

Glossary of Terms

Contemporary Australian Homelessness Practice

Term	Definition
Anti-Oppressive Theory	A practice framework that recognises and challenges power imbalances, structural inequality and oppression. In homelessness practice, it supports practitioners to examine how systems, policies and professional power affect people and to work in ways that promote rights, voice, dignity, participation and social justice.
Bias	Conscious or unconscious assumptions, beliefs or preferences that can influence how people are understood, assessed or treated. In homelessness practice, unexamined bias can contribute to stigma, discrimination, inequitable service responses and barriers to housing and support.
Choice and Control	Principles that support people to have meaningful influence over decisions affecting their housing, support and lives. This includes providing accessible information and genuine options, respecting informed decisions and recognising the person as the primary decision-maker wherever possible.
Community Development	A collaborative process that builds the strengths, capacity, connections and participation of communities to identify priorities and create locally relevant responses. In homelessness work, it can support prevention, inclusion, collective action and stronger local housing and support systems.
Community Engagement	The meaningful involvement of people, communities, organisations and stakeholders in identifying needs, planning, decision-making, implementation and evaluation. Effective engagement values diverse perspectives and seeks to ensure people affected by homelessness have genuine opportunities to influence responses.
Contemporary Practice	Practice that reflects current evidence, ethical and legal standards, sector knowledge, lived and living experience and evolving understandings of homelessness and housing insecurity. It requires ongoing learning, critical reflection and adaptation as evidence, communities and service systems change.
Critical Reflection	A deliberate process of examining practice experiences, assumptions, emotions, power relationships and broader social or organisational influences. It moves beyond describing what happened to consider why it happened, whose perspectives or interests were privileged, what could be understood differently and how future practice can improve.
Cultural Competence	The ongoing development of knowledge, awareness and skills required to work respectfully and effectively with people from diverse cultural backgrounds. Contemporary practice recognises that cultural competence is not a fixed endpoint and should be supported by cultural humility, self-reflection and attention to power and systemic inequality.
Culturally Safe Practice	Practice in which a person experiences their identity, culture, values and ways of knowing as respected and not diminished or harmed. Cultural safety is determined by the person receiving the service and requires attention to power, racism, discrimination, colonisation and culturally responsive service environments.

Term	Definition
Decolonising Practices	Approaches that critically examine and challenge colonial assumptions, structures and power while recognising and valuing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledges, cultures, kinship, connection to Country, community authority and self-determination.
Dignity	Recognition of every person's inherent worth and right to be treated with respect, regardless of housing status, behaviour, circumstances or service eligibility. Dignity is reflected through respectful language, privacy, choice, transparency and responses that avoid shame, stigma or unnecessary control.
Discrimination	Unfair or unequal treatment, exclusion or disadvantage associated with a personal characteristic or identity. Discrimination may be direct, indirect or systemic and can affect access to housing, services, employment and other resources.
Equality	The principle that all people have equal worth, rights and entitlement to fair treatment and freedom from discrimination. Equality often focuses on providing the same rights or opportunities, while equity recognises that different supports may be required to achieve fair access and outcomes.
Equity	Fairness in access, opportunity, resources and outcomes, recognising that people experience different barriers and may require different types or levels of support. In homelessness services, equity involves responding to need and structural disadvantage rather than assuming the same response will produce fair outcomes for everyone.
Ethical Decision Making	A structured process for responding to situations involving competing rights, values, responsibilities, risks or interests. It involves considering the person's voice and rights, relevant evidence, legislation, policy and ethical standards; examining power and potential impacts; seeking supervision or consultation where needed; documenting reasoning; and reviewing outcomes.
Ethics	The principles, values and standards that guide responsible, respectful and just professional practice. In homelessness services, ethical practice includes attention to dignity, autonomy, human rights, fairness, confidentiality, professional responsibility, power and potential harm.
Ethnocentrism	Viewing other cultures primarily through the assumptions, values and standards of one's own culture, including treating those standards as normal or superior. In practice, ethnocentrism can contribute to inaccurate assumptions, discrimination and culturally unsafe service responses.
Evidence-Based Practice	The integration of the best available research evidence with practitioner expertise and professional judgement, alongside the person's lived experience, preferences, culture, goals and circumstances. Evidence is applied critically and in context rather than as a rigid formula.
Homelessness	A condition in which a person does not have suitable accommodation alternatives and their current living arrangement is inadequate, has no tenure or only short and non-extendable tenure, and/or does not provide control of and access to space for social relations. Homelessness extends beyond rough sleeping and can include temporary, insecure or severely inadequate living arrangements.
Housing Distress	A broad term describing significant difficulty obtaining, affording, maintaining or remaining safely in suitable housing. It may include housing affordability stress, rental or mortgage arrears, insecure tenure, risk of eviction, overcrowding, unsafe or unsuitable housing, or repeated housing instability, and may place a person at risk of homelessness.

Term	Definition
Human Rights	The fundamental rights and freedoms inherent to all people, including dignity, equality, non-discrimination, privacy, participation and an adequate standard of living. A human-rights approach recognises people experiencing homelessness as rights-holders and considers how services and systems can respect, protect and support the realisation of those rights.
Informed Consent	A voluntary and ongoing process in which a person receives understandable information about a proposed service, action or information-sharing arrangement, including its purpose, potential risks and benefits, available alternatives and limits to confidentiality, and has a genuine opportunity to agree, decline or withdraw consent.
Leadership	The practice of influencing direction, culture and conditions so people can work effectively toward shared outcomes. In homelessness services, leadership includes supporting ethical and evidence-informed practice, psychological safety, reflective supervision, accountability, workforce wellbeing, lived-experience participation and service improvement.
Legislation	Laws and statutory requirements that establish rights, protections, duties and responsibilities relevant to homelessness practice. This may include housing and residential tenancy law, human rights, privacy, child protection, domestic and family violence, anti-discrimination and work health and safety requirements.
Lived and Living Experience	Knowledge and perspectives arising from personally experiencing homelessness, housing insecurity or related service and system responses. Lived experience commonly refers to past experience, while living experience recognises experience that is current or ongoing.
Lived Expertise	Knowledge and capability developed by critically reflecting on lived or living experience and applying those insights to practice, service design, governance, research, policy, education, advocacy or system reform. Lived expertise recognises experience as a valuable knowledge base while distinguishing expertise from experience alone.
Management	The planning, coordination and oversight of people, resources, quality, risk and service delivery to achieve organisational and client outcomes. In homelessness services, effective management creates conditions that enable safe, ethical, person-centred and evidence-informed practice while meeting governance and accountability requirements.
Othering	A social process through which people or groups are positioned as fundamentally different, deficient or outside what is considered normal or acceptable. In homelessness contexts, othering can reinforce stigma, blame, exclusion and discriminatory service or community responses.
Policy Context	The government priorities, funding arrangements, legislation, program guidelines and organisational policies that influence how homelessness prevention, housing and support services are designed, delivered and evaluated.
Practitioner	A worker who applies relevant knowledge, skills, values, professional judgement and reflective capability in work with people, families or communities. In specialist homelessness services, practitioners work collaboratively to prevent or respond to homelessness, strengthen housing stability, coordinate support, uphold rights and support person-defined goals.
Professional	A person who applies specialised knowledge, ethical principles, relevant standards and accountable professional judgement in their work. Professional practice includes maintaining competence and integrity, using supervision and reflection, recognising the limits of one's role and being accountable for the quality and impact of practice.

Term	Definition
Professional Boundaries	The ethical and relational limits that clarify a practitioner's role, responsibilities and use of professional power. Healthy boundaries support trust, consistency, safety and purposeful relationships while requiring consideration of issues such as dual relationships, self-disclosure, conflicts of interest, communication and availability.
Professional Integrity	Consistent alignment between professional values, ethical obligations, words and actions. It includes honesty, transparency, accountability, reliability, appropriate use of power, acknowledgement of limitations or mistakes and willingness to address practice that may compromise rights, safety or wellbeing.
Recovery-Oriented Approach	A person-led approach that supports hope, agency, connection, identity, meaning and opportunities to build a life defined by the person, whether or not challenges are ongoing. In homelessness practice, it avoids defining people by diagnosis, trauma or homelessness and supports strengths, choice, relationships, participation and access to resources that enable wellbeing.
Self-Awareness	A practitioner's capacity to recognise their own values, emotions, assumptions, identities, biases, strengths, limitations and responses, and to understand how these may influence professional relationships, assessment and decision-making.
Self-Determination	The right and capacity of people and communities to make decisions about matters affecting their lives and pursue goals consistent with their own values, priorities and circumstances. In homelessness practice, this requires meaningful participation, accessible information, respect for informed choices and attention to barriers that constrain genuine choice.
SHSPPF	The Specialist Homelessness Services Professional Practice Framework (SHSPPF) is a Homelessness Queensland initiative that brings together contemporary theory and practice knowledge, sector consultation, lived and living experience, literature and research to strengthen professional practice across Queensland's specialist homelessness services sector.
Social Justice	A commitment to fair access to rights, resources, opportunities and participation, together with action to address structural disadvantage and unequal distributions of power. In homelessness practice, this includes recognising structural drivers of homelessness and advocating for equitable access to safe, secure and appropriate housing and support.
Strengths-Based Practice	A collaborative approach that identifies and builds on a person's capabilities, relationships, resources, knowledge, survival strategies, aspirations and existing successes while still recognising risks, hardship and structural barriers.
Transformative Practice	Practice that seeks change beyond immediate responses to individual need by addressing the conditions, structures and power relationships that contribute to homelessness and inequity. It may involve changes to relationships, organisational practice, policy, resource distribution and service systems.
Trauma-Informed Practice	An approach that recognises the prevalence and potential impacts of trauma, integrates this understanding into practice and seeks to avoid re-traumatisation. It emphasises physical and emotional safety, trustworthiness, choice, collaboration, empowerment and respect for diversity, while avoiding assumptions that every person has experienced trauma.