Rough Sleeping is Up

We know what to do, we just need the funding

A PLACE TO CALL HOME AND THE SUPPORT TO KEEP IT

Homelessness NSW

Everyone in New South Wales should have a place to call home and support to keep it. Homelessness services play an essential role by providing people in need of homes with shelter, information and crucial support. Social and affordable housing provides stable pathways out of housing crisis.

But right now, we don't have enough social housing for everyone in need, and homelessness services have been under-funded for over a decade, leaving them struggling to respond to everyone seeking help. New data shows that more people than ever before are sleeping rough across NSW, and growth is highest in regional areas.[1] Rough sleeping leaves people vulnerable to violence and abuse, and traps people in deepening cycles of poor health, homelessness and trauma.

The solution to this crisis is clear. With enough funding, services can keep their doors open and ensure everyone gets the help they need. And with a strong commitment to grow social housing, we can support everyone with a safe pathway out of homelessness.

Key facts

- The number of people sleeping rough in NSW has risen by 5% over the past year, with 2,308 people recorded in 2026.
- The number of people counted sleeping rough across NSW has increased by 75%, or 989 people, between 2020 and 2026.
- Overall, the Mid North Coast, New England and Northern NSW districts are worst affected, with a combined total of 1,024 people counted in 2026, an increase 152% or 617 people since 2020.
- The Illawarra Shoalhaven and Southern NSW districts have experienced a staggering 689% increase in people counted sleeping rough between 2020 and 2026 (from 7 to 213).
- The City of Sydney continues to record the highest number of people sleeping rough in a single LGA across the state, with 296 people counted in 2026.
- While the City of Sydney recorded a 15% reduction over the past year (reducing by 50 people), the neighbouring Inner West and Randwick LGAs both recorded a significant increase (approximately 100%, or 47 people) over the same period. This suggests that people sleeping rough in Sydney may have relocated into other nearby LGAs.
- More people seeking help from specialist homelessness services are experiencing persistent homelessness. In 2024-25, 10,170 clients in NSW were experiencing persistent homelessness, up from 7,897 in 2019-20, a 28.7% increase.2
- The number of unassisted requests for help from a homelessness service has increased 92% (from 11,199 in 2020-21, to 21,530 in 2024-25).3
- The Sydney LGAs with the highest increase in the number of rough sleepers over the past six years are the Inner West, Liverpool, Randwick, Blacktown, and Campbelltown (see Table 1).
- The Regional NSW LGAs with the highest increase in the number of rough sleepers are Port Macquarie-Hastings, Wollongong, Coffs Harbour, Byron Shire, and Mid Coast (see Table 2).

1 Homes NSW (2026) NSW Statewide Street Count: Technical Paper, Appendix A.
2 AIHW (2026) Specialist homelessness services annual report 2024–25, Table PERS.1.
3 AIHW (2026) Specialist homelessness services annual report 2024–25, Table HIST.UNASSISTED.

TABLE 1 - **Sydney LGAs with the highest increase in the number of rough sleepers, 2020-2026**

LGA	2020 count	2026 count	Increase	
			No.	%
Inner West	25	75	50	200%
Liverpool	7	21	14	200%
Randwick	6	18	12	200%
Blacktown	11	20	9	82%
Campbelltown	10	18	8	80%

TABLE 2 - **Regional NSW LGAs with the highest increase in the number of rough sleepers, 2020-2026**

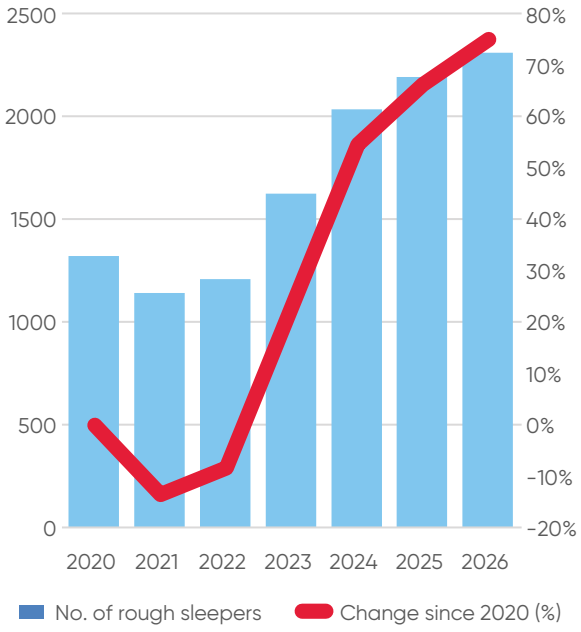
LGA	2020 Count	2026 Count	Increase	
			No.	%
Port Macquarie-Hastings	5	116	111	2,220%
Wollongong	10	110	100	1,000%
Coffs Harbour	51	151	100	196%
Byron Shire	174	245	71	41%
Mid Coast	2	63	61	3,050%

More people are being counted sleeping rough across NSW

The NSW Government, along with key partners such as local councils and organisations, undertakes a street count every year. This is a point-in-time record of people counted sleeping rough across NSW.

In 2026, 2,308 people were counted sleeping rough across NSW – a 5% increase from 2025 and a 75% increase from 2020.

FIGURE 1 - **NSW Street Count 2020-2026**



City of Sydney and surrounding LGAs show continued high pressure

City of Sydney continues to record the highest number of people sleeping rough across the state, with 296 people counted in 2026.

While the City showed a 15% reduction over the past year (reducing by 50 people), neighbouring LGAs Inner West and Randwick both recorded a significant increase over the same period.

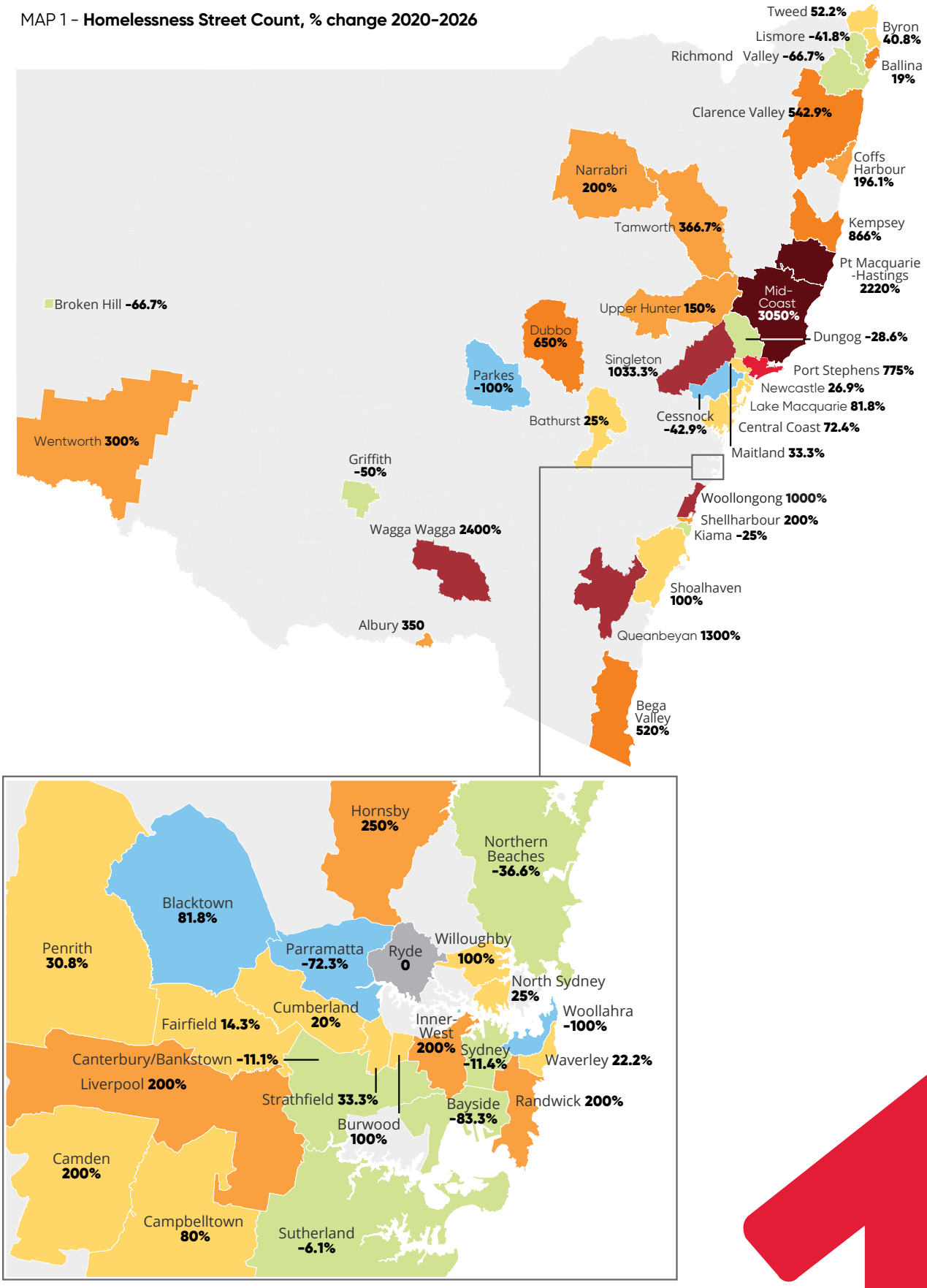
Inner West recorded a 103% increase (from 37 to 75) and Randwick had a 100% increase (from 9 to 18). Overall, these two LGAs recorded an increase of 47 people, almost mirroring the decrease in City of Sydney. This indicates people sleeping rough may be moving out of the CBD into nearby Sydney suburbs, rather than finding secure pathways out of homelessness.

Regions under increasing pressure

Rough sleeping is a state-wide issue and regions are experiencing increasing pressure. While metropolitan LGAs continue to record the highest overall numbers, regional NSW has seen huge increases in people counted sleeping rough between 2020 and 2026.

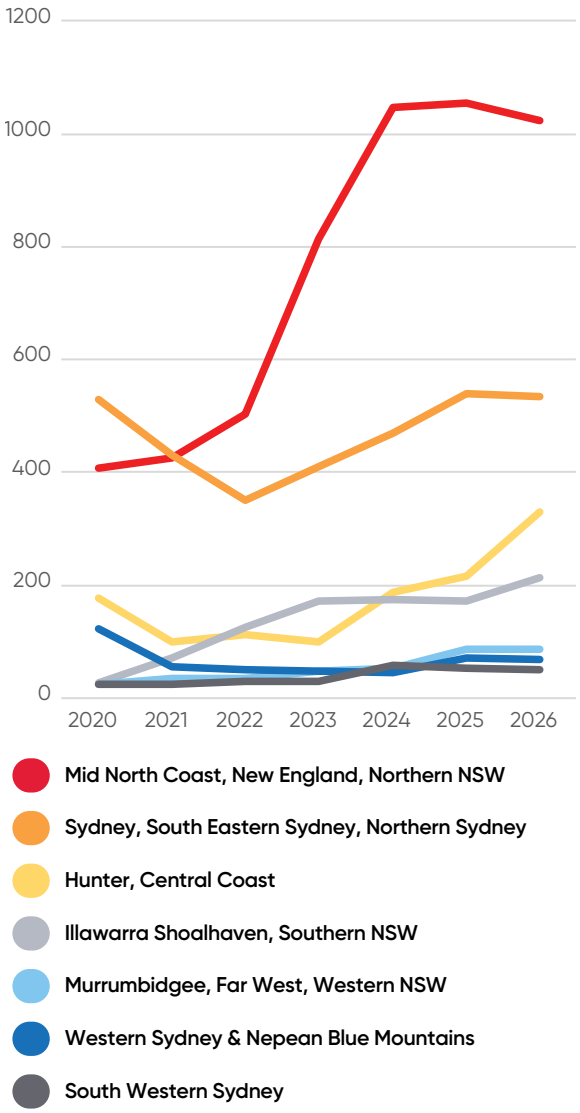
Illawarra Shoalhaven and Southern NSW recorded the highest percentage increase, with a staggering 689% rise in people sleeping rough from 27 in 2020 to 213 in 2026. This district also recorded one of the highest increases between 2025 and 2026, with numbers going up by 23% (an additional 40 people). Hunter and Central Coast also recorded a 54% increase between 2025 and 2026 (an additional 116 people).

MAP 1 - **Homelessness Street Count, % change 2020-2026**



Other regional areas continue to be seriously affected, with the Mid North Coast, New England and Northern district counting 1024 people sleeping rough in 2026. This is a small drop from 2025, but the overall figure is still almost 57% higher than all three Sydney districts combined.

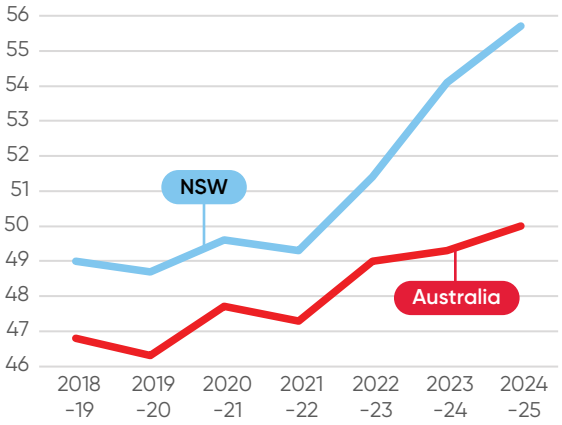
FIGURE 2 - **Change in street count by District Clusters, 2020-2026**



More people are already experiencing homelessness when they first ask for help, and persistent homelessness is increasing

More than half (55%) of clients in NSW are already homeless on their first presentation to a specialist homelessness service. This is higher than the national rate (49%), which is up from 47% in 2018-19.

FIGURE 3 - **Percentage of clients that were homeless at first presentation for support**

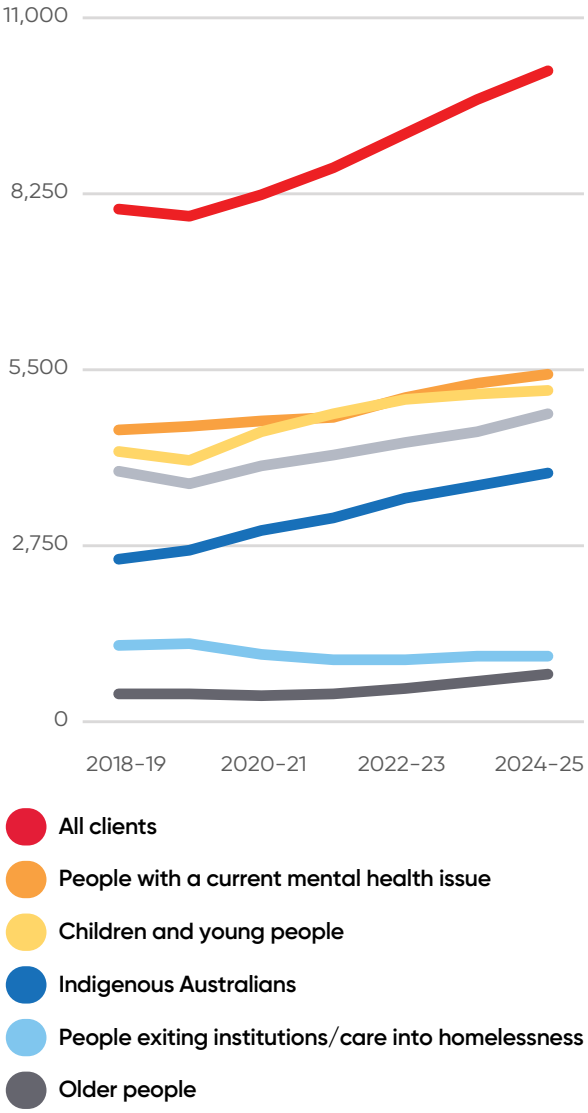


More people seeking help from specialist homelessness services are also experiencing persistent homelessness. In 2024-25, 10,170 clients in NSW were experiencing persistent homelessness, up from 7,897 in 2019-20.[4]

4 AIHW (2026) Specialist homelessness services annual report 2024–25, Table PERS.1.

Persistent homelessness is the experience of homelessness for more than 7 months over a 24 month period (that is, at least 30% of the time).

FIGURE 4 - **Clients who have experienced persistent homelessness, by cohort and year**



Children and young people make up over half (5,195 or 51%) of people experiencing persistent homelessness in NSW. People experiencing mental health issues, women and children affected by family and domestic violence, and Aboriginal people, are also more likely to experience persistent homelessness.

The severity of need is intensifying but service funding has not kept up

When people are already experiencing homelessness, their needs are generally more complex and harder to respond to. If someone doesn't get the right support early, it can lead to their crisis deepening and escalating due to the compounding trauma caused by experiencing homelessness.[5]

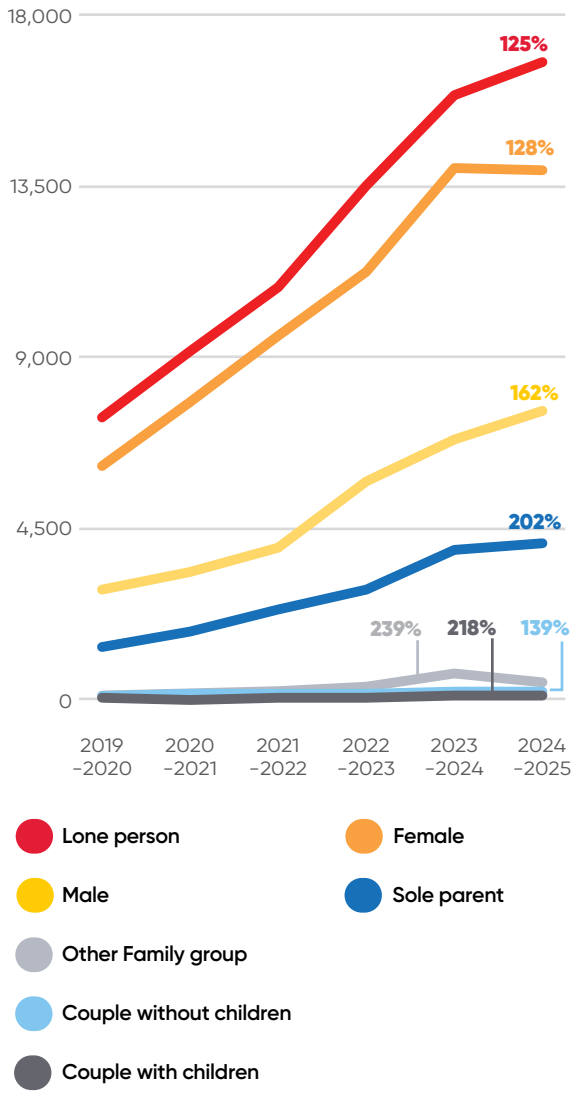
Rough sleeping leaves people much more vulnerable to violence and abuse, particularly women and young people.[6] [7] [8] And the longer someone sleeps rough the worse their health issues become.[9] People sleeping rough often disengage from health and housing providers due to experiences of judgement and discrimination, or feelings of hopelessness over long social housing waitlists, and this disengagement, combined with frequent contact with the justice system, can trap people in deepening cycles of poor health and homelessness.[10]

While the severity of need is intensifying and pressure is growing for support, homelessness service capacity remains limited due to inadequate funding. Services are operating at full capacity with increasing severity and complexity of client needs, and are having to turn away more people because they don't have the resources required.

5 Goodman et al. (1991) Homelessness as psychological trauma.
6 Robinson (2010) Rough Living: Surviving violence and homelessness.
7 Meinbresse et al. (2014) Exploring the experiences of violence among individuals who are homeless using a consumer-led approach.
8 Richards et al. (2023) Examining the Role of Duration and Frequency of Homelessness on Health Outcomes Among Unsheltered Young Adults.
9 Wood et al. (2019) Hospital collaboration with a Housing First program to improve health outcomes for people experiencing homelessness.
10 AIHW (2025) Homelessness services Clients rough sleeping; Glennie & Robinson (2024) Handing out tents: The unmet needs of Tasmanians sleeping rough.

Unassisted requests for support from a specialist homelessness service have grown 139% over five years (from 9,022 in 2019-20 to 21,530 in 2024-25)[11]. Even where services can provide support for a client experiencing homelessness, it is increasingly difficult to assist them back into sustainable housing outcomes. Of the 22,400 clients who began support when homeless in 2024-25, only 38% were assisted into housing.[12]

FIGURE 2 - **Increase in unassisted requests for support over five years, by cohort**



It's time to invest for change

The evidence is clear. More people than ever are seeking homelessness services, but providers lack the funding to meet this demand and NSW doesn't have enough social housing for everyone who needs it. This has resulted in rapid and unacceptable increases in rough sleeping.

Fortunately, we know how to respond. Experience during COVID-19 shows that taking a Housing First approach, in which rough sleepers are provided with both accommodation *and* specialist support tailored to the individual, creates lasting change.[13] We need to grow social housing to ensure that people and families have a pathway out of temporary and crisis accommodation into secure, stable tenancies.

Alongside housing, we also need better support for people to sustain their tenancy and resolve other issues that may have contributed to their crisis experience. And when services have enough resources to respond early, they can support people to address the issue and maintain their housing – preventing them from reaching crisis point.

In 2022-25, specialist homelessness services successfully supported every 9 out of 10 clients at risk of homelessness to maintain housing.

But this can only be achieved in a system that is adequately resourced.

We're calling on the Government to:

1) Invest in the right help, when it's needed: Increase homelessness services funding by 50%.
2) Support safe pathways from homelessness into homes: Commit to grow social housing by 10,000 homes a year until 10% of all housing is social housing.

11 AIHW (2026) Specialist homelessness services annual report 2024–25, SHS historical tables, Table HIST.UNASSISTED.
12 AIHW (2026) Specialist homelessness services annual report 2024–25, SHS Data Tables, Table Clients.32.
13 UNSW Centre for Social Impact (2024) Together Home Evaluation Final Report.

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