

NSW Youth Homelessness Services Evaluation

Mission Australia
Centre for Evidence and Insights
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We also acknowledge the valued contribution of all the people who participated in this evaluation. In particular, the young people who shared their stories and experiences, Mission Australia staff, and our service delivery partners.

Executive Summary

The NSW Youth Homelessness Services Evaluation was undertaken by Mission Australia (MA) to better understand what works well to meet the needs of young people experiencing or at risk of homelessness, and what more could be done.

The mixed methods evaluation analysed data from five of MA's youth homelessness services across NSW, as well as feedback from staff, representatives of partner organisations, and young people experiencing housing instability. The services included offer a range of support from early intervention, outreach, case management, crisis and transitional accommodation, and specialist support.

Evaluation Questions

- To what extent is the service model being implemented as intended?
- How effective are MA's youth homelessness services in supporting young people to achieve positive short and medium-term outcomes?
- What are the critical service components that enable or hinder positive outcomes for young people?

Data collection

- Administrative data from January 2020 to December 2024, including 3,649 young people who accessed a MA youth homelessness services 4,437 times.
- 336 Impact Measurement surveys complete by young people at entry and exit from a service (168 matched pairs).
- 209 Client Satisfaction surveys.
- Interviews with 17 young people, 20 MA staff members and 12 representatives from partner organisations.

Key Findings

To what extent is the service model being implemented as intended?

Overall services were being implemented as intended. Services had access to resources to deliver the basic service model, invested in highly skilled staff, and delivered most core activities. The quality of case management was a particular strength of the services. However, increased investment in youth friendly spaces, holistic goal-based support, earlier intervention and prevention pathways, and mental health specialist roles, is needed to support greater impact for young people.

Adequate resources

Services are funded to deliver the intended case management model. However, valuable additional supports such as accommodation, specialist roles, or soft-entry early intervention activities were not always available due to limited resources.

Having a physical presence in the communities where services operate was important, as was youth friendly spaces to engage young people.

Reaching young people in need

Demand for MA's youth homelessness services in NSW has grown over the past four years (+64% increase). Services were going above and beyond to ensure young people were supported. However, far too many young people were already experiencing homelessness by the time they connected to support. The number of young people who were already homeless when seeking support from the services more than doubled from 211 in 2020 to 481 in 2024 (+128%). Many young people also had highly complex needs, including mental health issues, experience of family and domestic violence, and/or involvement in the out of home care system.

Key Findings

Delivering core service activities

Services focused predominantly on case planning and review, practical and material assistance, and linking young people to additional supports. Although brokerage (i.e. direct financial support) was identified as a key component of the service model, especially for young people with no income, only around a third of young people (35%) received brokerage support and the amount of brokerage funding available was not sufficient to meet all the needs of young people.

Quality service delivery

There was strong evidence that services built effective relationships with young people, were person-led in their approach, and highly responsive to young people's needs.

While caseloads were within the expected range, the increasing complexity of young people's circumstances when presenting to homelessness services meant that high caseloads could be a barrier to service engagement.

The quality of case management was a strength of the services. It was key to supporting young people to build their self-confidence and agency, rather than dependence on support. Young people often described how they would come to their case manager with the goals that they wanted to work on, and almost all indicated that they felt involved in decision-making.

Young people felt that their case managers were skilled and knew how to help them. They frequently commented on how case managers could break down complex ideas in an understandable way and supported them to navigate systems, while making the young person feel included and comfortable. Still, services sometimes struggled to recruit staff with youth-specific experience.

Services demonstrated a high level of responsiveness and flexibility to engage young people. But the lack of long-term affordable housing created bottlenecks in crisis and transitional accommodation and over a third of young people disengaged from the services (38%). This meant that only two fifths of young people (41%) exited a service with their needs met - 51% of young people who were at risk of homelessness and 29% of young people experiencing homelessness at entry to a service.

Most services had strong connections and were seen as a valued community partner. Consistent communication with partners was important to ensure collaboration was effective. Many partners noted that MA services were very good at maintaining communication, which ensured all parties were aware of key updates relating to the young person. Where communication was inconsistent, collaboration was a challenge.

Effectively navigating the mental health and housing systems for young people was difficult and referrals to other services were low.



Key Findings

How effective are MA's youth homelessness services in supporting young people to achieve outcomes?

Overall services were very effective in supporting young people at risk of homelessness to remain housed, but many young people were already homeless and had complex needs by the time they accessed support. This made it very challenging for young people experiencing homelessness to successfully secure long-term affordable housing or make progress towards their goals.

Despite the challenges in securing stable housing, most young people experienced statistically significant and meaningful improvements in health and wellbeing, and satisfaction with standard of living, safety, relationships and community connections. They also felt more supported and in control of their lives, with many making progress towards education and employment goals. However, rebuilding relationships with family could be difficult, and mental health issues were often persistent without ongoing support.

Access to safe and secure housing

The youth homelessness services played a critical role in supporting young people to access stable housing. Overall, two thirds of young people who engaged in case management had a positive housing outcome (67%). However, Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander young people were significantly less likely to be successfully supported to achieve a positive housing outcome than non-indigenous young people (44% compared to 73%).

Housing outcomes also varied dramatically based on homelessness status at service entry. Young people at risk of homelessness were much more likely to achieve a positive housing outcome than those already experiencing homelessness (92% remained housed compared to 28% who exited homelessness).

Key barriers for young people were having access to sufficient income to live independently and navigating income support systems.

Proportion of young people who were at risk of homelessness at entry and their housing outcomes at exit (n=1,517)



92%
achieved a
positive
housing
outcome



92%
living in
secure and
sustainable
housing



91%
confident to
manage
accommodation



90%
had their
tenancy
support
needs met

Proportion of young people who were homeless at entry and their housing outcomes at exit (n=1,125)



28%
not
homeless



53%
short-term or
crisis
accommodation



19%
rough sleeping
or unstable
housing

Key Findings

Improved health and wellbeing

Most young people experienced significant and meaningful improvements in health and wellbeing following engagement with a service. Many young people described how the service had helped them to feel happier and how their mental health had improved. However, without access to ongoing support, mental health was often still a struggle for young people.

Improved access to support and positive connections

Most young people felt supported and well connected to the community when they exited a service. After being supported to engage with their local support networks, they were more confident and felt more able to navigate support independently.

Just like my quality of life and making me feel happier and more independent. I struggled a lot a few years ago with agoraphobia and I couldn't leave the house at all and...they were able to help me get out of the house...it's just been really helpful to know that the world isn't so scary and that I can do it. – Young person

I came in there depressed, I had so many nightmares almost all night. I slept there and then it just slowly came out, I slowly got out of it...but a lot of the time I'm still down a bit. I mainly just put a mask on it. – Young person

Overall wellbeing

76%
young people with improved overall wellbeing



45%
scored within or above the Australian normative range at exit¹

Happiness with standard of living

60%
young people felt happier with standard of living



38%
scored within or above the Australian normative range at exit

Happiness with connection to community

51%
young people felt happier with connection to community



77%
scored within or above the Australian normative range at exit

Happiness with health

65%
young people felt happier with personal health



55%
scored within or above the Australian normative range at exit

¹ Normative ranges for the Personal Wellbeing Index scores within the Australian public are published regularly. These national normative ranges are calculated based on PWI responses from people aged 18 and over.

Key Findings

Increased choice, control and independence

Young people consistently highlighted that engagement with the services helped to boost their self-confidence and that they felt more in control of their lives.

Eight in ten young people with education goals and seven in ten with employment goals had made progress towards their goals at exit. Further, over two thirds of young people with education goals were engaged in formal study and around a third of young people with employment goals were working at exit.

However, it was much more difficult for young people already experiencing homelessness to make progress towards their goals compared to young people who were at risk of homelessness.

Proportion of young people with education goals



81%
made progress towards
education goals



68%
engaged in
formal study

Proportion of young people with employment goals



71%
made progress towards
employment goals



32%
engaged in
employment

Happiness with what will happen later in life



54%
young people felt
happier about the future

62%
scored within or above the
Australian normative
range at exit

Control



68%
young people felt
more in control of
their life

I had to learn how to be responsible for myself and it was a bit hard at the start, but I got used to it, I adapted and now I'm really happy. I think that was the best, just adapting and learning how to live, how to be independent. – Young person

Definitely more independence and the feeling of freedom. They've given me so much of myself back and my self-confidence... They gave me self-awareness and gave me more knowledge about things I need to know about, and just gave me that confidence back, and self-respect, and just lots of things they've given back to me, which I never probably would have gotten on my own two feet because I have no family support. I don't know how I would have done it if I didn't have Mission Australia in my life. – Young person

Key Findings

What are the critical service components that enable or hinder positive outcomes for young people?

Enablers

- ✓ **Nurturing genuine, authentic and trusting relationships.** Young people accessing homelessness services often do not have other trusted adults they can rely on. Lower caseloads were viewed as an enabler to build genuine and authentic relationships, particularly when young people had a range of complex needs.
- ✓ **Person-led and age-appropriate support coordination.** Adapting to the level of emotional and cognitive development of the young person ensures that engagement is effective and support is appropriate to meet young people's needs.
- ✓ **Flexible, responsive and consistent services.** Young people need to know that support will be there for them when they need it.
- ✓ **Formal and informal counselling.** It is essential to support young people to process their emotions and trauma, and to identify their own strengths.
- ✓ **Mentoring and role modelling.** Young people require guidance to develop the life skills they need to transition successfully into adulthood.
- ✓ **Prevention and early intervention is key.** Outreach and community activities provide valuable soft entry pathways for young people.

Barriers

- X **Lack of appropriate youth accommodation.** Accommodation is lacking in both availability and suitability (i.e. shared settings without supervision), meaning some young people may be forced to stay in potentially unsafe situations.
- X **Lack of youth friendly offices spaces.** In some cases, the lack of youth friendly spaces resulted in cancelled appointments and young people disengaging from the services.
- X **Inadequate access to mental health support.** Most homelessness services were not funded to provide mental health specialists roles and accessing appropriate support externally can be extremely challenging.
- X **Operating in standard business hours.** Working with school-aged young people is very difficult if services are operating within business hours as young people are often not contactable for most of the day.
- X **Strict age limits.** Cutting off support when young people turn 25 is often not in the best interests of the young person.
- X **Systemic issues.** The biggest barriers that hinder positive outcomes are often not service components, rather, outside the control of services. In particular, the lack of affordable long-term housing, Centrelink eligibility criteria and processes, the lack of support options, and government benefit options available for young people under the age of 18.



Conclusion

This evaluation evidences the critical role MA's youth homelessness services had in supporting young people experiencing housing instability in NSW. Over the past five years more young people have needed assistance, and services have gone above and beyond to ensure young people were supported. However, far too many young people were already experiencing homelessness when they sought support, highlighting the urgent need to reach young people earlier.

Services were highly effective in supporting young people at risk of homelessness to remain safely housed but less than three in ten young people were able to exit homelessness. Despite these housing challenges many young people experienced statistically significant and meaningful improvements in their standard of living, health, wellbeing, relationships and connection to community, as well as education and employment goals.

Critical service components were the quality of case management relationships, person-led and age-appropriate support, flexible and consistent service delivery, skilled staff and working collaboratively with other services. Barriers included high caseloads, limited access to mental health supports, and lack of youth-friendly or appropriate spaces and accommodation.

More needs to be done to ensure that all young people have a safe place to call home. A range of systemic barriers limited the effectiveness of services. Urgent action is needed to boost investment in long-term youth housing and crisis responses, increase focus on prevention and early intervention, and improve income support and rental subsidies.



Conclusion

Implications for service delivery

Recommendation	Why is this recommended?
Increase focus on prevention and earlier intervention	Prevention and early intervention is key. Far too many young people were already experiencing homelessness by the time they connected to support. Tenancy support was highly effective in achieving positive housing outcomes.
Provide ongoing mental health support	Improved access to appropriate mental health support, in particular mental health/counsellor specialist roles, is vital for young people to sustain positive outcomes.
Design more youth-friendly spaces	Physical office spaces could be intimidating for young people to access support and in some case could lead to disengagement.
Continue to invest and upskill staff to work with young people	Working with young people requires additional skills and knowledge and it can be challenging to recruit staff with the right experience. Providing more youth specific training and practice sharing opportunities would help to bridge gaps.
Continue to work collaboratively with other services	Most services were seen as a valued community partner, however navigating the mental health and housing systems was challenging and referrals to other services to meet the needs of young people were low.
Improve cultural safety for Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander young people	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people encountered greater challenges in achieving positive housing outcomes. Providing more culturally safe support that reflects the unique needs of these young people is essential to increasing engagement and improving outcomes.
Focus on person-led goal-based support	Only half of young people made progress towards their goals and evidence of support aligned with those goals was mixed. To better support young people in achieving their aspirations, there is need for a stronger emphasis on person-led, goal-based, support and more accurate recording of service activities.
Build partnerships to evidence the long-term impact of young homelessness services	Being able to conduct analysis based on data linkage with government data assets would enable better understanding of what happens to young people in the months and years after their engagement with MA youth homelessness services ends and could facilitate the creation of comparison groups to provide stronger evidence that observed changes were caused by service interventions.

Conclusion

Towards a system that will make homelessness rare, brief and non-recurring

To end homelessness across Australia, we must transition to a future state which, while maintaining a necessary level of crisis response, primarily focuses on upstream solutions in both housing and support provision. A larger proportion of effort must be allocated to policies, practices and programs that effectively prevent people becoming homeless in the first place or intervene early to ensure that homelessness is rare, brief and non-recurring.

To achieve this, a suite of complementary recommendations to address systemic barriers must be implemented across governments within the following policy areas:

- 1. A service system wide shift to prevention and early intervention** ensuring that youth homelessness services are adequately funded to provide evidence-informed support and catalysed by the establishment of a \$500 million Homelessness Prevention Transformation.
- 2. More medium-term youth specific housing options** through funding 15,000 youth tenancies per year and constructing ten 40-unit Youth Foyers.
- 3. More long-term housing solutions** created by significantly boosting the number of social and affordable homes to 10% of all housing stock.
- 4. Boost income support and rental subsidies for young people** by raising the rate of Youth Allowance and JobSeeker to at least \$82 per day and increasing financial payments through Commonwealth Rental Assistance.

The implementation of these changes would eventually rebalance the homelessness service system, to quickly divert young people into stable housing and ensure that effective pre-emptive measures avoid human misery and costs to multiple service systems over the longer term.



Section 1. Introduction

1.1 Background

Why are youth homelessness services important?

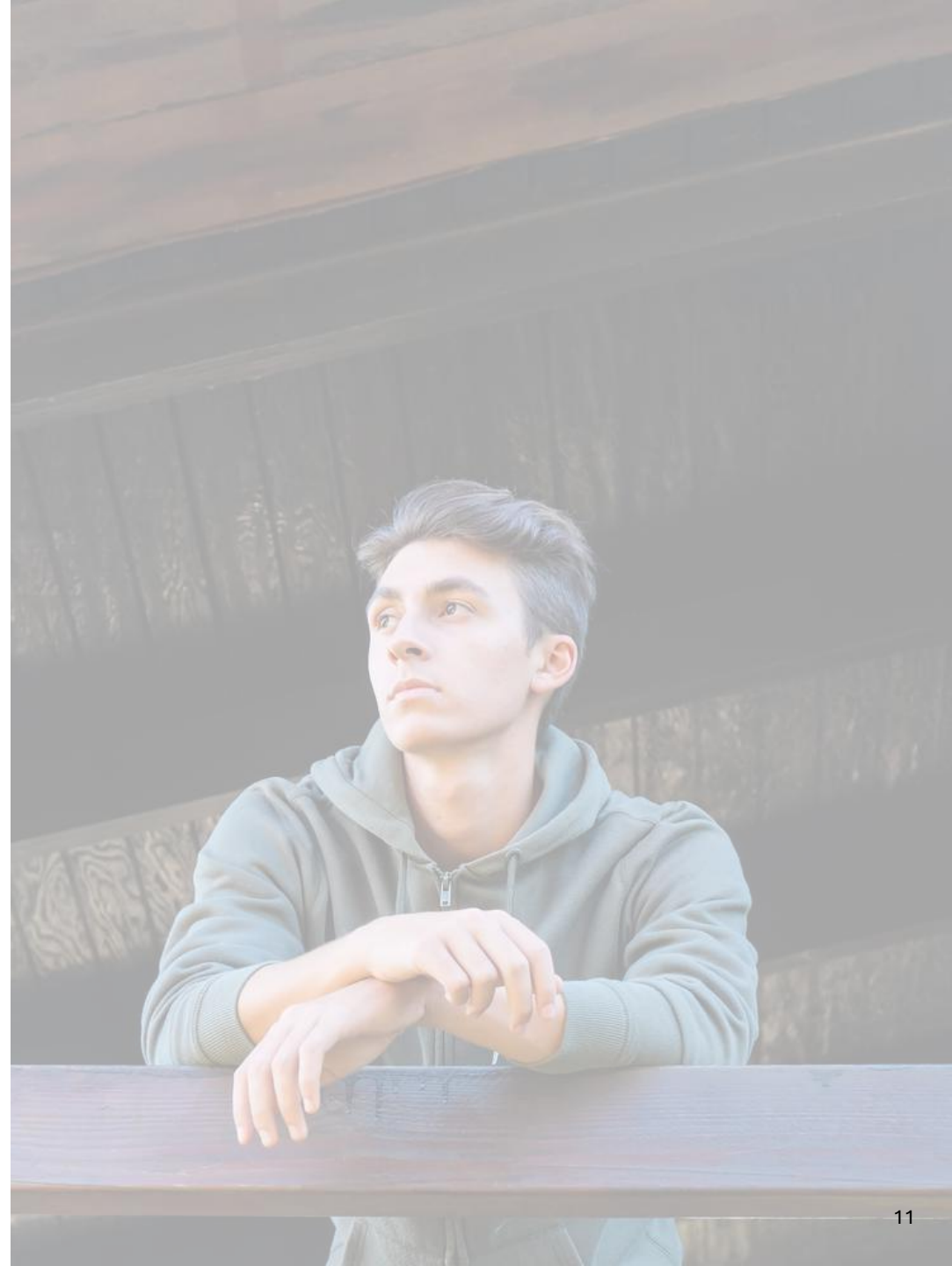
Young people are overrepresented in Australia's homeless population. According to the ABS Census, between 2016 and 2021 homelessness decreased for all age groups except children and young people under the age of 18. In addition, the highest rates of homelessness in 2021 were amongst young people aged 19 to 24 (ABS, 2023).

Homelessness puts young people at risk of several adverse outcomes which have a lingering impact into adulthood. These include untreated mental health problems (Cauce et al., 2000), substance misuse (Edidin et al., 2012), disengagement from education and employment (Heerde et al., 2020), a lack of healthy social networks (Heerde & Patton, 2020), and involvement in the criminal justice system (Martjin & Sharpe, 2006).

What is Mission Australia doing to address this?

Mission Australia (MA) wants to end homelessness in Australia. To help achieve this we provide a range of Specialist Homelessness Services (SHS), including youth focused services that aim to assist young people to achieve long-lasting life changes and prevent entrenched homelessness in adulthood.

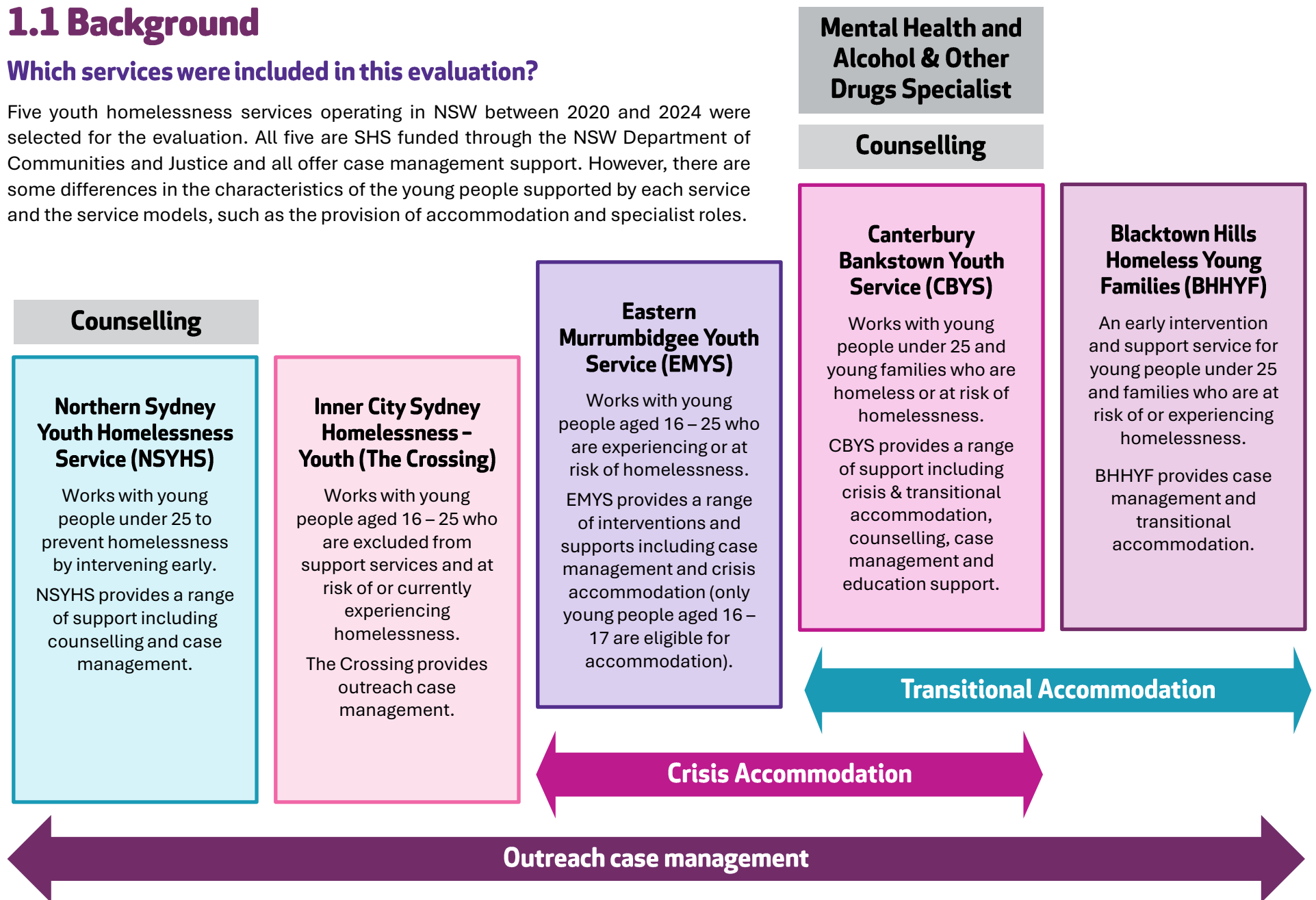
Aligned to Mission Australia's [Homelessness and Stable Housing Support Flagship Service Model](#), these services provide support focussed on the strengths, needs and aspirations of the individual young people they work with.



1.1 Background

Which services were included in this evaluation?

Five youth homelessness services operating in NSW between 2020 and 2024 were selected for the evaluation. All five are SHS funded through the NSW Department of Communities and Justice and all offer case management support. However, there are some differences in the characteristics of the young people supported by each service and the service models, such as the provision of accommodation and specialist roles.



1.2 Evaluation Objectives

What is the purpose of the evaluation?

The purpose of the evaluation was to:

1. Assess the implementation of MA's youth homelessness services in NSW, including the need and demand, core service activities and critical success factors.
2. Identify barriers, enablers, and service model components that are critical to delivery of support for young people.
3. Evidence the short and medium-term outcomes young people achieve through their engagement with youth homelessness services.

What are the Key Evaluation Questions (KEQ)?

Process Evaluation	KEQ1	To what extent is the service model being implemented as intended? <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Access to adequate resources• Engaging target groups• Delivering core service activities• Evidence of critical success factors
Outcomes Evaluation	KEQ2	How effective are Mission Australia's youth homelessness services in supporting young people to achieve positive short and medium-term outcomes? Specifically: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Access to safe and secure housing• Improved health and wellbeing• Increased access to support and positive connections• Increased independence
Learning	KEQ3	What are the critical service components that enable or hinder positive outcomes for young people?

MA will use the evaluation findings for both formative and summative purposes:

- Drive excellence by highlighting critical success factors and ways to improve early intervention youth homelessness services.
- Continuous learning and improvements to ensure we are delivering the best possible services.
- Build an evidence base to support strategic decisions and policy and advocacy efforts.
- Share learning, best practice and evidence with MA and the broader sector to improve knowledge of what works to end homelessness.

1.3 Methodology

The evaluation utilised a mixed methods explanatory sequential design to triangulate findings against the Homelessness Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning Framework (see Appendix A for [Signs of Progress](#)).

A range of statistical tests were applied to the quantitative data. Only findings with a medium or large effect are included in the report discussion. More details of the methodology and statistical findings are available [here](#).

Administrative Data

Administrative data from January 2020 to December 2024 was analysed to explore staffing levels, characteristics of young people, support provided, goals (including goal progress), reasons for exit, and housing, education and employment outcomes. This sample included **4,437 service interactions with 3,649 young people**. Most of the analysis was focused on **2,687 interactions** where the young person had received case management support and exited the service.

Client Satisfaction and Impact Measurement surveys

MA introduced a national approach to client satisfaction in 2022 through a short anonymous survey that is sent to people either during their engagement with services or at exit. All client satisfaction data collected across the five services to December 2024 was included in the report (n=209, 5% response rate).

Impact Measurement surveys are identifiable surveys completed by people accessing service at entry, at regular intervals during engagement, and at exit from a service. The survey includes the Personal Wellbeing Index (International Wellbeing Group, 2024), questions related to service specific outcomes (see Appendix B for [Headline Outcome and Indicators](#)) and provides the opportunity to capture qualitative stories of change. All matched entry and exit responses from January 2020 to December 2024 were analysed to assess self-reported changes (n=168, 6% response rate).

Qualitative interviews

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with **17 young people** aged 16 – 24 who had received support from the services, **20 MA staff members** employed in a range of roles within the services, and **12 representatives of partner organisations**.

Limitations

While the evaluation provides valuable insights several limitations should be acknowledged:

- The small sample sizes for both the Client Satisfaction and Impact Measurement surveys limited the generalisability of the results. The mixed methods approach aims to mitigate this limitation by triangulating data sources and enhancing the depth of interpretation.
- Longitudinal data was not available, as a result it was not possible to assess the sustainability of outcomes after young people exited services.
- Due to the absence of a comparison group (e.g. young people experiencing homelessness who did not access MA services), it is not possible to attribute outcomes solely to the interventions of the services.

Table 1. Data sources analysed to answer each Key Evaluation Question

Data source	KEQ1	KEQ2	KEQ3
Administrative data	X	X	
Client Satisfaction surveys	X		
Impact Measurement surveys		X	
Interviews with young people	X	X	X
Interviews with MA staff	X	X	X
Interviews with representatives of partner organisations	X	X	X



Section 2. Key Findings

2.1 To what extent is the service model being implemented as intended?

The following section presents the findings to determine the extent the services were implemented as intended, aligned to Mission Australia's Homelessness and Stable Housing Support Flagship Service Model.

Data sources were synthesised against the evaluation criteria of merit, and a rating was provided to assess each of the '[Signs of Progress](#)', developed as part of the Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning Framework.

2.1 To what extent is the service model being implemented as intended?

Key Findings

Overall services were being delivered as intended, aligned to MA's Homelessness and Stable Housing Support Flagship Service Model. Services had access to adequate resources to deliver the basic service model, invested in highly skilled staff, delivered most core activities and reached young people experiencing housing instability and complex circumstances. In particular, the quality of case management was a strength of the services and was key to supporting young people to build their self-confidence and agency, rather than dependence on services. However, increased investment in youth friendly spaces and accommodation, reduced caseloads, holistic goal-based support, early intervention and prevention pathways, and specialist roles to meet the complex needs of young people were areas for improvement. These additional activities, which add value to the basic case management service model, were not funded in most locations.

Did services have access to adequate resources?

Summary of Evidence	Rating
<p>Although services had resources to deliver the service model, more youth-friendly spaces and greater investment in early intervention and specialist roles are needed.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• All services were in alignment with the staffing model and case load ratios.• Having a physical presence in the communities where services operate increased awareness and accessibility of services. However, youth friendly spaces are critical to engage with young people and were not always available.• Having access to a range of accommodation options and maintaining a consistent relationship with young people until they could secure long-term housing was seen as beneficial. However, only one service was funded to provide the full range of support from crisis to transitional accommodation and support in private rentals through Rent Choice Youth.• All services had access to brokerage (i.e. direct financial aid), which was viewed as a key component of service delivery by both staff and young people. Brokerage was used to meet the immediate needs of young people and was particularly important for young people with no income.• Resources for greater impact (such as community events, group activities and specialist roles) provided early intervention pathways and targeted support for young people, however they were not a component of all service models due to lack of funding.	<p>★★★★☆</p> <p>Fair</p>

Did services have access to adequate resources?

Staffing

All services were in alignment with the staffing model. Services had more than 1 FTE Case Manager and an average caseload ratio between 1:7 and 1:16.²

Services with a greater focus on earlier intervention tended to have higher caseload ratios, while those that provided support to young people already experiencing homelessness tended to have lower ratios.

Specialist roles provided young people access to targeted services to meet their needs. Incorporating specialist supports within services can provide young people with support that may be hard to access externally due to waitlists, eligibility criteria or availability. Two out of the five services had specialist roles that provided counselling, mental health and/or Alcohol and Other Drugs support.

Specialist roles were most effective when used flexibly and/or simultaneously with case management roles to meet the individual needs of young people. For example, providing counselling to young people in crisis or transitional accommodation or mental health and/or Alcohol and Other Drugs support alongside case management.

Not having the flexibility to be able to provide specialist services simultaneously was a barrier for some young people, particularly those who had built a therapeutic bond with a counsellor and would also benefit from case management.

^[2]The Flagship Service Model recommends caseload ratios between 1:12 – 1:24 depending on complexity of client needs.

Youth friendly spaces

Having a physical presence in the communities where services operated increased awareness and accessibility of services. Many services had been operating for extended periods of time within communities, which meant that they were known to other services, young people and the broader community.

Physical office spaces could be a barrier to engaging young people. Although services were located within communities both staff and partners noted that often the offices were not youth friendly spaces. Staff reported that young people could feel intimidated, unsafe, or uncomfortable to 'hang out', which in some cases resulted in cancelled appointments and disengagement.

Outreach was an essential component of the model. Given that office spaces were not always accessible or suitable for meeting with young people, all services involved a high degree of outreach (i.e. reaching young people in public spaces, partner services and/or within their accommodation).



Did services have access to adequate resources?

Accommodation

Access to accommodation was critical to meet the immediate housing needs of young people. Most of the youth homelessness services had accommodation attached to their funding contracts (three out of five services) or some access to properties through an internal arrangement with Mission Australia Housing. This enabled services to quickly provide a safe and stable foundation to young people, while supporting them to build skills, make progress towards their goals and address risk factors for homelessness. However, only one service was funded to provide the full range of support from crisis to transitional accommodation and support in private rentals through Rent Choice Youth.

Access to brokerage

All services had access to brokerage, which was viewed as a key component of service delivery by both staff and young people. Brokerage and/or material assistance was used to meet the immediate needs of young people (i.e. food, housing, transport, support to engage in education). Brokerage was particularly important for young people with no income and young people suggested that more brokerage would be helpful, for example food vouchers and funds to purchase furniture.

I didn't have Centrelink for a while so [my case worker] helped me with Woolworths vouchers and Opal cards and she also helped me sort out One Meal and helped me get some pre-made meals and stuff, so I was able to eat some proper food. – Young Person

Resources for greater impact

Community events and group activities provided earlier intervention pathways for young people. Community events and group activities were used to build trust and awareness of services available in the local community. They also provided early intervention soft entry pathways to identify and offer support to young people who were at early risk of homelessness (i.e. through schools or other education settings).

Despite the importance of these activities, none of the services were funded to provide these types of activities and only two out of five services placed an emphasis on engaging with young people through these types of pathways.

Partners working with these services highlighted that MA was *'always willing to get involved'* and that they valued the involvement in community events and group activities.

That program is really good and provides quite a good soft entry point to our service for young people to have a little bit more of one-on-one support if they need it. They're in and out, they attend those sessions in the gym every week, but also some of them are provided with ongoing mentoring or case management for additional issues. – Program Manager

2.1 To what extent is the service model being implemented as intended?

Did services effectively engage target groups and deliver core service activities?

Summary of Evidence	Rating
<p>There was good evidence that services effectively reached and supported young people.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Demand for MA's youth homelessness services in NSW increased notably and has remained high since Covid-19.• All services exceeded their targets supporting young people who were experiencing homelessness, highlighting the growing need for services.• Relatively high proportions of young people engaged with the services experienced difficulties with mental health, had experience of family and domestic violence, and/or experience of the out of home care system.• Services focused predominantly on engagement, case planning and review, practical and material assistance, and linking young people to additional supports.• Around a third of young people who were homeless at entry accessed accommodation. However, in some cases the eligibility criteria for accommodation was a barrier.• Although all services had access to brokerage, the amount available was not sufficient to meet all the needs of young people.	<p>Good</p> <p>★★★★☆</p>



Did services effectively engage target groups?

Service need and reach

The need and demand for MA youth homelessness services in NSW has increased since the end of Covid-19 restrictions and has continued to grow. From 2021 to 2022 the annual number of interactions opened increased by 50% from 648 to 972. Since then, demand has remained high with 1,007 interactions recorded in 2024 (64% increase over five years).

Overall, 3,649 young people sought support 4,437 times from a homelessness services. Of those, 98% of young people were provided with assistance, with most services operating above capacity. Despite resourcing challenges, only five referrals were recorded as not receiving support due to a lack of service capacity.

More and more young people were already experiencing homelessness by the time they sought support. The number of young people who were already homeless when seeking support from the services more than doubled from 211 in 2020 to 481 in 2024 (+128%). Three out of five services had a higher proportion of young people who were experiencing homeless at entry compared to people at risk of homelessness, highlighting the increased need and demand.

Support delivered January 2020 – December 2024



3,649
young people



4,437
total interactions



4,361
interactions assisted



40%
experiencing
homelessness at entry



58%
at risk of
homelessness at entry



2%
unknown housing
status at entry

Did services effectively engage target groups?

Characteristics of young people

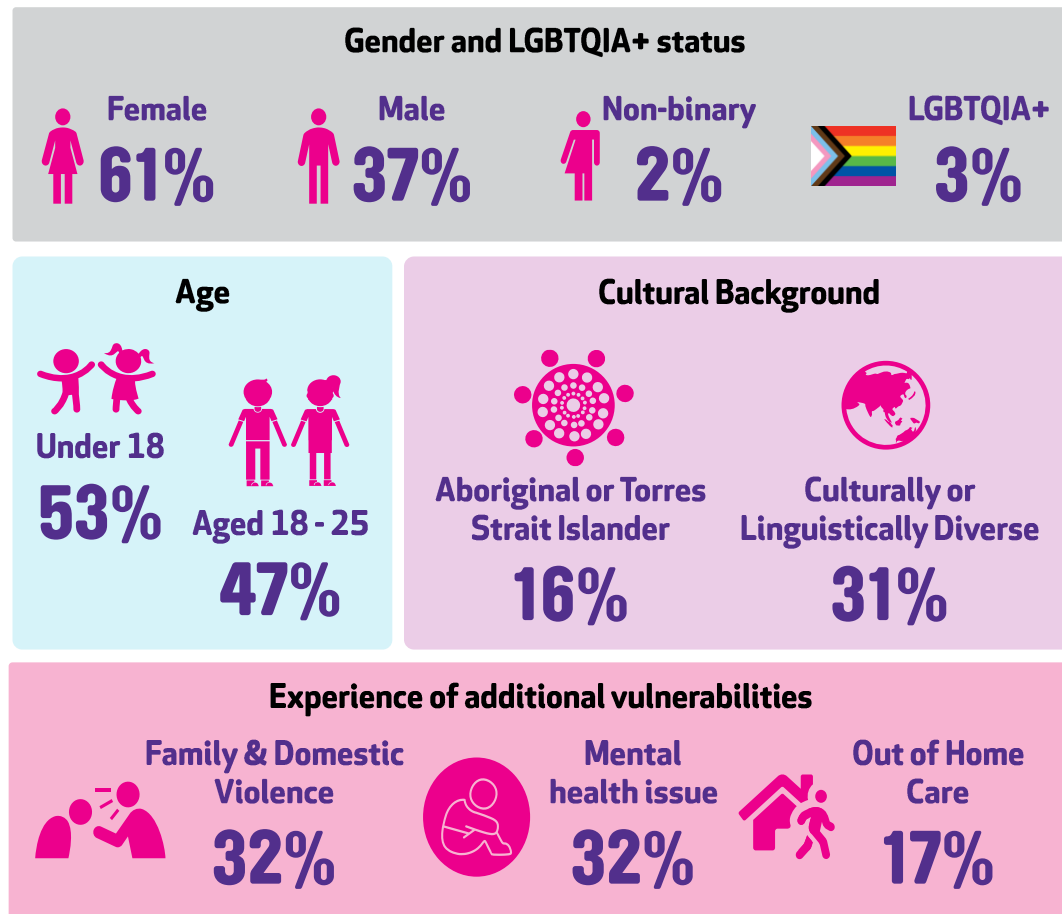
Services effectively reached priority groups of young people who had a range of complex needs. Consistently over half of young people who sought support were female (61% overall). Most services worked with young people from a diverse range of cultural backgrounds, both Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander young people (16%) and young people from Culturally and Linguistically Diverse backgrounds (31%).

Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander young people were significantly more likely to connect with support after becoming homeless (69%), while young people under 18 were significantly more likely to access support when at risk of homelessness (71%).

Staff noted that, unlike some other youth homelessness providers, MA services were willing to engage with young people with extremely high levels of complexity. Around 1 in 3 had experience of family violence and/or were living with a mental health issue, while around 1 in 6 had been on a care and protection order.

Family conflict, domestic violence, and mental health challenges were also common themes when young people described the circumstances that led to them seeking support.

Young people accessing services January 2020 – December 2024



I was going through family issues, it was kind of...I found it unsafe to stay there, I wanted some sort of sense of independence and safety, security. – Young person

My family are very narcissistic people and involved in drugs and things like that. I tried staying with each different family member and it didn't work...Long story short, I couldn't do it anymore, cause it was declining my mental health. – Young person

Did services deliver core service activities?

Goal based support

Most young people who engaged in case management received four of the five core support types described in the Flagship Service Model. Almost two thirds of young people who engaged with the services received case management.

Young people received case planning and review (94%), practical and/or material assistance (88%), community and service connections (78%) and engagement (63%). Many young people and staff members also referred to housing support and accessing housing options such as Rent Choice Youth³ as a key component of the service model.

Accommodation

Around a third of young people who were homeless at entry accessed accommodation. Although only three of the five services were contracted to provide accommodation, all had some evidence of ensuring young people had a place to stay. However, in some cases the eligibility criteria for accommodation was a barrier.

Most young people (n=351) who were homeless at entry that were provided accommodation by the services received short-term crisis accommodation (22%). Only 1 in 8 were able to access transitional or long-term accommodation (12%).

Brokerage

Just over a third of young people engaged in case management were provided brokerage. As mentioned [previously](#) access to brokerage is a key component of the service model and was highly valued by both staff and young people. Although all services had access to brokerage, the amount available was not sufficient to meet all needs. On average, young people who were provided with brokerage received just over \$500, with the main uses being material assistance (77%) and housing, including costs associated with establishing a new home (29%).⁵

We focus on my goals and where I want to be halfway through the program, by the end of the program.

– Young person



31%
provided with any
accommodation⁴



22%
crisis
accommodation



12%
transitional
accommodation



2%
long-term
accommodation

^[3] Rent Choice Youth is administered through Homes NSW providing short to medium-term private rental assistance for people aged 16 – 24 who do not have a stable place to live and are engaging with a support provider.

^[4] Some young people were provided with multiple types of accommodation, for example both crisis and transitional accommodation.

^[5] Some young people were provided with brokerage for multiple reasons.

2.1 To what extent is the service model being implemented as intended?

How well were services aligned to Mission Australia’s Homelessness and Stable Housing Support Flagship Service Model critical success factors?

Summary of Evidence	Rating
<p>There was good evidence that services were well aligned to the critical success factors, with some areas for improvement that can be addressed by the services.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Services built genuine and effective relationships with young people. Young people felt supported in a way that built their self-confidence and agency, rather than dependence on services. However, caseloads in some services were considered too high due to the complexity of young people’s needs that led to increased pressure on staff and less time to engage and support young people.• The longer young people were engaged the more likely they were to exit with their needs met (on average 7 months).• Young people who engaged with support when they were at risk of homelessness were much more likely to achieve a successful exit (51%) compared to young people experiencing homelessness (29%).• Services demonstrated a high level of responsiveness and flexibility to engage young people. But the lack of long-term affordable housing created bottlenecks in crisis and transitional accommodation and a third of young people disengaged from the service.• Staff were highly skilled, either through qualifications or additional training provided by the service but greater investment in youth-specific training would be beneficial to maximise this valuable resource.• Most services had strong connections and were seen as a valued community partner, however navigating the mental health and housing systems for young people was challenging.	<p>Good</p> <p>★★★★☆</p>

How well aligned were services to the critical success factors?

Genuine and effective relationships

Services were highly effective in building relationships with the young people they were supporting. Of the young people who completed a satisfaction survey around nine in ten felt respected, comfortable and safe.

Young people consistently commented on how much they valued the relationships they had built with their case managers. For some this relationship had changed their view of the wider community, for others their relationships with their case manager was the first time they had felt valued as an individual. Not only did these relationships help to boost young peoples' self-esteem, they also effectively assisted young people to feel more confident to access additional supports.

Both staff and partners emphasised the importance of managing expectations by being clear about what the service could offer and what was not possible. Ensuring that young people did not have unrealistic expectations was seen as key to maintaining an effective relationship.

Proportion of young people who felt...



Respected
91%



Comfortable
89%



Safe
94%

Having strangers who care for you has really kind of changed my view a lot, the world doesn't feel as cold. – Young person

Mission Australia treat me like a normal human being and my family never done that, it's very beautiful. – Young person

In some services high caseloads were a barrier to engage effectively with young people and build relationships.

Although within the recommended levels, caseloads in some services were considered too high due to the complexity of young people's needs. This led to increased pressure on staff and less time to engage with young people.

Allocation of multiple caseworkers that work with a young person, for example the Key-Co model at the Crossing, and leveraging co-located services were used by services to provide wrap around support for young people.

Person-centred holistic support

Young people require more holistic support than adults. Staff frequently noted that while adult homelessness services could focus predominantly on housing, when working with young people it was necessary to provide young people with support related to a much wider range of issues.

There was evidence that young people received support across a range of life domains. Health and wellbeing, and support to engage in education or develop skills was common across all services. Some services also had a high focus on supporting young people with issues related to family and domestic violence, legal matters, or assisting young people to increase their social participation.

How well aligned were services to the critical success factors?

Person-centred holistic support

Staff, partners and young people highlighted the importance of services being person-led in supporting young people to identify goals. Young people often described how they would come to their case manager with the goals that they wanted to work on and most young people who completed satisfaction surveys indicated they felt involved in decision-making.

Both staff and partners emphasised the importance of being client-led even when the young person's priorities did not align with what the case manager might have identified.

The quality of case management provided was also often noted as a strength of the services by both staff and partners.

Proportion of young people who felt involved in decisions



92%

I'll usually just come with a few main goals or things that I'm struggling with that I need some support with, and I'll get some support tackling those.
– Young person

I think they're very good at focusing on what the young person wants to focus on, even if they know that there's other things that need to be addressed. Rather than kind of pushing that I think they're all very good at building that connection...the case management is excellent. – Partner

There was mixed evidence that young people received support aligned to their personal goals. Only around two thirds of young people had a goal plan recorded, with the most common goals being related to housing, health and wellbeing, employment and education.

While most young people with material assistance (99%), community (82%) and health and wellbeing goals (72%) received support aligned to those goals, less than half of the young people with housing goals had some form of housing support recorded (49%).

Although there was very little quantitative data related to financial or employment support, many young people highlighted these domains as key issues they had been supported to address.

Despite a relatively high proportion of young people from [diverse cultural backgrounds](#) accessing the services, very little support related to connection to culture was recorded and young people did not mention cultural support in interviews.

Despite some disconnect between goals and support types recorded, young people were happy with the support they received. Most young people who completed satisfaction surveys were satisfied with the service, suggesting that they felt their support needs were met.

Proportion who felt satisfied with the service overall



96%

How well were services aligned to the critical success factors?

Building independence and resilience

Services supported young people to build confidence and agency. Young people often highlighted that their relationship with their case manager helped boost their confidence and motivated them to work towards their independence. Staff also noted the importance of supporting young people to build their independent living skills but also to know when to reach out for help.

Supporting young people to build independence was a gradual process. Although there was a clear focus on helping young people to become independent, there was also acknowledgement that this was a gradual process, and that young people often required a high level of support when they first engaged with services. Staff also noted the importance of being flexible with timeframes and being able to provide young people with stability of support long-term to ensure successful transitions into adulthood.

It's most helpful for me because I have grown up with a single dad who's not very present. So I haven't really had many responsible adults to explain real world things to me and sort of help me through them, like most people's parents would do. I find that it's really helpful for me to find my footing in the world and to gain some independence, while having support.

– Young person

The longer young people were engaged with the services the more likely they were to exit with their needs met. Overall, just over 4 in 10 young people who engaged in case management achieved a successful exit, indicating they no longer required support.

Proportion of young people who successfully completed case management



41%

who received case management



29%

experiencing homelessness



51%

at risk of homelessness

Across all services young people tended to have more successful exits when they stayed engaged for longer (on average 7 months). Despite the additional challenges that they faced, young people with a known mental health issue were significantly more likely to have a successful exit than those with no known issues (49% vs 36%).

Young people who engaged with support when they were at risk of homelessness were also significantly more likely to exit with their needs met (51%) compared to young people experiencing homelessness at entry (29%), highlighting the importance of earlier intervention.

I think the key difference for us is that we are long-term. I think a lot of services will have a timeframe on how long they'll provide support to somebody...We stay long-term with people. – Team Leader

How well were services aligned to the critical success factors?

Flexible and responsive support

Services demonstrated a high level of responsiveness and flexibility to meet young people where they were at and encourage engagement.

Both staff and partners highlighted that the services would respond to any young person in need. Partners noted the ease of the referral process and the services' willingness to help, even when at capacity.

Staff engaged with young people in a range of locations, such as cafes or picking young people up from school or home, to ensure services were accessible. When it was not possible to meet in person, staff would make use of technology, such as SMS or phone calls, to proactively keep in contact with young people.

Operating within business hours was a barrier to engagement for some services, as young people could be in crisis outside of business hours and/or engaged in education and employment, which limited the time available to meet with staff.

Young people were often stuck in crisis or transitional accommodation far longer than intended.

Housing providers demonstrated flexibility and frequently extended transitional accommodation placements, in recognition that despite the best efforts of young people there were often no suitable long-term options available. Although this provided enhanced stability for young people and more support opportunities, leading to high successful completion rates for young people who received transitional accommodation (58%), it also created a frustrating bottleneck for young people stuck in crisis accommodation which could lead to their disengagement.

Young people who were experiencing homelessness at entry were significantly more likely to disengage than those at risk of homelessness (46% vs 31%). Further, Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander young people were also significantly more likely to disengage (46%).

Duration and intensity of case interactions



How well aligned were services to the critical success factors?

Invest in highly skilled staff

Young people felt that their case managers were skilled and knew how to help them. Young people frequently commented on how impressed they were with their case managers' ability to break down complex ideas in an understandable way and navigate systems, while making the young person feel included and comfortable.

They've always had great case workers. I've always got along well with them. I've always felt comfortable with them. They always remember everything that's going on. They help me keep up with my life more than I do!
– Young person

The team was the most important resource of any service. Both frontline staff and managers highlighted the importance of having a well-trained, stable team for delivering a quality service. This was either achieved through recruiting well qualified staff or providing additional training to upskill team members.

However, it was increasingly difficult to find staff with youth-specific skills. Working with young people requires additional skills, such as increased focus on rapport building and utilising different communication techniques, that were increasingly difficult to find.

Some young people and staff felt that additional training would be beneficial to ensure all staff have the right skills for engaging well with young people.

Proportion of young people who felt staff knew how to help

92%



Services work collaboratively

Services had strong connections and were seen as a valued partner in their community. Both staff and partners frequently spoke of the importance of working collaboratively to support young people to achieve the best outcomes. Most referrals to the youth homelessness services came from other community services, followed by self-referrals.

Consistent communication with partners was important to ensure collaboration was effective. Many partners noted that MA services were very good at maintaining communication, which ensured all parties were aware of key updates relating to the young person.

Staff turnover, and the communication barriers this created, was noted by both MA staff and partners as an impediment to effective collaboration in some instances.

Although case managers recognised that they could not do everything themselves and that they worked with other services to ensure young people received wraparound support, there was little quantitative evidence of referrals out from the youth homelessness services to other supports (only 19% of young people who received case management support had a referral out recorded). Most referrals were for housing, health and wellbeing and financial/material assistance.



2.2 How effective are Mission Australia's youth homelessness services in supporting young people to achieve positive short and medium-term outcomes?

The following section presents the findings to assess the effectiveness of the services in supporting young people to achieve outcomes; Stable Housing, Health and Wellbeing; Support and Connection; and Choice, Control and Independence.

Data sources were synthesised against the evaluation criteria of merit, and a rating was provided to assess each of the Signs of Progress, developed as part of the Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning Framework.

2.2 How effective are services in supporting young people to achieve positive short and medium-term outcomes?

Key Findings

Overall services were very effective in supporting young people at risk of homelessness to remain housed, but many young people were already homeless, and experienced high levels of complexity, by the time they accessed support. These high levels of complexity made it very challenging for young people experiencing homelessness to successfully secure long-term affordable housing. Despite the challenges in securing stable housing, most young people experienced improvements in health and wellbeing, felt supported and well connected and more in control of their lives when they exited a service. However, rebuilding relationships with family could be difficult, mental health issues were often an ongoing struggle, and young people experiencing homelessness were less likely to make progress towards their goals.

Access to safe and secure housing

Summary of Evidence	Rating	
<p>The youth homelessness services played a critical role in supporting young people to access stable housing. However, supporting young people to exit homelessness was difficult due to a lack of housing options.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Overall, around two thirds of young people who engaged in case management had a positive housing outcome. • Young people at risk of homelessness were much more likely to achieve a positive housing outcome than those already experiencing homelessness (92% compared to 34%). This highlights not only the importance of prevention and early intervention, but also the impact of the national homelessness and housing emergency. • Most young people felt their accommodation met their needs, but sometimes they were further away from family and friends than they would like. • Young people reported statistically significant improvements in their standard of living but often felt that they did not have enough money to meet their needs. 	Overall	<p>Fair</p> <p>★★★★☆</p>
	At risk of homelessness at entry	<p>Excellent</p> <p>★★★★★</p>
	Homeless at entry	<p>Fair</p> <p>★★★★☆</p>

Access to safe and secure housing

The youth homelessness services played a critical role in supporting young people to access stable housing. Overall, around two thirds of young people who engaged in case management had a positive housing outcome.⁶ Young people at risk of homelessness were much more likely to achieve a positive housing outcomes than those already experiencing homelessness (92% compared to 34%). This highlights not only the importance of prevention and early intervention, but also the impact of the national homelessness and housing emergency.

Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander young people who, as noted earlier, were [more likely to be homeless at entry](#) and [more likely to disengage](#) from services, were also significantly less likely to be successfully supported to achieve a positive housing outcome.

Young people at risk of homelessness at entry

The services were highly effective in supporting young people at risk of homelessness to remain housed. At exit from the services over 9 in 10 young people who had been at risk of homelessness remained housed (92%), this was higher than the proportion of all young people presenting alone to specialist homelessness services who maintained housing reported to Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) from July 2019 to June 2024 (87%).⁷

Around 9 in 10 were also rated by staff as living in secure and stable accommodation, confident to manage their accommodation, and had their tenancy support needs met.⁸ Young people with experience of family and domestic violence were less likely to maintain housing (88%). While some of these young people may not have achieved a positive housing outcome, this may have been in the best interests of their safety.

I went from being pretty much on the verge of homelessness to now just moving in to my first own place... There was a lot of times where I genuinely thought I would be on the streets, and I had no clue what I was gonna do and they've made sure that I've got a roof over my head. – Young Person

Proportion of young people who were at risk of homelessness at entry and their housing outcomes at exit (n=1,517)



⁶ Young people who were homeless at entry were considered to have a positive housing outcome if their latest episode of homelessness indicated they were 'Not homeless' or their latest 'Going Home Staying Home' status was 'Staying Home'. Young people who were at risk of homelessness at entry were considered to have a positive housing outcome if their 'Going Home Staying Home' status had not changed to 'Going Home'.

⁷ AIHW data collated from specialist homelessness services annual report data tables, young people who were living in institutions at entry or exit from support excluded from calculations.

⁸ Excludes 458 closed cases with no staff rating for secure and sustainable housing, 539 closed cases with no staff rating for confidence to manage accommodation and 566 closed cases with no staff rating for tenancy support needs being met.

Access to safe and secure housing

Young people experiencing homelessness at entry

Supporting young people who were experiencing homelessness to achieve a positive housing outcome was challenging. Almost 3 in 10 young people exited homelessness into a secure home, this was slightly lower than the overall proportion reported into AIHW from July 2019 to June 2024 (28% vs 33%).⁹ However, young people supported by MA were much more likely to access short-term accommodation (53% vs 23%) and were less likely to exit into rough sleeping or other unstable housing options (19% vs 44%).

For some crisis accommodation eligibility criteria excluded older young people, leaving limited options even for short-term housing.

I was able to get my own place and now I have a lifetime lease. It's really good mentally knowing that I have a lifetime lease, like I'm not needing to move every year because that's just too much anxiety. – Young person

Having somewhere safe to stay, even short-term, was highly valued. Staff acknowledged that while long-term housing can be difficult to secure, the most important thing was that young people had a safe place to stay. Young people also expressed gratitude, even when accommodation was temporary, and just over half of young people were significantly happier with their safety at exit (62% within or above the Australian average range at exit).

I've got a room here, a room to myself. I'm just in peace and quiet myself for once. – Young person

They've always put my safety as their number one priority. I guess that's the biggest difference, they've given me a lot of security.

– Young person

Proportion of young people who were homeless at entry and their housing outcomes at exit (n=1,125)



28%

not homeless



53%

short-term or crisis accommodation



19%

rough sleeping or unstable housing

Most young people felt their accommodation met their needs at exit.

Regardless of whether young people were homeless or at risk of homelessness, most young people felt they had adequate access to services and that their accommodation was affordable and safe. However, due to the lack of accommodation options available, young people experiencing homelessness often had to move away from the communities where they had grown up to secure housing and were further from family and friends than they would like.

Proportion who felt housing met needs

83%

Access to services

76%

Affordability

84%

Safety

63%

Distance to family/friends

⁹ AIHW data collated from specialist homelessness services annual report data tables, young people who were living in institutions at entry or exit from support excluded from calculations.

Access to safe and secure housing

Access to enough money to live independently

Most young people did not feel they had enough money to meet their needs. Two thirds of young people were rated by staff as managing their finances with no assistance at exit. However, less than half of the young people surveyed felt they had enough money to meet their needs.

Over four fifths (81%) of young people who had no income at entry (n=949) still had no income at exit and almost three quarters (73%) who were awaiting government benefits at entry (n=193) were still waiting at exit.

Young people tend to have limited income due to restrictions on their earning capacity (lower wages, balancing work and study, difficulties in accessing Centrelink etc) and are often seen as higher risk tenants by both private landlords and Community Housing Providers, which also made accessing long-term housing exceptionally challenging.

When I moved out I didn't really know how to manage my money, obviously I wasn't used to paying rent and I moved out around 16/17, so I was pretty young...it took me a while to understand how to save up money and split everything up and [my case manager] helped me, she taught me how to do this stuff.

– Young person

I had an entire year that I could not access Centrelink and they worked with me to get that sorted within maybe two months, one month, of being back in contact with Mission. After a year of me not being able to get Centrelink they got it sorted immediately and got me back paid for the whole year. That was amazing.

– Young person

Standard of living

Young people reported statistically significant improvements in their standard of living. At exit from a service 3 in 5 young people felt happier about their standard of living, although only 38% were within the Australian average at exit.

Happiness with standard of living



60%
young people felt
happier with
standard of living

38%
scored within or above
the Australian
normative range

Finances



67%
managing
finances with no
assistance

49%
felt they had
enough money to
meet their needs

2.2 How effective are services in supporting young people to achieve positive short and medium-term outcomes?

Health, wellbeing, support and connections

Summary of Evidence	Rating	
<p>Most young people experienced statistically significant improvements in their health and wellbeing after engaging with a service, but ongoing mental health support was needed.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Three quarters of young people had improved overall personal wellbeing, although less than half were within the Australian average at exit from a service. • Around two thirds of young people were happier with their health (65%) and around half of young people felt their relationships had improved (53%). However, rebuilding relationships with family could be challenging. • Many young people described how the services had helped them to feel happier and how their mental health had improved, but without access to ongoing support, mental health was often still a struggle for young people. 	Overall	<p>Good</p> <p>★★★★☆</p>
At risk of homelessness at entry		
Homeless at entry		
<p>Most young people felt supported and well connected when they exited a service.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Half of young people had improved connections to their community, with over three quarters being within the Australian average at exit from a service. • Young people felt supported to navigate the service system and connect with services, as well as people who were important to them. • Around three fifths of young people were able to maintain connections with other supports independently by the time they exited a service. 	Overall	<p>Good</p> <p>★★★★☆</p>
At Risk of homelessness at entry		
Homeless at entry		

Health and wellbeing

Health, wellbeing and personal relationships

Most young people had improved health and wellbeing after engaging with the services. Almost two thirds of young people felt happier with their health and just over three quarters had improved overall wellbeing. However, less than half of young people scored within or above the Australian average range for overall wellbeing (45%) and only around two fifths (42%) felt they were coping better than at entry.

Many young people described how the services had helped them to feel happier and how their mental health had improved, but without access to ongoing support, mental health was often still a struggle for young people.

Just like my quality of life and making me feel happier and more independent. I struggled a lot a few years ago with agoraphobia and I couldn't leave the house at all and...they were able to help me get out of the house...it's just been really helpful to know that the world isn't so scary and that I can do it.
– Young person

I came in there depressed, I had so many nightmares almost all night. I slept there and then it just slowly came out, I slowly got out of it...but a lot of the time I'm still down a bit. I mainly just put a mask on it. – Young person

Relationships improved for some young people. Although staff often spoke of the significance of family relationships, only half of young people felt happier with their personal relationships and just over a third (36%) felt their family was getting along better compared to when they first engaged with the service. While family relationships may be difficult to repair in the short-term, many young people in group crisis accommodation found it valuable to form connections with other young people going through similar experiences, particularly if they had limited connections in the outside community.

Happiness with health



65%

young people felt happier with personal health

55%

scored within or above the Australian normative range

Overall wellbeing



76%

young people with improved overall wellbeing

45%

scored within or above the Australian normative range

Happiness with relationships



52%

young people felt happier with relationships

52%

scored within or above the Australian normative range

Support and connections

Most young people felt supported to connect with services, community and people who were important to them. Half of young people felt happier with their community connections and over three quarters of young people scored within or above the Australian average range for community connectedness (77%).

Staff often spoke of the importance of building positive relationships with young people, so that they would feel more comfortable accessing additional supports. However, it was sometimes hard for young people to build trust in other people.

Young people also often spoke about how their case managers had helped link them to additional supports and build confidence navigate the service system independently. At service exit three fifths of young people were rated by staff as being able to connect with support independently.

Happiness with connection to community



51%

young people felt happier with community connection

77%

scored within or above the Australian normative range

Staff rating of ability to connect with support independently



60%

young people required no assistance

For a lot of them, engaging with their case worker, building that relationship with the case worker subsequently leads to them then engaging with other supports that they need. – Program Manager

But I also think a lot of them knowing to ask for help that was a big thing too...I think when they leave, they're not afraid to ask. Whether it's in their workplace, or uni, or wherever it is, they've got the confidence to actually ask...because if you don't ask, you don't know. – Case Manager

If [my worker] didn't help me then I wouldn't have found out all this stuff and probably wouldn't have gone to Headspace and stuff like that. I feel like it's the support, the support is really good, 100% that's probably why I like this so much, because of that. – Young person

I have so many advocates, I feel like I have a small village behind me but [my MA case manager] has been one of the most important. – Young person

2.2 How effective are services in supporting young people to achieve positive short and medium-term outcomes?

Choice, control and independence

Summary of Evidence	Rating	
<p>Young people felt more in control of their lives and more independent when they exited services.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An increased sense of control and independence was the most common theme when young people described the changes they experienced through engaging with the services. • While less than half of young people were confident they could achieve their study or work goals, most young people with these goals had made progress towards them. Further, over two thirds of young people with education goals were engaged in formal study and around a third of young people with employment goals were working at exit. • Young people who were at risk of homelessness at entry were much more likely to make progress toward their goals than young people who were homeless (60% vs 37%) at entry. 	Overall	<p>Good</p> <p>★★★★☆</p>
	At risk of homelessness at entry	
	Homeless at entry	<p>Fair</p> <p>★★★☆☆</p>

Choice, control and independence

The services supported young people to set and achieve goals. Young people often spoke of the goals, big and small, that they had achieved with the support of the services.

Young people who were at risk of homelessness at entry were much more likely to make progress than those who were homeless (60% vs 37%).

I've gotten my bank card and the program that's happening in the school holidays, also my driving...The bank card that was a huge life changing moment for me because I've had problems with getting it and it was like getting it was an independence thing for me. A personal sort of freedom thing, taking control over my own self.– Young person

Proportion of young people exiting case management



50%

made progress towards goals



37%

homeless at entry made progress



60%

at risk of homelessness at entry made progress

Connection with education and employment

Young people had made progress towards their education and employment goals. Many young people spoke about the support they had received to engage in education and employment and the progress they had made in these areas of their life during engagement with services.

Although only around two fifths of the young people felt confident that they could achieve their study or work goals (41%), most young people with education (n=620) and employment goals (n=638) had made progress towards these goals by exit. Further, over two thirds of young people with education goals were engaged in formal study at exit and around a third of young people with an employment goal were working.

Young people at risk of homelessness were more likely to have made progress towards these goals and to be engaged in education (79%) or employment (37%) at exit.

Proportion of young people with education goals



81%

made progress towards education goals



68%

engaged in formal study

Proportion of young people with employment goals



71%

made progress towards employment goals



32%

engaged in employment

Choice, control and independence

Increased sense of independence and control were the most common changes young people identified they had experienced because of engagement with the services. The most common theme in young people's responses about the change they experienced through contact with a service was an increased sense of self-worth, independence, and control. In addition, two thirds of young people felt more in control of their lives; three fifths were happier with their life achievements; and just over half were more confident about what would happen later in life.

They gave me self-awareness and gave me more knowledge about things I need to know about, and just gave me that confidence back, and self-respect, and just lots of things they've given back to me, which I never probably would have gotten on my own two feet because I have no family support. I don't know how I would have done it if I didn't have Mission Australia in my life - Young person

I bought my own car, got it registered. It's been an amazing, amazing, experience. I would never change anything. - Young person

Definitely more independence and the feeling of freedom. They've given me so much of myself back and my self-confidence.
– Young person

My family always treated me dopey and said I would always be catching buses, one of those kids who would never be able to live alone. And [the staff have] given me that confidence, they gave me hope, there's still hope out there in the world and caring people that treat you the same as everyone else. – Young person

Happiness with what will happen later in life

54%
young people
felt happier with
the future



62%
scored within or
above the Australian
normative range

Happiness with life achievements

59%
young people felt
happier with life
achievements



60%
scored within or
above the Australian
normative range

Control



68%
felt more in control
of their life

2.3 What are the critical service components that enable or hinder positive outcomes for young people?



2.3 What are the critical service components that enable or hinder positive outcomes for young people?

Key Findings

Enablers

- ✓ **Nurturing genuine, authentic and trusting relationships.** Young people accessing homelessness services often do not have other trusted adults they can rely on. Lower caseloads were viewed as an enabler to build genuine and authentic relationships, particularly when young people had a range of complex needs.
- ✓ **Person-led and age-appropriate support coordination.** Adapting to the level of emotional and cognitive development of the young person ensures that engagement is effective and support is appropriate to meets young people's needs.
- ✓ **Flexible, responsive and consistent services.** Young people need to know that support will be there for them when they need it.
- ✓ **Formal and informal counselling.** It is essential to support young people to process their emotions and trauma, and to identify their own strengths.
- ✓ **Mentoring and role modelling.** Young people require guidance to develop the life skills they need to transition successfully into adulthood.
- ✓ **Prevention and early intervention is key.** Outreach and community activities provide valuable soft entry pathways for young people.

Barriers

- X **Lack of appropriate youth accommodation.** Accommodation is lacking in both availability and suitability (i.e. shared settings without supervision), meaning some young people may be forced to stay in potentially unsafe situations.
- X **Lack of youth friendly offices spaces.** In some cases, the lack of youth friendly spaces resulted in cancelled appointments and young people disengaging from the services.
- X **Inadequate access to mental health support.** Most homelessness services were not funded to provide mental health specialists roles and accessing appropriate support externally can be extremely challenging.
- X **Operating in standard business hours.** Working with school-aged young people is very difficult if services are operating within business hours as young people are often not contactable for most of the day.
- X **Strict age limits.** Cutting off support when young people turn 25 is often not in the best interests of the young person.
- X **Systemic issues.** The biggest barriers that hinder positive outcomes are often not service components, rather, outside the control of services. In particular, the lack of affordable long-term housing, Centrelink eligibility criteria and processes, the lack of support options, and government benefit options available for young people under the age of 18.

Key service enablers

Nurturing authentic and trusting relationships

Building a solid foundation of trust and rapport was key to working with young people. Staff and partners consistently noted the importance of building genuine, trusting, relationships with young people to be able to support them to achieve the best outcomes. This was particularly important as young people who seek support from homelessness services often do not have trusted adults in their lives, which makes their relationship with their case manager particularly important. Even when it was not possible to achieve housing outcomes, having an authentic, genuine and trusting relationship was seen as having a positive impact on building young people's self-esteem, supporting them to feel seen and valued, and increasing confidence to access support when needed.

Being someone who didn't have parental figures from the age of 16 and being thrown in at the deep end, it made me feel like I had someone there who could guide me through life a bit and support me in the way a parent would. – Young person

I think that's what sits with people...I think how someone feels they were treated at a service is what makes the impact on their life. Even if sometimes you can't deliver what you'd like for them, that makes a huge difference, how you make the person feel. – Program Manager

Lower caseloads provide case managers with more time to build genuine and authentic relationships, identify each young people's strengths and needs (which may not always be apparent at intake) and provide tailored holistic support. In some services high caseloads led to increased pressure on staff and less time to engage with young people.

Person-led and age-appropriate support coordination

Adapting to the level of development for young people and providing age-appropriate information and support is critical. Although being person-centred is essential for the success of any service, staff highlighted the particular importance of tailoring support in youth homelessness services to the emotional and cognitive development of the young people seeking assistance. Some young people may not have the capacity to engage in standard and/or intensive case management or may not have many available support options due to their age. Staff must adapt to ensure the information and support they provide is appropriate and meets the needs of the young person, without creating unrealistic expectations.

One service had created a specific mentor role to support young people (12-14 years) to engage with the service and build their skills, self-esteem and capacity, noting that standard intensive case management was not effective or appropriate for that younger age group.

Early Intervention

Prevention and early intervention is key. The evaluation found that youth homelessness services were highly effective in supporting young people at risk of homelessness to remain housed, yet there was a growing need for services to support young people already experiencing homelessness.

Tenancy support, engaging young people in a range of locations through outreach strategies, community and group activities are critical to provide prevention and early intervention pathways. They are important to increase awareness of services, build trust and relationships with young people and offer support to young people who are at early risk to prevent homelessness from occurring.

Key service enablers

Flexibility with consistency

Services require high levels of responsiveness and flexibility to meet young people where they are at and encourage engagement. The evaluation found that supporting young people to build independence was a gradual process and young people often require a high level of initial support and/or multiple support periods. Providing long-term support by allowing young people to disengage and re-engage when needed was critical to meet the needs of young people and ensure successful transitions into adulthood. Young people clearly valued being able to engage and disengage with services based on their level of need.

While being flexible and adapting to young people's wants and needs is important, it is also vital to offer consistency and reliability. Staff and partners noted that change can take a long time and that, while there may be many ups and downs, young people need to be confident that their support workers are consistent and reliable.

I stopped contact with them for a little bit...then I got in contact again when I needed some support and they helped a lot.

– Young person

Don't be tokenistic, because young people can see through BS better than most people. Just be upfront, honest, clear and kind with them and be reliable for them because what we know is for a lot of young people they haven't had that reliability in their life and that's, a lot of the time, why they've ended up in the homelessness space.

– Program Manager

Specialist support and mentoring

Role modelling, mentoring and counselling are key for young people's outcomes. The evaluation found that without access to ongoing support, mental health was often still a struggle for young people. As such, formal and informal counselling is important to help young people process their emotions and identify their own strengths. Specialist roles, such as counsellors, can provide young people with support that may be hard to access externally due to waitlists, eligibility or availability in local communities. These roles were most effective when used flexibly and/or simultaneously with case management or generalist support to meet the individual needs of young people.

Both staff and partners also highlighted the importance of informal counselling, mentoring and role modelling to help young people develop their life skills and successful transition to adulthood.

I call this informal counselling but it's mentoring, it's a whole process, giving them enough time and compassion and understanding and listening. They really figure it out themselves... You feel like a young person goes from a cocoon to a butterfly.

– Program Manager

[We help them develop skills] through household chores that they are given in the evening. We rotate them and have staff that supervise them...so they are supported in like "I will cook with you. I will do this with you, let's clean it together." It's buddy work.

– Case Manager

Service delivery barriers

Operating during standard business hours

For services working with young people who were still engaged at school, operating during standard business hours created barriers to engagement. The evaluation found that operating solely within standard business hours was a barrier as young people could be in crisis outside of business hours and young people were often engaged in education or training during the day, which placed further limits on the time available for engagement and service delivery. Case managers who supported school-aged children often had to schedule face to face time with young people in a short after-school window each day, which limited their ability to engage.

Strict age limits

Age limits for working with young people was a significant barrier to successfully transition young people into adulthood. Services highlighted that the requirement to transition people to adult services when they turned 25, regardless of their circumstances, was a significant barrier. Transitioning young people to adult services strictly based on age was often not in the best interests of the individual. Support provided through adult services was much less intensive and holistic and, therefore, did not meet the person's needs. Age-based eligibility criteria for accommodation was also a barrier that excluded some young people from seeking support.

... because of the level of disadvantage a lot of our clients face they still have really high levels of need at 25. Especially young people with cognitive impairment, chronic drug and alcohol issues, trauma backgrounds. It's not all sorted at 25. – Partner

Lack of appropriate youth accommodation and youth friendly spaces

Access to accommodation is clearly important to meet the immediate needs of young people who are experiencing homelessness. The evaluation found that only some services were funded to provide accommodation and even when available not all accommodation was suitable for young people.

Staff and partners noted that crisis accommodation was often at capacity or had restrictive eligibility criteria. Without access to crisis accommodation young people may be forced to stay in potentially unsafe situations. While transitional accommodation is desperately needed, some young people felt the properties allocated were not particularly suitable as they were required to live in a shared setting with strangers, without staff supervision, which led to them feeling unsafe.

The physical office spaces were also a barrier to engaging young people. The physical offices in local communities were often not youth friendly spaces. In some cases, resulted in cancelled appointments and young people disengaging from the service.

I have quite a few clients that are homeless at the moment and trying to get them into a refuge has been a really big struggle because they're either at capacity or they have certain requirements... Just recently I made eight referrals to eight different refuges and they were all at capacity. – Partner

Systemic barriers

Lack of long-term affordable housing

A lack of long-term affordable housing is the greatest barrier to positive outcomes. Although young people were very resilient and often made the best of their circumstances, having a safe and stable home was the key to successful long-term outcomes. The evaluation found that only 28% of young people could be successfully supported to exit homelessness. As is widely recognised, the housing crisis means there are very few long-term housing options available. Young people are at a further disadvantage as they have limited income. They are often not seen as attractive prospective tenants for private landlords due to their lack of rental history. Community Housing Providers are also disincentivised from providing housing to young people due to the very low levels of income support and Commonwealth Rental Assistance that they receive.

Due to the housing shortage young people were stuck in crisis or transitional accommodation for much longer than intended. While extending short-term crisis and transitional accommodation placements can provide stability for young people, it also creates a frustrating bottleneck for young people stuck in accommodation far longer than intended. When placements cannot be extended some young people needed to move between crisis accommodations every three months and/or were forced to stay in unsafe situations due to the lack of availability of both accommodation and long-term housing.

I've been wanting to move out for a very long time into my own transitional housing...I've been [at the refuge] for too long. Everything, every single detail, is starting to agitate me...I expected to leave at like three months, but I've been in for double the amount.
– Young person

Inadequate access to mental health support

Helping young people to navigate the mental health system was particularly challenging. The evaluation highlighted that many young people were experiencing mental health issues when they sought support from homelessness services and many more may be undiagnosed. Yet, access to mental health support is limited. Staff noted that without addressing mental health issues, it was difficult to make progress in other aspects of young people's lives.

Staff felt that the mental health system was exceptionally hard to navigate as eligibility criteria were applied inconsistently or young people were often deemed too acute for early intervention services but not acute enough for other services.

Lack of availability or prohibitively high costs also meant that accessing mental health support from specialists was often not an option. Despite this high need and challenges in accessing support externally, only two of the services were funded to provide dedicated counsellors or mental health workers. Even when these roles existed, they were limited in the support that they could provide. In one service young people who were receiving case management support could not also access in-house counselling, which meant young people did not always receive the full range of support they might need.

Obviously mental health can just create major ongoing issues, until they get some resolution around that, some mental health support, sometimes there's very little that we can achieve for them.
– Program Manager

Systemic barriers

Inadequate income support for young people

Young people need an income to live independently and are often forced to remain in unsafe situations because they cannot access adequate income support. For young people having access to an income was essential to obtain independent housing, however the evaluation found that most did not have enough money to meet their needs. While many young people spoke about the importance of being assisted to access income through Centrelink, staff highlighted that the amount of income support was often insufficient to live independently.

Accessing income support is complex and difficult for young people. Due to restrictive eligibility criteria and complex processes, it was very difficult for young people to access income support through Centrelink. The evaluation found that almost three quarters of young people who were awaiting government benefits at entry to services were still waiting at exit.

As Youth Allowance eligibility and payment rates are impacted by parental income, accessing income support was particularly challenging for young people at risk of homelessness who were still living at home. Even young people experiencing homelessness, whose relationships with parents had completely broken down, found navigating Centrelink challenging due to requirements to obtain information from parents.

Centrelink is always a huge barrier for young people, because it's always dependent on the parent rate until they're 22. We've got lots of people who are 18...and their parents are not willing to sign the forms, so they're stuck. – Case Manager

We have quite a few young people that just cannot safely stay at home but there's no way for them to access any finance through Centrelink...that they need to contact the parents it blows my mind the rigidity of that. – Case Manager

Limited options for young people aged under 18

Young people under 18 have very limited support and government benefit options available to them.

For most young people under 18 there is very little option but to stay at home, which may not always be safe. While some young people under 18 can access transitional accommodation, they are too young to enter utilities contracts and therefore end up paying higher rates or being ineligible for rebates as they obtain utilities through accommodation providers.

I think that 15-year-old age is probably the hardest one to deal with, because you really can see the need to reduce the temperature by helping the young person not be [home] for a period of time, but that ability to disengage the young person ...and then bring them back is quite limited.

– Team Leader

Kids who are under the age of 18, they can't sign up for electricity or gas. So when they move in to transitional accommodation they can't put their name on that, so we do it on their behalf... they're at a disadvantage because a lot of those kids would be eligible for rebates or one-off payments if they're behind...but their name's not on the bill, so they're not eligible for any of that. – Partner

Section 3. What could we do differently?



What could we do differently?

This evaluation evidences the critical role MA's youth homelessness services had in supporting young people experiencing housing instability in NSW. Over the past five years more young people have needed assistance, and services have gone above and beyond to ensure young people were supported. However, far too many young people were already experiencing homelessness when they sought support, highlighting the urgent need to reach young people earlier.

Services were highly effective in supporting young people at risk of homelessness to remain safely housed but less than three in ten young people were able to exit homelessness. Despite these housing challenges many young people experienced statistically significant and meaningful improvements in their standard of living, health, wellbeing, relationships and connection to community, as well as education and employment goals.

Critical service components were the quality of case management relationships, person-led and age-appropriate support, flexible and consistent service delivery, skilled staff and working collaboratively with other services. Barriers included high caseloads, limited access to mental health supports, and lack of youth-friendly or appropriate spaces and accommodation.

More needs to be done to ensure that all young people have a safe place to call home. A range of systemic barriers limited the effectiveness of services. Urgent action is needed to boost investment in long-term youth housing and crisis responses, increase focus on prevention and early intervention, and improve income support and rental subsidies.



What could we do differently?

Implications for service delivery

Recommendation	Why is this recommended?
Increase focus on prevention and earlier intervention	Prevention and early intervention is key. Far too many young people were already experiencing homelessness by the time they connected to support. Tenancy support was highly effective in achieving positive housing outcomes.
Provide ongoing mental health support	Improved access to appropriate mental health support, in particular mental health/counsellor specialist roles, is vital for young people to sustain positive outcomes.
Design more youth-friendly spaces	Physical office spaces could be intimidating for young people to access support and in some case could lead to disengagement.
Continue to invest and upskill staff to work with young people	Working with young people requires additional skills and knowledge and it can be challenging to recruit staff with the right experience. Providing more youth specific training and practice sharing opportunities would help to bridge gaps.
Continue to work collaboratively with other services	Most services were seen as a valued community partner, however navigating the mental health and housing systems was challenging and referrals to other services to meet the needs of young people were low.
Improve cultural safety for Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander young people	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people encountered greater challenges in achieving positive housing outcomes. Providing more culturally safe support that reflects the unique needs of these young people is essential to increasing engagement and improving outcomes.
Focus on person-led goal-based support	Only half of young people made progress towards their goals and evidence of support aligned with those goals was mixed. To better support young people in achieving their aspirations, there is need for a stronger emphasis on person-led, goal-based support and more accurate recording of service activities.
Build partnerships to evidence the long-term impact of young homelessness services	Being able to conduct analysis based on data linkage with government data assets would enable better understanding of what happens to young people in the months and years after their engagement with MA youth homelessness services ends and could facilitate the creation of comparison groups to provide stronger evidence that observed changes were caused by service interventions.

What could we do differently?

Towards a system that will make homelessness rare, brief and non-recurring

To end homelessness across Australia, we must transition to a future state which, while maintaining a necessary level of crisis response, primarily focuses on upstream solutions in both housing and support provision. A larger proportion of effort must be allocated to policies, practices and programs that effectively prevent people becoming homeless in the first place or intervene early to ensure that homelessness is rare, brief and non-recurring.

To achieve this, a suite of complementary recommendations to address systemic barriers must be implemented across governments within the following policy areas:

- 1. A service system wide shift to prevention and early intervention** ensuring that youth homelessness services are adequately funded to provide evidence-informed support and catalysed by the establishment of a \$500 million Homelessness Prevention Transformation.
- 2. More medium-term youth specific housing options** through funding 15,000 youth tenancies per year and constructing ten 40-unit Youth Foyers.
- 3. More long-term housing solutions** created by significantly boosting the number of social and affordable homes to 10% of all housing stock.
- 4. Boost income support and rental subsidies for young people** by raising the rate of Youth Allowance and JobSeeker to at least \$82 per day and increasing financial payments through Commonwealth Rental Assistance.

The implementation of these changes would eventually rebalance the homelessness service system, to quickly divert young people into stable housing and ensure that effective pre-emptive measures avoid human misery and costs to multiple service systems over the longer term.



Implications for policy and advocacy

Recommendation	Why is this recommended?
<p>Catalyse a service system wide shift to prevention and early intervention by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adequately funding youth homelessness services to provide evidence-informed support including specialist roles to compliment case management and earlier intervention pathways. • Establishing a \$500 million Homelessness Prevention Transformation Fund, to expand targeted programs and drive policy reforms to stop homelessness before it begins. 	<p>This report demonstrates that better outcomes are achieved for young people from early intervention approaches and where specialist supports are available alongside case management.</p> <p>To scale up these types of interventions and target groups at elevated risk of homelessness, new and ringfenced investment is required.</p> <p>This could be achieved through a mechanism such as the Homelessness Prevention Transformation Fund, which would catalyse the transition to prevention by funding policy, program and practice changes and investing in evidence-based housing and support models. This would also allow investment in housing and homelessness over the longer term to be freed up, as the need for cost-intensive crisis interventions diminishes.</p>
<p>Implement more medium-term youth specific housing options by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Funding 15,000 youth tenancies across Australia each year for homeless young people. • Constructing ten 40-unit Youth Foyers to support young people’s housing and education, training or employment needs. 	<p>Some young people require tailored housing options, such as a Youth Foyer, in recognition of their life stage and independent living skills, co-occurring issues alongside homelessness, and structural barriers to entering and sustaining tenancies in social and private housing.</p> <p>Additionally, more suitable transitional properties are essential to ensure young people with complex needs are not set up to fail by being placed in shared environments without the necessary supports to feel safe and secure.</p>
<p>Create more long-term housing solutions by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Significantly boosting the number of social and affordable homes to 10% of all housing stock to meet the need in the community. 	<p>It is clear in the evidence from our services that there is a lack of long-term housing options, which limits the achievement of stable housing outcomes.</p> <p>Building up the stock of social and affordable housing will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – assist young people who are ready to live independently with minimal support; – assist young people needing a housing pathway after exiting more supported forms of medium-term housing.
<p>Boost income support and rental subsidies for young people by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Raising the rate of Youth Allowance and JobSeeker payments to at least \$82 a day. • Increasing financial payments through Commonwealth Rent Assistance and ensure that it remains an effective payment for those struggling to pay rent. 	<p>Young people did not have enough money to meet their needs and are often seen as higher risk tenants by landlords.</p> <p>Increased income support and improved rental subsidies would lift more young people out of poverty and reduce some barriers to accessing stable housing.</p>

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Appendix A: Homelessness and Stable Housing Support Signs of Progress

Impact Homelessness is reduced and communities have access to the support and resources they need to thrive

Sign 1

Services have access to adequate resources to deliver the FSM

Services have:

- the minimum viable service model in place
- access to essential resources (vehicles, IT infrastructure, housing, brokerage, etc.)
- access to resources for greater impact (in-house specialist support, soft-entry group activities etc.)

Sign 2

Services effectively engage target groups and deliver core service activities

Services have/are:

- capacity to meet community need
- reaching people experiencing, or at-risk of, homelessness
- reaching priority groups and those affected by external vulnerability factors
- delivering of goal-based individual support and brief interactions
- delivering activities for greater impact

Sign 3

Services are well aligned to identified Critical Success Factors

- Genuine and effective case management relationships
- Assertive, proactive and responsive case management
- Case management is structured around individual goal plans
- Person-centred, holistic support tailored to individual needs
- Support builds independence and resilience
- Effective collaboration & partnerships with local service system
- Highly skilled staff
- Access to housing and support services

Sign 4

Stable Housing

- People have somewhere to live and enough money to meet their needs
- People have skills and resources to keep their housing and live independently
- People have an affordable long-term home

Sign 5

Health & Wellbeing

- People feel safe at home and in the community
- People are physically healthy
- People have good mental health and wellbeing
- People have healthy relationships

Sign 6

Support & Connections

- People access support when they need it
- People are happy with their connections to community, including culture and spirituality

Sign 7

Choice, Control & Independence

- People feel in control of their lives
- People set and achieve their own goals
- People have the opportunity to connect with education and employment

Appendix B: Homelessness and Stable Housing Support FSM Outcome Domains and Headline Indicators

Outcome Domain	Our impact	What we measure
Stable Housing 	People have a long-term affordable home, enough money to meet their needs, and the skills and resources to keep their housing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Number of people experiencing homelessness who are not homeless at exit Number of people who are at risk of homelessness who maintain their housing at exit Increased satisfaction with standard of living Number of people whose tenancy support needs are met Number of people who are living in housing that meets their needs
Health & Wellbeing 	People feel safe at home and in the community, have healthy relationships and good physical health and wellbeing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increased satisfaction with safety Increased satisfaction with health Increased satisfaction with overall wellbeing Increased satisfaction with personal relationships
Support & Connections 	People have access to support when they need it and are happy with their connections to community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Number of people who can find support when needed Number of people who receive community and/or service linkage support Increased satisfaction with community connection
Choice, Control & Independence 	People feel in control of their lives, set and achieve their own goals, and have the opportunity to connect with education and employment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increased satisfaction with future security Number of people who feel more in control of their life Number of people who exit with goals achieved Increased satisfaction with achievement in life Number of people with goals who are engaged in education or employment

Appendix C: Methodology

Qualitative Data and Analysis

Interviews were administered either in person, via telephone or via Microsoft Teams, based on interviewee preferences.

Interviews with young people

At least three young people per service were recruited. During interviews young people were asked about the circumstances that led them to seek support from Mission Australia, their experiences in services, and the changes they had experienced as a result of the support provided. Young people who participated in interviews were reimbursed for their time with a \$35 gift voucher, in alignment with Mission Australia's Paid Participation Policy.

Interviews with Mission Australia staff

At least three staff members per service were recruited. Staff were asked to describe the service model, differences between how their service operates and other homelessness services, barrier to and enablers of effective service delivery and the outcomes they observe young people achieving.

Interviews with representatives of partner organisations

Four of the five services participating the evaluation identified a partner willing to be interviewed. Partners were asked to describe how they interact with the services, any differences they have noticed between the Mission Australia services and other homelessness services, barriers to and enablers of effective service delivery and the outcomes they observe young people achieving as a result of their engagement with Mission Australia.

Qualitative analysis

Recordings of interviews were transcribed through Microsoft Word and analysed for common themes by Microsoft Co-Pilot in Excel. Each response was subsequently manually coded using QDA Miner 2024 using a code frame developed based on the Co-Pilot analysis and the Homelessness and Stable Housing Support Flagship Service Model.

Quantitative Data

Quantitative analysis

MA Connect and Impact Measurement survey data was analysed using IBM SPSS Statistics Version 30.0. As some services included in the evaluation provide support to a wider range of service users, interactions where the primary client was over the age of 24 at entry were excluded for all services and dependent children were excluded for Blacktown Hills Homeless Young Families. Only data relating to the main person who received support was analysed (i.e. support provided to other people such as partners, parents, siblings, or children was excluded).

Housing, education, and employment outcomes are presented for people who received case management support.

Changes in wellbeing outcomes are presented for 168 people who engage in case management support and completed both an entry and exit Impact Measurement survey. The Impact Measurement sample includes a lower proportion of people engaged in repeat interactions and lower proportions of people engaged in EMYS and The Crossing.

Client satisfaction data has been included for all people as this data is anonymous, therefore the type of interaction, age and role of the person who completed the survey is unknown. Client satisfaction data was analysed in Microsoft Excel.

Quantitative Analysis

To compare whether differences in distribution of homelessness status at entry and housing outcomes achieved by different cohorts of young people were statistically significant Chi-square tests of independence were carried out. A p-value of 0.05 was the threshold to determine statistical significance. Effect size was calculated using Phi coefficient (when comparing 2 groups) or Cramer's V (when comparing 3 or more groups).

Wilcoxon's Signed Ranks tests were carried out on Impact Measurement survey data to determine whether there were any significant differences between variables from entry to exit. A p-value of 0.05 was the threshold to determine statistical significance. Practical significance was calculated using Spearman's correlation coefficient to determine effect size.

Quantitative sample overall and by service

		All young people		Young people who were assisted		People who received case management support and exited		Matched Impact Measurement surveys		Client Satisfaction surveys	
		N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Service interactions	Total	4,437	-	4,361	-	2,687	-	168	-	209	-
	First interaction	3,649	82.2%	3,598	82.5%	2,128	79.2%	139	82.7%	-	-
	Repeat interaction	788	17.8%	763	17.5%	559	20.8%	29	17.3%	-	-
Service level data	BHHYF	259	5.8%	256	5.9%	216	8.0%	15	8.9%	111	53.1%
	CBYS	1,677	37.8%	1,615	37.0%	672	25.0%	56	33.3%	11	5.3%
	EMYS	747	16.8%	742	17.0%	514	19.1%	12	7.1%	8	3.8%
	NSYHS	1,253	28.2%	1,251	28.7%	974	36.2%	82	48.8%	72	34.4%
	The Crossing	501	11.3%	497	11.4%	311	11.6%	3	1.8%	7	3.3%

Statistical findings for differences between cohorts

Comparison Groups	N	χ^2 (Chi-square)	df	P value	Effect size (Phi coefficient or Cramer's V)	Finding
Homelessness Status at Entry (Homeless or At risk of homelessness)						
- Female	2,588					
- Male	1,570	16.000	2	<0.001**	0.061	Young women were slightly more likely to be at risk rather than homeless at entry
- Non-Binary	96					
- LGBTQIA+	137	5.71	1	0.017*	0.037	Young people identified as LGBTQIA+ were slightly more likely to be homeless at entry
- Unknown LGBTQIA+ Status	4,136					
- Under 18	2,250	313.13	1	<0.001**	0.271 ^M	Young people under 18 were more likely to be at risk of homelessness at entry
- Aged 18 - 24	2,023					
- Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander	670	284.93	1	<0.001**	0.265 ^M	Young people who were Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander were more likely to be homeless at entry
- Not Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander	3,399					
- Culturally and/or Linguistically Diverse	1,330	48.74	1	<0.001**	0.110 ^S	Young people who were Culturally or Linguistically Diverse were more likely to be at risk of homelessness at entry
- Not Culturally or Linguistically Diverse	2,717					
- Experience of Family and Domestic Violence	1,394	85.52	1	<0.001**	0.141 ^S	Young people with experience of FDV were more likely to be homeless at entry
- No known experience of Family and Domestic Violence	2,879					
- Mental Health issue	1,371	27.68	1	<0.001**	0.080	Young people with a known mental health issue were more likely to be at risk of homelessness at entry
- No known Mental Health issue	2,902					
- Care and Protection Order when presenting	740	70.48	1	<0.001**	0.134 ^S	Young people with a Care & Protection Order were more likely to be at risk of homelessness at entry
- No Care and Protection Order	3,163					

P value: *statistically significant (<0.05), **highly significant (<0.01). Where the difference is not statistically significant this has been highlighted in grey.

Effect size: ^SSmall effect (Phi coefficient: ≥ 0.10 , Cramer's V: ≥ 0.07), ^MMedium effect (Phi coefficient: ≥ 0.20 , Cramer's V: ≥ 0.21), ^LLarge effect (Phi coefficient: ≥ 0.30 , Cramer's V: ≥ 0.35), ^{VL}Very Large effect (Phi coefficient: ≥ 0.50). Where the effect size is negligible this has been highlighted in grey.

Statistical findings for differences between cohorts

Comparison Groups	N	χ^2 (Chi-square)	df	P value	Effect size (Phi coefficient or Cramer's V)	Finding
Reason For Exit from Case Management (Successful Completion or Disengagement)						
- Homeless at entry	861	107.700	1	<0.001**	0.226 ^M	Young people at risk of homelessness were more likely to exit with needs met
- At risk of homelessness at entry	1,244					
- Female	1,326	0.570	2	0.752	n/a	No statistically significant difference
- Male	746					
- Non-Binary	52					
- LGBTQIA+	91	4.369	1	0.037*	0.037	Young people identified as LGBTQIA+ were slightly more likely to exit with needs met
- Unknown LGBTQIA+ Status	2,037					
- Under 18	989	0.675	1	0.411	n/a	No statistically significant difference
- Aged 18 - 24	1,139					
- Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander	355	32.881	1	<0.001**	0.127 ^S	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander were more likely to disengage from support
- Not Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander	1,688					
- Culturally and/or Linguistically Diverse	611	10.708	1	0.001**	0.073	Culturally and Linguistically Diverse young people were slightly more likely to exit with needs met
- Not Culturally or Linguistically Diverse	1,412					
- Experience of Family and Domestic Violence	850	0.044	1	0.833	n/a	No statistically significant difference
- No known experience of Family and Domestic Violence	1,278					
- Mental Health issue	893	52.348	1	<0.001**	0.157 ^S	Young people with a known mental health issue were more likely to exit with needs met
- No known Mental Health issue	1,235					
- Care and Protection Order when presenting	326	11.186	1	<0.001**	0.075	Young people on a Care or Protection Order were slightly more likely to exit with needs met
- No Care and Protection Order	1,679					

Statistical findings for differences between cohorts (continued)

Comparison Groups	N	χ^2 (Chi-square)	df	P value	Effect size (Phi coefficient or Cramer's V)	Finding
Positive Housing Outcome at Exit from Case Management						
- Homeless at entry	1,124	757.163	1	<0.001**	0.602 ^{VL}	Young people at risk of homelessness were much more likely to have a positive housing outcome
- At risk of homelessness at entry	1,509					
- Female	1,632	15.534	2	<0.001**	0.086	Young women were slightly more likely to have a positive housing outcome
- Male	931					
- Non-Binary	64					
- LGBTQIA+	104	0.897	1	0.344	n/a	No statistically significant difference
- Unknown LGBTQIA+ Status	2,529					
- Under 18	1,238	56.755	1	<0.001**	0.165 ^S	Young people under 18 were slightly more likely to have a positive housing outcome
- Aged 18 - 24	1,395					
- Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander	460	125.592	1	<0.001**	0.250 ^M	Young people who were not Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander were more likely to have a positive housing outcome
- Not Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander	2,062					
- Culturally and/or Linguistically Diverse	763	3.061	1	0.080	n/a	No statistically significant difference
- Not Culturally or Linguistically Diverse	1,743					
- Experience of Family and Domestic Violence	1,053	20.137	1	<0.001**	0.098	Young people who had not experienced FDV were slightly more likely to have a positive housing outcome
- No known experience of Family and Domestic Violence	1,580					
- Mental Health issue	1,113	61.386	1	<0.001**	0.171 ^S	Young people with a known mental health issue were more likely to have a positive housing outcome
- No known Mental Health issue	1,520					
- Care and Protection Order when presenting	401	3.147	1	0.076	n/a	No statistically significant difference
- No Care and Protection Order	2,047					

Statistical findings for differences between cohorts (continued)

Comparison Groups	N	χ^2 (Chi-square)	df	P value	Effect size (Phi coefficient or Cramer's V)	Finding
Positive Housing Outcome at Exit from Case Management for Young People At Risk of Homelessness at Entry						
- Female	977					
- Male	487	4.285	2	0.117	n/a	No statistically significant difference
- Non-Binary	41					
- LGBTQIA+	54					
- Unknown LGBTQIA+ Status	1,455	0.023	1	0.880	n/a	No statistically significant difference
- Under 18	856					
- Aged 18 - 24	653	2.403	1	0.121	n/a	No statistically significant difference
- Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander	150					
- Not Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander	1,308	9.134	1	0.003**	0.079	Young people who were not Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander were more likely to have a positive housing outcome
- Culturally and/or Linguistically Diverse	482					
- Not Culturally or Linguistically Diverse	981	4.500	1	0.034*	0.055	Culturally and Linguistically Diverse young people were slightly more likely to have a positive housing outcome
- Experience of Family and Domestic Violence	531					
- No known experience of Family and Domestic Violence	978	15.521	1	<0.001**	0.101 ^s	Young people who had not experienced FDV were more likely to have a positive housing outcome
- Mental Health issue	749					
- No known Mental Health issue	760	0.238	1	0.626	n/a	No statistically significant difference
- Care and Protection Order when presenting	277					
- No Care and Protection Order	1,123	2.700	1	0.100	n/a	No statistically significant difference

Statistical findings for differences between cohorts (continued)

Comparison Groups	N	χ^2 (Chi-square)	df	P value	Effect size (Phi coefficient or Cramer's V)	Finding
Positive Housing Outcome at Exit from Case Management for Young People Homeless at Entry						
- Female	655					
- Male	444	3.659	2	0.160	n/a	No statistically significant difference
- Non-Binary	23					
- LGBTQIA+	50	0.387	1	0.534	n/a	
- Unknown LGBTQIA+ Status	1,074					
- Under 18	382					
- Aged 18 - 24	742	1.824	1	0.177	n/a	No statistically significant difference
- Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander	310					
- Not Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander	754	25.338	1	<0.001**	0.154 ^S	Young people who were not Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander were more likely to have a positive housing outcome
- Culturally and/or Linguistically Diverse	281					
- Not Culturally or Linguistically Diverse	762	8.499	1	0.004**	0.090	Culturally and Linguistically Diverse young people were slightly more likely to have a positive housing outcome
- Experience of Family and Domestic Violence	522					
- No known experience of Family and Domestic Violence	602	0.056	1	0.813	n/a	No statistically significant difference
- Mental Health issue	364					
- No known Mental Health issue	760	19.659	1	<0.001**	0.132 ^S	Young people with a known mental health issue were more likely to have a positive housing outcome
- Care and Protection Order when presenting	124					
- No Care and Protection Order	924	6.204	1	0.013*	0.077	Young people with no known Care or Protection Order were slightly more likely to have a positive housing outcome

Impact Measurement changes from Entry to Exit Statistical Findings

Item	Timepoint	N	Mean	Median	SD	P value	Effect size
Total PWI Score	Entry	166	60.11	58.56	17.34	<0.001**	0.582 ^L
	Exit	161	70.35	72.82	15.54		
Life as a whole	Entry	167	5.14	5	2.35	<0.001**	0.510 ^L
	Exit	166	6.83	7	1.96		
Standard of living	Entry	167	5.41	5	2.33	<0.001**	0.402 ^M
	Exit	166	6.78	7	2.05		
Personal health	Entry	167	5.17	5	2.50	<0.001**	0.597 ^L
	Exit	166	6.55	7	2.20		
Achieving in life	Entry	167	5.72	6	2.15	<0.001**	0.464 ^M
	Exit	166	6.67	7	2.11		
Personal relationships	Entry	166	6.58	7	2.59	<0.001**	0.464 ^M
	Exit	166	7.43	8	2.11		
Personal safety	Entry	166	6.70	7	2.47	<0.001**	0.420 ^M
	Exit	166	7.68	8	1.95		
Community connectedness	Entry	166	6.86	7	2.48	<0.001**	0.343 ^M
	Exit	166	7.77	8	2.04		
Future Security	Entry	166	5.74	5	2.44	<0.001**	0.422 ^M
	Exit	164	6.80	7	2.27		
Sense of control	Entry	157	5.63	6	2.49	<0.001**	0.464 ^M
	Exit	160	7.11	7	2.14		

P value: *statistically significant (<0.05), **highly significant (<0.01)

Effect size: ^S Small effect (0.1 - 0.3), ^M Medium effect (0.3 - 0.5), ^L Large effect (>0.5)

Impact Measurement changes from Entry to Exit Statistical Findings (continued)

Item	Timepoint	N	Mean	Median	SD	P value	Effect size
Have enough money to meet needs	Entry	46	2.80	3	1.31	0.041*	0.415 ^M
	Exit	76	3.33	3	1.19		
Sense of coping	Entry	106	2.85	3	0.89	<0.001**	0.517 ^L
	Exit	83	3.31	3	0.90		
How well family gets along	Entry	107	1.97	2	0.99	0.016*	0.579 ^L
	Exit	84	2.24	2	1.12		
How confident to achieve study or work goals	Entry	107	3.03	3	1.12	0.108	No statistically significant change
	Exit	82	3.29	3	0.949		

Limitations

Survey sample sizes

A key limitation was the relatively small sample sizes achieved for both Client Satisfaction and Impact Measurement surveys. Out of 4,361 interactions assisted only 209 completed a Client Satisfaction survey (5% response rate) and of 2,687 closed case interactions only 168 provided both entry and exit Impact Measurement surveys (6% response rate). These low response rates introduced several challenges:

- **Representativeness:** The small proportion of survey respondents may not accurately reflect the broader population of young people using the services. There is a risk that those who chose to participate differ systematically from those who did not (e.g. they may have had particularly positive or negative experiences or may be more engaged or confident to provide feedback). This may potentially skew the findings.
- **Statistical Power:** With limited numbers the ability to detect statistically significant differences was reduced, this means that some potentially meaningful changes or subgroup differences may not have been identified.
- **Generalisation:** Findings based on small sample sizes should be interpreted with caution as they may not be generalisable to all young people accessing Mission Australia's youth homelessness services in NSW.

Limitations (cont.)

Lack of longitudinal data

Another limitation of the evaluation was that findings only relate to young people's experiences at exit from services, due to the absence of longitudinal data tracking young people after they have ended their period of support.

The ability to conduct analysis based on data linkage with government linked data assets would have enabled better understanding of what happens to young people in the months and years after their engagement with MA youth homelessness services ends.

This limitation had several implications:

- **Sustainability of outcomes:** Without longitudinal data it is not possible to determine whether positive changes observed at exit (such as improvements in housing stability and health and wellbeing) were sustained over time. Some young people may have experienced setbacks, including further experiences of homelessness, which were not captured in the available data.
- **Understanding long-term impact:** The evaluation cannot provide insights into the long-term trajectories of young people, such as whether they were able to maintain independent living, continue their education, or achieved stable long-term employment. This restricts the ability to assess the true effectiveness in supporting lasting change.
- **Missed opportunities for learning:** Longitudinal data would also allow for the identification of factors associated with sustained positive outcomes and factors that contribute to reoccurring or persistent homelessness. This information would be highly valuable for refining service models and targeting support where it is most needed.

Absence of comparison group

The absence of a comparison group was another notable limitation of the evaluation. An ideal comparison group would be young people experiencing homelessness who did not access MA services. However, establishing a quasi-experimental design retrospectively would also require access to linked government data assets, which was not available for the evaluation.

The implications of the absence of a comparison group for interpreting the findings were:

- **Attribution of outcomes:** Without a comparison group it is not possible to directly attribute observed outcomes solely to the services provided.
- **Strength of evidence:** The lack of a comparison group means the evaluation is descriptive rather than causal. While it documents changes among young people who engaged with services, it cannot provide robust evidence that these changes were caused by the services themselves.

Despite the limitations, the evaluation offers a multi-faceted understanding of youth homelessness services in NSW. The evaluation used a theory-led design drawing on multiple data sources to evidence MA contribution to outcomes for young people.

By integrating quantitative and qualitative evidence, the evaluation captured both measurable changes and the lived experiences of young people, offering valuable insights for service improvement and policy development/changes.