



Summary of Lived Experience Workshops

Lived experience perspective informing the
South Australian Housing and Homelessness Strategy

August 2019

**“Having a home is a springboard
to stability, structure, community,
physical and mental health.”**

Workshop participant with lived experience of homelessness



Contents

We acknowledge the traditional owners and custodians of the land on which we work and live across Australia. We pay our respects to elders of the past, present and into the future.

The Australian Centre for Social Innovation is committed to furthering self-determination through Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander led innovation.

This report does not represent the views of the South Australian Government. It represents one part of a wider consultation process with the SA housing and homelessness sector undertaken by the SA Housing Authority. It contains a diversity of views from people who have experienced homelessness or housing stress.

Introduction	2
Summary	4
Customer at Centre	8
Effective and Efficient Industry	12
Supply and Demand	16
Targeted Support	20
Principles	24

This document captures the experience and knowledge of people with lived experience of housing challenges.

Their insights about housing and homelessness are shared to inform the *South Australian Housing Authority's Housing, Homelessness and Support Strategy*.

This report contains both people's reflections on housing challenges and their ideas about how the housing system could help them chart pathways to home, as well as economic and social participation.

We thank everyone who so generously gave their time and insight to developing this work, including all who attended Lived Experience Workshops. Thank you to Maryke van Diermen from the South Australian Housing Authority for her active support and organisation. Thank you to our colleagues Aunty Vickey Charles, Barbara Binns, Alazne Alberdi, Deborah Ziernicki and Emma Forest for their contribution to the workshops.

As a national centre for social innovation, The Australian Centre for Social Innovation is passionate about uncovering better ways to create social good. Read more about our work at www.tacsi.org.au

Introduction

The Australian Centre for Social Innovation (TACSI) has been working with the South Australian Housing Authority (SAHA) to understand people with lived experience's experience of housing and homelessness.

TACSI were honoured to work with 93 people with lived experience to gather their insights into housing and homelessness across. Participants represented:


- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people;
- People experiencing homelessness or exiting institutions;
- People with disability;
- Young people and older people; and
- Survivors of domestic and family violence.

TACSI delivered two workshops with each cohort. The first workshop focussed on housing challenges and the second on ideas to improve the housing system and its supports and services. Despite many attendees being in the midst of crisis more than half of them returned for the second workshop, demonstrating a remarkable commitment to the process.

People were honest, passionate, pragmatic and creative in their response to the Lived Experience Workshops.

They clearly demonstrated the ability to not just describe their housing challenges, but to create solutions. The opportunity represented in this report is for SAHA to go beyond consultation to ongoing co-design with this community. Genuine partnership with people with lived experience offers the opportunity to create an effective, efficient and thriving housing system.

This report uses South Australia's *Housing, Homelessness and Support Strategy Strategic Intent 2019* as a framework for sharing the knowledge, experience and ideas of people with lived experience to improve the housing system.



**"I hope these people in power
realise that this is about homes
and helping us have a life, not just
managing assets and problems."**

Workshop participant with lived experience of domestic
and family violence

Summary

Below is a summary of ideas generated by people with lived experience in each of the four strategic areas identified in the South Australian *Housing, Homelessness and Support Strategy Strategic Intent 2019*.

Each of these ideas is explored in detail later in this report.

Strategic area	Ideas from people with lived experience
Customer at centre	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mobile health and housing support • Lived Experience workers • Longer term support to rebuild your life • Culturally responsive housing options • Transitional housing
Effective and efficient industry	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Outcomes based funding • Interconnected service system • Data sharing
Matching the right supply and demand	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tiny houses and shipping container housing • Stay safe at home program • Co-housing options and better quality boarding houses
Targeted support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Local Neighbourhood Support links • More information for early intervention • One Stop Nunga Shop with 'Open Days' • Consistent framework across different housing providers • Holistic support across services and systems

**“Home helps me feel connected
to a future.”**

Workshop participant with lived experience of disability



Insights





Customer at Centre



Meeting the housing needs of customers and community to support life opportunity.

- South Australia's Housing, Homelessness and Support Strategy Strategic Intent 2019

People with lived experience of housing challenges could clearly articulate the goals and outcomes they are trying to achieve. Whilst many had long-term aspirations, they were also pragmatic about their more immediate goals. People with lived experience told us in detail, for example, about plans to build a shipping container village, but could also quickly identify in detail the qualities needed for an ideal housing support worker.

"It is only done the whitefella way. There's no understanding, no empathy, no heart"

- Workshop participant

We met real people with real initiative, who can identify what their problems are and are able to articulate what challenges they face. People with lived experience told us that they regularly face stereotyping about who they are and how they have come into this situation, when often the reality is far different.

People with lived experience told us that what is missing is a system that starts with deeply understanding who they are and what is important to them. We heard that misconceptions often cause the system to miss an opportunity for impact because it lacks a fundamental understanding of the person it is responding to.

"The system does not see the person. It just tells us what we can and can't do with our lives."

- Workshop participant

People with lived experience told us there is a need to go beyond 'customer voice' to see people experiencing housing challenges as having the capacity to be the architects of their futures. We heard that a flexible and responsive housing system is one that really listens and is able to shape services around individual needs and goals, rather than simply provide a narrow service response.

People told us that customer voice means listening to people in order to create pathways to home, social and economic participation.

Far from the housing system being streamline, many people experienced it as confusing and disempowering. People experiencing homelessness stated, "It feels like the system is designed to make you crack. It is a full-time job accessing services and support." People felt trapped in a cycle of short term-accommodation, homelessness, in some cases offending and "being released to nothing."

Rather than supporting customer voice, the housing system is also experienced as lacking in transparency: "It is like the secret service. Trying to get information or support is a nightmare." A lack of transparency is fundamentally disempowering as it removes people's agency.

Survivors of domestic and family violence expressed how the system reinforced trauma through processes requiring people to tell and re-tell their stories multiple times: "I am so tired of telling and re-telling my story to people in the system. My story is a sad story. It hurts to tell it again." People wanted to be heard and they want consistency in support.

People with disabilities felt that housing services made too many assumptions about their aspirations and capabilities, selling them short of what they could clearly articulate as their goals and needs. They spoke of the critical need for more education for services and workers so that people's knowledge and experience can be better utilised in creating housing solutions. People with lived experience reflected on the lack of empathy they felt from services, and the judgement and shame that accompanied that.

“You fill in a form, you're on a list. That's not holistic support.”

- Workshop participant

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people felt their agency and voice had been diminished with the integration of the Aboriginal Housing Authority into SAHA. “We didn't even know it was happening. I got a letter in the mail. And now each person has different rules and we have whitefellas telling us what to do again.” This group also saw a lack of cultural responsiveness in the housing system, which clashed with their conception of home:

“Home for me is family. But I have to call housing to report if I have family staying. They don't understand our ways.”

- Workshop participant

In varied ways, workshop participants stated that the housing system needs to find ways to truly understand what home means for people and build sustainable pathways that start with what is important to people with lived experience.

Ideas

People with lived experience brought energy and creativity to the generation of housing solutions. In thinking about ideas that place 'Customer at Centre,' they focussed on accessible services, empathetic workers and explored what a housing system that supported diverse views of 'home' could look like.

Accessible services were seen as critical by all groups, but especially by people experiencing homelessness and people with disabilities. The idea of mobile health and housing support was important for those who had physical or mental barriers to accessing centralised support. “Support that comes to you when you can't get out and about, that would make all the difference.”

People experiencing homelessness also saw mobile services as helping reduce the shame they experienced in being homeless: “There is so much shame and judgement. Your self-esteem takes a dive.” Young and older people also expressed that mobile services helped reduce judgement. People in this cohort felt judged by the housing system as being either “too young and dangerous” or “doddering idiots...on their way to the nursing home.” “If services meet me where I am at, I know they're interested in the real me,” stated a young person with lived experience.

Solutions that increased empathy came up time and again in the Lived Experience workshops. One of these solutions was the idea of a Lived Experience worker. This role would work alongside housing professionals. A Lived Experience worker was someone who

had “walked a mile in my shoes” and could help navigate the housing system without judgement. This role was seen as a valuable way of utilising the expertise of people who had experienced housing challenges and could then act as a mentor to others. People saw Lived Experience workers as working hand in hand with housing services to provide tailored support.

“I want someone to walk with me”

- Workshop participant

‘Good’ professional support was seen as having continuity, being long term, and in the case of those in crisis, be focussed on rebuilding their lives, not just on finding shelter. People with disabilities had strong ideas around the qualities professional workers should develop: being empathetic, strong advocates that enabled choice: “They need to stand up for what is possible for me.”

Survivors of domestic and family violence called for longer term support: “Support that is based on client’s needs not workers belief that they are okay. Withdrawing support too early does not help long-term outcomes.” People experiencing homelessness said that good professional support came back to the idea of really listening to people: “The system has put me on the waiting list for housing, I am homeless because I couldn’t get a job when the contract finished. What I really want is help to get back the NT, but I need somewhere to live when I get there. I feel stuck”

People with lived experience stated that taking the time to listen deeply creates the opportunity for housing solutions that cater to individual needs and are ultimately more efficient. People with a disability called for solutions that create new ways of engaging between clients and professionals: “We need new ways of having conversations so we find the right home for the right person.”

“You often feel less than human and reduced to a checklist. We need someone to listen in and see the whole picture.”

- Workshop participant

Deep listening was seen as a critical first step to a housing system that enabled people to live their idea of ‘home.’ Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people envisaged a housing system that supported their values around family and the need for mobility. They spoke about a system that could cater for extended family coming to stay and people from remote communities periodically spending time in town. This system would have improved access to transitional housing, where people coming to Adelaide from remote areas could, “slow down and ease the transition from the lands to urban life. A sanctuary, a safe place. An Aboriginal village.”

Services and workers that start where you are, and a housing system that enables you to live your idea of home. That is how people with lived experience brought the idea of Customer at Centre to life.

Effective and Efficient Industry



A high-performing sector and industry that delivers good customer outcomes.

- South Australia's Housing, Homelessness and Support Strategy Strategic Intent 2019

People with lived experience of housing challenges saw the inherent tension in seeing housing as an industry. They articulated the tension between housing as an industry and housing as critical lever to removing barriers between crisis and a better life. People often felt like they were a cog in a large and complex machine rather than being supported to forge their own path out of housing crisis and into wellbeing, economic and social participation.

People with lived experience told us that for the housing industry to meet their needs it needs to be accessible, innovative and provide a diversity of options. We heard from participants that the benchmark for an effective housing industry must be its ability to meet the goals people set out to achieve. People told us that leaders within the housing system require genuine empathy.

“The CEO Sleepout is a not enough. Try really living my life for a week, or even just come down and have a cuppa with me. Hear my stories if you want to know what it's like and how to make it better.”

- Workshop participant

People with lived experience want the housing system to invest with them in their futures, rather than as they currently experience: “Make me feel like a welfare case to be subsidised.” This shift in mindset is critical. To seeing housing as something to be invested in rather than subsidised creates a significant difference in how people experience the system. An investment signals that the system is interested in looking at the capabilities of those within the system and creating a pathway for them into sustainable housing and beyond.

We heard that people are experiencing a lack of pathways and finding themselves cycling back into, rather than out of, housing crisis. Workshop participants told us that joined up systems must exist to create pathways and progress for those experiencing housing challenges.

“It's like jumping through hoops in a cycle of being assessed, waiting and despair.”

- Workshop participant



Ideas

Ideas in this space included support for outcomes-based funding, interconnected services that connect individuals more easily to the multiple systems involved in their lives and data sharing between services to reduce trauma.

A number of cohorts talked about the idea of outcomes-based funding for services ("they should get paid when they help someone break the cycle"). This was a response to the sense that too many housing and crisis support programs are short-term and fragmented. People were interested in ways to shift what services paid attention to, with long term outcomes being seen as most important by people with lived experience. People understood the efficiency argument too: "It's cheaper to get me well for good than have me keep on coming back into the system."

Likewise, support for one stop service hubs and data sharing between services centred on the idea that 'joined up systems' could better collaborate with them around their goals and needs. The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cohort in particular also talked about the trauma of sharing their stories multiple times with multiple services. Data sharing was seen as helping reduce this.

"I am so tired of telling and re-telling my story to people in the system. My story is a sad story. It hurts to tell it again. If they can put MyGov together why can't they do the same with our stories?"

- Workshop participant

Investing in long-term outcomes and a better-connected system was seen by people with lived experience as being the way out of crisis and into a better life.



Matching the right supply and demand



A well-functioning and resilient housing market that supports housing choice and supply.

- South Australia's Housing, Homelessness and Support Strategy Strategic Intent 2019

"I have been waiting 40 years for a house. I went on the list when I was 22."

- Workshop participant

People with lived experience had experienced housing supply and demand challenges first hand. Some had been waiting decades to access housing. Others had been placed in houses where they felt unstable or unsafe. People with disabilities felt particularly vulnerable: "Any time of day or night, I don't feel safe. They [other housing tenants] see I am physically weak and they prey on me." Some had been placed in housing that did not enable them to live independently with a disability; survivors of domestic violence had lived for months with their small children in motel rooms.

People with lived experience had a clear sense of the type of housing that would meet their needs. From "living out bush in a simple place" to living in a shipping container ("a few square metres to call my own") or "being able to step onto a patch of grass and water my lawn," people could articulate clearly what home looks like to them. Their visions were not flashy. Matching supply with a closer sense of what people want stands to create opportunities in the system to remove bottlenecks and generate more flow.

People also spoke about the need for differentiated housing and support based on need:

"Housing Trust now is like a welfare dumping ground. There's no middle options for housing for us people who don't have serious issues. There needs to be two options- one for people needing support to change their life and another for people who just need a house."

- Workshop participant

People with lived experience also spoke consistently about their desire to be housed not in clusters but throughout the community. People with disability stated: "Please don't lump us together... help fit us into the community. Otherwise you keep just institutionalising us."

Housing stock distributed throughout the community was seen as giving people who have experienced housing challenges the best chance to be part of a community and contribute to their neighbourhoods.

Lastly, people spoke about the difficulties of accessing housing if you sit outside of a high priority category defined by SAHA. We heard of difficulties in accessing housing for young people, older women and men older than 40. Similarly, high level bureaucratic categorisation of people was seen as a barrier to achieving housing goals.

“I couldn’t get a family house because I didn’t have custody of my daughter. I couldn’t get custody of my daughter because I didn’t have a house. There is no spot for people like me.”

- Workshop participant



Ideas

People with lived experience came up with creative and lateral ideas to address supply and demand challenges within the housing and support system.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people expressed their support for different housing designs and regulations to allow for an expanded definition of family and reduce monitoring required through SAHA. This group also discussed ideas around passing 'ownership' of public housing through family lines so parents would be able to pass on their property to their children. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people felt that the stability and security provided by this solution would make a significant difference to their sense of wellbeing.

Amongst people experiencing homelessness there was support for innovative models such as tiny houses and shipping container housing. Specifically, people stated they would like to be involved in building shipping container villages and in developing a genuine sense of community around them. People saw that tiny houses or shipping container housing could be helpful as transitional housing.

Women who had experienced domestic and family violence were open to the idea that they get to stay in the home and the perpetrator of violence is removed, if it is safe to do so. There were very clear experiences where this would not have been an option. There were experiences where women wished that option had been available to them.

Women supported the idea of co-housing and quality boarding houses (instead of motels) that enable women and children to stay together and include intensive support to transition into a stable option and then focus on rebuilding their life.

Innovation and options outside of traditional 'bricks and mortar' had support amongst people with lived experience.



Targeted Support



People are supported out of crisis or homelessness to maintain and improve their housing outcomes.

- South Australia's Housing, Homelessness and Support Strategy Strategic Intent 2019

The Lived Experience workshops were full of resilience. People who had survived, battled and persevered. Yet many people were still in the midst of crisis. One constant across cohorts was that people had experienced trauma; often years or decades of trauma. Targeted support must start from an understanding of this and work with the whole picture of people's lives; not just housing.

If the system fails to do this it will continue to perpetuate trauma.

We heard that targeted support for people in crisis or experiencing homelessness must be focussed on both prevention, and being responsive in times of crisis so people can move past crisis and into stronger positions of resilience.

People with lived experience told us that support for people in crisis must centre on continuity of care, understanding, and a long-term effort to rebuild lives. But we also heard that this sort of targeted support was a scarce resource. Support was often time bound, crisis driven and fragmented. This added layers of stress and complexity to people's lives.

We heard the current housing system provides little stability for people in the most need, which is resulting in people re-entering cycles of crisis. People need stable and secure housing to focus on rebuilding their lives.

“Having no long-term security, no stability. It has a huge impact on my mental health. You can't start anything as you don't know where you'll be the next week. You can't make plans.”

- Workshop participant

People experiencing homelessness and survivors of domestic and family violence both faced significant yet basic barriers in accessing support and housing, including not having access to phones, no fixed address and often no rental history.

“Having a house is a springboard to stability, structure, community, physical and mental health.”

- Workshop participant

Very few people we spoke with who were in housing crisis had found pathways out or been able to break the cycle of homelessness. Those who had been housed reported that support had dropped off dramatically once they had a home, often plunging them back into risk of homelessness.

“You feel like you're getting nowhere and doors are being slammed.”

- Workshop participant

People experiencing homelessness and in crisis need support that addresses the often-multiple traumas they have experienced. Housing crisis must be seen in a broader context of trauma, and resources targeted to bolster the inherent resilience of people and help rebuild their lives.

Ideas

People who had experienced homelessness and recently transitioned into housing supported the idea of Local Neighbourhood Support, especially from others who have been through and come out the other side of housing stress. This was seen as particularly important by women who had survived domestic or family violence and had been resettled in new areas.

“We need support around places to play, schools, community supports. If women don’t feel settled and independent it is harder to stay away from their old partner.”

- Workshop participant

Survivors of family and domestic violence also suggested that more information is made available as a means of early intervention; especially in health and community services.

“Less culture of blame, more languages. More support earlier.”

- Workshop participant

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people developed the idea of a ‘One Stop Nunga Shop’ as a means of streamlining prevention, early intervention and crisis support services and locating them in one place. Some people were concerned that a centralised support hub could be the source of shame, however the idea of having ‘Open Days’ for specific groups e.g. women’s days, men’s days was seen as getting around this stigma.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people also spoke about the need for a consistent framework for housing support regardless of asset or provider. Around a table of seven Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people at the Lived Experience workshop, there were five different housing providers. This was seen as confusing as each provider seemed to have different rules.

People with lived experience of housing crisis implored the system to think not just in terms of housing but of whole people. They called for workers with the skills and authority to consider the holistic support required to truly facilitate housing pathways.



Principles

This section places people with lived experience's insights alongside the Principles set out in the *SAHA Strategic Intent 2019* document. It illustrates the distance still to travel in aligning strategy with people's experience on the ground.

The opportunity is to partner long-term with people with lived experience to bring these principles closer to their everyday reality.

Strategic Intent Principles	What we heard from people with lived experience
Collaborative	"I've got one worker for housing, one for health, one for my kids. There's no one to join the dots."
Customer focussed	"I am tired of being a reference number or a box. The system makes people feel like they are worthless and something is wrong with them."
Fair and equitable	"It feels like there is no equality. Why are decisions being made? Why do Housing SA give certain people houses and not others? There's no transparency."
Transparent and accountable	"It is like the secret service. Trying to get information or support is a nightmare. We are left wondering what the criteria is and who makes the decisions."
Responsive	"The system does not see the person. We are just told what we can and can't do with our lives."
Simple	"There's an assumption that we all have agency; but we are expected to pick ourselves up when you just fell off a cliff."
Sustainable and future focussed	"Home helps me feel connected to a future."

Providers and government have significantly more influence and power than users of housing and homelessness system. By supporting Lived Experience workshops, SAHA have taken the first steps to amplify the voices of people experiencing housing stress.

It is our recommendation that a co-design process be a key pillar of the *South Australian Housing and Homelessness Strategy*. This would involve bringing together the needs and ideas of people with lived experience with the needs and ideas of the other stakeholders in the system.

Through the process of developing solution and testing them together, trade-offs can happen between the needs of people with lived experience, the needs of the housing and homeless stakeholders.

It is imperative that the *South Australian Housing and Homelessness Strategy* and ongoing solution development honours the people who gave their time in starting this journey of change. Many of the participants of the Lived Experience workshops asked to be involved in future work to take the strategy from words to action.

A commitment to co-design requires recognition of the evidence generated through the Lived Experience workshops. It also requires a commitment to innovation, trying something differently, and generating additional evidence about what works through learning by doing, not discussion.

“I really care about what happens next and if there is any way to keep being involved I will be there.”

Workshop participant, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workshop





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