

## AUGUST 2020 NEWSLETTER

Welcome to the latest Life Course Centre newsletter.

In this edition, we are focussing on homelessness to coincide with Homelessness Week from 3-7 August. The theme of this year's Homelessness Week is 'Everybody Needs a Home' emphasising the need for more affordable housing to address this problem at its core - the lack of safe, affordable housing for all.

This is a theme that is aligned with our research that shows if you really want to tackle homeless, you have to give people homes. We recently made a submission to the Australian Government's Inquiry into Homelessness which presented key findings from our research on this topic. Chief among these was that investment in more social housing must be central to any plan to fight homelessness. This newsletter provides a snapshot of this research from across the Life Course Centre.



The experiences of COVID-19, and swift government responses to shift the homeless off the streets into hotel rooms, has demonstrated what is possible. Stable, albeit temporary, accommodation, rather than constantly being on the move, has given the homeless and service providers a base to engage with transformative programs. There have since been further encouraging moves from some States on social housing investment but this now needs to be replicated and coordinated nationally.

If there is a silver lining to emerge from COVID-19 it is that governments have shown they can act quickly with major interventions that upend long-standing institutions overnight. The challenge now is to reimagine how these institutional frameworks can be reshaped to deliver sustainable long-term solutions. We hope you enjoy this newsletter. You can stay up to date with our latest news and research on our [website](#) and on [Twitter](#). Please stay safe and connected.

**Professor Janeen Baxter**  
Centre Director

## AFFORDABLE HOUSING FOR ALL





The Life Course Centre is a proud ongoing sponsor of [Anti-Poverty Week](#), which this year will be held from 11-17 October 2020. Anti-Poverty Week this year is supporting [affordable housing for all](#) as the best solution to reducing poverty, and is also strongly supporting the campaigns of [Homelessness Week 2020](#) and [Everybody's Home](#) for a better, fairer housing system for all Australians. Find out more at: [@AntiPovertyWeek](#) [@\\_EverybodysHome](#) [@HomelessnessAus](#) [#HW2020](#) [#BuildMoreSocialHousing](#)

## RESEARCH IN FOCUS: HOMELESSNESS

**The problem.** The Australian Homelessness Monitor 2018 is the first-of-its-kind authoritative insight into the state of homelessness in Australia. This in-depth analysis was commissioned by Launch Housing, which partnered with the Institute for Social Science Research at the University of Queensland, including Life Course Centre researchers. The study clearly highlights Australia's growing homelessness problem with 116,000 Australians reported as homeless on Census night 2016, a 14 per cent increase from 2011. Rough sleeping, the most visible and extreme form of homelessness, had increased at an even higher rate with 8,200 Australians sleeping rough on Census night 2016, a 20 per cent increase from 2011. Other key findings from the [Australian Homelessness Monitor](#) include: homelessness outpacing our population growth, and rough sleeping, severe overcrowding and older and Indigenous Australians among the fastest growing sub-groups. The monitor also identified socio-economic trends influencing Australia's homelessness rate, including rising numbers of Newstart recipients, increased rates of incarceration and domestic and family violence, rising property prices, and more young people leaving out-of-home care.



**The complexity.** When examining homelessness, it is crucial to recognise the underlying complexity and diversity of experiences of those affected. Life Course Centre researchers at the University of Melbourne have utilised data from Journeys Home, a longitudinal study of disadvantaged Australians experiencing, or at risk of, homelessness. This study, managed by the



Melbourne Institute of Applied Economic and Social Research, [tracks people exposed to homelessness and housing insecurity over time.](#)



Our research shows that homelessness [is not a 'one-size fits all' problem](#), with people moving in and out of homelessness in varying time frames and experiencing it in many different ways such as sleeping rough, in a car, or on someone else's couch. Our research also points to gendered patterns in homelessness. It finds that women are overrepresented in family, as opposed to single-adult, homelessness and are more likely to be part of the ['hidden' homeless](#). Older women are also among the fastest growing group of homeless people in Australia.

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**The cost.** In the end, homelessness comes down to a failure of policy not money. Homelessness is not free, as the cost turns up somewhere and is always higher in places such as emergency departments and watch houses. [Analysis of linked government data](#) shows it costs governments more to keep a person chronically homeless than it does to provide them with permanent housing. This research shows that, over a 12-month period, homeless people used government-funded services costing \$48,217 each. Over another 12-month period, in which they were tenants of permanent housing, the same people used government services costing \$35,117. Not only is it \$13,100 cheaper to house homeless people in homes, it is better all round for society. When the homeless are housed, many aspects of their lives improve including reductions in low level criminal behaviour and reliance on crisis health and accommodation.

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**A life course approach.** While increased investment in public housing is the number one opportunity for reducing homelessness in Australia, homelessness is not an issue that can be solely viewed or addressed in isolation. The factors affecting homelessness are complex, multi-faceted, interrelated with deep and persistent disadvantage, and often transmit within families and between generations. They also encompass individual vulnerabilities and circumstances and navigation of major life events,

pathways and shocks with potential negative long-term consequences. This highlights the value of a life course approach to investigating and addressing homelessness that identifies the emergence and accumulation of risks over the life course and pinpoints strategic opportunities for intervention. These interventions may not always be framed primarily on addressing homelessness, but can have important flow-on effects in weakening the influence of contributing factors. Research from across our Life Course Centre university nodes has produced valuable knowledge on a number of these life course influences on homelessness, including [intergenerational welfare dependency](#), [young parenthood](#), [breakdown in family relationships](#), [parental separation](#), and [incarceration](#).

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**The lived experience.** In his book, [The Homeless Person in Contemporary Society](#), Life Course Centre researcher Associate Professor Cameron Parsell describes being homeless in Australia as living with a proliferation of services but an absence of housing. Through his conversations with homeless people, and learning



from their lived experiences, he explains that when people are homeless and rely on services on a day-to-day basis they are unable to exert control over their own life. They appreciate the

people they see and services they receive, but at the crux of their experience is a lack of autonomy and control. Homelessness casts a shadow over them and 'normalises' their poverty, and an elaborate services system only perpetuates this. These insights highlight the importance of **amplifying the voices of those who experience disadvantage in their daily lives**. Talking and listening to those suffering from disadvantage, and understanding their experiences, is crucial to developing effective solutions they can use to actively improve their lives.

**Where to now?** The 'Housing First' approach puts housing at the forefront of homelessness policy. Under this evidence-based model, which has been taken up by several European countries, the United Kingdom, the United States, Canada and New Zealand, the homeless are moved straight into long-term housing, rather than progressed through various levels of temporary accommodation. Importantly, there are no strict pre-conditions, such as employment, no criminal history and sobriety, for the homeless to prove their housing 'readiness'. Once permanent housing is secured, a team of support workers address complex needs such as drug and alcohol and mental health treatment. The development of a Housing First approach in Australia has been constrained by a lack of affordable housing stock necessary to quickly house those experiencing homelessness. However, there have been successful pilot examples that have shown they can reduce homelessness. Our researchers have examined the effectiveness of such pilots in **Brisbane** and **Cairns** and found that people housed through these initiatives have experienced positive life changes. Our research has also informed the development of a two-year Housing First pilot underway in the **Australian Capital Territory**. The critical need now is to take the evidence and lessons from these successful Housing First pilots, and institutionalise them within Australia's housing and social service systems.



## CONTACT THE LIFE COURSE CENTRE

The above is a snapshot of Life Course Centre research relating to homelessness in Australia. Please contact us if you are interested in learning more about our research, partnering with us on research projects, or if you have any difficulties with access to the links above. Email: [lcc@uq.edu.au](mailto:lcc@uq.edu.au)

The Life Course Centre is an Australian Research Council Centre of Excellence bringing together researchers from the University of Queensland, the University of Western Australia, the University of Melbourne, the University of Sydney and other leading international universities, in collaboration with key government and non-government organisations.

ISSR The Life Course Centre is administered by the University of Queensland's Institute for Social Science Research



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