



# HOMES FOR 100 WOMEN **DISCOVERY INSIGHTS**

INSIGHTS PAPER TWO:  
UNDERSTANDING DIVERSITY -  
INTERSECTIONALITY, GENDER AND  
HOMELESSNESS

*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 (transgender and cisgender), 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 2:

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

This paper presents the second key finding from the Discovery Phase for the *Homes for 100 Women* project, highlighting evidence that demonstrates the wide range of diversity in the experiences of homelessness for different groups of women. This paper also explores the available data and literature concerning homelessness for trans gender, non-binary and gender-diverse people. Although there remain significant limitations in the availability of intersectional and inclusive data in relation to homelessness, this paper aims to present and explore existing data while emphasising the critical need for more inclusive and intersectional data collection practices.

### **Finding 2a. Women and non-binary people experiencing homelessness are diverse.**

Women and non-binary people’s experiences of homelessness vary widely. It is critical that we recognise not only the diversity amongst women and non-binary people experiencing homelessness but equally the disproportionate likelihood of certain subgroups experiencing homelessness.

Women and non-binary people experience different forms of interpersonal, systemic, and structural discrimination, oppression, and privilege. When addressing homelessness through a gender lens, it's essential not to overlook the differences within the categories of 'women' and 'non-binary people', nor the ways intersecting forms of oppression and privilege impact individual women and non-binary people and their experiences of homelessness. While a gender lens provides critical insights into understanding the unique drivers and different needs across genders, adopting an intersectional feminist lens enables us to incorporate additional demographic and socioeconomic factors that inform and impact housing and homelessness.

There is a significant lack of robust gender-disaggregated and intersectional data available in relation to housing and homelessness in Australia.<sup>1</sup> While it is common practice within the homelessness service sector and major Australian surveys exploring housing and homelessness to collect gender data, prevailing data collection practices are currently limited by a binary approach to gender. This approach often leads to confusion, conflation, and inadequate definitions of sex and gender undermining our ability to gain accurate insights into homelessness for trans gender, non-binary and gender-diverse people. This failure is then compounded by the lack of data available that pairs gender with other demographic and socioeconomic categories such as race, sexuality, age, disability, socioeconomic and migration status, among others.

This lack of intersectional, gender-disaggregated data obscures the intricate ways in which marginalisation and discrimination operate, intersect, and often compound, heightening the risk of homelessness for certain women and non-binary people. This inadequacy effectively renders invisible those who are at greatest risk of homelessness and most disadvantaged by multiple systemic failures and forms of discrimination. It also prevents us from adequately recognising and addressing these interlinking systems of discrimination in the design and delivery of support services.

### **Available intersectional data on gender and homelessness.**

Despite the above limitations, there is some available intersectional data about gender and homelessness:

- First Nations women constituted nearly 23% of all women experiencing homelessness in 2021.<sup>2</sup> Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Victorian women are nearly five times more likely to be homeless than non-Indigenous women.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Ng, M., Buxton, A., Martin, C. Pawson, H. (2023) Gender, Housing Insecurity and Homelessness in Australia: Data insights. UNSW Sydney. <https://www.ywca.org.au/gender-housing-insecurity-and-homelessness-in-australia-data-insights/>

<sup>2</sup> Ng, M., Buxton, A., Martin, C. Pawson, H. (2023) Gender, Housing Insecurity and Homelessness in Australia: Data insights. UNSW Sydney. <https://www.ywca.org.au/gender-housing-insecurity-and-homelessness-in-australia-data-insights/>

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

- Lesbian and bisexual women are at least twice as likely as heterosexual women to have experienced homelessness.<sup>4</sup> An Australian study has shown that lesbian women were twice as likely to stay in crisis accommodation or sleep rough, and bisexual respondents at least three times more likely than heterosexual respondents.<sup>5</sup> In a national survey, 35% of lesbian respondents and 14% of bisexual respondents did not seek assistance from service organisations while homeless.<sup>6</sup>
- 52% of women entering prison have been homeless in the year prior to incarceration.<sup>7</sup> Over 40% of women incarcerated in Victoria are homeless upon release, with women twice as likely as men to be homeless post-release.<sup>8</sup> The number of women imprisoned in Victoria increased by 58% between 2008 and 2013, more than double that of the male prison population.<sup>9</sup> During the same period, the number of women aged between 17 and 24 imprisoned in Victoria rose by 163.2%.

***If you don't have access to accommodation what we are finding is that people are going back to violent partners, unhealthy situations, dealers and that is very common. The other thing is if you can't get accommodation when you are eligible for parole, you don't get parole. Say for example, if you are doing a 5-year sentence with parole after 3 years, if you haven't got accommodation, then you have to stay in for those extra 2 years. So, it is literally you've got accommodation, or you stay in prison. So that's a really stark thing for us. The cost of keeping someone in prison compared with the cost of providing them with housing. (Flat Out expert interview, January 2024)***

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women are 21 times more likely to be imprisoned than non-Indigenous women in Australia.<sup>10</sup> 33% of women in prison exhibit evidence of an acquired brain injury, 45% were unemployed at the time of incarceration, 87% were victims of sexual, physical or emotional abuse, with the majority experiencing multiple forms of abuse,

<sup>4</sup> 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/>

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Victorian Ombudsman, (2015) Investigation into the rehabilitation and reintegration of prisoners in Victoria (Report, September 2015). <https://www.ombudsman.vic.gov.au/our-impact/investigation-reports/investigation-into-the-rehabilitation-and-reintegration-of-prisoners-in-victoria/>

<sup>8</sup> Victorian Ombudsman, (2015) Investigation into the rehabilitation and reintegration of prisoners in Victoria (Report, September 2015). <https://www.ombudsman.vic.gov.au/our-impact/investigation-reports/investigation-into-the-rehabilitation-and-reintegration-of-prisoners-in-victoria/>

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Victorian Legal Services Board and Commissioner (2023) Keeping Women Out of the Justice System Final report – August 2023. [https://lsbc.vic.gov.au/sites/default/files/2023-10/Keeping\\_Women\\_Out\\_of\\_the\\_Justice\\_System\\_final\\_report.pdf?mc\\_cid=cd12f019f2&mc\\_eid=4e49176381](https://lsbc.vic.gov.au/sites/default/files/2023-10/Keeping_Women_Out_of_the_Justice_System_final_report.pdf?mc_cid=cd12f019f2&mc_eid=4e49176381)

83% reported previous illicit drug use and 85% are parents or primary carers.<sup>11</sup>

- Young people are disproportionately impacted by homelessness and housing insecurity. Nearly half of those experiencing homelessness and 57% of those in inadequate housing are young people.<sup>12</sup> At the 2021 Census, young women had a homelessness rate of 70 people per 10,000, up from 68 in 2016.<sup>13</sup> The homelessness rate for young men decreased between the 2016 and 2021 Censuses, while that for young women increased.<sup>14</sup> Young women were more likely than men to reside in supported accommodation for the homeless (26.6%, compared with 20.3% of males) or stay temporarily with other households (9.9%, compared with 8.5% of males).<sup>15</sup>
- The most dramatic increases in homelessness between the 2016 and 2021 Censuses were for women aged 35 to 44 years and young women aged 12 to 18 years.<sup>16</sup> The largest overall group of homeless women are those in the 25-34 age bracket.<sup>17</sup>
- Between 2011 and 2016, women over the age of 55 were the fastest growing cohort experiencing homelessness, experiencing a 31% increase.<sup>18</sup> At the 2021 Census, women over the age of 55 had a homelessness rate of 19 people per 10,000 in 2021, down from 20 in 2016.<sup>19</sup> Women over the age of 55 were more likely than men to be in supported accommodation for the homeless (16.9%, compared with 10.2% of males), staying temporarily with other households (26.7%, compared with 19.6% of males) and living in 'severely' crowded dwellings (30.5%, compared with 17.7% of males).<sup>20</sup>
- 34% of sole-parent households live in poverty,<sup>21</sup> with poverty recognised as a key driver of homelessness for children and their families.<sup>22</sup> 80% of all

<sup>11</sup> Victorian Ombudsman, (2015) Investigation into the rehabilitation and reintegration of prisoners in Victoria (Report, September 2015). <https://www.ombudsman.vic.gov.au/our-impact/investigation-reports/investigation-into-the-rehabilitation-and-reintegration-of-prisoners-in-victoria/>

<sup>12</sup> Ng, M., Buxton, A., Martin, C. Pawson, H. (2023) Gender, Housing Insecurity and Homelessness in Australia: Data insights. UNSW Sydney. <https://www.ywca.org.au/gender-housing-insecurity-and-homelessness-in-australia-data-insights/>

<sup>13</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics (2021), *Estimating Homelessness: Census*, ABS Website, accessed 15 March 2024.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute (2024), What are the real costs of Australia's housing crisis for women?, AHURI website, <https://www.ahuri.edu.au/analysis/brief/what-are-real-costs-australias-housing-crisis-women>, accessed 15 March 2024.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Australian Human Rights Commission (2019), Older Women's Risk of Homelessness: Background Paper 2019. <https://humanrights.gov.au/our-work/age-discrimination/publications/older-womens-risk-homelessness-background-paper-2019>

<sup>19</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics (2021), *Estimating Homelessness: Census*, ABS Website, accessed 15 March 2024.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Naidoo, Y; valentine, k; and Adamson, E (2022) Australian experiences of poverty: risk precarity and uncertainty during COVID-19 Australian Council of Social Service (ACOSS) and UNSW Sydney. <https://povertyandinequality.acoss.org.au/poverty-in-australia-2023-who-is-affected/#:~:text=1%20IN%208%20PEOPLE%20LIVE,CAN%20ALL%20HAVE%20AN%20IMPACT>

<sup>22</sup> Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (2022) *Australia's children*, AIHW, Australian Government, accessed 15 March 2024.

single-parent families are headed by women.<sup>23</sup> 81% of homeless children are accompanied by a female adult parent or guardian.<sup>24</sup> 1 in 3 clients assisted by homelessness services in 2022-23 were single parents with one or more children.<sup>25</sup>

- Finding safe and affordable housing is the most significant problem facing migrant women and children settling in Australia.<sup>26</sup> The 2016 Census showed that recent migrants to Australia (those who arrived within the five years prior to the 2016 Census) accounted for 15% of the homeless population – a significant overrepresentation.<sup>27,28</sup>
- Women in regional, rural and remote areas are more likely than women in urban areas to experience invisible homelessness and there is a significant lack of availability and accessibility of services for women located in these areas.<sup>29</sup> Women in regional, rural and remote areas face unique challenges in accessing support to address homelessness or housing insecurity.<sup>30</sup>
- While there is an acute lack of available and current data and research that considers the intersection of gender and disability in relation to housing and homelessness in Australia,<sup>31</sup> a correlation between disability and housing precarity is well-established in the literature on homelessness.<sup>32</sup> People with disabilities are over-represented among the homeless population in Australia, face poorer housing outcomes than the general population and have been found to experience disadvantage across all housing indicators.<sup>33,34</sup> What data we do have that asks about disability type shows that the likelihood of homelessness is not equally distributed amongst people with disabilities. For instance, individuals with

<sup>23</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics (June 2023), *Labour Force Status of Families*, ABS Website, accessed 14 March 2024.

<sup>24</sup> 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.

<sup>25</sup> Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (2024) *Homelessness and homelessness services*, AIHW, Australian Government, accessed 15 March 2024.

<sup>26</sup> Ng, M., Buxton, A., Martin, C. Pawson, H. (2023) Gender, Housing Insecurity and Homelessness in Australia: Data insights. UNSW Sydney. <https://www.ywca.org.au/gender-housing-insecurity-and-homelessness-in-australia-data-insights/>

<sup>27</sup> 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.

<sup>28</sup> Hermant, N. (2021) Australia's 'hidden' housing problem: Migrants and refugees are overrepresented among the homeless population, ABC News website <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2021-08-02/australias-hidden-migrant-housing-homelessness-problem/100336236>, accessed 15 March 2024.

<sup>29</sup> 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.

<sup>30</sup> Ng, M., Buxton, A., Martin, C. Pawson, H. (2023) Gender, Housing Insecurity and Homelessness in Australia: Data insights. UNSW Sydney. <https://www.ywca.org.au/gender-housing-insecurity-and-homelessness-in-australia-data-insights/>

<sup>31</sup> Women With Disabilities Australia (2023), Response to the National Housing and Homelessness Plan Issues Paper, <https://wwda.org.au/publication/wwdas-response-to-the-national-housing-and-homelessness-plan-issues-paper/>

<sup>32</sup> Lim, G., Melendez-Torres, G. J., Amos, N., Anderson, J., Norman, T., Power, J., Jones, J., and Bourne, A. (2023) Demographic predictors of experiences of homelessness among lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, gender-diverse and queer-identifying (LGBTIQ) young people in Australia, *Journal of Youth Studies*.

<sup>33</sup> Beer A, Baker E, Lester L, Daniel L. The Relative Risk of Homelessness among Persons with a Disability: New Methods and Policy Insights. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*. 2019; 16(22):4304.

<sup>34</sup> Aitken, Z., Baker, E., Badland, H., Mason, K., Bentley, R., Beer, A & Kavanagh, A. (2019) Precariously placed: housing affordability, quality and satisfaction of Australians with disabilities, *Disability & Society*, 34:1, 121-142.

psychological or intellectual disabilities, particularly those related to mental illness or brain injury, are at a higher risk of homelessness than those with physical disabilities.<sup>35</sup>

### **Diverse pathways into homelessness for women.**

Alongside the intersectional data regarding rates of homelessness for diverse women, there is an emerging database on pathways into homelessness for women, revealing distinct gendered patterns when compared to men.<sup>36</sup>

- The primary pathway into homelessness for women is family violence.<sup>37</sup> Family violence can lead directly to homelessness when women leave violent homes to find safety.<sup>38</sup> Family violence also often results in housing insecurity, poverty and the risk of further violence, which can drive women to return to the violence, rather than face homelessness.<sup>39</sup> Data shows that many women experiencing violence from a partner want to leave but are unable to because of a lack of money or resources, having nowhere else to go or concerns for their children's welfare.<sup>40</sup>
- One study of Australian Specialist Homelessness Service (SHS) data identified two key subgroups among the population of homeless women presenting to services for support: single mothers and lone women, each with distinct characteristics.<sup>41</sup> Single mothers were more likely to be younger, to have been born overseas, to be employed and to have been homeless in the past 12 months.<sup>42</sup> On the other hand, lone women were more likely to have medical issues, a mental health condition, addiction issues, admission to a psychiatric ward in the past 12 months, and be out of the labour force.<sup>43</sup> Reasons for seeking support also differed: lone women were more likely to present to SHSs due to substance and mental health issues, whereas homeless mothers with children were more likely to seek support from SHSs because they had run out of other accommodation options.<sup>44</sup>
- An international scoping review on women and homelessness also found different pathways into homelessness for women across diverse

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> 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*.

<sup>37</sup> 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>

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> Warburton WA, Papic M, Whittaker E. Heterogeneity among Homeless Australian Women and Their Reasons for Homelessness Entry. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*. 2022; 19(15):8909.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

characteristics.<sup>45</sup> This has been summarized in the below figure (non-binary pathways to homelessness are also included in the figure below but discussed further in Finding 2b). One key finding was that pathways into homelessness differed according to employment status: homelessness for employed women was more likely to be precipitated by health issues for themselves or someone they were caring for, whereas, for unemployed women, pathways were found to be more complex and included adverse childhood experiences, substance use and criminalisation.<sup>46</sup>

- Research on pathways to homelessness for women 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.<sup>47</sup>
- Gendered poverty is also a critical pathway influencing women's risk of homelessness. Women are more likely than men to live in households below the poverty line and women and girls make up the majority of people living in poverty.<sup>48</sup> The gender wage gap makes it more difficult for women, particularly single women with children, to afford suitable housing.<sup>49</sup> Nearly two thirds (59%) of people receiving income support lower than the pension (including JobSeeker, Youth Allowance, Austudy, Parenting Payment and Special Benefit) are women.<sup>50</sup> Furthermore, households where women are the main income earner are more likely to be in poverty, with single-parent households headed by women twice as likely to be in poverty.<sup>51</sup>
- While the relationship between housing and poverty is complex, gender is an important factor in understanding poverty related to housing, as women are both more likely to be in poverty and constitute the majority of people seeking support from specialist homelessness services.<sup>52</sup> Women are also more likely to have a less secure housing tenancy, for example, primarily renting rather than owning their own homes, and are more likely

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<sup>45</sup> 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*.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> Davidson, P; Bradbury, B; and Wong, M (2023), *Poverty in Australia 2023: Who is affected Poverty and Inequality Partnership Report no. 20*. Australian Council of Social Service and UNSW Sydney.

<sup>49</sup> Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute (2024) *What are the real costs of Australia's housing crisis for women?*, AHURI website, <https://www.ahuri.edu.au/analysis/brief/what-are-real-costs-australias-housing-crisis-women>, accessed 15 March 2024.

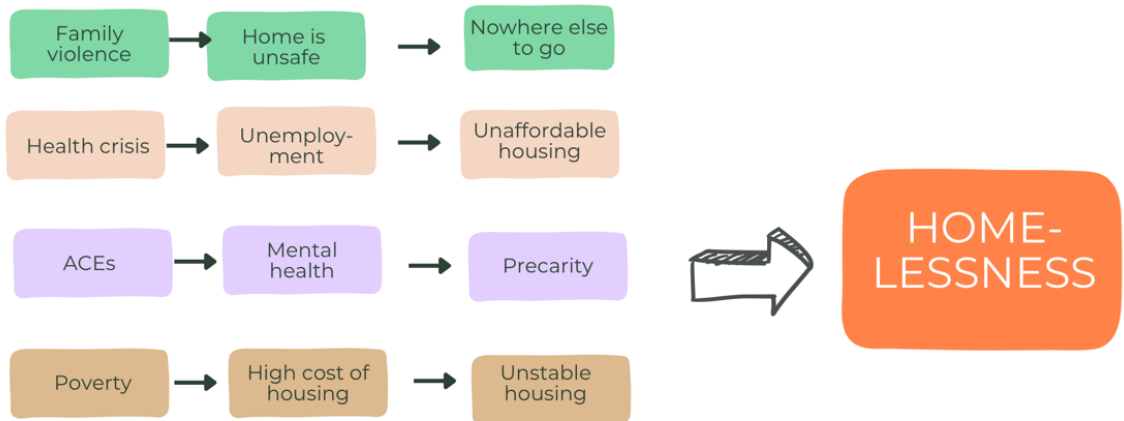
<sup>50</sup> Australia Council Of Social Service (2022) *Why lifting income support is essential to gender equality and economic security for women*, ACOSS website, accessed 15 March 2024

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

<sup>52</sup> Liu, E., valentine, k., Batterham, D., Stone, W., Martin, C., Parkinson, S. and Hynes, D. (2023) *Poverty and Australian housing: findings from an AHURI Investigative Panel*, AHURI Final Report No. 410, Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute Limited, Melbourne.

to struggle to pay their housing costs.<sup>53</sup> Women make up 55% of those living in social housing.<sup>54</sup>

### COMMON PATHWAYS TO HOMELESSNESS FOR WOMEN



### & FOR NON-BINARY PEOPLE



**Figure 1: Common pathways to homelessness for women and non-binary people**

### Implications of available intersectional data on women and homelessness

A consistent theme across the literature and research cited above is the need for tailored service provision that is flexible, client-led and responsive to the needs of clients as they define them. The importance of self-determination, autonomy and choice within service provision is frequently highlighted, along with the need to dismantle the many different barriers to support that continue to prevent many women and non-binary people from seeking, or receiving, the assistance they need.

What this data makes clear, is that an equity, or intersectional feminist, approach that can recognise and respond to differences among women and non-binary people experiencing homelessness is essential. While our current data collection may not yet fully capture the multiple intersecting and overlapping identities held by women and non-binary people experiencing, or at risk of, homelessness, it is evident that these differences mean that the support we provide to women and non-binary people to exit homelessness needs to be equally varied and diverse.

<sup>53</sup> Per Capita (2023) Glass Ceilings: Gendered Inequality in the Housing System. [https://percapita.org.au/blog/our\\_work/glass-ceilings-gendered-inequality-in-the-housing-system-the-australian-housing-monitor-report-2/](https://percapita.org.au/blog/our_work/glass-ceilings-gendered-inequality-in-the-housing-system-the-australian-housing-monitor-report-2/)

<sup>54</sup> Productivity Commission (2022) In need of repair: The National Housing and Homelessness Agreement, Study Report, Canberra <https://www.pc.gov.au/inquiries/completed/housing-homelessness/report/housing-homelessness.pdf>

## Finding 2b. There is a significant knowledge gap on homelessness for transgender, non-binary and gender diverse people.

Currently, Australian homelessness data collection practices are restricted to the use of binary gender categories, which undermines our capacity to understand homelessness for people with genders outside of man and woman.<sup>55</sup> Both Census and Specialist Homelessness Services (SHS) data collection, the primary sources of homelessness data in Australia, exclusively record binary gender identities and fail to inquire about sexual orientation. Consequently, our current data practices are actively excluding LGBTQIA+ people, making it impossible to accurately measure homelessness rates for trans gender, non-binary and gender diverse people.<sup>56</sup>

As a result, there are significant knowledge gaps in understanding homelessness for trans, non-binary and gender-diverse people.<sup>57</sup> Much of the literature about women and homelessness does not specify how women have been defined in the research, whether through binary definitions or more inclusive definitions of gender, and whether these definitions encompass both cis gender and trans gender women. The inclusion of trans gender people within a binary gender category renders them invisible and undermines the capacity of the data to be useful in understanding differences among diverse populations of women.<sup>58</sup>

Differences between, and the varied distribution of homelessness among, different LGBTQIA+ subgroups is poorly understood.<sup>59</sup> Existing research tends to focus on young people, effectively excluding older LGBTQIA+ people.<sup>60</sup>

Efforts to bridge this data gap in Australia have relied on the best available data on LGBTQIA+ people and homelessness. These studies have found that rates of homelessness are high for LGBTQIA+ people, for example:

- People who identified as lesbian, gay or bisexual were at least twice as likely as those who identified as heterosexual to have ever experienced homelessness,

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<sup>55</sup> 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>

<sup>56</sup> While the 2021 Census added the option of 'non-binary sex', to the binary categories of male and female as available responses to the question of an individual respondent's sex, this data cannot be used as a measure of gender diversity, non-binary genders or trans populations. For more information on the approach to gender and ex within the census, see: [Analysis of non-binary sex responses | Australian Bureau of Statistics \(abs.gov.au\)](#)

<sup>57</sup> 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>

<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

<sup>59</sup> Lim, G., Melendez-Torres, G. J., Amos, N., Anderson, J., Norman, T., Power, J., Jones, J., and Bourne, A. (2023) Demographic predictors of experiences of homelessness among lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, gender-diverse and queer-identifying (LGBTIQ) young people in Australia, *Journal of Youth Studies*.

<sup>60</sup> 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>

- Bisexual people are much more likely to have at least five repeated experiences of homelessness,
- Lesbian respondents were twice as likely to stay in crisis accommodation or sleep rough, and bisexual respondents at least three times more likely than heterosexual respondents,
- Lesbian, gay and bisexual people were twice as likely to have experienced discrimination than heterosexual people,
- 35% of lesbian and gay respondents and 14% of bisexual respondents did not seek assistance from service organisations(s) while homeless.<sup>61</sup>
- LGBTQIA+ young people who identify with sexual identity labels other than lesbian, gay or bisexual there is a higher likelihood of experiencing homelessness compared to their respective counterparts.<sup>62</sup>
- LGBTQIA+ young people who are also racially-minoritized persons, disabled persons and/or individuals from a religious family or household also face a higher likelihood of experiencing homelessness.<sup>63</sup>

These findings highlight the critical importance of intersectional data which encompasses a variety of demographic and socioeconomic categories, including gender, sexuality, race, class, age, and disability for a nuanced understanding of homelessness across and within diverse population groups.

Whilst the inadequacy of Australian data collection practices makes it impossible to accurately measure the prevalence of homelessness for LGBTQIA+ people, international literature has found evidence of the overrepresentation of LGBT individuals among homeless populations.<sup>64, 65</sup> Studies also reveal that LGBTQ young people experience homelessness at earlier ages, and remain homeless or unstably housed for longer periods, than their heterosexual and cisgender peers.<sup>66</sup>

Emerging evidence identifies common pathways into homelessness for young LGBTQIA+ people, including family conflict and rejection, poverty, employment discrimination, violence, minority stress, and substance use.<sup>67, 68</sup> These pathways encompass unique structural and social factors (such as discrimination, violence and family rejection) that stem directly from the stigma and discrimination

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<sup>61</sup> 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/>

<sup>62</sup> Lim, G., Melendez-Torres, G. J., Amos, N., Anderson, J., Norman, T., Power, J., Jones, J., and Bourne, A. (2023) Demographic predictors of experiences of homelessness among lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, gender-diverse and queer-identifying (LGBTIQ) young people in Australia, *Journal of Youth Studies*.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

<sup>64</sup> McCarthy, L. & Parr, S. (2022) Is LGBT homelessness different? Reviewing the relationship between LGBT identity and homelessness, *Housing Studies*.

<sup>65</sup> Shelton, J., DeChants, J., Bender, K., Hsu, H.-T., Maria, D. S., Petering, R., Ferguson, K., Narendorf, S., & Barman-Adhikari, A. (2018). Homelessness and Housing Experiences among LGBTQ Young Adults in Seven U.S. Cities. *Cityscape*, 20(3), 9–34. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26524870>

<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

<sup>67</sup> McCarthy, L. & Parr, S. (2022) Is LGBT homelessness different? Reviewing the relationship between LGBT identity and homelessness, *Housing Studies*.

<sup>68</sup> Shelton, J., DeChants, J., Bender, K., Hsu, H.-T., Maria, D. S., Petering, R., Ferguson, K., Narendorf, S., & Barman-Adhikari, A. (2018). Homelessness and Housing Experiences among LGBTQ Young Adults in Seven U.S. Cities. *Cityscape*, 20(3), 9–34. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26524870>

disproportionately affecting LGBTQIA+ individuals.<sup>69</sup> Experiences of violence and harassment (including verbal, physical and sexual harassment) are associated with unique pathways to homelessness for young LGBTQIA+ people, as well as being more likely to be experienced once homeless.<sup>70</sup> Family conflict is also considered a specific pathway to homelessness for LGBTQIA+ young people, leading them to first experience homelessness at a younger age and to a greater reliance on friends or community groups rather than family for support.<sup>71</sup>

Discrimination has been identified as a central driver of homelessness for LGBTQIA+ people.<sup>72</sup> Whilst discrimination, stigma and a lack of social supports – both as precursor to and experienced when homeless – are prevalent for all LGBTQIA+ people, studies show they pose an even greater problem for trans gender and gender diverse people.<sup>73</sup> This is further complicated by experiences of transphobia and biphobia from within LGBTQIA+ communities, which can lead to even greater isolation and marginalization.<sup>74</sup> Discrimination, along with fears and negative experiences of accessing services, limits disclosure and creates barriers to help-seeking for LGBTQIA+ people.<sup>75</sup> The lack of perceived safety in homelessness and housing services is a reoccurring theme in qualitative research with LGBTQIA+ people who have/are experiencing homelessness.<sup>76</sup>

Additionally, the highly gendered nature of accommodation options in the homelessness sector presents a major challenge for people whose gender is non-binary or fluid, including a lack of safe housing options, being placed in accommodation that is inappropriate for their gender, mis-gendering, harassment, and violence.<sup>77</sup>

International research has found that once homeless, LGBTQIA+ young people are at heightened risk of experiencing a range of negative health outcomes compared to their heterosexual and cisgender peers.<sup>78</sup> Housing discrimination, employment discrimination and financial stress have also been found to be significant structural barriers to exiting homelessness, disproportionately effecting LGBTQIA+ young people.<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> Ibid.

<sup>70</sup> Lim, G., Melendez-Torres, G. J., Amos, N., Anderson, J., Norman, T., Power, J., Jones, J., and Bourne, A. (2023) Demographic predictors of experiences of homelessness among lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, gender-diverse and queer-identifying (LGBTIQ) young people in Australia, *Journal of Youth Studies*.

<sup>71</sup> 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/>

<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid.

<sup>78</sup> Shelton, J., DeChants, J., Bender, K., Hsu, H.-T., Maria, D. S., Petering, R., Ferguson, K., Narendorf, S., & Barman-Adhikari, A. (2018). Homelessness and Housing Experiences among LGBTQ Young Adults in Seven U.S. Cities. *Cityscape*, 20(3), 9–34. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26524870>

<sup>79</sup> Ibid.

Local research has identified that pathways out of homelessness for LGBTQIA+ people include having agency through opportunities to authentically present their identities; having autonomy; having meaningful and secure social connections within LGBTQIA+ or mainstream communities; and, for some, engaging in social advocacy.<sup>80</sup> There is a pressing need for appropriate and specific accommodation options for LGBTQIA+ people, as well as for more LGBTQIA+ staff and liaison officers within both mainstream and specialist services.<sup>81</sup>

Recommendations stemming from current research stress the need for both specific, tailored services for the LGBTQIA+ community (including appropriate, safe and specific accommodation options), along with safe and inclusive mainstream services, with the right for individuals to choose the most appropriate setting for themselves.<sup>82</sup>

## Recommendations

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.

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<sup>80</sup> 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/>

<sup>81</sup> Ibid.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid.