



Housing First for Youth (HF4Y) Project Report

October 2025

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Acknowledgment of Country

The Youth Affairs Council of Western Australia acknowledges the rightful custodians of country on which this report was based, the Wadjuk people of the Noongar Nation, and their continuing connection to land, sea and community. We pay our respect to them and their cultures, and to their Elders both past and present, as well as acknowledge and celebrate the ongoing contributions of Aboriginal young people in our communities.

About the Youth Affairs Council of Western Australia

The Youth Affairs Council of Western Australia (YACWA) is the peak non-government youth organisation in Western Australia. YACWA operates primarily as a human rights organisation that seeks to address the exclusion of young people in a rapidly changing society. Our vision for Western Australia is one that celebrates and engages young people in all aspects of the community. Our role is to strengthen the trust, cooperation, collaboration, professionalism and voice of the non-government youth service sector to better serve the young people of Western Australia. YACWA is widely acknowledged as a leader in the field of current youth participation best practice. This reputation has a national profile and is supported by academic research, proven training and project management and, most importantly, extensive engagement with children and young people. YACWA strongly believes that children and young people are the 'experts in their own experiences and wellbeing' and we are dedicated to ensuring their equal access to participation in community decision-making processes.

The Purpose of this Report

After working closely with the State Government and the youth sector to build collective understanding of Housing First for Youth (HF4Y) and emphasise the need to include it in WA's youth service landscape over the last couple of years, YACWA identified that further work was needed to build understanding of HF4Y in WA and identify what is needed to facilitate the successful piloting and implementation of the approach in WA. In August 2022, the Uniting Church in the City provided YACWA with a grant to undertake a short project to undertake this work. The key components of the project included:

- Undertaking a literature review to research and collate the core national and international evidence underpinning the HF4Y Model.
- Engaging a small group of key stakeholders with extensive knowledge of Housing First and the youth homelessness system as part of a Steering Group aimed at informing the development of both the workshop and the report.
- Delivering a workshop with around 20 youth workers to gain a sense of the operational needs and barriers of implementing a HF4Y approach in WA and canvassing how HF4Y would fit within the existing Housing First Homelessness Initiative currently in place.
- Developing a final report to collate both information gathered from the literature review and sector workshop to inform a series of recommendations and guidelines for the State Government to implement HF4Y in WA.

This work was carried out with the intended aims of:

- Increasing State Government and youth sector understanding of the core principles of a HF4Y approach, how it is distinct from adult-focused Housing First, and the supports, infrastructure, knowledge and governance required to pilot a HF4Y program in WA.
- Providing the State Government with list of sector-informed guidelines and pathways to support the progression of work to trial a pilot of a HF4Y program in WA.
- Establishing a strong collaborative relationship between YACWA, the State Government and youth sector to work together to implement HF4Y in WA.

This report is a reflection of the learnings and insights gathered through both the national and international literature review and the youth sector workshop. It provides a detailed outline the key components of implementing HF4Y in Western Australia by helping to define the model's core components, outline the current conditions for Housing First across the service landscape, and provide a snapshot of feedback from youth homelessness services on how the model should be adapted to suit the needs of young people.

The Current Landscape of Housing First in WA

Over the last several years Housing First has emerged as a key element in collaborative approaches across government and community services to ending homelessness in Western Australia. However, despite being identified as a priority cohort in the State Government's 10 Year Strategy on Homelessness, young people have largely only been included as part of broad action across key commitments such as the Housing First Homelessness Initiative (HFHI) and Common Ground Model over the course of the Strategy's implementation thus far. Whilst these are welcome priorities, they have been designated as comprehensive services for all clients, whilst largely being managed and delivered by adult-focused homelessness services, with limited support by youth specialist services.

The current approach to the development and implementation of a Housing First Service System in Western Australia is a clear example where a specialised approach for young people is needed. In the years since the release of both the community and State Governmentled Homelessness Strategies we have seen a growing understanding of this across governance and service delivery which has led to actions addressing the needs of young people to be better included in strategic priorities. In the last six years in particular YACWA has been involved in efforts to broaden understanding of HF4Y in WA through:

- Supporting the WA Alliance to End Homelessness with the development of the community-led Youth Homelessness Action Plan in 2019 which was led and informed by young people with lived experience I through formation of a Youth Homelessness Advisory Council (YHAC) that was managed and supported by YACWA.
- In 2020, YACWA worked with the Department of Communities and key youth services to develop a business case proposal for the development and implementation of a HF4Y trial as part of the State Government's COVID-19 Response Youth Taskforce, which was unfortunately unable to be progressed as part of this process.
- In 2021, guided by YHAC, YACWA worked collaboratively with the Department of Communities to host the first Director General Roundtable on Youth Homelessness. At this event, a clear recommendation was put forward, that further development of a HF4Y model for Western Australia be researched and co-designed with recommendations towards implementation of the model made, with this priority also included in the State Government's Homelessness Strategy First Action Plan.
- In 2024, YACWA partnered with the WA Alliance to End Homelessness, Vinnies WA, and YHAC on a joint submission for the Youth Action Plan 2024-2027, to advocate for the Government to support the development of a HF4Y model in WA.

- In 2025, YACWA collaborated with the Ending Child and Youth Homelessness initiative, led by the youth homelessness sector, developing a pre-budget submission encouraging a whole-of-government response to ending youth homelessness. As a part of this submission, the collective emphasised the importance of a HF4Y model in WA.

Although some work has been done by YACWA and members of the COVID-19 Youth Taskforce in 2020, the opportunity to broadly engage with the sector has been limited and there are potential misperceptions on not only the differences between the adult and youth model, but also its applicability and sustainability in a West Australian context.

Aligned Strategic Priorities

Beyond a commitment to ending chronic homelessness in Western Australia, implementing HF4Y and the recommendations outlined in this report align with a number of key government strategic priorities including:

- *Western Australia's 10-Year Strategy on Homelessness 2020-30 | Action Plan 2020-2025* (Department of Communities):
 - Priority Action 2.1.3 - 'Support the development of a Housing First for Youth Model.'
 - Priority Action 3.1.1 - 'Develop and support low-barrier / low threshold accommodation options for young people which are inclusive of the needs of vulnerable groups, including culturally and linguistically diverse (CaLD) and LGBTQI+ young people.'
- *WA Youth Action Plan 2024-2027 Koorlangka Bidi "Young people's path"* (Department of Communities):
 - Priority Action 4.2 - 'Supporting affordable housing opportunities.'
- *At Risk Youth Strategy 2022-2027* (Department of Communities):
 - Priority Action 1.4 - 'Identify further opportunities for the earlier identification and assessment of young people at risk of harm and cumulative harm and strengthen responses across agencies to appropriate and timely supports.'
 - Priority Action 2.1 - 'Develop and implement targeted, culturally and trauma informed responses to meet the priority needs of at-risk young people, including diversion from the youth justice system, homelessness, family safety concerns, and support to transition from care to independent adulthood.'
 - Priority Action 3.2 - 'Communities will undertake a phased approach to strengthen its targeted services for at risk young people including reviewing the service mix, service consistency, sector capacity and best practice across

the service types, cultural responsiveness and agility to respond to emerging areas of service need. The views of young people with lived experience will inform this work.'

- *WA Housing Strategy 2020-2030* (Department of Housing and Works):
 - Priority Action 3.3 - 'Collaborate with the community sector in the design and delivery of support services to enable people to sustain their homes and achieve their housing aspirations.'
 - Priority Action 5.5 - 'Provide access to safe and stable homes for people experiencing homelessness as a first priority, to allow access to appropriate support.'
 - Priority Action 5.3 - 'Trial initiatives that combine housing assistance and wrap around support to build household capacity and provide viable pathways and transitions from social housing.'

What is Housing First for Youth?

Definition & Origins of Housing First

Since its conception in the 1990s through the New York based Pathways to Housing Initiative, the Housing First approach has become a successful and evidence-based approach to addressing homelessness around the world. This housing-based model of intervention was designed to address chronic homelessness and provide a 'pathway' out of homelessness for those with complex needs typically unserved by traditional housing models^{1 2}. Core to this approach is valuing housing as a human right – preferencing immediate access to permanent housing and relevant supports over housing readiness and time limited accommodation³. This understanding forms the underpinning philosophy of Housing First – **that a successful transition out of homelessness and into recovery and independent living is contingent on the provision of safe and adequate housing with the right supports before all else**⁴. Housing First operates through a set of principles that guide both high-fidelity program design and delivery, as well as this underpinning philosophy to inform the homelessness system⁵.

While not a blanket solution, studies from past and ongoing Housing First programs have found that those participating in a Housing First program as opposed to a more traditional staircase model have higher rates of tenancy sustainment and improved mental health outcomes⁶. Due to these successes, the Western Australian Government has committed to embedding Housing First principles within its 10-Year Strategy to End Homelessness with the goal of providing low-barrier, low-threshold access to safe and stable homes with tailored services for those in need.

¹ 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. Retrieved from <https://www.dunstan.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/FINAL-Mercy-Housing-First-report-v1.2.pdf>

² Kozloff N., Adair CE., Palma Lazgare LI., et al. (2016). *Housing First for Homeless Youth with Mental Illness. Pediatrics*. 138(4):e20161514. . Retrieved from https://www.researchgate.net/publication/308763390_Housing_First_for_Homeless_Youth_With_Mental_Illness

³ Lockett, G., & Halligan, J. (2020). *Can Housing Put Youth First?*. Y Foundations. Retrieved from <https://yfoundations.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/Can-Housing-First-Put-Youth-First.pdf>

⁴ Gaetz, S., Walter, H. and Story, C. (2021). *THIS is Housing First for Youth. Part 1 – Program Model Guide*. Toronto, ON: Canadian Observatory on Homelessness Press. Retrieved from <https://www.homelesshub.ca/sites/default/files/HF4Y-Program-Guide-Jul-15.pdf>

⁵ 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.

⁶ Dixon, J., Quilgars, D., & Wenham, A. (2021). *Relationships First? The initial two years of Haringey Housing First Project for Care Leavers*. University of York. Retrieved from <https://centrepnt.org.uk/media/5040/evaluation-of-haringey-housing-first-for-care-leavers-final-report-nov-2021.pdf>

Adapting Housing First for Young People

We can define Housing First for Youth as **" based on the understanding that the causes and conditions of youth homelessness are distinct from adults, and therefore the solutions must be youth-focused."**⁷

The intended malleability of Housing First as a philosophy allows for local adaptations and changes to be made in order to meet the unique needs of different target cohorts. Early data from Housing First programs in Canada found that the successes of the model failed to translate to significant outcomes for young people⁸. This is often due to Housing First program's tendency to be targeted towards adults who are entrenched rough sleepers, meaning that youth services are not as integrated within the service.

The youth iteration – HF4Y – emerged from Pathways adaptations for youth in Canada and was designed to address the gaps a traditional Housing First model may have when it comes to the specific needs of young people experiencing homelessness and offering a broader range of supports. Whilst it is still grounded in the belief that everyone has a right to housing without preconditions and will recover more effectively if they are housed, it is also built ensuring that accompanying supports are delivered by specialist youth workers that can effectively nurture the unique developmental needs of young people, building resilience and independent living skills in order to foster a positive transition into adulthood.

HF4Y is underpinned by the belief that young people are more equipped to deal with complex issues such as mental ill-health and alcohol/drug addiction from the stability of a home and therefore having a better chance of improving overall wellbeing and life trajectory. Additionally, research demonstrates that it costs less on average to provide appropriate housing and support to a person at risk of or experiencing homelessness (ending homelessness) compared with providing that same person with short-term and ongoing emergency and other institutional responses (managing homelessness) which treats the ongoing health effects of homelessness but does not necessarily guarantee access to the long-term secure housing needed to break the cycle.

As a philosophy, the core principles of HF4Y can provide a youth service with foundational guidance for all aspects of program delivery, including goals, outcomes, collaboration and practice and form a crucial component of broader efforts to end homelessness. In order to achieve this, a whole system approach must be taken that encompasses other youth

⁷ Gaetz, S., Walter, H. and Story, C. (2021). *THIS is Housing First for Youth. Part 1 – Program Model Guide*. Toronto, ON: Canadian Observatory on Homelessness Press. Retrieved from <https://www.homelesshub.ca/sites/default/files/COH-AWH-HF4Y.pdf>

⁸ Gaetz, S., Scott, F., & Gulliver, T (Eds.). (2013) *Housing First in Canada: Supporting Communities to End Homelessness*. Toronto: Canadian Homelessness Research Network Press. Retrieved from https://www.homelesshub.ca/sites/default/files/HousingFirstInCanada_0.pdf

homelessness services outside of the HF4Y umbrella – such as crisis accommodation, employment, health and education supports. As such, HF4Y can be thought of as both an early intervention program for young people at risk of entrenched homelessness, and a philosophy that can form an underlying and guiding principle to align services towards a whole of community approach to addressing youth homelessness.⁹

The Core Principles of H4FY

Essential to implementing a high-fidelity HF4Y model is adherence to the model's core principles. A Way Home Canada identifies the following as critical components of a HF4Y approach:

A right to housing with no preconditions

Housing First for Youth is defined by providing safe, secure, and permanent housing as quickly as possible without conditions required for the young person to meet prior. Housing and supports are separated, where a loss of housing does not equal a loss of supports as the two are not contingent on one another. This also encompasses the adoption of a zero-discharge policy into homelessness, where a young person will not permanently lose their housing due to their actions or behaviours.

Youth choice, youth voice, and self-determination is prioritised

Young people have input and agency over their support and housing choices. This principle is based on informed decision making where young people should be able to choose, and be supported to make choices, to the best of their ability. This also includes ensuring young people understand the limits of choice – such as housing or location limitations. Choice over housing, amongst whatever has been made available, is crucial. This may look like scattered site housing as used most commonly in the traditional model, transitional housing, supported housing, shared housing or returning home to live with family. There may also be some elements young people are required to do within a HF4Y program, such as regular contact with their caseworker and contributing to their rent, with consideration given to affordability and other mitigating circumstances. Failing to meet these does not lead to a young person permanently losing their housing and/or supports.

Positive youth development and wellness orientation

Recovery orientation is embedded within the approach as a recognition of the trauma young people face as a result of their experiences of homelessness. The focus in providing support should move beyond meeting basic needs to a positive recovery orientation framework. Understanding a young person's recovery journey often involves trial and error, and that

⁹ Parsell, C., Petersen, M., & Culhane, D. (2017). Cost Offsets of Supportive Housing: Evidence for Social Work. *The British Journal of Social Work*, 47(5), 1534-1553. <https://doi.org/10.1093/bjsw/bcw115>

support is given with care from a culturally appropriate, strengths-based perspective. This might involve working on a young person's self-esteem and sense of self, communication skills, social skills, family relationships, friendships and identifying personal interests and goals to work towards. A trauma-informed approach should also be used to ensure the safety of the young person and prevent re-traumatisation. Supports should also enable a healthy transition to adulthood, successfully equipping young people to live and thrive independently.

Individualised, client-driven supports

Young people are not a monolith, and each and every one of their experiences are unique. This should be respected in program design and implementation. Supports given to young people should be appropriate and individualised, as well as voluntary. Supports are not tied to housing, and remain ongoing through any situational changes a young person might face. Supports should remain flexible both in terms of time frame and the evolving needs of young people, and youth choice should always be central to the support provided. Engagement and reengagement with a service is also on an individual's own terms, and they are encouraged to engage without coercion from staff.

Social inclusion and community integration

As part of this strengths-based approach, strengthening young people's sense of social inclusion combats feelings of being 'shut' or 'left' out of society and acts as a protective factor for their recovery. Combating social exclusion and isolation can look like reconnecting young people with natural supports such as family or looking for ways to engage or reengage with First Nations, culturally and linguistically diverse (CaLD), disabled, and LGBTQIA+ community networks and supports. This is particularly important for young people participating in programs with scattered site housing, as they may experience feelings of social isolation and exclusion. Young people should be supported to make meaningful and fulfilling connections within their communities.

The Infinity Project - A High-Fidelity HF4Y Adaption

One of the earliest iterations of a high fidelity HF4Y program is the Infinity Project in Calgary, Canada. After embedding a Housing First approach within their 10-Year Plan to End Homelessness (2008) the city witnessed a 11.4% drop-in homelessness rates over a four-year period, but no reduction in youth homelessness rates prompting a review into youth specific solutions to the crisis. At the time of the Plan's release, young people represented 20% of Calgary's homeless population, while 44% of young people in the city were not suitable or eligible for the youth housing programs currently available.

In 2009, the Infinity Project was launched by the Boy's and Girl's Club of Calgary (BGCC) and funded by Calgary Homeless Foundation (CHF) to provide a low-barrier, youth-specific Housing First program for young people aged 16 to 24 in Calgary. At the core of the program is its adherence to foundational principles that form the basis of HF4Y – specifically an emphasis on youth 'choice' and youth 'voice', as well as broader supports tailored to the transitional needs of young people accessing the service. These broader supports encompassed transitional planning - both to adulthood and out of the service itself - that started at the point of intake, and a separation of housing and supports that allowed young people to participate voluntarily without fear of losing access to services they need.

Low caseloads, the support of dedicated Housing Support Workers, and access to 24/7 on-call support were key to the successes of the program and its outcomes:

- Of the 37 young people in the program for 2 years, 32 retained their housing.
- 63% over 18 and 87% under 18 were able to secure a stable source of income.
- 100% of the young people in the program said they had engaged with community activities and supports that the project had helped them access.

The successes of the program led to an adaption of this HF4Y model for Indigenous youth called Home Fire, which was later joined by another program, Endaayaang, in Ontario. These Indigenous-led programs built on the successes of the Infinity Project, with the addition of culturally appropriate supports that facilitated cultural engagement for young people with their communities, and ensured Indigenous ways of knowing were embedded into the service.

Where HF4Y Sits in the Youth Homelessness System

It is critical to state that both Housing First and HF4Y are not a one-size-fits-all philosophies that would suit the needs of all individuals experiencing homelessness. **Different models of accommodation and support can support the Housing First approach without being considered high-fidelity Housing First Programs.** The Housing First approach generally targets those who need wraparound support due to complex needs and therefore may not be well served, or able to access, traditional staircase-model type homelessness services. As such, it cannot be considered a one size fits all approach to homelessness. Some young people may be better suited to higher threshold long-term transitional accommodation services such as Foyer Oxford or others through family mediation and support to remain in the home. Whereas those experiencing chronic homelessness and/or are impacted by complex trauma, mental health issues, addiction, and/or engagement with the justice system, among other factors that prevent them from meeting preconditions for some housing services or maintaining a place within a program, may be better suited to a Housing First for Youth program that offers low-barrier, low-threshold support.

That being said, HF4Y is both a specific program model and a philosophy that should inform the entire spectrum of youth homelessness services. Utilising the principles of the model, HF4Y services can form a key component of a broader systemic strategy to end homelessness, working with other youth homelessness services such as crisis accommodation, and mainstream health and education supports. Alongside this service coordination, key elements of the HF4Y principles such as low threshold supports, prioritisation of rapid housing and youth-specialist service delivery can inform planning and procurement across the entire service system.

The existing youth homelessness system should continue to provide the full spectrum of services that supports young people to transition through crisis to develop the skills they need to graduate to independent housing. Whilst this continuum will still be critical under a HF4Y model, it is important that a no wrong door approach is embedded where young people can be supported to access supports that are tailored to their individual needs, with access to some form of housing prioritised for all young people experiencing homelessness.

What HF4Y is not

HF4Y offers an alternative solution for young people to access low-barrier, low-threshold support. Part of recognising youth choice is the flexibility to not participate in a HF4Y program as other services may be better suited to a young person's preferences of needs.

Across the service spectrum there are many different types of services that address the diverse needs of young people experiencing homelessness, such as transitional accommodation, drop-in centres and outreach. The HF4Y approach is intended to complement these services, rather than replace them.

The existing youth homelessness system operates by seeing young people move through a continuum of services as they transition from crisis to independent living. The services that make up this continuum will remain an essential component to a broader systemic strategy that adopts a 'housing-led' approach, incorporating policy and service responses that increase access to permanent housing, provide accommodation-based service support and facilitate enhanced capacity for prevention¹⁰. This means that rather than stable housing purely being an end goal as in traditional homelessness service models, it becomes integrated into the full-service system throughout all components of service delivery.

The examples below are a snapshot of some of the types of services that are not considered high-fidelity HF4Y, however would continue to be critical components of a youth homelessness system and complement an integrated HF4Y approach:

- **Foundation Youth Housing in NSW**

Foundation Youth Housing in NSW uses a Transitional Housing Plus model to provide youth specific social housing with integrated case supports to young people aged 16 – 25. Young people are supported in their transition to independent housing over a 5-year period, and rent is scaled up over time to prepare young people for the private rental market. Though it shares similarities with high-fidelity HF4Y models seen internationally, the capped term limit for the service means it cannot be strictly considered a HF4Y program.

- **Foyer Oxford**

Foyer Oxford in WA is a highly successful independent living program for young people experiencing or at risk of homelessness. The program focusses on young people gaining financial independence through developing practical employability skills and has seen over 90% of young people maintain housing 12 months after exiting the service¹¹. Though upskilling young people to prepare them to transition to adulthood and independent living follows the HF4Y philosophy, a 2-year term limit and high-barrier conditional entry into the service based on mental health history, substance use, and family history do not align with the low-barrier, low-threshold requirement of HF4Y.

¹⁰ European Federation of National Associations Working with the Homeless (2011). Housing-led policy approaches: Social Innovation to end homelessness in Europe. Retrieved from https://www.feantsa.org/download/14_11_2011_hf_position_paper_final_en2408443683520304907.pdf

¹¹ Foyer Oxford. Foyer Oxford - Results. Retrieved from <https://www.foyeroxford.org.au/about/results>

It is important to acknowledge that these and other services are doing excellent work in this space and they share some of HF4Y values and supports but not the full suite of conditions required to be a HF4Y program.

Prioritising Action to Address Youth Homelessness

It is well-documented that young people are a cohort that experience high rates of homelessness, with 2016 Census data reporting that young people aged 10-24 account for 21% of Western Australia's homeless population¹². This figure is likely an underrepresentation as homelessness among young people is generally under-reported due to a tendency for young people to be staying in short-term or temporary accommodation such as couch-surfing. Often for these young people, a usual address will be reported and so they will not be counted on the census as homeless, despite them often experiencing unstable financial and living circumstances. It is important to note that Aboriginal young people are a key cohort that are disproportionately overrepresented in homelessness whilst simultaneously being underrepresented in statistics. Any further efforts to end youth homelessness and implement HF4Y in Western Australia must be done in partnership with Aboriginal people to ensure a culturally informed approach.

Young people are disproportionately impacted by economic downturns alongside other issues affecting employment, such as family conflict and lack of income. Youth unemployment in WA currently sits at 10.2%, more than double the rate of general population¹³. In addition to this, young people ages 18-24 had the highest rate of specialist homelessness service clients working, with more than 1 in 5 young people working while experiencing homelessness¹⁴. This is because young people are disproportionately impacted by economic factors, such as lower wages and higher rates of workplace exploitation, alongside other factors affecting employment, such as family conflict¹⁵. This demonstrates that we must ensure there are pathways not only out of homelessness but into educational and employment supports as these form crucial components of early intervention¹⁶. There is a clear need for more intervention pathways such as HF4Y that

¹² Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. (2025). *Specialist homelessness services annual report 2023–24*. Retrieved from <https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/homelessness-services/specialist-homelessness-services-annual-report>

¹³ Australian Bureau of Statistics. (2025, August). *Labour Force, Australia, Detailed*. ABS. <https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/labour/employment-and-unemployment/labour-force-australia-detailed/latest-release>.

¹⁴ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. (2025). *Specialist homelessness services annual report 2023–24*. Retrieved from <https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/homelessness-services/specialist-homelessness-services-annual-report>

¹⁵ Howe, J., & Dillon, T. (2025). *Underpaid and Overlooked: The Wage Crisis Facing Young Workers in Australia*. Melbourne Law School. https://law.unimelb.edu.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0007/5331517/Fair-Days-Work-Report_final.pdf?utm_source=miragenews&utm_medium=miragenews&utm_campaign=news

¹⁶ Flatau P., Lester L, Kyron M., Lai, C., and Li, M. (2022). *Ending Homelessness in*

provide both housing and employment support to prevent chronic before it is entrenched. Breaking the cycle is crucial and must be achieved by improving the health and wellbeing of young people to avoid risking further exposure to poverty, trauma, and a potential return to homelessness. In doing so, we help to build resilience and prevent young people from facing long-term, chronic homelessness well into adulthood.

Housing First vs Housing First for Youth

The need for an adapted Housing First model for young people emerged from research evaluations of the At Home/Chez Soi project, a five-year trial of Housing First in five different Canadian cities. The key finding from this extensive study was that Housing First was inadequate at wholly addressing the needs of developing young people, and as a result an adapted model was created that was informed by researchers, service providers, policy makers, and young people with lived experience of homelessness.

This extensive body of international evidence reinforces that Housing First must acknowledge and be tailored to the unique developmental needs of young people, and the temptation to simply insert young people into an adult-focused Housing First program must be resisted.

In order to paint a clearer picture of the distinction between the two models, it is important to clarify what the key elements of HF4Y are that ensure more specialised support for young people that facilitates greater outcomes than Housing First. These include:

1. **Underlying principles and philosophy:** Simply providing housing and supports for young people does not make a program HF4Y. Additionally, Housing First programs that are designed for adults but are inclusive of young people also cannot be considered HF4Y. A centralised and coordinated HF4Y philosophy is required to ensure that youth services can develop programs that are wholly aligned to the principles of HF4Y.
2. **Youth-centred solutions:** Outcomes for HF4Y are based on the understanding that the causes and conditions of youth homelessness are different from adults and therefore the solutions must be appropriately youth focused. A Housing First program that is not specialised for young people may not be fully tailored to addressing the underlying causes of youth homelessness, as 'catch-all' solutions often do not fully capture and address the unique needs of young people.
3. **Age-appropriate supports:** The HF4Y model offers a broader range of supports than what is typically associated with Housing First for adults. HF4Y is designed to address the needs of developing adolescents and young adults and as a result a key

goal that is unique to HF4Y is not only to be independently housed, but also supported through a successful transition to independence, wellbeing and access to adult services if needed.

4. **Variety of housing solutions:** Young people generally require a range of housing options be made available to them for HF4Y to be successful. Many Housing First programs for adults do not have the same variety of housing options available as should be the case in HF4Y. Learnings from the 50 Lives 50 Homes Project in Western Australia has shown that the key cause of young people exiting the program was the lack of alternative housing options available – having rapidly accessible re-housing alternatives is critical to the success of HF4Y as young people must be given the opportunity to secure alternative accommodation if their original choice is not working for them or as their needs develop during the transition to adulthood.
5. **Caseload and management:** HF4Y programs also generally require more rigorous case management of clients and therefore smaller caseload sizes for support staff is required.

Key to the difference between a Housing First model and its youth iteration is an emphasis on the transition to adulthood and the supports required to facilitate this. Rapidly housing young people is only the first step to ensuring they are better equipped to deal with complex issues in a safe, stable environment. This should be coupled with the understanding that young people cannot simply be housed without accompanying supports to compensate for the loss of familial support, depriving them of the chance to learn key developmental life skills. The detrimental and recent impacts of trauma many have experienced prior to and during their experience with homelessness^{17 18}, are also significant factors to take into account due to family conflict being a key factor in first onset of youth homelessness¹⁹. This trauma can have long lasting ramifications on their long-term wellbeing and if no intervention occurs can entrench chronic homelessness. Evidence has demonstrated that the earlier someone experiences homelessness the more likely they are to have chronic homelessness entrenched well into adulthood²⁰ and so, this is a critical period to disrupt homelessness and prevent rough sleeping.

¹⁷ Luckett, G., & Halligan, J. (2020). Can Housing Put Youth First? Y Foundations. Retrieved from <https://yfoundations.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/Can-Housing-First-Put-Youth-First.pdf>

¹⁸ Gaetz, S., Walter, H. and Story, C. (2021). THIS is Housing First for Youth. Part 1 – Program Model Guide. Toronto, ON: Canadian Observatory on Homelessness Press.

¹⁹ Luckett, G., & Halligan, J. (2020). Can Housing Put Youth First? Y Foundations. Retrieved from <https://yfoundations.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/Can-Housing-First-Put-Youth-First.pdf>

²⁰ Flatau, P., Conroy, E., Spooner, C., Edwards, R., Eardley, T. and Forbes, C., (2013). Lifetime and intergenerational experiences of homelessness in Australia. Retrieved from https://www.ahuri.edu.au/sites/default/files/migration/documents/AHURI_Final_Report_No200_Lifetime-andintergenerational-experiences-of-homelessness-in-Australia.pdf

Adults engaging with Housing First may already possess a significant amount of life experience to draw from, whereas for many young people being housed through HF4Y may represent many 'firsts' - the first time they have been housed, first time managing a household, their first time living independently, or the first time they are accessing the supports they need. Due to this, it is critical that any Housing First approach for young people provides intensive support for young people to pursue goals related to these 'firsts'. As family breakdown is one contributor to youth homelessness, HF4Y seeks to both provide supports in place of family absence, and to reconnect young people with their natural supports if it is safe and appropriate to do so.

Due to a lack of safety net and support from family, young people experiencing homelessness are often not afforded the privilege of pursuing their development in a safe and secure environment, such as their childhood home. The freedom to take risks and develop life skills is greatly lessened when survival is the main focus and/or consequences of this pursuit may lead to a return to homelessness²¹. Due to the risks associated with experiencing homelessness at an earlier age, this return could see young people face lasting effects on their mental and physical wellbeing, as well as cognitive and academic functioning due to the chronic stress associated with homelessness²². Additionally, evaluations from the 50 Lives 50 Homes Project in WA found the presence of intergenerational homelessness in the youth cohort accessing the service – so for many it was the first time they had been housed in a long time²³.

²¹ Karabanow et al., (2016) In Gaetz, S., Walter, H. and Story, C. (2021). THIS is Housing First for Youth. Part 1 – Program Model Guide. Toronto, ON: Canadian Observatory on Homelessness Press. Retrieved from <https://www.homelesshub.ca/sites/default/files/COH-AWH-HF4Y.pdf>

²² Vellesi, S., Quinn, D., Wood, L. (2021). An Evaluation Snapshot: Youth Experiences of Housing First. University of Western Australia. Retrieved from <https://assets.csi.edu.au/assets/research/An-Evaluation-Snapshot-YouthExperiences-of-Housing-First-Report.pdf>

²³ Ibid.

Youth and Housing First – The Zero Project Youth Snapshot (50 Lives 50 Homes Project)

Launched in 2015, the 50 Lives 50 Homes Project²⁴ was a collective impact program and the first Housing First program in Western Australia, established to provide housing and support to the most vulnerable people experiencing homelessness. Of the 427 participants in the program's lifespan, 110 were 25 years or younger.

The Youth Snapshot provided compelling evidence for a dedicated youth Housing First approach. Youth participants were found to be more likely than adults to:

- Abandon property when housed (27% vs. 16%)
- Wait longer to be housed (186 median days vs. 136 median days)

Youth participants were found to be less likely to:

- Be priority listed on the public housing waitlist (87 days vs. 65 days)
- Sustain their tenancies for at least one year (71% vs. 83%)

Challenges to sustaining tenancies that may have contributed to differences in abandonment rates were attributed to the appropriateness of housing acquired, feelings of social isolation in the transition to independence, and difficulty resisting peer pressure. Due to limited housing in WA, young people also felt pressure to accept what was available and offered to them. Critical success factors to sustaining tenancies identified throughout the program included after hours wraparound support, support in developing independent living skills, and support navigating services. Despite these challenges, significant improvements to young people's health, mental health and wellbeing through a reduction in hospital presentations and inpatient admissions were observed throughout the program.

²⁴ Ibid.

Implementing Housing First for Youth in WA

Sector Consultation Findings

In November 2022, YACWA hosted its Housing First for Youth Sector Workshop. The event was attended by representatives from key youth homelessness services as well as the Minister for Housing and Homelessness. Through this workshop attendees developed a shared understanding of the operational needs and potential barriers to the implementation of the approach in WA to inform the development of this report's recommendations. These findings are complemented by the input of a small working group of select housing services representatives with key knowledge about HF4Y in WA. Requirements identified through this consultation process were:

- Key components and supports required to implement a high-fidelity Housing First for Youth approach in WA;
- Required preconditions to be met to facilitate successful implementation;
- Barriers to be addressed prior to implementation; and,
- Existing tools to aid implementation.

Key components of a HF4Y Program

The HF4Y model offers a broader range of supports than what is typically associated with Housing First targeting adults. In alignment with HF4Y's core principles, and the additional support required to facilitate a transition into adulthood, below are example support options that could be developmentally appropriate:

1. Health and Wellbeing

- a. Dedicated after hours support
- b. Isolation support and management
- c. Accessible mental health and health services including general practitioners, counselling, and clinical therapeutic interventions
- d. Specialist AOD services focusing on harm reduction
- e. Digital accessibility
- f. Promoting healthy sexuality and gender identity
- g. Crisis de-escalation and management
- h. Family mediation and reconciliation

2. Education and Income Support

- a. Alternative education program/service with low threshold and change approach
- b. Subsidised education that is tailored to the pace/needs of the young person

- c. Youth specific job providers embedded in established services
- d. Brokerage funding for food security and financial sustainability
- e. Mediation between case workers and a young person's existing educational institution/employment

3. Community Engagement

- a. Low threshold engagement hubs with built in outreach capacity
- b. Peer support and mentorship
- c. Parenting support programs for young parents
- d. Facilitating community engagement activities such as involvement in sport and recreation
- e. Allowance to participate in hobbies, interests, or engage in community-based initiatives including sports clubs, gyms, musical instruments, and creative supplies
- f. Support to navigate different service systems/social organisations
- g. Legal advice/support capability

4. Housing Support

- a. Support to manage daily household responsibilities
- b. Supported landlord/tailored tenancy management – zero exit into homelessness
- c. Moving and/or furnishing allowance

5. Life Skills Development

- a. Empowerment to conduct self-advocacy and develop communication skills
- b. Support to manage transitional periods e.g., exiting out of care, completing education, commencing employment, etc.

The effectiveness of these supports will be enhanced if the following best-practice elements of both HF4Y and youth work are met:

1. Person focused and place-based support with no predetermined time limit.
2. A primary youth worker-client relationship within a skilled multidisciplinary team and a community engagement hub.
3. Low caseloads per youth worker determined prior to commencement of the program.
4. Service delivery based upon the Youth Work Code of Ethics and has ongoing independent oversight and evaluation.
5. Services that are culturally informed, LGBTQIA+ inclusive and tailored to meet the specific needs and backgrounds of young people.
6. Access to a range of housing options for young people being supported so they have a genuine choice (particularly to choose between independent living and another

option so they are not accepting service delivery/housing models that don't suit them).

7. Capacity to offer alternative housing if one tenancy fails.
8. Support service that is tied to the person not to the building.
9. Peer and mentor roles to build a relationship with the young person - particularly around social and community integration.
10. Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations delivering services for Aboriginal young people to ensure cultural accessibility.
11. Access to afterhours wraparound supports and outreach.
12. Linkages to the broader services system, including mainstream health, education and employment services.
13. Brokerage funding to assist young people towards their longer-term goals.
14. A skilled workforce with capacity to provide intensive case management

Barriers to implementation

Informed youth choice must be respected even when housing supply is limited

A core principle of HF4Y is young person' choice, voice and self-determination, meaning that young people should have some kind of say in what kind of housing they receive and where it is located. Housing First programs typically prioritise independent living through the use of 1-2 bedroom scattered-site housing. However a range of options should be considered in order to prioritise as much as possible housing arrangements that are flexible to suit young people's developmental needs and life changes and provide housing choice where practicable. In some cases where the range of housing options/living conditions is insufficient, young people can be referred to other kinds of housing options such as transitional housing, while remaining within a HF4Y program as long as the following conditions are adhered to:

- The young person can consider options and make an informed decision to participate in the alternative housing program;
- They remain part of the HF4Y program and retain the support of a youth worker as part of this, even while residing in a housing program that comes with separate supports and other conditions;
- They are provided with support for accessing other kinds of housing such as independent living, if they leave the program. In other words, they cannot lose their housing and supports when their tenure in the housing program ends; and
- There is a clear pathway for HF4Y clients to eventually move into, and sustain, independent living accommodations and this is updated in partnership with the young person.

Lessons on housing from the Living Independently for the First Time (LIFT) Program

The Living Independently for the First Time (LIFT) program utilises Housing First principles to provide long-term support for young people leaving care.

Meeting these conditions for housing choice may be challenging in landscapes where housing is supply-based rather than needs-based²⁵. Evaluation data from the LIFT Program described instances in which young people were housed in accommodation inappropriate to their needs – such as individual, scattered-site housing – that they struggled to manage without support, leading to exacerbated mental health and interpersonal problems. Additionally, the sudden freedom of living independently and the resulting experimentation period contributed to difficulties in transitioning into the service.

Respecting youth choice is essential to ensuring young people do not feel pressured to accept housing options that are inappropriate to their needs for the sake of accepting what is available, while a separation of housing and supports ensures young people are supported in these choices. In providing this support, the Program saw 80% of young people have made gains in the domains of independent living skills, money management and tenancy skills.

Adequate funding is crucial to ensuring young people and staff are supported

Intensive, parent-like case management is an essential component to the Housing First for Youth approach. As the model is designed to take on a significant amount of risk, adequate funding is essential to ensuring specialist youth workers are employed to manage caseloads and upskilling is available for existing staff. This is crucial to achieving a 'system of care' that is client-driven and designed to ensure that needs are met in a timely and respectful way by assisting young people to access supports (internal and external) as required. Moving towards a sector-wide shift that encourages services to undertake the high risk associated with a lowbarrier, low-threshold approach will not be achieved without the funding and resources to facilitate it.

²⁵ Dodd, R., Rodrigues, N., Sequeira, T., & Watkins, L. (2020). Housing First Principles for Australia. Homelessness Australia & Lotterywest. Retrieved from <https://www.ruah.org.au/wpcontent/uploads/2020/08/Housing-First-Principles-web.pdf>

'Stickability' overcoming barriers in HF4Y adoptions in the UK and Scotland

Recent evaluations coming out of the UK and Scotland have seen success in the model's application for young people leaving care. The two pilot projects – Rock Trust²⁶ in Scotland and Centrepoin²⁷ in London – supported young people between the ages of 16 and 25 in their transition to independent living after exiting care.

Both programs were described as operating under a 'relationships-first' or 'relationships-based' model of service that was 'person-led, not system-led'. The concept of 'stickability' largely referred to the consistent, 'parent-like' relationships case workers utilised with participants even in the event of rehousing or disengagement from the program. Housing supply and limited location choices meant securing housing proved difficult, and young people were often left waiting several months to be rehoused. Despite this, continuous and intensive support continued to be given to the young people involved regardless of housing status. Additionally, both programs utilised a Leaving Care grant or bursary to provide financial assistance to participants for the purpose of setting up and furnishing their homes, while Rock Trust partnered with a housing provider that employed a dedicated housing officer for the program to assist the young people in finding the right home.

These continued supports through every stage of the rehousing process, including the additional bursaries, saw significant outcomes for the young people involved in both programs. Every young person but one maintained their tenancy with Rock Trust, and all but one of the young people that accepted housing referrals through Centrepoin maintained their tenancies. Both programs saw improvements across mental health, education, employment and training, and family reconnection and improved relations.

Existing tools identified to aid with implementation

There are several readily available tools, services and programs that could potentially be used to rollout HF4Y in Western Australia. Further exploration will be required as to the exact details on how these could be utilised, however they provide us with examples of local supports and services to build on and could potentially be utilised to facilitate rapid implementation of a HF4Y trial and approach in WA. Examples of this include:

The By-Name List

The By-Name List is a real-time list of individuals currently rough sleeping in various metropolitan and regional communities. It includes a robust set of data points that support coordinated access to services and prioritisation of need. It can be used as a critical starting

²⁶ Blood, I., Alden, S., & Quilgars, D. (2020). Rock Trust Housing First for Youth Pilot: Evaluation Report. Housing First Europe Hub & Rock Trust.

²⁷ Dixon, J., Quilgars, D., & Wenham, A. (2020) Relationships First? The initial two years of Haringey Housing First Project for Care Leavers. University of York

point to assist youth workers who are specifically trained to use the list to engage young people experiencing homelessness and support to access housing.

The Zero Project WA

The By Name List is managed by The Zero Project WA, who is also the Housing First Coordinator for Western Australia. The Zero Project WA support communities to use a Housing First approach by working at a systems level to assist collaboration to reduce and ultimately end homelessness in their local communities. This means they could be well placed to support the establishment of a HF4Y system in WA, and drive evidence-based improvements that help reduce rough sleeping and chronic homelessness and to utilise the By Name List to enable the youth sector to collaboratively track and quantify youth homelessness.

The Common Assessment Tool

The WA Alliance to End Homelessness's Youth Cohort Action Plan identified the development of an evidenced based Common Assessment Tool and Framework as a key commitment required to improve outcomes for young people experiencing homelessness. Youth Accommodation Services currently measure client outcomes differently depending on the organisation and service provided. The developed prototype Assessment and Outcomes Measurement Framework acted as a COVID-19 specific client screening tool and could be used as part of a HF4Y approach to ensure access is prioritised for those with the most need. Resourcing is needed to pilot the use of the prototype tool and evaluate its' effectiveness in streamlining access to appropriate accommodation options for young people experiencing homelessness and as such this could be easily aligned to the implementation of HF4Y.

Youth Rough Sleepers Coordination Group

The Youth Rough Sleepers Coordination group is a powerful collective of youth homelessness services that addresses the accommodation and support needs of vulnerable young people in the Perth Metropolitan area. Founded by the Ending Child and Youth Homelessness initiative, the group is an interagency collaboration inspired by the Rough Sleeper Coordination Group established in 2023. Using the By-Name List, the group uses real-time data to strengthen the pathways to connect young people with services that suit their circumstances.

Recommendations

Below is a series of recommendations intending to inform both the rollout of a HF4Y trial as well as the state-wide implementation of the HF4Y approach. They were guided by both the national and international evidence base for HF4Y as well as the feedback from youth sector representatives at the Sector Workshop. After 6pt 1.15

The recommendations are intended to form part of a staged approach similar to the rollout of Home Stretch in WA, with immediate actions focused on the development and implementation of a trial which will subsequently inform the shift to a statewide HF4Y approach with programs across all Western Australian regions. These also build on a range of existing strategic priorities and initiatives that are being delivered by the Department of Communities, including the implementation of the State Homelessness Strategy.

Phase 1 - Piloting a HF4Y Program in WA

Invest in the co-design, development and trialling of a high-fidelity HF4Y trial in the Perth Metropolitan Area targeted towards young people aged 16-25 who are homeless. This would complement existing youth homelessness services and enhance local knowledge and data around implementing HF4Y in WA. Key components of this trial are listed below.

1. Service Design and Procurement

Priority Action 1.1 - Undertake a co-design process with young people and youth services to inform and refine the trial. The co-design must be driven by the voices and experiences of young people, achieved through mechanisms such as YACWA's *Youth Homelessness Advisory Council*.

Priority Action 1.2 - Facilitate the resourcing of a backbone organisation who would coordinate the program and work with youth services to maintain a high-fidelity HF4Y approach as well as maintain/establish linkages between youth and adult services. This could be rapidly implemented by leveraging existing strategic initiatives and coordinating bodies such as *The Housing First Homelessness Initiative* and *The WA Alliance to End Homelessness (through the Zero Project WA)*.

Priority Action 1.3 - Canvass existing and/or proposed accommodation options to serve as housing for the pilot. The exact nature of housing location, design and available amenities should be informed by the co-design process.

In order to deliver a variety of housing options for the HF4Y program, a range of existing initiatives and infrastructures could be utilised:

1. Utilising the State Government's *Spot Purchasing Program* to acquire established housing stock that meet young people's needs as identified through the co-design process.
2. Allocating a portion of existing or planned social housing to be used as sites for a HF4Y approach through an inclusionary zoning approach.
3. Establish an accommodation hub that is specifically designed for young people, adapting from existing adult focused initiatives such as *Boorloo Bidee Mia* and/or *Koort Boodja*.
4. Engage ethical landlords by subsidising the use of vacant or under-utilised accommodation for long-term rentals for young people as part of the program, partnering with existing initiatives working in this space such as *the Home Hub's Homes for Good program*.
5. Utilising a portion of existing accommodation service providers (example services include *Foyer Oxford*, *PICYS Household Network*, *Vinnies WA's Plug Program* or *Indigo Junction's Indi Living Youth*).

Priority Action 1.4 - Identify and resource dedicated youth services to collaboratively deliver the HF4Y pilot. This should include Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations ensure the program is culturally informed and accessible for Aboriginal young people.

Priority Action 1.5 – Work with contracted youth services to provide specialist youth workers with training in the HF4Y principles and Youth Work Code of Ethics to enable them to provide high-fidelity case-management and support.

2. Program Delivery

Priority Action 2.1 - Deliver a high-fidelity HF4Y trial, including the following key components:

1. Specialist youth workers to deliver intensive case management and wraparound support to housed young people.
2. Dedicated brokerage funding coordinated by the backbone organisation and managed by youth services to assist young people to maintain housing, engage in employment and education opportunities, access digital devices and other amenities, as well as work towards their long-term goals. This brokerage funding could be adapted from the 'Invest In Me Funding' approach piloted in the recent Home Stretch Trial or the successful Centralised Diversion Fund utilised by A Way Home Washington in the Anchor Community Initiative.
3. 24/7 after hours and outreach supports.
4. Fostering a No Wrong Door Approach in line with the State Homelessness Strategy by building in capacity for the program to build collaborative relationships a range of services and supports to assist case managers to support young people with referral

and engagement and ensure supports are comprehensively tailored to need.

Examples of these include:

- a. Centrelink.
- b. Specialist youth mental health and AOD support and other health-related services as required.
- c. Employment services and educational institutions.
- d. Community-based organisations to assist with social integration and enable young people to build relationships with peers outside of the program and participate in recreational activities.

Priority Action 2.2 - Ensure as much as practicable that all available supports are delivered in line with the key elements of HF4Y best practice as outlined on p.17 of this report.

3. Evaluation

Priority Action 3.1 – Partner with a research institution to deliver a comprehensive evaluation of the HF4Y program, who would work with the youth services managing the pilot to collect and evaluate data on the effectiveness of key supports in achieving the desired outcomes for young people involved.

Priority Action 3.2 – Identify the key goals and outcome of the trial and agree on a shared outcomes framework to measure the impact of the supports provided. The State Government’s *Community Services Outcomes Measurement Framework* could be used to facilitate this.

Priority Action 3.3 – Develop a detailed report based on this evaluation which summarises the key elements of the development and delivery of the program, the learnings and insights from service activities and participant experiences, as well as a range of key recommendations to 23 inform the expansion of the model, done in partnership with the stakeholders involved in the trial.

Phase 2 - Implementing a HF4Y Approach Across WA

In implementing a HF4Y approach across Western Australia it is important that we build on the learnings from the trial evaluation, leverage existing services, infrastructure and skills, and undertake comprehensive consultation with key government agencies, peak bodies, youth services and young people.

This will ensure a successful integration of HF4Y into both the broader structures of the Housing First Homelessness Initiative and the various types of services involved in a ‘housing-led’ youth homelessness system.

1. Embedding HF4Y Principles in Systems Design

Priority Action 1.1 - Partner with the WA Alliance to End Homelessness, Zero Project WA and the HF4Y trial services to facilitate a strategic and collaborative focus on young people and increase sector understanding of HF4Y. This partnership would then be utilised to implement the actions details below.

Priority Action 1.2 – Develop and deliver a HF4Y Community of Practice to assist with integrating the HF4Y approach into the youth homelessness system and support the development of strong policies and frameworks that build the capacity of the State Government to provide strong governance over, and effective investment into the long-term rollout of HF4Y. Learnings from the Home Stretch rollout Community of Practice could inform this process.

Priority Action 1.3 - Adapt the By- Name List to develop a youth-specific version focused on building a clearer picture of youth homelessness in each region which will ensure the rollout of HF4Y across the state is tailored to local conditions and need.

Priority Action 1.4 – Develop a youth-specific homelessness dashboard that contains publicly accessible data on key trends and figures in youth homelessness and the progress of initiatives aimed at addressing it. Existing dashboards such as the WA Alliance to End Homelessness' *Homelessness Outcomes Measurement Framework Dashboard* could be adapted to facilitate this process.

Priority Action 1.5 – Develop and deliver youth specific HF4Y trainings which would support both the high-fidelity adoption of HF4Y principles by services involved in the HF4Y pilot and general understanding and embedment of the philosophy within the broader youth homelessness system.

Priority Action 1.6 – Ensure representation from the youth sector on the newly formed Housing First Advisory Group to ensure a strong strategic focus on young people.

Priority Action 1.7 - Engage with State and Territory Governments as well as youth peaks across the nation to co-design and development of a nationally endorsed set of HF4Y principles across Australia to guide a consistent approach that can be adapted to local circumstances.

2. Building the Capacity of the Youth Homelessness System to Deliver Effective Services that Align with HF4Y Principles

Priority Action 2.1 - Build into ongoing Department of Communities homelessness recommissioning processes a priority focus on supporting services to deliver more low threshold accommodation and support options for young people with complex needs.

Priority Action 2.2 - Undertake a targeted recommissioning process for youth homelessness services with a specific focus on:

1. Developing a coordinated entry system specifically designed for youth homelessness services, building on the Office of Homelessness' ongoing efforts to facilitate this for the broader homelessness system.
2. Adopting a long-term financial commitment that enables the stability and sustainability required to embed systemic reform, enhance quality of practice and shift ways of working across the youth homelessness service system.
3. Improving service capacity and sustainability by increasing funding to match true costs of service delivery and resource crucial unfunded services, and
4. Facilitating a shift to outcomes-based funding that allows services flexibility to adapt their service delivery to meet changing needs, costs and improved approaches.

Priority Action 2.3 - Audit existing commissioning and procurement policies to ensure that existing systemic barriers to implementing high fidelity HF4Y principles such as restrictive eligibility criteria, 3 strikes policies and generalised housing waitlists are removed for HF4Y aligned services.

Priority Action 2.4 – Adopt inclusionary zoning in all new social housing development with a portion of the housing to be allocated specifically for young people under 25 and channelled into a priority housing stream for young people engaged in HF4Y programs.

3. Expanding the trial into a statewide rollout of HF4Y

Priority Action 3.1 - Building on the learnings from the trial, undertake an extensive planning and consultation process across the state in partnership with community services, including Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations.

Priority Action 3.2 - Deliver a staged rollout of HF4Y across WA, partnering with local youth services and Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations to undertake trials in regional areas.

Conclusion and Next Steps

This Report has aimed to provide a broad overview of the theory, evidence and local, national and international knowledge on the HF4Y approach with the aim of informing future implementation of a HF4Y trial program to gather evidence of best practice, upscaling the trial to a full rollout of the HF4Y approach across Western Australia as well as embedding the HF4Y principles and philosophy across the full scope of the youth homelessness system. It is not meant to be the panacea of this process and instead intended to be the starting point for strong collaborative partnership between the State Government and youth sector to collaboratively determine what HF4Y looks like within the youth homelessness system, and work towards embedding the HF4Y approach across Western Australia.

Key to this process is the inclusion of the voices of young people with lived experience and particularly those who are disproportionately impacted by youth homelessness, including Aboriginal and LGBTQIA+ young people as well as young people from a refugee and migrant background and young people with a care experience. Given the limited scope and capacity of this project it was not feasible to engage young people in the development of this Report however any future co-design of a HF4Y program and approach must ensure the voices of young people are at core of service design, with YACWA's Youth Homelessness Advisory Council an example of a body that could be utilised to inform this.

Moving forward YACWA will continue to highlight the key recommendations contained within this Report, including holding an ongoing dialogue with the State Government to advocate for progression of work towards a HF4Y trial and an enhanced strategic focus on young people, well as hold further conversations with the youth sector to broaden understanding of HF4Y and continue collaborative efforts to end youth homelessness in WA.