

# Permanent Supportive Housing

Permanent Supportive Housing (PSH) is permanent, independent and affordable housing that is accompanied by a suite of services matched to people's needs and preferences. Like rapid re-housing, it is premised on a 'housing first' philosophy.

PSH is targeted at people experiencing long term homelessness, usually with a range of mental, physical or substance misuse issues. The following elements are crucial to the success of PSH approaches:

- Targets people with significant health issues and housing challenges
- Proactively seeks out people and engages them in services
- Permanent affordable housing
- A choice in housing options
- Immediate access to permanent housing
- Voluntary engagement with individualised supports
- Housing focused support for tenancy sustainment

## What is permanent supportive housing?

Like rapid re-housing, permanent supportive housing is premised on a 'housing first' philosophy which prioritises getting people into permanent housing. Since the housing first model emerged in the United States and Canada in the early 1990s, evidence has shown that complex health issues do not have to result in homelessness. In fact, many people find it easier and more cost effective to manage complex health issues when they already have a home.

International evidence confirms that PSH reduces people's use of institutional and emergency services, and is likely to result in overall savings for governments in the medium to long term. In Australia, the costs associated with crisis and criminal justice responses for a person who is homeless with a mental illness can easily exceed one million dollars over a lifetime.

## What works?

- Targeting people with significant health issues and housing challenges

PSH programs target people with significant health and housing problems that will require intensive and ongoing support. Numerous Australian studies show the relationship between long term repeat homelessness and chronic health issues. For

example, initial results from a University of Melbourne study show that the longer someone experiences homelessness, the worse their physical health becomes.

- Proactive engagement

This involves engaging with people who are sleeping rough with the intention of getting them into PSH. Teams of outreach workers build a rapport with people and help them access permanent housing and specialist health services. The process is not coercive, and recognises that people experiencing chronic homelessness are often reluctant to engage with government and community services due to past negative experiences.

- Permanent and affordable housing

The availability of permanent affordable housing is central to ending homelessness. Strategies to ensure affordable housing is available include building new social housing, identifying a targeted number of social housing dwellings for this group and securing rent subsidies and tenancy agreements. If programs secure tenancies in the private rental market it is important that rent subsidies are ongoing and rise at the same rate as rental increases, to ensure that housing is affordable long term.

- Immediate access to permanent housing

Research from across the world shows that housing first approaches have consistently higher housing retention rates than staged or transitional housing models for most groups; however, the comparative success has not been consistently proven for people with substance addiction problems.