

Back to school but nowhere to sleep: WA's hidden youth homelessness crisis

Students across Western Australia are returning to school this week but hundreds of young people across the state will start the new school year without a safe place to sleep.

New data reveals youth homelessness in WA has surged at an alarming rate to crisis levels, leaving children and young people competing for help in a system that is already overwhelmed.

The [Australian Institute of Health and Welfare](#) figures show 830 unaccompanied children and young people are being assisted by specialist homelessness services on any given day, a 17 per cent increase in just one year.

“That’s equivalent to almost 40 classrooms of unaccompanied children and young people experiencing homelessness here in WA”. Kylie Wallace, CEO of the Youth Affairs Council of WA (YACWA) said.

Western Australia also has the highest number of people turned away from homelessness services in the country, with an average of 96 unassisted requests every day.

Children and young people make up 56 per cent of all unassisted requests, far higher than the national average of 44 per cent.

“Behind these numbers are children and teenagers trying to stay focused on school while living in crisis, with a severe shortage of youth crisis accommodation and affordable rental homes, and a lack of critical prevention and accessible services driving the emergency,” Ms Wallace said.

Caitlan, a member of the Youth Homelessness Advisory Council, reflects on her experience of juggling homelessness with returning to school, saying “Going to school while homeless was humiliating. While my friends showed off new pencil cases and sports shoes, I wore the same dirty uniform for weeks at a time.”

“Without a home or an adult to rely on, school didn’t just become hard, it became impossible. I had to leave [school], the only stability I had so I could focus on survival. No child should ever have to make that choice.”

“Returning to school after years out of the system made me feel like an outsider. Other students had mastered skills I was learning for the first time. When you miss crucial years of education, you can never fully make them back” Caitlan said.

Although we acknowledge the Cook Government's recent funding boost to WA's homelessness services, and record investment into new social housing, there has been little investment directly targeted towards children and young people.

"These are children and young people who are presenting alone at services, without a parent or guardian" said Ms Wallace.

"While most children and young people are picking out what new lunch box they will be buying for the first day back at school, hundreds of children and young people are struggling to find a place where they can sleep safely for the night."

"For young people experiencing homelessness, the challenges of returning to school extend far beyond homework and exams. Without a stable home, maintaining school attendance, completing homework and building friendships becomes nearly impossible.

"Homelessness disrupts every part of a young person's life. In one of the richest states in the world, this shouldn't be happening. Education is a right all children are entitled to but without stable housing, school becomes an uphill battle.

In response to the shocking data, a coalition of peak bodies, frontline services and young people is urging the State Government to prioritise ending youth homelessness.

The Youth Affairs Council of WA (YACWA), Youth Homelessness Advisory Council (YHAC), Shelter WA, WA Council of Social Services (WACOSS), WA Alliance to End Homelessness (WAAEH), Mission Australia WA, Vinnies WA, and Indigo Junction's joint [pre-budget submission](#) calls for an urgent investment of \$150 million in the 2026-27 Budget.

"We shouldn't have a huge hidden population of hundreds of school students experiencing rough sleeping and homelessness in the wealthiest state in Australia.

"We need to see more funding for access to suitable accommodation and support when they're needed by young people experiencing homelessness while at school, and more for prevention and early intervention initiatives."

"Child and youth homelessness in WA is at crisis point - but commitments made in the next State budget could solve it." Ms Wallace concluded.

Representatives from the 'Ending Child and Youth Homelessness' coalition will hold a press conference on Sunday 1 February at 11am at the Youth Affairs Council of WA, 5/200 Adelaide Terrace East Perth, where media are invited to attend.

Key facts:

- 830 young people are presenting alone to specialist homelessness services every day - up 17% from last year and 21% five years ago
- 1,400 children in families are being assisted daily by specialist homelessness services

- WA has the highest daily average of unassisted requests at 96 - a 22% increase since last year
- Children and young people aged 0-24 make up 56% of unassisted requests in WA, compared to 44% nationally

Key priorities from the pre-budget submission include:

- Investing in a “Housing First for Youth” model which delivers a variety of accommodation and housing models for young people, including crisis accommodation, more Youth Foyers, and more social and affordable housing
- Strengthening prevention and early intervention initiatives, such as Place-Based Youth Service Hubs
- Building the capacity and coordination of the youth homelessness sector
- Ensuring the voices of young people with lived experience are embedded in policy and service design.

Definitions of sector asks:

- **Housing First for Youth (HF4Y) model** - Prioritises immediate, safe, secure and sustainable homes without preconditions or judgement, alongside tailored youth-specialist support for young people aged 10–24 experiencing or at risk of homelessness.
- **Direct Access Crisis Housing** - Short-term emergency (crisis) accommodation providing immediate, low-barrier access for young people (aged 15–24) who are at imminent risk of or experiencing homelessness, offering safe shelter and connection to longer-term housing and supports.
- **Youth Foyer** - A transitional housing and support model for young people (aged 16–24) who are at risk of or experiencing homelessness, offering accommodation (typically up to two years or until independent housing is secured) with integrated supports in education, training, employment and independent living skills.
- **Place-Based Youth Service Hubs** - Community-led service hubs for young people (aged 10–24) that provide co-located, wrap-around supports (housing, mental health, education, employment, recreation) and essential amenities (meals, showers, social connection) within a youth-friendly, place-based environment.
- **Safe Space services** - Non-accommodation after hours early-intervention support services for young people (aged 10–24).
- **Youth Zero Project** - Funding to support the project implementation, using the AtoZ framework to coordinate service integration, maintain a By-Name List, and drive a Housing First, data-led response to ending youth homelessness.

Media contact:

Katie Berry 0499 611 958 // katie@yacwa.org.au

Lauren Ferri 0422 581 506 // lauren@hortonadvisory.com.au