



HOMES FOR 100 WOMEN **DISCOVERY INSIGHTS**

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

*A GENDER-TRANSFORMATIVE HOUSING PROJECT
BY THE WOMEN'S HOUSING ALLIANCE*

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Introduction

The Victorian Women's Housing Alliance (WHA) formed in 2019 to address the systemic barriers and housing crisis being faced by women and children fleeing family violence. The WHA's members are leading organisations across the family violence, homelessness, and housing sectors with expertise in delivering safe, sustainable housing (both transitional and social), and providing family violence support, homelessness support, and a range of allied services. The WHA is committed to driving systemic change to deliver effective solutions to homelessness for women (trans gender and cis gender), non-binary people and their families.

The WHA recognises the critical need for stable, secure and affordable housing, along with necessary support for women, non-binary people and their families experiencing homelessness in Victoria. Through our combined knowledge and experience, the WHA is keenly aware of the systemic barriers within Victoria's current service system. These barriers are leading to a growing housing crisis with dire impacts for women, non-binary people and their families.

To address this urgent need, the WHA have secured philanthropic funding to develop a gender-informed pilot project that responds to the unique needs of women and non-binary people who have experienced homelessness or are at risk of homelessness. With a target of supporting 100 families, *Homes for 100 Women* will partner with women and non-binary people who have experienced homelessness (including victim-survivors of family and domestic violence) and sector stakeholders. Together, we will co-design an integrated housing-led response that not only ensures a sustainable pathway out of homelessness but also supports participants to recover from crisis and build economically secure and thriving futures.

The project addresses:

- The increasing numbers of women entering into the homelessness service system,
- The deficit in appropriate, safe and sustainable housing for women and non-binary people,
- The system delays between housing support requests and securing permanent accommodation,
- The lack of integrated support available once housing is secured,
- The need for a coordinated program of gender specific supports to assist people to not only maintain their tenancy but thrive once housed, including health, legal, financial, income, education and employment,
- Incorporating insights from the emerging international evidence base on effective gender-informed approaches to housing and homelessness response.

A note on language: Whilst the WHA uses the term “women” inclusively to encompass both trans gender and cis gender women, it is crucial to note some significant limitations in much of the research informing this document. For example:

- Adoption of a binary approach to gender without acknowledging gender identities beyond the binary of men/ women;
- Conflation of gender and sex, for example using “male/female” language to denote gender;
- Failure to specify how “women” are defined within studies and whether research is inclusive of both transgender and cisgender women.

These limitations must be taken into consideration when examining the insights explored throughout these papers.

This project is a major initiative of the WHA and is auspiced by Juno. Once co-designed, the project will build government and philanthropic support to fund the model, thereby delivering an integrated, evidence-informed model that can be piloted with women (trans gender and cis gender) and non-binary led households.

Insight Papers

The first stage for this project was to undertake a scan of the current literature investigating best practice (both nationally and internationally) in housing and support models for women (trans gender and cis gender) and non-binary people and their children at immediate risk of homelessness and violence. The discovery phase engaged a special focus on literature that included the voices and lived experiences of women and gender diverse people who have experienced housing instability and family violence. The discovery phase also included expert interviews with agencies delivering gender specific housing and support services.

The Discovery Insights Papers set out the findings and recommendations from the discovery phase for the *Homes for 100 Women* project. The papers are designed to be read either individually, or collectively to provide a holistic understanding of the current literature on homelessness for women and non-binary people. To accompany the papers, there is a mapping of current service provision in Victoria in response to homelessness and family violence. Taken together it is envisaged that these inputs will establish a substantive evidence base for the *Homes for 100 Women* demonstration project and guide the next steps in a co-design process.

The next stage of the project will involve testing these insights from the research with women and non-binary people with lived experience and a range of system experts through a co-design process. The co-design stage will then move into a collaborative and participatory process to develop a prototype for an effective

response for women (trans gender and cis gender) and non-binary people and their children at risk of homelessness and violence in Victoria.

Acknowledgments

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Interviews and discussions were held throughout 2023 and 2024 with the following members: Jeanette Large (Women's Property Initiatives); Lindy Parker (Women's Housing Limited); Joceyln Bignold and Cat Willians (McAuley Services); Tanya Corrie (Juno); Jade Blakkarly and Pai Rittichai (WIRE); Felicity Reynolds, Nardine Keriakous and Marika (Good Samaritan Inn); Charlotte Dillon and Libby van der Waal (YWCA); Jenny Davidson (Council to Single Mothers and their Children); Trishia Barclay (Refuge Victoria); Karen Fletcher and Adriana (Flat Out); and Suzanne Paynter and Che Stockey (Safe Steps).

We extend our thanks to Kate Mackenzie (Bridge It); Nadine Howard and Samantha Ace (Launch Housing); and Kerri Griffin-Karasawa and Pippa Brown (Haven Home Safe) for sharing insights on exciting new projects that consider gender and housing in Victoria.

We would also like to particularly acknowledge the academic papers and qualitative research on gender and homelessness shared by Monique Phipps (University of Tasmania).

The next stage of the project will involve testing these insights from research with women and non-binary people with lived experience and a range of system experts through a co-design process.

Key Findings – Summary

The findings and recommendations from the Discovery Phase for the *Homes for 100 Women* project have been grouped into four themes:

1. **There is a need for gendered analysis in understanding homelessness:**
 - a. How we define homelessness matters and shapes how we respond. Definitions of homelessness that focus on rough sleeping and 'visible' forms of homelessness erase women's experiences of homelessness.
 - b. Housing and homelessness are gendered. Women and non-binary people's pathways to, experiences of, and pathways out of homelessness are distinct.
 - c. Gender-based violence and homelessness are inextricably linked. Gender-based violence is both a cause and consequence of women's homelessness.

2. **There is a wide range of diversity within gendered experiences of homelessness:**

- a. Women and non-binary people experiencing homelessness are diverse.
 - b. There is a significant knowledge gap on homelessness for transgender, non-binary and gender diverse people.
3. **The current system is failing to ensure sustained pathways out of homelessness:**
- a. Demand for homelessness services and social housing far exceeds supply.
 - b. There is limited housing supply across all types of housing.
 - c. Multiple barriers prevent women and non-binary people getting help from the homelessness system.
 - d. There is an urgent need for gender-informed services to be funded.
 - e. Systems are 'siloed' from each other, and this inhibits effective outcomes.
4. **There is an emerging local and international evidence base about what works in responding to homelessness for women.**
- a. Recovery from homelessness requires more than just securing housing.
 - b. Both local and international models of gender-informed responses to homelessness for women offer valuable insights about what works.

THE CURRENT SYSTEM IS FAILING WOMEN & NON-BINARY PEOPLE

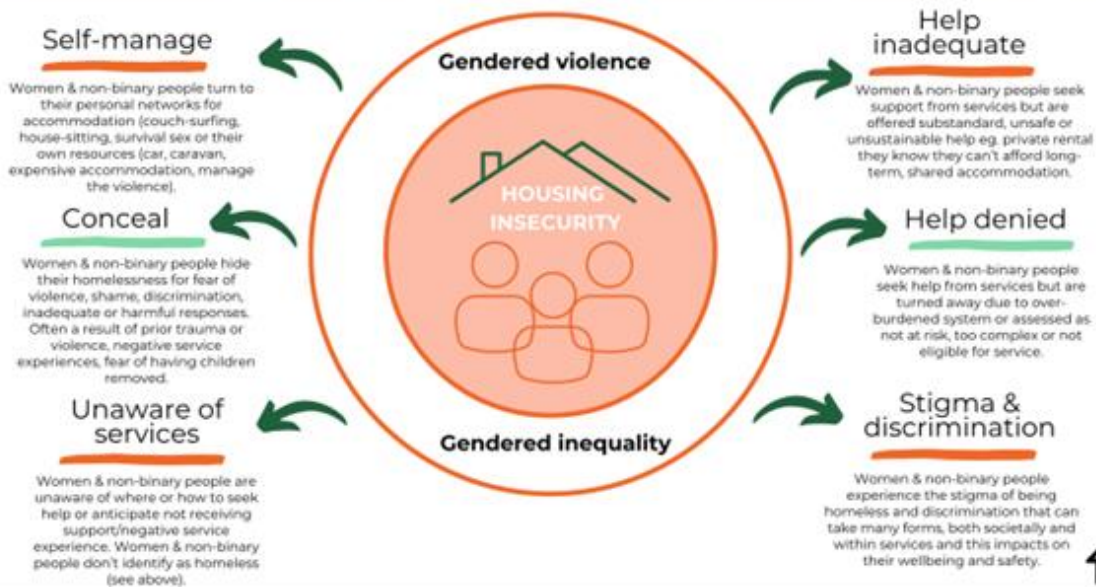


Figure 2: Summary of ways the current system is failing to meet the needs of women and non-binary people

Key Findings – Discussion

Gender plays a key role in homelessness. Pathways into, experiences of, and pathways out of homelessness differ due to gender disparities. Critical to this disparity is the gendered inequality, gendered poverty and gendered violence that can lead to experiences of homelessness for women and non-binary people and make it harder for them to exit homelessness into safety (**Paper 1**).

Research on pathways to homelessness for women and non-binary people demonstrates that trauma and experiences of violence and abuse are highly prevalent, whether that be family violence, childhood experiences of abuse or other forms of physical and sexual violence (**Paper 1**). This link between trauma, violence and homelessness is critical for understanding, and responding effectively to, homelessness for women and non-binary people.

While gender is critical to understanding homelessness, there exists a wide range of diversity in the experiences of homelessness for different groups of women and non-binary people (**Paper 2**). An intersectional feminist lens is needed to accurately assess and respond to this diversity and ensure that women and non-binary people are receiving services that meet their needs.

There is a significant knowledge gap on homelessness for trans gender, non-binary and gender-diverse people, however what data we have indicates that there are unique structural and social factors impacting homelessness for this group that stem directly from gendered violence and discrimination (**Paper 2**).

There is now an overwhelming number of sources providing insight and evidence into the challenges confronting our housing and homelessness support systems (**Paper 3**). The acute shortages in accommodation across the Victorian homelessness and housing system create significant bottlenecks, leading to women and non-binary people being turned away from services. With few alternatives, they are often forced to rely on their own networks and resources for a place to stay, or worse, return to an unsafe home. Frequently, homelessness support is unable to provide a permanent pathway out of housing instability for many who turn to the system for help.

Multiple barriers around eligibility and priority prevent women and non-binary people getting help from the homelessness system (**Paper 3**). The housing, homelessness and family violence systems operate separately or in 'silos' from each other. This means women and non-binary people in crisis are navigating multiple systems and this both inhibits effective outcomes and adds significant distress for women and non-binary people attempting to find stable housing through these systems.

Women experiencing or at risk of homelessness are frequently the primary carers of children, meaning that the consequences of homelessness are equally being

experienced by their children (**Paper 4**). It is imperative that children and young people are included in the design and delivery of homelessness responses and their needs considered both independently and in partnership with the needs of their primary caregiver to ensure they receive the support they need and that outcomes are in their best interests.

While the challenges are many, excitingly there are a range of emerging evidence-based models being trialed both locally and internationally addressing homelessness for women (**Paper 4**). Homelessness is a complex social issue that requires more than accommodation to resolve. Effective evidence- and gender-informed solutions need to be trauma-informed, holistic, ongoing and include both housing and diversified, tailored support. There are a range of lessons emerging from these local and international trials which are relevant to our local context and point the way towards effective gender-informed solutions to homelessness for women and non-binary people.

Recommendations

1. Homelessness is not a gender-neutral phenomenon. The WHA should define and adopt a definition of homelessness that encompasses both gendered and cultural differences, including recognition of safety as a necessary feature of 'home'.
2. Gender-informed housing and homelessness approaches are urgently required to ensure system responses address the needs of women and non-binary people at risk of, and experiencing, homelessness. Both housing and homelessness funding need to take a gendered approach that is responsive to the distinct needs of people of all genders.
3. Homelessness and housing system responses that address the underlying causes of women and non-binary people's homelessness are essential if they are to be effective at ending, and preventing, homelessness. This includes the need to prevent gender-based violence, gendered poverty and other forms of gendered inequality.
4. An intersectional feminist lens is crucial across homelessness and housing service design and delivery to ensure the efficacy of system responses. This is critical to ensuring system responses remedy existing inequalities rather than perpetuating them.
5. Housing and homelessness services must be co-designed with women and non-binary people with lived experience to ensure that they can meet the needs of diverse women and non-binary people.

6. Improved gender- and sexuality-inclusive data collection is needed within the homelessness and social housing systems, including the requirement for services to collect and record gender and sexual identity data (where voluntarily disclosed).
7. There is a need for tailored homelessness and housing service responses that are specific to communities who experience marginalisation and discrimination. It is equally critical that mainstream services have the knowledge, skills and policies to provide safe and appropriate support to all homeless people.
8. Adequate supply of affordable, safe, sustainable and fit for purpose housing is crucial to provide long-term solutions to homelessness.
9. A whole-of-government approach to housing and homelessness is necessary, with investment across the spectrum of intervention, focusing on prevention and early intervention and aiming to divert people from crisis.
10. Priority funding for gender-informed homelessness and housing programs is essential to redress gender-neutral approaches that have failed women and non-binary people.
11. Integrated responses to family violence and homelessness are urgently needed at a system-wide and service level to enable holistic and effective responses to homelessness for women and non-binary people.
12. Recognition in policy and practice that exit from homelessness involves both assistance to obtain housing and support to address experiences that preceded and occurred during periods of homelessness.
13. Housing and homelessness support must prioritise a trauma-informed approach that centres physical and emotional safety and continues post-housing with the capacity to address trauma recovery.
14. Children and young people must be included in the design and delivery of homelessness responses and their needs considered both independently and in partnership with the needs of their primary caregiver to ensure they receive the support they need and that outcomes are in their best interests.
15. Dedicated funding for gender-informed Housing First programs is essential to build a local evidence base on what works to end homelessness for women and non-binary people.

16. Learn from the international evidence base on effective Housing First responses for women and victim-survivors of family violence.

Conclusion

Homelessness for women and non-binary people is a major societal issue and a form of gendered inequality and injustice that is poorly responded to in Australia. Not enough is known about the factors that lead to positive outcomes and an exit from homelessness to housing stability for women and non-binary people.

From the findings set out above, a set of recommendations has emerged. These recommendations are drawn from the available evidence and provide insight into effective, evidence-based and gender-informed solutions to homelessness for women and non-binary people. These recommendations, along with the above findings, will inform the development of the *Homes for 100 Women* model and ensure it provides a much-needed gender-informed Housing First pilot within the local context.

This Insights Summary is the culmination of the Discovery Phase for the *Homes for 100 Women* project. In the next phase, these learnings will be triangulated, explored and built upon through a co-design process involving women and non-binary people with lived experiences of homelessness, alongside a range of system experts from the Women's Housing Alliance and representatives from across the Victorian homelessness and housing system.

At the closure of the Co-design Phase, the project will have developed an evidence and lived experience-informed model for a gender-transformative housing project, offering an immediate and effective response to women (both transgender and cisgender) and non-binary individuals, along with their children, who are at risk of homelessness and violence.

In so doing, the *Homes for 100 Women* project will make a much-needed contribution to the local evidence base on effective strategies to end homelessness for women and non-binary people.