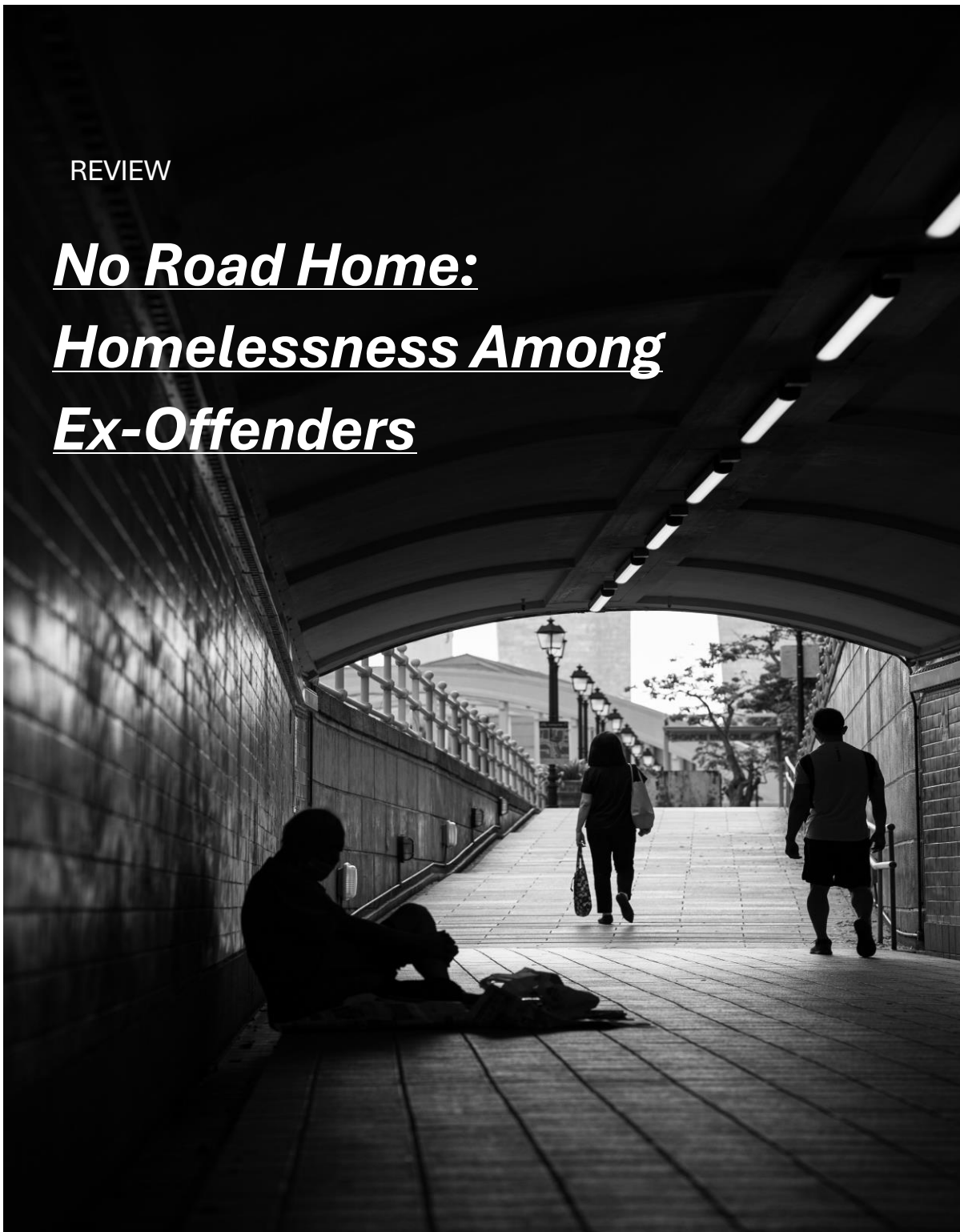


REVIEW

No Road Home: Homelessness Among Ex-Offenders



"Housing affordability in Australia is among the worst globally. Ex-offenders struggle to meet rental demands, particularly with unprecedented rental increases affecting regions across the country."

Homelessness QLD would like to acknowledge Finn Cates USQ Student who provided the literature review in support of this report.



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2 SCOPE OF THE PROBLEM: HOMELESSNESS AMONG EX-OFFENDERS

2.1 OVERVIEW

Australia is currently facing a severe homelessness crisis, which extends beyond the general population and into the criminal justice system. Formerly incarcerated individuals are highly vulnerable to housing instability. Many individuals are released from custody without secure housing, leaving them exposed to the dangers of homelessness. This lack of housing not only isolates them socially, but also creates additional barriers, making it difficult for them to secure employment, access healthcare, and reintegrate into society.

Exiting custodial settings into homelessness significantly increases an individual's risk of victimisation, violence, chronic health problems, and long-term unemployment. These risks are especially prevalent in Queensland, where homelessness among ex-offenders highlights systemic shortcomings in both the criminal justice system and social support services designed to facilitate reintegration.

3 REVIEW ON THE JOURNEY FROM CUSTODY TO HOMELESSNESS (2022–2023)

Between 2022 and 2023, Homelessness Queensland (QLD), in collaboration with other key stakeholders, conducted an extensive review focusing on the critical transition of individuals from custodial settings to the community, with particular emphasis on their heightened risk of homelessness. The goal was to identify the systemic challenges contributing to housing insecurity for individuals leaving the justice system. The findings underscored the pressing need for better-coordinated efforts to support successful reintegration.

A major component of the review was a detailed literature analysis conducted by Finn Cates, a research student at the University of Queensland (UQ). Cates' contribution offered valuable insights from existing studies, shedding light on the structural barriers ex-offenders face in securing stable housing and rebuilding their lives. These complementary efforts—the review and the literature analysis—were synthesized to create this in-depth report on the pressing issue of homelessness among ex-offenders in Australia.

3.1 ACKNOWLEDGING COLLABORATIVE PARTNERSHIPS

The successful completion of this review was made possible by the collaboration and support of several key partners. Their combined efforts were instrumental in shaping the direction and outcomes of the review:

- **Queensland Corrective Services (QCS):** QCS provided crucial insights into the challenges individuals face as they transition from correctional facilities to the community. Their input was vital in understanding the barriers to securing stable housing post-release and helped guide the review's recommendations.
- **Re-entry Services:** Organisations providing re-entry services played an essential role in supporting individuals during the vulnerable period of transition. Their work, offering tailored assistance such as pre-release planning, case management, and connections to housing resources, was crucial in shaping the review's findings and recommendations.
- **The MARA Project:** The MARA Project is a targeted initiative that aims to reduce recidivism by offering intensive case management and holistic support for individuals post-custody. Their contributions provided valuable insights into effective strategies for reducing homelessness among ex-offenders.

- **CREST (Community Re-entry Services Team):** CREST offers re-entry services designed to help individuals transition successfully back into the community. Their focus on this critical period provided an understanding of both the successes and limitations of current re-entry programs in reducing the risk of homelessness.
- **Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Housing Queensland Peak:** The involvement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Housing Queensland Peak was crucial in ensuring that the review addressed the specific needs and experiences of Indigenous individuals, who are disproportionately affected by both incarceration and homelessness. Their perspectives were essential in developing culturally appropriate housing solutions for Indigenous ex-offenders.
- **Department of Housing:** The Queensland Department of Housing played a significant role in addressing the housing needs of ex-offenders. Their contributions were key in exploring how housing availability and affordability impact the reintegration process for individuals exiting custodial settings.

3.2 KEY FOCUS AREAS

The review focused on identifying gaps in the existing system that exacerbate homelessness for individuals' post-custody. Based on the findings, the following key focus areas were identified as critical to addressing homelessness among ex-offenders:

1. **Addressing Barriers to Housing Access:** Many individuals leaving custody encounter substantial barriers when trying to secure stable accommodation. Discrimination due to their criminal history, limited housing options, and a lack of coordinated support services make the transition out of prison difficult. The review highlighted the need for housing policies that account for the unique challenges faced by this group, including incentives for landlords and broader access to affordable housing.
2. **Collaborative and Holistic Support Services:** The review emphasized the importance of integrated wraparound services. Housing support must be complemented by mental health services, substance abuse treatment, and employment opportunities to address the complex needs of ex-offenders. The review also underscored the importance of culturally competent services, particularly for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander individuals, to ensure their needs are met in a culturally safe manner.
3. **Early Intervention and Pre-Release Planning:** Effective pre-release planning is essential to ensuring a smooth transition out of custody. The review called for improved collaboration between correctional services, housing providers, and re-entry programs to ensure individuals receive comprehensive support as they re-enter the community. This support must begin before the individual is released, with housing arrangements and other key services already in place to prevent a return to homelessness.

3.3 CHALLENGES FACED BY EX-OFFENDERS

Formerly incarcerated individuals face numerous challenges when trying to secure stable housing upon release from custody. These challenges can be categorized into several key areas:

1. **Housing Affordability:** Australia's housing market is one of the least affordable in the world. Formerly incarcerated individuals, particularly those attempting to settle in major cities like Brisbane, Sydney, and Melbourne, often struggle to find rental housing due to skyrocketing rental prices.
2. **Health and Addiction Issues:** Many individuals exiting custody suffer from high levels of psychological distress, substance abuse problems, and chronic physical conditions. These health issues complicate

reintegration efforts, as they affect both an individual’s ability to seek assistance and their eligibility for certain housing services.

3. **Social Stigma:** Formerly incarcerated individuals, especially those who have been homeless, face significant social stigma, which hinders their ability to interact with social services, secure employment, or find stable housing. This stigma not only exacerbates their housing challenges but also creates a cycle of social exclusion that can lead to reoffending.
4. **Reintegrating First Nations offenders:** Communities have experienced historical injustices, such as forced removal from their lands, residential schools, and cultural erasure. These traumas often lead to cycles of poverty, substance abuse, and violence, which complicate reintegration.

Risk Approaches	
Housing supply	Early market engagement
Concentration of cohorts	Tenant development & security
Public safety, risk of reoffending, DFV	Service integration and practice changes
Systemic racism	Community & practice development
Cross government service integration for shared clients	Jurisdictional scan and develop practice model as proof of concept
Embedding effective and sustainable practices that can withstand changes in key personnel	Strong, early engagement and co design of joint practice enhancements

4 QUEENSLAND: INDIVIDUALS TRANSITIONING FROM CUSTODIAL SETTINGS INTO HOMELESSNESS

Individuals transitioning from custodial settings into homelessness face a complex array of challenges within both the social welfare and criminal justice systems. Nearly half of those discharged from prison are expected to be homeless upon release, with 43% of prison entrants reporting homelessness in the four weeks leading up to their incarceration, which includes emergency and temporary accommodations ([Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2023](#)). Alarming, some individuals view prison as a refuge, further entrenching a cycle of incarceration and homelessness ([Schneider, 2023](#)).

The increasing prevalence of homelessness post-incarceration highlights the inadequacy of current preventative strategies. Probationers who are homeless face a heightened risk of reoffending ([Jacobs & Gottlieb, 2020](#)). Over

time, incarceration significantly raises the likelihood of homelessness, with prisoners being 20 times more likely to experience homelessness than the general population ([Bashir et al., 2021](#)).

5 CHALLENGES IN QUEENSLAND'S REINTEGRATION EFFORTS

Despite these initiatives, Queensland continues to face challenges in reintegrating individuals and preventing homelessness. More than one-third of clients in Queensland's Specialist Homelessness Services (SHS) who exited prison were still homeless at the end of their support period (AIHW, 2023). This reflects the complex challenges that individuals face when re-entering society after incarceration. Approximately 1,300 clients remained in temporary accommodation at the end of their SHS support period, demonstrating the urgent need for more permanent housing solutions.

5.1 COMPLEX BARRIERS TO REINTEGRATION

Addressing the complex needs of individuals re-entering society from custodial settings requires a holistic approach. The challenges they face often include difficulty in securing accommodation, finding employment, and accessing government benefits. Co-occurring issues such as illicit drug and alcohol addiction strongly predict homelessness and further complicate reintegration. In the year prior to incarceration, 73% of individuals reported illicit drug use, and 37% continued these behaviours while in prison ([AIHW, 2023](#)).

Reintegration is further hampered by health complications, including depression and chronic conditions, which affect an individual's motivation and ability to seek assistance. Additionally, 52% of prisoners reported having chronic physical conditions, while 43% exhibited high levels of psychological distress ([AIHW, 2023](#)). In the general population of those receiving homelessness services, 43% reported mental health issues, and 15% had experienced family and domestic violence ([AIHW, 2022](#)).

Stigmatisation of individuals transitioning from custodial settings, particularly those experiencing homelessness, severely impedes their ability to interact with social services, secure employment, and find stable housing ([Keene et al., 2018](#); [Reilly et al., 2022](#)).

5.2 FIRST NATIONS AUSTRALIANS

Impact of Colonisation: The legacy of colonisation, including forced removal from lands, the Stolen Generations, and cultural erasure, has caused deep-seated intergenerational trauma within First Nations Australian communities. This trauma manifests in higher rates of substance abuse, mental health issues, and violence, which complicate the reintegration process.

Distrust of the Legal System: First Nations Australians often harbor a deep mistrust of the criminal justice system, which is seen as a tool of colonisation. This mistrust can lead to disengagement with rehabilitation programs and support services, hindering successful reintegration.

High Incarceration Rates: First Nations Australians are disproportionately represented in prisons. As of recent statistics, they make up about 30% of the adult prison population but only 3% of the national population. This overrepresentation creates a systemic cycle of incarceration, making reintegration even more difficult.

Inadequate Housing: Secure housing is a critical factor in successful reintegration. However, many First Nations Australians live in overcrowded or inadequate housing conditions. This makes it difficult for former offenders to find stable living arrangements, increasing the risk of homelessness and reoffending.

Loss of Cultural Identity: Many First Nations Australian offenders experience a disconnection from their cultural heritage due to their time in the criminal justice system and prior social circumstances. This loss of identity can exacerbate feelings of alienation upon release, particularly when returning to culturally strong communities.

Lack of Culturally Appropriate Programs: The mainstream correctional and rehabilitation programs often do not reflect Indigenous cultural practices, values, or spirituality. The absence of culturally relevant support services makes it harder for First Nations offenders to fully engage in their rehabilitation.

Social Stigma: Offenders often face significant stigma when returning to their communities, particularly in smaller or tightly-knit First Nations communities where their criminal behaviour may have directly impacted other members. This social ostracism can lead to isolation and hinder their ability to rebuild relationships and reintegrate.

Community Capacity to Support: Many First Nations communities, especially in rural or remote areas, lack the resources and capacity to provide adequate support for reintegrating offenders. This includes access to employment, education, counselling, and other critical services.

Lack of Continuity in Support Services: There is often a lack of continuity between programs offered in prison and those available in the community. Many rehabilitation programs that are provided in the correctional setting do not have counterparts in the community, leaving former offenders without ongoing support after their release.

During consultation it is important to note many said that local planning and responses are needed. Reintegration for First Nations Australian people is a complex and multifaceted process, requiring a nuanced approach that considers historical trauma, cultural identity, socio-economic disadvantage, and systemic bias. Solutions need to be culturally sensitive and community-driven, with an emphasis on restorative justice, mental health support, and the provision of adequate resources. Only by addressing these interconnected challenges can successful reintegration and reduced recidivism be achieved for First Nations Australian offenders.

6 INTERNATIONAL APPROACHES TO HOMELESSNESS AMONG EX-OFFENDERS

6.1 SCOTLAND AND EUROPE'S OPEN PRISON MODELS

In Scotland, initiatives aimed at reducing short-term sentences and increasing non-custodial alternatives have allowed individuals to maintain vital connections with their communities and homes. Nordic and other European countries employ "open prison" designs during the final stages of sentences to facilitate smoother reintegration into local communities. These open prisons, which emphasize rehabilitation, offer inmates more freedom while maintaining a connection to society. By allowing prisoners to work, study, and reconnect with family before their release, these systems reduce the likelihood of homelessness and recidivism.

Innovative employment programs, such as virtual reality job interview training, offer greater opportunities for ex-offenders to find employment. These programs simulate real-world interview scenarios, providing individuals with essential skills that make the transition from custody to community life smoother and more successful.

7 NATIONAL PROGRAMS TO PREVENT HOMELESSNESS POST-CUSTODY

Several national programs and initiatives in Australia aim to address homelessness among ex-offenders, though many are limited in scope and funding. Below is an overview of key programs at the state and federal levels:

1. **The Throughcare Program (Australian Capital Territory):** This program is regarded as one of the most successful in Australia, providing continuous support to individuals both before and after release. Throughcare offers a holistic range of services, including housing assistance, mental health support, and employment services. Its approach has proven effective in reducing recidivism and homelessness by addressing the complex needs of ex-offenders.
2. **Housing Pathways (New South Wales):** Housing Pathways offers a coordinated approach to housing for vulnerable groups, including ex-offenders. The program integrates housing assistance with other vital services, such as mental health care, addiction treatment, and employment support, to ensure stable housing for ex-offenders ([Corrective Services NSW, 2023](#)).
3. **South Australia's Integrated Housing Exit Program (IHEP):** IHEP aims to reduce exits into homelessness by providing individuals with suitable housing for up to 12 months, easing their transition back into the community.
4. housing for up to 12 months, easing their transition back into the community. And the IHEAAS and 'Outreach Service': [Department for Correctional Services - Access to housing \(corrections.sa.gov.au\)](#)
5. **Corrections Victoria Housing Program:** In partnership with community housing providers, this program provides transitional housing for ex-offenders. While it has successfully reduced homelessness, its impact is limited by funding and housing availability. Many ex-offenders continue to struggle to secure stable housing after their transitional period ends.
6. **Corrections Victoria Reintegration Pathway:** The Corrections Victoria Reintegration Pathway (CVRP) is an effective model for addressing homelessness among individuals exiting custodial settings. It provides comprehensive pre- and post-release support, including individualized pre-release assessments. Services such as Transition Triage and ReGroup focus on examining housing arrangements and managing debt to prevent homelessness post-release. **Victoria Housing Program (CVHP)** also delivers housing and support services for individuals at risk of homelessness.
7. In Western Australia, the **Foyer Oxford program**, which provides accommodation and support to at-risk youth, reported a 90% success rate in preventing young people from returning to homelessness or criminal activity.
8. Sacred Heart Mission's **Journey to Social Inclusion Program** in Melbourne, participants experienced a 61% reduction in the use of emergency health services after being placed in stable housing.

National Housing and Homelessness Agreement (NHHA): The NHHA provides federal funding to state and territory governments to support housing and homelessness services. However, the agreement often fails to meet the demand for housing services, particularly for ex-offenders. Without specific provisions for ex-offenders, many individuals exiting prison do not receive the housing support they need.

The Queensland-based [Building Own Women's Strength \(BOWS\)](#) program provides critical pre- and post-release support for incarcerated mothers, focusing on maintaining and rebuilding relationships with their children both during and after incarceration. This gender-specific program recognises the unique challenges faced by mothers upon release, offering targeted interventions to facilitate family reunification.

The [MARA program](#), specifically designed for women, offers trauma-informed pre- and post-release services, including extensive reintegration planning. It provides both in-reach services through external agencies and outreach support for up to six months post-release, depending on the individual's needs ([Queensland Government, 2018](#)).

The [Next Steps Home](#) program is an initiative designed to support individuals, particularly women, transitioning from incarceration to community life. It focuses on providing stable housing and the necessary support services to help formerly incarcerated individuals reintegrate into society. It offers:

- **Pre- and post-release support:** Assisting women in planning their transition back into society even before they are released.
- **Stable housing:** Providing access to secure housing, which is critical for reducing the risk of homelessness and re-incarceration.
- **Holistic support services:** Offering mental health care, addiction treatment, employment services, and family reunification to ensure individuals have a comprehensive support system as they rebuild their lives.

8.1 GENERAL POPULATION

The [Community Re-Entry Services Team](#) (CREST) is another program that offers pre- and post-release counselling for individuals experiencing drug and alcohol withdrawal. It provides outreach support to both men and women, although CREST's post-release support lasts only three months, which may not be sufficient for achieving long-term reintegration success.

9 EMPLOYMENT AND POST-RELEASE PROGRAMS

Employment is key to preventing homelessness among ex-offenders, as stable work provides the financial security and social structure necessary to reintegrate into society successfully. Programs such as Queensland's **Borallon Training and Correctional Centre (BTCC)** are essential in increasing employment opportunities for individuals exiting custody, addressing one of the major barriers they face when re-entering the community. Without employment, ex-offenders often struggle to secure housing, leading to a cycle of instability and recidivism.

The **Borallon Throughcare team** plays a pivotal role in preparing inmates for life beyond the prison walls. This team collaborates closely with prisoners to develop individualised "pathway plans" tailored to each person's skills, experience, and aspirations. These pathway plans assess each inmate's existing qualifications and identify areas where further training and development are required, ensuring they have a clear roadmap to gainful employment post-release.

Training at BTCC focuses on providing inmates with both technical skills and soft skills, making them competitive in the job market. Inmates have the opportunity to engage in vocational programs such as construction, hospitality, and manufacturing, alongside education programs that allow them to complete high school equivalency certificates or further studies. The center works closely with local businesses and industries to ensure that the training aligns with market demands, increasing the chances of ex-offenders finding employment upon release.

By focusing on employment as a key component of successful reintegration, programs like the BTCC's Throughcare initiative significantly reduce the risk of homelessness among ex-offenders. Securing stable employment not only offers financial independence but also fosters a sense of purpose and belonging, which are crucial in preventing recidivism and promoting long-term community reintegration.

In 2019, Queensland Corrections partnered with St. Vincent de Paul to launch the **Post Release Supported Accommodation (PRSA) program**, aimed at addressing housing challenges faced by men eligible for parole but unable to secure stable accommodation. This initiative was designed to bridge a critical gap in the rehabilitation and reintegration process, offering not only a place to stay but also support services that could help former inmates build a more stable life post-release.

The program plays a crucial role in reducing recidivism by providing participants with the stability needed to comply with parole conditions, find employment, and reconnect with their communities. Stable housing is a fundamental aspect of reintegrating into society, and without it, individuals are often left vulnerable to falling back into patterns of criminal behaviour.

Between 2019 and June 2023, 293 men participated in the program, with a significant portion—46%—being Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders. This statistic highlights the program's importance in supporting marginalized groups who face disproportionately higher rates of incarceration and challenges upon release. The PRSA program aims to mitigate these inequities by offering tailored support to those most in need.

Beyond providing accommodation, the PRSA program offers comprehensive case management services. These include assistance with navigating employment opportunities, accessing healthcare, managing mental health and substance abuse issues, and rebuilding relationships with family and community. Such holistic support ensures that participants not only have a roof over their heads but also the tools to sustain long-term independence and reintegration.

The PRSA program has garnered widespread support from various stakeholders, including correctional officers, parole boards, community organizations, and advocates for prison reform. Its success in improving post-release outcomes has led to discussions about expanding the program to accommodate more individuals and offer even more robust support services. By focusing on both immediate housing needs and long-term reintegration goals, the program serves as a model for addressing the complex challenges faced by individuals re-entering society after incarceration. <https://www.vinnies.org.au/qld/homelessness/prisoner-re-integration>

10 THE COSTS OF INCARCERATION VS. HOUSING SOLUTIONS

The debate surrounding incarceration and housing solutions often boils down to economic, social, and moral considerations. While incarceration has long been the traditional method of dealing with criminal activity, the

increasing costs of maintaining prisons and the growing evidence that housing solutions provide a more sustainable alternative have raised important questions about which approach is more effective.

Micah Projects in Queensland, which offer housing-first programs for individuals with complex needs, estimate that their services save AUD \$13,000 per person per year in reduced reliance on emergency services, hospital stays, and police interventions. This is supported by evaluations of **Brisbane Common Ground**, a supportive housing initiative in Queensland. Research conducted by the **Institute for Social Science Research (ISSR)** at the University of Queensland shows that providing chronically homeless individuals with secure long-term housing, along with essential support services, saves governments this amount annually.

These savings come primarily from the reduced reliance on emergency services, hospital stays, and police interventions, as individuals in supportive housing require fewer interactions with these costly services. The evaluation also highlights that once people transition to stable housing, their need for acute services decreases, leading to significant long-term savings ([ISSR Evaluation](#)).

A **2019 evaluation** of the **Journeys Home** study, which tracked individuals experiencing housing insecurity across Australia, found that those who received housing and support services were less likely to be involved in criminal activity and had higher employment rates. <https://melbourneinstitute.unimelb.edu.au/journeys-home>

The 50 Lives 50 Homes program in Perth provides housing for people experiencing chronic homelessness, many of whom have criminal backgrounds. A 2017 study revealed that providing stable housing reduced individuals' use of emergency services by 57% and lowered their interactions with the criminal justice system. <https://www.uwa.edu.au/Projects/Evaluation-of-50-Lives-50-Homes>

Direct Costs: Incarceration in Australia is an expensive undertaking, with taxpayers spending over \$6 billion annually—an increase of \$2 billion over the past five years. On average, the cost of incarcerating a prisoner is \$147,900 per year, or \$405 per day (Schlicht, 2023). In comparison, the cost of living in Queensland ranges from \$400 to \$750 per week (IDP Education, 2024).

Indirect Costs: Beyond direct financial costs, incarceration has hidden social costs that are difficult to quantify but deeply impactful:

Loss of economic productivity from incarcerated individuals

The social cost of family separation, especially for Indigenous communities

Increased recidivism rates, with around 45% of prisoners reoffending within two years of release

Individuals released from prison incur health costs 1.7 times higher than the general population, particularly in emergency health services and hospital visits (Snow et al., 2019). By reducing short sentences and providing secure, supportive housing post-release, significant cost savings could be achieved, benefiting both the individuals and the wider community in the long term.

A comprehensive study of housing-first programs in the UK and Australia found that participants in these programs were far less likely to reoffend than those without stable housing. Stable housing provides the foundation for individuals to engage with supportive services such as addiction treatment, mental health care, and employment training. <https://issr.uq.edu.au/brisbane-common-ground-evaluation>

According to the most recent data from the 2021 Australian Census, **122,494 people** were experiencing homelessness, a 5.2% increase from 2016. Formerly incarcerated individuals are notably at risk, with nearly 1 in 5 people released from prison becoming homeless within their first month of release. This population, already marginalised, often faces multiple challenges, including mental health issues and substance abuse, which compound their difficulties in securing stable housing.

For Indigenous Australians, the rates of homelessness are significantly higher than for non-Indigenous Australians, although a 15% decrease in Indigenous homelessness was observed between 2016 and 2021. Across all groups, women and younger individuals have seen marked increases in homelessness. Those under 25 now account for 37.4% of all people experiencing homelessness([AIHW](#))([Australian Bureau of Statistics](#)).

Moreover, people living in temporary accommodations such as boarding houses saw a 43% increase from 2016 to 2021. The continuing high rates of homelessness, particularly among vulnerable populations such as ex-offenders, emphasise the need for more robust prevention and housing-first solutions to break the cycle of incarceration and homelessness([Australian Bureau of Statistics](#))([Australian Bureau of Statistics](#)).

The growing issue of homelessness among ex-offenders also reveals disparities in **gender and age**. Women, particularly those aged 35-45 and under 18, saw a more significant increase in homelessness than men, with **homelessness among women rising by 10.1%** between 2016 and 2021([CSI Australia](#)). Vulnerable youth, especially those under 25, accounted for **37.4%** of the homeless population, highlighting the need for targeted early intervention strategies([Australian Bureau of Statistics](#)).

The increasing rates of homelessness, especially among ex-offenders, underscore the inefficacy of current post-incarceration support and housing services. **Housing-first approaches** have proven effective internationally by providing stable housing as the first step in addressing other barriers, such as employment and mental health issues. These programs not only prevent recidivism but also reduce government spending on incarceration by offering sustainable solutions to homelessness([Australian Bureau of Statistics](#)).

To combat this issue, there is growing advocacy for a shift in public resources from punitive systems of incarceration to **comprehensive housing and rehabilitation programs**. This strategy would address root causes of homelessness and reoffending, creating more equitable outcomes for marginalised populations, particularly Indigenous Australians and ex-offenders.

The combination of rising homelessness rates and the over-representation of vulnerable groups among those affected reveals a need for **system-wide reforms**, focusing on prevention, early intervention, and long-term support to disrupt the cycle of homelessness and incarceration.

This data highlights the growing intersection between homelessness and systemic issues in Australia, particularly for those leaving the prison system.

12 RISK FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO HOMELESSNESS POST-CUSTODY

The transition from custody back into society is fraught with challenges, and for many individuals, this process is marred by significant risk factors that increase the likelihood of homelessness. The journey from incarceration to stable living conditions is complex, and without adequate support, formerly incarcerated individuals face a high probability of housing instability. Below are some of the key risk factors that contribute to homelessness post-custody.

Several factors contribute to the elevated risk of homelessness among ex-offenders:

1. **Housing Affordability:** Australia's housing market is one of the least affordable in the world. Formerly incarcerated individuals often find it difficult to afford rental housing, especially in major cities like Brisbane, Sydney, and Melbourne, where rental prices have soared in recent years.
2. **Discrimination:** Many ex-offenders face discrimination due to their criminal history. Landlords and property managers are often unwilling to lease to individuals with criminal records, leaving them with limited options for housing.
3. **Mental Health and Substance Abuse Issues:** A significant portion of individuals leaving prison have untreated mental health conditions or substance abuse disorders. Without proper support, these individuals struggle to maintain stable housing, making them highly vulnerable to homelessness.
4. **Limited Social Support Networks:** Many ex-offenders are estranged from their families or social networks, leaving them without the necessary support to secure housing and reintegrate into society.
5. **Cycle of Incarceration:** Many individuals who leave prison without secure housing find themselves in precarious living situations that put them at risk of criminal behaviour. Homelessness often leads to minor criminal offenses such as vagrancy or theft, which can result in re-incarceration. This cyclical pattern makes it incredibly difficult for individuals to break free and achieve housing stability.
6. **Legal and Financial Obligations:** Individuals leaving prison may face legal obligations such as parole conditions, fines, or restitution payments. The stress of meeting these obligations, particularly without stable housing, can lead to reoffending and eventual re-incarceration.
7. **Lack of Transitional Housing:** Transitional housing provides a temporary solution for formerly incarcerated individuals as they work to rebuild their lives. However, these programs are often underfunded and unable to meet the demand, leaving many without a stable place to stay upon release.
8. **Insufficient Case Management:** Comprehensive case management that helps individuals access mental health care, substance abuse treatment, employment services, and housing is vital to successful reintegration. Without such support, the transition from custody to community can be overwhelming, increasing the likelihood of homelessness.
9. **Overstretched Services:** In many jurisdictions, services aimed at helping formerly incarcerated individuals are overstretched, with long waiting lists for access to housing programs or support services. The lack of immediate assistance can lead to a period of homelessness shortly after release, during which individuals may become entrenched in the cycle of instability.

The risk factors contributing to homelessness post-custody are multifaceted and deeply interrelated. From employment barriers and housing discrimination to mental health challenges and inadequate support services, formerly incarcerated individuals face a multitude of obstacles that can push them into homelessness.

To break this cycle, it is critical to implement a more holistic and supportive approach to reintegration. Key strategies include:

- **Expanding affordable housing:** options to make it easier for ex-offenders to find stable accommodation.
- **Providing targeted support:** for mental health and substance abuse treatment to ensure individuals have access to the care they need, including 'Psychosocial/educational and capability building programs are designed and implemented'.
- **Strengthening transitional housing:** programs and ensuring they are properly funded to meet the demand.
- **Offering comprehensive case management:** to help formerly incarcerated individuals navigate the complex systems they encounter upon release.

By tackling these risk factors, society can help break the cycle of homelessness and custody, providing formerly incarcerated individuals with a genuine opportunity to rebuild their lives and contribute to their communities.

13 BARRIERS TO HOUSING FOR EX-OFFENDERS IN AUSTRALIA

Homelessness is a complex issue, and the barriers faced by ex-offenders in securing housing are particularly challenging. These barriers not only make it difficult for ex-offenders to find stable housing but also increase the likelihood of recidivism, further marginalizing this group.

1. **Lack of Transitional and Long-Term Housing Options:** Australia faces a severe shortage of transitional housing for individuals leaving custody. While some states provide temporary accommodation, the demand far exceeds supply. Additionally, transitional housing programs typically only last for a few months, after which ex-offenders are expected to find long-term accommodation. Given the barriers they face—discrimination, financial instability, and lack of support—many are unable to secure permanent housing and fall back into homelessness.
2. **Insufficient Re-entry Support:** Many individuals are released from custody without comprehensive reintegration plans. While some may have access to pre-release programs, these programs are often underfunded and inconsistent across states. This lack of coordinated re-entry planning leaves ex-offenders to navigate housing, employment, and health services on their own, which can be overwhelming and increases their risk of homelessness. Additionally, many ex-offenders are released with limited financial resources, making it difficult to secure housing or meet basic living expenses.
3. **Legal and Administrative Barriers:** Formerly incarcerated individuals face numerous legal and administrative barriers when attempting to secure housing. For example, parole conditions may restrict where they can live or whom they can associate with, further limiting their housing options. Outstanding fines or debts also complicate their ability to secure housing. Administrative inefficiencies in connecting ex-offenders to housing and support services exacerbate the problem.

14 CHALLENGES AND GAPS IN CURRENT SYSTEMS

Despite the existence of several programs aimed at preventing homelessness among ex-offenders, significant challenges and gaps remain:

1. **Lack of Coordination Between Correctional and Housing Services:** A major challenge in preventing homelessness post-custody is the lack of coordination between correctional services and housing providers. Many ex-offenders are released without a clear housing plan, and there is little follow-up to

connect them with housing services. This disconnect often leaves individuals vulnerable to homelessness.

2. **Inadequate Funding for Housing Programs:** Many housing programs designed to assist ex-offenders are underfunded, limiting their ability to provide comprehensive support. The demand for transitional and affordable housing far exceeds the available supply, leaving many ex-offenders without stable housing options. Furthermore, funding for re-entry programs is inconsistent across states, creating disparities in the level of support available.
3. **Geographic Disparities:** There are significant geographic disparities in the availability of housing services for ex-offenders. While urban areas may have more resources, individuals in rural and remote regions often have limited access to housing and support services, increasing their risk of homelessness and reoffending.

15 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR REDUCING HOMELESSNESS POST-CUSTODY

Housing-first models, which prioritize stable housing for individuals at risk of homelessness, including those with criminal backgrounds, have proven to be a more affordable and effective alternative to incarceration. These programs focus on providing long-term housing along with access to services that address the underlying causes of crime, such as mental illness and substance abuse.

The comparison between the costs of incarceration and housing solutions in Australia clearly favours the latter in both economic and social terms. While incarceration has been the dominant response to crime, particularly among marginalised populations, the rising costs and high rates of recidivism demonstrate the system's shortcomings. Housing-first models, which are both more affordable and effective in addressing the root causes of crime, offer a humane and sustainable alternative to incarceration. Shifting towards housing solutions can save governments money while providing individuals with the support they need to rebuild their lives and contribute positively to society.

To effectively reduce homelessness among ex-offenders, a multi-faceted approach is required. The following recommendations aim to improve housing outcomes for individuals leaving custody:

1. **A co-design approach:** A Justice Reinvestment Strategy is essential to ensure that the voices of those with lived experience are central to the process. Participants have key insights into the kinds of support they needed after release. Research highlights that involving former detainees in reintegration programs not only fosters better community connections but also lowers the likelihood of reoffending.
2. **Improve Pre-Release Planning:** Correctional facilities should implement comprehensive pre-release planning for all individuals leaving custody. This should include housing assessments and connections to housing providers prior to release. Early coordination between correctional services and housing providers ensures that ex-offenders have a clear housing plan in place.
3. **Expand Transitional Housing Programs:** Both state and federal governments should increase funding for transitional housing programs tailored specifically to ex-offenders. These programs should provide longer-term housing solutions rather than just a few months of support. Extending the duration of transitional housing would give ex-offenders more time to stabilize their lives and secure long-term accommodation.
4. **Increase Access to Affordable Housing:** Governments should develop policies to reduce barriers to affordable housing for ex-offenders. This could include offering incentives for private landlords to rent to

individuals with a criminal record and expanding access to public housing for ex-offenders. Addressing the broader housing affordability crisis would benefit vulnerable populations, including ex-offenders.

5. **Provide Holistic Support Services:** Housing support must be integrated with other services, such as mental health care, substance abuse treatment, and employment support. Programs that address the multiple needs of ex-offenders are more likely to succeed in preventing homelessness and reducing recidivism. Governments should invest in holistic services that provide wraparound care for individuals exiting custody.
6. **Enhance Community-Based Programs:** Community-based programs play a crucial role in supporting ex-offenders as they reintegrate into society. Governments should foster partnerships between correctional facilities and local community organizations to build a stronger network of support services, ensuring access to housing, mental health care, and employment in local areas.
7. **Breaking the Cycle of Homelessness and Crime:** Providing stable housing has been shown to reduce reoffending rates significantly. By addressing underlying issues like addiction, poverty, and mental health, housing-first models create opportunities for rehabilitation and reintegration.

16 FURTHER RESEARCH AND POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Given the evidence presented, further research is necessary to explore how Queensland can adapt successful international practices, such as open prisons and person-centred services, to its context. These approaches have proven effective in facilitating reintegration and reducing homelessness among individuals exiting custodial settings. Additionally, the potential for significant cost savings in both health and criminal justice sectors should encourage policymakers to prioritize long-term housing solutions and reintegration support.

It is also essential to address systemic barriers within Queensland's criminal justice and social welfare systems. Currently, these services are often difficult to navigate, particularly for individuals with complex needs. A more streamlined, user-friendly system would help reduce the stress and disengagement that many experience upon release, leading to better long-term outcomes.

Programs such as the Building Own Women's Strength (BOWS) and the Post Release Supported Accommodation (PRSA) program provide valuable gender-specific and culturally sensitive support. Expanding these initiatives and offering longer-term support can help prevent homelessness for vulnerable populations, especially women and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

Furthermore, reducing short sentences and adopting community-based sanctions—like Scotland's Presumption Against Short Sentences (PASS)—could prevent individuals from losing their housing and personal belongings during incarceration, mitigating their risk of homelessness. This approach aligns with Queensland's broader goal of reducing recidivism rates and alleviating pressure on the state's prison system.

While employment is critical to successful reintegration, it is equally important to recognise that individuals exiting custodial settings often have more immediate needs, such as housing, healthcare, and financial support. Addressing these needs should be prioritized, with employment support integrated into a holistic, long-term reintegration strategy. Future research should explore the development of comprehensive, person-centred services that address the diverse range of barriers faced by individuals re-entering society, ensuring these services are accessible and tailored to each person's unique circumstances.

his literature review highlights the urgent need for comprehensive, person-centred reintegration services for individuals exiting custodial settings into homelessness. Five key themes emerged as critical components of effective reintegration pathways: government benefits, permanent housing, reducing short sentences, punitive alternatives, and employment.

Ensuring housing benefits during incarceration, providing permanent housing upon release, and supporting individuals through employment programs are all vital components in preventing homelessness. Queensland must adopt a tailored approach that addresses the complex needs of individuals exiting custodial settings, moving away from the "one size fits all" model.

International examples, such as open prisons and community-based sanctions, offer valuable lessons on how to facilitate gradual reintegration and reduce the likelihood of homelessness. Queensland should consider adapting these approaches, focusing on long-term support, cost savings, and improving outcomes for individuals and communities alike.

In summary, creating a cohesive system of services that integrates the five key themes identified in this review can significantly reduce the risk of homelessness for individuals exiting custodial settings. Moreover, these interventions will provide long-term benefits to society.

The findings underscore the urgent need for reintegration services that prioritize permanent and safe housing, employment support, and person-centred approaches. International models, such as open prisons, have demonstrated success in facilitating gradual reintegration and reducing homelessness post-release. Employment programs, particularly those that incorporate innovative tools like virtual reality job interviews, can further support reintegration and prevent recidivism.

Queensland must consider adopting a tailored reintegration approach, supported by a cohesive system of services. Addressing individual needs, while also reducing short sentences and offering long-term housing support, can lead to significant cost savings and improved outcomes for individuals exiting custody. Future research should explore the implementation of open prison models and person-centred services in Queensland, with a continued focus on addressing the broad range of barriers faced by individuals re-entering society.

Preventing homelessness among ex-offenders is crucial for their successful reintegration into society and for reducing recidivism rates. Although several programs exist in Australia to support ex-offenders, significant challenges remain, such as a lack of coordination between correctional and housing services, inadequate funding, and geographic disparities.

By addressing systemic barriers, providing adequate resources, and ensuring coordinated care, communities can significantly reduce the risk of homelessness for individuals leaving incarceration.

Improving pre-release planning, expanding transitional housing, increasing access to affordable housing, and providing holistic support services are essential steps. Through these efforts, Australia can make considerable progress in reducing homelessness among ex-offenders, contributing to safer and more inclusive communities.

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