



Toward Home Alliance: Homelessness System Review

Statement/Q&A, September 2026

The Toward Home Alliance (THA) consists of eight NGOs: Aboriginal Family Support Services, Baptist Care, Hutt St Centre, Lutheran Care, Mission Australia, Sonder, The Salvation Army and The St Vincent de Paul Society of SA.

1. Response to the review

The Toward Home Alliance welcomes a robust examination of South Australia's homelessness system, and are committed to working constructively with government, our partners and the broader sector to strengthen the system and improve outcomes for people experiencing homelessness in South Australia.

At the same time, it is important that any assessment of the system is fully informed by the reality of the work, the ongoing cost of living and housing crisis which has fundamentally changed the experience of housing stability and security for many South Australians over the last five years, and the extraordinary work of our frontline workforce.

THA will carefully consider the Review's findings and recommendations, including what they may mean for the future structure of homelessness services. As an Alliance, we will work together to determine how we can best contribute to the next phase of South Australia's homelessness response.

The Toward Home Alliance's (THA) formal submission to the Homelessness Review¹ is available on the THA website, here: [THA Submission, DHS homelessness system review Nov 2025](#)

2. THA position on Alliancing?

The Toward Home Alliance believes the fundamental principles of alliancing are highly relevant and conducive to ensuring effective and impactful service delivery.

These principles include:

- Making decisions in the best interests of people experiencing homelessness and the broader community;
- Open book financial reporting;
- Transparent performance data and evaluation;
- Sharing successes, risks and problem solving;
- Active and intentional resource sharing across organisations and services – both hard and soft resources;
- Creating a no-blame culture where organisations can identify and address problems together; and,
- A commitment to continual service/system reflection and improvement.

¹ which was accompanied by over 50 separate documents, service models, evaluations and reports

We know there is not a single solution to ending homelessness, however, collaboration is essential to delivering outcomes for community, and building a connected, well and engaged workforce.

The Alliance system is a collective impact approach for tackling socially entrenched issues, of which homelessness is one. We acknowledge that different regions and communities need different responses, and that there is no one-size fits all service model for tackling homelessness; we need to be responsive to local context/need, population and services.

3. Learnings

South Australia's alliancing system, in particular the Toward Home Alliance, has matured beyond the blueprint from which it was adopted (the Glasgow Alliance to End Homelessness in Scotland), and is now a source of interest and learnings from other states and sectors.

THA's experience of alliancing has been a collaborative, innovative and systemised approach to supporting people at risk of or experiencing homelessness.

Toward Home is committed to continually evolving and building adaptive and responsive services in an environment of historically low investment, with partners and community who deeply know the people they work with.

We acknowledge that alliancing takes considerable patience, determination, perseverance and trial-and-error. We have a deep commitment to working with all people who experience homelessness – this is the driver behind all that we do. Our responses are driven by what people on the ground, both community and people accessing our services tell us, and this is what we are continually responding to.

Whilst there isn't a single solution to tackle homelessness, the principles of deep collaboration, transparency and effective resource utilisation should continue to remain central to any future procurement process.

4. Value of Alliancing in Toward Home?

\$1m additional sector contribution: The Toward Home Alliance has taken its commitment to working for, and in, the best interests of community seriously. Each year, over \$1m of additional financial and in-kind investment beyond its contract with State Government is contributed by THA partners - this is in the form of funding for additional staffing and infrastructure from THA partners to address service gaps and strengthen service delivery.

Meeting service gaps and changing lives: The contract flexibility and buy-in from THA partners has enabled Toward Home to develop critical frontline responses to unmet need and service gaps. At a time of severe under-investment in homelessness services, these life changing services include:

- Wright Place: A 10-bed short stay accommodation program for women aged over 45, delivered within existing resources through the utilisation of a Baptist Care owned property and alliance funding. The program provides an opportunity for women experiencing homelessness to heal, connect and stabilise, and has successfully supported the transition of over 50 women into long-term accommodation since November 2023.

- Brief Intervention responses: Supporting approximately 1000 individuals annually, THA's Brief Intervention responses are essential to addressing strained sector capacity. They have ensured that THA has rarely had to turn people away, and empowers individuals and families with the tools, resources and support needed to navigate and resolve their episode of homelessness.

5. **THA Commitment to Aboriginal Funding parity and Aboriginal specific service delivery.**

The Toward Home Alliance (THA) is committed to Aboriginal case management funding parity, self-determination and culturally responsive service delivery for Aboriginal People and communities. THA said it would commit to Aboriginal case management funding parity and it has done this - the proportion of case management funding directed to Wardli-ana, THA's Aboriginal specific service segment, is equal to or greater than the proportion of Aboriginal People accessing THA.

THA is the only generic homelessness service nationally to make an explicit commitment to Aboriginal case management funding parity - it is a sector and state-first response within Australia's homelessness system, and one garnering national attention.

Wardli-ana is jointly delivered by Aboriginal Family Support Services (AFSS) and BaptistCare. Aboriginal leaders within THA identified where systems and service responses were not working for Aboriginal People experiencing or at risk of homelessness and led THA's response through how resources were directed and how practice changed. Importantly, choice is preserved for Aboriginal People seeking support from THA; approximately 65% of Aboriginal People who access THA are supported by Wardli-ana, with the remaining 35% of Aboriginal People choosing support from a non-Aboriginal service segment.

It has been THA's intent and commitment from inception to progressively transfer Wardli-ana funding to Aboriginal Community Controlled partner AFSS.

THA's approach is one of numerous strategies needed within the homelessness system, to respond to the over-representation of Aboriginal People experiencing homelessness and changing the systems and service responses that continue to exclude, delay or fail Aboriginal People experiencing or at risk of homelessness

6. Investment in Homelessness Services

Without a genuine commitment to invest in homelessness services in South Australia, the dial on homelessness will not shift:

- **SA's government funded specialist homelessness services have the second lowest cost per support day of service delivery in the country:** In 2024/25, South Australia had the second lowest cost support per day in Australia of delivering homelessness services; \$46 /day versus an average national cost of \$57. South Australia also had the second lowest cost for whole support period per client².
- **11% funding reduction to homelessness services over 4 years:** SACOSS estimates a net funding reduction to the sector of 11% from 2021 to 2025, equating to a 15% per client reduction³.
- **SA funding is out of step with other states:** South Australia's investment in homelessness services is clearly out of step with other states, which recognise the important role of homelessness services, and have seen considerable investment in specialist homelessness services: [Recommendations Paper: A homelessness peak body, South Australia. Report commissioned by Toward Home Alliance.](#)

7. Why has demand for homelessness services decreased in South Australia?

Currently, the Specialist Homelessness services (SHS) data system measures system "capacity", and not actual demand for services. With the sector experiencing ongoing net funding reductions over the last five years, capacity of frontline South Australian homelessness services has reduced.

The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) is responsible for reporting national and state-based specialist homelessness services data on those who have received support from a government-funded specialist homelessness service (SHS) agency. The AIHW acknowledges there are limitations to this data, describing it as an "incomplete picture of the need for homelessness services across Australia"⁴. AIHW have initiated a data improvement project to try and address these current limitations and data gaps.

This is not just a South Australian issue. Nationally, the AIHW reports that the number of people assisted by specialist homelessness services decreased from around 290,000 people in 2019–20 to approximately 289,000 in 2024–25⁵. However, this does **not** mean demand has decreased; over the same time period between 2019-20 and 2024-25, the duration of support periods for people receiving services increased by 16%⁶.

This indicates that whilst fewer people are being 'recorded' as accessing specialist homelessness services nationally, the people who are accessing services are requiring substantially longer and

² SCRGSP (Steering Committee for the Review of Government Service Provision). (2026). *Report on Government Services 2026*. Productivity Commission, Canberra. <https://www.pc.gov.au/ongoing/report-on-government-services/housing-homelessness/homelessness-services/>

³ South Australian Council of Social Services. (2025). Homelessness Week 2025. <https://sacoss.org.au/homelessness-week-2025/>

⁴ [Homelessness and homelessness services - Australian Institute of Health and Welfare](#)

⁵ AIHW. (2025). 'Homelessness and homelessness services', AIHW, Australian Government. <https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/australias-welfare/homelessness-and-homelessness-services>

⁶ "The rate of people accessing specialist homelessness services decreased from 114.6 to 106.3 people per 10,000 population; while the number of support days increased by approximately 16% (by 4.3 million days to 30.4 million days)." AIHW. (2025). 'Homelessness and homelessness services', AIHW, Australian Government. <https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/australias-welfare/homelessness-and-homelessness-services>

more intensive support. Importantly, the collection is limited to data on persons who have sought support from government funded organisations, not all people experiencing homelessness.

This is consistent with what homelessness services are experiencing on the ground.

People are presenting with more complex and intersecting needs, and often when they are already homeless rather than when they are first at risk.

In South Australia, approximately 60% of people who sought assistance from specialist homelessness services in the last financial year presented due to a housing crisis, compared to a national average of 38%⁷.

- Recent AIHW national research showed “increasing rates of support services reaching capacity, closing their doors and turning off phones. This has been linked to increasing worker burnout within support services and has been observed across the industry” (Jackson and Blane 2024). This is symptomatic of a homelessness system in overwhelm – in both South Australia and nationally.
- According to data from the AIHW’s Specialist Homelessness Services annual report 2024-25, the percentage of all clients experiencing ‘persistent homelessness’ in South Australia increased by over 10% in the last 5 years alone⁸, with SA having the second highest percentage of persistent homelessness in the country⁹. This points to South Australia’s enduring housing crisis. Over the last five years the structural changes in SA’s housing affordability means that the private rental market is no longer a viable option for the majority of people accessing specialist homelessness services, forcing increased reliance on extremely limited community and public housing stock. In 2026, Adelaide was ranked the 4th least affordable housing market in the Western world¹⁰, with our rental market now unviable for many South Australians - as of June 2026, Adelaide’s rental vacancy rate was 0.4%.

8. What is the actual demand?

We all know homelessness is increasing, as evident across our communities and services. Homelessness services often act as an “emergency department” response for some of the most vulnerable and at-risk people in our community - particularly in an under-resourced environment. This reality is also reflected in our frontline workforce, through:

- **Caseloads:** Recommended homelessness sector caseloads are 10-12 households per worker. Across Toward Home, caseloads are well above this, pointing to a workforce under deep and persistent strain.
- **Capacity and brief intervention:** Every staff member and team across the Alliance is working well beyond capacity. To address this, THA developed targeted brief intervention responses which work with approximately 1000 people annually and ensure THA can respond to the majority of people seeking support.

⁷ AIHW (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare) (2025) Specialist homelessness services annual report 2024-25, AIHW, Australian Government. <https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/homelessness-services/specialist-homelessness-services-annual-report/contents/state-and-territory-summary-data-and-fact-sheets>

⁸ AIHW. (2025). Data tables: Specialist homelessness services annual report 2024-25. Australian Government. <https://www.aihw.gov.au/getmedia/2dae7989-90e4-4a70-b1f7-32f23f01bf0c/AIHW-HOU-343-Specialist-homelessness-services-data-tables-2024-25.xlsx>

⁹ Percentage of all clients in SA who experience persistent homelessness: 34.6% in 2024-25.

¹⁰ Cox, W. (2026). *Demographia Internatioal Housing Affordability: 2026 Edition*. Centre for Demographics and Policy, Chapman University. <https://frontiercentre.org/wp-content/uploads/Demographia-International-Housing-Affordability-2026-Edition-1.pdf>

9. We need to see this against the drastic reality of the changes in our state's housing market:

- Adelaide was ranked the 4th least affordable housing market in the western world in the 2026 edition of the Demographia International Housing Affordability¹¹, being described as 'impossibly unaffordable'.
- Adelaide has had the biggest increase in rents of all capital cities in the past decade, increasing by 81% between 2015 and 2025, and 52% since April 2020¹². As of June 2026, Adelaide's rental vacancy rate is only 0.4%, while the cost of renting has increased at 4.8% year-on-year¹³. This means that rental prices in traditionally affordable suburbs such as Christies Beach, Hackham and Morphett Vale have increased over 65% in the last five years.
- The Priced Out: An income test for Australia's rental market report, released in August 2026, revealed a person earning \$70,000 per year would need to devote 50% of their income to be able to afford the median rent for a unit in Adelaide, despite the accepted affordability benchmark of 30% of disposable income¹⁴.
- These changes in our housing market are pushing people who traditionally could afford private rentals into homelessness, due to the dramatic increase in rent across the state, and the record-low vacancy rates.



Aboriginal Family Support Services
Together with the community



BaptistCare

Hutt St Centre



LUTHERAN
CARE

MISSION
AUSTRALIA



Sonder
Better Care Better Health



St Vincent de Paul Society
SA
good works

¹¹ Cox, W. (2026). *Demographia International Housing Affordability: 2026 Edition*. Centre for Demographics and Policy, Chapman University. <https://frontiercentre.org/wp-content/uploads/Demographia-International-Housing-Affordability-2026-Edition-1.pdf>

¹² Azize, M. (2025). *Out of Reach: Australia's rental crisis and the decline of social housing*. Everybody's Home, Melbourne. <https://everybodyshome.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2025/07/Out-Of-Reach-2025.pdf>

¹³ Domain. (2026). Domain rental report: June 2026. <https://www.domain.com.au/research/rental-report/june-2026/>

¹⁴ Azize, M. (2026). *Priced Out: An income test for Australia's rental market*. Fourth Edition. Everybody's Home: Melbourne. <https://everybodyshome.com.au/resources/priced-out-an-income-test-for-australias-rental-market/>