



HOMES FOR 100 WOMEN **DISCOVERY INSIGHTS**

INSIGHTS PAPER ONE:
HOW GENDER IMPACTS HOMELESSNESS
FOR WOMEN

*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 family violence 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.

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 (transgender and cisgender) and non-binary led households.

A note on language: Whilst the WHA uses the term “women” inclusively to encompass both transgender and cisgender 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.

Key Finding 1:

There is a need for gendered analysis in understanding homelessness

This paper presents the first key finding from the Discovery Phase for the *Homes for 100 Women* project and lays out the evidence on how homelessness is distinct

for women. There is now clear evidence indicating that gender plays a key role in shaping experiences of homelessness. Pathways into, experiences of, and pathways out of homelessness differ as a result of gender disparities. While it is important to acknowledge the diversity of experiences among women (see Insights Paper 2 for a further exploration of this), both local and international evidence and literature agree on a range of critical factors that are important for understanding homelessness for women and that distinguish it from homelessness for men. This is further explored below through three key facets:

- Firstly, we need to examine existing definitions of homelessness in order to accurately capture women's experiences,
- Secondly, there are a range of factors that are now recognised as specific to women's experiences of homelessness, and
- Thirdly, gender-based violence and homelessness are mutually reinforcing for women.

Finding 1a: How we define homelessness matters and shapes how we respond. Definitions of homelessness that focus on rough sleeping and 'visible' homelessness erase women's homelessness.

Homelessness is a complex social issue and there is no single definition of homelessness in use in Australia. While popular understandings of homelessness continue to focus on 'rooflessness', or those who are visibly rough sleeping in public locations, homelessness in fact encompasses a much wider range of situations. This narrow view fails to capture the full spectrum of homelessness, particularly the experiences of women.

The definition of homelessness currently employed by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), states that a person is considered (and counted as) homeless:

if their current living arrangement:

- *is in a dwelling that is inadequate,*
- *has no tenure, or if their initial tenure is short and not extendable, or*
- *does not allow them to have control of, and access to space for social relations,*

and they do not have suitable accommodation alternatives.¹

Whilst this definition includes considerations of the physical (adequacy of the dwelling), legal (the security of tenure), and social aspects of housing, it does not include safety as a criterion for determining whether a person is homeless. The

¹ Australian Bureau of Statistics (2021). *Estimating Homelessness: Census methodology*, ABS Website, accessed 28 February 2024.

ABS acknowledges the limitations of this definition and the difficulty of accurately measuring the intersection of homelessness and family violence.² Consequently, those who are experiencing family violence and remain in their unsafe home with the perpetrator are excluded by the ABS from its definition of homelessness and are instead labelled as being 'at risk of homelessness'.³

How we define homelessness matters. It extends beyond issues of classification; the definitions we use also shape how we respond socially and systemically and the kinds of services we put in place.

Local and international literature on gender and homelessness recognises that, historically, definitions of homelessness are more likely to reflect the experiences of men, meaning that homeless women have existed on the 'margins of marginality'.⁴ Women's homelessness is often described as 'hidden' or less visible in the literature.^{5,6,7} Qualitative research with women reveals that women tend to exhaust their personal networks and resources before turning to services for support and may avoid identifying as homeless.⁸ They are more likely to seek support from homelessness services insecurely housed in over-crowded, unsafe or tenuous housing arrangements, than without accommodation altogether.⁹ Even when sleeping rough or without shelter, women will often employ strategies to remain 'invisible' in order to stay safe and minimise the risk of detection.¹⁰

Due to the challenges in capturing these less visible forms of homelessness through research and data collection, it is widely accepted that women's homelessness is likely underreported. Consequently, Australian data collection on rates of homelessness does not provide an accurate representation of the full extent of women's homelessness.¹¹ A European review of the data on women and homelessness recognizes three ways that women are underrepresented in homelessness data:

- Spatially – narrow definitions of homelessness that conflate it with rooflessness disappear much of women's homelessness. Once the

² Australian Bureau of Statistics (2012). 4922.0 - Information Paper - A Statistical Definition of Homelessness, 2012, ABS Website, accessed 28 February 2024.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Stone, W., Sharam, A., Goodall, Z., Reynolds, M., Sinclair, S., Faulkner, D., James, A., Zhang, T. (2024) Gendered housing matters: toward gender-responsive data and policy making, AHURI Final Report No. 415, Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute Limited, Melbourne, <https://www.ahuri.edu.au/research/finalreports/415>, p.16.

⁵ Phipps, M., Dalton, L., Maxwell, H and Cleary, M. (2018): Women and homelessness, a complex multidimensional issue: findings from a scoping review, *Journal of Social Distress and the Homeless*.

⁶ Bretherton, J. and Mayock, P. (2021) *Women's Homelessness: European Evidence Review*. Brussels: FEANTSA.

⁷ Bullen, J. (2019). *Didn't feel heard, didn't think I had a voice, didn't feel safe: Gender responsive strategies for assisting women experiencing long-term and recurrent homelessness*. Crows Nest, NSW: The Mercy Foundation.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (2023) Specialist homelessness services annual report 2022–23, AIHW, Australian Government, accessed 19 December 2023.

¹⁰ Bullen, J. (2019). *Didn't feel heard, didn't think I had a voice, didn't feel safe: Gender responsive strategies for assisting women experiencing long-term and recurrent homelessness*. Crows Nest, NSW: The Mercy Foundation.

¹¹ Stone, W., Sharam, A., Goodall, Z., Reynolds, M., Sinclair, S., Faulkner, D., James, A., Zhang, T. (2024) Gendered housing matters: toward gender-responsive data and policy making, AHURI Final Report No. 415, Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute Limited, Melbourne, <https://www.ahuri.edu.au/research/finalreports/415>

definition shifts beyond those sleeping rough and receiving support from homelessness services, women are much more strongly represented in the data;

- Administratively – the categorisation of women experiencing family violence separately from those experiencing homelessness means they are not included in homelessness counts. Similarly, when women presenting with children are categorised as families, they are excluded from data on homeless adults. These practices lead to a downplay of the actual number of women counted as experiencing homelessness; and
- Methodologically – the use of data collection methods that overlook diverse experiences of homelessness means they are more likely to record people stuck in long-term or repeated homelessness and therefore neglect those who are experiencing homelessness differently.¹²

The primary sources of Australian homelessness data, namely the ABS Census data and the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare's data collected by Specialist Homelessness Services, play a crucial role in shaping our understanding of homelessness nationally. Several Australian studies in recent years have attempted to address some of the gaps in our understanding of homelessness for women, and for trans gender, non-binary and gender-diverse people. These studies have highlighted the ways our current data collection methods, and definitions of homelessness, often undercount these groups' experiences of homelessness.^{13,14,15,16,17,18}

Whilst Australian definitions of homelessness currently lack recognition of the dimension of safety, one example internationally that has addressed this is ETHOS, the European definition of homelessness. It recognises that for housing to be truly be considered a home, it must provide at least relative safety.¹⁹ This inclusive approach encompasses both individuals living under the threat of violence and those currently in crisis accommodation as a result of family violence within the definition of homelessness. However, this definition is limited

¹² Bretherton, J. and Mayock, P. (2021) Women's Homelessness: European Evidence Review. Brussels: FEANTSA.

¹³ Equity Economics. (2021). Nowhere to Go: The benefits of providing long-term social housing to women that have experienced domestic and family violence. <https://everybodyshome.com.au/report-social-housing-keeps-women-safe-from-family-violence-expands-economy/>

¹⁴ Dawson, E. (2022) A Home of One's Own: Philanthropic & social sector solutions for women's housing, [AIIW-Per-Capita-Report-A-Home-of-Ones-Own-FINAL.pdf](#)

¹⁵ Bullen, J. (2019). Didn't feel heard, didn't think I had a voice, didn't feel safe: Gender responsive strategies for assisting women experiencing long-term and recurrent homelessness. Crows Nest, NSW: The Mercy Foundation

¹⁶ McNair, R., Andrews, C., Parkinson, S., and Dempsey, D. (2017) LGBTQ Homelessness: Risks, Resilience, and Access to Services in Victoria. GALFA LGBTQ Homelessness Research Project. <https://www.lgbtihomeless.org.au/research-and-policy/reports/>

¹⁸ Box, E., Flatau, P., Lester, L., Callis, Z. (2018) The Health and Social Costs of Women Sleeping Rough in Australia's Cities. University of Western Australia. <https://www.csi.edu.au/research/the-health-and-social-costs-of-women-sleeping-rough-in-australias-cities/>

¹⁹ Bretherton, J. and Mayock, P. (2021) Women's Homelessness: European Evidence Review. Brussels: FEANTSA.

in only acknowledging instances where police intervention has occurred as a result of family violence.²⁰

While gender is an important consideration in defining, measuring, and responding to homelessness, it is not the sole factor. In Australia, definitions of homelessness and home privilege Eurocentric cultural values and expectations, which leads to discrimination and injustice for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women, gender-diverse and non-binary people.²¹ The Australian Bureau of Statistics acknowledges that their definition of homelessness “emphasises the core elements of 'home' in Anglo American and European interpretations of the meaning of home as identified in research evidence”.²² There is a need for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander definitions of home and homelessness to be valued and adopted, that is inclusive of mobility practices, kinship and connection to Country.²³ Homelessness or rooflessness does not necessarily equate to homelessness for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples,²⁴ and narrow, Eurocentric definitions of homelessness have led to a significant underestimation of homelessness among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.²⁵

How we define a problem determines not only how we measure and understand it, but equally how we respond. Our definition of homelessness, and by extension what constitutes a ‘home’, can either enable our capacity to respond effectively, or, if approached narrowly, hinder our capacity to respond. The use of an intersectional feminist lens, that encompasses factors such as gender, race, culture, class, sexuality, age and ability, is critical in equipping us to design service systems and responses that can effectively meet the needs of the homeless population.

²⁰ FEANTSA (2017), ETHOS - European Typology on Homelessness and Housing Exclusion. [ETHOS Typology on Homelessness and Housing Exclusion \(feantsaresearch.org\)](https://www.feantsaresearch.org)

²¹ Tually, S., Tedmanson, D., Habibis, D., McKinley, K., Akbar, S., Chong, A., Deuter, K. and Goodwin-Smith, I. (2022) Urban Indigenous homelessness: much more than housing, AHURI Final Report No. 383, Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute Limited, Melbourne, <https://www.ahuri.edu.au/research/final-reports/383>.

²² Australian Bureau of Statistics (2012). [4922.0 - Information Paper - A Statistical Definition of Homelessness, 2012](https://www.abs.gov.au/4922.0), ABS Website, accessed 28 February 2024.

²³ Tually, S., Tedmanson, D., Habibis, D., McKinley, K., Akbar, S., Chong, A., Deuter, K. and Goodwin-Smith, I. (2022) Urban Indigenous homelessness: much more than housing, AHURI Final Report No. 383, Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute Limited, Melbourne, <https://www.ahuri.edu.au/research/final-reports/383>.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Australian Bureau of Statistics (2012). [FACTSHEET: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Homelessness](https://www.abs.gov.au/4922.0), ABS Website, accessed 28 February 2024.

Finding 1b: Experiences of housing and homelessness are gendered. Women and non-binary people's pathways into, experiences of, and pathways out of homelessness are distinct.

It is now well-established in the literature nationally and internationally that both housing and homelessness are gendered.²⁶ Gender plays a pivotal role in access to housing, entry into and exit from homelessness, the risk of homelessness and the lived experiences of homelessness. Women and non-binary people have specific and distinct pathways in their experiences of housing instability and homelessness and their pathways out of homelessness. Equally, their specific housing needs differ from those of men and cannot be effectively addressed by gender-blind housing and homelessness policies and programs.

Despite this understanding, policy and programs addressing housing and homelessness in Australia have largely overlooked gender considerations, opting for universal approaches that often fail to meet the needs of women and non-binary people.²⁷ In fact, it has been argued that the refusal of Australia's current housing and homelessness systems to consider gender is not only failing to meet the needs of women but may be actively harming some women when seeking assistance.²⁸ Alongside this are the costs to government and society from ineffective programs and policies.²⁹

Women's homelessness differs from that of men in several significant ways (for a discussion of the available evidence on non-binary people's homelessness see *Insights Paper 2*):

Women's homelessness is less visible.

- Women's homelessness is often hidden or less visible and is less likely to involve sleeping in public spaces.³⁰ Women are more likely to present to homelessness services sheltered but unsafe and at risk of homelessness.³¹ Women will often self-manage their homelessness and avoid presenting to services for help, relying instead on their own resources and networks to

²⁶ Stone, W., Sharam, A., Goodall, Z., Reynolds, M., Sinclair, S., Faulkner, D., James, A., Zhang, T. (2024) Gendered housing matters: toward gender-responsive data and policy making, AHURI Final Report No. 415, Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute Limited, Melbourne, <https://www.ahuri.edu.au/research/finalreports/415>.

²⁷ Stone, W., Sharam, A., Goodall, Z., Reynolds, M., Sinclair, S., Faulkner, D., James, A., Zhang, T. (2024) Gendered housing matters: toward gender-responsive data and policy making, AHURI Final Report No. 415, Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute Limited, Melbourne, <https://www.ahuri.edu.au/research/finalreports/415>.

²⁸ Flanagan, K., Blunden, H., valentine, k., and Henriette, J. (2019) Housing outcomes after domestic and family violence, Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute Limited Final Report No. 311, Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute Limited, Melbourne, <https://www.ahuri.edu.au/research/final-reports/311>.

²⁹ Stone, W., Sharam, A., Goodall, Z., Reynolds, M., Sinclair, S., Faulkner, D., James, A., Zhang, T. (2024) Gendered housing matters: toward gender-responsive data and policy making, AHURI Final Report No. 415, Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute Limited, Melbourne, <https://www.ahuri.edu.au/research/finalreports/415>.

³⁰ Milaney, K., Williams, N., Lockerbie, S.L. et al. Recognizing and responding to women experiencing homelessness with gendered and trauma-informed care. BMC Public Health 20, 397 (2020).

³¹ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (2023) *Specialist homelessness services annual report 2022–23*, AIHW, Australian Government, accessed 19 December 2023.

secure accommodation.³² Some research has shown that women sleep rough in equal numbers to men however employ 'strategies of invisibility' to evade detection and ensure their safety.³³ It is likely that the full extent of women's homelessness is underestimated by official counts and available data.³⁴

- This is further reinforced by the experiences and conditions women encounter when turning to homelessness services for support. Research shows that women will avoid homelessness services due to perceived risks and fears about what will happen to them in these settings.³⁵ Women who have experienced homelessness point out that both mixed-sex and single-sex environments are often viewed as frightening, destabilising or risky.³⁶

Women are more likely to experience homelessness whilst being primary caregivers.

- Women are more likely to experience homelessness with dependent children in their care and are vastly overrepresented in family homelessness.^{37, 38} It is estimated that 90% of homeless families are headed by women.³⁹ Australian data demonstrates a very strong negative trajectory for single mothers from family violence to poverty and homelessness.⁴⁰ 81% of homeless children are accompanied by a parent or guardian who is an adult woman.⁴¹ 1 in 3 clients assisted by homelessness services in 2022-23 were single parents with one or more children.⁴² 80% of all single parent families are headed by women.⁴³

Women's homelessness is marked by structural gender inequality, violence and trauma.

- Structural gender inequality is a key driver of women's homelessness. Systemic discrimination and inequity, for example, in unequal employment opportunities and wages for women (the gender pay gap is still significant globally); along with the effects of gender roles, such as in caring and

³² Bullen, J. (2019). Didn't feel heard, didn't think I had a voice, didn't feel safe: Gender responsive strategies for assisting women experiencing long-term and recurrent homelessness. Crows Nest, NSW: The Mercy Foundation.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Bullen, J. (2019). Didn't feel heard, didn't think I had a voice, didn't feel safe: Gender responsive strategies for assisting women experiencing long-term and recurrent homelessness. Crows Nest, NSW: The Mercy Foundation.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Phipps, M., Dalton, L., Maxwell, H and Cleary, M. (2018): Women and homelessness, a complex multidimensional issue: findings from a scoping review, *Journal of Social Distress and the Homeless*.

³⁸ Johnson, G., Ribar, D. and Zhu, A. (2017) *Women's Homelessness: International Evidence on Causes, Consequences, Coping and Policies*. Life Course Centre Working Paper Series. Life Course Centre, Melbourne. No. 2017-06.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Summers, A. (2022). *The Choice: Violence or Poverty*. University of Technology Sydney.

⁴¹ Zufferey, C., Parkes, A. (2019) Family homelessness in regional and urban contexts: Service provider perspectives, *Journal of Rural Studies*, Volume 70, 2019, pp. 1-8.

⁴² Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (2024) *Homelessness and homelessness services*, AIHW, Australian Government, accessed 15 March 2024.

⁴³ Australian Bureau of Statistics (June 2023), *Labour Force Status of Families*, ABS Website, accessed 14 March 2024.

caregiving, and other forms of overt and covert discrimination, increase women's risk of homelessness.⁴⁴ The link between gendered poverty and housing insecurity is critical for understanding pathways into and out of homelessness for women.

- Family violence is the leading cause of homelessness for women.⁴⁵ Many thousands of Australian women every year are being forced to choose between homelessness or violence, with an estimated 7,690 women returning to violent relationships every year and 9,120 women a year becoming homeless as a direct result of family violence.⁴⁶
- Violence and trauma are highly prevalent in the lives of women experiencing homelessness.⁴⁷ For women and girls, violence and traumatisation often precede homelessness, occur during homelessness, and create barriers to exiting homelessness.⁴⁸ Research has shown that violence, unsafe experiences and fear are often features of homelessness for women, including being subject to both physical and sexual assaults.^{49, 50, 51}
- Data from the Western Australian Advance to Zero database indicate that women experiencing homelessness report higher rates of violence since becoming homeless. As many as 86% of women, compared to 50% of men, reported that they had been the victim of an attack since becoming homeless.⁵² Women were also more likely to report being forced/ coerced into unwanted behaviour to do things they didn't want to do since becoming homeless and threatening, or trying, to harm themselves or others.⁵³
- Women experiencing homelessness are more likely to have experienced adverse childhood experiences, including childhood sexual abuse, compared to both homeless men and women in the general population.⁵⁴

⁴⁴ Stone, W., Sharam, A., Goodall, Z., Reynolds, M., Sinclair, S., Faulkner, D., James, A., Zhang, T. (2024) Gendered housing matters: toward gender-responsive data and policy making, AHURI Final Report No. 415, Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute Limited, Melbourne, <https://www.ahuri.edu.au/research/finalreports/415>.

⁴⁵ Homelessness Australia (2024) Homelessness and domestic and family violence State of Response Report 2024. <https://homelessnessaustralia.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/IWD-2024-3.pdf>

⁴⁶ Nowhere to Go: The benefits of providing long-term social housing to women that have experienced domestic and family violence. <https://everybodyshome.com.au/report-social-housing-keeps-women-safe-from-family-violence-expands-economy/>

⁴⁷ Phipps, M., Dalton, L., Maxwell, H and Cleary, M. (2018): Women and homelessness, a complex multidimensional issue: findings from a scoping review, *Journal of Social Distress and the Homeless*.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Phipps, M., Dalton, L., Maxwell, H and Cleary, M. (2018): Women and homelessness, a complex multidimensional issue: findings from a scoping review, *Journal of Social Distress and the Homeless*.

⁵⁰ Bullen, J. (2019). Didn't feel heard, didn't think I had a voice, didn't feel safe: Gender responsive strategies for assisting women experiencing long-term and recurrent homelessness. Crows Nest, NSW: The Mercy Foundation.

⁵¹ Flatau P., Lester L, Kyron M., Lai, C., and Li, M. (2022). Ending Homelessness in Western Australian 2022, Perth: The University of Western Australia. <https://doi.org/10.25916/ns0d-0q24>

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Phipps, M., Dalton, L., Maxwell, H and Cleary, M. (2018): Women and homelessness, a complex multidimensional issue: findings from a scoping review, *Journal of Social Distress and the Homeless*.

This includes very specific traumas such as losing primary care of a child and/or family violence.⁵⁵

- Repeating and compounded trauma is a significant factor in homelessness for many women, including high rates of trauma prior to homelessness, frequent traumatic experiences whilst homeless (both from within and outside service settings) and the impact of trauma continuing to inform what women need in terms of support once housing has been secured.^{56, 57} Trauma-informed care and service responses, are therefore essential in designing effective gender-responsive services for women experiencing, or recovering from, homelessness. This includes from both homelessness and housing services and accompanying support services.^{58, 59}
- Alongside the lifetime trauma rates for women experiencing homelessness, becoming - and being - homeless is a traumatic experience in and of itself.⁶⁰

Gendered stigma and discrimination are barriers to support for women experiencing homelessness.

- Research has shown that stigma and discrimination act both as a barrier to women seeking support and to services offering them support.⁶¹ The stigma associated with being homeless as a woman is a deterrent to women approaching services for support, and research with women who have been homeless has shown they are acutely aware of the stigma and shame associated with this status.^{62, 63} In particular, many women who are mothers hold fears around how they will be judged by services and the impact this will have on their custody and care of their children.⁶⁴
- Australian research has uncovered disparities in the quality of service provided to some women and families, driven by systemic discrimination

⁵⁵ University of York: Centre for Housing Policy. (2021) Housing First for Women: A five year evaluation of the Manchester Jigsaw Support project. https://homelesslink-1b54.kxcdn.com/media/documents/Jigsaw_Housing_First_for_Women_Final_Evaluation_Report_2021.pdf

⁵⁶ Phipps, M., Dalton, L., Maxwell, H and Cleary, M. (2018): Women and homelessness, a complex multidimensional issue: findings from a scoping review, Journal of Social Distress and the Homeless.

⁵⁷ Bullen, J. (2019). Didn't feel heard, didn't think I had a voice, didn't feel safe: Gender responsive strategies for assisting women experiencing long-term and recurrent homelessness. Crows Nest, NSW: The Mercy Foundation.

⁵⁸ Tually, S., Tedmanson, D., Habibis, D., McKinley, K., Akbar, S., Chong, A., Deuter, K. and Goodwin-Smith, I. (2022) Urban Indigenous homelessness: much more than housing, AHURI Final Report No. 383, Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute Limited, Melbourne, <https://www.ahuri.edu.au/research/final-reports/383>

⁵⁹ Milaney, K., Williams, N., Lockerbie, S.L. et al. Recognizing and responding to women experiencing homelessness with gendered and trauma-informed care. BMC Public Health 20, 397 (2020).

⁶⁰ Phipps, M., Dalton, L., Maxwell, H and Cleary, M. (2018): Women and homelessness, a complex multidimensional issue: findings from a scoping review, Journal of Social Distress and the Homeless.

⁶¹ Bullen, J. (2019). Didn't feel heard, didn't think I had a voice, didn't feel safe: Gender responsive strategies for assisting women experiencing long-term and recurrent homelessness. Crows Nest, NSW: The Mercy Foundation.

⁶² Bullen, J. (2019). Didn't feel heard, didn't think I had a voice, didn't feel safe: Gender responsive strategies for assisting women experiencing long-term and recurrent homelessness. Crows Nest, NSW: The Mercy Foundation;

⁶³ University of York: Centre for Housing Policy. (2021) Housing First for Women: A five year evaluation of the Manchester Jigsaw Support project. https://homelesslink-1b54.kxcdn.com/media/documents/Jigsaw_Housing_First_for_Women_Final_Evaluation_Report_2021.pdf

⁶⁴ Bullen, J. (2019). Didn't feel heard, didn't think I had a voice, didn't feel safe: Gender responsive strategies for assisting women experiencing long-term and recurrent homelessness. Crows Nest, NSW: The Mercy Foundation.

and views of 'deservingness'.⁶⁵ Women and people of 'other gender identity' (not women or men) report very high rates of discrimination with respect to seeking support from homelessness or housing services (52.2% and 71.4% respectively).⁶⁶

- Systemic discrimination is a barrier for some women more than others. Discrimination and injustice created by Eurocentric definitions of home and inflexible service systems that conflict with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander understandings of home, mobility practices, kinship and connection to Country has a devastating impact on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and is reflected in their overrepresentation in the homeless population.⁶⁷ Research involving lesbian and bisexual women, trans gender women, and gender diverse people who have been homeless shows that discrimination is highly prevalent both in what led to their experience of homelessness and their experiences of the homelessness system.⁶⁸

There is a stronger correlation between mental ill health and homelessness for women.

- The prevalence of both physical and mental health issues is higher for women experiencing homelessness than the general population.⁶⁹ Research has found that women experiencing homelessness have greater mental health concerns, higher rates of diagnosed mental health issues, suicidal thoughts and attempts, and adverse childhood trauma, compared to men experiencing homelessness.⁷⁰ There is also a stronger relationship between abuse and mental health issues observed among homeless women than homeless men.⁷¹
- A lack of social support has been identified as a contributing factor for women who experience homelessness, with research showing significantly less social support compared to women who have never experienced homelessness.⁷²
- Australian research has found that women who are sleeping rough are substantially more likely than men who are sleeping rough to present at

⁶⁵ valentine, k., Cripps, K., Flanagan, K., Habibis, D., Martin, C., and Blunden, H. (2020) *Inquiry into integrated housing support for vulnerable families*, AHURI Final Report No. 339, Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute Limited, Melbourne, <https://www.ahuri.edu.au/research/final-reports/339>

⁶⁶ Flatau P., Lester L, Kyron M., Lai, C., and Li, M. (2022). *Ending Homelessness in Western Australian 2022*, Perth: The University of Western Australia.

⁶⁷ Tually, S., Tedmanson, D., Habibis, D., McKinley, K., Akbar, S., Chong, A., Deuter, K. and Goodwin-Smith, I. (2022) *Urban Indigenous homelessness: much more than housing*, AHURI Final Report No. 383, Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute Limited, Melbourne, <https://www.ahuri.edu.au/research/final-reports/383>

⁶⁸ McNair, R., Andrews, C., Parkinson, S., and Dempsey, D. (2017) *LGBTQ Homelessness: Risks, Resilience, and Access to Services in Victoria*. GALFA LGBTQ Homelessness Research Project. <https://www.lgbthomeless.org.au/research-and-policy/reports/>

⁶⁹ Phipps, M., Dalton, L., Maxwell, H and Cleary, M. (2018): *Women and homelessness, a complex multidimensional issue: findings from a scoping review*, *Journal of Social Distress and the Homeless*.

⁷⁰ Milaney, K., Williams, N., Lockerbie, S.L. et al. *Recognizing and responding to women experiencing homelessness with gendered and trauma-informed care*. *BMC Public Health* 20, 397 (2020).

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Phipps, M., Dalton, L., Maxwell, H and Cleary, M. (2018): *Women and homelessness, a complex multidimensional issue: findings from a scoping review*, *Journal of Social Distress and the Homeless*.

hospital emergency departments.⁷³ They were also significantly more likely to have been taken to hospital against their will for a mental health reason.⁷⁴

Whilst there is a growing body of evidence both locally and internationally that is building our understanding of women's pathways into and experiences of homelessness, along with promising responses and solutions, the availability of robust gender-disaggregated and intersectional data remains inadequate. This undermines our capacity to build a comprehensive understanding of how women enter, experience and exit homelessness in Australia, along with the diversities among women in these experiences.

There is an urgent need for more gender-disaggregated and intersectional data collection and for increased research into the needs, experiences of and solutions to homelessness for women and non-binary people in Australia.

Finding 1c. Gender-based violence and homelessness are inextricably linked. Gender-based violence is both a cause and consequence of women's homelessness.

Gender inequality, inclusive of gender-based violence and gendered poverty, is the driving force behind women's homelessness. Whilst family violence is the single biggest cause of homelessness for women - with gender-based discrimination and family rejection significant factors in homelessness for transgender, non-binary and gender-diverse people - the structural underpinnings of both gender-based violence and homelessness, spanning economic, social, legal and cultural domains, must be acknowledged. It is structural and systemic discrimination and inequality ingrained within these structures that creates the social context for the gender-based violence and homelessness experienced by women and non-binary people.⁷⁵

Not only does gender inequality drive women and non-binary people into homelessness, but that inequality creates significant barriers to exiting homelessness as well. Structural inequality not only directly impacts women and non-binary people, but it also influences and undermines the effectiveness of the systems designed to support them.⁷⁶

- 44% of clients accessing the state's homelessness system are victim survivors of family violence.⁷⁷

⁷³ Box, E., Flatau, P., Lester, L., Callis, Z. (2018) The Health and Social Costs of Women Sleeping Rough in Australia's Cities. University of Western Australia. <https://www.csi.edu.au/research/the-health-and-social-costs-of-women-sleeping-rough-in-australias-cities/>

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Our Watch (2021). Change the Story: A shared framework for the prevention of violence against women in Australia. (2nd ed.)

⁷⁶ Mayock, P., Sheridan, S. and Parker, S. (2012) Migrant Women and Homelessness: The Role of Gender-based Violence. European Journal of Homelessness. Volume 6, No. 1, August 2012. [article-3-44464520364946263931.pdf \(feantsa.org\)](https://www.feantsa.org/article-3-44464520364946263931.pdf)

⁷⁷ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (2022) *Specialist homelessness services Annual Report*, AIHW

- 3 out of 5 have previously sought support from the homelessness system.⁷⁸
- Only 3% of women fleeing family violence received the long-term housing they needed for the 2020 and 2021 financial years.⁷⁹

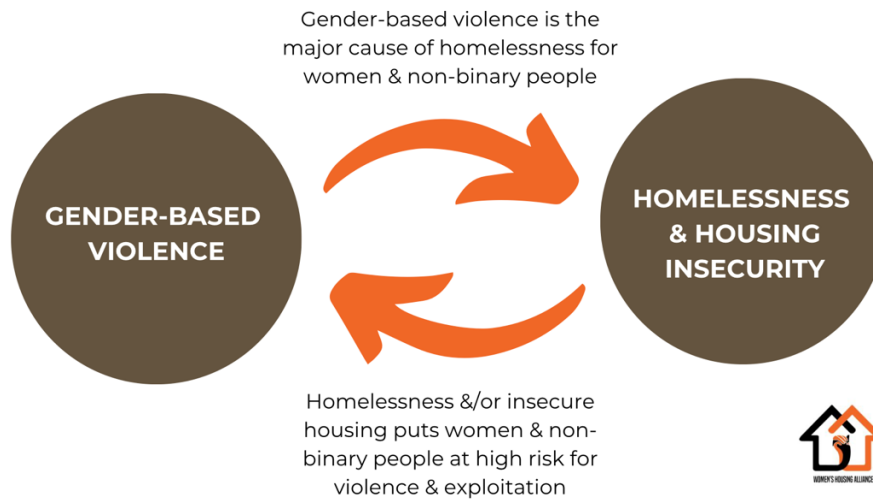


Figure 1: The link between gender-based violence and homelessness for women is mutually reinforcing.

Gender-based violence, including intimate partner violence, childhood abuse, and adult experiences of sexual and physical assault, is pervasive in the lives of homeless women.¹ Whilst family violence is often the “trigger” for homelessness when women flee unsafe relationships, gender-based violence and its impacts on the mental and physical health of women further heightens women’s risk of homelessness.¹ Once homeless, women are at further risk of violence. Australian research indicates as many as 86% of women experiencing homelessness have been attacked since becoming homeless, a significantly higher rate for women than men.¹

The current failure to include adequate housing solutions into system responses to family violence is pushing more women, non-binary people, and their children into homelessness and resulting in elevated risk of homelessness. AHURI’s 2019 detailed investigation into housing outcomes after domestic violence found that there was no reliable pathway from family violence crises to secure, long-term

⁷⁸ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (2022) *Specialist homelessness services Annual Report*, AIHW

⁷⁹ Homelessness Australia (2022). Only three per cent of housing needed for women’s safety delivered.

<https://homelessnessaustralia.org.au/only-three-per-cent-of-housing-needed-for-womens-safety-delivered/>

housing for victim survivors in any state, across Australia.⁸⁰ This disconnect between the family violence support system and the wider housing market is a significant barrier to recovery for victim survivors and, as shown above, is forcing them into harmful situations where they must choose between safety or housing.⁸¹ The report recommended action at a systemic level to improve integration between the family violence and housing systems to ensure that reliable and accessible pathways from family violence crisis to secure, long-term housing are created.⁸²

Since the release of the AHURI report, Victoria has launched two initiatives that aim to improve pathways for victim survivors from crisis into housing. These include a boost to social housing through the Big Build, where 1,000 of the properties being built have been prioritised for survivors of family violence,⁸³ and the Exit Pathways Pilot, designed to support victim-survivors in transitioning from crisis accommodation into private rentals through head-leasing. At the national level, there is also Keeping Women Safe in their Home (KWSITH) funding, an action of the National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children 2022-2032, that provides victim survivors with support to stay in their current home safely.⁸⁴

However, expert interviews with practitioners and service managers in Victoria has identified concerns about both the lack of available funding for longer-term support to assist victim-survivors to transition sustainability into housing, and apprehensions regarding the temporary nature of housing pathways like the Big Build.

It is also critical that homelessness and housing services are responsive to the fact that for many women and non-binary people seeking support, home has been the site of violence and trauma. Their experience of home is that it has not been safe, nor has it been an environment where they have exercised control. This has implications for housing and further reinforces the urgent need for access to trauma-informed support to continue to be available to women and non-binary people post-housing.

Fundamentally, both family violence and homelessness responses must be integrated and coordinated to support victim-survivors and ensure system responses lead to a sustainable exit from both violence and homelessness.

⁸⁰ Flanagan, K., Blunden, H., valentine, k., and Henriette, J. (2019) Housing outcomes after domestic and family violence, AHURI Final Report No. 311, Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute Limited, Melbourne, <https://www.ahuri.edu.au/research/final-reports/311>

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Victorian Government (2023), Ending Family Violence in Victoria: Annual Report 2022, <https://www.vic.gov.au/ending-family-violence-annual-report-2022>

⁸⁴ Department of Social Services (2023), Keeping Women Safe in their Homes, <https://www.dss.gov.au/women-programs-services-reducing-violence/keeping-women-safe-in-their-homes>

Addressing fundamental issues of economic security is equally essential for these responses to be genuinely effective.⁸⁵

Recommendations

1. Homelessness is not a gender-neutral phenomenon. Definitions of homelessness must encompass both gendered and cultural differences in its manifestations, including recognition of safety as a necessary feature of 'home'.
2. Gender-informed housing and homelessness approaches are urgently required to ensure system responses that 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. 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.

⁸⁵ Victorian Government (2023), Ending Family Violence in Victoria: Annual Report 2022, <https://www.vic.gov.au/ending-family-violence-annual-report-2022>