

Do Council-Led Homelessness Camps Work?
A Contemporary Review of Outcomes, Risks and Conditions:
Considerations for Australia



Acknowledgement

Homelessness Queensland acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of the lands and waters on which we work, collaborate and travel.

We pay our respects to their Elders past, present and emerging, and recognise their continuing connection to Country, lores, customs and ceremonies.

We acknowledge all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples and affirm their inherent right to self-determination.



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Stephen has 20 years' experience in the global private sector and over 15 years' experience in the Queensland public, peak, and not-for-profit sectors. In addition to senior operations management roles across homelessness, community development, disaster response, and mental health settings, Stephen has successfully led several human-centred design, implementation, and evaluation projects relevant to this review's subject matter.

- ✚ 'Integrated Service Response Project' (2014-2015). Funded by the Queensland Government, a 'hub and spoke' coordination model comprising assertive outreach and in-reaching into a Brisbane caravan park known for accommodating homeless families.
- ✚ 'Mental Health Demonstration Project (2016-2018). A psychosocial model supporting public housing tenants at risk of losing their housing. The program provided case management support and peer support, along with mental health social workers. In collaboration with tenancy officers, support was coordinated for tenants experiencing poor mental well-being.
- ✚ 'Service Integration Initiative' (2020-2022). With continued funding from the Queensland Government since its inception in 2020, this statewide initiative intentionally brings together regional services from across the human services system. The response is designed to understand that, in addition to experiencing homelessness or unstable housing, people face other support needs that benefit from a coordinated, human-centred approach.

Stephen led the design, delivery and reporting of a statewide homelessness sector research project:

'Homelessness responses in Queensland: A narrative-based exploration of current practice methodologies, contextual challenges and implications in moving toward an intentional outcomes-focused collaboration model' (2025).'

Stephen is now engaged in PhD research, exploring work-related distress among homelessness workers.

Stephen is driven by a commitment to continuous improvement, rejecting the status quo and understanding that tomorrow we can be better than today.

Credit: Image 1: The Oregonian/Will Geschke/The News-Review/Roseburg Sanctioned Site, Roseburg, Oregon (2023)

Credit: Image 2: Minnpost/Amy Boelter/Opinion, Community Voices/Powderhorn Park Homelessness Site, Minneapolis, Minnesota

Foreword

Across Queensland, local councils are facing the immediate realities of visible homelessness. Homelessness Queensland acknowledges the priorities and investments of both state and local governments in responding to this challenge. When people have nowhere safe to sleep, providing a place with basic amenities can reduce harm. It can also raise difficult questions about safety, dignity, rights and what happens next.

Homelessness Queensland fully supports this review that aims to examine what the available evidence tells us about council-led camps: where they may help, where they may cause harm, and what conditions should guide their use. The evidence is limited, particularly in Australia, so this paper does not offer a simple answer or a model to adopt everywhere.

Our position is that any temporary response must be shaped with people experiencing homelessness, protect their rights and connect them to a credible pathway into safe, stable housing. A camp may offer immediate relief, but its success must be judged by people's experiences and outcomes, including what happens after they leave.

We hope this review supports informed discussion between councils, governments, services and people with lived and living experience, and encourages careful, independent evaluation of emerging approaches.



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Abstract

Council-led homelessness camps have re-emerged as a pragmatic response to visible homelessness, but their value is contested. This review asks whether such camps work, what they can and cannot achieve, and what conditions should govern their use in Australia. It synthesises peer-reviewed research published since 2020, Australian policy and sector grey literature, and selected international evaluations and case studies. The literature is limited and heterogeneous: very few studies directly evaluate council-run tent camps, and no robust Australian outcome evaluation of a council-led camp was identified. Evidence from sanctioned encampments and alternative shelter villages suggests that a well-resourced, voluntary, low-barrier site can improve immediate safety, sanitation, access to services, social connection, and perceived stability for some residents. These benefits are not equivalent to ending homelessness. Housing exits are constrained when permanent affordable housing and support are unavailable; poorly designed or open-ended camps can normalise inadequate shelter, reproduce institutional control, or shift people between public spaces. Displacement and property loss can worsen health and interrupt care. The review finds that camps are best understood as a time-limited harm-reduction and housing-transition measure within a wider system, not as a substitute for housing. The review translates seven identified principles into evidence-linked operating conditions and recommends co-design, enforceable housing-focused timeframes, safe and dignified infrastructure, rights-respecting procedures, coordinated exits, and an independent evaluation. Queensland's newly announced Wyllie Park pilot is discussed as a prospective evaluation initiative.

Keywords

homelessness; encampments; Australia; local government; harm reduction; Housing First; temporary accommodation; evaluation

Introduction

Visible homelessness is an increasingly urgent issue for Australian councils. Local governments manage public space, receive complaints, provide community facilities, and often act as the first point of contact for people with nowhere safe to sleep. However, councils generally do not control the principal levers needed to end homelessness: adequate income, social and affordable housing, specialist support, and state and Commonwealth funding. A national study of Australian councils found widespread concern about homelessness alongside uneven capacity, constrained resources and uncertainty about local government's mandate (Clarke et al., 2026). Queensland research also describes councils adapting existing functions, including public-space monitoring and complaint response, to identify people sleeping rough and connect them with services. More sustained responses depend on formal partnerships, stable funding, and the integration of this work into councils' routine systems (van den Nouwelant et al., 2024).

Against this background, sanctioned or council-led camps can appear to offer an immediate, locally manageable response. They may provide a legal place to sleep, basic amenities, and access to outreach services,

while reducing the harms of repeated dispersal. However, a camp is still a form of temporary accommodation, and may leave residents without secure tenancy, privacy, adequate protection or a credible route to permanent housing. The central policy question is therefore not simply whether a site is better than sleeping in an exposed public place. It is whether the intervention reduces harm while moving residents toward safe, stable housing, and whether its costs and burdens are justified relative to alternatives such as rapid rehousing, rental assistance, supported accommodation, or permanent supportive housing.

The Australian evidence makes this question particularly timely. The *Australian Homelessness Monitor 2024* reported a 22% increase over the three years to 2023–24 in the monthly number of newly assisted Specialist Homelessness Services clients who had recently slept rough, amid historically low private-rental vacancy rates and deteriorating rental affordability (Pawson et al., 2024)

In August 2026, Moreton Bay announced a 12-month free-campsite pilot at Wyllie Park, Petrie, with amenities and safety measures (City of Moreton Bay, 2026). At the time of writing, the pilot had only recently commenced, and an internal evaluation

framework was being designed. When finalised, such an evaluation framework should consider measuring human, operational, community, system, fiscal and legal outcomes and impact.

Exploring contemporary academic and grey literature, this review seeks to address three related but distinct questions: (a) *what benefits and harms are associated with sanctioned camps and analogous non-congregate temporary villages*; (b) *what*

conditions appear to enable or undermine those benefits; and (c) *what role, if any, can a council-led camp responsibly play in an Australian homelessness context?*

The review takes a rounded approach: it recognises the value residents may attach to safety, autonomy and community while also examining risks to human rights, health, public space and housing-system accountability.

Review Approach and Scope

This is a targeted narrative review, not a systematic review or meta-analysis. Searches and source identification focused on literature published from 2021 to September 2026, to keep the synthesis focused on contemporary evidence. Searches covered peer-reviewed literature on homelessness, public health, and urban policy; Australian local government, housing, and homelessness reports; court and government materials; and evaluations of temporary alternatives to conventional shelter. Search concepts included sanctioned or managed encampments, temporary supported communities, tiny-home or modular villages, council homelessness responses, Housing First, displacement, and encampment evaluation.

Reference lists of relevant sources were used to identify additional studies. The review prioritised Australian sources for context and included international evidence where the intervention had a relevant operational resemblance.

The term “council-led homelessness camp” is not a standardised intervention label. This paper uses it to mean a site explicitly authorised, established, funded or operated by a local government for people experiencing homelessness, usually with designated sleeping places and at least some facilities or support. It distinguishes this from: (1) an unsanctioned encampment formed without public authorisation; (2) a general campground used by people who have no other accommodation; (3) a congregate emergency shelter; and (4) a more developed

village or tiny-home community offering enclosed units, staffing and services. Findings from the latter models can inform camp design, but should not be treated as direct proof that a tent campsite will produce the same outcomes.

The evidence was appraised narratively for design, population, outcome and transferability. Camp studies are predominantly qualitative, cross-sectional, or administrative and are vulnerable to selection

effects, short follow-up periods, missing data on people who leave, and differences between sites. Grey literature provides important operational details but may rely on agency-defined measures and lack independent comparison groups.

Accordingly, this paper distinguishes evidence of acceptability or immediate benefit from evidence of causal effects and long-term housing outcomes.

Findings

Direct Australian Evidence is Limited

The most important finding is the evidence gap. The literature identified for this review contains little direct evaluation of Australian council-run homelessness camps. Australian research instead documents the pressures on local government, the changing role of local government, and the broader housing conditions that shape any site's prospects. Clarke et al.'s (2026) national study drew on a survey completed by 167 of 537 councils (31%) and three selected case studies.

Responding councils commonly reported homelessness as a significant or acute issue, but described roles concentrated on surveillance and referral, coordination, and facilitation of services or accommodation. The study identified constraints in mandate,

staffing, resourcing and housing availability.

The response rate and case-study design mean it is informative about roles and reported practice, not a census of council performance or an outcome evaluation of camps.

A Queensland report provided more locally specific implementation lessons. Across three council case studies, local government activity included identifying rough sleeping through public-space functions and referring people to specialist services. The report implies that councils can make useful contributions when responsibilities are formalised across agencies and supported by reliable funding, policy alignment and organisational systems (van den Nouwelant et al., 2024). A pilot site

that depends on an exceptional team, short-term discretionary funds or informal goodwill is therefore at risk of discontinuity. These findings support partnership and governance principles, but do not guarantee that a camp itself leads to housing.

The Wyllie Park initiative is a contemporary example in Queensland. The council's announcement describes a 12-month free legal campsite with amenities and safety provisions (City of Moreton Bay, 2026). Conversely, and providing a somewhat cautionary tale, the Wagga Wagga response provides contrast rather than a direct

comparator: triggered by the death of an infant, residents and service providers reported that people faced deadlines to leave a public campground without a suitable destination, and that some accommodation offers did not meet needs related to pets, belongings, or continuity (Basta & Holdsworth, 2026). Wilks Park was not a purpose-designed homelessness intervention, but it illustrates how a place nominally intended for short stays can become de facto accommodation when housing is unavailable.

What International Studies Suggest about Benefits and Limits

Studies of sanctioned encampments and temporary villages suggest that immediate benefits are possible when residents have a stable place, are not required to meet abstinence or treatment conditions, and can access trusted services. Pin et al. (2026) report a community engagement case study of 'A Better Tent City in Ontario', drawing on surveys of residents, guests, and visitors. Participants commonly described improved wellbeing, social support and access to healthcare and services. The site offered a degree of community and stability to people who had difficulty accessing conventional shelter, including residents facing disability,

discrimination or substance-use-related exclusion. However, few participants moved to permanent housing, and the authors emphasise that the encampment could not replace adequate permanent homes. The study is valuable for understanding resident experience, but a single community-based case study cannot establish comparative effectiveness.

A 2026 US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) assessment in Denver compared conditions at seven unsanctioned public encampments with those at three Temporary Supported Communities (TSCs), voluntary sites which are a mix of tents or

small structures, amenities, and round-the-clock staffing (Waddell et al., 2026). Residents of TSCs reported better access to sanitation and fewer concerns about the hazards still observed; however, substantial health risks remained in both settings. More than half of surveyed participants reported at least one involuntary displacement, which participants associated with health deterioration, interrupted service connections and property loss. Because the assessment was cross-sectional and used a convenience sample, differences cannot be attributed confidently to the TSC model alone. It nevertheless supports the practical importance of sanitation, continuity and non-displacement safeguards.

The Veterans' encampment study by Kalofonos et al. (2023) offers insights into implementation. Ethnographic observation and interviews at a low-barrier sanctioned site in Los Angeles found that trusting relationships, staff continuity and multi-level partnerships were central to access to care. The site combined tents with meals, hygiene, health and social supports. Whilst the researchers identified onsite services and interagency coordination as operational strengths, staff reported unclear shared goals, burnout and turnover. This was a single specialised program serving veterans during

the pandemic, so generalisation to an Australian local council population is limited. However, it shows that physical amenities are not the sole ingredient for success: staff, service relationships, and a shared housing outcome focus also matter.

Evidence from an enclosed modular housing project supported privacy and day-to-day stability, though still modest. Ehwi et al. (2023) followed six residents of a modular homes initiative through longitudinal interviews. Residents described improved safety, confidence, social ties and capacity to address substance use, finances and employment readiness. Units afforded private facilities and some control over personal space; however, three-year planning permission and delays in moving into permanent housing created anxiety. The authors call for a broader evaluation. This case suggests that residents benefit from shelter quality and agency, while also illustrating how a temporary pilot can reproduce insecurity if its duration does not align with realistic housing pathways.

An administrative evaluation of Portland's alternative shelter programs shows why the label "village" is not, by itself, evidence of effectiveness. Greene et al. (2024) compared adult congregate shelters, county villages, motel placements and city Safe Rest Villages using administrative data and interviews with

11 participants. The report found marked variation in housing placements and returns to unsheltered settings across programs; some village pathways showed more exits to housing than congregate shelter, while also recording returns to homelessness. Differences in residents served and program design limit comparisons, and the small interview sample and observational administrative data do not establish causal effects. The evaluation also cautions against assuming that villages are inherently cheaper: free land may lower startup costs, but operating costs, replacement of structures

Conditions Associated with Failure or Harm

A central failure is the displacement of a resident without a viable destination. Public-health modelling by Barocas et al. (2023), using data from 23 US cities, projected that ongoing involuntary exits could increase overdose deaths, infections and hospitalisations and reduce initiation of medication treatment among those using substances. These are simulated population-level effects rather than directly observed outcomes, but they are consistent with qualitative reports of disrupted care and property loss.

A separate Massachusetts simulation found that sweeps were associated with poorer

and length of use affect whole-of-life cost. Housing subsidies and assistance may be more directly connected to stable housing outcomes.

Taken together, these sources support a bounded claim. An organised site can improve the conditions of unsheltered survival and sometimes create a platform for service engagement. Evidence is weaker on sustained housing exits and comparative cost-effectiveness. Additionally, findings related to resident wellbeing do not inherently support sanctioned sites over an unsanctioned equivalent.

projected health outcomes than housing approaches, with housing that did not require medication treatment producing the best health outcomes (Zwick et al., 2025). Whilst such models inform plausible mechanisms, they do not estimate the effect of housing outcomes in the context of an Australian local council policy.

A second failure is a camp that becomes an administrative solution to visibility rather than a housing intervention. Orr et al. (2024) assembled a database of 50 sanctioned encampments in the United States and argued that governance ranges from supportive management to punitive control;

authorisation alone does not ensure that a site is non-coercive or housing-oriented. The longitudinal Denver study found that public support for sanctioned encampments rose six months after sites opened. In contrast, support varied with respondents' beliefs about the causes of homelessness and other social characteristics (Orr et al., 2025). This is evidence about public attitudes, not resident outcomes; therefore, it should not be treated as evidence that community acceptance is equivalent to program effectiveness. It does show that siting and communication may be manageable, but political legitimacy must not be purchased by excluding residents from decisions or promising rapid closure without housing.

A third failure is under-specification: inadequate sanitation, water, waste services, lighting, security, privacy or weather protection. Such omissions impose health risks and disproportionately burden people with disabilities, chronic illness, children, women, gender-diverse people and First

Nations residents. A tent site may offer more autonomy than a congregate shelter for some people, but it cannot be presumed safe merely because it is authorised. Site rules can also reproduce shelter exclusions if they require sobriety, treatment compliance, curfews that conflict with work, or separation from partners, pets and possessions. The available literature consistently identifies meaningful choice and low conditionality as design requirements.

Finally, short-term funding and unclear exit responsibility can undermine a pilot. If one agency operates the site, another controls housing allocation and a third supplies outreach, residents can be caught between systems. A 'time-limited' camp without an accountable housing plan risks transferring the cost of housing scarcity to residents through repeated uncertainty. Time limits should trigger an obligation to review the program and resource exits, not an automatic eviction date.

Findings Synthesis: Principles for Council-led Camps

Table 1

Principles, Minimum Conditions and Evidence

Principle	Minimum Conditions	Evidence Summary
Sector co-design	Design and govern the response with specialist homelessness and health services, housing providers, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations, residents, lived-experience representatives, peak and industry bodies and affected neighbours.	- Cross-sector coordination (van den Nouwelant et al., 2024); - Resident engagement (Kalofonos et al., 2023; Pin et al., 2026; USICH, 2024; Waddell et al., 2026). Note: Evidence supports the process; it does not prove co-design alone creates housing outcomes.
Published time limit linked to housing pathways	Publish a review date, maximum pilot period and housing milestones. A calendar date must trigger a transparent review and funded transition planning, not an automatic eviction when no suitable destination exists.	- Modular-home residents experienced anxiety where temporary permission outlasted housing pathways (Ehwi et al., 2023). - Permanent housing is the objective of encampment response (USICH, 2024). - Wagga reporting illustrates the risks when a nominal short-stay setting meets a housing shortage (Basta & Holdsworth, 2026). Note: This is a design inference; no study has established an optimal duration.
No eviction without an appropriate destination	Avoid involuntary displacement unless a safe, suitable alternative is available. Assess each person's circumstances, provide notice and review, protect and store property, and document any urgent safety exception.	- Involuntary displacement and health decline, service interruption and property loss (Barocas et al., 2023; Zwick et al., 2025; Waddell et al., 2026). - Housing and support-focused transitions (USICH, 2024). - Lawful processes; notice, possession protection and storage (<i>Bobeldyk & Anor v Moreton Bay City Council</i>; <i>Eichin & Ors v Moreton Bay City Council</i>, 2026) Note: The cited studies indicate potential health and service harms associated with displacement, but do not establish causal effects for residents of sanctioned camps.
Reliable sanitation, water, waste, safety and privacy	Resource toilets, handwashing, drinking water, showers, laundry, waste and sharps services, fire prevention, weather protection, lighting, accessible layouts and meaningful privacy from the outset; budget for operation and maintenance.	- Access to sanitation, fewer reports about hazards, while risks persisted (Waddell et al., 2026). - Residents valued private facilities and personal space (Ehwi et al., 2023). Note: Whilst these studies support minimum levels of amenities and shelter quality, they do not establish that tents can match the quality of permanent housing.

Principle	Minimum Conditions	Evidence Summary
Resident-centred, low-conditionality rules with review and appeal	Clear, proportionate rules developed with residents. Sobriety or treatment conditions are avoided. Partners, pets, possessions, disability and cultural needs are catered for. Provide confidential complaints, independent review and appeals process.	• Low-barrier operations supported service access (Kalofonos et al., 2023) • Residents described community and wellbeing benefits (Pin et al., 2026). • Meaningful engagement (USICH, 2024). • Sanctioned sites can coexist with punitive management (Orr et al., 2024). Note: Low conditionality does not mean an absence of rules. It means avoiding unnecessary barriers to entry and punitive conditions while maintaining clear, proportionate expectations. These should be developed with residents, communicated accessibly and applied consistently, with respect for legal obligations, safety and residents' rights.
Coordinated Housing First and permanent supportive housing exits	Housing-focused staff and a named interagency lead; offer rapid rehousing, income and tenancy supports, mental health and alcohol and other drug care, and permanent supportive housing matched to need. Secure housing supply and budget before opening the site.	• Sustained housing outcomes across Housing First programs, especially for people with complex needs (Roggenbuck, 2022). • Research identifies housing scarcity as a binding constraint (Clarke et al., 2026). • Housing outcomes vary by model and resident mix (Greene et al., 2024).
Independent evaluation focused on housing and resident outcomes	Pre-register outcomes, collect baseline and follow-up data, include current and former residents, as well as people who declined entry, publish costs and unintended effects, and use a comparator where feasible. Track sustained housing, wellbeing, safety, service continuity, returns to homelessness and displacement.	• The scarcity of Australian contextual outcome evaluation is itself a review finding. • Administrative, interview and cross-sectional evaluation designs illustrate both the value and limitations of program monitoring (Greene et al., 2024; Waddell et al., 2026). Note: Council cleanliness, complaints or reduced visibility are operational measures, not evidence that a camp has been effective. Evaluation requires a multi-dimensional lens to determine usefulness and impact.

Note. The conditions translate the seven principles into auditable operating requirements. International studies are used as transferable design evidence, not as direct estimates of likely outcomes in Australia. Practice-based commentary also emphasises the importance of compassionate, informed responses to homelessness encampments (De Jong, 2024).

Discussion

Do council-led camps work? The evidence supports a conditional answer. They may work as a harm-reduction and service-access intervention for people who otherwise sleep outside, particularly where conventional shelters are inaccessible, unsafe or incompatible with residents' needs. The evidence does not support claiming that camps, by themselves, end homelessness. Direct Australian evaluations are absent from the literature identified here, and the strongest relevant studies are observational, small-scale, non-comparative, cross-sectional models. Any confident claim of comparative success would exceed the evidence.

This distinction reflects the difference between intervention levels. A legal campsite can change where a person sleeps and the conditions under which they sleep. A village with enclosed units can further enhance privacy and protection from the weather. Neither necessarily secures a tenancy.

Housing First and Permanent Supportive Housing, by contrast, aim to place people into permanent housing without requiring treatment or sobriety as a precondition, with support matched to need. Evidence supports Housing First programs commonly sustaining housing for people with chronic homelessness and complex needs, while

outcomes depend on adequate support and service integration (Roggenbuck, 2022). Thus, camps should be evaluated as a bridge or stabilisation setting and benchmarked against interventions that actually deliver housing.

The seven principles in Table 1 are mutually reinforcing. Co-design gives residents and specialist services influence over location, rules, and operations; infrastructure makes a site safer and more usable; low-conditionality rules preserve access and choice; and a housing-linked time limit prevents temporary provision from becoming indefinite.

Coordinated exits require real housing supply and support, while independent evaluation checks whether the system is achieving outcomes beyond cleaner parks or fewer complaints. The principles are not a claim that every camp can meet every need. They set minimum conditions for deciding whether a pilot is defensible, and for adapting or ending it responsibly.

The rights and legal dimension is integral to effectiveness. An authorised site must still provide fair procedures, privacy and protection from arbitrary loss of possessions. Conversely, the existence of a camp does not erase a council's obligations when a site is closed, or residents are moved. The Moreton Bay judgment makes the local process salient

in the Queensland context, while the international health evidence highlights the potential consequences of displacement. Council procedures should therefore specify notice, consultation, accessible review, safe storage and individual assessment, alongside clear emergency exceptions for immediate threats to life or safety.

There is also a scale and equity issue. Camps can be distributed geographically in ways that either connect residents to services, transport and community or isolate them at peripheral sites. First Nations people are disproportionately represented in homelessness statistics and may have distinct cultural, kinship and service needs. A generic 'one-site' solution is unlikely to be appropriate for all residents. Co-design must be funded, culturally safe and ongoing, with meaningful representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations and lived-experience groups. Evaluation should

disaggregate outcomes where sample sizes and privacy allow and should report whose needs were not met or who declined to participate in the site.

The most defensible policy position is to assess camps against realistic alternatives and a clear duty of progression toward housing. The relevant comparison is not with an ideal housing system that does not currently exist; for an individual, the immediate alternatives may be unsafe public sleeping or repeated displacement.

At the program level, assessment should also consider options such as motels or non-congregate shelters, rental brokerage, income support, rapid rehousing, and permanent supportive housing. A camp is justified when evidence shows it reduces immediate harms, preserves residents' agency, and connects them to better housing options, without diverting funds or political attention from permanent housing.

Recommendations

Informed by the tabled principles and intended to serve as a roadmap when considering the establishment and evaluation of a potential site, the review provides the following recommendations.

Create a co-design and governance group before or at the start of operation. Include residents and people with lived experience, specialist homelessness and health services, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations, disability and family support services, nearby residents and relevant council and state agencies. Incentivise lived-experience contributors and publish how their recommendations changed the design.

Commission an independent evaluator to establish a baseline and assess outcomes at 3, 6, 9 and 12 months. Measures should cover human, operational, community, system, fiscal and legal outcomes, including permanent housing placements and retention; days housed; returns to unsheltered homelessness; resident-defined safety, dignity, autonomy and wellbeing; health and service continuity; involuntary exits and property loss; complaints and serious incidents; costs per resident and per sustained housing exit; and impacts on nearby public spaces, services and community. Qualitative interviews should include residents, people who have exited or were declined entry, service representatives and community members.

Establish the camp only as a defined, voluntary, low-barrier component of a broader homelessness response. Publish the target population, purpose, operating model, service commitments, governance, funding period and conditions for review. State explicitly that the site is temporary accommodation and not a housing outcome.

Embed the principles into an auditable operating standard. At a minimum, specify site capacity and admission pathways; water, toilets, showers, laundry, waste, and fire safety; privacy and accessibility; resident rights and complaints; staff coverage and training; emergency response; and notice, review, property storage, and retrieval procedures. Provide a written, accessible resident agreement and independent complaint route.

Link a time limit to a funded housing pathway rather than a calendar-only closure. Each resident should be offered an individual housing plan and named worker, with realistic options that accommodate pets, partners, possessions, disability, health needs and cultural obligations. Use Housing First principles, income and tenancy assistance, mental-health and alcohol and other drug

care, and permanent supportive housing when required. If housing is unavailable at the planned review date, enact a resident-informed decision about continuation or transition; do not treat the date as an automatic eviction trigger.

Set decision thresholds in advance. Continue or scale only if the site meets minimum safety and rights standards, shows resident-valued benefit, and demonstrates credible housing progression without unacceptable displacement or inequity. Adapt promptly when deficiencies emerge. If the model cannot meet those conditions, transition residents through individual plans and redirect resources toward interventions with stronger evidence for stable housing.

Conclusion

Council-led camps can make unsheltered homelessness less dangerous and more connected to services, but current evidence does not show that camps alone reliably end homelessness. Their value depends on design, resident choice, competent and stable services, rights-respecting management, adequate housing exits and independent evaluation. Australian evidence is currently stronger in documenting the local government role and structural constraints than in evaluating camp outcomes. For Australian councils, a camp should therefore be treated as a carefully governed, time-limited stabilisation measure with a funded pathway to housing and transparent evaluation. The seven principles presented in this review provide a practicable minimum standard. Whether a specific pilot works must be answered by an independent evaluation of the site's intent, design process, operationalisation, effectiveness, outcomes, and impact; not simply by the site's appearance or by a perceived reduction in visible camping across a given region.

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