Ending street homelessness in the inner city

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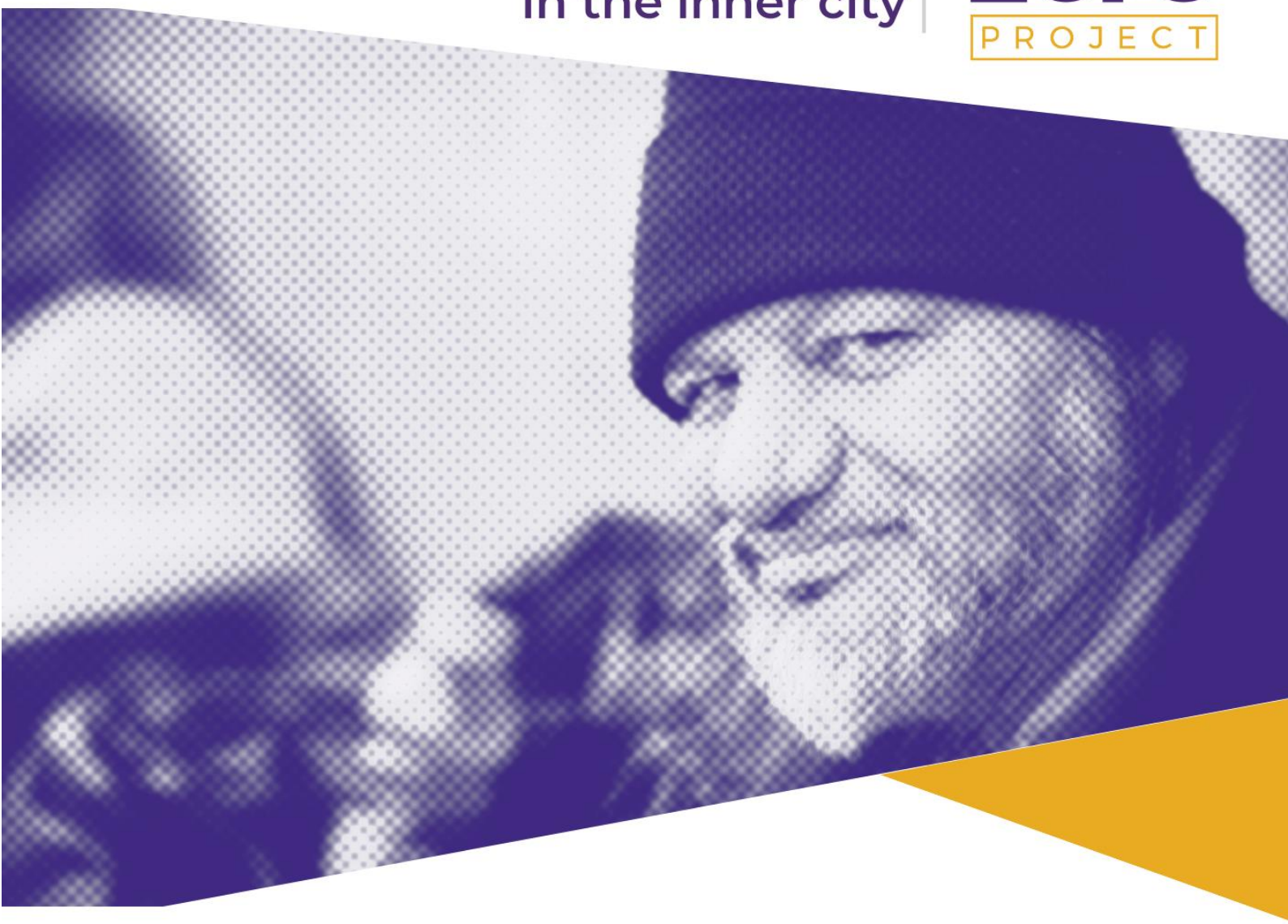

Adelaide Zero Project

Understanding barriers and opportunities for Housing First in Adelaide: data learnings, reflections and tools

December 2021

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Acknowledgments

The authors would like to thank the Mercy Foundation for their financial support for this project, as well as the many stakeholders in the Adelaide Zero Project who gave freely of their time and opinions, providing important insights into how Housing First can and is working within the bounds of the Adelaide Zero Project. A special thanks also to Jung Yoon for her work producing the graphics included in the report.

We acknowledge and pay our respects to the Kaurna People, the traditional custodians whose ancestral lands we work and live on. We acknowledge the deep feelings of attachment and relationship of the Kaurna people to country and we respect and value their past, present and ongoing connection to the land and cultural beliefs.

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Suggested citation
Tually, S., McKinley, K., Rowley, C. and McDougall, K. 2021, Adelaide Zero Project, Understanding barrier and opportunities for Housing First: data learnings, reflections and tools, report for the Mercy Foundation prepared by The Australian Alliance for Social Enterprise and Adelaide Zero Project, December 2021.

Introduction

This report presents the findings of both a deep dive into experiential data within the Adelaide Zero Project, and reflections on such evidence and learnings from the Adelaide Zero Project to date to advance thinking around orienting service delivery to a Housing First approach for people experiencing chronic or rough sleeping homelessness.

There remains significant interest in Housing First as an approach for supporting people moving on from homelessness in Australia.

This project is timely for a range of reasons. There remains significant interest in Housing First as an approach for supporting people moving on from homelessness in Australia, reflected in the inclusion of the Housing First approach in recent state and territory homelessness plans (see, for example, *Our Housing Future 2020-2030*, the SA Government's 10-year housing, homelessness and support plan; Western Australia's *All Paths Lead to a Home* 2020-2030 homelessness strategy and *Homelessness Action Plan 2020-2025*; and Victoria's *homelessness and rough sleeping action plan*). Additionally, the extra spotlight shone on homelessness during the Covid-19 pandemic has also illuminated the importance of suitable, permanent housing, with tailored support, for individual, family and community health and wellbeing (Pawson et al. 2021).

The Australian Alliance to End Homelessness (AAEH) is driving the growing national movement to end homelessness in Australia. This movement adopts and promotes Housing First as the ultimate goal of support for people experiencing homelessness. The AAEH's Advance to Zero (AtoZ) methodology (AAEH 2021a) is founded on Housing First as a core principle and is aimed specifically at supporting people to move on from rough sleeping. This is the key focus in the numerous communities the AAEH is collaborating with, for example, Adelaide, the City of Port Phillip, Brisbane, Perth and Fremantle (AAEH 2021b). The AAEH movement and methodology mirrors international practice through the Built for Zero campaigns in the US and Canada, where key stakeholders are coalescing to both secure permanent housing outcomes for people experiencing homelessness first and foremost, and to ensure homelessness is rare, brief and non-recurrent (AAEH 2021a; Community Solutions 2018, 2021).

At the more local (South Australian) level, Housing First is a stated principle of the Adelaide Zero Project itself, as well as an ideological and practice foundation of the newly established homelessness alliances. The homelessness alliances are driving homelessness service design, delivery and sector integration state-wide. How the Adelaide Zero Project, and the housing, homelessness and support system of which it is a part, understands and activates Housing First as an ideology and approach remains underdeveloped, necessitating this focussed investigation into the understandings of, barriers to and opportunities for Housing First.

Other communities can learn from this investigation, particularly given how central aligning the right housing and support to people's needs is to ending homelessness. Communities starting or already on their journey to ending homelessness could replicate the steps undertaken in Adelaide, identifying their own understanding(s) of Housing First and the barriers to, and opportunities for, implementing a Housing First system. The practical tools developed as part of this project—the *Housing First assessment and implications matrix* (Figure 6), the *Continuous improvement spectrum for Housing First system orientation*

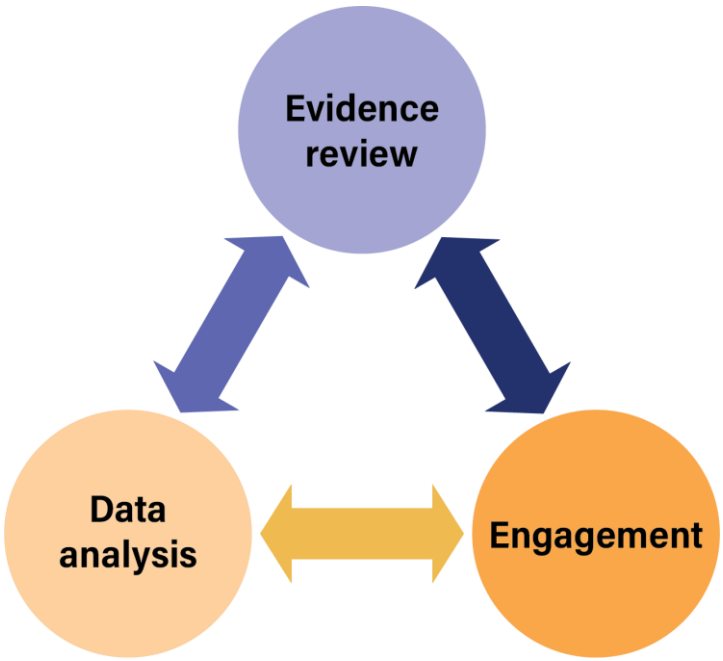
(Figure 7) and the *Adelaide Zero Project continuous improvement framework*[1]—can be applied in any context to advance Housing First understandings, thinking and ways of working. Additionally, the *continuous improvement framework* tool developed for Mercy Foundation by the Adelaide Zero Project (Rowley and Jones 2021) as an aligned component of this work should also be helpful for communities wanting to test cycles of change in relation to Housing First or other innovations.

Methodology

The Adelaide Zero Project holds a wealth of qualitative and quantitative data relevant to people's experiences of homelessness and their housing and support needs. The data also provides insight into the processes and learnings for supporting people to move on from rough sleeping homelessness. Such data make the Adelaide Zero Project an interesting and useful case study for identifying and understanding barriers to and opportunities for implementing a Housing First focused homelessness support system.

A range of research methods were employed in this investigation to understand where the Adelaide Zero Project, and the support systems of which it is a part, are in terms of Housing First (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Research approach



[1] https://www.dunstan.org.au/resources/adelaide-zero-project-continuous-improvement-framework/

The methods were constituted as several research steps or activities:

1. **Review of the relevant evidence and literature**, including practice documents, on Housing First. This step also involved investigation of Adelaide Zero Project documents and processes around housing allocations, the Adelaide Zero Project and AAEH model, as well as relevant literature about the SA homelessness system.

2. **Thematic analysis of Adelaide Zero Project data**, including:
   - de-identified Housing Allocations Meeting notes from two time points (September 2020 and March 2021) including advocacy and property notes.
   - de-identified advocacy notes from the Coordinated Care List for three time points (November 2020, January 2021, March 2021) and data about a particular complex 'case' across much of 2020 and some of 2021.
   - de-identified By-Name List data, derived from the VI-SPDAT, particularly responses to the safe and well question, as well as other domains pointing to the specific support and housing needs of individuals.

Housing First challenges the idea that people must be 'housing ready' in order to be housed or to receive support.

Thematic analysis involved identifying ideas or topics raised repeatedly in the data, thus forming a range of consistent 'themes' then aligned to the categories of 'barriers' and 'opportunities' to successful housing outcomes.

Once a range of data had been explored and no new themes emerged, we concluded that a saturation point had been reached and the analysis of data from that source ceased.

3. **Engagement with key Adelaide Zero Project groups and stakeholders**, including the Housing Allocations and Coordinated Care groups, to determine their understandings of Housing First and barriers and opportunities. Transcripts from these interviews and focus groups were also thematically analysed.

The investigation received approval from the UniSA Business Negligible Risk Ethics Committee (protocol 022-2021). Approval was also sought and secured from the Adelaide Zero Project's own data request process, which is managed by the project's Data and Evaluation Working Group. Members of the Adelaide Zero Project's Coordinated Care and Housing Allocations groups were also provided with the opportunity to express any concerns held over the use of deidentified case notes from their meetings, with no concerns raised. Deidentification of case notes was performed by a member of these groups, with significant attention paid to removing identifying context information to ensure individual anonymity.

What is Housing First?

Housing First is both a set of principles and a housing model. The approach positions housing as a basic and unconditional right, and centres safe and secure housing as the first and primary need of a person experiencing homelessness (Tsemberis 2010).

Five core principles underpin the approach:

- housing;
- choice;
- recovery;
- support; and,
- community.

Individual choice and self-determination are central to housing and service delivery, participation in programs addressing mental health issues and substance abuse is voluntary, programs are client-centred, and housing, clinical and social support based on the needs of the individual continues for as long as is required and should not be tied to housing provision.

Along with the core principles outlined above, Housing First can be distinguished from other models – as well as applied differently depending on context – when considered as:

a) a philosophy;
b) (ideally) embedded in a systems approach;
c) as an operationalised program; and,
d) provision of support by teams (see Canadian Observatory on Homelessness 2021 for a more in-depth discussion).

Clinical and community psychologist Sam Tsemberis is considered the founder of the model, developing the Pathways to Housing model (later Pathways Housing First) in New York in the 1990s. The Pathways Housing First model is evidence-based, well researched and generally considered the 'default' Housing First model; the model against which fidelity in implementation is considered and debated.

Rapid or 'as rapid as possible' placement in secure, permanent housing and wrap around support without preconditions are defining elements which must be present in a Housing First service model.

Notably, the Pathways Housing First approach was 'not designed as a response to every form of homelessness' (Pleace et al. 2019: 12). Instead, the intention of the model is to provide a pathway out of homelessness for people, especially rough sleepers, who have experienced long-term and recurrent periods of homelessness, and who have high and complex needs, such as severe mental illness and/or addiction issues. In this respect, the model targets people who 'have not been well served by traditional approaches' (Polvere et al. 2014). Housing First models can and do also target other specific populations, including families, veterans and youth, and in some places the approach is being used with the broader homeless population.

Rapid or 'as rapid as possible' placement in secure, permanent housing and wrap around support without preconditions are defining elements which must be present in a Housing First service model. In Australia, like many other places over the past two decades, Housing First and related approaches to homelessness have begun to replace (and challenge) the traditional 'treatment first' or 'staircase' approach, which assumes people experiencing homelessness must be 'housing ready' (Keast et al. 2011). Housing readiness here includes such things as a demonstrated willingness among people seeking support to change their 'behaviours' such as anti-social behaviours and substance use issues, as well as commitment to consistently paying rent; to possess or commit to developing independent living skills prior to assuming a tenancy; and/or to be sober or mentally well before being sustainably housed. By contrast, Housing First assumes people with complex needs in particular are best placed to benefit from support programs and services once they are off the streets and in safe and secure housing. For this reason, preconditions such as sobriety are not a feature of Housing First-type models. Individual choice and self-determination are central to housing and service delivery. This includes voluntary participation in programs addressing mental health and substance use issues , ensuring programs are client-centred, and housing, clinical and social support based on the needs of the individual continues for as long as is required and should not be tied to housing provision (Kenny 2016; Parkinson and Parsell 2018).

Housing affordability, availability and suitability remain significant constraints around implementing Housing First.

Housing First recognises that people are the experts in their own lives even when they are experiencing issues around mental health or substance use.

Housing First recognises that people are the experts in their own lives even when they are experiencing issues around mental health or substance use. Harm reduction and recovery, rather than abstinence from substance use, underpins the Housing First approach, though this is not always made explicit in practice (Watson et al. 2017).

Housing First is widely considered to be an evidence-based model and has been investigated across various jurisdictions and adaptions of the model (Keenan et al. 2020). To date, evidence has shown that Housing First programs achieve impressive results for people to access and sustain housing outcomes (Mackie et al. 2018). Emphasis on rapid (re)housing and the level and duration of post-housing support are key elements of the success of the models (Brackertz et al. 2016). In saying this, it is important to note that although housing retention is the goal, eviction or tenancy loss is not seen as a failure overall in the Housing First ethos (Jones et al. 2019). Tenancy breakdown should not lead to the cessation of support and can be viewed instead as an opportunity for reflection about peoples' needs (Perrens and Fildes

'...housing is the prerequisite that allows other problems to be solved...'
(Y-Foundation 2017: 9)

2019). Tenants may require one or more placements, for a range of reasons, before achieving sustainment of tenancy (Vallesi et al. 2020). This reality stands in contrast to 'traditional' interventions or models, where not only do people have to show they are 'housing ready' before being housed, but they are at risk of eviction if they experience a mental health episode or relapse into substance use and their post-housing supports are unsuitable or fall away (Greenwood et al. 2013).

Housing First: some caveats

The conditionality common in 'housing ready' and staircase-type programs is explicitly excluded from a 'pure' Housing First model. However practical adoption of a Housing First ethos does not preclude the these conditions from being imposed. Some of the challenges to effective implementation are more rigid than others through effects of government housing policy, availability of resources and service provider practices and ethos. (Johnson et al. 2012; Kertesz and Johnson 2017).

Housing First 'has implications for systems approaches to ending homelessness and for program models'
(Polvere et al. 2014)

It is essential to use a strengths-based and 'inclusive and affirming service provision' alongside Housing First to ensure it remains a positive solution for populations who are over-represented amongst people experiencing homelessness or who may be more likely to have particular vulnerabilities (Shelton and Abramovich 2019: 24).

Additionally, Housing First is not the only or best model for all people experiencing homelessness. Community living may not suit every person moving on from homelessness. Softer institutional responses such as housing with a live-in carer or caretaker are needed for people who prefer not to or cannot for a range of reasons live independently in the community.. Similarly, ongoing supports may not be appropriate or necessary to achieve sustainable outcomes for all people or groups. Both of these realities point to the need for ongoing review of people's housing and support circumstances as they move through the journeys on from homelessness (Vallesi et al. 2020).

It is also important to acknowledge that the Housing First approach does not solve poverty, a key driver of homelessness (Johnson 2012), nor does the model address the lack of affordable housing experienced across most of Australia. Additionally, the model does not explicitly work to create a supply of the types of housing people moving on from homelessness want and need (Isogai 2019). Housing affordability, availability and suitability remain significant constraints around implementing Housing First. These are important considerations in any discussion of orienting a homelessness (and beyond) system to Housing First, highlighting that housing and support systems must be ready – adequate supply pipelines of housing and support – to ensure a Housing First model can operate in the way it is intended.

Housing First in Australia

Models based on or informed by the Housing First approach have been implemented (and evaluated) across Australia (Wood et al. 2017; Vallesi et al. 2018, 2020; Perrens and Fildes 2019; Bullen et al. 2016; Parsell et al. 2013, 2016; Mason and Grimbeek 2013, Conroy et al. 2014). Such models gained popularity on the back of *The Road Home*, the 2008 Australian Government White Paper on homelessness and the last policy document and significant investment directly addressing homelessness nation-wide (Brkic 2020).

Australian Housing First models have been adapted or tailored to meet a range of needs, including:

- locational characteristics, such as the dynamics of homelessness locally, challenges with regional housing markets and service capacities;
- levels of care; and,
- to serve populations with diverse needs, such as youth, Indigenous and culturally and linguistically diverse populations.

A range of challenges continue to exist to broader-scale adoption of the Housing First model, not least of which is the lack of a national homelessness agenda centering Housing First in policy and practice, backed by the resources needed to support the approach.

Small-scale Housing First programs/projects have been implemented in some cities in Australia, including:

- Common Ground initiatives: single site, high density and mixed-tenancy housing developments have been opened in Adelaide (from 2006), Melbourne (2010), Sydney (2011), Brisbane (2012), Hobart (2012), Port Augusta, SA (2012) and Canberra (2015). The Common Ground model of permanent supportive housing offers residents some co-located services as well as recreational, training and other opportunities. 24/7 concierge support is another key element (for the six critical principles of the model see Mission Australia 2016; see also Verdouw and Habibis 2018; Bullen et al. 2016); and,
- Youth Foyers: single site housing developments providing intensive case management and linked to education, training and employment opportunities, with participation in such opportunities aimed at providing young people with a pathway to access and sustain permanent housing on exit from the Foyer. Foyers and related services are operating or in development in most states and territories and at present SA has one Foyer, in Port Adelaide (Foyer Foundation 2018; Launch Housing 2021; Gaetz and Scott 2012).

In line with the principles of Housing First, wrap around support and intensive case management are central elements of each of these models.

Culturally appropriate Housing First models and services are an emerging area of Housing First program evolution in Australia, reflecting similar focuses in other colonial countries such as Canada and New Zealand (i.e. 'Indigenising Housing First'; see Bodor et al. 2011, Distasio et al. 2019, Gaetz et al. 2021 on Canadian models; Lawson Te-Aho 2019, Tīaho Limited (2021a, 2021b) for New Zealand examples and perspectives). As with other

adaptations of Housing First, such models have also been designed specifically for youth and other cohorts.

A notable Australian adaptation of Housing First for Indigenous Australians is the WA-based Wongee Mia (see Vallesi and Wood 2021; Vallesi et al. 2020). A pilot initiative linked to the longer running *50 Lives 50 Homes* project in Perth, Wongee Mia takes a family-centred approach to support people experiencing chronic rough sleeping toward and into housing (family as caseload), rather than the individual-centred approach which has been the norm in homelessness support programs, including Housing First programs (Vallesi et al. 2020). The Wongee Mia approach responds to local context and cultural specificity, tying together housing services and Indigenous values in ways that other commentators (e.g. Habibis et al. 2013) have suggested can improve Indigenous housing access and tenancy sustainment and in turn, have the potential to reduce entry to homelessness via this pathway.

There is seemingly a renewed appetite for and focus on Housing First in policy and practice, with clear Australian principles and communities working to end homelessness strongly committed to the approach.

Challenges to implementing Housing First

While several Housing First (informed) programs, projects and initiatives have been rolled out across Australia as discussed, it is fair to say that not all service providers have been effectively engaged in the process of moving toward Housing First as the primary means for ending homelessness. A range of challenges continue to exist to broader-scale adoption of the Housing First model, not least of which is the lack of a national homelessness agenda which centers Housing First in policy and practice and is backed by the resources needed to support the approach. Necessary resources here include pipelines of suitable (affordable, secure and appropriate) permanent housing and social/community supports (tailored to need, level and duration) to ensure access to, and the sustainability of, permanent housing outcomes. Australia's private rental market, although expanding, cannot be relied upon to deliver permanent housing outcomes for disadvantaged and vulnerable people (Parkinson and Parsell 2018).

In line with the principles of Housing First, wrap around support and intensive case management are central elements of existing Australian models.

Australia's current housing system does not have the capacities in terms of the supply, design and location of stock, its affordability, or a rights-based view and understanding of housing and alignment with support. All of these elements are needed to sustainably assist people moving on from any type of homelessness, including people with more acute and complex needs. There are often long delays to finding permanent homes for people moving on from homelessness. As a result, access to and delivery of post-housing support (where this can be secured at appropriate level and duration) may also be delayed (Johnson 2012; Kenny 2016; Kuzmanovski 2018; Bullen and Baldry 2018; 2019). Delays accessing housing can compromise or even outright limit the supports available to people with complex needs such as mental health or substance use issues (Bullen and Fisher 2015).

Program-, funding- and system-focuses on short to medium-term accommodation options and transitional support for people experiencing homelessness. This is aligned with market-driven ideals of 'housing readiness', continue to dominate service delivery and are likely to do so until sufficient resources and capacities are built (and constantly added to) in terms of appropriate permanent homes.

A renewed focus on Housing First

In 2020, Homelessness Australia released a set of Housing First Principles for Australia (Dodd et al. 2020), incorporating learnings from European, UK and North American practice and principles as well as input from Australian Housing First practitioners, including Indigenous Australian perspectives. The Australian Housing First principles have been defined as:

- people have a right to a home;
- flexible support for as long as it is needed;
- housing and support are separated;
- choice and self-determination;
- active engagement without coercion;
- recovery-oriented practice;
- social and community inclusion; and,
- harm reduction approach.

The principles have been endorsed by the AAEH as a core component of the methodology for ending homelessness nationally.

Housing First versus other housing-led approaches in practice

The following matrix (Figure 2) outlines the characteristics of Housing First as a key approach to ending homelessness, contrasted with the still dominant mode of housing-led approaches for addressing homelessness in Australia (housing readiness). These housing-led approaches can be read as a spectrum of responses in terms of current practice in South Australia. Moving to the right of the spectrum is ideal.

Between housing readiness and the Housing First approaches on the spectrum we have articulated a transitional housing-led response for ending homelessness, something we call supported throughput. In practice, supported throughput is an alignment of transitional or temporary accommodation (with accompanying post-housing support) to Housing First principles. This approach may be the best option for some people moving on from homelessness, for example people who choose this kind of stabilising environment or who want intensive on-site support. It may also suit homelessness support systems where evolution in service culture and infrastructure (away from significant portfolios of transitional accommodation) to Housing First is needed. This option, however, should always be a person's choice, low barrier, for the shortest possible time and linked to conversations and action about establishing long-term housing and support.

Figure 2: Matrix of general characteristics of homelessness to housing approaches

Housing readiness	Supported throughput	Housing First
Driven by housing market expectations of a 'good' or 'appropriate' tenant, i.e. tenant to prove worthiness and that they are a low risk proposition for a landlord Housing and support generally linked to tight program criteria, specified in or tied to funding criteria (i.e. program first approach) Generally requires behaviour change and onus is on person to actively and consistently engage with services, related to market expectations and program criteria (sobriety, detox, antisocial behaviour modification/monitoring, x number of strikes and tenancy terminated) Post-housing support is time limited (commonly 6 weeks to 6 months), tied to strict eligibility criteria, specific needs, type and duration of support, i.e. largely inflexible in how offering and how it can be used to support someone's needs Housing readiness is often structured as moves between crisis accommodation, transitional accommodation and then (hopefully) permanent accommodation Short-term tenancies commonplace, linked to proving worthiness and low risk (3, 6 month)	Transitional accommodation for stabilisation and shortest-timeframe possible, where chosen by and appropriate for person Transitional accommodation linked to a permanent housing and community/health/social support pathway, matched to type, level and duration of need (i.e. moving towards Housing First) Some program entry criteria, ideally not related to behaviour change, with some requirement to engage in some services to build living and life skills Reduced barriers to access temporary accommodation, with flexible support options. Expectations in line with pathway to access a permanent housing outcome Post (transitional) housing support identifies areas of living and life skills, and support to quickly support the tenant into permanent housing in the shortest-timeframe possible Transitional accommodation provides housing history/reference Pathway to a permanent housing option ideally identified before a person is placed in temporary accommodation (or very soon after their placement) Temporary accommodation provided for as long as required, however expectation for person, service and other agencies is arrangement is for the shortest-time possible before someone moves to permanent housing	No expectation for person to prove they are ready and able to sustain a tenancy Permanent housing option identified from the outset, with support provided to suit the individual's needs, which may change over time (i.e. may need to scale up or down) Permanent housing outcome linked to chosen and appropriate community/health/social support pathway, matched to person's type, level and duration of need No expectation of behaviour change or engagement with services Post-housing support is identified and delivered to support the needs of the person, evolving over time as chosen/appropriate Tenancy is secure and as permanent (long-term) as possible, and tenancy is not dependent on the person engaging with supports. Appropriate supports are identified and workers assertively engage with individuals to support the tenancy. Support needs are regularly reviewed for suitability and in line with a person's choice and control.

Learning from the Adelaide Zero Project's Housing First journey

Housing First is a foundational principle of the Adelaide Zero Project and has been since the project's inception. While most stakeholders in the project understand what Housing First means, there is widespread acknowledgement that the operational processes that are the mechanics of the project are a long way from Housing First, so is the housing and homelessness system in South Australia generally.

> **…in terms of supporting people to move from rough sleeping to housing unsurprisingly *it's actually having housing available*.**
>
> **(Stakeholder, Adelaide Zero Project)**

Barriers exist to Housing First at the system, agency, program and individual levels. Helpfully, though, identifying such barriers presents a range of opportunities to build a Housing First-oriented system, with this system sitting alongside services that are Safety First focused for women escaping domestic and family violence and Culturally Safe for Aboriginal people who want and need them (a definite work in progress).

> **…the issue with the Housing First for me is... it's not just about housing support…, it's about social support, whatever that looks like for that individual, but that can come first as well.**
>
> **(Stakeholder, Adelaide Zero Project)**

Barriers to Housing First

Our engagement with project stakeholders, as well as the deep dive into project data undertaken (including consideration of case coordination notes), illuminates a range of barriers around system alignment with Housing First. Such barriers relate to:

- the structure of the homelessness *system* as a whole (as well as interfacing systems), encompassing *agency* offerings, capacities, culture and practices and whether these meet or align with people's needs and challenges; and,
- how homelessness support *programs* are designed and delivered, including, for example, program cohort focus and program entry criteria. example, program cohort focus and program entry criteria.

> **We do have to push hard on other government departments…to come up with good responses for these people who need it. *Simply housing is just not enough in many cases*.**
>
> **(Stakeholder, Adelaide Zero Project/Covid-19 Emergency Accommodation for Rough Sleepers)**

Barriers to Housing First also exist at an individual level, related to people's often complex lived and living experiences.

> **Housing First is meant to mean you put… the appropriate supports around them but for that to happen the appropriate supports have to exist and often in our case [Aboriginal-specific services] they don't...**
>
> **(Stakeholder, Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisation)**

A deep dive into the Adelaide Zero Project's wealth of person-specific data builds a collective picture of the multiple barriers experienced by individuals and standing in the way of a Housing First system. Such barriers are a part of a complex, interconnected web (Figure 3), orbiting around a series of key barriers: mental health, multiple and complex needs, disability, trauma, the right support not being available, program criteria (limiting support or participation), a challenging housing history and a range of specific housing needs.

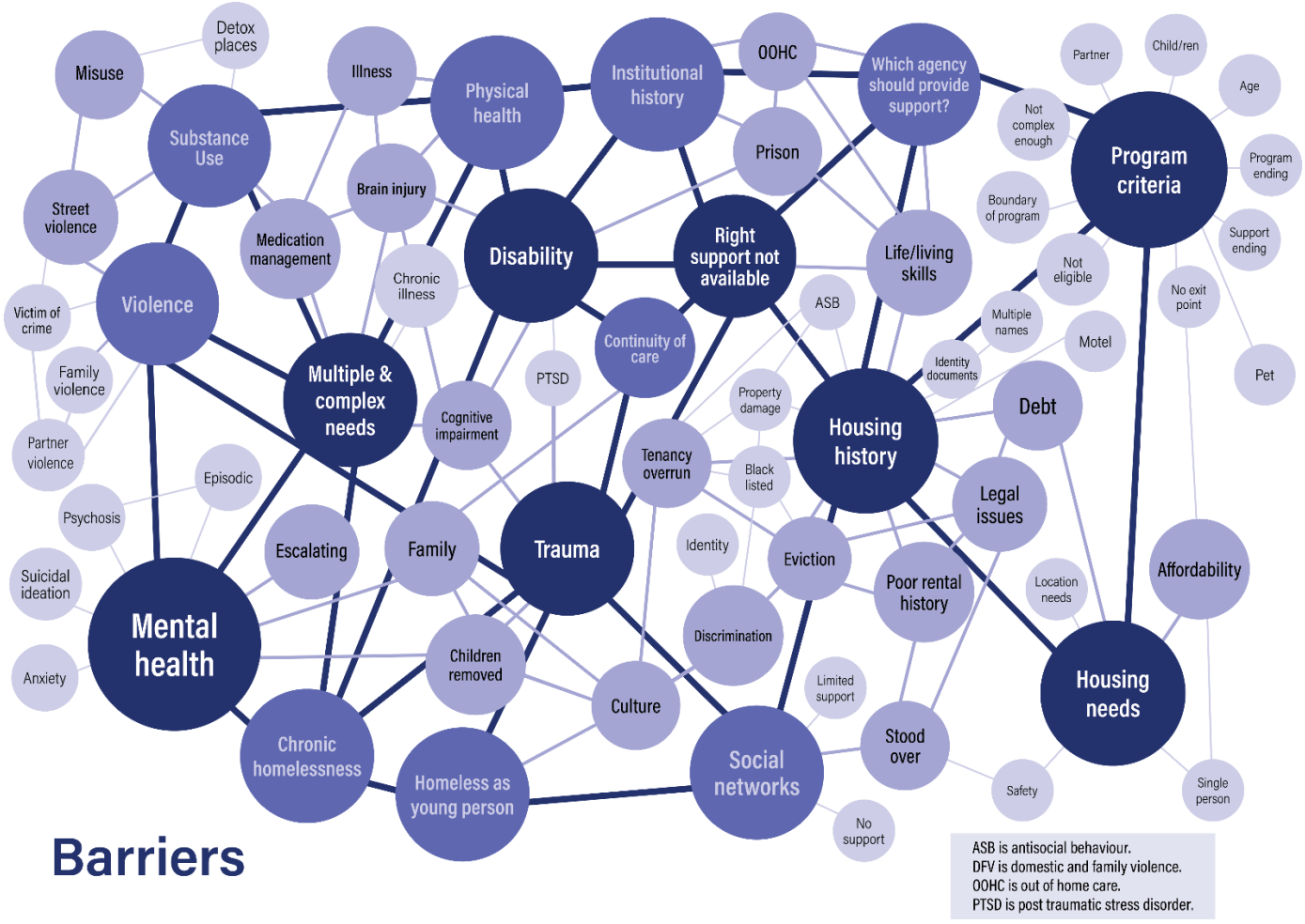
Systematic drawing out of the barriers to implementing a Housing First oriented system in the Adelaide context shows the not only the range of barriers, but how basic and simplistic some of them are, like:

- ensuring people have the identification documents they need to sign a lease or access support
- right through to deep and complex challenges, such as cultural or intergenerational trauma and its associated manifestations, which may be expressed as poor cultural connection and safety or violence
- being a victim of crime
- having co-morbidities, such as mental health and substance use issues; and,
- an acquired brain injury.

> **Because we don't have a holistically genuinely Housing First response... the team are asked a lot about what somebody's needs are... We've never worked with them housed, we can't answer that question and they can't answer that question even for themselves until they're in a position where they're safe and secure enough to have those conversations and to work that through.**
>
> **(Stakeholder, Adelaide Zero Project)**

> **The actual support at the time of allocation is pretty critical…getting someone off on the right foundation to you know hand over the keys and understanding the conditions of tenancies. That in partnership with tenancy management and support is a good formula when it's done well.**
>
> **(Stakeholder, Adelaide Zero Project)**

Figure 3: Barriers to Housing First, as identified in the context of the Adelaide Zero Project



Source: Authors. Barriers drawn from analysis of individual and service data and stakeholder interviews.

Note: the frequency and relative importance of barriers is indicated by the size of the circle around each barrier and the strength of the connections between barriers indicated by the intensity of connecting lines.

The shape and structure of wrap around supports to ensure a positive and sustainable housing outcome and individual wellbeing is brought into sharp focus when the relative importance of barriers across the rough sleeping population is considered in the way depicted in Figure 3. We (agencies and the system) need to understand and consider the strength of the links and relationships between barriers, which are realities in people's lives.

> **Three months [of post-housing support] is pretty flimsy you would have to say…and not a lot of time to create other support pathways.**
> **(Stakeholder, Adelaide Zero Project)**

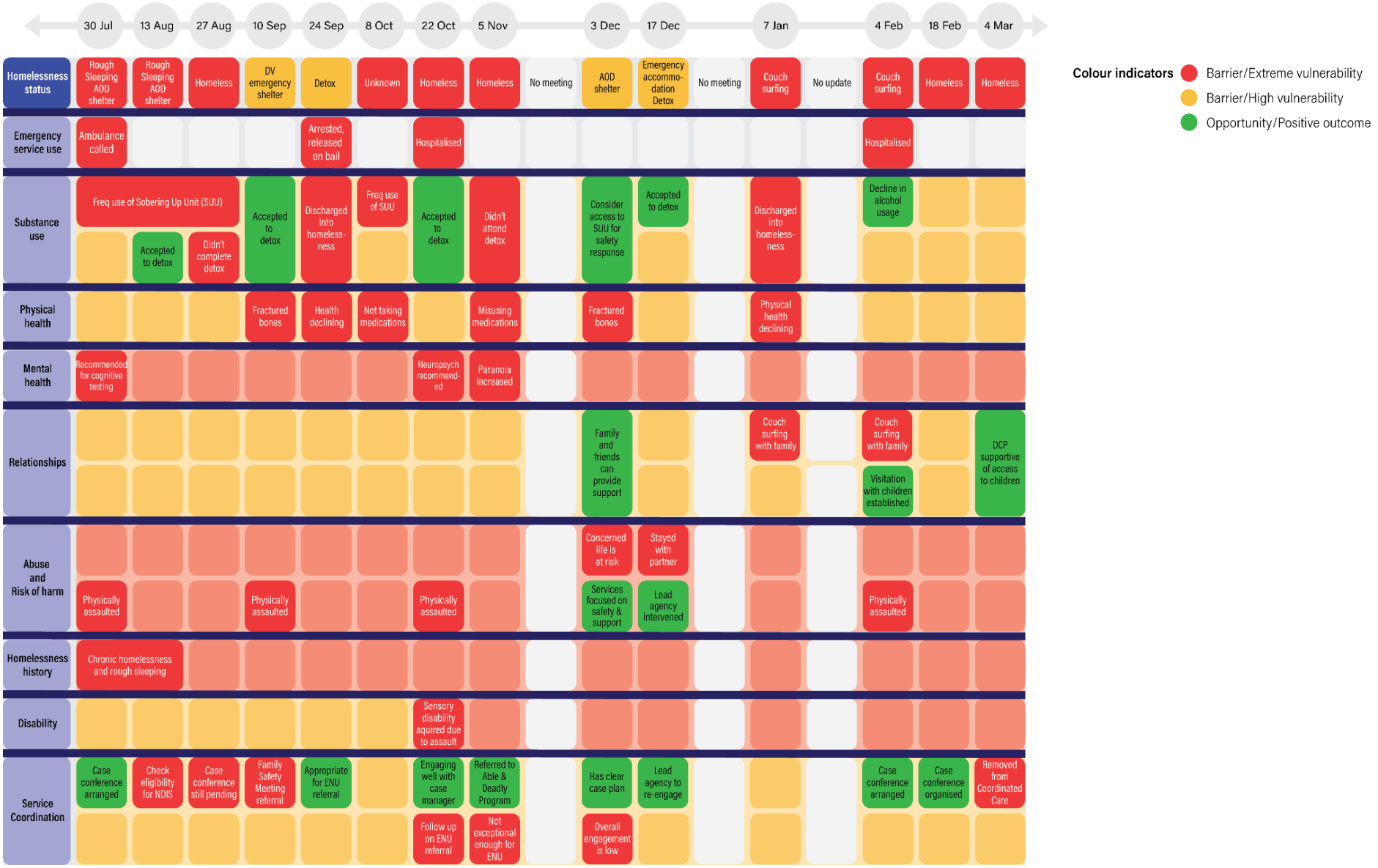
A more detailed representation of the multiple, diverse and more or less complex barriers experienced by individuals experiencing rough sleeping homelessness during their life journey is demonstrated at a very granular level in Figure 4, which presents the critical events—positive (green), negative (red) and in between (orange)—of a young Aboriginal woman supported through the Adelaide Zero Project's coordinated care (support alignment) group during 2020-2021.

> **There's so many services out there that consumers can't access because of discrimination, the labels of homelessness, they don't have a fixed address.**
> **(Stakeholder, Adelaide Zero Project)**

Emily's story, at least the part of her story where she was in the view of the Adelaide Zero Project, is underpinned by complex trauma, the removal of her children, chronic homelessness, family violence, intimate partner violence and abuse, very poor physical and mental health (including a likely existing cognitive disability), acquiring of a sensory disability, intersection with the justice system and significant substance abuse, including of prescribed medications. While Emily's case could be considered extreme, and it absolutely is, it is representative of the types of complex, high vulnerability and risk 'cases' raised to the Adelaide Zero Project's coordinated care group because of concerns about risk and to prioritise people for action by a range of stakeholders/agencies who can make a difference in their lives, immediately and longer-term.

> **I don't think that we're applying Housing First in the true sense of its original intent... I think that we do that because we don't have enough stock to play with, we don't take risks on people...for various reasons.**
> **(Stakeholder, Adelaide Zero Project / Covid-19 Emergency Accommodation for Rough Sleepers response)**

Figure 4: Emily's journey



Source: Authors. Drawn from case coordination and VI-SPDAT data, Adelaide Zero Project (provided to the research team in deidentified format).

Presenting the complex web of barriers people face in their journey through life, homelessness and beyond, helps to shed light on where systems need to bend to better accommodate and support people's many needs. Matching people to appropriate housing and social supports (broadly defined) is not an easy task. However, timely information, practitioner skills and diversity and flexibility in service offerings will make a huge difference in terms of meeting people's needs and supporting sustainable life outcomes.

> **That's what Housing First is about, it's about it doesn't actually matter, we believe housing is a human right and it doesn't matter how many times you've messed up or what's gone wrong, your fault, anybody else's fault, every human being deserves a safe place to live and so who provides that?**
>
> **(Stakeholder, Adelaide Zero Project)**

Building a Housing First oriented system

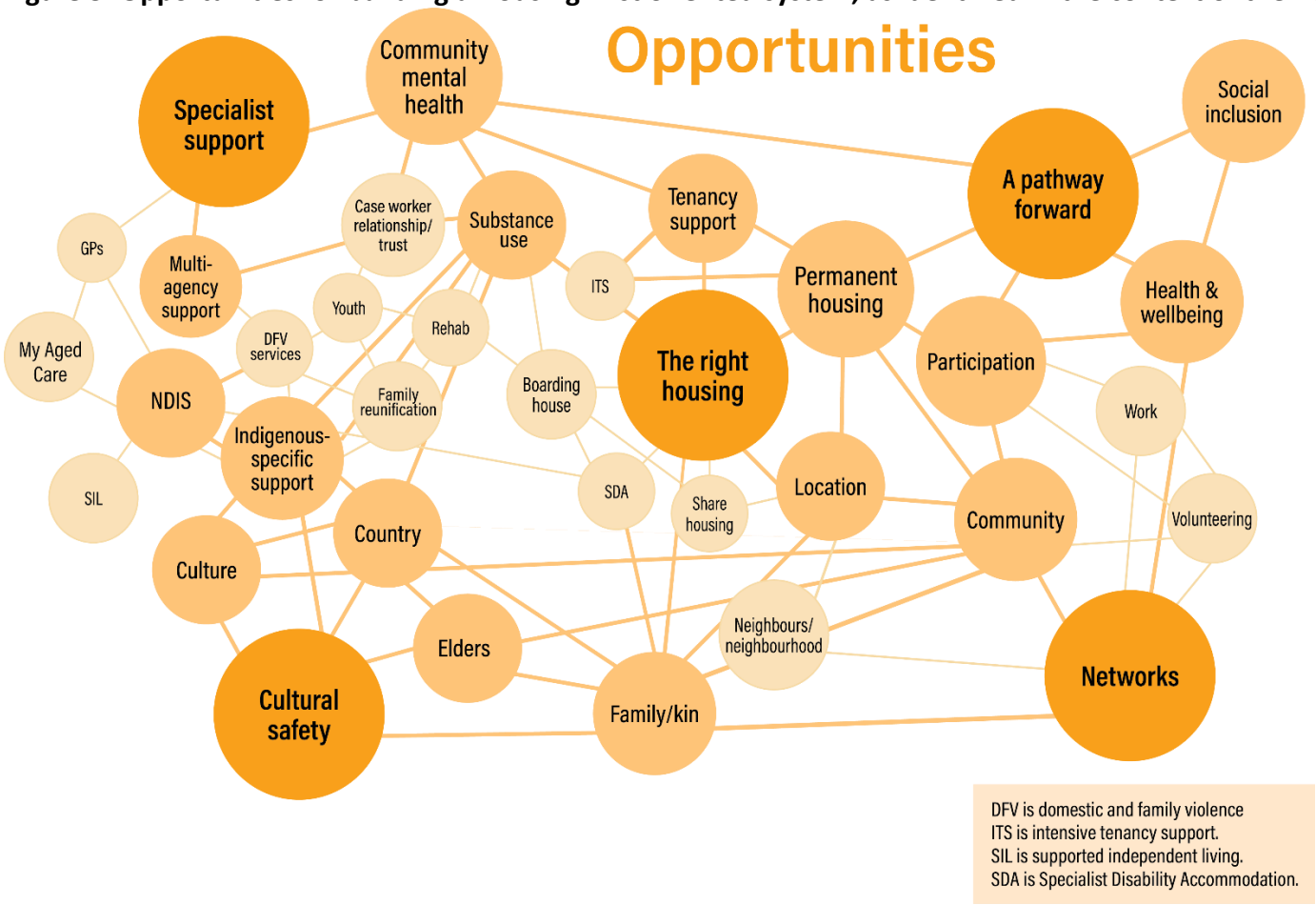
There remains much work to do in Adelaide to develop a Housing First oriented system for people experiencing chronic or rough sleeping homelessness. Much of this work is about looking at the individual and system level barriers people are facing in terms of the housing and support outcomes they want or need, and turning these into opportunities that the system, agencies and workers can support or provide (Figure 5). Again, the 'system' here refers to the ecosystem of formal and informal programs, interventions and supports that should intersect with people moving on from homelessness. For example, health and mental health services, veterans, disability and aged care services, community and other social supports.

Detailed examination of Adelaide Zero Project data and other evidence for this project identified five core opportunity domains: specialist support, the right housing, cultural safety, networks, a pathway forward, all linked strongly with need for community mental health, and, of course, permanent housing options.

It is evident from this research that there are a range of key ways forward to advance opportunities for system orientation to Housing First:

1. a shared understanding of Housing First and what it is trying to achieve. We have developed a tool to support this in communities, developed to inform this work (see Figure 6: *Housing First assessment and implications matrix*).
2. quality data capturing the individual housing, support and other relevant needs of people experiencing homelessness (cultural safety or Safety First needs, for example).
3. regular scrutiny of project data (qualitative and quantitative; by-name data and case notes for example) to understand system and individual barriers and enablers (opportunities) to Housing First (housing and support) outcomes and the best housing and support bundle for an individual, and to examine gaps in service offerings with a view to plugging such gaps with new responses. Testing new ways to present such information can also be helpful to practitioners and policy makers (Figures 3 and 4, for example).

Figure 5: Opportunities for building a Housing First oriented system, as identified in the context of the Adelaide Zero Project



Source: Authors. Opportunities drawn from analysis of individual and service data and stakeholder interviews.

Note: the frequency and relative importance of barriers is indicated by the size of the circle around each barrier and the strength of the connections between barriers indicated by the intensity of connecting lines.

4. agency, intra-alliance and program coordination, i.e. within and between specialist homelessness services (SHSs), to ensure more joined up approaches within the SHS sector.
5. system coordination, with the alliance system offering a central point from which to build system connections, such that all the relevant stakeholders see their role, and that of their resources (housing officers, support coordinators, system navigators, peer supports, mentors) as part of a sustainable, socially-inclusive solution.

It is also clear from our work in the context of the Adelaide Zero Project that building a Housing First oriented system is about culture change:

- practitioners capturing and understanding the breadth and depth of people's *individual* housing and ongoing support needs (and reviewing these over time);
- *agencies* supporting flexible, tailored responses and not simply fitting available houses and support to people, even where dwellings on offer are limited in supply or type, configuration or location; and,
- *systems* working together to share responsibility and accountability and track outcomes across time, including sustainment of housing and support, and people's broader life and wellbeing outcomes.

There are clear opportunities to more strongly embed Housing First understanding and practice in the South Australian context, particularly through the alliances that are the foundation of recent statewide homelessness sector reform. The outcomes framework being developed to measure client and system outcomes across the homelessness sector will also further embed Housing First principles and practice. State directions for the structure, ethos and delivery of housing, homelessness and support outlined in the state housing plan – *Our Housing Future 2020-2030* and *Future Directions for Homelessness* – provide an authorising environment for ensuing a Housing First oriented system. Programs like the Aspire Social Impact Bond and Housing for Health program offer important opportunities to implement, refine and learn from practice. Bringing agencies along the journey requires collective effort, co-design, reflection and monitoring.

Tools

To assist Adelaide, South Australia and other communities on their journey to a Housing First oriented system for people experiencing chronic or rough sleeping homelessness, we have developed three tools:

- the *Adelaide Zero Project continuous improvement framework*, developed as an earlier component of this project funded by the Mercy Foundation (Rowley and Jones 2021) and available at: https://www.dunstan.org.au/resources/adelaide-zero-project-continuous-improvement-framework/.
- a *Housing First assessment and implications matrix* (Figure 6).
- a *Continuous improvement spectrum for Housing First system orientation* (Figure 7).

The Housing First assessment and implications matrix

Context: The opportunities and barriers to Housing First are seen at different levels of a community's service system. The questions below have been designed to be answered at the three levels discussed throughout this report: system, agency and individual/program.

Undertaking a system and service mapping exercise will help to identify system, agency and individual/program-level barriers and opportunities (or enablers) to implementing a Housing First approach. Once barriers and opportunities are identified, the *Adelaide Zero Project continuous improvement framework* can be used to guide incremental, but real, changes to processes at all levels to address, remove or work around barriers and/or maximise opportunities.

Figure 6: *Housing First assessment and implications matrix*

	Individual/ Program	**Agency**	**System**
	Housing and service models, service delivery and individual interventions	**Inter-agency collaboration and ability to collectively support a client**	**Federal, state and local laws, policies and funding**
1) How does your community understand Housing First currently?	What are the practical elements of a Housing First system, for the client?	What are the key requirements of a Housing First system?	What are the key policy outcomes Housing First aims to achieve?
2) Does your community have a Housing First homelessness services system in line with your understanding of Housing First (refer question 1)?	☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Working towards ☐ Don't know	☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Working towards ☐ Don't know	☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Working towards ☐ Don't know
3) What elements of your system exist that support Housing First?	What service models exist for implementing individualised Housing First outcomes?	How does your organisation and system collaborate with other sectors and services towards Housing First?	What policies allow you to implement Housing First in your system?
4) This report supports the following definition of Housing First: https://homelessnessaustralia.org.au/what-you-can-do/housing-first/ Where does your current understanding of Housing First diverge from the definition above and what implications does this have for your system?	Describe key differences: Describe implications (program design, criteria):	Describe key differences: Describe implications (i.e. agency practices):	Describe key differences: Describe implications:

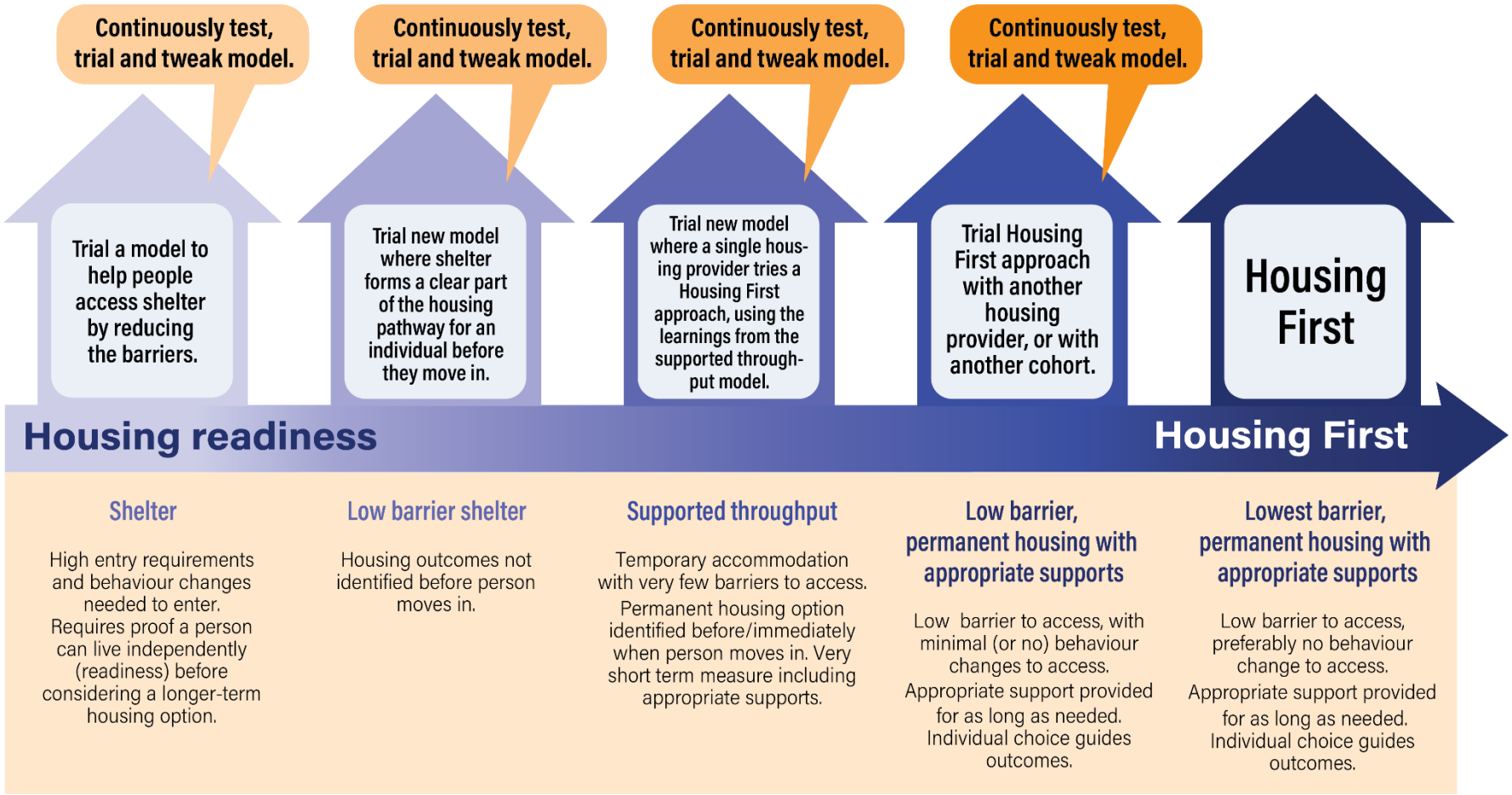
	Individual/ Program	Agency	System
	Housing and service models, service delivery and individual interventions	**Inter-agency collaboration and ability to collectively support a client**	**Federal, state and local laws, policies and funding**
5) What opportunities exist in your system and beyond to make changes in each of these levels to move towards a Housing First system?	What elements of your housing and service models can be improved for better Housing First client outcomes?	Which connections between sectors and services can be strengthened?	What advocacy opportunities do you have?

Source: Authors.

Continuous improvement spectrum for Housing First system orientation

Context: The continuous improvement spectrum for Housing First system orientation is a model for thinking through the possible steps that could be taken to move from a housing readiness oriented support system for people experiencing chronic or rough sleeping homelessness to a truly Housing First oriented system. The model is not about a defined pathway or stepped transition where each step must be followed in order, although they can be. In ideal circumstances, people would move straight to Housing First, although this is not always practical for a range of reasons, including system capacities to deliver Housing First options, including sustained support at appropriate level and duration. The model promotes the use of continuous improvement cycles of change to evolve the system progressively towards Housing First. The *Adelaide Zero Project continuous improvement framework* can be used to scope, implement and evaluate the continuous improvement activities.

Figure 7: ***Continuous improvement spectrum for Housing First system orientation***



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