

St Bart's

We're by your side.

National Housing and Homelessness Plan Submission
20th October 2023

Contact:



We acknowledge and pay respects to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples across Australia, who are the Traditional Owners and Custodians of the land and waters and of the oldest continuous living culture on Earth. We pay respects to Elders past and present. (Issues Paper)

Introduction



St Bart's welcomes the opportunity to contribute towards the National Housing and Homelessness Plan. This response brings together the experience of our highly qualified staff and managers in homelessness, mental health and aged care, as well as reflecting the lived experiences of consumers who use our services.

This submission addresses the focus areas of homelessness and homelessness services presented in the issues paper. St Bart's acknowledges and supports the government's intent to increase national housing supply, particularly social and affordable housing through the Housing Australia Future Fund (HAFF), Social Housing Accelerator and the National Housing Accord. St Bart's supports Anglicare Australia, Shelter WA and the WA Alliance to End Homelessness recommendations that growth and long-term investment in social and affordable housing is essential, including Anglicare WA's recommendation of a social housing net increase of at least 15,000 dwellings by 2030:

- A greater volume and range of new social and affordable homes is required in Western Australia to meet current and ongoing demand.
- Investment to maintain existing stock to liveable standards is required.
- Sustainable, long-term investment is required for social and affordable housing.
- Delivering the above will help reduce housing wait times.



St Bart's is committed to ending homelessness through the implementation of the "End Homelessness WA Strategy", and is a member of the WA Alliance to End Homelessness and supports:

- Housing First approach to underpin the homelessness response.
- No Wrong Door – policy and system designed to encourage and better facilitate linkages and cooperation between different social services providers.
- Zero Project has provided greater support to rough sleepers, increased collaboration and resource sharing between agencies.
- All support services are person centred and trauma informed.
- Make Renting Fair campaign particularly ending unfair evictions, better protections for boarders and lodgers and ending unfair rent increases.

In addition to the above, three specific areas of concern require attention/policy response to improve homelessness and housing outcomes:

- Lack of security of tenure is a significant factor contributing to insecure housing status for people living in supported homeless accommodation.
- The housing continuum and importance of consumer choice.
- Accessible, ongoing person-centred outreach support is critical to support people on their recovery journey and/or journey out of homelessness.

Significant barriers to achieving housing and homelessness outcomes are:

- WA State Government workforce funding and remuneration does not reflect true costs to deliver services.
- Two funding bodies supporting the homelessness services sector causes additional complexity.
- Longer contracts enable longer term planning, investment, certainty of service delivery and sector stability.

St Bart's is the only recognised provider of homeless residential aged care services for men in Western Australia. At present our service supports men only. St Bart's will submit a proposal, St Bart's 140, to the Federal Government this year to expand these services so that we have the additional ability to provide accommodation and support for older women. The complexities involved in homeless aged care are outlined and require specific attention.

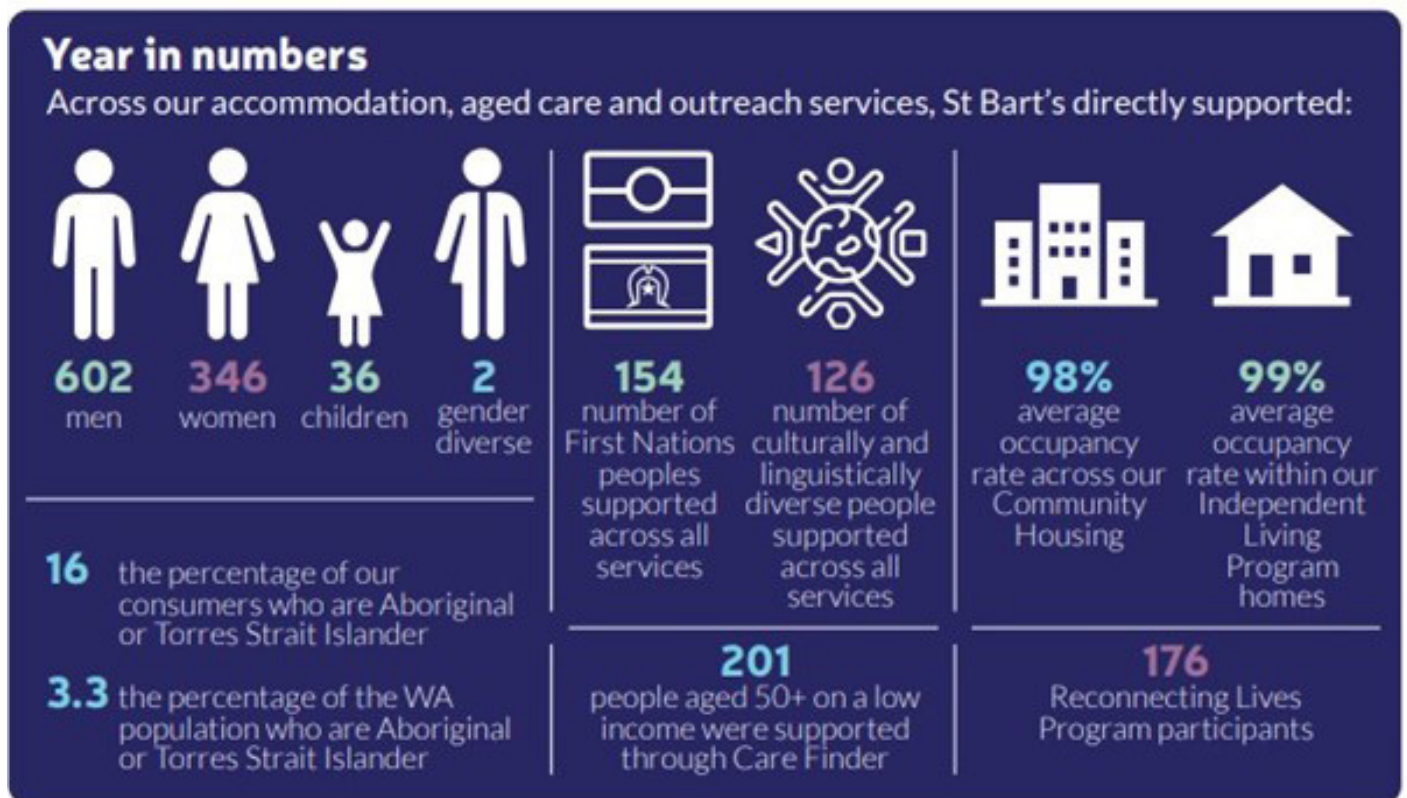


About St Bart's

This year marks 60 years of St Bart's supporting Western Australia's most vulnerable people. We have grown over 60 years from a small shelter for 30 men to a progressive, inclusive organisation that provides support to nearly 600 people every day who are experiencing or at risk of homelessness, living with mental health challenges or requiring supportive aged care.

At St Bart's, our vision is for a community where everyone has a safe and secure place to call home. Through practical support, innovative services and powerful advocacy, we work tirelessly towards achieving that goal.

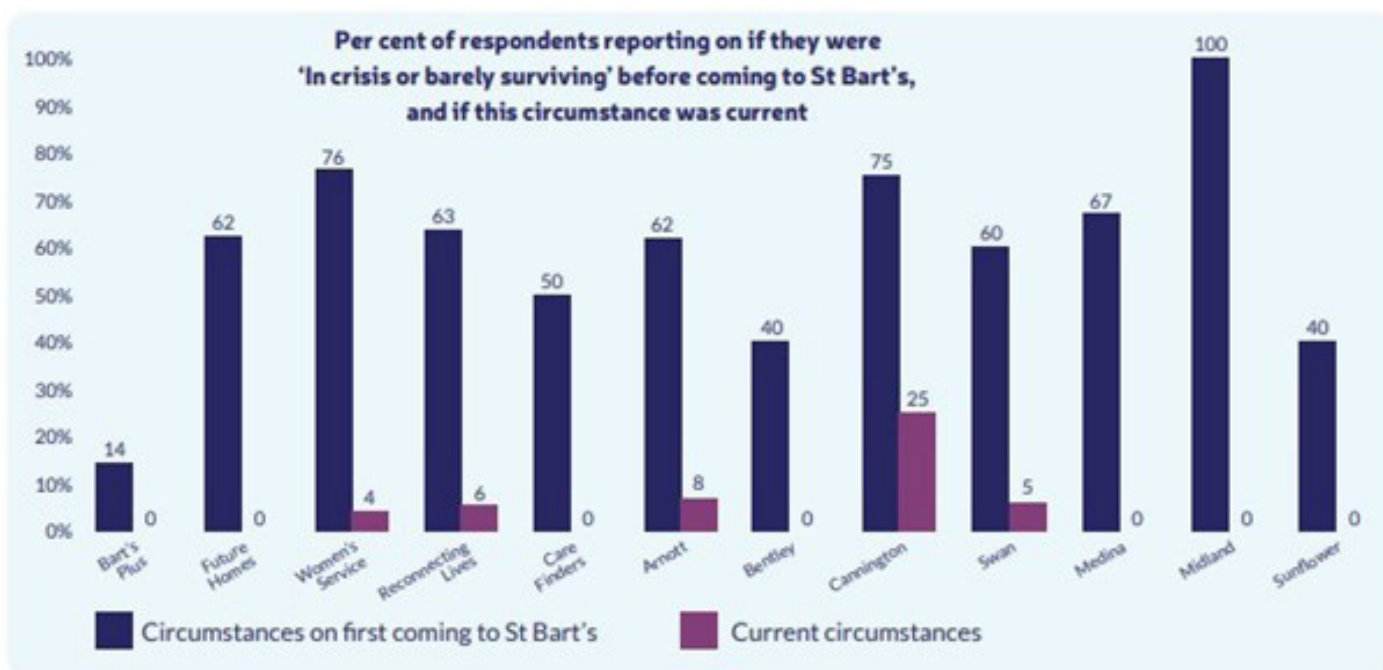
St Bart's provides supported, short-term accommodation to men, women and families who are experiencing homelessness, providing a safe haven while working with them to actively seek a long-term, permanent housing solution.



St Bart's is the only provider of homeless residential aged care in Western Australia through our James Watson Centre, which provides care for up to 40 men aged 50 and over who have experienced chronic homelessness, many of whom have complex health needs. In addition, we operate a homecare service to support older people to live independently in their own homes for as long as they are able.

We are proud to extend our support to all marginalised and disadvantaged people in the community, providing mental health supported accommodation, offering community housing options for low-income earners, and as a member of the ReSet consortium, supporting people to rejoin the community after leaving correctional services.

In 2020 we were the proud recipients of the IPAA Award for Excellence in the Not-For-Profit Sector for our Reconnecting Lives Program – an innovative housing-first model that provides support to consumers transitioning into independent living to help them resolve issues that may have contributed to their homelessness and prevent the revolving door where people cycle back into homelessness. Since RLP first piloted in 2018, the program, originally funded by BHP, has successfully supported over 326 people and has a 100% success rate of maintaining tenancy for those in long term accommodation.



Titled St Bart's 140, the vision for this significant project is to provide 140 additional safe and secure homes for vulnerable people, back in the original home of St Bart's in Brown Street, East Perth. An 80 bed residential aged care facility for homeless men and women with complex psycho-social needs and 56 social housing units will be built.



Key Issues

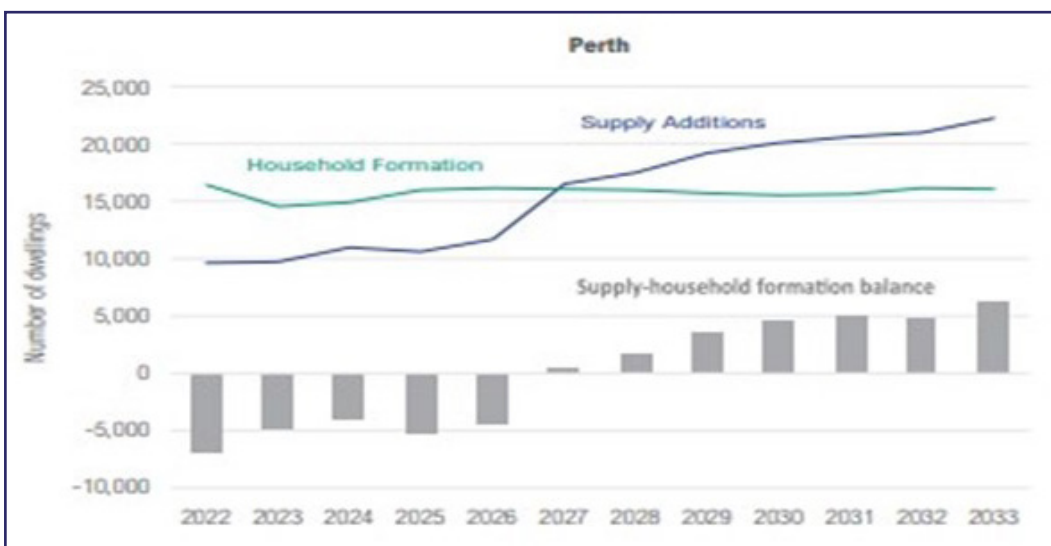
1. Homelessness and the need for housing

More than 9,720 people experience homelessness every night in Western Australia. Western Australia now has the highest proportion of rough sleepers in Australia, with an increase of 113.8% between the 2016 and 2021 Census, from 1,083 to 2,315. Of the total WA homeless population, 23.8% are rough sleepers. A lack of stable accommodation impacts access to healthcare, employment and education, as well as privacy, wellbeing and dignity. The majority of people experiencing homelessness find themselves moving from place to place.

Where Western Australians experiencing homelessness stay*	
Type of accommodation	Total numbers
Sleeping rough	2,315
Supported accommodation for the homeless	1,614
Couch surfing	2,125
Boarding houses	631
Other temporary accommodation	109
Severely crowded dwellings	2,935

*Shelter WA 2023

The above homelessness results are driven by the current housing deficit and compounded by record low rental vacancy rates and escalating rental inflation. The housing deficit in Perth is forecast to continue in the short and medium term. In addition to the housing deficit there are 26,200 households in rental stress (ABS 2021).



Source:

Housing Australia Future Fund

Growth and long-term investment in social and affordable housing is essential.

A growing need

Enquiries and referrals received for our services in 2022-23

	Future Homes	Women's Service	Bart's Plus
Enquiries	728	347	354
Referrals	492	312	161

- A greater volume and range of new social and affordable homes is required in Western Australia to meet current and ongoing demand.
- Investment to maintain existing stock to liveable standards is required.
- Sustainable, long-term investment is required for social and affordable housing.
- Doing the above will help reduce housing wait times.

Recommendation: Social housing net increase of at least 15,000 dwellings by 2030.

- **Support St Bart's 140 project, delivering new social housing in East Perth**

Additional information on the St Bart's 140 project is provided as attachment x.

Priority Cohorts	St Bart's 140 Alignment
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Women • People experiencing repeat homelessness • People exiting from care or institutions into homelessness • Older people • Indigenous Australians 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Safe, secure, permanent accommodation, some accessible to all, some tailored specifically for vulnerable priority cohorts. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 80 bed homeless aged care for men and women - 56 new social housing units – reducing the wait list • St Bart's does not exclude people from services based on previous challenges or behaviours, drug use, criminal activity, or service compliance. • Many women using our services come from a domestic violence background.



2. Lack of security of tenure for supported homeless accommodation

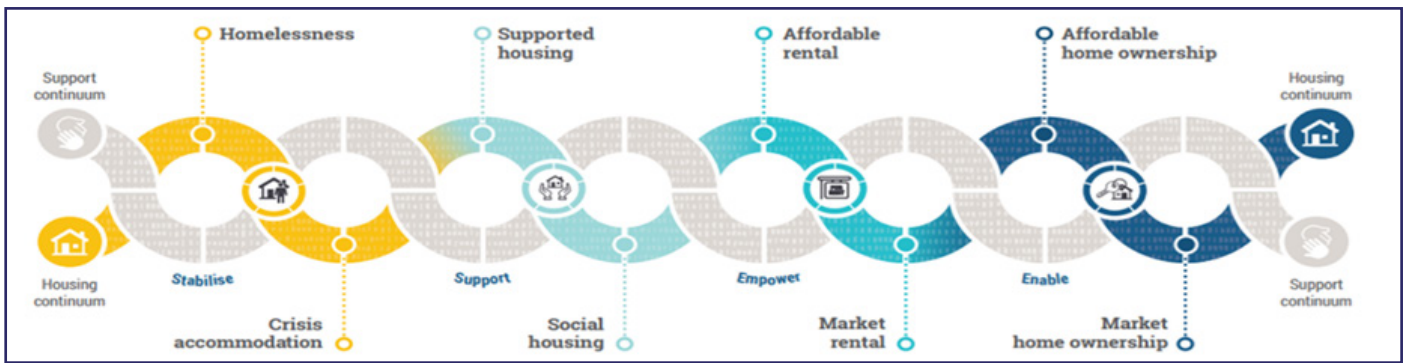
The lack of security of tenure is a significant factor contributing to insecure housing status for people living in supported homeless accommodation.

At St Bart's, we hold ourselves accountable to a standard which removes the fear of unjustifiable or unreasonable eviction for our residents.



- The current definition of homelessness counts people living in supported homeless accommodation.
- St Bart's has defined its benchmark for what is justifiable and reasonable for ending someone's occupancy of supported homeless accommodation, acknowledging that eviction is a last resort.
- Increased security of tenure providing residents with rights to the roof over their head alleviates housing insecurity, is consistent with a housing first approach and supports individual choice of housing options appropriate to the individual.

Recommendation: Increased security of tenure providing residents with rights to the roof over their head and supports individual choice of housing options appropriate to the individual.



An integrated housing and support continuum

3. The housing continuum and importance of consumer choice

Housing First vs Person First - There is an understanding that the Housing First approach can only work when tied to independent living in social housing which ignores other types of accommodation as potential and appropriate housing solutions for people looking to exit homelessness. Housing choice is part of a Housing First approach, people may choose short, medium, or long-term accommodation.

- There is an assumption with Housing First that everyone wants a long term, social housing tenancy, but in our experience, we see people that say they don't want a house and the responsibility that comes with it, such as a formal rental agreement.
- Identifying the preferred/optimal housing solution for an individual as chosen by themselves, in parallel with wraparound support provision is vitally important to assist with the recovery journey.
- Having a choice of housing solution (e.g. short term, shared, Mental Health Supported etc) is important.
- The right accommodation, with the right support, at the right time is the optimal approach.
- Supported housing options are important and have a role in the housing continuum.
- Some people find living on their own very lonely and isolating, particularly if they were living on the streets and are used to having people around them.
- If residents have health problems, being in supported accommodation allows support providers to provide a level of care and service that cannot always be provided if service consumers are living alone in the community in social housing.
- People exiting homelessness need time to prepare, rebuild their skills and confidence in themselves. Living in long term accommodation in a community where they may experience isolation and loneliness may not support someone's recovery journey and reintegration into the community.



- Living alone and unsupported, and having to deal with past trauma is not optimal to assist with recovery.
- Common Ground housing options are important and have a role in the housing continuum.
- Mental Health Supported Accommodation (MHSA) options are important and have a role in the housing continuum.

Residents receive a level of support with their recovery which they would not receive in other forms of housing.

MHSA reduces strain on the mental health system and prevents bed blocking in hospitals.

MHSA enables people to transition from hospital back into the community and gives them a place of stability from which they can begin to rebuild and ultimately decide what is the best accommodation option for them.

A cookie-cutter approach to housing and housing programs is not best practice. A broad spectrum of needs should be considered within the housing continuum.

- Different housing options for different people in need are required beyond just social housing.
- There is a need for a wide range of consumer voices to be heard to help inform an evolving housing continuum.
- The sector needs to listen to the lived experience voice and not make self-informed assumptions or judgements about what consumers want/need.

Recommendation: A Housing First approach can work with a range of accommodation types for people looking to exit homelessness. These include short, medium, and long-term tenure; and, supported accommodation.

Further support for the need for crisis accommodation and accommodation option choices for consumers, from Crisis Accommodation in Australia Report, sourced from Shelter WA.



“The lack of attention to crisis accommodation evidenced in this report is perhaps because it is seen as out of step with recent developments in homelessness policy and service delivery, including Housing First approaches, and calls for the service system to be reoriented towards prevention and early intervention (Casey and Brennan 2019; Commonwealth of Australia 2008; Department of Human Services (VIC) 2010; Spinney, Beer et al. 2020). While we strongly endorse these developments for the SHS system as a whole, they also need to be considered in the context of a sustained lack of investment in the provision of affordable rental housing options (both social and private). Quite simply, Housing First is not possible without housing.

There clearly remains a role for crisis accommodation in Australia’s homelessness service system for the foreseeable future, even if affordable rental housing options expand exponentially to allow a transition to a workable Housing First approach. In practice, moving people directly from the street to settled housing is often not possible even under a Housing First approach. A short stay in crisis accommodation will sometimes be required while longer-term housing is sourced. This is evidenced in Finland, where significant progress has been made towards reducing homelessness by implementing housing-led approaches, and night shelters have been largely ‘designed out’. However, Helsinki still retains a short stay emergency accommodation facility (Everyone Home Collective n.d.), family violence refuges and youth shelters.

There are also specific cohorts, such as people escaping family violence or those affected by natural disasters, for whom crisis accommodation addresses an immediate acute need.

“Crisis accommodation has a really great purpose for respite, for people who might identify that they’re not ready yet to consider permanent housing and that’s not necessarily a lack of understanding about our assessment of their readiness, that’s their assessment because I think there are some people that that idea is really overwhelming for.” - (Stakeholder)

Other stakeholders noted a role for crisis accommodation while people were preparing for living independently and maintaining a tenancy:

“I see there’s still a real need for it, particularly for young people. I mean it’s wonderful when they can secure a home and have that longer-term stable accommodation, but for many, there are steps along the way, important steps along the way to being able to maintain that property once they get there.” - (Stakeholder)



Some of this commentary suggests that housing-led approaches that aim for rapid housing might not be the ideal for everyone all of the time. This highlights the need for a diversity of options to suit different people.” (AHURI Final Report No. 407, pp 75). As noted above, St Bart’s advocates for an approach that promotes the right accommodation, with the right supports at the right time, putting people at the centre of those choices.

4. Homelessness services - The importance of outreach support

- Accessible, ongoing person-centred outreach support is critical to support people on their recovery journey and/or journey out of homelessness.
- Outreach support to maintain tenancies once consumers secure long-term accommodation is crucial to improve outcomes and prevent regression into homelessness.
- For a lot of people who are struggling, their recovery journey can go up and down, so it is important for outreach services to be accessible to people as and when they require the support.
- It is important consumers inform the service and level of support they receive, including frequency of contact.
- Empowerment of consumers is a critical element of outreach support.
- Investing in wraparound outreach support services for people who have moved into stable accommodation to prevent regression into homelessness is equally as important as focussing on rough sleeping.
- The regular contact post-exit from St Bart’s transitional housing services ensures consumers are connected to their communities, aligned with additional support organisations and staff can identify any deterioration in the presentation, health, wellbeing or personal circumstances of the consumer.
- Flexible and agile service models like St Bart’s Reconnecting Lives Program ensures we can provide a rapid response to crises with service consumers and intervene early.

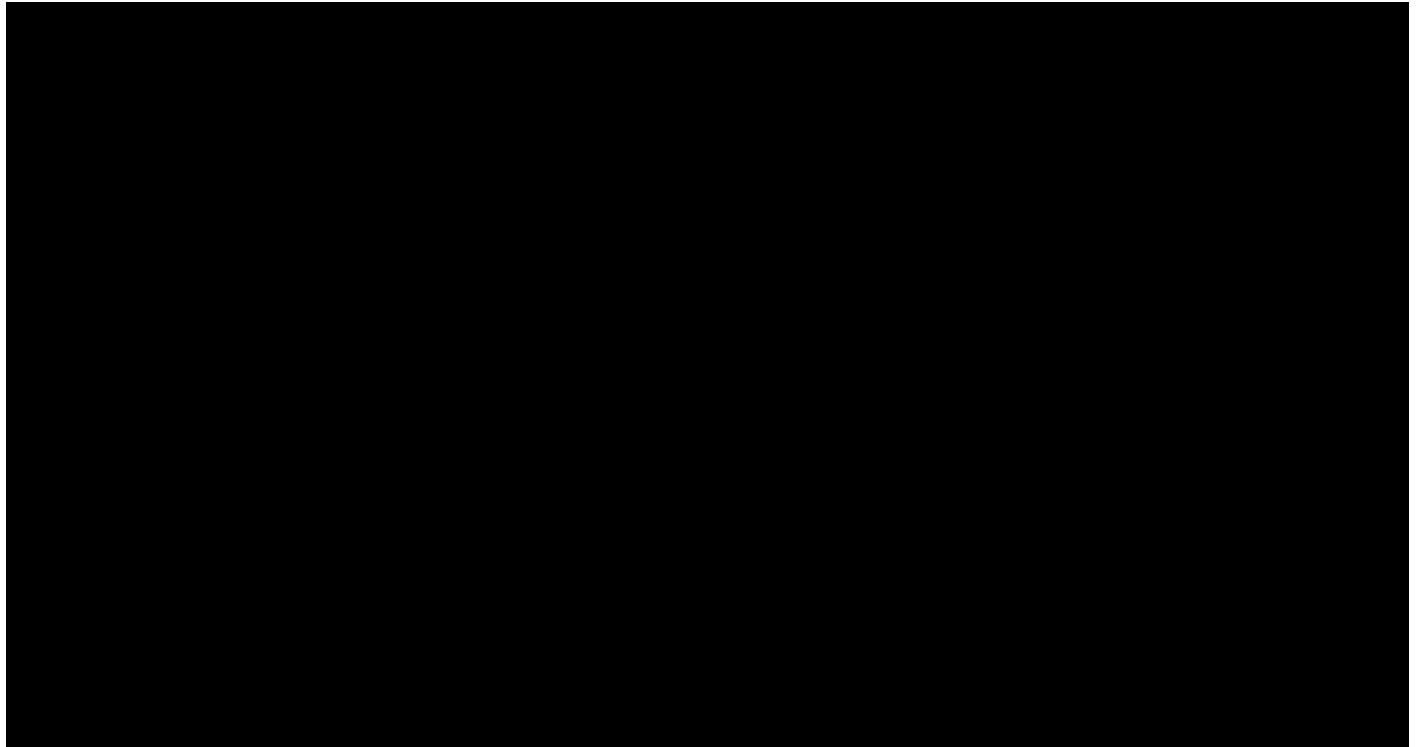
St Bart’s outreach services have proven life changing for consumers who have engaged after being in a cycle of homelessness for many years.

Recommendation: The government should fund flexible and agile service models such as St Bart’s Reconnecting Lives Program, ensuring we can provide a rapid response to crises with service consumers and intervene early.



Solution: Reconnecting Lives Program

Our Reconnecting Lives Program (RLP) is St Bart's largest outreach program.



RLP is currently fully funded by corporate and philanthropic support and is both unique and innovative in its 100% success rate in supporting people as they move from transitional, short-term accommodation into their own long term, stable home in the community. RLP support is available to people moving on from our transitional accommodation into long-term, sustainable accommodation, either with St Bart's community housing or independently in the community.

The program reinforces the Housing First model, enabling stable, secure housing to ensure that people have certainty and security in their living situation and preventing the spiral back into homelessness. This stable housing foundation has a ripple effect, empowering people to address their challenges and set their own goals. With stable housing, people are better equipped to rebuild relationships, pursue employment, and focus on their overall health and wellbeing. Enabling people to sustain their tenancy unlocks the potential for them to regain their independence, dignity and self-respect and paves the way for a brighter and more hopeful future.

The RLP provides each client with a case manager and an individualised, person-centred plan is developed to help them achieve the goals they identify and to maintain secure and stable housing in the community.



The success of St Bart's RLP lies in the wrap-around services provided by case managers to clients that is tailored to the individual needs of each person. This includes referrals to a wide range of relevant services and agencies, with support to attend appointments, training, social support, NDIS implementation, financial counselling, goal planning, tenancy, and budgeting support, and obtaining identification – all of which are important in preventing a return to homelessness. These wrap-around services coordinate supports which help stabilise a person's transition and settlement into community housing. This, in turn, results in a reduction in the use of more costly community and health services, including emergency department admissions, and police and justice systems costs.

Tenancy Support, liaising with landlords and helping with debt/arrears/tenancy issues.

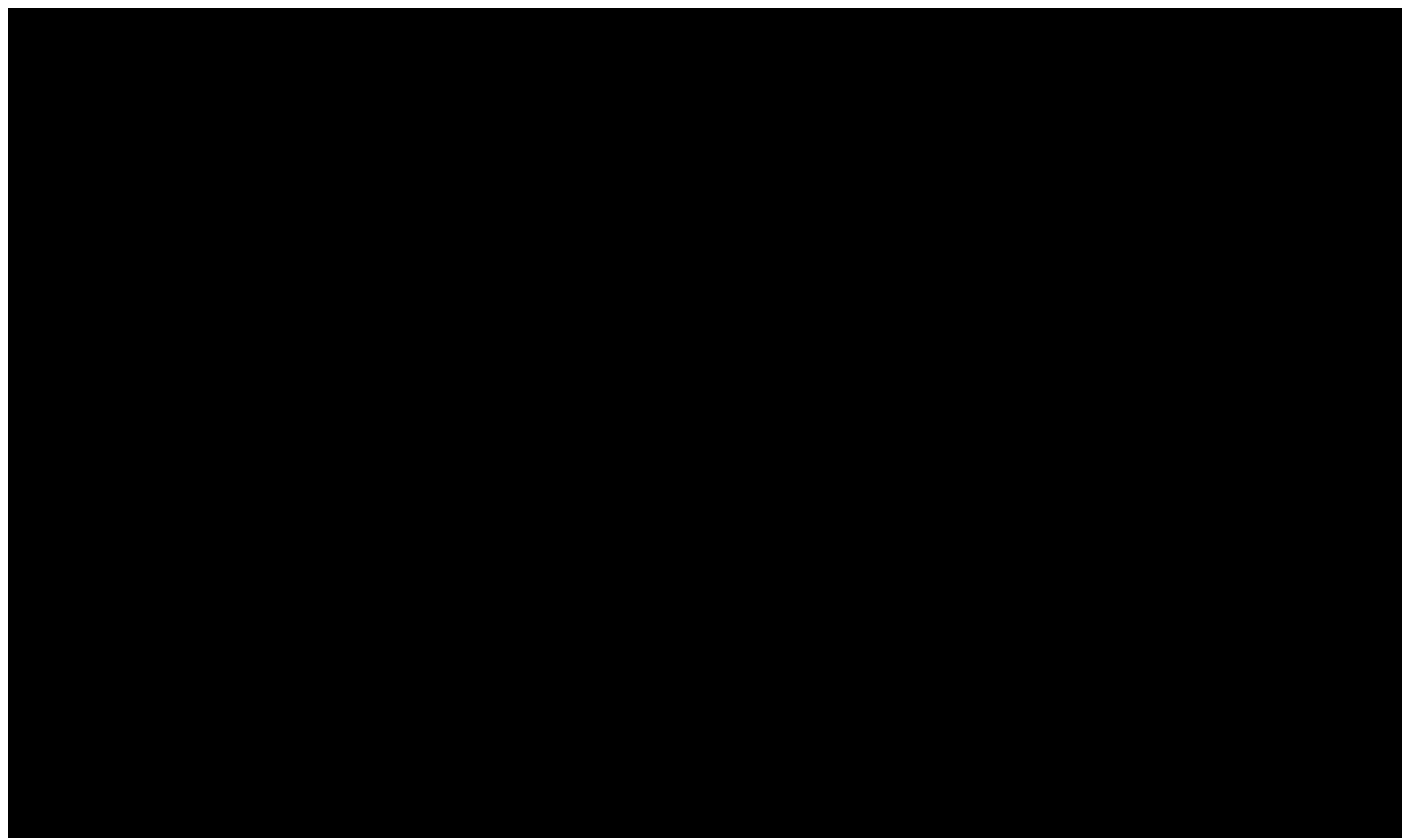
1. Budgeting and financial counselling support.
2. Social support, finding and building links to the community, aiding in employment, education and social support, including physical and health outcomes.
3. Assistance with crisis situations, acting as a key point of contact to prevent crisis escalation and provide support.
4. Goal planning, identifying, and actioning, including goals and pathways to employment and education.
5. Referrals to relevant services including GP's, counselling, mental health services, employment and education support, dental services.
6. Obtaining ID & other important documents.
7. NDIS implementation, assisting with planning of NDIS packages.
8. Support to obtain household products for tenancy start-up furniture, white goods and household goods.

Since its inception in 2018, RLP has supported 326 people: 214 men, 107 women and five gender diverse people, ranging in age from 21 to 85 years of age (data accurate as at 30 June 2023). Of the total number of people supported, 77 identified as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and 32 as culturally and linguistically diverse. The RLP has a 100% success rate to date where participants have maintained their tenancy and not spiralled back into homelessness.



Since the inception of RLP, and as of 30 June 2023, a total of 1,210 goals have been set by all participants and of those goals, 813 have been closed, which means they were partially, mostly or fully achieved or deemed by the client to be no longer relevant. 56% of all closed goals were fully achieved.

In the past twelve months, St Bart's has expanded our pathways to employment plan through a structured, targeted approach to private and social enterprises to build partnership agreements which facilitate employment opportunities for St Bart's consumers. Where employment has been secured for people living in our short-term accommodation, earning a regular income enables them to transition into long term accommodation, and RLP support helps them to sustain it.

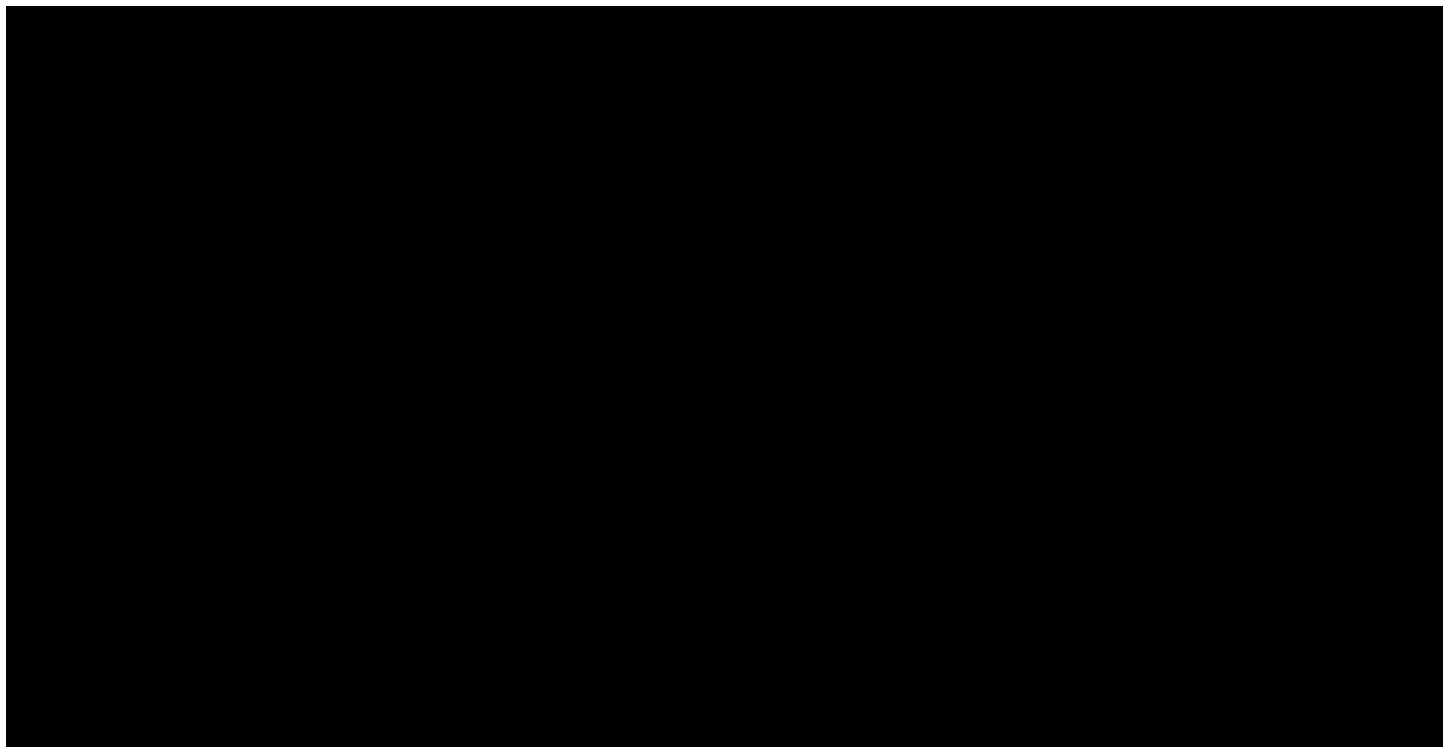


The top four primary outcomes achieved through these goals were:

- 23% increased their life skills and ability to live independently
- 18% increased their quality of life
- 12% obtained long term accommodation



The flexible and dynamic nature of the RLP model ensures we can provide a rapid response to crises, intervene early and before a client's situation deteriorates to the point where they are at risk of homelessness. The regular contact post-exit from St Bart's services ensures that people are connected to their communities, aligned with additional supportive organisations, and identify any deterioration in presentation, health and wellbeing or personal circumstances. This innovative service provision is something St Bart's was unable to provide before inception of the RLP and this has proven life changing to clients who have been in a cycle of homelessness for many years.



The level of support provided by a Case Manager is tailored based on the needs of each person. At various stages of a client's journey the level of support will vary between weekly, fortnightly and monthly contact. Person-centred support that is tailored to the needs of clients is the central activity of RLP, and it is person-centred in that both the type of support and frequency of contact with a case manager are determined by the clients themselves.

We will continue collaborating with other sector partners, State Government and the Department of Communities, and will work together to drive the RLP strategy to ensure St Bart's consumers reconnect to the community and avoid the risk of cycling back into homelessness. A core aim of our strategy and fundraising drive is to broaden the program to people from outside of St Bart's in order to demonstrate to Government the effectiveness and importance of the program and its alignment to the second part of the Government's 10 year strategy to end homelessness (Action Plan 2, 2026-2030), which is focussed on preventative responses, early intervention and measuring success. We will be advocating for Government to fund RLP through the second stage of the strategy to end homelessness (2026-2030).



Attached are case studies of consumers that have been supported by St Bart's Reconnecting Lives Program. The case studies demonstrate the range of supports required due to the individual consumers circumstances. In addition, the case studies also highlight the range of accommodation types required/preferred by different consumers at different points along their journey and further supports the recommendations noted earlier of: Housing First approach can work with a range of accommodation types for people looking to exit homelessness. These include short, medium, and long-term tenure; and, supported accommodation.

5. Sector funding and contract considerations

WA State Government workforce funding and remuneration does not reflect true costs to deliver services.

- In FY2021/22 Fair Work awarded a 2.5% pay increase, but CPI revenue growth in our funding contracts was 1.3%, leaving a gap of \$150,000 in our men's transitional accommodation staffing expenses. CPI increases need to match the true underlying cost.
- In FY2022/23 Fair Work announced a 4.6% increase to minimum wages, plus the FY202/23 superannuation guarantee increase of 0.5%. St Bart's supports fair and equitable pay, but the contracts need to match true costs.
- State Government policy for indexation is based on a calculation of 80% historical wage price index and 20% historical CPI, not what Fair Work determine future wage increments. Therefore, St Bart's and others in the sector, will always have a misalignment in the calculation between service funding and the percentage increase in wage costs as determined by Fair Work.
- It is inequitable that NFP's are expected to try to find funding through philanthropic and other sources to fill the gap where funding is not adequate to match increasing costs.

Two funding bodies supporting the homelessness services sector causes additional complexity

- The complexity of having two funding bodies to provide support to the homelessness services sector generates uncertainty about sustainable long-term investments into the sector and to service providers directly.
- The Federal Government contributes funding to the States towards NHHA service contracts (for St Bart's these contracts are the Future Homes and Barts Plus contracts).
- NHHA contributions go towards the National Partnership Agreement on Pay Equity for the Social and Community Service (SACS) Award.
- The State Government decides annually how much NHHA funding is applied to service contracts.



Longer contracts enable longer term planning, investment, certainty of service delivery and sector stability

- Certainty of longer-term contracts provide the platform for the organisation to make investment decisions and long term planning around innovation, investment in staff learning and development, assets, maintenance and program development.
- Longer term contracts will provide more stability across the sector where staff do not need to move jobs to follow program funding.
- Ongoing, rolling extended contracts put pressure on our ability to remunerate staff appropriately and will eventually lead to a reduction in the level of service we can provide.

Recommendations:

Workforce funding and remuneration should be increased to reflect true costs to deliver services.

Contract length should be increased to enable longer term planning, investment, certainty of service delivery and sector stability.

Reduce complexity and increase certainty around funding to the homelessness services sector to enable sustainable long-term investments into the sector and to service providers directly.

6. Homeless Aged Care

St Bart's is the only recognised provider of homeless residential aged care services in Western Australia. At present our service supports men only. St Bart's will submit a proposal for the aged care element of our St Bart's 140 project, to the Federal Government this year to expand these services to include provision for women.

Prematurely aged / under 65s who have a history of homelessness and need residential services because of their premature ageing should be allowed to reside in specialist homeless residential aged care facilities.

- Residential aged care is the right level of care for this demographic who may have lived on the streets, have deteriorating health, AoD and/or behavioural issues.
- Traditional providers do not have specialist care support and trauma informed responses to care, which is essential given the lived experience of residents with complex issues.
- Residents have access to 24/7 care and support and, with this, we see residents thrive and their health and wellbeing improves. Many have lived with us for a long time through this model.



- Staff understand residents' journeys and trauma and have a higher level of tolerance around challenging behaviours and how to manage them.
- The Aged Care Quality and Safety Commission needs to confirm an exemption to providers of homeless residential aged care services who support prematurely aged / under 65's so they can remain in these facilities if their care needs dictate this level of service. (check if this has been confirmed officially)
- If this demographic goes into, or remains in community supported accommodation, its highly likely their health needs, which have led to their premature ageing, will not be addressed and their lifespan and quality of life could be negatively impacted.



Recommendations:

Support an increase in specialist homeless aged care, including expanding services to women in Western Australia, by supporting the St Bart's 140 project.

Policy change to confirm exemption to providers of homeless residential aged care services who support prematurely aged / under 65's.

