Supporting people to exit long-term homelessness

A SACRED HEART MISSION STRATEGY
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Over 105,000 people are experiencing homelessness in Australia.

Around 22,000 people across the country are trapped in a cycle of long-term homelessness.

We have a plan to support people out of long-term homelessness so they can realise their full potential.

Our goals are:

• To achieve a measurable reduction in the number of people experiencing long-term homelessness

• To demonstrate savings for government for each person who exits long-term homelessness

• To help create better targeted and more integrated services for people experiencing long-term homelessness

1 Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2011 census

2 Chamberlain, C., and Johnson, G., 2015 Australian Social Policy Conference presentation
About Sacred Heart Mission

Over thirty years of working with people experiencing homelessness, we’ve learnt a thing or two.

• We’ve learnt about entrenched, intergenerational disadvantage and social exclusion.
• We’ve learnt that trauma is both a cause and consequence of homelessness.
• We’ve learnt about resilience, the power of relationships and the strength of hope.
• We’ve learnt about the importance of home—both physical and otherwise.
• Most of all, we’ve learnt that all of us are better off when we expand our circles to include society’s most vulnerable members.

Our vision is of an inclusive, fair and compassionate community, which enables people to overcome disadvantage and realise their full potential.

Our mission is to build people’s capacity to participate more fully in community life, by addressing the underlying causes of deep, persistent disadvantage and social exclusion.

What is homelessness?

According to the most recent census, over 105,000 people are experiencing homelessness.

For many people, homelessness is due to limited affordable housing options.

Around 1 in 10 people are experiencing housing stress.³

There are over 32,000 people on Victoria’s public housing wait list alone.⁴

Lacking support from family, friends, community or the services system, a financial shock like losing a job could push you into homelessness.

Adequate housing is a human right.⁵

A safe, secure, affordable home provides us with security, choice and control over our lives.

It provides the physical foundation for solutions to mental and physical health conditions, as well as full participation in society.

Affordable housing is a necessary part of ending homelessness.

but long-term homelessness is more complex.

³ ‘Housing stress’ means paying more than 30% of your income on rent. See: housingstressed.org.au/get-the-facts
for more information.


What is long-term homelessness?

Many clients at Sacred Heart Mission have lived through family violence, chronic physical ill-health, long-term unemployment, mental ill-health, substance dependence, social isolation and/or trauma. Any one of these issues in isolation can make life seem unmanageable, impossible or hopeless.

Most people experiencing long-term homelessness have multiple difficulties to grapple with. These issues compound to make the experience exponentially more complex and challenging to overcome. This complexity is often related to early childhood trauma. In a recent study, 9 of 10 participants experiencing long-term homelessness were exposed to trauma in childhood.

This same research has demonstrated a cyclical interrelationship between trauma exposure, mental ill-health, social disadvantage and long-term homelessness. The interrelationship among the cycle’s elements means that they drive and influence other elements. This creates multiple potential barriers to recovery.

For example, trauma can lead to mental health difficulties, which can lead to social disadvantage and difficulty maintaining a tenancy. Indeed, all of these difficulties can feed in to each other, creating a cycle of long-term homelessness.

A diagram representing this relationship is on the right.

Explanatory maintenance model of the relationship between trauma exposure, mental health difficulties, social disadvantage, and long-term homelessness


8 Ibid
Once this cycle has begun it may be easy to feel ‘trapped’ in it.

It can be hard to see any doors out. People may feel a sense of confusion and chaos.

It can also be hard to reach any doors out. The social housing system is filled to capacity, so finding affordable long-term housing often takes many years. It’s nearly impossible to find affordable accommodation in the private rental market if you’re unable to work.

Even once you obtain stable housing, it may be difficult to integrate socially, overcome substance dependence, or manage your mental health. Finding strong community supports is a challenge for many of our clients.

If you are trapped in this cycle you are also more likely to engage with the criminal justice, hospital or mental health systems which is very costly.

Long-term homelessness across Australia

Of the 105,000 people across Australia experiencing homelessness, we estimate that around 22,000 are trapped in a cycle of long-term homelessness. 9 10

Homelessness is hard to measure. Long-term homelessness is even harder.

The census does not count the number of people experiencing long-term homelessness.

Some people, for example people sleeping rough, may not be counted on census night.

Any estimate of homelessness is probably conservative.

For the purpose of defining eligibility to a targeted program, Sacred Heart Mission defines an experience of long-term homelessness as: at least three episodes of homelessness over the past three years or sleeping rough continuously for the last 12 months.

Long-term homelessness is an indicator that the service system is failing people with complex needs.

At Sacred Heart Mission, we believe we can do better.

9 Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2011 census

10 Around 22% of people experiencing homelessness are experiencing long-term homelessness, according to Chamberlain, C., and Johnson, G., Australian Social Policy Conference 2015
Finding a door out of homelessness

Sacred Heart Mission offers people a door out of the cycle of long-term homelessness through both supported accommodation and individualised support options.

We know that exiting long-term homelessness is not about a housing solution alone.

Rather, coordinated support and a trusting relationship allow clients to rebuild a sense of control and empowerment.

By harnessing the client’s resilience through strengths-based practice, one improvement can build on another as the client regains hope and learns to better manage day to day life.

As a trauma-informed organisation, we recognise the impacts of trauma, which informs and guides all of our interactions with the people who access our services.

Through wrapping support around clients they are able to achieve a range of positive outcomes:

- SUSTAINED HOUSING
- HEALTH & WELL BEING
- INDEPENDENCE
- SOCIAL PARTICIPATION
- ECONOMIC PARTICIPATION

These outcomes reflect that a multi-dimensional approach is required to support people to overcome deep and persistent disadvantage.

The capacity to obtain and sustain suitable housing is strongly influenced by a range of factors including: physical and mental health, access to services, social connection, and the potential for meaningful contribution to society through social and economic participation.

Supporting people in this way demands longer-term engagement, stronger relationships and more support than the current system allows.
Exiting long-term homelessness

All of our services are available to support people experiencing long-term homelessness. We provide an integrated response from initial access at our engagement hub to long-term support as clients age.

In addition, we offer two targeted service models to support people with complex needs to exit long-term homelessness:

- Supported accommodation
- Individualised planned support

**Supported accommodation**

Sacred Heart Mission has three supported accommodation programs, through which we offer on-site support 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. We are able to step up the intensity of support when necessary and step down to encourage independence. Through respectful regular contact we develop trusting relationships with residents and build an inclusive community through regular activities such as excursions, gardening and creative arts.

Our **Rooming House Plus Program (RHPP)** offers supported long-term accommodation to 67 residents. All RHPP residents have experienced homelessness and 90% have a mental health diagnosis.

**Bethlehem community** also provides safe, supported medium- and long-term accommodation for 27 residents. There are two facilities: 10 women living in community and another 17 in independent living units.

**The Sacred Heart Community (Aged Care)** provides a specialist residential aged care service, including end of life care. It is a home for life in which older people who have experienced homelessness or financial disadvantage can live in safety and rebuild their social connections.

In each of these programs clients are supported to exit the cycle of long-term homelessness through a combination of housing and support that is flexible and responsive.

“I hope that Bethlehem continues to grow. I wish there were more places like it for women in crisis.

I shudder to think what would have happened to me if there had been no Bethlehem.”

**RESIDENT AT BETHLEHEM SUPPORTED ACCOMMODATION FACILITY**
**Individualised planned support**

We offer case management to access housing as well as a range of supports, including legal, health, mental health and substance abuse services. We also support people with skills to help them sustain their tenancy.

Through government funding we can provide people with 13 weeks of Transitional Homelessness Support.

Through a small amount of government funding we are also able to offer 26 weeks of intensive support to 12 women thorough our Women Housing and Complex Needs Project (WHCN).

Sacred Heart Mission has also designed, piloted and funded the Journey to Social Inclusion (J2Si) a program which provides a higher level of coordinated and intensive supports for people with multiple and complex needs.

J2Si offers three years of intensive wrap-around support including case management and service coordination. This level of intensity and consistency allows the longer-term engagement required to exit the cycle of long-term homelessness.

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**Journey to Social Inclusion (J2Si) pilot**

From 2009 – 2012 conducted the J2Si pilot, combined with a rigorous independent evaluation.

The evaluation demonstrated that:

- When people successfully manage their complex needs, their reliance on the service system is reduced
- Without J2Si, participants would be using more expensive health and emergency services, have higher levels of incarceration, be less likely to be housed, and more likely to die
- People with complex needs can live stable, fulfilling lives and be part of society

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"I don’t know where I’d be if I hadn’t been in contact with J2Si … they helped me with somewhere to live, helped me with my mental health issues, my physical health."

MAUREEN

AGED 43, J2SI PARTICIPANT
Key outcomes showing the difference the J2Si pilot made:

**Rapid Access to Housing**
J2Si participants were housed within 206 days compared to 410 days for the control group.

**Sustained Housing**
After 4 years (one year post J2Si support) 75% have maintained their housing.

**Homelessness**
31% of control group members remained homeless for the full three-years; the corresponding figure amongst J2Si participants was only 7%.

**Health**
Reduced use of emergency hospitals and days hospitalised by 80%.

**Mental Health**
Reduced use of psychiatric wards by 66%.

**Savings**
Delivered savings to taxpayers of between $14,978 and $32,080 per participant.

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**Bill**

As a child, Bill experienced severe, ongoing abuse at the hands of a trusted caregiver. He spent his teenage years in state care and did not learn to read and write. Throughout his life, severe alcoholism exacerbated a learned tendency toward violence. Not taking anti-psychotic medications also resulted in chronic mental ill-health and disorganisation.

A conviction for physical assault meant he spent most of his 20s in prison.

All up, he was homeless for about 30 years before J2Si.

Since J2Si, Bill has been living in public housing for over four years. He is punctual and regular with rent payments.

Now in his fifties, he has learned to read and do basic maths.

He has a GP and is compliant with medication to manage his mental health.

His alcohol use has decreased and is in better control.

He has not been involved with the police, nor involved in any violent incidents.
J2Si phase 2

We have partnered with St Mary’s House of Welcome and VincentCare (Ozanam Community Centre) to offer J2Si to 60 people across inner Melbourne.

J2Si Phase 2 will allow us to solidify the research base by:

- enhancing the service model with learnings from the pilot
- testing the scalability of the program across Melbourne’s inner-south and northern suburbs
- demonstrating even greater cost savings to government

The elements of the Phase 2 service model are:

**ASSERTIVE CASE MANAGEMENT**

- Flexible, individualised, relationship-based support to empower and coach the person through the recovery journey to achieve their goals
- Coordinate access to mainstream and specialist services through strategic partnerships

**RAPID HOUSING ACCESS AND SUSTAINING TENANCIES SUPPORT**

- A partnership between clients, J2Si and housing providers to assist people to quickly secure and sustain permanent housing and create a sense of home and community

**TRAUMA INFORMED PRACTICE**

- A trauma-informed team who use trauma informed practice tools and frameworks to support people’s recovery

**BUILDING SKILLS FOR INCLUSION**

- Dedicated time, resources, and participation opportunities to promote social and economic inclusion within the broader community

**FOSTERING INDEPENDENCE**

- Build on people’s strengths and self-reliance to increase their choice and control over their life and environment including sustainable connections with specialist and mainstream services
Ending long-term homelessness across Australia

Over the next few years we plan to roll out J2Si across the country.

Our vision is to have the J2Si program delivered across Australia through a Sacred Heart Mission licensing model (to ensure quality control). We will work with community partners across the homelessness sector to deliver the model.

A Centre of Excellence will be established to gather, analyse and disseminate evidence of the impact of J2Si on how to end long-term homelessness.

Our evidence indicates that expanding J2Si across the country will deliver a measurable reduction in the number of Australians experiencing long-term homelessness. We know that supporting people to exit long-term homelessness is the right thing to do. The J2Si research also demonstrates that this will save money for both the community and for government.

Ending long-term homelessness across Australia is not something Sacred Heart Mission is able to do alone. We need close support and partnerships from corporates, government and philanthropic funders.

Contact us

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