Independent review of
the homelessness
response in Queensland

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Review Update June 2024

Acknowledgements

The Independent Review of the homelessness response in Queensland acknowledges the Traditional Owners and Custodians of the lands on which we meet, work, and live. We pay our respects to the Elders past, present, and emerging, and recognise their enduring connection to Country, waters, and community.

We acknowledge the Jagera and Turrbal peoples as the Traditional Custodians of the land on which our office is located in Meanjin (Brisbane). We extend this respect to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples across Queensland, whose diverse cultures, histories, and knowledge systems continue to enrich our communities.

We recognise the deep relationship, connection, and responsibility to land, sea, and sky as central to identity and culture. We honour the resilience, strength, and wisdom of First Nations peoples and their ongoing contributions to the stewardship and protection of these lands for thousands of generations.

In conducting this review, we are committed to listening to and learning from the voices of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, ensuring that their perspectives and experiences are integral to our understanding and recommendations. We strive to work in partnership with First Nations communities to address homelessness and create a future where all Queenslanders have access to safe, secure, and affordable housing.

Why are we doing this review?

Homelessness is not just about numbers or data points - it's about people, their dignity, and their need for a safe and supportive place to call home. We are doing this review to improve the response to homelessness by designing a system that better considers our people and their stories to ensure homelessness is rare, brief, and non-recurring.

Homelessness is a global social issue which has been growing at an alarming rate internationally and across Australia, including in Queensland.[1] It arises from various underlying factors, including poverty, housing supply pressures, domestic and family violence, mental health challenges, addiction, and many more. The COVID-19 pandemic, natural disasters, economic impacts and broader cost-of-living challenges have all contributed to global influences such as homelessness[2]. Traditionally associated with single men, particularly those dealing with substance abuse or mental health issues, homelessness is now affecting a broader and a more diverse group of people. Families, women, children and young people are increasingly experiencing homelessness, reflecting significant changes in our social landscape.[3]

Economic pressures are major drivers of this shift. Rising housing costs have made it difficult for lower-income earners to afford stable housing. The widening gap between income and housing expenses has pushed more people into precarious living situations. A shortage of affordable housing has driven up rental prices, making it even harder for lower-income individuals and families to find or afford stable homes.[4.]

Domestic and family violence has also contributed to the changing face of homelessness. Women and children escaping abusive environments represent a rapidly growing segment of the homeless population in Queensland. The lack of affordable housing options makes it difficult for them to secure safe homes and sustain tenancies.[5] Furthermore, the rising incidence of mental health challenges and addiction issues has placed pressure on allied support systems, leading to higher rates of homelessness among these groups.[6]

First Nations Queenslanders experience homelessness at a rate five times higher than the rate of non-Indigenous Queenslanders due to issues such as remoteness, poverty, discrimination, and inadequate access to appropriate services.[7] The impact of these issues extends to First Nations Queenslanders staying homeless longer than other groups.[8] These factors underscore the need for targeted and culturally sensitive responses.[9]

Many families are locked into cycles of intergenerational trauma and poverty, where historical and ongoing traumatic experiences, such as those faced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, exacerbate their vulnerability to homelessness. This can perpetuate a cycle of poverty, mental health issues, and housing instability, making it even more challenging for affected families to break free from homelessness and achieve long-term stability.

2005
Responding to Homelessness Strategy 2005-09

2009
2008-13 National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness

QLD strategy for reducing homelessness 2010-20

2011
Opening Doors strategy 2011-14

2013
QLD Homelessness to Housing Strategy 2013-2020

2015

Queensland's population growth, characterised by an influx of people moving to the State, has further intensified the demand for housing, outstripping supply at a growing rate.[10] Increased funding for specialist homelessness services and housing support and accelerated construction of social and affordable housing will not close the housing supply gap overnight.

Addressing homelessness requires recognition of the diverse needs of individuals and families who are either experiencing or at risk of becoming homeless. Providing a roof is often just part of the solution. Effective responses must involve coordinated efforts from specialist homelessness services in partnership with government agencies and other community groups. These efforts must include comprehensive, supportive, and wraparound services that address both the root causes and consequences of homelessness.

Wraparound services include housing, healthcare, mental health services, substance abuse treatment, employment assistance, education, and legal support. Better integration of these services will help individuals and families to receive the comprehensive assistance they need to address the causes of their homelessness.

A shift to a truly supportive housing approach requires sustained, decades-long investment as seen in countries such as Finland.[11] This requires bipartisan support for a common goal towards ending homelessness.
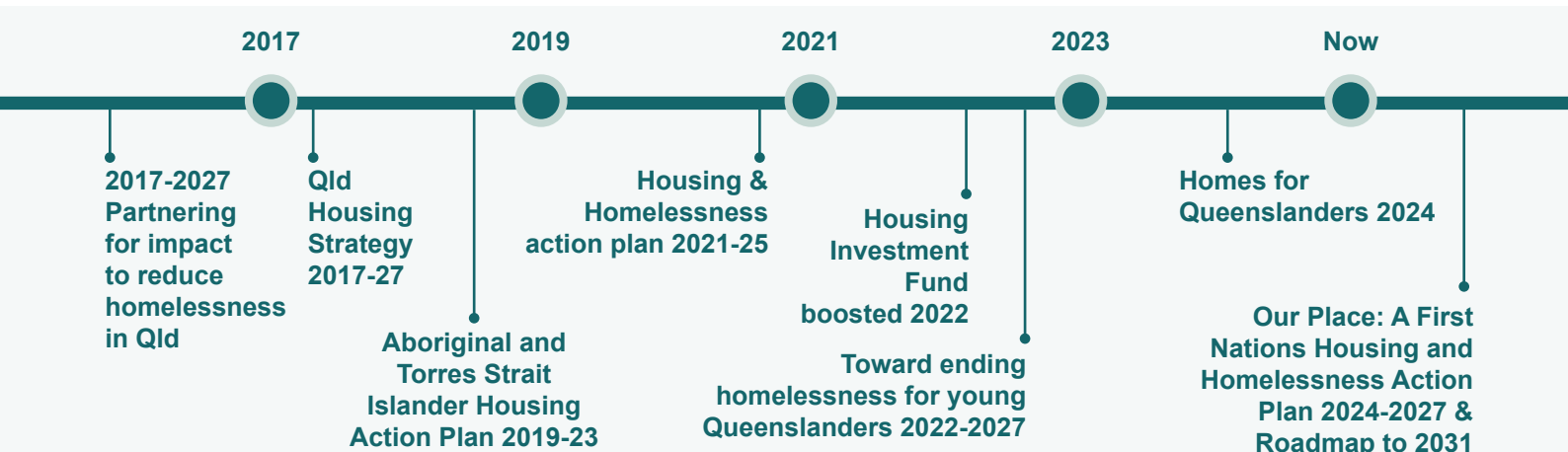
Government and service providers need to work in partnership to create a seamless support network that effectively addresses the multifaceted challenges of homelessness - across sectors, geographies, and communities. Collaboration in this way ensures that services are accessible and tailored to the specific needs of different populations, such as families, youth, and Indigenous Australians.

Prevention is crucial. For some individuals, the most effective response may be to help them maintain their existing tenancy. Women, families with children, and young people experiencing homelessness must be prioritised for support and access to housing. While crisis accommodation serves as a short-term emergency response, it is neither suitable nor sustainable in the medium to long term.

There has been a focus on addressing homelessness by successive governments over the past two decades.

Much has been done in terms of investment and planning, however there is more to do in terms of system design and delivery to strengthen integrated support services centred around the unique needs of individuals and communities.

The purpose of this review is to design a system response which moves toward ending homelessness in a way that ensures being homeless is rare, brief, and non-recurring. This needs a bipartisan and enduring focus on early intervention and prevention as well as longer term sustainable support and secure tenancies.

2017
2017-2027 Partnering for impact to reduce homelessness in Qld

Qld Housing Strategy 2017-27

2019
Housing & Homelessness action plan 2021-25

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Housing Action Plan 2019-23

2021
Housing Investment Fund boosted 2022

Toward ending homelessness for young Queenslanders 2022-2027

2023

Now
Homes for Queenslanders 2024

Our Place: A First Nations Housing and Homelessness Action Plan 2024-2027 & Roadmap to 2031

What is the approach to the review?

The Queensland Government is working towards ending homelessness, recognising that vulnerable community members deserve access to safe, secure, and affordable housing. To address this pressing issue, the Government has launched an independent review of the homelessness response in Queensland, led by Rachel Hunter PSM. This review aims to provide a comprehensive analysis of the current state of homelessness, identify gaps in the existing support systems, and propose actionable solutions to ensure that no one is without a safe place to call home.

The review is guided by a terms of reference, and commenced on 21 March 2024. To deliver this first phase of the review, key inputs were sought to understand the current state of the system and service response to homelessness in Queensland.

Expert Reference Group:

- Provided advice and input on the nature and range of services in Queensland, factors influencing homelessness, and strategies to improve service responses.

- Included representatives from peak bodies, Specialist Homelessness Service (SHS) providers, Community Housing Providers (CHPs), and other key stakeholders.

Data and evidence:

- Data and evidence were gathered to map the current state, including experiences, challenges, successes, and opportunities. This process included demand mapping to understand needs and investment mapping to identify current resource allocation. This information was used to identify trends, gaps, and areas for improvement in the response to homelessness.

What are the system and service reforms needed to optimise investment in homelessness services and responses to minimise the incidence of homelessness and improve outcomes for people at risk of, or experiencing homelessness over the next 3 to 5 years?

Stakeholder Engagement:

- Engaged 1,290 people, including those experiencing homelessness, service providers, Non-Government Organisations (NGOs), and government frontline staff from 60 locations across Queensland including urban, regional, rural, and remote areas.

- Consultations gathered insights on the scale and profile of homelessness, the nature and range of services, and ways to address risk factors. They provided local understanding of different risk factors, preventative factors, drivers for homelessness, and the effectiveness of the current response.

  — **Lived Experience:** Seven focus groups were held, and stories were gathered from individuals who are currently or have previously experienced homelessness. These stories ensured a human perspective provided nuanced insight into homelessness.

  — **Regional roundtables:** Thirteen roundtables were held with SHS providers to capture regional perspectives.

  — **Government workshops:** Eleven workshops were conducted with local and state government staff to understand governance, investment and related issues.

  — **Online surveys:** Distributed to service providers and individuals experiencing homelessness, these surveys collected both quantitative and qualitative data, yielding 110 responses.

  — **Site visits:** Conducted with SHS providers to gain on-the-ground insights.

Examples of best practice:

- Case studies were gathered to understand elements of good practice from local models, interstate programs and systems, and international approaches to ending homelessness.

This initial phase of the review aims to use data and evidence from consultation and research to provide a comprehensive and informed analysis of the efficacy of Queensland's current homelessness response. In doing so, the review has identified opportunities for improvements, including some short-term actions to achieve better outcomes for those at risk of, or experiencing, homelessness.

How are we currently responding?

The independent review of the homelessness response in Queensland recognises the Homes for Queenslanders initiative as the foundation for the delivery of more effective housing and homelessness services across the State. The Homes for Queenslanders plan, launched in February 2024, builds on the work of the Queensland Housing Strategy 2017–2027. It acknowledges the effort and investment already made to address housing pressures and support those who are vulnerable.

This long-term housing plan aims to deliver more homes faster and provide more support for people in housing need. It reflects the government's commitment to addressing the growing pressures on the housing market, including population growth, natural disasters, and material and labour supply shortages.

Key components of the Homes for Queenslanders plan[12] include:

- **Increased Funding:** A $3.1 billion investment in the State's housing system, to build more homes, support renters, help first homeowners, boost social housing, and work towards ending homelessness.

- **Building More Homes:[13]** A goal of building one million new homes by 2046. This is supported by a $350 million investment targeting opportunities to unlock more State-owned land for social and affordable housing, as well as identifying ways to increase density and diversity of housing where needed.

- **Supporting Renters:[14]** A $160 million package of rental relief. This includes expanded eligibility for products and services such as bond loans and rental grants which can help people to find, secure and move into, or maintain a rental home.

- **Boosting Social Housing:** A commitment to deliver 53,500 new social homes by 2046, with $1.75 billion allocated over the next five years.

- **Ending Homelessness:[15]** A 20% increase in funding for frontline homelessness services, including the expansion of on-the-ground critical response teams which regularly visit known areas where people are experiencing homelessness and offer rapid support to help them find accommodation, and the development of new policy to deliver a supportive housing approach.

The Queensland Government has implemented significant measures to increase the supply of social and affordable housing.

The Queensland Housing Investment Growth Initiative (QHIGI) aims to deliver 8,365 new homes.[16] This initiative is supported by the $2 billion Housing Investment Fund (HIF), which provides subsidies and capital grants to encourage partnerships between developers, CHPs, and institutional investors to develop and manage additional housing.[17]

The QuickStarts Qld program, part of QHIGI, is a capital investment program to accelerate the delivery of social housing and increase the supply of a range of housing types, based on local needs.[18] These efforts are complemented by legislative reforms and strategic land use planning to unlock more land for development and streamline housing approvals, enabling the steady increase in housing supply required to meet growing demand. In tandem these measures will be supplemented with Federal Housing Australia Future Fund (HAFF) investment to support growth in Queensland.

In partnership with the Commonwealth Government, the Queensland Government will receive more than $398 million to deliver an additional 600 homes under the Social Housing Accelerator Fund (SHAF). This builds on the HAFF and other existing measures to support an overall increase in the supply of social and affordable housing.[19]

Legislative changes to strengthen the rights of renters and stabilise the rental market have been established.

These changes include:[20]

- Limiting rental increases to once every 12 months for all new and existing tenancies, effective from 1 July 2023.
- Banning the practice of rent bidding and introducing penalties for agents who engage in or encourage this practice.
- Establishing a Rental Sector Code of Conduct to outline the obligations of rental accommodation participants.
- Implementing a portable bond scheme to allow tenants to transfer their bond from one property to another.

The current response to homelessness is characterised by a focus on immediate support for those in need.

SHS providers in Queensland support a significant number of individuals, with 45,500 clients receiving assistance in the State every year, representing 17% of presentations to SHS providers nationally.[21] These services are tailored to meet the diverse needs of individuals, including those experiencing family and domestic violence, young people, and Indigenous Australians.

A key strength of the current response is the emphasis on maintaining housing for those at risk of homelessness. In FY23, almost nine out of 10 individuals at risk of homelessness were able to receive support which targeted tenancy sustainment.[22] This could include social housing itself, or rental assistance to maintain an existing tenancy. Access to tenancy sustainment supports is critical in preventing people from becoming homeless.

There is an array of support available, which has grown in response to increasing demand and complexity. The Government continues to adapt and enhance its support mechanisms to meet the evolving needs of those experiencing homelessness. However, the ongoing expansion of services, while necessary, adds complexity to the response, making it larger and more intricate in terms of coordination.

Building from what we know, the review will identify opportunities to improve, change or amplify the current response to ensure we meet the needs of Queenslanders.

The review will consider whether these initiatives are sufficient to meet the needs of people experiencing, or at risk of experiencing homelessness in Queensland. It will identify opportunities for improvement to ensure that every Queenslander has access to safe, secure, and affordable housing.

There is a human story behind every homelessness statistic. It is imperative to approach the review with empathy, compassion, and a commitment to understanding the diverse needs of those experiencing homelessness. Together, we can make a difference and work towards ending homelessness in our State.

People don't know what services are out there. I didn't know about registering or about housing."

Person with lived experience of homelessness

What is the current investment into homelessness?

The longer a person remains homeless, the more complex their needs become, in turn increasing the overall cost of support.

There have been many strategies and action plans to address homelessness in the last decade but the rate of homelessness has remained unchanged. Since the last Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) census in 2021, various indicators show homelessness increasing. For example, the number of people presenting to SHS providers increased by 10.3% between FY21 and FY23.[23] In the same time period, the investment into SHS has increased by 36% and by a further 46% in FY24.[24]

Funding Landscape[25]

Commonwealth funding to Queensland for housing and homelessness has declined from a peak of $429 million in FY19 to $356 million in FY24. Of the $356 million received in FY24, $89 million was allocated to homelessness services. The majority of Commonwealth funding ($62 million) was directed to services delivered by the Department of Housing, Local Government, Planning and Public Works (DHLGPPW) with the remaining $27 million directed to four other departments.

In FY24, the total Queensland spend on homelessness services (by DHLGPPW and other departments) is estimated to reach $444 million, an increase of around 80% over four years. Of the $444 million, $355 million has been provided by the Queensland Government with the remaining $89 million provided by the Australian Government.

Of the $444 million, $311 million is estimated to be spent by DHLGPPW on homelessness services. In FY24, $266 million was allocated to SHSs providing access, support, temporary supported accommodation and service system development. The Department of Justice and Attorney-General (DJAG) also allocated $41 million to SHSs providing services specifically for women and children at risk of domestic and family violence. The remaining $91 million was spent by other departments for services related to homelessness, including support for youth exiting state care, re-entry support and accommodation for people exiting correctional facilities, health outreach teams (for homeless people experiencing mental illness) and public intoxication programs.

Specialist Homelessness Services providers

SHS providers are NGOs funded by DHLGPPW and DJAG (for domestic violence shelters). Over time, the funding mix has shifted with the State contributing a greater share as Commonwealth funding has not increased at the same rate as State funding.[26]

There are 126 NGOs providing SHS across Queensland. Almost half of all SHS provider funding is received by 10 of those organisations.[27] Reliance on brokerage funding for crisis accommodation and support services has increased as SHS provider capacity has become constrained. This can lead to an over reliance on motels and hotels.[28]

Social Housing Supply

While investment in social housing stock has recently increased, the social housing register has also grown, with 41,484 persons across 25,364 households on the register as of June 2023, including 21,021 people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness.[29]

Homes for Queenslanders aims to deliver 53,500 new social homes by 2046, providing over 2,000 per year from 2028 onward.   This will require partnership between all parts of the sector including state and local government, private industry and CHPs.

Geographic Inequities[30]

Metropolitan areas receive 60% of SHS funding, with the remaining 40% spread across regional areas. Limited funding is allocated to remote and very remote areas, including Indigenous Local Government Areas (LGAs).

Compared to metropolitan areas, remote areas have access to fewer SHS service types such as temporary accommodation, mobile support, and outreach services, with no supportive long-term housing available in these areas.

New social housing models

While there is a focus on increasing housing stock, diversification is necessary to meet the differing needs of people experiencing homelessness. New models such as supportive housing offers people access to housing that is linked to direct and tailored support services.[31] In 2023, it was estimated that the annual cost of Queensland Government services for a person experiencing chronic homelessness was approximately $64,273.[32] In contrast, if the same person were placed in supportive housing, the cost of required Queensland Government services would be $46,801 annually – representing an almost 30% reduction in service cost per person per year.[33] This is because sustaining housing has been associated with reductions in the usage of other government services such as emergency and in-patient visits, mental health services, courts, prisons, crisis accommodation services, and being victims of crime.[34]

The Homes for Queenslanders plan includes specific initiatives to deliver supportive accommodation models to address the needs of vulnerable groups.[35]

First Nations Queenslanders

Despite investment, the number of First Nations people experiencing homelessness in Queensland has remained unchanged between 2006 and 2021.[36] Additionally, the rate of First Nations people being homeless is five times that of the non-Indigenous homeless population in Queensland.[37] Factors such as poverty, vulnerability, access to housing support and the absence of targeted housing and homelessness programs contribute to many First Nations people cycling in and out of homelessness.

The experience and needs of First Nations people, with respect to homelessness, are different and unique to individual circumstance. For those living in regional and remote areas, overcrowding is a significant driver of homelessness. While in metropolitan areas (e.g. Logan, Brisbane, West Morton) the needs are more diversified requiring specialist service responses.

The Queensland Government has launched Our Place, an 8-year strategy and 4-year action plan to support First Nations people in Queensland to close the housing gap. Backed by a $61.3 million investment, the Our Place Action Plan will accelerate First Nations housing outcomes over the next 4 years to deliver outcomes across the whole housing and homelessness systems.[38]

What has the review told us?

Achieving better outcomes for people experiencing homelessness will require unprecedented collaboration and partnership across all sectors.

The review has taken account of the inputs and insights from stakeholder engagement, demand and investment analysis, available literature and documentation to determine emerging areas for consideration. In doing so, the review has identified areas for focus in the homelessness response, specifically system governance and performance; housing accessibility and supply; and service delivery and support.

> " I've been homeless for 6 months. I've been camping at a caravan park… I pay $200 a week rent… but I only get $700 fortnight and that only leaves me with $300 a fortnight [to live on]."
>
> *Person with lived experience of homelessness*

System Governance and Performance

- **System fragmentation:** The Government has committed to work towards ending homelessness. Notwithstanding this there continues to be challenges in coordination and integration across the system leading to siloed planning and operations and fragmented delivery of services by Government, service providers, peak bodies and community organisations.

- **Geographic disparities:** Queensland's vast size and the remoteness of some communities creates challenges in delivering homelessness services equitably. Remote and regional areas face higher costs of living, reduced access to services, and a scarcity of construction and trade workers, presenting challenges in the way homeless individuals are supported in regions.

- **Performance metrics:** There is recognition across government and the sector that the reliance on throughput-based performance metrics rather than service impacts and outcomes for individuals undermines the ability to understand both the focus and effectiveness of services and supports. The absence of comprehensive data and inconsistent use of platforms impede effective tracking and support of homeless populations.

Housing Accessibility and Supply

- **Demand outstripping supply:** The demand for housing nationally is outstripping supply. From January to September 2023, Queensland experienced a net increase in population of over 140,000 people. This translates to estimated demand for more than 57,000 dwellings. However, in the same period there was a net increase of just under 30,000 dwellings.[39,40] This imbalance drives up prices, making affordability and accessibility of housing challenging for lower-income earners, exacerbating housing instability and homelessness.

- **Affordability issues:** Rising rents and housing costs in the private market present further challenges for lower-income earners and people with other vulnerabilities. In Greater Brisbane (inclusive of Brisbane City, Logan City and West Moreton local areas), the portion of income required to service rent increased from 25% in March 2020 to 31% in March 2024,[41] while in the rest of Queensland it has increased from 29% to 36% in the same period.[42] This is higher than the total national rate of 32%, and the national combined regional rate of 33%.[43] This reduces options for affordable housing and drives housing instability or homelessness.

- **Shortage of social housing:** Queensland is experiencing a shortage of fit-for-purpose, appropriate, and affordable social housing. In 2021, 3% of the total occupied dwellings in Queensland was social housing, compared to the national figure of 4%.[44] This shortage increases the number of people on the social housing register each year. The reliance on the private rental market as a default response has proven difficult in recent years, hence lower vacancy rates and high rents.[45]

- **Shortage of diverse housing options:** There is a gap in the availability of diverse housing types across social, affordable and private rental markets. This includes size and location of dwellings, accessibility for people with disability, as well as the breadth of supportive housing available.

- **New and emerging groups:** Individuals with lower incomes and older women, are increasingly experiencing, or at risk of, homelessness and are seeking support. Additionally, there has been a 29% increase in presentations to SHS providers from women with children citing housing and/or financial difficulties.[46] In FY23, of the 25,364 household applications on the Queensland social housing register 6,570 (26.9%) were new applicants.[47]

Service Delivery and Support

- **Crisis-driven response:** The system is currently focussed more towards crisis interventions rather than prevention and long-term support. Whilst it is not possible from the data to differentiate funding by service or intervention type, stakeholders across government, service providers and people experiencing homelessness consistently referenced the concentration of effort on a crisis-driven response.

- **Increasing presentations involving mental health and domestic and family violence:** The rising incidence of mental illness, alcohol dependency, and domestic and family violence are significant drivers of homelessness. Overcrowding in social housing can lead to relationship breakdowns further exacerbating homelessness.

- **Lived experience and delivery:** The delivery of homelessness services can be further enhanced by increasing the representation of diverse perspectives and experiences in planning and delivery. Increasing mechanisms available to capture the lived experiences of those facing homelessness, in particular for children and young people,[48] will assist to ensure services can more fully address the complex realities and needs of this population.

Data, Information, and Insight

- **Centralised data collection:** There is an urgent need for a centralised system for data collection that supports matching and tracking of individual journeys through homelessness supports and services and across the broader system. Currently, providers are uploading similar data in different formats across multiple platforms. This creates barriers to accessing meaningful, real-time, and longitudinal data.

- **Visibility of vacancies and demand:** There is limited capacity to view housing vacancies within a region. There is currently no central system where SHS providers can view or search for available accommodation. This leads to delays and inefficiencies in access and allocation of housing to those in need. Similarly, for CHPs, the lack of visibility of the housing register means these providers are unable to match available accommodation to demand in a timely and appropriate manner.

- **Reporting burden:** Providers consistently indicated that data collection practices and reporting requirements create administrative burden and do not deliver the necessary information or insight to support planning, delivery and understanding of performance. This is evident in the type and nature of data collected. Service providers in particular report a lack of transparency in both data access and feedback from the provision of data to government agencies.

> " **There is a new face to homelessness, working Queenslanders, families living in cars."**
>
> *Specialist Homelessness Service provider*

Strategic Investment

- **Supportive housing programs:** Currently, there is a reliance on crisis accommodation providing temporary or short-term support. The average length of stay in temporary accommodation has increased from 77 days in FY19 to 117 days in FY23.[49] There is a need for the development and availability of more supportive options which provide affordable housing linked with health and social services to help tenants stay housed. This includes a mix of housing which considers the cost and intensity of support required for different homeless populations.

- **Regional community challenges:** Data indicates that in 2024 the proportion of income required to service rent in regional areas (36%) is greater than in metropolitan areas (31%).[50] Additionally, consultations found that regions with increased frequency and severity of natural disasters or greater economic activity through mining and defence industries experience difficulties with availability of affordable housing. The challenge in regional areas was highlighted in regional consultations with feedback that services are less accessible and the burden on the service user to seek help can be greater.

- **Impact of funding:** The current mechanisms (or lack thereof), for tracking the outcomes of investment into homelessness are neither efficient nor effective. This means there is insufficient visibility and understanding of the impacts achieved through strategic investment in the sector.

> " **You have to work together. You sometimes need all the services to work together for an individual."**
>
> *Specialist Homelessness Service provider*

Workforce Development

- **Workforce support:** The homelessness workforce requires additional support and enhanced skills to effectively meet the sector's demands and address the increasingly complex needs of clients. The work is highly demanding, both physically and psychologically. Exposure to distressing situations, long hours, and insufficient wellbeing resources contribute to burnout and attrition.

- **Short-term funding and staff shortages:** Service providers indicated that short-term contracts and competitive funding models reduce financial security for employees, prompting experienced staff to leave the industry. This leads to staffing shortages across the sector, impacting the ability to deliver required support to people in need.

> **We are empowered and passionate individuals moving mountains to deliver success to clients in a flawed system. We have passionate people – you're in this industry because you're passionate about people. There needs to be way more support and benefits for these people."**
>
> *Specialist Homelessness Service provider*

Policy and Legislation

- **New housing build policy:** Stakeholders reported that regulatory requirements for housing development can present challenges in relation to the complexity, cost, and time involved in navigating the approval processes. The Homes for Queenslanders plan seeks to address these challenges through streamlined planning processes, legislative reforms, and targeted funding initiatives. These measures are steps in the right direction, however ongoing efforts and adjustments will be necessary to ensure the timely and cost-effective delivery of new housing.

- **Fit for purpose policy and procedures:** Current policies mandate specific housing criteria that may not be appropriate for all situations, such as the requirement that a single mother with one child cannot reside in a one-bedroom unit. This limits the ability for the flexible utilisation of available housing options and further exacerbates demand.

- **Procurement and contracting:** Stakeholders consistently reported that procurement and contracting policies and processes were costly, lengthy and not fit-for-purpose. This was evident through the large number of contracting types between Government and SHS providers and the variability in reporting requirements and duration of contracts reported by stakeholders. The current procurement and policy culture limits the efficient delivery and operation of services.

> **It's all very well and good to provide a roof over someone's head but if we don't give them the tools to hang on to it, then we're just going to set them up for failure."**
>
> *Specialist Homelessness Service provider*

What should the future look like?

The review has listened to the sector and to people experiencing homelessness, gathered detailed data and evidence, and sought learnings from other jurisdictions, to develop a set of guiding principles for the next phase of work.

Importantly, applying these principles will ensure that future actions will enable individuals and families, regardless of background, circumstances, or location, to access timely, tailored services aimed at preventing homelessness and supporting stable and sustained housing. Communities will benefit from locally led strategies focused on their unique characteristics and needs, with services provided in an individualised, culturally appropriate, and trauma-informed manner. Collaborative partnerships across governments and sectors will enhance service delivery and outcomes for individuals with a goal of homelessness being rare, brief, and non-recurring.

> **Improving coordination among service providers is crucial. Streamlining processes and enhancing collaboration, including the use of digital tools, can ensure a more seamless and integrated response to homelessness.”**
>
> *Specialist Homelessness Service provider*

> **…there needs to be affordable accommodation that people can rent that's within our budget being on DSP [disability support pension] or pensions.”**
>
> *Person with lived experience of homelessness*

- **Access and equity:** Homelessness responses must be accessible and equitable for all individuals, regardless of their background, circumstances, or location.

- **Focus on earlier identification and prevention:** Strategies and actions should aim to prevent individuals and families from entering the homelessness system and prevent re-entry.

- **Timely, fit-for-purpose, and supportive:** Responses should be timely, tailored to individual preferences, and provide support as required.

- **Evaluate and innovate:** Homelessness services should continuously explore, adopt, and refine new practices, technologies, and approaches to drive positive change and better meet the evolving needs of individuals experiencing homelessness.

- **Joined-up, integrated systems and services:** There should be a focus on coordination and collaborative partnerships across governments, sectors, and services to enhance service delivery and outcomes for people experiencing homelessness.

- **Locally led and place-based:** Responses to homelessness should be developed and implemented locally, considering the unique characteristics, resources, and needs of specific communities.

- **Individualised, culturally appropriate, and trauma-informed:** Homelessness services should create safe and supportive environments that meet the unique needs of individuals, empower them to participate in decision-making, and tailor solutions to their specific preferences and cultural backgrounds.

> **Housing alone will not solve the problems created by homelessness or the factors driving it. Improving coordination among service providers is crucial.”**
>
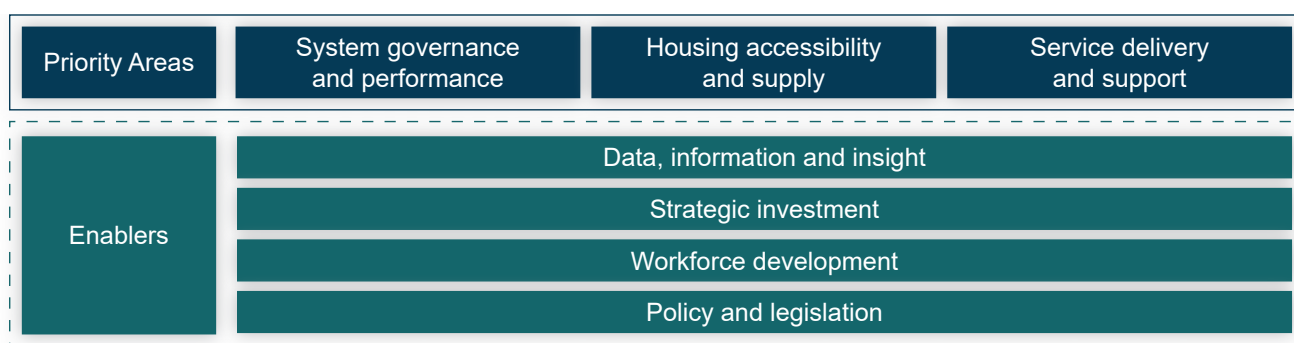> *Specialist Homelessness Service provider*

How can we turn opportunity into action?

The review's terms of reference emphasise the need for a comprehensive examination of the efficacy of the current responses, the identification of systemic factors influencing homelessness, and the development of innovative, evidence-based solutions to prevent and reduce homelessness across Queensland's diverse communities. The first phase of the review lays the foundation for system redesign which will focus on balancing efforts across prevention, crisis and long-term support for people experiencing homelessness. The review highlights three key themes that will serve as priority areas for addressing homelessness in the State. These priority areas are:

- **System Governance and Performance:** This area focuses on enhancing and integrating the governance and performance of the homelessness response system, including improved coordination, accountability, and monitoring mechanisms across government agencies, advisory bodies, and service providers. Importantly it will embed the views of those with lived experience into governance mechanisms. It will take a continuous improvement approach to foster innovation and change.

- **Housing Accessibility and Supply:** This area focuses on increasing access to affordable, appropriate, and supportive housing options, as well as boosting the overall supply of housing for homeless people.

- **Service Delivery and Support:** This area focuses on strengthening the delivery of homelessness services and support systems to ensure they are responsive, integrated, and tailored to the diverse needs of individuals and communities experiencing or at risk of homelessness.

To enable progress in the priority areas outlined above, the review identified the following key enablers:

- **Data, information, and insight:** It is essential to enhance data collection, analysis, and sharing to inform evidence-based decision-making. This approach will drive continuous improvement in homelessness responses by providing accurate and actionable insights.

- **Strategic investment:** Ensuring strategic and sustainable investment in homelessness initiatives is fundamental. This involves focusing on maximising value and impact through efficient and effective resource allocation and outcome measurement to support long-term positive outcomes.

- **Workforce development:** Building the capacity and capabilities of the homelessness sector workforce is necessary. This can be achieved by providing comprehensive training, professional development, and ongoing support to ensure the delivery of high-quality, culturally safe, and trauma-informed services.

- **Policy and legislation:** Reviewing and adjusting policies and legislation is important to remove barriers and reduce burdens. This process looks to ensure policies and legislation deliver the right intent and specify requirements for homelessness responses in order to be effective.

Priority Areas	System governance and performance	Housing accessibility and supply	Service delivery and support
Enablers	Data, information and insight		
	Strategic investment		
	Workforce development		
	Policy and legislation		

The Queensland Government and the homelessness sector will collaborate closely and take concerted actions across these priority areas, enabled by the recommended focus areas, to effectively address homelessness in the state.

Government	Specialist Homelessness Services	Social and affordable housing	Lived experience

What should we do now?

Recognising the urgency of the situation, immediate actions have been identified for implementation **within the next three months**. These actions are designed to make swift and impactful improvements, setting the stage for longer-term reforms and improved outcomes for those experiencing homelessness.

System Governance and Performance

1. **Define the leadership and accountability role of the DHLGPPW as the primary entity responsible for the homelessness response.**
   The purpose is to formalise the authority and system leadership of the DHLGPPW to direct actions and resources across agencies and sectors to integrate and improve responses to homelessness.

2. **Develop a DHLGPPW led governance body to drive an integrated response to homelessness, ensuring appropriate representation from across government, the sector, and individuals with lived and living experience.**
   This governance body should be commissioned by Ministerial Charter, and it should be appropriately resourced. Its role is to proactively design and drive system reform and performance, with a focus on prevention, innovation, and continuous improvement.

3. **Establish a Data Working Group to inform the development of appropriate data collection, linking of existing datasets, and streamlining of reporting.**
   The purpose is to ensure planning commences across government and the sector for data integration and sharing, to achieve better understanding of demand and a more outcome focused response. This is central to system reform. It will clearly delineate data ownership as a DHLGPPW responsibility.

4. **Establish expectations across the sector that lived experience and service users' voices are reflected in the leadership, design, and delivery of homelessness services.**
   Whilst there is existing commitment to involve people with lived and living experience in policy development, the purpose of this is to ensure their voices and diverse perspectives are heard and used to inform needs-based responses on the ground.

5. **Immediately reduce unnecessary administrative burden associated with reporting by streamlining and simplifying reporting requirements. This may include removing the need for case studies as a standard part of compliance reporting and investigating the use of alternative identifiers, for example the Centrelink Reference Number (CRN) to determine eligibility.**
   The purpose is to alleviate reporting burden on the sector, improve responsiveness and reduce barriers which currently impede access to services for those experiencing homelessness (for example, feedback from SHSs indicated that they are often asked to provide letters of support for individuals for whom they have no service history; this process can deter or prevent people from engaging with support services).

6. **Clarify the role of peak organisations to reduce confusion and risk of duplication and develop a sector-wide Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) to formalise the relationship between government and peak organisations.**
   The purpose is to reduce duplication and strengthen understanding of the respective roles of advisory bodies in supporting sector co-ordination, service integration and system reform.

7. **Revise the current model of communication and engagement between government and the sector to improve the flow of information, ensure they are up to date on policy changes and maintain transparency regarding the use and sharing of data and information.**
   The purpose is to enable more effective two-way communication between the sector and DHLGPPW. For example, ensuring information provided by the sector to DHLGPPW is purposefully used and insights fed back to providers to inform continuous learning and improvement.

Housing Accessibility and Supply

8. Mandate that current Government planning processes for building and supplying housing explicitly include considerations for reducing homelessness.
The purpose is to amplify the focus on homelessness within current initiatives and ensure that within social, affordable, and supportive housing there is an explicit allocation for people experiencing, or at risk of homelessness.

9. Ensure Government regional and local planning and housing targets account for local homelessness needs to better address demand.
The purpose is to build on existing regional planning activities and embed specific targets for initiatives which seek to respond to the specific and unique needs of people experiencing homelessness within the local community.

> " **We need front end investment for long term [supportive] accommodation….
> the [supportive] model is the way to go….they are cheaper, they're better.**"

Specialist Homelessness Service provider

Service Delivery and Support

10. Ensure that actions under "Homes for Queenslanders" prioritise support for the homeless, starting with women or families who have children, women escaping domestic violence, and young people under 18.
The purpose of this is to ensure women, children and young people are prioritised within the homelessness response to support breaking the intergenerational cycle of poverty experienced by these groups.

11. Investigate the opportunity to provide SHSs and CHPs with timely access to social housing vacancy data, and CHPs with access to the social housing register, to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of housing placements locally.
The purpose is to establish an open and transparent approach between Government and the sector, driven by principles of access and equity which prioritise, and are more responsive to local needs and requirements.

12. Convene a Co-design Working Group/s to develop a tenancy sustainment model, focusing on preventative actions to enable housing stability and prevent increases in crisis support requirements.
The purpose is to increase focus on the prevention of homelessness. It will engage the sector and enhance awareness of tenancy sustainment measures that can be accessed to prevent people moving into homelessness. It will also seek to provide consistency in the response across providers.

13. Convene a Co-design Working Group/s to develop a supportive housing framework that underpins the policy being developed.
This will define the service continuum and requirements to deliver an effective supportive housing model. It will leverage expertise in the sector, align with the existing policy under development and provide consistency in the delivery of supportive housing across providers.
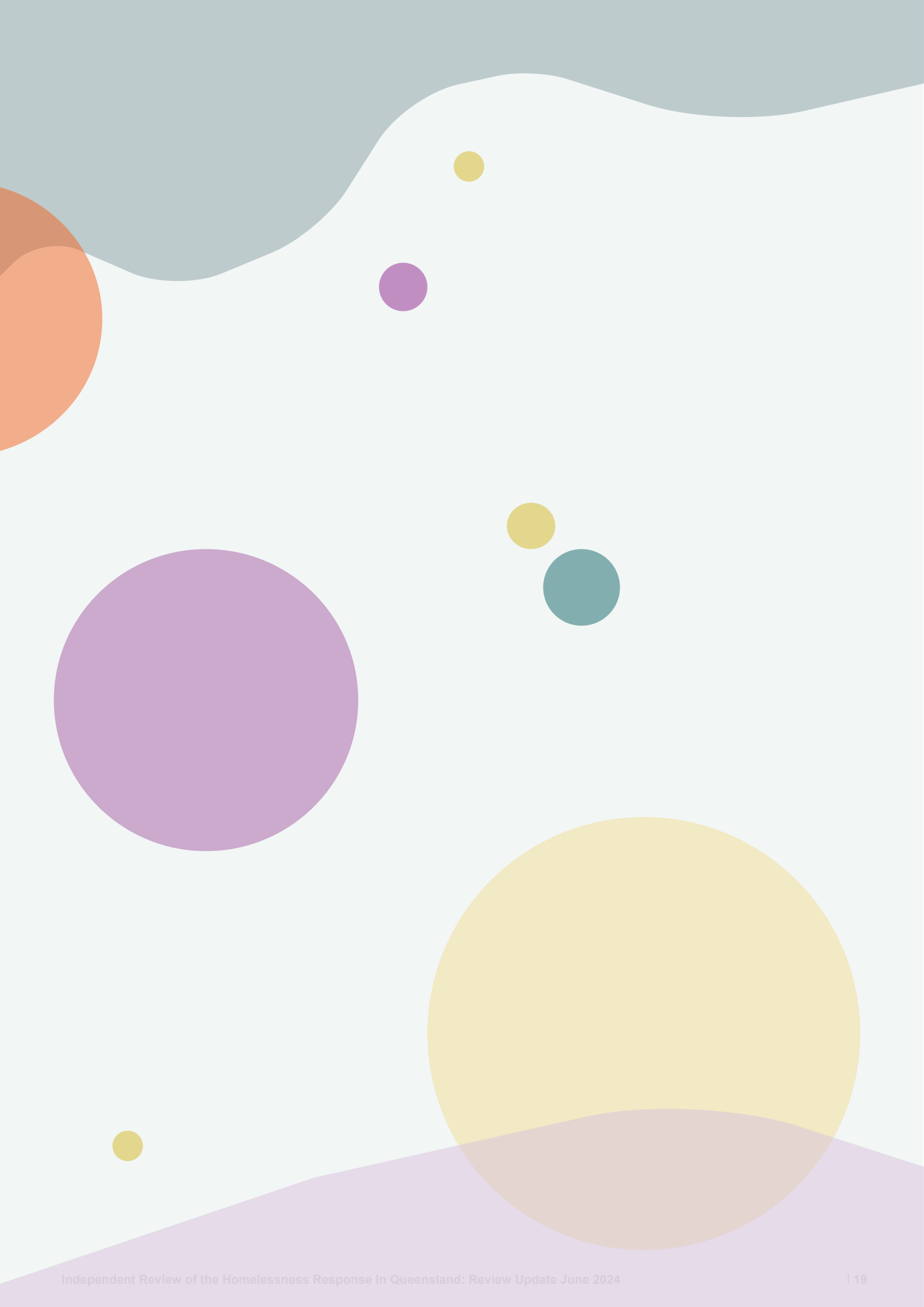
What's next?

At this early stage the review has identified several key areas that require further investigation to inform system reforms and improve the response to homelessness.

We want to make sure that the next phase of the review leads to meaningful recommendations for sustainable improvements in service delivery and support for addressing homelessness in Queensland. A key focus of further work will be to identify emerging outcomes-based practices that can be scaled or supported as we move towards ending homelessness.

The review will continue to be conducted independently, in partnership with the sector, government agencies and the communities of impacted Queenslanders.

"[we need] a more holistic approach that extends beyond temporary shelter provision… we need long-term supportive housing to help individuals maintain stability and avoid recurring homelessness."

Person with lived experience of homelessness

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