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A WELCOME HOME

YOUTH HOMELESSNESS AND MENTAL HEALTH

On any given night in Australia, it is estimated that approximately one in 200 Australians are experiencing homelessness. The burden of homelessness is one that falls disproportionately on young Australians. While people aged 12 to 24 years make up just under 20 per cent of the Australian population, they comprise 25 per cent of individuals experiencing homelessness.

There is a direct relationship between homelessness and mental health. It is estimated that in 35 per cent of cases, mental ill-health has contributed to young people experiencing homelessness.

To minimise the impacts of homelessness, it is important to support adequate early intervention and prevention of homelessness among young people. By identifying young people who may be at risk of experiencing homelessness and intervening before they experience homelessness, it may prevent further experiences of homelessness. To support intervention and prevention, young people need to be able to engage with mental health and homelessness services.



An effective policy response to the mental health of young people experiencing homelessness requires an integrated approach across federal, state and territory governments, one which prioritises early intervention to address housing insecurity, homelessness and mental ill-health.

Three key solutions have been identified that build on existing policies and have the potential to improve access to mental health treatment, as well as creating stable housing opportunities for young people experiencing homelessness.

IMPROVING SERVICE ENGAGEMENT

Emphasising service use among young people with mental ill-health by focusing on approaches which have been seen to improve service engagement, such as care coordination, outreach programs and involving young people in delivery and design of mental health and homelessness services.

A COORDINATED NATIONAL APPROACH

Developing guidelines for a national strategic approach to housing homelessness and mental health services which emphasises the involvement of young people in service delivery and development.

INCREASING HOUSING STOCK

Federal, state and territory governments recognise the role of housing in supporting young people's mental health and work to address the shortfall of supported housing in Australia.

IMPROVING SERVICE ENGAGEMENT

Young people will engage with services if they are better tailored for their specific needs. Services need to be accessible, collaborative, and supportive. This means exploring the potential for approaches which can improve service use, such as outreach services, drop-in centres and care coordination. Young people need to be involved in the tailoring services and programs. Engagement with the impacted members of a population is critical to ensuring that services are appropriate, sustainable, and are aligned with population needs.

A COORDINATED NATIONAL APPROACH

An examination of the Australian policy framework around mental health and homelessness shows a lack of integration between mental health and housing services. This increases the complexity of service settings for young people and increases the chance of disengagement. The limited amount of service integration is underpinned by a minimal integration in mental health and housing policies. This lack of strategic coordination minimises the connections that can be made between housing, mental health and homelessness, and also ignores the evidence that integrated responses provide better results than service settings which were not integrated.

While individual states and territories have implemented some promising approaches to improving integration between housing, homelessness and mental health services, there is a need for increased national oversight to these issues.

INCREASING HOUSING STOCK

Housing is central to any response to homelessness. Housing is necessary to support individual health and is protective against a range of negative outcomes, including mental ill-health and homelessness. Despite the importance of housing, young people face a number of barriers to housing stability, both developmental barriers and structural barriers. There is a need in Australia for wide-ranging housing programs to enact 'Housing First' methodologies which emphasise the provision of housing to young people who are at risk of homelessness.



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