2024). An evaluation of the initiative's first two years found it connects with people who may not be comfortable with or accustomed to using community services, and in some cases, to connect with people earlier, 'before the situation becomes too chronic or complex' (Quinn et al. 2022: 8).

## Supporting people to navigate services and systems

Several councils have developed simple service directories or assistance resources to hand out directly to people experiencing homelessness or housing stress or to people suspected of being homeless (staying in cars, for example). The [Coffs Harbour homelessness help information card](#) is one example, distributed through local services and community-facing council staff and available on the council (and other) websites. The City of Adelaide also has a similar resource made widely available: [A quick guide to homelessness services in the city](#). Examples of these resources are provided on the next page for inspiration.

## Just...Ask Izzy, refer to Pickle or Daisy

Councils can assist in preventing homelessness by linking people seeking assistance with websites like [Ask Izzy](#), [Pickle](#) (South Australia specific) or [Daisy](#) (an app developed by national domestic family and sexual violence counselling service 1800RESPECT). Such websites and apps provide easy to access information and contacts for local services such as food, housing, financial wellbeing and specialist counselling. Notably, [Ask Izzy](#) can be accessed without credit or wi-fi on some mobile networks. [Daisy](#) has privacy features to protect the safety of users.

Councils can easily promote such services broadly and train staff on their existence and value.



*'Concerted efforts are needed to educate local council workers so they know how to connect into specialist services that might help someone find housing, get emergency funds to cover bills, or access health services. These actions could stop homelessness before it happens.'*

(Mitchell 2023b)

## Ideas from abroad...

**Active Inclusion Newcastle** (AIN) is a homelessness prevention and financial inclusion-oriented partnership developed by **Newcastle City Council (UK)**. The collective, city-wide partnership identifies and supports people at risk of homelessness by making it 'everyone's business to predict and prevent crisis' (NCC 2023).

The AIN [Information for professionals - homelessness prevention](#) webpage provides information and resources which support the partnership's work, including:

- [Trigger point conversation](#) resource designed to guide staff/volunteers to recognise signs of homelessness and support them in their interactions with people struggling with their housing. The resource gives practical prevention advice (i.e. encouraging people to read important letters and report changes in their circumstances).
- [Spectrum of housing and homelessness advice](#) guide, which outlines types of advice/services people in certain roles within Council can provide to ensure people's needs are met and workloads and demands for services are managed.

Newcastle City Council also runs Active Inclusion training (via e-learning) for Council staff, Councillors and others.

## Responding to hoarding and environmental neglect

Hoarding and environmental neglect are triggers for homelessness or risk of homelessness. Councils are often frontline in responses. Bringing together key agencies around people's needs is considered best practice. Available resources here include: [Housing Safety Authority \(SA\)](#), [SA Metropolitan Fire Service's PATH \(People and their Hoarding\) program](#), Victorian Government's [Make safe guide](#) and Catholic Healthcare's [Effective Service Responses](#) resource for local government.

Coffs Harbour's homelessness help information card (postcard style)



**Coffs cares - Find help here**

**COFFS HARBOUR NEIGHBOURHOOD CENTRE** Ph: 02 6648 3694  
 The place to go when you don't know where to go

- Support information and referrals
- Access to phones, internet and computers
- Free legal advice, counselling, tax help
- Vouchers and donations

**PETE'S PLACE** Ph: 0438 931 201  
 Le Vincent de Paul Society

- Open Mon - Fri (8:30am - 1:30pm)
- Access to food, showers, laundry, clothing or bedding
- Support and information
- Visiting medical and other support services

**MISSION AUSTRALIA** Ph: 1800 269 672  
 Emergency accommodation (9am-5pm). Contact Link2Home after hours

**LINK2HOME** Ph: 1800 152 152  
 For after hours temporary accommodation if you are homeless

**NEW HORIZONS** Ph: 02 5632 4800  
 Assistance if you are at risk of homelessness or currently homeless  
 Securing housing and keeping you housed

**WARRINA (Women & Families)** Ph: 02 6652 4000  
 Women's refuge and outreach  
 Support for women and families experiencing domestic and family violence and/or homelessness  
 Case management for men who use violence

**COMMUNITY HOUSING LTD** Ph: 1300 245 468  
 Supporting CHL tenants  
 Information about how to obtain housing

**MOMENTUM YOUTH HOUSING** Ph: 02 5632 4021  
 For young people aged 17 - 24 yrs  
 Support to keep or find housing  
 Access to computers and information

**WESLEY MISSION (Young people)** Ph: 02 5646 5755  
 Specialist housing for young people 12-25  
 Crisis Youth refuge for 14-17 year olds  
 Medium term accommodation and transitional housing

Source: City of Coffs Harbour, <https://www.coffsharbour.nsw.gov.au/Community-and-recreation/MyCoffs-Connect/Homelessness>

City of Adelaide's A quick guide to homelessness services in the city (including highlighted legend and visuals showing services available and area map)

A quick guide to homelessness services in the city.

If you are experiencing homelessness or at risk of homelessness and need support, you can **Free Call:**

- The Toward Home Alliance (City, South and Hills, Mon-Fri, 9am-5pm) | 1800 809 273
- Adelaide Northwest Homelessness Alliance (North and West, Mon-Fri) | 1800 569 086
- Domestic and Family Violence Crisis Line (24/7, state-wide support) | 1800 800 098
- After Hours Homeless Connect SA (24/7, state-wide support) | 1800 003 308
- 1800 Respect (24/7, state-wide support) | 1800 732 732
- Rent Right SA - tenancy advice (Mon-Fri, 8am-8pm) | 1800 060 462
- Youth Specific Services:
- The Foundry by SYC | 42-46 Carrington Street | Mon-Fri, 9am-5pm | (08) 8405 8540
- RentRightsSA | Adelaide | Mon-Fri, 8am-8pm | 1800 060 462
- Multicultural Youth SA (MYSA) | Shop 9, Millers Arcade, 28 Hindley Street | (08) 8212 0085
- Streetlink Youth Health Service | 43 Franklin Street | Mon-Fri, 9am-5pm | (08) 8202 5950
- Toward Home Alliance | Mon-Fri, 9am-5pm | 1800 809 273

**LEGEND**

- Accommodation and welfare assistance
- Clothes/Blankets
- Food (meals, groceries or vouchers)
- Luggage Store
- Legal Services
- Mental Health Services
- Medical Assistance
- Mental Health Services
- Legal Advice
- Drug and Alcohol Services
- Youth Specific Services

MAP REF	Other services in the city	Icons
1	Aboriginal Sobriety Group   182-190 Wakefield Street   Mon-Fri, 9am-5pm   (08) 8223 4204	🏠
2	Adelaide Day Centre   32 Moore Street   Mon-Fri, 8.30am-4pm   (08) 8232 0048 (for males 25+)	🏠
3	The Big Issue   237 North Terrace   (08) 8359 3450	📄
4	Brian Burdakin Clinic   27 Selby Street   weekdays 8.30am-12pm (Mon & Thurs until 4pm)   (08) 8231 4801	🏠
5	Food Hub (Baptist Care)   11-19 Millers Court   Mon-Thurs, 10am-3pm   (08) 8118 5200	🍲
6	Fred's Van   Gawler Place between Flinders and Wakefield Streets   Mon-Fri 7pm; Sat & Sun 6pm   (08) 8118 5200	🚚
7	The Foundry by SYC   42-46 Carrington Street   Mon-Fri, 9am-5pm   (08) 8405 8540	🏠
8	Housing SA   120 Flinders Street   Mon-Fri, 9am-5pm   (08) 8207 0211	🏠
9	Hutt Street Centre   258 Hutt Street   Mon-Fri, 7am-4.30pm, Sat 7-9am   (08) 8418 2500	🏠
10	Multicultural Youth SA (MYSA)   Shop 9, Millers Arcade, 28 Hindley Street   (08) 8212 0085	🏠
11	Nunkawarrin Yunti   182-190 Wakefield Street   Mon 9am-1pm, Tues-Fri, 9am-5pm   (08) 8406 1600	🏠
12	Royal Adelaide Hospital   Port Rd   open 24 hours   (08) 7074 0000	🏠
13	Salvation Army Sobering Up Unit   62 Whitmore Square   open 24 hours   (08) 8212 2855	🏠
14	Salvation Army Community Support Service   277 Pirie Street   (08) 8227 0199	🏠
15	Streetlink Youth Health Service   43 Franklin Street   Mon-Fri, 1pm-4.30pm   (08) 8202 5950	🏠
16	St Vincent de Paul Homeless Men's Crisis Accommodation Service   28 Whitmore Square   (08) 8231 2250	🏠
17	The Magdalene Centre (Anglicare)   82 Gilbert Street   Mon-Fri, 9am-11.30am   (08) 8305 9434	🏠
18	Westcare Centre (Baptist Care)   11-19 Millers Court (off Wright Street)   Mon-Fri, 9am-5pm   (08) 8118 5200	🏠
19	Urgent Mental Health Care Centre   215 Grenfell Street, Adelaide   24 hours   (08) 8448 9100	🏠
	Catherine House (women only)   (08) 8232 2882	🏠
	Crisis Care (crisis helpline)   131 611	🏠
	Aboriginal Connection Program (DASSA)   Mon-Fri, 8am-4pm   0435 960 984	🏠
	Lifeline (counselling helpline)   131 114	🏠
	Mental Health Emergency   13 14 65	🏠
	Remote Visitor Outreach Team   250 Wright Street, Return to Country support   0418 104 845	🏠
	St Johns Youth Services   (08) 8231 3314	🏠
	Toward Home Alliance   Mon-Fri, 9am-5pm   1800 809 273	🏠

**A QUICK GUIDE**

**LEGEND**

- Homeless Services
- Libraries/Community Centres
- Police Stations
- Bus Stations
- Public Toilet
- Free City Loop Bus (98A/99C)
- Free City Loop Bus (98A/98C)
- Tram
- Railway

If you are homeless and need support, you can call:

- Homeless Connect SA | 1800 003 308
- 24 hour Domestic Violence Crisis Line | 1800 800 098
- Police, Fire, Ambulance (Emergency) | 000 (24 hours)
- Police Attendance | 131 444 (24 hours)
- Mobile Assistance Patrol
- (MAP Bus - transport for Aboriginal people) | 0411 474 368 (4pm to 12 midnight, 7 nights a week)
- Lifeline (counselling helpline) | 131 114

CITY OF ADELAIDE

Source: City of Adelaide, <https://d31atr86jnqrq2.cloudfront.net/docs/quick-guide-to-homelessness.pdf>



## Relevant resources (see also References)

- Commonwealth of Australia (2021) [Addressing homelessness](#), Chapter 4 in *Final report: Inquiry into homelessness in Australia*, Parliament of the Commonwealth of Australia, July 2021.
- Dej, E., Gaetz, S. & Schwan, K. (2020) [Turning off the tap: a typology for homeless prevention](#), *The Journal of Primary Prevention*, 41(5): 397-412.
- Fitzpatrick, S., Mackie, P. & Wood, J. (2020) [Advancing a five-stage typology of homelessness prevention](#), *Intl Journal on Homelessness*, 1(1): 79-97.
- Flatau, P., Lester, L., Seivwright, A., Teal, R., Dobrovic, J., Vallesi, S., Hartley, C. & Callis, Z. (2021) [Ending Homelessness in Australia: An evidence and policy deep dive](#), Centre for Social Impact, Business School, The University of Western Australia, Perth.
- Oudshoorn, A., Dej, E., Parsons, C. & Gaetz, S. (2020) [Evolving an evidence-based model for homelessness prevention](#), *Health and Social Care in the Community*, 28(5): 1754-1763.
- Pearson, D. (2023) [Homelessness is solvable: How we can end it in Australia](#), Winston Churchill Fellow research report.
- Prance, F., Beer, A. & Horne, S. (2013) [The Role of Local Government in Addressing Homelessness: A Tool Kit for Local Government](#), Australian Government, Department of Families, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs.
- Shinn, M. & Khadduri, J. (2020) Preventing Homelessness for People at Risk, in *In the Midst of Plenty: Homelessness and What to Do About It*, Wiley-Blackwell.
- See also outputs of Dr Jane Garner's Australian Research Council project: ['Public libraries in the lives of people experiencing homelessness'](#) (2022-25).

## References for fact sheet 8

- City of Fremantle (2024) [Library Connect at Fremantle Library](#).
- Gaetz, S and Dej, E (2017) [A New Direction: A Framework for Homelessness Prevention](#), Canadian Observatory on Homelessness Press, Toronto.
- Garner, J., Mitchell, L., Bell, K., Lockwood, A. & Wardle, S. (2021) [Social Work in Australian Public Libraries: An Interdisciplinary Approach to Social Justice](#), *Public Library Quarterly*, 40(6): 504-520.
- Mitchell, L. (2023a) [Everybody's Business: What local government can do to end homelessness](#), Winston Churchill Fellow research report.
- Mitchell, L. (2023b) [Why local councils are the missing link in Australia's efforts to end homelessness](#), *The Conversation*, May 11, 2023.
- Newcastle City Council (2023) [Active Inclusion Newcastle - briefing note 2023-24](#), July 2023.
- Quinn, D., Vallesi, S., Wood, L. & Lund, S. (2022) [Fremantle Library Connect Project: An evaluation of the first two years](#), School of Population and Global Health, University of Western Australia; Institute for Health Research, University of Notre Dame Australia; School of Allied Health, UWA.

## 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: Helping to prevent homelessness: ideas for local government

Fact sheet 9: An ending homelessness glossary

**This project has been supported by the Local Government Research and Development Scheme administered by the LGA South Australia.**

<https://doi.org/10.25957/gnky-sc45>