

ATTENDEE REPORT: NATIONAL HOMELESSNESS CONFERENCE 2022

NT SHELTER

NT Shelter is the peak body for affordable housing and homelessness in the Northern Territory. We advocate for appropriate and affordable housing for all people of the Northern Territory.

BACKGROUND

In August 2022, NT Shelter sponsored representatives from the housing and homelessness sector around the Northern Territory to attend the AHURI and Homelessness Australia National Homelessness Conference 2022.

Delegates represented Darwin, the Big Rivers, Barkly and Central regions.

At the conference, Katherine Women's Legal Service presented the new Minister for Housing and Homelessness, Julie Collins MP, with an artwork created in Katherine by clients accessing support for homelessness through KWILS, Anglicare NT, Mission and other local service providers.

Peter McMillan, Executive Officer at NT Shelter presented at the conference as part of a panel looking at youth homelessness during the COVID-19 pandemic. He brought insights from the Northern Territory to the table, which many in the room found shocking.

In the following report, NT Shelter staff and sponsored delegates provide their insight on the conference and subsequent recommendations for the Northern Territory.

Contact

admin@ntshelter.org.au

www.ntshelter.org.au

(08) 8985 4389

Conference overview

The National Homelessness Conference 2022 was an incredible opportunity to hear from leaders in the sector about their tailored responses to the housing crisis. It also offered insight into the disparity in solutions available in the Northern Territory as a result of the lack of funding. We need comparable funding to develop and implement meaningful change for our communities.

These discussions also need to be led by the community members affected by these issues to ensure solutions are appropriate and therapeutic. The session around closing the gap on housing outcomes for Indigenous Australians served as an important point of reference for the rest of the conference.

In this discussion, Shane Hamilton emphasised the clear and direct cost of colonisation on Indigenous Australians and the ongoing impact of dispossession and forced labour on current rates of homelessness. As we move forward, we need to fund housing stock in addition to improvements to existing social housing infrastructure to ensure that they are appropriate to address the impact of climate change and changing social structures and demands. The Northern Territory could consider the Victorian approach in their development of the treaty with First Nations communities and their overarching model of change to empower Aboriginal controlled community housing organisations and personal home ownership. They have committed to the release of an annual report card for accountability.

There was significant discourse across the conference around housing first strategies as the best practice response to homelessness. It was particularly encouraging to hear from Frances Crimmins from YWCA Canberra who spoke about how the purpose built and person-centric system covid response could be replicated in ongoing homelessness responses to address the clinical and psychosocial needs of participants. She spoke about how there were individualised plans for entrants into the covid isolation facilities so that no one would be exited into homelessness.

The lived experiences session was an incredibly powerful reminder of the benefits of prioritising a workforce with a diverse range of people with lived experience. Lived experience and the expertise this provides needs to be centred when developing relationships and rapport with clients. Leander Kreltszheim spoke about how lived experiences can be used at the front of program design. Lisa Townsend from Council to Homeless Persons gave a moving account of the system fatigue that is common from people without homes trying to engage with the service system. Even if you have met the criteria for housing supports, the regularity in which you have to prove these tests is a burden when it is not paired with long term solutions.

Anisha Hegde



Legal
Practitioner
Central
Australian
Women's Legal
Service

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While homelessness typically provokes imagery of rough sleeping, this ignores the reality of the diverse and typically gendered ways that homelessness presents.

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The Northern Territory experiences high levels of overcrowding and this can contribute to poor social well-being and health outcomes. Michael Klerck from Tangentyere Council discussed how the current statistics surrounding rates of overcrowding, particularly in NT communities and community living areas are unlikely to be accurate given the distrust of government services leading to minimal disclosures of accurate household member numbers. This reinforced the value of Aboriginal controlled community housing organisations managing social housing stock.

The session on women experiencing homelessness resonated the most with my work and the stories of women who come through the CAWLS office. Kelly Hansen from Nova for Women and Children noted that assertive outreach programs mainly target male rough sleepers and have largely missed women's experience of cyclical homelessness.

Subsequently, the models of measuring homeless demonstrated a gender bias. Kelly discussed that while shelter is a human right and housing first is the best practice approach, it is not realistic with the supply issues of the current housing crisis.

As a sector, we need different initiatives that are proactive and not reliant upon housing first principles. While sleeping in cars has been largely discouraged, Kelly spoke about the anecdotal feedback she had received of women feeling safer in this setting compared to rough sleeping where they felt at high risk of harm and sexual assault.

This presented a key way in which this lived experience informed advocacy directed towards government. In this circumstance, there continue to be discussions with local councils to develop spaces where this is a possibility until more stable arrangements can be established.

In the same session, Kelly Maxwell and Dale Townes echoed the sentiments of Lisa Townsend around the necessity of trust from community and clients in order for organisations' service provision to be effective. Kelly and Dale discussed the development of their service and safe house in Brewarrina and the importance they placed upon fostering good will and community investment. This relationship facilitated other local services to capitalise on this trust by working in partnership to provide wrap around housing and social supports.

Margaret-Ann Brunjes and Marion Gibbs provided an alternative jurisdictional perspective of how collaboration between government and the advocacy sector effected change in Scotland. Fundamentally the issue remains the same. Poverty is the key driver of homelessness and instead of addressing this, we build a homeless system around people. It costs more to keep people homeless than it would to resolve the causes of this.

We know that homelessness has a compounding negative affect on health and wellbeing. We also know that housing need can elevate risk of harm and reliance on perpetrators of domestic, family and sexual violence for secure housing. There is an unreasonable expectation that the service sector provide solutions in an area where there are nowhere near enough housing and safe accommodation options to address the level of need.

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As long as the Northern Territory continues to receive a limited amount of the funding under the National Housing and Homelessness Agreement, we will continue to see disproportionate levels of homelessness and overcrowding in our communities.

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The NT delegates get together to discuss the conference

Conference overview

The obvious highlight of the week was being able to present the Katherine Collective Community Artwork to the Federal Minister for Housing and Homelessness, the Hon Julie Collins MP. It was heartening that she stopped to read the contributions with us, and that we were able to share some information about the homelessness in Katherine and the context of how the Artwork came to exist. We hope that it was a small step forward in putting Katherine, and NT, homelessness on her radar, and we look forward to building on this.

It was challenging hearing mainly presentations from Victoria and NSW, particularly the jealousy I experienced at learning of the significant Government investment, both past and future, that they have benefited from. 75 new Women's Shelters have just been funded in NSW!

I would love for there to be more rural, remote and very remote voices in future conferences, across all the topic areas. The 'regional' sessions focussed on places like Geelong and Ballarat, which, whilst undoubtedly having significant issues, weren't able to provide the lessons we could try in our context that I had hoped for. The same could be said for 'Ending Indigenous Homelessness', with perspectives from cities across Australia, but little relevance for our context.

My two favourite sessions were DFSV and Homelessness, and Women and Homelessness. Both had innovative ideas that, with some work, would be transferrable to our context: for example, the women session had presenters from remote NSW who talked about bringing the entire community along the journey of planning, building, and maintaining their women's safe house and crisis accommodation. There is no point in a small community, maintaining a pretense that no-one knows where the women's safe house is – instead, this approach meant there was community buy-in and shared responsibility to ensure it remains a safe space.

The most enjoyable and helpful networking for me was with the other NT delegates. There were many I met for the first time face-to-face that week, or even at all. To be able to build relationships with like-minded people and services across our jurisdiction was invaluable.

Siobhan Mackay



CEO
Katherine
Women's Legal
Service

Plenary Session #1: Are COVID responses the building blocks for a national plan to end homelessness?

When COVID-19 arrived in Australia, governments responded rapidly, with new and existing partnerships between governments, not-for-profit sectors and private industry reducing homelessness and financially improving the situations of vulnerable Australians. Can these impressive approaches forged during the pandemic form the basis for the development of a national plan to end homelessness? Presenters

- *Humair Ahmad, Department Communities and Justice NSW*
- *Chris Burns, Hutt Street*
- *Frances Crimmins, YWCA Canberra*
- *Ben Rimmer, Homes Victoria*
- *Facilitator: Jenny Smith, Homelessness Australia*

Alex Gibson



Housing Projects
Manager
NT Shelter

The idea that lingered with me after attending this session was that it was incredible what could be achieved by the sector in very short timeframes, once it had the necessary commitment, sanctioning and resources provided to it by the government. The ability of the sector to mobilise and provide shelter, services and support to so many homeless people within a matter of weeks shows how driven, innovative and efficient the sector is, provided it has the government backing.

It struck me that the sector is bursting with possibilities which it is unable to "unleash" because it lacks adequate funding and entrusting of confidence from government. The account provided by Frances from YWCA Canberra of standing up a Covid facility within four weeks speaks to this point. That arrangement included not just partnering with vaccine providers and providing Covid care, but also with partners in mental health, DFV, youth, etc. They had people on site every day to manage all the needs. Further, they took the opportunity to develop a clinical health assessment and psycho-social assessment tool.

Humair Ahmed from NSW Department of Justice gave particular attention to the need to look at the broader housing sector and circumstance when considering how to address matters of homelessness, and not just at the homelessness services themselves. He noted that the bigger picture of housing supply generally needs to be addressed, to ensure that persons accessing homelessness services have appropriate exit points. For example, he spoke about:

- investing money into the private rental market to assist those experiencing financial hardship to be able to maintain their rentals, rather than be evicted and end up in the homelessness space
- investing in the community housing sector, which has led to the creation of thousands of additional homes over the past 5 years.

An important message that also came through in this session was to develop policies, guidelines and procedures which responded to the needs of the clients, and not try to provide services to clients in a way which only ticked the boxes of funding requirements and existing policies. This message was repeated in various sessions throughout the conference, in particular through the voices of people with lived experience.

MC3: The lived experience of not having a home

The voices of people with lived experience are vital to improving service responses to homelessness. Support services and peak bodies are increasingly finding ways to embed lived experience in their service design and program development. This session will draw from recent innovations that are strengthened by these approaches. Presenters:

- *Leander Kreutzheim, Mission Australia*
- *Cass Corrone, Council to Homeless Persons*
- *Daisy Gleeson, Consultant*
- *Lorna Robinson, Constellation Project*
- *Haja Suma, Mission Australia*
- *Lisa Townsend, Council to Homeless Persons PESP*
- *Facilitator: Jacqui Jones, Constellation Project*

Alex Gibson



Housing Projects
Manager
NT Shelter

This session was a particularly emotive session to attend. To hear the stories of a panel of women speaking about their various lived experiences was an important inclusion in the program. Those on the panel had lived experience of homelessness, mental health, domestic and family violence, alcohol and drugs, amongst others.

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The key takeaway from the session was that the voice of those with lived experience should be the voice that shapes programs and policies.

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It also focused on the fact that lived experience is an area of expertise and should be treated as such when the sector seeks to draw on that lived experience. The important point was made by Leander Kreutzheim of Mission Australia that where persons with lived experience are being engaged to provide advice and contribute to the work of the sector, they should be paid or adequately compensated for their work. This creates jobs for persons with lived experience thereby potentially giving them a pathway into other employment, and simultaneously, provides insights and expertise to the sector.

Cassandra Corrone and Lisa Townsend from the Council to Homelessness Persons (Vic) spoke about their Lived Experience program. Cassandra had developed the program and had recruited Lisa to a role within the program due to her lived experience of homelessness, AOD, mental health issues and other matters. These two speakers would be useful to approach about how to implement a lived experience program, or even to most appropriately engage people with lived experience to certain roles within the sector.

For the NT, perhaps the most obvious role that lived experience can play is in implementing policies and services for Aboriginal clients. Their lived experience will assist to shape culturally appropriate provision of services, but also design homes that are culturally appropriate and support the best outcomes for Aboriginal people - whether in an urban or remote setting.

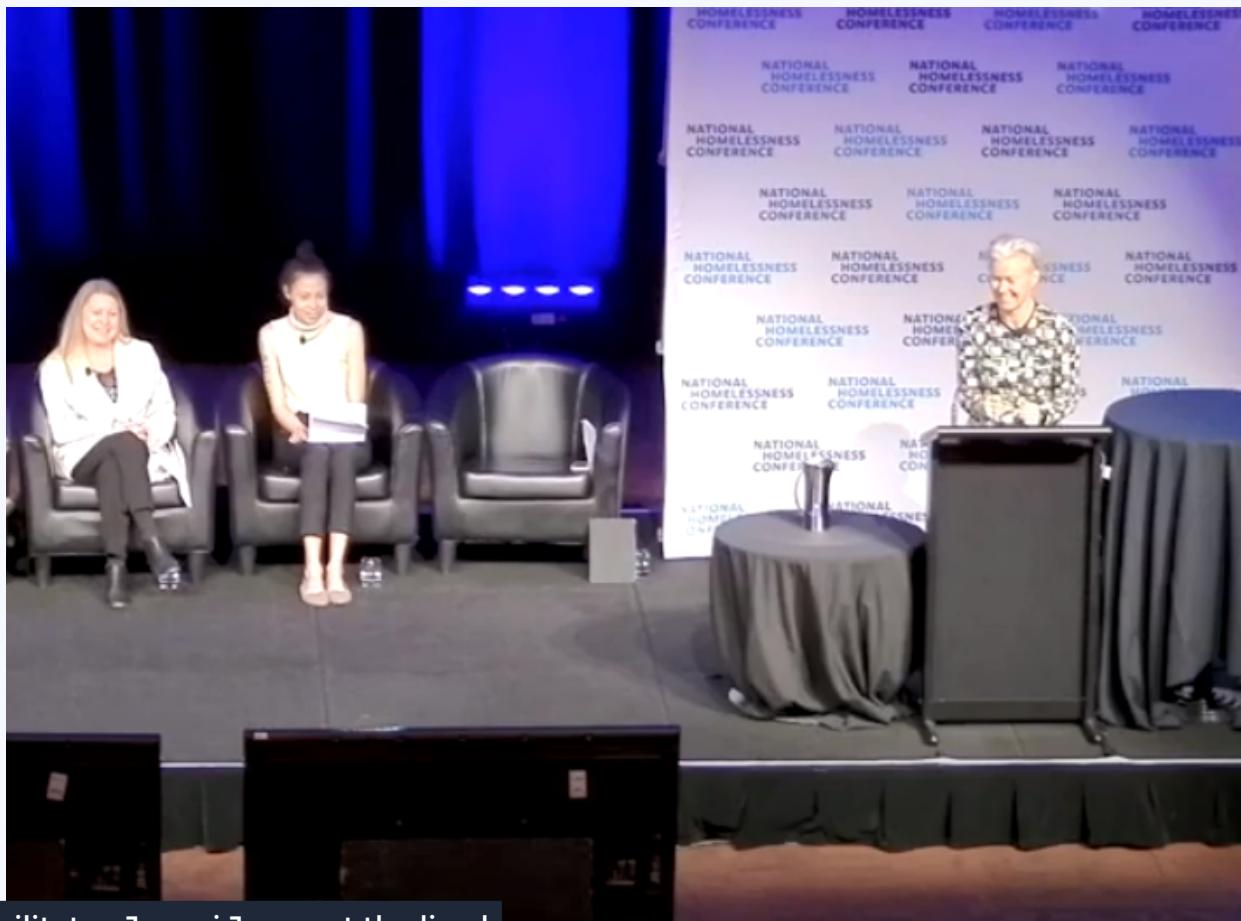
MC3: The lived experience of not having a home

1. Lived experience came through on many of the sessions attended, it is a growing movement across the homelessness sector and has been entrenched in the mental health sector for some time.
2. In a time where services are struggling to recruit staff a new approach must be taken to achieve positive outcomes. A lived experience workforce should be considered by the homeless sector and the government sector.
3. The people who use services have first-hand knowledge of what worked for them and what didn't. This knowledge should be used to design better or more efficient programs.
4. Lived experience is an employment opportunity for an under employed demographic and is possibly an opportunity to build the capacity for under skilled workers to access tertiary qualifications and higher paying positions within organisations
5. Lived experience workforce must be funded by Government and have roles in the non-government sector as well as within government. Perhaps a not for profit lived experience labour hire model may work.

Mike Byrne



Regional
Coordinator
Northern
Australia
NT Shelter



Facilitator, Jacqui Jones, at the lived experience of not having a home session.

Plenary Session 4: Is the climate crisis an impending homelessness crisis?

Climate change is generating new challenges for an already pressured homelessness sector. Increasing incidence of natural disasters is displacing whole communities – forcing thousands of people into homelessness. This plenary session will examine the homelessness implications of climate change – what are the ways in which communities and governments can prepare and respond as we face the realities of a changing climate. Presenters:

- *Paula Coghill, Lead Aboriginal Specialist Consultant*
- *Tony Davies, Social Futures*
- *Daniel Taber-Kennedy, Q Shelter*
- *Facilitator: Amy Remeikis, The Guardian*

Alex Gibson



Housing Projects
Manager
NT Shelter

In this session, Tony Davies provided a harrowing account of the Lismore floods, the devastating effect they had on the town, and the exhausting and frustrating experience of trying to respond to the housing need of displaced persons, as well as rebuild the town. This experience is perhaps most similar to what might be experienced in the NT as the result of a significant cyclone event.

Tony Davies spoke to the frustration of trying to implement a response but coming up against the road blocks of planning requirements and government tender processes which hindered progress by tying it up in red tape. Similar frustrations are often experienced in the NT when attempts are made to build new houses, and particularly houses that are climate appropriate. Government tender processes are often spoken of as being laborious to the point where new builds are delayed by years. Davies' call for the government to think about practical approaches to getting money out the door and work done in an emergency response setting is a message that also applies in the NT in relation to the need for the government to get on with the process of expending budgeted money to build new homes.

Paula Coghill spoke of the need to use the knowledge and experience of Aboriginal people when it comes to considering appropriate areas to building housing (and other services), as well as what type of housing is suitable for particular areas or contingents. She noted that Aboriginal people have intensive knowledge of the land and landscape as a result of generations of knowledge having been passed down. Not only do they know about the land as it currently exists, but quite often how it has changed shape over years due to the effects of climate and population. This is highly relevant knowledge that should be drawn upon when determining where and how to build housing, and how existing housing may be impacted by climate. Such experience will likely be most relevant when considering the requirements to build climate-appropriate and efficient housing in remote communities. Drawing on the knowledge of traditional owners and residents of those communities will likely produce housing arrangements that are more efficient and sustainable, and lead to better housing and health outcomes for their inhabitants. Coghill spoke of the need to have traditional owners and land councils involved in advisory groups and decision-making panels.

Plenary Session 4: Is the climate crisis an impending homelessness crisis?

1. Gloom, how can we fight for more houses for the most vulnerable when entire townships of middle class people are being made homeless.

2. What was missed in the discussion which was focused on natural disasters, is insurance. It seems evident that insurance companies will not offer policies for certain areas, or it will set premiums so high that people will choose not to take out insurance. This will leave the responsibility on Government to clean up after a disaster and to house a homeless population. Maybe there is a need for a Government Insurance scheme much like Medicare.

3. I was disappointed that the focus was on natural disasters like flood and fire and not on climate change making habitable areas non-inhabitable or habitable houses uninhabitable.

Mike Byrne



Regional
Coordinator
Northern
Australia
NT Shelter



NT Shelter's, CEO, Peter McMillan presents at the youth homelessness session



C9: Homelessness and mental health

The evidence-base on the link between housing insecurity and mental ill health as well as the risks of homelessness for those experiencing mental ill health continues to grow. Against the backdrop of these studies, and the mental health challenges exacerbated by the pandemic, what impacts have been felt by the SHS sector, and what solutions are being enacted across Australia.

Presenters:

- *Brenton Chivell, SA Housing Authority*
- *Y Le, Homes Victoria*
- *Ken Zulumovski, Gamarada Universal Indigenous Resources*
- *Facilitator: Dr Nicola Brackertz, AHURI*

Alex Gibson



Housing Projects
Manager
NT Shelter

A key theme that came out of this session was the disconnect that exists between what programs are needed and are effective vs the programs the government wants to fund so it can tick its boxes for service provision requirements. This needs to be something that is raised with government, but it is also a matter that needs to be front of mind for those providing homelessness services (whether mental health related or otherwise) - their programs need to be designed to meet the needs of their clients, not to "tick the box". Conversations need to be had with government if the funding requirements government is placing on services do not fit with the required services.

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There was also considerable material discussed which demonstrated the fact that mental health is improved with housing.

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It was suggested that data should be provided (e.g. by a health economist) to demonstrate the savings that are made to the health system through provision of housing. This would potentially lead to re-directing funding to housing related services and lessen the load on the health system.

The presenter from the South Australian Housing Authority spoke of their pilot program during Covid where they stood up an 18 unit apartment block in a high-density setting in Adelaide. They had an NGO and a collective of SA health operators on site to provide wrap-around services. They also used the setting for opportunistic engagement with clients which provided many opportunities to assist with medical and dental aid, where it otherwise would not have been provided to those clients. They set up systems with local GPs where clients were not required to use waiting rooms and were given priority access to certain doctors. This was in response to information they have gathered previously which showed that waiting for doctors and dentists was a key reason why homeless persons did not end up seeking medical or dental assistance.

Ken Zulumovski from GAMARADA Universal Indigenous Resources spoke about the mental health program he runs in Redfern, Sydney.

Ken himself has lived experience of mental health and homelessness. His program focuses on indigenous healing techniques and is a cultural healing program used to assist its participants to confront anger, addiction and loss of culture. Ken spoke about the need for the considerations of health in aboriginal contexts to be a holistic approach and include more than physical and mental health, but also spiritual and cultural matters.

Ken also spoke about report findings which said that a lot of the support that can effectively be provided for mental health comes from community. He is trying to respond to a push to focus on up-skilling in that area, looking at how communities and family can support persons with mental health, not just formal services.

There would certainly be scope for programs such as Ken's in the NT. Ken cited very notable success rates with his program. He would be a useful person to engage with to speak about whether such programs could be developed and run here in the NT.

Although his programs were not targeted at homeless clients, and he noted he did not receive many referrals from housing / homelessness services (which he saw as a lost opportunity), they could form a useful part of a suite of wrap around services.



Lived experience panelists



Homelessness and mental health session



MC2: Local Government - Inner City and Suburban Responses

Given Australia's population distribution, the greatest number of people at risk of homelessness are living in greater capital cities on the eastern coast of Australia, in both central and suburban locations. Local governments are increasingly responding and implementing programs to deliver more affordable housing and responds to all forms of homelessness. This session examines leading responses in metro and outer urban locations. Presenters:

- *Lauren Grant, City of Adelaide*
- *Celeste Harris, Byron Bay Shire*
- *Leanne Mitchell, Brimbank City Council*
- *Linda Scott, Australian Local Government Association*
- *Jon Swain, City of Sydney*
- *Facilitator: Barney Wilson, City of Melbourne*

Annie Taylor



Regional
Coordinator
Central Australia
NT Shelter

A highlight of day two of the National Homelessness Conference 2022, was the Local Government – Inner City and Suburban Responses session. The session focused on local government responses to homelessness in various Australian jurisdictions. The panel featured presentations by representatives from City of Melbourne, City of Sydney, Brimbank City Council, City of Adelaide and Linda Scott of the Australian Local Government Association.

There are a few reasons I found the session so engaging, first and foremost because NT Shelter has been advocating for local councils in the urban centres of the Northern Territory (Katherine, Tennant Creek and Alice Springs) to engage in street-based assertive outreach, similar to the City of Darwin Council's [Darwin Safer City Program](#).

Leanne Mitchell, Manager of Community Strengthening and Social Planning at [Brimbank City Council](#), launched the session, describing councils as connectors that can unite unlikely collaborators. When speaking of the way in which Brimbank Council stepped into, rather than away from homelessness as it increased in their jurisdiction, Leanne said: "What we were able to do was to play that role of connector, of bringing services together, bringing unlikely partners together, bringing police together, bringing businesses together and bringing our own colleagues together to work on things collectively".

The session also highlighted the role that local government can play in both preventing homelessness (councils know what's going on in their community, they can see problems as they arise and are in the unique position of being able to gather data) and advocacy and education for their residents, businesses and services about homelessness.

Brimbank City Council sees preventing and responding to homelessness as the responsibility of all levels of government. In 2019, the Council commissioned a report into homelessness in its jurisdiction. Recommendations included in this report led to the Homelessness Implementation Plan. The Plan considers the 'various roles that Council can take in adopting a more integrated, flexible and coordinated approach to preventing and responding to homelessness'.

Some of the actions detailed in the plan, include developing a resource detailing the local support and services available to people experiencing homelessness, establishing Council protocols for engaging and supporting people experiencing homelessness, training Council staff and local business, resourcing Council facilities to provide immediate assistance like showers and identifying Council's powers to increase the supply of affordable housing.

More information on Brimbank City Council's homelessness response is [available here](#).

Leanne finished with a quote from a Canadian local council, thus the use of 'province' when describing a state/territory: "When it comes to housing and homelessness, the feds have the money, the province has the jurisdiction and the cities have the problem and it's very important that we all work together".

While the session had a metropolitan focus, it was great to hear [Linda Scott](#) of the [Australian Local Government Association](#), acknowledging that homelessness is a national problem whilst also mentioning that the Northern Territory experiences 12 times the national average rate of homelessness. Linda highlighted that country mayors around Australia are increasingly raising concerns about the cost of housing and are seeing, for the first time in living memory, constituents sleeping rough.

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At the recent National General Assembly of Local Government attended by over 1,000 representatives from local governments around Australia, homelessness was identified as one of the most salient issues and was at the forefront of discussions.

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[Celeste Harris](#) of [Byron Shire Council](#) spoke about the initiatives in progress in her part of the world. Byron Bay was frequently mentioned throughout the conference and indeed at the National Housing Conference earlier in the year, as an example of a location in which the housing crisis has reached tipping point. Of course, there's also the celebrity drawcard, something the Territory is missing despite the scale of the crisis here.

Byron Shire Council is taking multiple initiatives, one of these is the Ending Rough Sleeping Collaboration which brings together a group of key stakeholders in the homelessness space, including those with a lived experience of homelessness, with the objective of reducing rough sleeping by 50% by 2025. The council also employs Public Space Liaison Officers who engage with people who are sleeping rough to ensure that they are connected to the support they need. Council is also taking a number of land and housing initiatives, including enabling 'tiny house' development on Council owned or managed land, rezoning and reclassifying Council lots and researching affordable housing models used nationally and internationally to identify models that could work locally.

More information on the response is [available here](#).

Australia-wide there are examples of local government stepping into a humanitarian role in a space that has not historically been their responsibility; in Brisbane there's the [Brisbane Housing Company](#), a community housing provider with Brisbane City Council as a shareholder, in Tasmania there's a lived experience reference group informing council policy, in Western Australia, the [City of Bayswater](#) has a Homelessness Strategy and Implementation Plan, [City of Melbourne](#) does assertive outreach and there are multiple examples of social workers working out of local libraries. [Lauren Grant](#) of [City of Adelaide](#) made the point that what councils have historically done simply has not worked, "For years we have been using our regulatory systems and moving people on and that hasn't worked."

A takeaway from the session is that councils are the closest form of government to the community, they know what's happening in their communities, they have the connections to make change. Bringing this home to the Northern Territory, there is work to be done by local government here and there is innovation from around Australia that can be used as inspiration.



Housing First - And now for the hard part

While there has been broad agreement for some time of the merits of the Housing First, implementation has been limited. However, there are signs that this is changing, such as the implementation of Together Home in NSW, which adopts Housing First principles, bringing together community housing providers and specialist homelessness services. Presenters:

- *Laura Collister, Wellways*
- *Cathy Humphrey, Sacred Heart Mission*
- *Michala McMahon, RUAH Community Services*
- *Rebecca Pinkstone, Bridge Housing*
- *Karen Walsh, Micah Projects*
- *Facilitator: Jane Barnes, Wintringham*

Annie Taylor



Regional
Coordinator
Central Australia
NT Shelter

Housing First seems like a long off reality for Central Australia. With the critical undersupply of social housing in the Northern Territory, how can we possibly provide immediate housing to the sheer number of people experiencing homelessness?

Housing First recognises that access to permanent, secure housing is a human right and is not conditional upon addressing any other issues or behaviours a client may have. Housing First began in the United States as a way to address rough sleeping. It is known to be widely successful in Finland, the only European country that has seen a decline in rough sleeping since 2008 – reference here.

A question posed early in the session to Cathy Humphrey, CEO of Sacred Heart Mission, was “do we have to wait for governments to increase social housing supply to do Housing First or can we just get onto it?”. Cathy’s swift response was no.

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Cathy put the challenge out to the sector, “if you have the revenue raising ability, invest in innovation. Don’t wait for government to identify a funding source...It’s over to you to find that innovation in your own territory”.

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As an example of such innovation, Cathy spoke about Sacred Heart Mission’s Journey to Social Inclusion (J2SI). J2SI works to a similar premise as Housing First; if people can sustain their housing, this provides a solid foundation to improving other areas in people’s lives. When J2SI was first piloted, it was fully funded by philanthropy and used a rapid housing response, housing people within six months. Today, this timeline has improved, housing people at most at 90 days from engagement. 96% of people have retained housing post support.

More information on Journey to Social Inclusion is [available here](#).

Karyn Walsh, CEO of Micah Projects, also made the point that rapidly housing those experiencing homelessness is possible. She used the Covid-19 pandemic as an example, when we saw people's income double, services increased, and housing provided. In New South Wales, the state government provided \$14 million to immediately house people through the Temporary Accommodation Program.

Micah Projects in Brisbane provides secure accommodation as the foundation for other support services. More information on Micah Projects is available [here](#).

Ultimately, Housing First will continue to be constrained in Australia until it is supported by an investment in social and affordable housing, but individual Housing First programs are possible in the Northern Territory with innovation and alternative sources of funding.



Plenary Session 2: Ending homelessness for Indigenous Australians

Hearing directly from a panel of Indigenous leaders, this session will examine the pathways forward to reduce Indigenous homelessness, including overcrowding, and what lessons can be learned from the excellent response in supporting Indigenous communities during the pandemic. The panel will discuss a range of service models and housing strategies built through community collaboration.

Presenters:

- *Shane Hamilton, Aboriginal Affairs NSW*
- *Sandra Harben, Noongar Mia Mia*
- *Jenny Samms, Aboriginal Housing Victoria*
- *Facilitator: Greg Slabb, NATSIHA*

Mike Byrne



Regional
Coordinator
Northern
Australia
NT Shelter

1. The states seem to do more than the NT because they have a separate Aboriginal Public Housing body meaning they can focus on Aboriginal housing. I guess in the NT we have an equivalent which is Remote Housing. TFHC have a different system for remote aboriginal tenants and the urban Aboriginal tenants are engaged in the same way as every other state engages with their non aboriginal tenant base. To me this seems to be “holding back” urban aboriginal tenants from achieving sustainable tenancies.
2. We need to move away from using the term “overcrowding” the issue is a lack of housing that forces people to live wherever they feel safe. Three families living in one house is a shortage of three houses, not an overcrowding issue. “Overcrowding” diminishes the problem and leads to a perception that it is the choice of people to live this way, that it is “cultural”.
3. We need to get away from “punitive” allocations measures. There are many reasons why someone could choose not to live in the property offered. To some these reasons may seem nonsensical but to the person involved their reasons are real and should not be ignored. A person should be able to refuse a tenancy without fear that they would lose their place on the waitlist. Giving a tenant choice will result in a more sustainable tenancy. Here we have policies that say they recognise culture but ignore culture.
4. Clearly there needs to be people with “lived experience” assisting people establish a tenancy. We are trying to fit a very spiritual and cultural person into an urban system that doesn’t recognise their needs.
5. NT needs a plan rather than just aspiring to achieve a goal without any commitments or plan. Victoria has the following:

Vision Every Aboriginal person has a home.

Purpose Aboriginal Victorians achieve quality housing outcomes in a generation.

Challenge To meet demand for 27,000 additional Aboriginal households by 2036.

One presenter outlined the following:

Address systemic/structural racism Commit to decolonising our ways of being, knowing and doing.

Start with an Aboriginal world view When we don't start with an Aboriginal world view it's easy to have the wrong starting point.

Spirit-led. Aboriginal people need to be included from the very beginning and their thoughts, desires and spirituality has to be considered.

Relationship building at the heart.

C10: Supportive housing after prison

Inadequate planning and support for safe transitions into secure and affordable housing for people leaving institutional settings can have dire consequences including higher rates of inpatient care, increased need for substance use treatment, ongoing offending and other criminal justice costs, and greater pressure on specialist homelessness services. This session examines the latest research and leading examples of services supporting people leaving prison and rehabilitation settings. Presenters:

- *Dr Chris Martin, UNSW*
- *Matthew Sander, Department of Communities and Justice NSW*
- *Sara Stilianos, Homes Not Prisons* •
- *Ian Welsh, Community Housing Limited*
- *Facilitator: Steve Simpson, Council to Homeless Persons Queensland*

Mike Byrne



Regional
Coordinator
Northern
Australia
NT Shelter

1. Lived experience came through strongly.
2. If we are looking at crime in our communities, we need to understand how having a safe secure home impacts crime.
3. Recidivism is reduced through education but equally important by ensuring people leaving prison are housed.
4. If we return young offenders to the same place from which they started offending, then we will not address crime. If we bail young offenders to the same place they started offending, then we can expect more offending prior to their court appearance.
5. An economic reasoning must be made to engage the community. When housing is limited how can we “reward” offenders by giving them a safe secure house?
6. The house is one aspect the support is another. Support for people exiting prison is vital.
7. The conversation was about criminals leaving prison and the programs and services good and bad that they received prior to release. In the NT there is a large prison population of aboriginal people on remand, they are considered not guilty until they go to court and receive a guilty verdict. Yet they are in the prison system. As they are on remand, they do not receive the supports that a convicted person does. They, although innocent, are introduced to the prison system and very likely to reoffend.
8. In NSW supporting the housing needs for people exiting custody is justified by the NSW government commitment to reduce street homelessness by 50% by 2025. The CHL funded program seemed impressive but in reality involved 9 participants only.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The National Homelessness Conference 2022 came at an opportune time for the Northern Territory; as TFHC funding agreements are entering the final year and the NT Homelessness Strategy comes to its projected completion after being implemented in 2018.

This strategy, drafted and endorsed by the NT Government and the Federal Government, is a requirement under the National Housing and Homelessness Agreement to secure federal funding for SHS services.

A key priority in this strategy is **Work with the Specialist Homelessness Services sector to strengthen responses for people who are homeless and at risk of homelessness.** It is focused on reform or realignment of the homelessness sector.

NT Shelter see the conference as a prime opportunity for those working in the sector to learn from our interstate and international colleagues, look at evidence of best practice and innovation and consider how this can be incorporated into a sector led reform process for the Northern Territory. Can we incorporate these learnings into our everyday work schedules to create better outcomes for those that need our help and importantly can what we learn and implement or create a better work experience for ourselves?

In line with the reports provided in this document, NT Shelter sponsored conference delegates make the following recommendations.

Recommendations

- Funding through the NHHA must be based on need.
- The NT Government must explore ways in which lived experience can better inform sector reform and future development and design, including investigating a not-for-profit lived experience labour hire model.
- The Northern Territory needs specific goals for Aboriginal Housing. Goals must take into account structural racism and Aboriginal world views.

Recommendations for AHURI and HA

- The inclusion of more rural, remote and very remote voices across all topic areas.

Contact

admin@ntshelter.org.au

www.ntshelter.org.au

(08) 8985 4389

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Our presence (both in terms of colour, and number, and participation in the entire conference) was excellent – thank you NT Shelter for your support of our attendance!

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