

## **Attachment B - Give 'Together Home' a permanent place in NSW**

Together Home has been heralded as 'Housing First philosophy' and in its intent to resolve rough sleeping has been incredibly successful, with over 1000 people housing longer-term with support packages. But with support and housing due to collapse after 24 months, the hard-won gains could be lost given the complexity of experience within the program.

Housing First can reduce homelessness for those with the most chronic and complex experiences of homelessness. It is the basis on which homelessness strategies have succeeded worldwide. As has been demonstrated internationally, it can be powerful in changing both individual lives and systems responding to homelessness.

There is strong international evidence that Housing First ends homelessness for most people who have such complex needs.<sup>1</sup> Across a number of countries with very diverse contexts Housing First services are reporting the end of homelessness for between 7 – 9 out of 10 clients, with twice the success rate when compared with earlier models.<sup>2</sup> The volume of evidence far exceeds that of any other intervention.<sup>3</sup> It includes a mix of large-scale Randomised Control Trials and smaller studies.

The Housing First approach moves away from earlier 'housing ready' models where housing was contingent on a person meeting treatment or other goals, often resulting in a churn of people through short-term or temporary accommodation if and when they didn't meet goals. Housing First model provides independent and **permanent** housing to people alongside non-compulsory support.

Critical to the success of the model, is the implementation of core principles<sup>4</sup>:

- A right to a home
- Flexible support, for as long as needed
- Housing and support/treatment are separated
- Active engagement, without coercion
- Individuals have choice and control
- The service is person centred, based on strengths and aspirations
- A harm reduction approach is used.
- Recovery orientated

It should be noted that there is research to support the ill effects of delayed access to housing, including the development of new problems, while exacerbating existing vulnerabilities.<sup>5</sup>

The NSW Together Home program, established June 2020 after advice from Homelessness NSW and its supporters to minimise spread of COVID-19 amongst those most exposed, has longer-term accommodation housing with support, targeted to people entrenched in rough sleeping. Together Home was a very welcome step from initial emergency responses which housed people in hotels and motels, but it's also time limited. It utilises the established Community Housing Leasing Program which sources rental properties from the private rental market to accommodation people for crisis or transitional housing, the lease period being 2 years.

Together Home has largely been very successful. By mid 2022 it will have housed and be actively supporting 1050 people, previously sleeping rough.

Although Together Home in its appearance, and as stated in the program guidelines, is 'premised on a Housing First philosophy'<sup>6</sup>, the emphasis is largely in relation to only 1 of the 8 principles of Housing First, namely the separation of housing from support. Most obviously lacking from the program is immediate access to permanent housing. There is no clear pathway to permanent housing, rather the aim of supporting participants to identify 'long-term sustainable housing'. As stated in the NSW Audit of the NSW Homelessness Strategy, '...it is not clear how it will overcome longstanding housing challenges to do so, given the complexity of needs amongst this client group, the limited availability of affordable rental properties and the existing scale of unmet need for social housing in New South Wales.'<sup>7</sup>

This issue was also flagged in a comprehensive assessment of the Australia housing and homelessness response to COVID-19. Given the housing conditions in NSW and the complex and multiple needs of those housed through the Together Home Program, termination of funding at the end of the 24 month period would likely result in the responsible CHP's taking on the costs of retaining the headlease for these people, and potentially at the cost of '...terminating a pre-existing headlease elsewhere in its portfolio'.<sup>8</sup> The same paper further highlighted the transgression from a Housing First model, whereby some Together Home clients were required to demonstrate 'housing readiness' which is the opposite to what Housing First aims to achieve. An interviewee stated "We've got a few clients who Housing have said ... need to demonstrate that they can sustain a tenancy. So yes, the people who need it are barred from housing, I suppose, until they can sustain that tenancy (NSW NGO interviewee)."<sup>9</sup>

High-fidelity to the Housing First model is an incredibly important factor to sustain the same success as has been had elsewhere.<sup>10</sup> Data from the AIHW demonstrated a 2% reduction in rough sleeping in NSW, which Homelessness NSW largely attributed to Together Home. These gains, and the multi-million-dollar investment in Together Home and subsequent savings from housing rough sleepers, will largely be lost without the introduction of permanent housing, and ongoing support for Together Home participants, through a high-fidelity Housing First program.

Homelessness NSW recommends the NSW Government embed 'Together Home' as part of the social housing system by:

- **Funding the purchase of social housing properties for existing clients**
- **Funding ongoing wraparound support for clients**
- **Funding an ongoing expansion of the Program with at least 50 new packages per year**

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<sup>1</sup> See for example: Nicholas Pleace, 'Effective Services for Substance Misuse and Homelessness in Scotland: Evidence from an International Review', Scottish Government Social Research (York: Centre for Housing Policy, Scottish Government, 2008), <https://www.york.ac.uk/media/chp/documents/2008/substancemisuse.pdf>; Nicholas Pleace, 'Housing First Guide Europe', 2016,

[https://housingfirsteurope.eu/assets/files/2017/03/HFG\\_full\\_Digital.pdf](https://housingfirsteurope.eu/assets/files/2017/03/HFG_full_Digital.pdf); Deborah Padgett, Benjamin F. Henwood, and Sam J. Tsemberis, *Housing First: Ending Homelessness, Transforming Systems, and Changing Lives* (Oxford University Press, USA, 2016).

<sup>2</sup> Blood, Imogen, Ian Copeman, Mark Goldup, Nicholas Pleace, Joanne Bretherton, and Shelly Dulson. 'Housing first feasibility study for the Liverpool city region.' (2017), p. 37.

<sup>3</sup> Peter Mackie, Sarah Johnsen, and Jenny Wood, 'Ending Rough Sleeping: What Works: An International Evidence Review' (Crisis, 2017).

<sup>4</sup> Pleace, 'Housing First Guide Europe'; Council to Homeless Persons, 'Housing First, Permanent Support Housing: Ending Chronic Homelessness' (Melbourne: Council to Homeless Persons, 6 June 2018), <http://chp.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/FINAL-180606-Housing-First-2018-6-June.pdf>.

<sup>5</sup> Jane Bullen and Eileen Baldry, "'I Waited 12 Months": How Does a Lack of Access to Housing Undermine Housing First?', *International Journal of Housing Policy* 19, no. 1 (2 January 2019): 120–30, <https://doi.org/10.1080/19491247.2018.1521187>.

<sup>6</sup> Together Home Program Guidelines, p.6, accessed via <https://www.facs.nsw.gov.au/download?file=812695>

<sup>7</sup> NSW Auditor General, 'Responses to Homelessness', Performance Audit, New South Wales Auditor General's Report (Sydney: Audit Office of NSW, 4 June 2021).p.3

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<sup>8</sup> Hal Pawson et al., 'COVID-19: Rental Housing and Homelessness Policy Impacts', ACOSS/UNSW Poverty and Inequality Partnership (Sydney: Australian Council of Social Service and University of New South Wales, 2021).

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., p.94

<sup>10</sup> Mackie, Johnsen, and Wood, 'Ending Rough Sleeping: What Works: An International Evidence Review'.