

What is homelessness?



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Homelessness is not just rooflessness

Many people, if asked, would say that homelessness is when you don't have a roof over your head, for example sleeping rough on the streets. However rough sleeping is only a small part of the picture. Homelessness is about not having a home – 'home'lessness, not rooflessness. Individuals almost always exhaust other options before resorting to a night on the street. Only seven percent of homeless people are 'Rough sleepers'.¹⁹

A home means a sense of security, stability, privacy, safety, and the ability to control living space.²⁰ Homelessness is a complex issue, with varied and sometimes conflicting definitions. It is an issue sitting at the intersection of public health, housing affordability, domestic violence, mental illness, substance misuse, urbanization, racial and gender discrimination, infrastructure, and unemployment.²¹ We need to understand that the homelessness process begins before people are without a home.²² The infographic explains what homelessness and "at risk" of becoming homelessness can look like and entail. It demonstrates, once again, that homelessness is not "rooflessness", but that there are many other forms as to how homelessness or housing insecurity can be manifested.

It is important to consider when working with the Support at Home program that people who are homeless or at risk, can age prematurely and are therefore (*current as of 2021 (yet this may change when ACH services will transition into the new care finder program (Planned January 2023))*) eligible for Aged Care Services (such as CHSP and the CHSP Assistance with Care and Housing (ACH program) from 50 years. For Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples this applies from the age of 45 years and older.

WHAT IS HOMELESSNESS AND "AT RISK"?



Sleeping in a car or "rough sleeping"



Living in housing that is supposed to be temporary



Living with friends or family, or couchsurfing



Living in inadequate housing, like a shed or caravan



Living in overcrowded conditions



Renting a home that is too expensive, unsuitable or poor condition



Renting a home where there is no guarantee of staying

Activity 2

Housing insecurity amongst older people

Listen to Fiona York from the Housing for the Aged Action Group (HAAG) as she describes the likelihood of older people experiencing housing stress in private rental as well as the need to intervene early ([here](#)).

Questions:

1. What risk factors will you look out for to identify people who are at risk of homelessness when they access your services?
2. Why is it important to learn more about homelessness as a direct care worker/manager?
3. How could you initiate a conversation about your concerns with the client, and how could you support someone who is at risk or experiencing a housing crisis?
4. What are the benefits of early intervention when risks are identified?
5. What policies and procedures are in place to ensure your organisation addresses early identification and appropriate support for people who are homeless or at risk?

Activity reflections and considerations may include

- Homelessness is on the rise for older people, in particular for older women
- Any older person who is on a fixed income like the pension or Jobseeker or a disability pension and is living in private rental is likely to experience housing stress, and may be at risk of homelessness
- Be aware that at every stage in the client journey, workers can identify risks
- Early intervention and appropriate referral is essential as it can prevent older people from becoming homeless, or for their housing situation to deteriorate
- It is important for all staff to be aware that current, as of 2021 (yet this may change when ACH services will transition into the new care finder program from January 2023) people who have prematurely aged are eligible for Aged Care Services (such as CHSP and ACH program) from the age of 50 and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples from 45 years and older
- Sometimes, risks will be identified during assessment or intake. As an assessor or intake worker for instance, you will ask some questions that may identify risks, which can then be discussed in a safe and inclusive way



As a direct care worker you can ensure that:

- You know your consumers, you will observe and build a trusted relationship with them. As a result of this you may also identify risk, such as when you visit a client at home, or during a care plan review
- Whilst it may not seem easy to initiate the conversation, all workers play a crucial role in identifying people who may be at risk

Some tips in initiating a conversation are:

- Have a casual discussion with the person about their current housing situation, and any concerns they may have
- Build trust and rapport before tackling issues related to homelessness
- Don't be afraid to initiate the conversation about a person's housing situation
- Never assume that an older person will raise concerns about their housing needs with you. The person might not feel comfortable asking for help, or even realise they need help
- Be sensitive when discussing homelessness and vulnerability, as some older people who are living with friends or in unsuitable housing, in their car or a caravan, may not see themselves as homeless
- Encourage consumers to involve someone they trust in their assessment and other decision-making processes
- Report identified risks and concerns to your supervisor when you don't feel comfortable discussing it with the consumer directly
- Early intervention and referral can help prevent a person from becoming homeless. Homelessness services, such as Housing Action for the Aged Group (HAAG), can also do secondary consults with staff to identify housing support options. More information about support with housing can be found on page 30 of the resource.

As a manager you can ensure that:

- All staff members know about the risk factors, the impacts of homelessness, and the benefits of prevention and appropriate referral pathway(s)
- During initial assessment/screening appropriate referrals are made for older people who need housing support
- All assessments, intakes and care plans are conducted and implemented by appropriately trained staff.



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evaluation.

[Evaluation](#)

