Life Course Centre

Listening to lived experience
What needs to be done to end homelessness in Australia?

Skye Constantine

Christine Thirkell

Jason Russell

Amanda Bingham

Jody Letts

Helen Matthews

Australian Government
Australian Research Council

THE UNIVERSITY
OF QUEENSLAND
AUSTRALIA

THE UNIVERSITY OF
SYDNEY

THE UNIVERSITY OF
WESTERN
AUSTRALIA

THE UNIVERSITY OF
MELBOURNE

Research Summary

Why was the research done?

While there is an increasing recognition of the value of lived and living experience involvements in solving issues such as homelessness, there is currently very little research exploring what these contributions might be. To build a greater understanding of these lived and living experience contributions to the end of homelessness, this study investigates what people with lived and/or living experiences believe needs to be done to end homelessness in Australia.

What were the key findings?

We found almost unanimous agreement that the availability and accessibility of housing, particularly that which is affordable and appropriate, is critical to the end of homelessness. Additionally, many of the participants named obstructive systemic issues, such as a lack of a will to act, as key barriers.

What does this mean for policy and practice?

We argue that actions to ensure the availability of housing are a fundamental requirement for the potential of lived and living experience to meaningfully contribute to the issues of homelessness, and for the overall concern of seeing homelessness end.

Citation

The authors

Skye Constantine
The University of Queensland
Email: s.constantine@uq.edu.au

Christine Thirkell
Lived Experience Expert

Jason Russell
Lived Experience Expert

Amanda Bingham
Lived Experience Expert

Jody Letts
Lived Experience Expert

Helen Matthews
Lived Experience Expert

Acknowledgements/Funding Sources

Introduction

Despite substantial evidence of effective interventions to address homelessness (see for example, Aubry et al., 2020; Boland et al., 2018; Padgett et al., 2016), homelessness is an enduring, increasing, and significant issue of global concern (UN-Habitat, 2023; United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2020). In Australia, for example, the 2021 Australian Census counted 122,494 people as experiencing homelessness (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2021). This was the third Census count that had shown increasing experiences of homelessness and represented more than a 35% increase from the 89,733 counted on Census night in 2006. This has led researchers, advocates, services, and government bodies to suggest that the involvement of lived and living experience (LLE) is essential in developing the solutions that might lead to the end of homelessness (for example, Constantine, 2023; Constantine, 2024; Homes Victoria, 2023; Parsell et al., 2023; Stonehouse et al., 2022; The Constellation Project, 2024) however there is currently very little research representing the perspectives of LLE or investigating their contributions.

The present study makes a significant contribution in its centralisation of the knowledge of lived and living experience as a consideration for ending homelessness. Taking a Community Based Participatory Action Research (CBPAR) approach, this research collaborated and engaged with people with LLE of homelessness to investigate what they think needs to be done to end homelessness in Australia. Drawing on our findings, we argue that the knowledge of lived and living experiences are likely to be a critical contribution to the end of homelessness but that this does not, and can not, take the place of ensuring the availability of housing.

Ending homelessness in Australia

Homelessness interventions in Australia are predominately delivered through a network of Specialist Homelessness Services (SHSs) that provide services such as information, referral, material aid, and crisis accommodation (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2023). SHSs receive funding from the Australian Commonwealth and state governments, and are regulated through the states with additional guidance from the intergovernmental National Housing and Homelessness Agreement. SHSs do not, however, directly provide ongoing housing and therefore their role in ending homelessness is additionally reliant on the availability of suitable housing (Spinney et al., 2020).

The intergovernmental National Housing and Homelessness Agreement is also instrumental in determining the national and state housing policy priorities (Department of Social Services, 2022), however it does not mandate targets for housing availability. Investments into social housing in Australia have been decreasing over recent decades. The Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute (2022) found decreases between 1981 to 2021 with the proportion of social housing in the broader housing market reducing from 4.9% to 3.8%. While this analysis stops short of a conclusion that Australia currently has insufficient social housing stock, it does acknowledge that 6.1% of households have a demonstrated need for social housing (through approved application or current tenancy) meaning that there is a shortfall of 2.3%, or over 200,000 households (Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute, 2022). Further, the private rental market in Australia has been demonstrated to be distinctly unaffordable. Anglicare Australia's (2023) rental affordability snapshot 'recorded the worst ever result for a person on the minimum wage' (p. 10). The 2023 and 2024 rental affordability snapshots have both revealed fewer than one per cent of the nationally

available rental listings as affordable on a minimum wage, with an even lower proportion for persons depending on Centrelink incomes (Anglicare Australia, 2023, 2024).

This disconnect, between homelessness services and suitable housing options, has been implicated in the failure of interventions intended to address homelessness in Australia. For example, research has found that evidence-based permanent supportive housing models, such as Housing First, have been undermined due to an inadequate resourcing of the housing component (Bullen & Baldry, 2019; Clarke, Parsell, et al., 2020; Clarke, Watts, et al., 2020; Parsell et al., 2013). That said, even where permanent supportive housing has been ensured, this has not presented as a definitive solution for the end of homelessness. For example, Parsell et al.'s (2023) analysis of ten years of tenancy data from a Brisbane permanent supportive housing program found that, while 75% of the tenancies had sustained housing or voluntary exits into other housing options, 25% of tenancies were lost to homelessness and/or were ended with unresolved tenancy issues. While the insufficient resourcing of evidence-based interventions is a contributing factor for Australia's failure to end homelessness, it appears that there are also other factors, and that these are still unknown.

Learning from lived and living experiences

There is increasing recognition from researchers, advocates, services, and government bodies that the voices of lived and living experience (LLE) needed to be included in the identification of effective solutions for complex concerns such as homelessness (Barrow et al., 2007; Beresford, 2021; Clifford et al., 2019; Constantine, 2023; Constantine, 2024; Homes Victoria, 2023; Ife, 2016; Parsell et al., 2023; Phillips & Kuyini, 2018; Stonehouse et al., 2022; The Constellation Project, 2024; Whiteford, 2011). As Clifford

et al. (2019) put it, LLE involvement 'enables pragmatic service responses that meet the needs of its target population [and] addresses the normative imperative of social inclusion when working with marginalised groups' (p. 1130). Furthermore, Goodhew et al.'s (2019) systematic review of the involvement of LLE in alcohol and other drug services concluded that this led to more effective and innovative interventions; improved relationships; and increased service engagement with issues of social justice. Despite these promises, there is currently very little research into the involvement of people with LLE of homelessness in responding to homelessness, and none that represents their contributions to its end (Constantine, 2024).

Currently, the available literature speaks to limited opportunities for LLE to be heard in the context of addressing homelessness (Phillips & Kuyini, 2018; Tseris, 2020). Opportunities for LLE involvements in service decisions, for example, have been identified as 'low on the participation spectrum and perhaps even tokenistic' (p. 1108) or, further, potentially 'futile and pointless', with one homelessness service user saying: 'People in charge, they're not going to listen ... They're just going to do whatever they're going to do anyway' (Phillips & Kuyini, 2018), p. 1107). Likewise, the impacts of LLE voices on policy and government decisions have been identified as possibly falling short of their aims in longstanding and well established LLE movements such as Australia's Council to Homeless Person's Peer Education and Support Program (Black, 2014) and Denmark's 'national interest organisation of homeless people' known as SAND (Anker, 2008). That said, these limited reviews do not reflect all of the experiences of the Lived Experience Expert authors of this paper, and we believe that these findings are indicative of the need for further research in this space.

Beyond the potential losses for services and policy, this shortfall of impact can also risk harm to the people sharing their experiences. Gathen et al.'s (2022) scoping

review of the involvement of LLE from 'people in vulnerable situations' (including homelessness, seeking asylum, intellectual disability, and child protection) concluded that people contributing their experiences need to see 'concrete results' or 'the process may result in feelings of powerlessness and frustration' and 'unintended and negative impact on the [service] users' mental health and their feeling of empowerment' (p. 61).

That said, the benefits of LLE involvements hold great potential. In addition to the aforementioned possibilities for better services and policy, there are potential personal benefits, including improved experiences of social inclusion and self-worth (Black, 2014; Gathen et al., 2022; Phillips & Kuyini, 2018; Whiteford, 2011). Although, as already noted, this might be reliant on the capacity of those who are positioned to listen also taking on a responsibility to adequately respond.

Currently, there is only a small amount of research attending to the contributions of LLE in addressing homelessness and none that links LLE with the end of homelessness. Beyond this, the research that foregrounds and/or is directed by LLE voice is extremely limited. This is a substantial gap in the current evidence base and a failure to adequately respond to the participatory rallying cry *nothing about us, without us!* The present study makes a substantial contribution through its foregrounding of the voices of lived experience through participatory and collaborative processes.

Research question and methodology

This paper reports on a selection of findings from a larger research project exploring the ways in which the involvement of people with lived and/or living experiences of homelessness might contribute to the end of homelessness in Australia. In particular, this selection addresses the research question: What do people with lived and/or living experience of homelessness believe needs to be done to end homelessness in Australia?

Methodologically, this larger project is founded in the principles of Community Based Participatory Action Research (CBPAR) with its emphasis on collaboration, co-learning, and co-inquiry (Friedman, 2021; Wilson, 2019). In this, the community being researched is involved from the outset and is expected to be instrumental in defining the issues of concern, the methods of investigation, and the actions arising from the research. Within this project, this has been enacted through three key approaches, outlined below.

The first is the development of a collaborative relationship with people who are affected by the research topic through the establishment of a Consultative Committee. This Consultative Committee is made up of five people who have been trained through the Council to Homeless Persons' Peer Education and Support Program to use their lived experiences of homelessness for education and advocacy work. While institutional requirements (such as ethics approval: approval number 2023/HE000182) prohibited the involvement of the Consultative Committee from the outset, they were involved at the earliest possible stage and all research planning has been understood as provisional until agreed with the active involvements of the Consultative Committee. The Consultative Committee chose their own title, set their own terms for involvement in the project, actively critiqued the research design, partnered with the institutional researcher in data collection and analysis as community researchers, and led the decisions on any actions related to the projects results (noting that the latter aspects are still in progress at the time of publication). All of the Consultative Committee are listed as named co-authors of this paper.

Secondly, the involvement of the community being researched has been enacted more broadly through the data collection process, and through further involvements in analysis and dissemination. Participants in the research were provided with the

opportunity to actively direct the data being collected as the semi-structured interviews erred toward focused conversations, allowing for unexpected points of interest to emerge. Additionally, participants were provided with the option of checking interview transcripts, contributing to analysis, receiving findings, providing feedback and review of pre-submission drafts, and suggesting future actions.

Finally, this methodology relies heavily on researcher reflexivity. CBPAR's emphasis on collaboration and co-learning meant that institutional researcher engaged in iterative reflections on their role in the collaboration, their opportunities to enable actions, the ways they received explicit and more subtle cues from the collaborative team, and so on. For the institutional researcher, actively learning when to lead and when to step back has been ongoing and remains unfinished. Part of the collaborative process has been undergoing these negotiations in relation with the community, while attempting to mindfully navigate the risk that the institutional researcher's dilemmas become further community burdens.

Data collection and analysis

The data used in this paper was collected through semi-structured interviews and focused conversations facilitated by the institutional researcher and two of the Consultative Committee members from November 2023 to April 2024. This research was promoted through lived experience, advocacy, and service provider networks in Victoria, Australia. Victoria was chosen as the location for data collection due to the collaboration with the lived experience experts that made up the Consultative Committee, who were all based in Victoria. The conditions of Victoria are relevant to the broader Australian context: it currently has the second highest rate of homelessness in Australia and, in line with the national data, showed an increase in the number of

people affected by homelessness in the most recent Census count (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2021).

Sixteen people with lived and/or living experiences of homelessness (including all of the Consultative Committee members) participated in interviews. All participants were provided with a $30 gift card of their choice as an acknowledgement of their participation. Interviews were scheduled for 60 minutes sessions and were voice recorded with participants' consent and transcribed by the institutional researcher. Four of the participants attended additional and/or extended interviews and were additionally compensated. Two of the participants (a married couple) attended a shortened interview of 15 minutes due to their acute homelessness needs taking precedence.

The findings discussed in this paper are primarily in response to the question: 'what do you think needs to be done to end homelessness in Australia?' Typically, this was the final interviewer-led question and followed 30-90 minutes of discussions related to experiences of homelessness services and the actual, or potential, opportunities for LLE involvements in influencing services and/or policy.

Analysis was an iterative process drawing on inductive thematic analysis techniques (Braun & Clarke, 2022) and abductive exploration (Brinkman, 2014). Due to the exploratory nature of the research, thematic analysis techniques allowed for the data to lead the research process and findings. But also, due to the immense experience of homelessness and the homelessness sector across the research team, it was common for the data to draw our attention because it reinforced our own preliminary, but sometimes unarticulated, understandings or because of its 'breaks with our normal understanding', signifying potentially important or additional knowledge (Brinkman, 2014, p. 722). The research team initially formed individual and collective senses of the themes through

journalling and discussion, these were then further developed and clarified by the institutional researcher using the qualitative data analysis support program NVivo.

Decisions about how to interpret and organise the data were guided by collaborative principles, and all participants were provided with opportunities to comment on the inclusion and analysis of their contributions. An early analysis decision was to aspire to democratic knowledge production and to make any conflicts in analysis explicit in the reporting, however this has not yet been needed.

Results

Fourteen of the sixteen people with lived and/or living experiences of homelessness responded to the question: 'what do you think needs to be done to end homelessness in Australia?' Almost all of these participants spoke to issues of the availability and accessibility of affordable and appropriate housing as essential to the end of homelessness in Australia. The two participants who were not asked the core question also spoke in detail about the affordability of housing as the central issue of their current crisis. Many participants also raised the need for a will to act and for the remedy of a systemic misalignment between what is said and what is done in addressing the current shortages of housing. One participant, however, did not respond with housing-related solutions at all and focused instead on issues of enduring stigma and the lack of an understanding of the experiences of people affected by homelessness. While this participant was alone in positioning the end of homelessness as separate from issues of housing availability, they were not alone in raising the issue of stigma as a substantial hurdle.

Housing is needed to end homelessness

The vast majority of participants interviewed said that ending homelessness in Australia relies on housing. As already noted, only one interview participant did not provide an answer that centred on some aspect of housing as the key concern in ending homelessness. The following are examples of the responses provided that spoke to housing as the critical feature of the end of homelessness in Australia:

> Honestly, like they need to, I don't know. Maybe have more houses available.
> (LLE Participant 9)

> I wish you guys all have magic wands, so you could build properties.
> (LLE Participant 12)

> Housing First … well it's worked for me. Like, I got housing, I was able to deal with my medical issues. I was able to deal with my education. Deal with stuff like work. So, all those things sort of helped me like regain my footing as a complete person in society. That's what it feels like for me. (LLE Participant 14)

> You know, the housing itself has to be there in order for it to be a solution.
> (LLE Participant 15)

While these responses indicate substantial concerns with the availability of housing in Australia as a critical contribution to homelessness' end, they do not suggest that this is necessarily sufficient. For example, LLE Participant 14 links housing with the Housing First model and their own experience of addressing the aspects of their life that enabled them to take further actions that moved them on from an experience of homelessness into that of a 'complete person in society'.

Other responses also named housing but were more specific about the type of housing seen as necessary to the end of homelessness. For example, some spoke about the availability of social housing as needed:

I think it is clearly obvious that investment in housing stock is vital.
(LLE Participant 1)

Oh that's easy. Build more social housing. (LLE Participant 3)

There obviously needs to be a commitment to building - what we've asked for is 6,000 social housing units per year, because we've gotta catch up with the population and the waiting list. So I mean, that's easy. I mean that's easy as far as it's a no brainer. (LLE Participant 7)

In these responses, the responsibility for solving homelessness appears to be situated with government funded social housing options. However, while the above responses explicitly address the availability of social housing as factor, most of the participants did not specifically name social housing as necessary but spoke to a range of aspects of housing that needed to be addressed: availability, affordability, appropriateness, and accessibility. While all of these might be satisfactorily addressed through social housing, not all were associated with social housing but were sometimes linked with other government actions such as market regulation.

Affordability of housing

Housing affordability was raised by participants, outside of a reliance on additional social housing, with links made to the ways in which the affordable housing and private rental markets are regulated and delivered:

Well, housing needs to be more affordable. More affordable housing. And I'm not talking about, like, there's a website, Affordable Housing Victoria. I was on it just the other day. … And so I've been looking at some of those and, like, their definition of affordable housing [is not affordable for me]. (LLE Participant 2)

Oh, these rents have to be dealt with, there needs to be a cap on some of these rents … I worked for that company for 10 years and for 10 years it was never enough to afford anything outside of Community Housing. (LLE Participant 8)

Further, the two participants who were unable to complete the full interview due to their current crisis explicitly connected their imminent homelessness with their low income and the lack of affordability of the private rental market:

> That's the reason why we are in a very big hardship to pay the rent on the time, you know, just we are trying to pay this on the time, not to be homeless. … And in these days, it's not possible to find a house privately less than 400 I am checking every day. If I find something less than 400 I am going to be happy. … We have $749 from Centrelink. Payment is $800. (LLE Participants 10 & 11)

Finally, one of the participants situated the end of homelessness in their utopian vision of complete income and social equality and stated simply that 'housing should be free' (LLE Participant 6).

Appropriateness of housing

In addition to concerns of affordability and availability, participants also raised the appropriateness of housing options. One participant discussed the ways that issues of housing availability and appropriateness are necessary considerations for the end of homelessness due to the realities of the diverse and changing needs of both individuals and populations:

> I talk a lot in in the space about disability access … they could not find a transitional house that suited my needs. They couldn't find me permanent housing that could be modified to suit my needs … [so] I don't just want housing stock … I need the mix to be so, do they call it then eclectic? Where people are given choice … [and my needs have changed] now I gotta get rid of this joint and get another one. But that takes time. And in the mean time, my physical health is declining … and it impacts on my mental health. (LLE Participant 1)

Another participant extended these concerns, identifying the ways that housing design and controls can contribute to personal wellbeing and/or risk:

> Housing and support, it's a no brainer. But it's also about making sure you've got the right housing, like I've noticed people who are suicidal who've been put on the 12th story of a high rise. I mean, who on Earth does that? So you know these things about, you know, don't make people leave behind their pets. You know, how do you make sure that people can have their pets in their home. Because they're often the stability in their lives that's going to help them be OK. It's going to help them make that place a home. (LLE Participant 7)

Finally, appropriateness of housing was extended to the neighbourhood context, and in particular the situation of available housing alongside other instances of necessary infrastructure:

> I would tie planning in better. People are talking about 15 minute cities, but remember the hubs? Like Springvale was going to be a hub, Glen Waverley was gonna be a hub, Footscray was gonna be a hub, Dandenong was gonna be a hub … just base them along the train lines. Maybe do some stuff like put in schools rather than closing them. You know, a hospital would be probably a good idea.
> (LLE Participant 13)

While the appropriateness of housing was not presented as a concern by most of the participants, the significant and negative impacts of inappropriate housing were well demonstrated.

Accessibility of housing

Finally, issues of housing accessibility were also raised by the participants. These ranged from ensuring that the people who needed supports to access housing were effectively able to do this to addressing systemic issues that result in existing housing not being available on the market:

> There needs to be a more like streamlined approach to accessing services [for homelessness and housing]. Because there's so many different agencies nowadays and, like, I'm a smart woman, but I just don't even know where to begin to go to, you know, what to do. (LLE Participant 2)

See they have all these questions and history [that exclude some people from accessing housing]. So no history. They don't do history. Someone's past doesn't dictate their future. And when it comes to questionnaire, I've got three questions. If you're paying taxes and you've been homeless for an amount of time, then all I need for you to apply for public housing is your name, your CRN number, and where do you wanna live? And that's it. (LLE Participant 4)

I'd start targeting land banking to be honest … If you wanna buy a bunch of apartments in town and leave them vacant, sorry, you're going to get absolutely smashed. (LLE Participant 13)

The common element in these concerns is that systemic barriers to accessing currently available housing will also need to be effectively mitigated and addressed.

In summary, there was near unanimous agreement that housing is essential, and almost certainly the first step, to ending homelessness in Australia. While there were diverse ideas about how this might best be achieved, and the particular issues that will also need to be considered and addressed, there was a strong suggestion that the responsibilities for this lie within the decisions of the Australian governments.

The will to act is needed to end homelessness
Many of the participants who talked about housing as necessary to the end of homelessness also spoke about the barriers they saw in this. A substantial theme within these was a perceived lack of will to act, primarily from governments but also from society more broadly:

I would say in my previous answer I'd sort of taken it as read or assumed that somehow there was people and governments that did have said will, because otherwise it's obviously never gonna happen. (LLE Participant 13)

I think it's a lack of political will, I think it's like the various parties playing off each other. I don't think it should be a political issue. I think it should just be an

issue that is taken seriously and thought about and acted upon. But they don't need to play politics. It doesn't need to be left or right. It could just be like an issue. Cause like housing for people is really important and at the moment we're in a time of great hardship and going through poverty, it seems like we've never seen before. (LLE Participant 14)

One of the participants situated these issues of will in a national complacency, the enduring myth of Australia as a 'lucky country':

I think that we believe that this doesn't happen here, that we're the lucky country. To be quite blunt, we accept the unacceptable. We don't question what's going on … Where that money could be better utilised in preventative strategies that can lead to better outcomes. Why aren't we putting that money into, you know, looking at better ways that we can we work as human beings? (LLE Participant 16)

Others, however, noted that there are apparent differences between what is said and what is done, indicating that there is an awareness of the issues of homelessness but that this awareness might not be leading to sufficient action:

I think changing the, I guess what I would call a, triage and bandage approach to a far more back end systemic policy approach because you can have all those, let's say, frontline services, or you could open a dozen more emergency housing sites in the CBD alone, but that doesn't fix the underlying problem. (LLE Participant 13)

I would like to see government put more capital into things that they say they're going to do. Because, like, there's a lot of promise around the Big Builds, for example, for social housing. But we haven't really seen much action on that. Like, how many homes have actually been built … I just don't believe there's enough will within the government to actually house people. (LLE Participant 14)

It needs to be a set of policies for starters. That will, you know, change things at a very fundamental level government-wise so that whatever is put in place is enforced … I'm finding is that, laws and regulations that pertain to temporary housing or Community Housing, and anything that you apply to the homelessness issue, it's so vaguely regulated, if at all. Does that make sense? There needs to be

some more definitive solutions. Things with a more definitive regulation.
(LLE Participant 15)

In addition to the issues of insufficient action, some participants identified potential by addressing the issues of coordination and collaboration across the relevant stakeholders in ending homelessness:

> Maybe all these little organisations and charity people, they all work together. And really build something that's helping people … I was given worker in [Service 1], I had a caseworker, and then my housing workers is in [Service 2], then the main [Service 3 support] was different. So if they all work collaboratively, like they have connections and, you know, or they know what's going on, so it will stop a lot of problems. And it's straightforward too for a person who's dealing. Because I was a new person, and I didn't know what is this lady for the application. She had no idea what I'm doing or, you know, and the other one is saying, Sorry, I'm just here to support you with your personal needs, short term, long term goals. … Then I had to do my personal research, personal things for the housing … I'm still doing it, because I have to keep applying. After six months of staying or four months of staying in transitional property, I have to apply for private rentals again. … Maybe if everyone is working under one arm so they're clear. (LLE Participant 12)

> I think what needs to be done is people working together, so you have all the cohorts that, you know, mental health, housing, artists, creative, all of them coming together and go, OK, what have we got? What are the resources at our disposal? ... You know, we used to do things like have Houses for Habitat, they do them overseas, why can't we do it here? Why can't we raise money somehow? … I just think, look, people have made housing out of mud and straw and corn cobbing. Why aren't we investing in some of that for temporary housing? It'll give them a home. And stability until, you know. Because all these things are gonna take time. (LLE Participant 16)

While many of the participants acknowledged that there are various stakeholders in ending homelessness, most of the participants, again, situated the issues of will and responsibility with the decisions and priorities of the Australian governments:

Get out there and just say, hey, look, this does not need to happen. Hey, let's stop negative gearing. Let's stop capital gains tax exemptions and put the money into housing instead. Because it's, you know, something like twelve point one billion a year that goes on to the top 20% of income earners … [and that] money [could] go to building social housing. So, that's what. The Federal Government needs to just pull its bloody pants up and, you know, do something about it. (LLE Participant 3)

I think the government needs to get that together and just, yes, there's money that seems to come from anywhere, but to be serious about ending homelessness, it's got to start somewhere. So just get the funds together and build more houses, but just getting the right people on the job to have it done properly. So it's actually done. (LLE Participant 5)

The thing with that is, even with the Big Build, the government's going to fall short on the amount of houses they're supposed to build. So what I would like, because a lot of that problem, is local councils getting pressure from their constituents, saying, We don't want your building here. So there's land, the government's ready to build on it, and people in that area are saying no, and the council listens to them. So I would really like it if councils were directed and said, you know, the state government said, Well, you can't say no anymore. If you've got the land and it's available and we're ready to build, then you're just going to have to work with the people who live in that area, because we're doing it. (LLE Participant 7)

This final participant contribution to issues of will, and barriers to decisions to act, contains suggestion of the final issue identified in ending homelessness in Australia, that of stigma.

Ending stigma is needed to end homelessness

As already noted, one participant (LLE Participant 4) did not address housing at all in their answer to the question 'what do you think is needed to end homelessness in Australia?' Instead, this participant emphatically distanced their answer from the issues of housing and instead stressed the enduring nature of homelessness as an issue of stigma, at both a systemic and an individual level:

Look, you know, I could really, I could dress it up, but stigma. The stigma attached to it. It's pretty much that. It's such an easy fix. And they put boogie woogie on it or they just don't even mention it in the news. Every month a couple of punters die. It's not newsworthy. It's not fucking newsworthy, man. … It all comes back to stigma. In my years of experience, if I could attack homelessness, if I did it on force and used all my assets, deplete my reserves, it would be on stigma. The horror show that's, take these away. Then it will start at a grassroots level. If I had, like, endless funding, I wouldn't put it in the drop in centres. I wouldn't build houses. You gotta get stigma the sorted away because if you don't, you'll end up like me in a brand new house and it'll be like a squat inside. The false exterior. You can say, oh, he's happily housed. I'm housed, yeah, but it's not a home.
(LLE Participant 4)

In this, stigma is recognised as an external force: the representations, or neglect, of the issues of homelessness in the media, for example. The stigma is also, however, recognised as internalised and as presenting barriers to transition from homeless to housed to homed: 'if you don't [address the stigma], you'll end up like me in a brand new house and it'll be like a squat inside' (LLE Participant 4).

While LLE Participant 4 was the only person who spoke about stigma in relation to the end of homelessness, they were not the only one to discuss the effects of stigma during the interviews. In addition to the above discussion of how local councils block social housing builds in response to community concerns, stigma was also positioned as a distinct element of the homeless experience and response:

That goes to, I guess, the general characterisation or stereotype of people that either are currently either without a house or home, and/or people that have been so previously, as you know, what sort of person people think that they may be. … I think that lack of experience and lack of understanding is… well, I guess in everything, ignorance can breed contempt. (LLE Participant 13)

What keeps sticking out to me is what the general public have been shown of what a homeless person is, you know what I mean? … You can tell. You know, and they

put it synonymous with, you know, criminal, drug addict, you know … And even those definitions on their own, I mean for example it's the stigma around people with drug problems. It's shocking as it is. You know, people don't think what led to this person being dependent on this, they just think, junkie. (LLE Participant 15)

Conversely, the possibilities of addressing stigma at a societal level and moving toward a sense of prosocial unity was presented as an opportunity for a genuine and expansive sense of hope for the end of homelessness: 'I'm not talking about a bandaid, I'm talking about a cure. If we can move forward as a species. All of us together'
(LLE Participant 4).

Discussion

These findings raise questions as to the potential for LLE contributions to ending homelessness in Australia. If, as previously acknowledged, the voices of LLE are necessary to solving the complex issues such as homelessness (as per Barrow et al., 2007; Beresford, 2021; Clifford et al., 2019; Ife, 2016; Parsell et al., 2023; Phillips & Kuyini, 2018; Stonehouse et al., 2022; The Constellation Project, 2024; Whiteford, 2011), does this mean that they have a role to play in resolving the critical, and pivotal, issues related to shortages of accessible, affordable, and appropriate housing? Furthermore, what is the role for LLE in investigating and addressing issues related to a will to act or to enduring stigmas?

We argue that LLE of homelessness does not, and can not, hold most of the answers to the current, and enduring, shortages of suitable housing in Australia. Certainly people with LLE can advocate for actions that address the availability of housing, and people with LLE may well have additional expertise to offer that results in the potential for contributions beyond the sum of their parts. Further, LLE is well positioned to offer necessary knowledge related to what affordable, appropriate, and

accessible housing might mean in the context of different needs and circumstances. Additionally, for the minority of people for whom the availability of affordable and appropriate housing does not resolve homelessness, LLE might well hold the critical difference between the end of homelessness and its continuation. However, to look to LLE's contributions to homelessness' end when the known, and majority impact, solution of housing is not being adequately pursued is disingenuous.

These concerns might also relate to the present research findings that 'will to act' and 'stigma' are fundamental to ending homelessness in Australia. Previous research has already indicated that failures to ensure housing during the implementation of Housing First interventions result in the imposition of 'negative effects on the homeless people' they purport to serve (Bullen & Baldry, 2019, p. 126). Likewise, there is a body of research that demonstrates the negative effects on people who have provided LLE contributions when they do not then see any material evidence of their impact (Gathen et al., 2022). The present study potentially indicates some of the broader negative outcomes of failures to address issues with known solutions, in this case homelessness with housing; that is, a loss of faith in the government and service system's 'will to act' and, further, a linking of these failures to the targeted exclusions of stigma.

In order to end homelessness, and to learn from the lived and living experiences of the people that homelessness affects, the relevant systems need to be ready and willing to act on both evidence and LLE contributions. We acknowledge that the establishment of a successful housing response to homelessness is a significant undertaking and involves 'substantial financial, administrative and political responsibilities for governments, and [that] success depends on the alignment between the formal policy framework and informal institutions' (Scheba & Turok, 2023,

p. 1134). We contend, however, that the essential first step to ending homelessness is to do the work to establish these systems effectively, to follow through with Housing First's foundational principle of 'taking homeless persons at their word' (Padgett et al., 2016, p. viii), and to ensure what is now an obvious and evidence-based requirement for ending homelessness: the availability and accessibility of affordable and appropriate housing.

Limitations

The experiences of homelessness and housing insecurity are extremely diverse. There is a risk in the present study that the recruitment processes, facilitated by the research team's established networks in Victoria, resulted in a misleading homogeneity of participants and, therefore, results. It is also worth noting that eight of the sixteen participants had experience in using their LLE for advocacy purposes. That said, the current research findings are in line with well established evidence and the involvement of community researchers and familiar networks enabled a deep and robust engagement with the participants' experiences. Notwithstanding this, the present lack of research foregrounding and/or led by LLE is still a notable gap in the established knowledge base. Future research should aspire to the expansions of multifaceted knowledge, founded in the realities of diverse lived and/or living experiences.

Conclusion

The conclusion of this paper is that an effective housing response is needed to end homelessness. This conclusion is in line with the currently available evidence. That said, the available evidence also shows that while housing is a necessary component, it is not sufficient, on its own, to end homelessness. The current evidence base points to the additional need for appropriate supports, but also to enduring gaps in knowledge.

Lived and living experiences are likely to be critical to addressing these knowledge gaps but, as the current study shows, the capacity for these voices to meaningfully contribute to the end of homelessness is limited while there are ongoing failures to ensure the necessary housing.

References

Anglicare Australia. (2023). *Rental Affordability Snapshot*. Anglicare Australia. Retrieved 30 March 2023 from https://www.anglicare.asn.au/publications/2023-rental-affordability-snapshot/

Anglicare Australia. (2024). *2024: Rental Affordability Snapshot*. Retrieved 28 July 2024 from https://www.anglicare.asn.au/publications/2024-rental-affordability-snapshot/

Anker, J. (2008). Organizing homeless people: Exploring the emergence of a user organization in Denmark. *Critical social policy*, 28(1), 27-50. https://doi.org/10.1177/0261018307085506

Aubry, T., Bloch, G., Brcic, V., Saad, A., Magwood, O., Abdalla, T., Alkhateeb, Q., Xie, E., Mathew, C., Hannigan, T., Costello, C., Thavorn, K., Stergiopoulos, V., Tugwell, P., & Pottie, K. (2020). Effectiveness of permanent supportive housing and income assistance interventions for homeless individuals in high-income countries: a systematic review. *The Lancet Public Health*, 5(6), e342-e360. https://doi.org/10.1016/S2468-2667(20)30055-4

Australian Bureau of Statistics. (2021). *Estimating Homelessness: Census*. ABS. Retrieved 30 March 2023 from https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/people/housing/estimating-homelessness-census/2021

Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute. (2022). *What is the right level of social housing for Australia?* Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute. Retrieved 28 April 2023 from https://www.ahuri.edu.au/research/brief/what-right-level-social-housing-australia

Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. (2023). *Specialist homelessness services annual report 2021–22*. Australian Government Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. Retrieved 9 April 2023 from https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/homelessness-services/specialist-homelessness-services-annual-report/contents/policy-framework

Barrow, S., McMullin, L., Tripp, J., & Tsemberis, S. (2007). Consumer integration and self-determination in homelessness research, policy, planning, and services. Toward Understanding Homelessness: 2007 National Symposium on Homelessness Research, Washington. https://www.huduser.gov/portal/publications/homeless/p3.html

Beresford, P. (2021). *Participatory Ideology: From Exclusion to Involvement*. Bristol University Press. https://doi.org/10.46692/9781447360520

Black, C. (2014). *Homelessness, learning from those who've lived it: evaluation of the Peer Education Support Program*. Council to Homeless Persons. https://chp.org.au/publication/homelessness-learning-from-those-whove-lived-it-the-pesp-evaluation/

Boland, L. P., Slade, A. P., Yarwood, R. P., & Bannigan, K. P. (2018). Determinants of Tenancy Sustainment Following Homelessness: A Systematic Review. *American Journal of Public Health*, 108(11), E1-E8. https://doi.org/10.2105/AJPH.2018.304652

Bullen, J., & Baldry, E. (2019). 'I waited 12 months': how does a lack of access to housing undermine Housing First? *European Journal of Housing Policy*, 19(1), 120-130. https://doi.org/10.1080/19491247.2018.1521187

Clarke, A., Parsell, C., & Vorsina, M. (2020). The role of housing policy in perpetuating conditional forms of homelessness support in the era of housing first: Evidence

from Australia. *Housing Studies*, 35(5), 954-975.
https://doi.org/10.1080/02673037.2019.1642452

Clarke, A., Watts, B., & Parsell, C. (2020). Conditionality in the context of housing-led homelessness policy: Comparing Australia's Housing First agenda to Scotland's "rights-based" approach. *Australian Journal of Social Issues*, 55(1), 88-100. https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1002/ajs4.97

Clifford, B., Wilson, A., & Harris, P. (2019). Homelessness, health and the policy process: A literature review. *Health Policy*, 123(11), 1125. https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1016/j.healthpol.2019.08.011

Constantine, S. (2023). 'Ending homelessness in Australia: what is the problem?' Life Course Centre Working Paper Series, 2023-13. Institute for Social Science Research, The University of Queensland. https://doi.org/10.14264/1c56e02

Constantine, S. (2024). Consumer participation in homelessness service delivery in Australia: What is it for? *Australian Journal of Social Issues*, 59(20), 554-570. https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1002/ajs4.294

Department of Social Services. (2022). *National Housing and Homelessness Agreement*. Australian Government Department of Social Services. Retrieved 9 April 2023 from https://www.dss.gov.au/housing-support-programs-services-homelessness/national-housing-and-homelessness-agreement

Gathen, J. M., Slettebø, T., & Skjeggestad, E. (2022). User participation among people in vulnerable situations at service level. A scoping review exploring impact for individual stakeholders and services. *Nordisk välfärdsforskning*, 7(1), 52-67. https://doi.org/10.18261/nwr.7.1.4

Goodhew, M., Stein-Parbury, J., & Dawson, A. (2019). Consumer participation in drug treatment: a systematic review. *Drugs and Alcohol Today*, 19(2), 97-112. https://doi.org/10.1108/DAT-05-2018-0023

Homes Victoria. (2023). *Homes Victoria's new Homelessness Lived Experience Reference Group*. Department of Families, Fairness and Housing, State Government of Victoria, Australia Retrieved 30 July 2024 from https://www.homes.vic.gov.au/news-and-media-Homelessness-Lived-Experience-Reference-Group

Ife, J. W. (2016). *Community Development in an Uncertain World : Vision, Analysis and Practice* (2nd ed.). Cambridge University Press. https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781316342855

Padgett, D. K., Henwood, B. F., & Tsembris, S. J. (2016). *Housing First: Ending Homelessness, Transforming Systems, and Changing Lives*. Oxford University Press. https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199989805.001.0001

Parsell, C., Jones, A., & Head, B. (2013). Policies and programmes to end homelessness in Australia: Learning from international practice. *International Journal of Social Welfare*, 22(2), 186-194. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2397.2012.00884.x

Parsell, C., Perales, F., Kuskoff, E., Stambe, S., & Plage, S. (2023). Permanent supportive housing: A ten-year study of entries and exits. Life Course Centre Working Paper Series, 2023-05. Institute for Social Science Research, The University of Queensland. https://doi.org/10.14264/c46109d

Phillips, D., & Kuyini, A. B. (2018). Consumer participation at Specialist Homelessness Services: Do the homeless have a say in the services they receive? *International Social Work*, 61(6), 1095-1115. https://doi.org/10.1177/0020872817695644

Scheba, A., & Turok, I. (2023). The role of institutions in social housing provision: salutary lessons from the South. *Housing Studies*, 38(6), 1132-1153. https://doi.org/10.1080/02673037.2021.1935765

Spinney, A., Beer, A., MacKenzie, D., McNelis, S., Meltzer, A., Muir, K., Peters, A., & valentine, k. (2020). *Ending homelessness in Australia: A redesigned homelessness service system* (AHURI Final Report). https://www.ahuri.edu.au/research/final-reports/347

Stonehouse, D., Theobald, J., & Threlkeld, G. (2022). Responsibility for homelessness: Lived experience perspectives and their alignment with neoliberal discourse. *Australian Journal of Social Issues*, 57(2), 356-371. https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1002/ajs4.191

The Constellation Project. (2024). *Lived Experience Practice Framework*. The Constellation Project. https://theconstellationproject.com.au/projects/lived-experience-practice-framework/

Tseris, E. (2020). The Expansion of the Peer Adviser Workforce: Opportunities and Challenges for Social Work. *Australian Social Work*, 73(2), 162-174. https://doi.org/10.1080/0312407X.2019.1675734

UN-Habitat. (2023). *Housing*. United Nations Human Settlements Programme. Retrieved 3 November 2023 from https://unhabitat.org/topic/housing

United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs. (2020). *Everyone included – how to end homelessness*. United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs. Retrieved 3 November 2023 from https://www.un.org/development/desa/en/news/social/58-session-commission-for-social-development.html

Whiteford, M. (2011). Square Pegs, Round Holes: Rough Sleeping and Service User Involvement? *Practice (Birmingham, England)*, 23(1), 45-58. https://doi.org/10.1080/09503153.2010.532547