

SHELTER NSW SUBMISSION ON THE NSW DRUG SUMMIT 2024

About Shelter NSW's

Shelter NSW has operated since 1975 as the state's peak housing policy and advocacy body. Our vision is to create a sustainable housing system that provides secure homes for all. We are a non-profit organisation that is concerned about the housing crisis in NSW and the rising trends of homelessness, housing rental stress as well as impacts of poor-quality housing, particularly for lower-income households.

We pursue our vision through critical engagement with policy and practices and thought leadership. We provide systemic advocacy and advice on policy and legislation for the NSW housing system to resolve housing inequality. We are especially concerned for low-income households that struggle to afford good quality and well-located housing in the private market.

Shelter NSW is concerned about the housing crisis in NSW and the rising trends in homelessness; housing rental stress as well as the impacts of poor-quality housing, particularly on low-income households, including those people experiencing drug-related harm and or exiting the criminal justice system. We advocate solutions to make the housing system work towards delivering a fairer housing system for all.

Shelter NSW (Shelter) welcomes and appreciates the opportunity to submit to the NSW Government Drug Summit. Our submission focuses on a 'Theory of Change' model that aims to address the problem of accessing housing security linked with treatment support services for people *with drug-related harm* and those existing in the criminal justice system. What we know is that by increasing housing opportunities for this group, health outcomes improve and they are more able to seek treatment options.

Submission

Theory of change to advocate for better housing and support options for people experiencing drug related harm or exiting the criminal justice system

Problem 1 People with drug related harm often have insecure, transient housing options

Problem 2 People experiencing drug related harm are often criminalised and do not have equal access to housing and supported accommodation when exiting correctional centre in NSW

Goal: to enable people with drug related harm and those exiting the criminal justice system or to be able to access safe and accessible accommodation with adequate treatment and support including harm reduction initiatives.

Context

Housing Issues

- For those with drug dependency issues or those exiting the criminal justice system access to stable housing is a substantial issue and a barrier to tackling drug related harms and reincarcerations rates.
- Homelessness is on the rise across NSW LGA and street sleeping has increased.
- Many of those with drug dependent issues or those exiting the criminal justice system are men who do not fit the usual criteria for priority housing.

More housing support models are needed for people struggling with drug depended issues or for those exiting the criminal justice system

- People exiting prison have been the fastest growing client category for specialist homelessness services over the past decade. Almost half (48 per cent) of people leaving Australian prisons in 2022 are expected to be homeless upon release.
- There is a need for an injection of funding for more specialist recovery beds and harm reduction programs in NSW for people leaving prison.
- Some people return to harmful situations, including going back to abusive relationships or attempting to re-enter prison, due to a lack of appropriate housing.

Dominant value systems that inform exclusions from the housing market

- In a scarce housing market, priority is given to people perceived to be the 'deserving poor', which generally excludes people with experience of incarceration or drug dependency. Such exclusion is linked to a lack of understanding of the experiences of trauma, racism, substance dependence, mental health concerns and abuse faced by people.
- There is often a simplistic and decontextualized understanding of 'choice' fueling the stigma faced by those with experience of drug dependency and incarceration. Such an understanding fails to recognise that, it is more difficult for people to make positive choices when the basic human right of housing is not met, we live in an unfair, unaffordable housing market like Australia.

Misunderstandings the housing and support needs of people with drug dependency or those on post-release from prison

There is a widespread belief within the mainstream service sector that supporting people with drug dependency or those who have experienced incarceration is only the responsibility of limited support services or the Corrective facilities while completely ignoring their broader housing and health needs. This is primarily due to an assumption that people who have experienced drug dependency or who have been incarcerated are not part of society, that they are permanently 'criminal' and therefore not entitled to the same support as other citizens.

In response to the situation outlined above Shelter NSW's submission is focused on the development of a change model that puts housing at the centre - This system starts with prioritizing the housing needs for people experiencing drug dependency or exiting the criminal justice system as outlined in the following table.

Assumptions	Inputs	Activities	Short term outcomes	Long term outcomes
<p>Due to limited access to secure and affordable housing and support options, people with drug dependency or those leaving the criminal justice system are more likely to continue engaging in recidivist behaviours that could lead to them ending up in the criminal justice system.</p> <p>Insufficient safe, secure and affordable housing available for people across NSW.</p> <p>There is a disproportionately high number of First Nations people who experience drug dependency or are in the criminal justice system.</p> <p>Limited housing options across NSW, especially for those who experience drug dependency or those exiting in the criminal justice system.</p> <p>People who experience drug dependency issues or those exiting the criminal justice system into social housing without support systems are unlikely to deliver a long-term, non-recidivism outcome.</p> <p>Limited government funding support for accommodation models that address the housing needs of people who experience drug dependency or those exiting the criminal justice system.</p> <p>Limited access to affordable housing options.</p> <p>A service system that is fragmented i.e. mental health, Housing and AOD</p>	<p>Injection of funding to treatment services including harm reduction initiatives and Funding for support services linked with accommodation options that specifically target those people who experience drug dependency or those exiting the criminal justice system.</p> <p>Monitor how many people in NSW are experiencing drug dependency and those exiting the criminal justice system by region.</p> <p>Development of a best practice model of accommodation linked with support services, especially for people struggling with, dependency and mental health issues who are exiting the criminal justice system.</p> <p>The need for services that can sustain intervention that incorporates other factors such as substance abuse, mental health, poverty, criminality, racism and gender.</p> <p>Funding that links people exiting the criminal justice system before leaving with support services and safe, secure housing options.</p> <p>The formation of a working party that can provide a clear understanding of local needs and funding options with housing providers and support services dealing with people exiting the criminal justice system.</p> <p>The need for a whole government strategy that links mental health, corrections, AOD and housing.</p>	<p>Investigate accommodation design options such as 'Core and Cluster' in NSW that provide both support service and accommodation in one location, providing a connected holistic assessment and support model.</p> <p>Meet the funding gaps of current treatment services.</p> <p>Collaborate with local social and community housing providers to investigate opportunities for the development of a core and cluster housing and support services model.</p> <p>Support services should collaborate with service organisations that can best provide pathways to reunification with family.</p> <p>Collaborate with Aboriginal CHP's and local Land Councils on ways to facilitate First Nation people exiting the criminal justice system and best practice ways of retaining the importance of family and cultural connection.</p> <p>Engage with support services who in turn engage with family's post-release from the criminal justice system.</p> <p>Engage with correctional facilities on the development of a protocol housing exit model to ensure those in the criminal justice system exist and have supportive accommodation options on release.</p> <p>Investigate land options within the Coffs Harbour region that could be used to deliver a supported housing model for those exiting the criminal justice system.</p>	<p>Develop a relationship with support services and correctional facilities that identifies the housing and support needs of those existing supported accommodation and corrective services in NSW.</p> <p>Have protocol in place with correctional facilities to ensure those in the criminal justice on exiting are provided with access to a support or housing accommodation option.</p> <p>A best practice model should be developed that aims to bridge pathways to reunification with family.</p>	<p>To deliver accommodation models that link accommodation with support services for people who exiting the criminal justice system.</p> <p>The creation of a housing and support service pathway model provides people with drug dependency or those leaving the criminal justice system with information and support that will help them build a pathway back to reunification with family.</p> <p>The formation of a consistent services model within correctional facilities is needed to help people exiting the criminal justice to better understand and address their housing and support needs.</p>