

Rare, brief and non-recurring

A system wide approach to ending homelessness together

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Acknowledgement

We acknowledge that we work and live on Indigenous lands and that sovereignty was never ceded. We pay respect to Elders, past and present, and acknowledge the strength of First Nations people and communities. We look to their wisdom in finding solutions to homelessness.

We embrace diversity and are committed to creating a safe environment for all people, irrespective of their age, gender, cultural identity, sexuality, abilities, language, economic status, profession or location.

We recognise, respect and value the many people who have experienced, or are currently at risk of or experiencing homelessness in NSW. Your experiences, knowledge and wisdom of the system and solutions are central to everything we do.



About Us

Homelessness NSW is a not-for-profit peak body working to end homelessness in NSW.

Our 200+ members include specialist homelessness services, allied organisations and services who share the belief that everyone should have a safe home. We work with our members, people with lived experience and a broad network of partners to understand drivers of homelessness, advocate for solutions, build skills and knowledge, and scale innovation.

Mission

We exist to build the capability of people and the capacity of systems to end homelessness.

Vision

We have a vision for a future where everyone has a safe home and the support to keep it.

Values

At Homelessness NSW our values provide the foundation for our beliefs and behaviors. They are our collective truth and guide our work and impact.

OUR IMPACT

 <p>Integrity</p> <p>We do what we say we will do.</p>	 <p>Making a difference</p> <p>We bring passion and purpose to our work in service to others.</p>	 <p>Pathfinder</p> <p>We create solutions by embracing change and innovation.</p>	 <p>Amplify</p> <p>We champion voices and ideas for change.</p>	 <p>Courage</p> <p>We challenge the status quo, speaking up, taking decisive action, showing vulnerability, and sitting with discomfort.</p>	 <p>Together</p> <p>United, we cultivate a culture of support and connection.</p>
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Contents

	Preface	5
1.	Introduction	6
2.	Overview of the problem and context for change	7
3.	Why a systems change approach to homelessness?	8
4.	People-powered strategy	10
5.	Understanding the challenges	12
6.	Principles for change	13
7.	A shared roadmap for change	18
8.	Levers for aligned action	20
9.	Current and future state	21
	Outcome area 1: Homelessness is rare (prevented)	21
	Outcome area 2: Homelessness is brief	23
	Outcome area 3: Homelessness is non-recurring	26
	Impact measurement	28
10.	Horizons of change road map	30
11.	How you can contribute to change the system	32
12.	Homelessness NSW role	34
13.	Join us!	36
14.	Glossary	38
	Reference	39

Ending Homelessness Together

Thank you to the more than 200 organisations and over 650 people who contributed to the development of this work. Your lived experience, generosity of knowledge, ideas, passion and commitment to working for change is an inspiration and motivation to continue our shared work. Together we will work towards a future in NSW where everyone can have a safe home and the support to keep it.

Preface

At Homelessness NSW we have a vision for a future where everyone has a safe home and the support to keep it.

We hold this vision despite the fact that across NSW, thousands of people are experiencing homelessness on any given day. Many people remain homeless for years, impacting their health, wellbeing, personal potential, families, and broader community.

We believe that homelessness is solvable. The solutions to homelessness are well documented and evidenced across Australia and the world and yet we continue to have a system that contributes to and entrenches people in further homelessness.

In 2022 we set out to take a different approach to achieving our vision. This was rooted in the understanding that homelessness is a cause and a consequence of a broken and unfair system that perpetuates disadvantage and disempowers people in poverty and personal crisis. Our approach was to take a whole-of-system view to ensure a future where homelessness is rare, brief, and non-recurring. We brought together service providers, policy makers and changemakers. We spoke to over 650 people, fostering a diversity of thinking using systems theory to reimagine how we could share resources and act together in an aligned way to end homelessness.

This report is the culmination of the first stage of that work, setting out a shared vision of the future and key areas to work smarter together for greater impact. To achieve our ambitious goals, we must “redesign the plane while we are flying it”.

We must commit to continuously assessing what is and is not working, deciding what to continue and what to stop, based on its potential for scale and impact.

To succeed we will need to work outside of our comfort zones. We will need to proactively build strong networks between lived experts, specialist homelessness services, homelessness services, mainstream services, housing providers, property professionals, private industry, government, the media, community members, policymakers and academics.

Our solutions will need to work at different levels of the system, from small and specific practice improvements, to interventions that redesign policies and change legislation and economic conditions.

Our goals are ambitious and we must be prepared to fail and learn rapidly along the way. We believe that a future NSW where everyone has a safe place to call home is in reach and that applying a systems change approach to how we work together can help us to achieve it.

We want you, our members, allies and partners to come with us on this journey as we work to end homelessness together.



01

Introduction

Homelessness NSW is facilitating a whole-of-system approach to create a future where homelessness is rare, brief and non-recurring in NSW. This joined up approach for change is about acting in new ways to support better outcomes for the people of NSW.

The homelessness system is experiencing a significant shift with the announcement in early 2023 of a National Housing and Homelessness Plan and the review of the current NSW Homelessness Strategy. Rather than awaiting a top-down action plan led by governments, there is an opportunity for a whole-of-system response to influence these strategies and actions to address homelessness at the root causes.

Right now, we have an opportunity to transform the system. Last year, 50% of people in NSW seeking homelessness support were not getting their needs met.² When people can access support, it's often temporary. Services are underfunded and stretched as there are more people than the system can support. People seeking assistance are experiencing stigma, racism and a lack of power in decision making about their lives. There are currently 57,000 households on the waiting list for social housing, where many people wait more than 10 years for a safe and permanent home³. The current system is in gridlock as it responds to the crisis at our front door without the resources to start working towards prevention.

For this project, we are developing a shared, community-centred vision and commitment to tackle the challenges and conditions that hold homelessness in place. To achieve this, we are working together to:

- Understand the system more deeply,
- Engage fellow stakeholders more meaningfully, and
- Think and act together in new ways, informed by evidence.

The community referred to here are all system stakeholders – people with lived and living experience, community, industry, the private sector, academics, service providers and government. Together we have begun to map out the elements for change over the next 10 years. Part of this work is understanding that these elements will not include a list of static actions that lock us in. Rather the roadmap ahead will allow us to plan, respond and adapt to collectively deliver change and learn together as we go.



02

Overview of the problem and context for change

Homelessness is a deeply entrenched social issue that affects individuals, families, and communities. It poses immense challenges to society, as it not only strips people of their basic human rights but also hinders their access to essential resources and opportunities for a dignified life.

Homelessness in NSW is increasing. Across NSW specialist homelessness services are supporting more than 60,000 people who need help every year. As the cost of living continues to spiral, rents rise and wages fall behind inflation, the pressure on those vulnerable to homelessness grows. Homelessness is considered by some to be an intractable problem, assuming it is an issue too big to fix or a personal choice. This is not the case.

There are several structural factors that contribute to homelessness, including inadequate affordable housing, insufficient social support systems and systemic inequalities such as poverty, unemployment, and discrimination. These problems interact with one another, creating a cycle of homelessness that is challenging to break. In NSW, income support payments have not kept pace with the cost of living and continue to mean many people are living in poverty. Rates of domestic and family violence continue to increase, with no Local Government Area across NSW seeing an improvement over the past 60 months to June 2023.⁴ The private rental market has reached a point of extreme unaffordability, with vacancy rates of less than 1% for those on low incomes.⁵ All of this is compounding

at a time when the level of social housing is at its lowest and declining. As of June 2022, there were over 57,000 households on the NSW Social Housing waiting list, the majority of whom will wait 10 years or more for a safe home.⁶

Homelessness can be temporary or last for years, resulting from a range of circumstances, such as job loss, family breakdown, mental health issues, substance use, leaving care, exiting prison, or fleeing domestic and family violence. Change to:

All people want and need a safe place to call home. However, housing, welfare, economic and social policy systems, and implicit and explicit mindsets are creating conditions which lead to homelessness.

In order to address the challenges of homelessness, we already know what works. There are evidence-based solutions within our reach. However, current practices across the system are disconnected and uncoordinated, despite having deep linkages and interdependency. This includes social security payments, housing policy and lived experiences of homelessness. Not taking a whole-of-system approach risks perpetuating a system that can't scale what works in a nuanced, localised and coordinated way to achieve the impact required to make homelessness rare, brief and non-recurring.



03

Why a systems change approach to homelessness?

What is systems change?

"Programs help people beat the odds. Systems change helps change the odds."

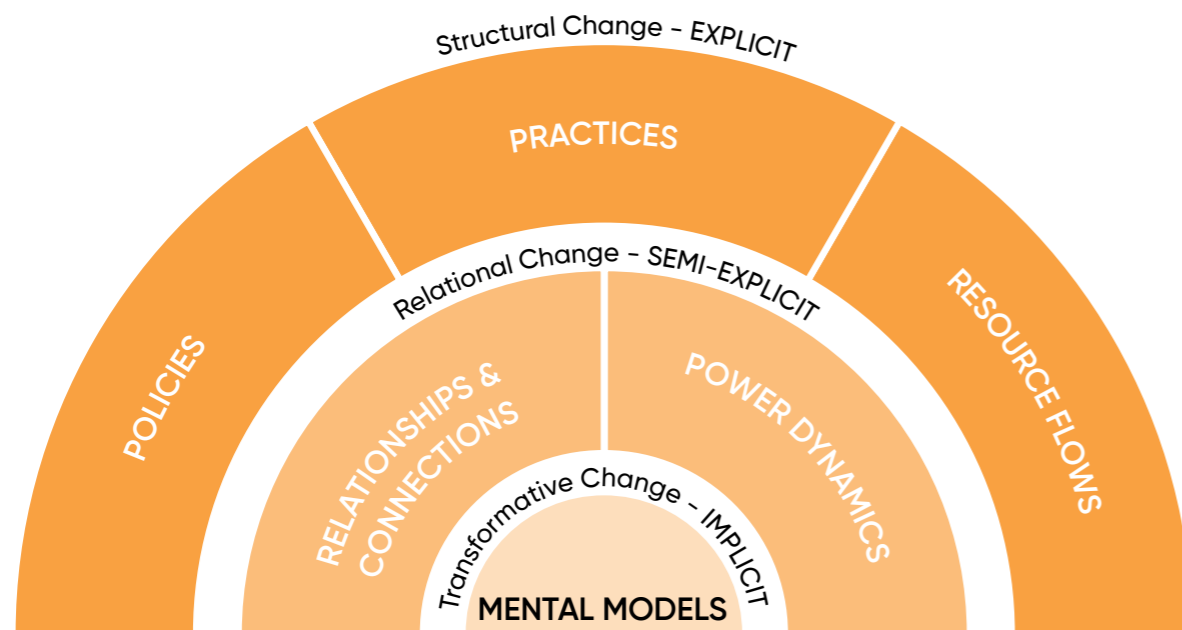
Karen Pittman, Forum on Youth Investment

Systems change refers to the outcomes of deliberate and coordinated efforts to alter the fundamental structures, policies, and practices of a complex system to address social or environmental challenges. Inherent in this approach is the recognition that many of the problems we face today are not isolated issues

but are dynamic in nature. Their causes are deeply interconnected and embedded within larger systems. The symptoms of these are constantly influenced by a range of factors such as economic policies, social structures and cultural norms.

The coordinated efforts to create change involve a shift from a narrow, short-term focus on symptoms, to a broader, long-term focus on the underlying systemic factors. We need to direct our efforts towards changing the contributing conditions and inequalities. This will take a process of shared learning to drive adaptive action across multiple actors. We need regular feedback to make sense of the changes and iterative efforts that can lead to the desired outcomes.

The six conditions of systems change



Adapted from Kania, Kramer and Senge (2018)

This diagram is adapted from 'The Water of Systems Change'.⁹ It unpacks the conditions at varying levels in the system from the explicit policies, practices and "rules" of the system to more implicit ideologies and deeply held beliefs that determine funding priorities and community concerns.

Systems change approach to ending homelessness in NSW

No single organisation or sector can make substantial changes to homelessness across NSW. The challenges of homelessness are broad, complex and dynamic. They include the explicit challenges around housing affordability and supply, family and domestic violence, as well as deeper structural issues including poverty, unemployment, racism and social inequality.

The interconnectedness of these contributing factors means that actions in one domain can have ripple effects and unintended consequences.¹⁰ Therefore, preventing and responding to homelessness requires a coordinated effort involving multiple stakeholders, including lived experts, government agencies, not-for-profit organisations, the private sector and community members.

By collectively creating a strategy that sets out efforts for systems change we believe we can provide a north star towards a better future for the people of NSW. With actions that are more comprehensive, integrated, and sustainable we will be equipped with a broader picture of the factors at play and contributions we can all make. This in turn, will help us to learn and guide the principles and understanding that enables aligned, but independent action across New South Wales.¹¹



04

People-powered strategy

At Homelessness NSW we proactively partner for greater impact. This includes ensuring we have deep connections with, and seek input from, people experiencing homelessness and those supporting, championing, funding, and leading on action.

We had deep conversations and a series of workshops with a wide range of people across the system. From August 2022 to June 2023, we engaged with over 650 people who have been in, work within, or are connected to, the homelessness system in NSW.

Conversations began with people with lived and living experience of homelessness, specialist homelessness services, homelessness support providers, housing providers, government (services and policy makers), non-government service providers and funders. We then widened the engagement to connect with people not directly involved with homelessness, but who also have influence to shift the conditions. This included property developers, business owners, corrections, employment and health professionals, academics and philanthropists. Each individual and group we engaged has a role to play as a connected system actor to end homelessness in NSW.

Our purpose was to gain different perspectives to build and consolidate an understanding about the biggest challenges to ending homelessness and the conditions that continue to hold these challenges in place. By working together to understand these, we also identified several key levers that can be actioned by a network of system actors for aligned yet independent action to shift the conditions.

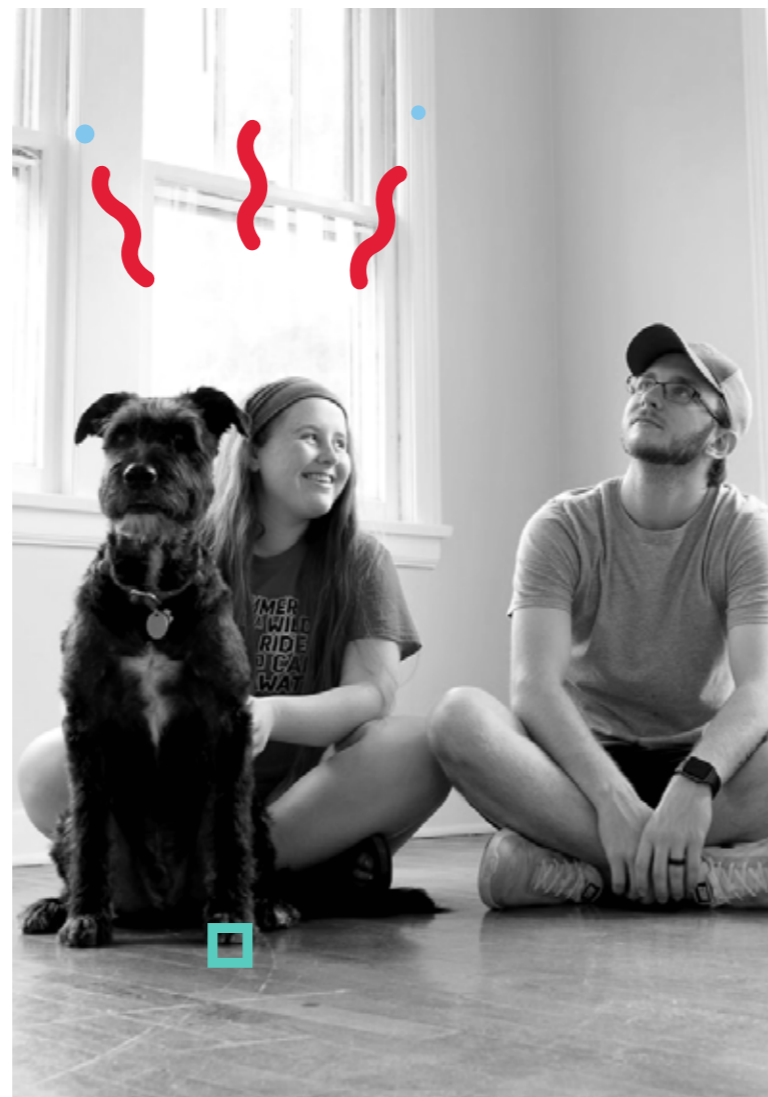
The diagram on page 11 provides an overview of the timeline and methods of engagement.

We synthesised and qualitatively analysed the information after each workshop. We were then able to identify key themes related to the challenges and the key levers to act on the conditions. We used an iterative process where we took the findings into our next conversations and workshops, to test and expand upon these themes.

This process enabled us to build a systems theory of change for ending homelessness a set of guiding principles, a framework for action and metrics to track progress at the local level.

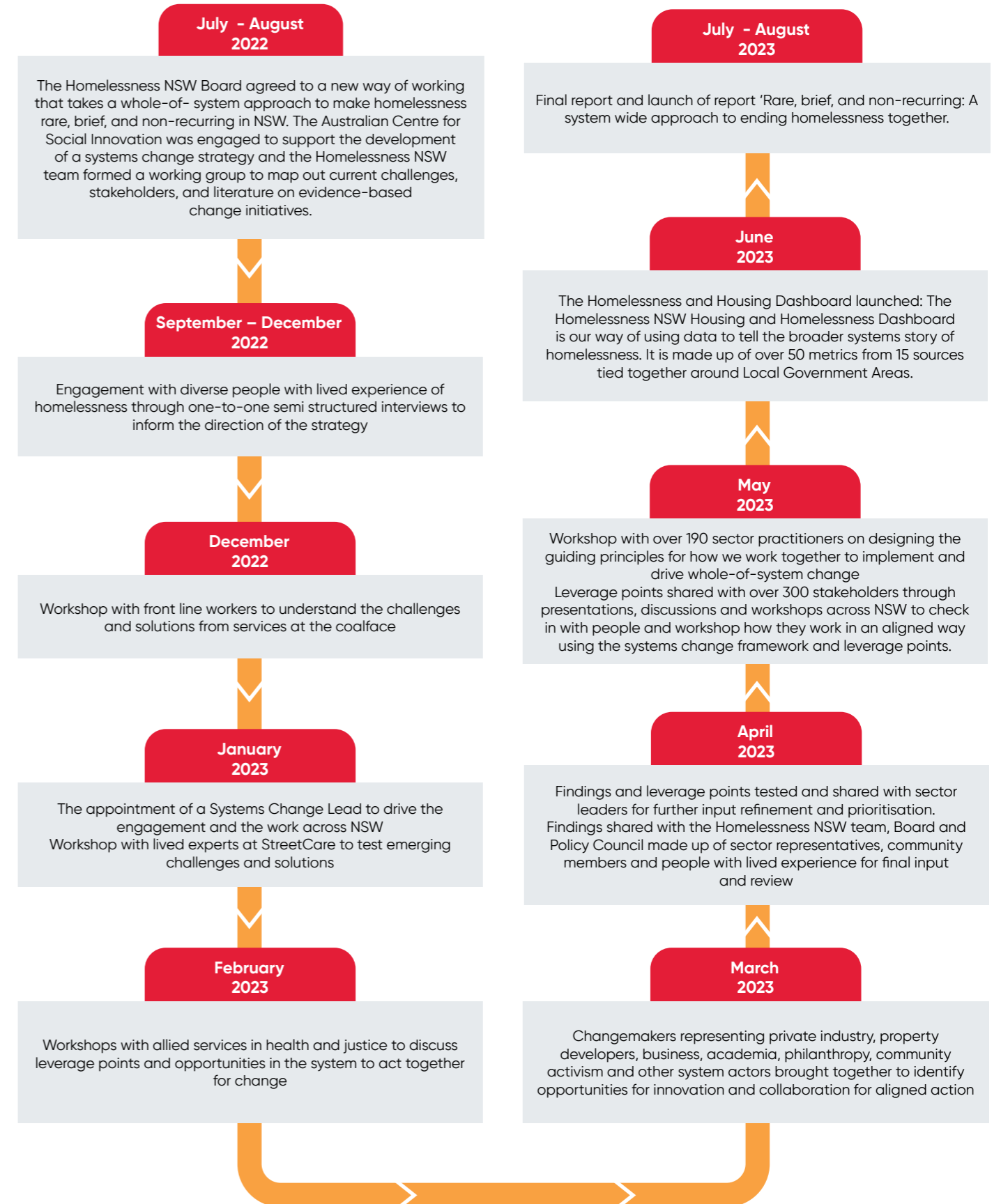
The theory of change tells the story of the impact and vision we are collectively working towards. The framework outlines how the vision contributes to making homelessness rare, brief, and non-recurring and presents principles to guide the actions. These together form the strategic direction which organisations and individuals can mobilise to act together for change.

For more information about the main challenges, conditions and leverage points, please refer to chapter 10 Current and Future State on page 19 for our analysis on the current system challenges and barriers experienced.



Contributors and changemakers: Timeline of engagement and strategy development

2022 – 2023



05

Understanding the challenges

Four key challenges emerged from the engagement workshops, interviews and group discussions.

Social and economic policy contributes to increasing homelessness

There are a range of policy settings at a macro level including social security payments, tax policy, a lack of investment in early intervention – as well as policy directly related to housing and homelessness – that contributes to people's risk of homelessness.

There are systemic barriers to accessing accommodation and support

There are myriad explicit rules and criteria that lock people out of the help they need and make it exhausting to navigate the system. There are also deeply held and prevalent implicit forces that disadvantage people, including stigma and racism, and directly contribute to greater risk of homelessness.

There is a lack of coordination across government and support services

There are several failures of coordination that are major contributors to perpetuating risks and experiences of homelessness. Examples include high rates of exits from institutions such as prison and out of home care into homelessness, inadequate access to data and information and a lack of coordination across levels of government for the delivery of housing and support services. There is also a break down in coordination related to power dynamics between funders, providers and people experiencing homelessness, and amongst providers themselves, which can undermine collaboration.

People's support needs are not being met

All of these challenges culminate in a system that perpetuates homelessness and reinforces trauma. A lack of social and affordable housing and insufficient investment in services to keep up with demand mean that people can't get the long-term pathways out of homelessness that they need. The trauma of homelessness is compounded by a lack of choice and control – people often end up accepting the support they can get, rather than the support they want and need. This is even more pronounced when seeking culturally-safe and Aboriginal-led services and specialist services such in areas such as domestic and family violence, and youth.



06

Principles for change

The principles guide the way people want to work together to end homelessness in NSW. They are a framework for decision making, outlining collective ethics and helping people to prioritise efforts and resources. These principles were generated from the findings from the systems change engagement and refined with over 180 sector practitioners in a participatory workshop. All the ideas and insights from this workshop are captured in the visual story on page 15. Participants shared a sense of common understanding and deeply held values of respect, social justice, empathy, and belief in making a difference.

The following six principles guide the shared beliefs on how people want to work together to end homelessness in NSW.



Shift power to people with lived experience

Shifting power to people with lived experience means empowering individuals who have firsthand experience with the issues being addressed and recognising their expertise and knowledge. Lived experience is a crucial form of knowledge, and those who have gone through specific challenges or situations hold valuable insights that can lead to positive outcomes. In practice, this principle involves giving people with lived experience a seat at decision-making tables, involving them in service design and delivery, and incorporating their perspectives into policy development.

It emphasises co-design, active listening, and respecting the voices of those affected. However, this principle should not be tokenistic or dismissive; it should genuinely empower individuals and avoid exploiting or judging them. It requires a shift away from top-down models, where decisions are made without seeking input from those with lived experience, and towards an inclusive, diverse, and respectful approach.



Everyone needs safe and secure housing

The belief that a safe home is a fundamental and foundational need we all share brings people with diverse viewpoints together to act for change. It does not involve long waiting periods for housing or rigid systems. It does not promote a one-size-fits-all approach, non-trauma-informed spaces, or tenants being forced into unsafe or inappropriate housing situations. Furthermore, it discourages combative attitudes and the notion that individuals have to "earn" their right to housing.



Trauma informed responses at every level of the system

This principle emphasises the importance of recognising and addressing trauma in individuals experiencing homelessness. It involves understanding the impact of trauma on people and providing services and support that are compassionate, empathetic, and focused on their needs and choices. This principle aims to create safe environments where individuals can feel understood and supported in their journey towards stability and healing. In practice, it involves training staff to be trauma-informed, incorporating trauma knowledge into service design, and involving people with lived experience in decision-making processes. However, this principle should genuinely prioritise the well-being and dignity of those affected by trauma and homelessness requiring new ways of working and engaging with people across all levels of governance and operations.



Surface and address racism, structural and gender inequity

This principle emphasises the importance of recognising and addressing trauma in individuals experiencing homelessness. It involves understanding the impact of trauma on people and providing services and support that are compassionate, empathetic, and focused on their needs and choices. This principle aims to create safe environments where individuals can feel understood and supported in their journey towards stability and healing. In practice, it involves training staff to be trauma-informed, incorporating trauma knowledge into service design, and involving people with lived experience in decision-making processes. However, this principle should genuinely prioritise the well-being and dignity of those affected by trauma and homelessness requiring new ways of working and engaging with people across all levels of governance and operations.



Learn, adapt and evolve

This principle highlights the importance of continuous learning, improvement, and flexibility within the sector. It emphasises the need to be open-minded, innovative and willing to make changes based on evidence and feedback. This principle is crucial for providing better services, addressing evolving needs and ensuring the sector stays relevant and effective. In practice, it involves learning from mistakes, embracing collaboration, seeking and sharing knowledge, and staying up-to-date with the changing needs of those experiencing homelessness. This principle should not look like rigid adherence to old practices, resisting change, or refusing to learn from failures. Instead, it requires a proactive and responsive approach to create a stronger and more adaptable support system.



Data-led decision making and evaluation of change

This principle highlights the importance of using evidence and facts to inform decision-making processes and evaluating the effectiveness of interventions. This principle promotes the use of data-driven approaches to ensure resources are allocated efficiently, policies are based on evidence, and services are tailored to meet the actual needs of those experiencing homelessness. In practice, this involves collecting accurate data, conducting evaluations, and using the insights gained to continuously improve services. However, this principle should not involve overwhelming clients with excessive surveys or using data as a means to discount lived experience, and it should prioritise trauma-informed data collection. Instead, it should strive for transparent, relevant, and understandable data that informs and empowers positive change.



HOMELESSNESS IS RARE, BRIEF & NON-RECURRING

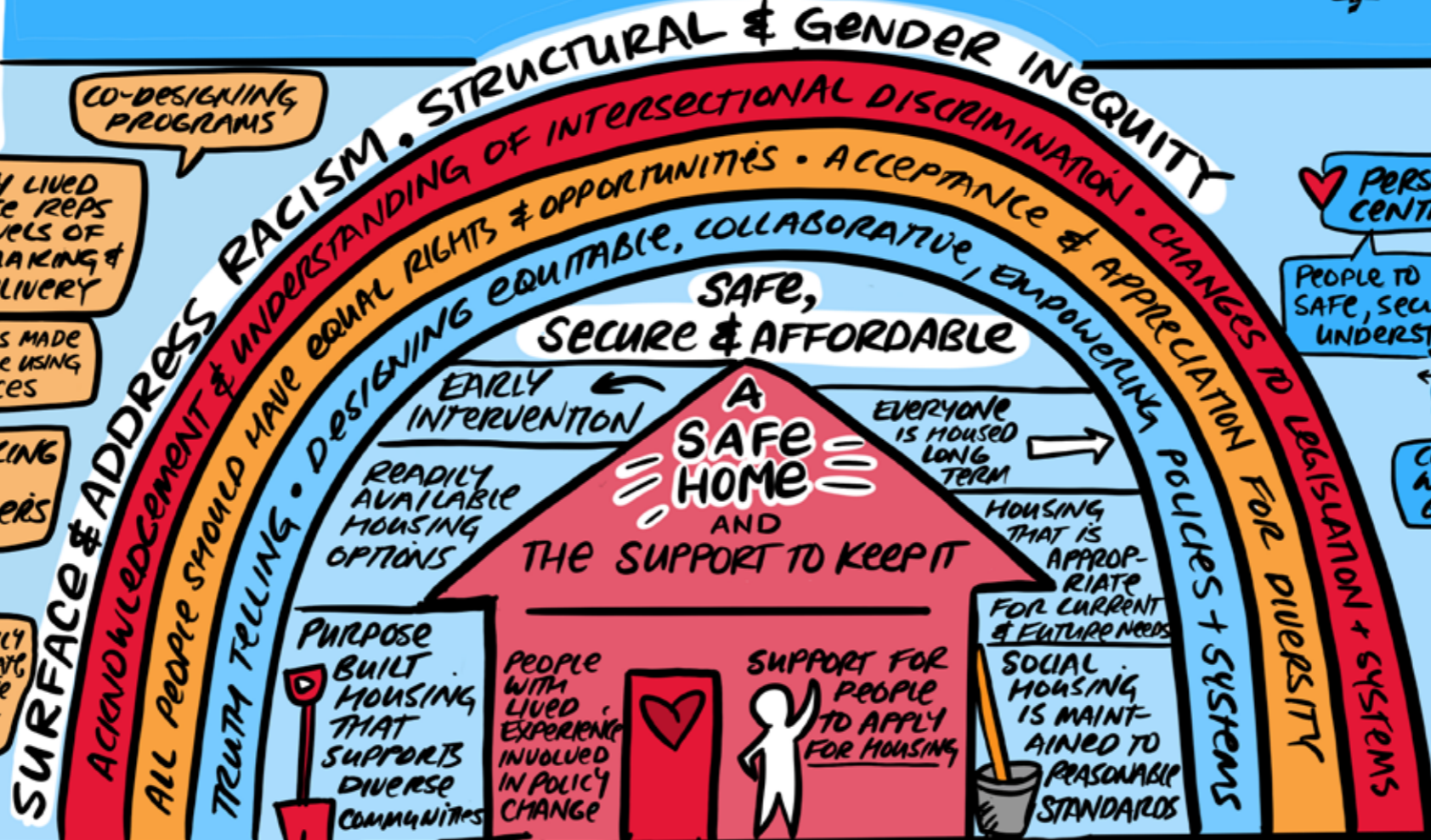
BUILDING CONSTELLATIONS NOT STARS

SHIFT POWER TO PEOPLE WITH LIVED EXPERIENCE

- Authentic & genuine, not tokenistic
- Creating a safe space, active listening & supporting
- Having a coordinated response across the sector that enables training & recruitment of lived exp. into LSHIP roles
- Understanding the value of lived experience
- Mandatory lived experience reps at all levels of decision making & service delivery
- Decisions made by people using services
- Breaking down barriers
- Culturally appropriate, inclusive non-judgmental
- Co-designing programs

TRAUMA INFORMED RESPONSES AT EVERY LEVEL OF THE SYSTEM

- Person centred: People to feel safe, secure & understood
- Qualified, trained staff, w/ specialist trauma-informed representatives
- Flexibility within systems
- Ability to share info across sectors
- Ask people how they would like to be supported
- Consistent workplace guidelines
- People are given time & space to talk
- Ensuring people do not experience more trauma
- Thoughtful planning & discussion before approaching a person



LEARN, ADAPT & EVOLVE

- Homelessness & people experiencing homelessness are constantly changing
- Experimentation is important
- Systems need to be agile
- Greater cross sector collaboration & partnerships
- Communities of practice
- Ambition + courage
- Learning from mistakes; growing from failure
- Being innovative & trying new things
- Change where the system is not working

DATA-LED DECISION MAKING & EVALUATION OF CHANGE

- Evidence based decision making
- Consistent systems that relate to each other
- Fit-for-purpose service delivery & funding
- Implementation of evidence
- Every program plan & policy has a research & measurement monitor
- A focus on prevention
- Visualisation of data
- Data that everyone can understand
- Data that everyone can understand
- Data that everyone can understand
- Meaningful data: Qualitative & Quantitative
- Real-time local data
- Clear + transparent information on the collection & use of data
- Innovative ways to capture the complexities of the work & ways to share it across the sector
- Accurate relevant & free from bias
- Lived experience counts as evidence
- Meaningful data: Qualitative & Quantitative

BUILD ON WHAT IS WORKING

WE ARE STRONGER TOGETHER

IT'S UP TO US, WE ARE BUILDING THIS TOGETHER

ALIGNED INDEPENDENT ACTION!

07

A shared roadmap for change

The Ending Homelessness Theory of Change (ToC), over page, provides a narrative about the pathways for impact to end homelessness in NSW. This includes our long-term and intermediate outcomes, key action levers for change and foundational enablers for success.

The ToC is a strategic framework that provides a roadmap for understanding and driving social change. It is a rigorous and participatory process whereby stakeholders identify the conditions they believe have to unfold for their long-term goals to be met. These conditions are modeled as outcomes, arranged graphically in a causal framework. It serves as a guiding tool to identify desired outcomes and delineate the necessary steps and interventions required to achieve those outcomes. Similar to a blueprint, it enables stakeholders to systematically plan and implement actions that lead to tangible and positive transformations.¹²

Our ToC is built upon a robust picture of our collective understanding about the change we want to create, why this is needed and how we intend to go about it. It's not a list of every possible action that can be taken or intended to be a descriptive policy analysis. Its goal is to inform the highest points of contribution for collective and aligned action that can be adopted by change makers at all levels of the system.

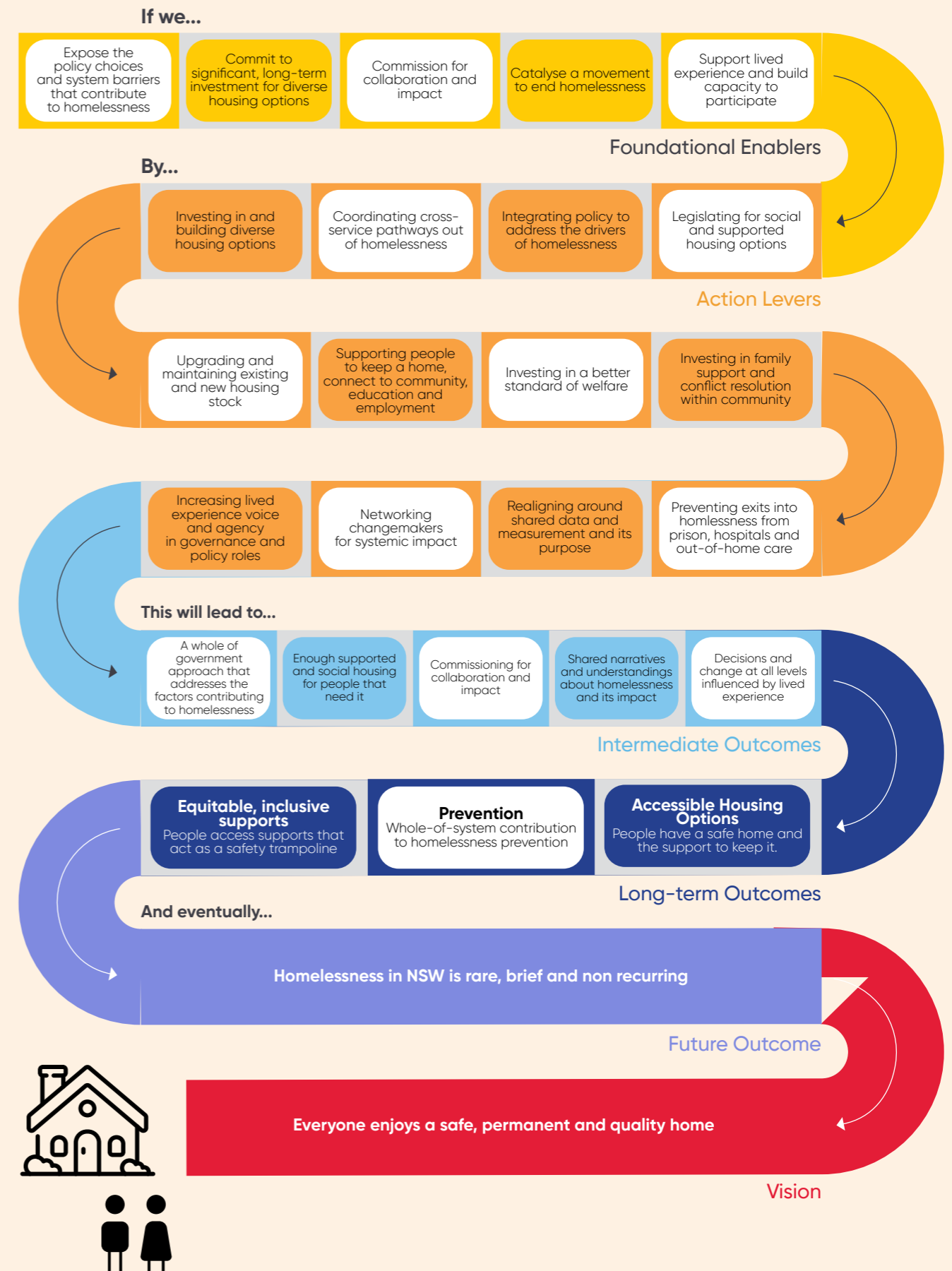
The ToC has been developed from the insights that have emerged from nine months of community engagement. The long and short-term outcomes are those that people want to see and where the system can align to act independently but towards a shared vision and outcome. The leverage points have been identified through a series of system mapping exercises with key stakeholders. These key levers direct us to places in the system where change is critical, and where an action/ solution can be applied to create that change. The enabling factors are the building blocks required to be in place first to support action at the leverage points and to achieve outcomes.

The ToC will enable change to be continuously stewarded through a systems lens to:

- Create a shared understanding of the key challenges preventing progress,
- Make explicit the system conditions and leverage points to act upon, and
- Support relational infrastructure for learning and collaboration.



Ending Homelessness Together – Systems Theory of Change



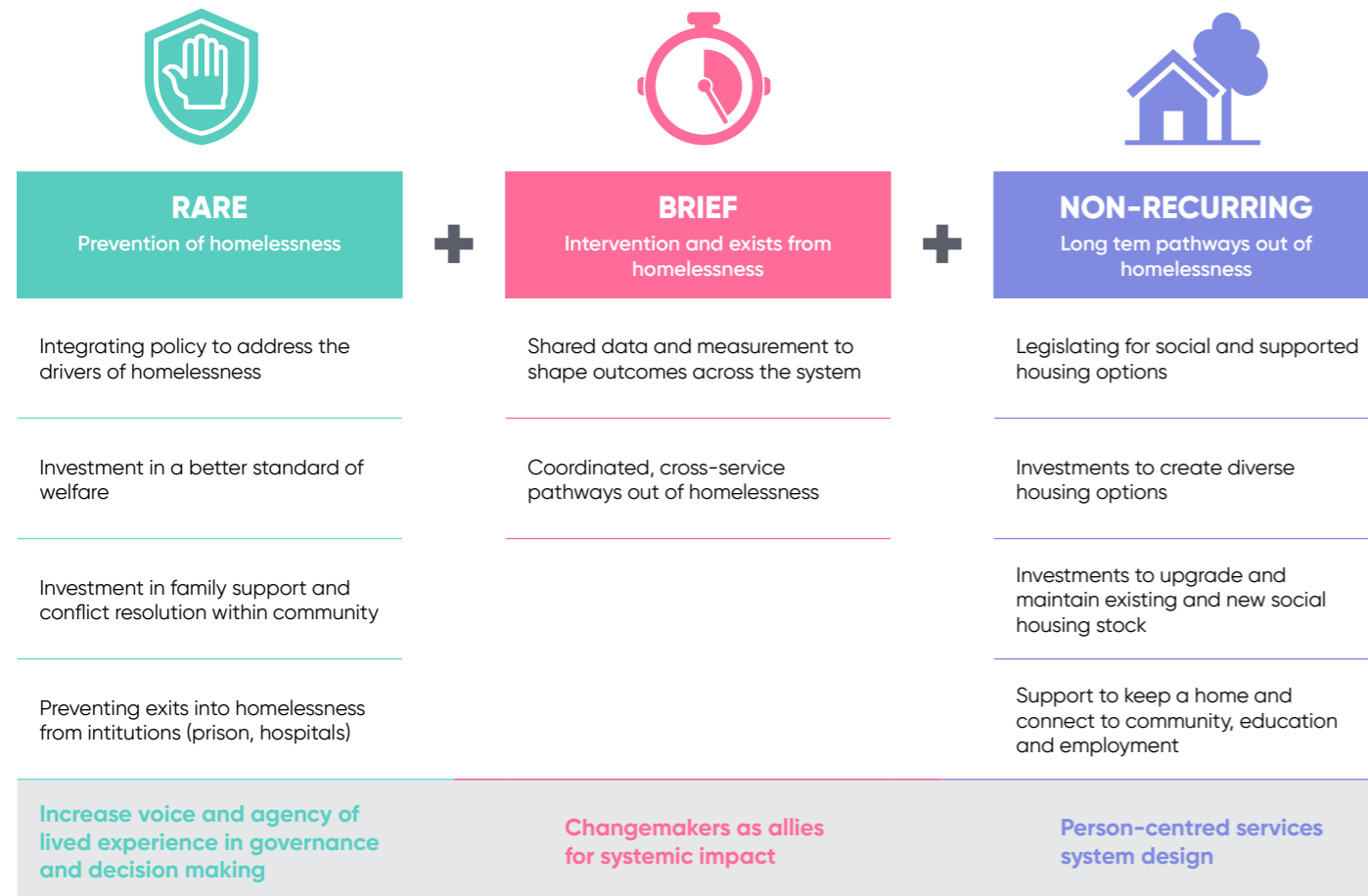
08

Levers for aligned action

“Leverage points are places to intervene in a system, where a small shift in one thing can produce big changes in everything”.

Donella Meadows¹³

This framework maps the action levers identified in the Theory of Change by the outcomes of rare, brief and non-recurring homelessness. Underpinning these actions across all outcome areas are key actions to embed lived experience, person-centered design and collaboration across all stakeholder groups.



09

Current and future state of homelessness

Outcome area 1:

Homelessness is rare (prevented)



“It’s better to put fences at the top of cliffs than run ambulances at the bottom.”

Long term outcome

Whole-of-system contribution to homelessness prevention across all levels of government, community, and business.

Current challenges

Right now, funding and responses to homelessness are focused on the crisis end of the system. Many services want to increase their prevention efforts but are overwhelmed and under resourced to meet demand. This makes it difficult for people to access appropriate services at the point where prevention can occur.

A lot of support provided to people at risk of homelessness is focused on one-off interventions of food or clothing. Often not resourced or set up to provide long term pathways out of homelessness for people.

Poverty and housing stress are the main drivers of homelessness in NSW ensuring people have a decent standard of living through adequate supply of quality affordable and safe homes and income support that lifts people out of poverty would be major contributors to reducing the rate and prevalence of homelessness.

Structural inequality, racism, gender based violence and non-residency status all contribute further risks to people not being prevented from becoming homeless.

“I did feel it is really hard to find a group that can help unless you have access to internet or a phone.”
AWC

“You feel like you have no control or power. And you’re not deserving. Like everyone’s thinking, “they’re the problem.””
S

“There are support systems out there, it’s just that they’re so scarce, there needs to be more available.”
P

“In practice it is difficult. Women don’t always have documentation and evidence required when they flee violence. Temporary visa holders feel fear accessing supports, especially when this has been used as a coercive control tactic over them in their relationship (if you leave me they will kick you out of the country).”
SERVICE PROVIDER

Actions for change



RARE Prevention of homelessness

Integrating policy to address the drivers of homelessness

Investment in a better standard of welfare

Investment in family support and conflict resolution within community

Preventing exits into homelessness from institutions (e.g. prison, hospitals)

Future state

The future system has shifted from centring on short-term crisis responses to prevention as a key goal to end homelessness. This has involved a community-centred, whole-of-system contribution towards prevention and an integrated policy approach that addresses the drivers of homelessness such as poverty and family violence. Investment in a better standard of welfare to address disproportionate financial support and perpetual waiting lists is a priority.

Prevention strategies target the general population and at-risk groups. Public and private investment has enabled a range of responses for people who face imminent housing loss, have previously been homeless or are currently homeless. These responses work quickly to place or keep people in stable housing. Interventions are not solely the domain of Specialist Homelessness Services, but include an integrated service response across education, employment, family and welfare services, housing and health. Policy and service responses that prevent people from entering homelessness when they leave prison, a hospital or out-of-home care are a priority interventions.

Investment continues into raising community capacity to respond to homelessness, while building individual protective factors, such as literacy, education, employment skills, financial capacity and conflict management to reduce risk.

There is enough supported and social housing for people to access including rapid permanent rehousing, permanent supportive housing and targeted recovery services. These are accessible through identifiable connection points in the community.

Measures

- Number of people provided support to prevent homelessness (data not yet collected/ available publicly)
- Number of people experiencing homelessness (census and street count) by demographic (gender, age, indigenous status)
- Percentage of households in rental stress
- Number of domestic and family violence incidents
- Number of alcohol related hospitalisations
- Number of people on/rate of income support payments

"I don't think the system is properly well-equipped to deal with the issue of homelessness, not just giving food, coupons and a place to sleep and things like that, but there's not a lot of support for the people who need someone to talk to. I sort of wished that there was someone who truly did understand my circumstance."

P

Outcome area 2:

Homelessness is brief



"Availability is the main thing. I was looking for a house for two years while I was living with my dog on the street."

AWC

Long term outcome

Every person living in NSW who is at risk of or experiencing homelessness can access supports that act as a trampoline back to safety, stability and community connection.

Current challenges

Overwhelmingly, people with lived experience of homelessness described a system that was restrictive, complex and exhausting to navigate. People described the short-term nature of crisis support as not enough to help them to exit homelessness. Many people are homeless for two years or more with some people becoming entrenched in decades of cycles of homelessness.

Workers described having limited options to support people in the way they would want to due to overstretched services and a gridlocked system with nowhere for people to go. Services described a lack of coordination and meaningful collaboration or willingness to share data driven by competitive tendering and funders pitting organisations against one another.

Pathways out of homelessness are limited due to a lack of supply of affordable rental, social or supported housing. People get stuck in the crisis system which is not set up for long term tenancies. Many services feel forced to exit people back into homelessness because their planning permissions and contracts don't allow people to stay in temporary refuges for more than three months.

"Three months is absolutely nothing. Sometimes you're only coming to terms that you're homeless three months after things have happened."

P

"I was in emergency accommodation for two months and then a temporary residence but there wasn't any talks of long-term goals like getting a job in an area I wanted to live in, or getting a drivers' licence, or having a connection with the community."

H

"There's just not enough places to meet the need, especially for people like me who have four children."

C

"You go from emergency housing and then put into transitional housing, but you can get stuck there. Transitional housing is meant to be for 18 months. I was there for two and a half years. I was just about to be evicted until I got my place."

E

"Women escaping DV are often placed in accommodation with offenders and people with criminal histories. There is no support for our clients other than our staff and clients are expected to get to and from Temporary Accommodation and housing office by their own means. This can consist of a client having to walk kilometers with children and bags of belongings."

SERVICE WORKER

"Prior to the reforms, we were encouraged to collaborate, and then when the tender process began and tenders were awarded, everybody learned that they were sub-contract arrangements and immediately changed some of the dynamics and ownership. It introduced a lot of conflict that nobody ever saw coming. It turned a once positive thing into quite an adversarial thing."

SERVICE WORKER

"I totally get that the three-month thing is because there's more than just one person is homeless, but I think if there was more funding, there would be more room for help."

P

"When I first started it, homelessness, it was before all the changes [Going Home, Staying Home reforms], relationships with mentors and other people in the sector completely changed. There wasn't that sharing of resources and knowledge - it all became quite competitive. And all the older people who had been in the sector for a long time, they left. So all that knowledge and relationships vanished. And just now, services aren't working together for the benefit of clients. Everyone is very competitive."

SERVICE REP

"There's not a lot of places offering long-term help, there's help for three months but that's just about it. You get three months then you have to move. As someone who has been in the system two years in, I've only just found some peace of mind for the setting I'm in."

P

Actions for change



BRIEF

Intervention and exits from homelessness

Shared data and measurement to shape outcomes across the system

Coordinated, cross-service pathways out of homelessness

Future state

Equitable and inclusive support is about everyone accessing support when and how they need, to prevent or reduce experiences of homelessness. Shifting to this future state relies on a shared understanding of homelessness, including its definition, and how it impacts diverse people's lives. People's lived experience informs this understanding and the decisions made around the type of support that works for people across their life course.

This shared understanding is developed and held by a network of change makers that includes business, government, philanthropy, service providers, peak bodies, lived experience and community representatives. They are aligned around shared goals, data and measurement with an agreed purpose. A joined-up partnering approach focuses outward on impact in addition to inward on service delivery.

Practice is shaped by the mindset of doing with, rather than doing for, which fosters capability building and growth. The system is moving away from the "safety net" concept of support to a "trampoline" of support that people use to bounce back to safety, stability and wellbeing. The support on offer reflects people's diverse and complex needs and considers their whole self.

Measures

- Number of people accessing specialist homelessness services by demographic (gender, age, Indigenous status) and reason
- Average time spent waiting for a housing outcome (data not yet in the dashboard)
- Number of people supported into housing (data not yet in the dashboard)
- Satisfaction percentage reported by people supported in the homelessness system (data not yet available)

Outcome area 3:

Homelessness is non-recurring



“You spend most of your days looking for a home. That’s pretty much what you do all day – search for properties, go and look at properties. It’s hard to move on or restart your life when that’s what you’re doing all day, every day.”

Long term outcome

People have a safe home and the support to keep it.

Current challenges

There is not enough affordable rental or social housing to meet the needs of people who become homeless, forcing people to remain homeless for longer periods of time. The longer a person is homeless the more entrenched in disadvantage they become, impacting their health, wellbeing and connection to community. A lack of access to secure, safe quality homes that people can afford creates significant and ongoing stress.

In some cases, people are being encouraged to stay poor to stay housed limiting their potential and capacity to participate in employment and further study.

People highlighted the need for ongoing support once linked to housing. Housing First programs like Together Home have significant success rates at retaining tenancies but require a pipeline of housing and ongoing supports for people with complex and ongoing needs.

“The house has been planned to be demolished so I’m just literally waiting for the call to go. It’s hard because you want to settle in and do all these things but you’re just in limbo.”

C

“When I found a place I got off Centrelink because I got a job, but then the support just fell away because they couldn’t help me unless I didn’t have a job. So then I had to give then job away, go back on Newstart allowance and the social housing waitlist. I want to work but I’m scared I’ll lose my place [on the housing waiting list]. What do I do, just sit here on the dole and wait. I hate it.”

D

“Support Programs are often too short and should be longer to ensure people don’t have to resort to crime to stay afloat.”

H

Actions for change



NON-RECURRING

Long term pathways out of homelessness

Legislating for social and supported housing options

Investments to create diverse housing options

Investments to upgrade and maintain existing and new social housing stock

Support to keep a home and connect to community, education and employment

Future state

More people have a safe and permanent home because of public and private investment and strategic partnering initiatives. People are surrounded with the right type of support, when people need it, which minimises the risk of becoming or cycling back to homelessness.

The approach to housing in NSW is in line with the core principles of Housing First that prioritises getting people into permanent housing with flexible and tailored support.^{14,15,16} These principles include:

- Immediate access to permanent housing with no housing readiness requirements
- Consumer choice and self-determination
- Recovery orientation
- Individualised and client-driven supports
- Social and community integration.
- Homes are available to meet people’s cultural and community needs and stage of life

Diverse, quality housing is available for, and reflects, our diverse population – homes for a single person, for small and large families and for those living with disability. A home offers safety and respite, the opportunity for people to express themselves and experience a sense of belonging and connection to their neighbourhood and communities. The needs and circumstances of different groups are considered such as young people and children.

Legislative change has provided the platform for more diverse social and supported housing options. Significant ongoing investment into social housing from government, philanthropy and business has improved access and substantially reduced the social housing waitlist. This investment has included funding to upgrade and maintain existing housing stock.

Measures

- Percentage of rental vacancy available for people on low incomes
- Social Housing as a percentage of residential dwellings
- Number of people on the NSW social housing waiting list and time spent waiting
- Number of people supported out of homelessness that have retained their home for 2 years or more (data not yet available)

“Having a caseworker has been more than beneficial, because in all honesty, I shudder to think what I would have done without them.”

M

Impact measurement

The drivers and solutions to Homelessness are impacted by all levels of Government, business, community, and support sectors. Several factors, such as policy settings, economic conditions, climate impacts, attitudes, power dynamics and resource flows contribute to rates and incidences of homelessness in NSW. As the peak agency for homelessness, we have two distinct roles in monitoring and measuring homelessness.

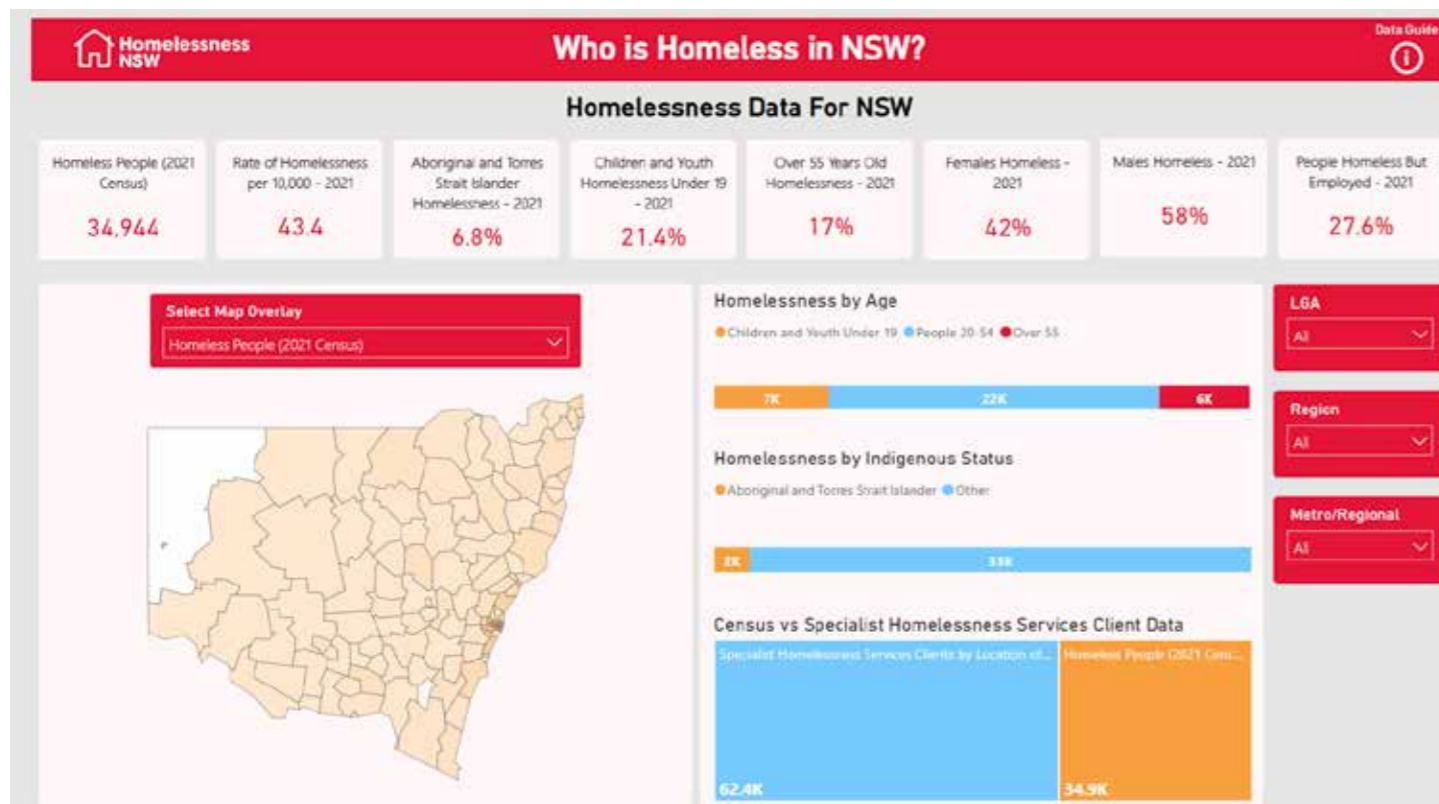
1. Monitor and measure the population level and indicators of homelessness, and
2. Measure our own impact and contribution at a program level to ending homelessness.

Monitoring Homelessness at the Population Level: Housing and Homelessness Dashboard

The Homelessness NSW Housing and Homelessness Dashboard is our way of using data to tell the broader systems story of homelessness. It is made up of over 50 metrics from 15 sources tied together around Local Government Areas. For the first time, users will be able to select an LGA or regional area and understand the level of homelessness (at a demographic level), housing stress, social housing levels and risks of homelessness.

The Dashboard uses the latest available data for each metric. This means that the data is not all tied around the same time - however it provides users with the best available data for a deeper understanding of issues. The data is publicly available, and datasets will be updated as they become available. You can access the dashboard here.

<https://homelessnessnsw.org.au/data/housing-and-homelessness-dashboard/>



Screenshot of the Homelessness NSW Housing and Homelessness Dashboard, July 2023.

The following outlines population-level metrics across the categories of rare, brief and non-recurring to collectively measure risk and impacts of homelessness in NSW. Not all of these data sets are available yet:

Homelessness is rare or (prevented)

- Number of people provided support to prevent homelessness (data not yet collected/ available publicly)
- Number of people experiencing homelessness (census and street count) by demographic (gender, age, indigenous status)
- Percentage of households in rental stress
- Number of domestic and family violence incidents
- Number of alcohol related hospitalisations
- Number of people on/rate of income support payments

Homelessness is brief

- Number of people accessing specialist homelessness services by demographic (gender, age, indigenous status) and reason
- Average time spent waiting for a housing outcome (data not yet in the dashboard)
- Number of people supported into housing (data not yet in the dashboard)
- Satisfaction percentage reported by people supported in the homelessness system (data not yet available)

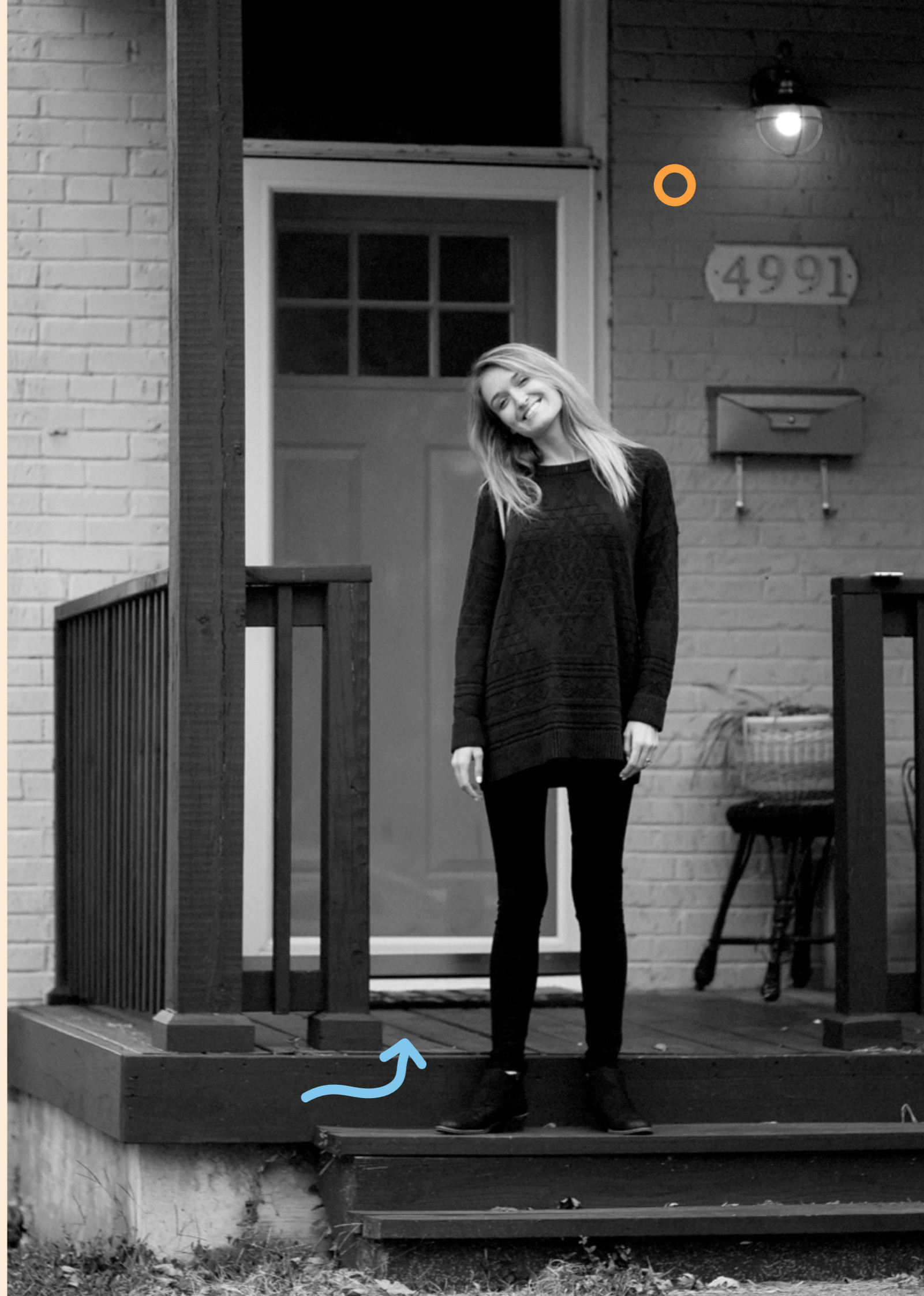
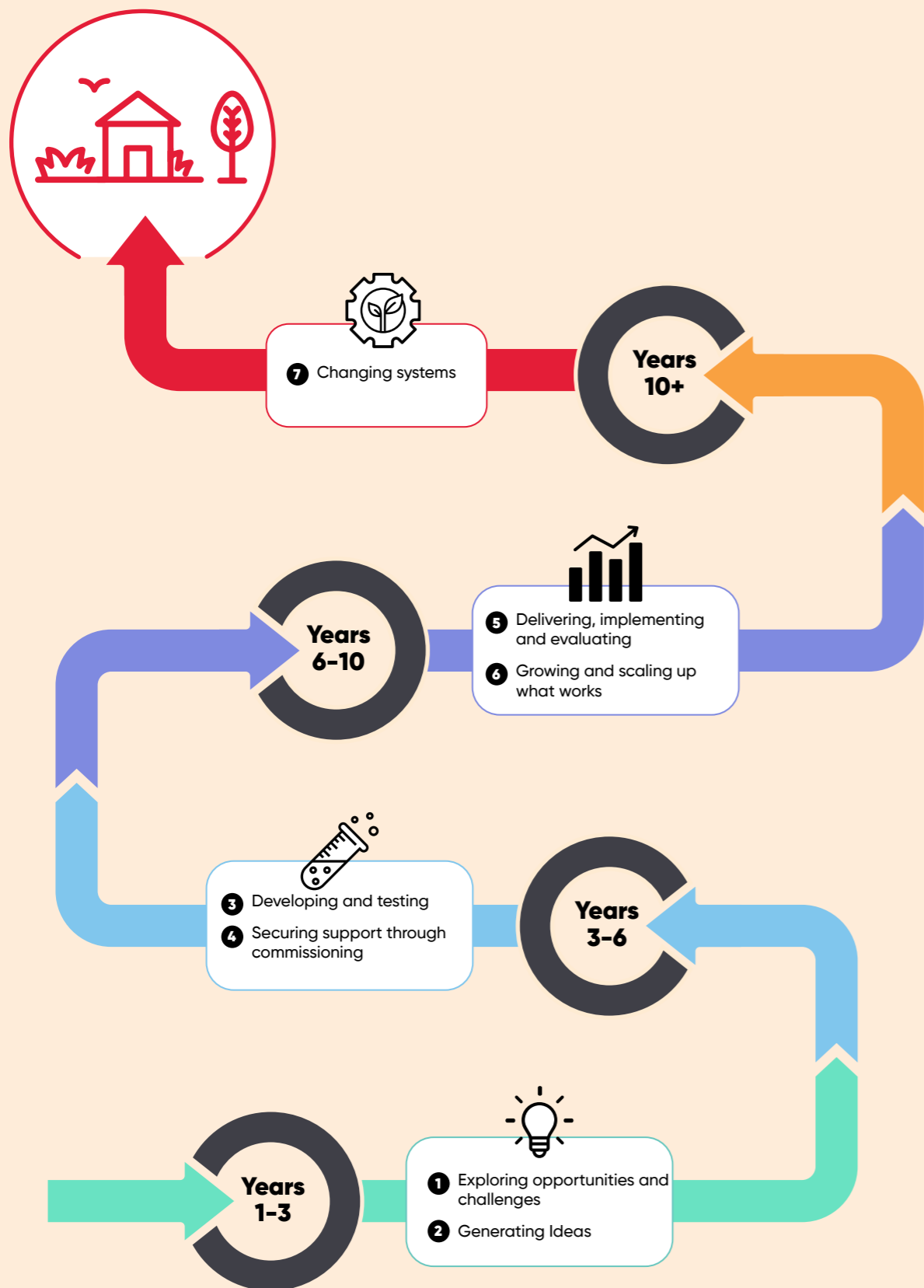
Homelessness is non-recurring

- Percentage of rental vacancy available for people on low incomes
- Social Housing as a percentage of residential dwellings
- Number of people on the NSW social housing waiting list and time spent waiting
- Number of people supported out of homelessness that have retained their home for 2 years or more (data not yet available)



10

Horizons of change roadmap



11

How you can contribute to change the system

To address homelessness, we must each identify the roles we implicitly or explicitly play, and evaluate if new or different roles are needed to best address the challenges and conditions.

In identifying these roles, it is clear there are two main categories.

The homelessness system: These are the people whose themselves as a part of a sector/system, with the vested interests, remit and direct influence to improve outcomes for those experiencing homeless today and in the future. These actors come from across local state and federal governments, third sector and community-led organisations with a specific remit for addressing homelessness and funders and people who contribute their time and resources.

For example: Specialist homelessness services, other specialist services such as health, out of home care, corrections, peak bodies, government, and community volunteers

Broader society: These are the people who do not directly see their connection to addressing homelessness, but who can have broader influence to significantly address the conditions contributing to homelessness.

These actors come from across the business community, third sector and community-led organisations. They also include local state and federal governments and the general public. These actors have adjacent remits/interests that contribute to the experiences individuals have in society and the socio-economic and socio-political conditions created.

For example: Allied and mainstream services, property developers and providers, general public, institutions such as the media, business and community leaders.

As we move forward we ask government, third sector, private sector and media actors to reflect on their interest and influence in addressing homelessness.

The role each actor plays, and the way these roles interact across different communities, create outcomes for those at risk of or experiencing homelessness. This means that we must ask ourselves:

1. What roles do we currently play, and does that serve the broader needs for systems change?
2. What roles might we need to play and where are we best placed to act?
3. How might we transition or transform to do that?

The following prompts provide some guidance for further what role you can play:

Convenor: Actively brings organisations and communities together, with different voices and knowledge and provides safe spaces for differing opinions to be heard and to allow new relationships to form. For example, sector working groups, community events, partnerships.

Catalyser: Sees the leverage points and builds a coalition for change by openly challenging assumptions and laying forth new ways forward. The catalyst is often a pragmatist who can maneuver through the different behavioural and structural barriers to change.

Co-Designer: Creates opportunities to involve people, communities and workers in the design of new approaches, programs, products and services that are built around needs. Takes an active approach to balance power and enhance co-production experiences.

Sensemaker: Works with and through others to make sense of the complexity of a particular problem space. The sensemaker is often skilled in visualising or telling stories about complexity to build a shared understanding of the key forces and patterns at play and how they could be changed.

Systems Steward: Sees the whole, and stewards connections and actions that are not about control and command, but by pruning, weeding, composting and planting together to usher the system to improved health and key transition moments.

Policy Maker/Regulator: Acts to co-develop, prototype and test regulation and policy that is fit-for-purpose for networked governance and seeks to be dynamically adaptive and anticipatory for themselves and the people they serve. Outcomes focused, less about "enforcing compliance" or imposing decisions.

Service Delivery: Delivers services and programs, which meet our user needs today with continual use of evidence and feedback to improve how we provide services. Looks for patterns in changing unmet needs in communities, to enhance the way we provide support in future.

Advocate: Amplifies what works and challenges the norms of the broken system within circles of influence. Uses appropriate language that breaks down stereotypes, stigma and racism.



12

Homelessness NSW's role

Our vision at Homelessness NSW is for a future where everyone has a safe home and the support to keep it.

Recognising the urgency and complexity of the barriers to achieving this, we need to leverage all available resources and collective efforts across specialist homelessness services, community, business, and government to work together in aligned action to achieve a future where homelessness is rare, brief, and non-recurring.

We will actively engage in driving systems change by leveraging our expertise, influence, and collaborative partnerships. Our role in this work is centred around five key areas in facilitating a whole-of-system response to ending homelessness.

Leadership and Advocacy

As a prominent voice in the sector, Homelessness NSW will provide leadership by advocating for the rights of people at risk of and experiencing homelessness. We will actively engage with government agencies, community organisations and service providers to shape a supportive policy environment that prioritises affordable housing, wraparound support services, and prevention initiatives. Through our advocacy efforts, we will work towards increasing public awareness, challenging stereotypes, racism and discrimination, and fostering a collective commitment to ending homelessness.

Collaboration and Partnership

Addressing homelessness requires a collaborative approach that involves various stakeholders working together towards shared goals. Homelessness NSW will act as a facilitator, bringing together diverse stakeholders around shared leverage points to foster collaboration, improve coordination and exchange knowledge. By building strong partnerships we will create synergies, avoid duplication of efforts and promote evidence-based practices across the sector. Our aim is to create aligned action to work smarter together for systemic change.

Knowledge and Capacity Building

To effectively prevent and respond to homelessness, it is essential to have access to up-to-date information, research, and evidence-based practice. Homelessness NSW will play a pivotal role in gathering and disseminating knowledge throughout the sector. We will actively engage in research initiatives, share data analyses, and promote evidence-based decision-making. Additionally, we will provide training and capacity-building opportunities to service providers and stakeholders, equipping them with the necessary skills and knowledge to deliver effective interventions. By fostering continuous learning and knowledge exchange we will contribute to an informed and adaptive system response.

System Coordination and Integration

Homelessness is a multifaceted issue that requires a comprehensive and integrated approach. Homelessness NSW will work towards coordinating and integrating interventions across multiple levels, from prevention and early intervention to housing and ongoing support services. We will establish platforms for information sharing, facilitate collaboration among service providers, and advocate for streamlined service delivery models. By promoting coordination and integration, we aim to ensure that individuals experiencing homelessness receive the holistic support they need to exit homelessness and sustain stable housing.

Monitoring and Evaluation:

To drive effective systems change, it is crucial to continuously monitor and evaluate interventions. Homelessness NSW will establish robust monitoring and evaluation mechanisms to track progress, assess the impact of interventions, and identify areas for improvement. We will work closely with stakeholders to develop outcome measurement frameworks and collect relevant data. By fostering a culture of learning and accountability, we will drive continuous improvement and evidence-based decision-making within the sector. We will ensure people with lived and living experience are at the centre of this and amplify ideas and marginalised voices for change.

Homelessness NSW's role in a whole-of-system response to ending homelessness encompasses leadership and advocacy, collaboration and partnership, knowledge and capacity building, systems coordination and integration, as well as monitoring and evaluation. By actively engaging in these areas, we will contribute to a coordinated and effective response that addresses the root causes of homelessness, provides comprehensive support to individuals experiencing homelessness, and drives sustainable change in our society.



13

Join us!

Homelessness is not a “person” problem. It is not a “money” problem. It is not a “housing” problem. It is a “system” problem. And solving a system-level problem requires a collection of actors, working together to achieve a common goal – to end homelessness. This requires us to think, act and fund things differently for long term outcomes.

- People with lived experience of homelessness need to be at the center of decisions that affect their lives and the governance arrangements need to be in place to achieve this.
- Governments need to realign and coordinate their policy and investment priorities with a focus on outcomes and work smarter together with the non-government sector for greater impact.
- Business organisations can contribute solutions in new ways with resources, networks, employment opportunities and support for housing for all.
- Social service providers need to reimagine how they can best work together and ensure their programs contribute to long term outcomes with decisions led by those impacted by homelessness.
- As a community, we need to address the pervasiveness of racism, gender inequality and social stereotyping that underpin decision making, social norms and resources flows that contribute to disadvantage and disempowerment.

The homelessness system is complex but there are areas where focused and shared effort can result in lasting change to make homelessness rare, brief and non-recurring in NSW.

How you can get involved and contribute

Thank you to everyone who has been part of this work, for joining us on our journey in developing the shared vision and actions for change. We will continue to proactively seek out partners and work collaboratively wherever possible, including with people with lived experience of homelessness, and we look forward to seeing how far we can go together over the next 10 years.

Become a member or supporter of Homelessness NSW

Homelessness NSW is a member-based organisation. Our members are made up of specialist homelessness services, allied organisations, services, and people with lived experience who share the belief that everyone should have a safe home. If you would like to become a member or supporter of Homelessness NSW check out our options here <https://homelessnessnsw.org.au/membership/become-a-member/>.

Or get in touch with us

-  [Twitter.com/HomelessnessNSW](https://twitter.com/HomelessnessNSW)
-  [Linkedin.com/homelessnessnsw/](https://www.linkedin.com/company/homelessnessnsw/)
-  www.homelessnessnsw.org.au



Glossary

A system

A system is a group of interrelated, interacting, or interdependent parts that form a complex whole.

Co- production

An ongoing process whereby the people who are affected by policy, program and research decisions are authentic and impactful contributors to design, planning, implementation, monitoring and governance.

Housing First

Under a Housing First model people experiencing homelessness are provided safe and stable housing as the first priority, and then provided with individualised support. Housing is not conditional on engagement with services or behaviour changes.

Leverage point

A place within a system where a change can occur, where a solution can be applied to various activation points to create change.

Lived experience

A person's wisdom, expertise and evidence that comes from their experience of having been, or being, homeless.

System actor

A person or organisation who interacts with a system.

Systems change

Systems change is shifting the conditions that are holding the problem in place.

System condition

What keeps the problems stuck and maintains the status quo.

Theory of change

An intentional, structured and participatory process of thinking about and documenting how a program, service, policy or system should work, why it would work, who would benefit and how, and the conditions needed for it to work.

Trauma informed

Trauma-informed services and systems do not cause harm. A trauma-informed approach focuses on the impact of an experience or experiences rather than the event itself. It shifts the question from 'What is wrong with you?' to 'What happened to you?'

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