



Communicating about housing and homelessness

Housing insecurity is complex. We must acknowledge that housing insecurity looks different for different people. For some, it may be sleeping on the street or in a car, 'couch-surfing' at friends' houses or living in an insecure private rental. For others, it may mean temporary housing or the threat of homelessness due to unmanageable debt.

The reasons why people experience housing insecurity are also complex. For many people, these issues are outside their control. For example, an inaccessible housing market, lack of suitable rental properties, high interest rates or cost of living may contribute to housing insecurity.

Sometimes, issues such as family violence, mental ill-health, or alcohol and other drug (AOD) use may contribute to housing insecurity. At other times, these issues may result from housing insecurity.

It is important to acknowledge this complexity and recognise that the way we communicate about housing is an opportunity to provide people with information that helps them protect their mental health and wellbeing.

This resource provides some practical tips on how to communicate sensitively about housing insecurity.



**Black Dog
Institute**



Mindframe

This resource has been developed by Everymind, under the Mindframe initiative, in partnership with Black Dog Institute and the National Suicide Prevention Trial Sites.

1. Think about how you frame the conversation

- It is important to acknowledge that housing insecurity is a structural issue, not a personal failing. Do not pass judgement on a person's abilities or experiences based on their housing status.
- It is important to acknowledge the humanity of people experiencing housing insecurity.

- Be mindful of the specific language used to describe people experiencing housing insecurity or homelessness.

See the following table for some practical tips on how to frame the conversation.

Aim to avoid	Example	Alternative
<p>Using collective nouns</p> <p>Using collective nouns can be offensive and does not recognise the variety of experience within a group</p>	<p>The homeless</p>	<p>People without homes, people without housing, people without a current fixed address, people experiencing homelessness</p>
<p>Using 'homeless' as an identifier</p> <p>Identifying someone as homeless when it is not necessary fails to acknowledge that homelessness is only one part of a person's life</p>	<p>'I met a homeless person the other day'</p>	<p>Leave homelessness out of the conversation if it is not relevant. If it is relevant, say 'I met a person experiencing homelessness the other day'.</p>
<p>Stigmatising language</p> <p>Stigmatising language can present barriers to seeking help</p>	<p>Bum, vagrant</p>	<p>Person without a home, person without housing, person experiencing homelessness, person without a current fixed address.</p>
<p>Labelling someone by their housing status</p> <p>Labelling someone by their housing status does not acknowledge that homelessness is only one part of a person's life</p>	<p>Homeless person, homeless people</p>	<p>Person without a home, person without housing, person experiencing homelessness, person without a current fixed address.</p>



2. Provide information about support services to encourage help-seeking

When communicating about housing insecurity, include information about where people can seek help. This should include:

- Services that can offer support regarding housing insecurity:
 - **National: Homelessness Australia** publish a list of homelessness services by state, including the following:
 - **ACT: One Link**, 1800 176 468 (Mon – Fri, 8am – 6pm)
 - **VIC: Statewide After Hours Service**, 1800 825 955 (Mon-Fri 5pm – 9am, Weekends 24/7)
 - **NSW: Link2home**, 1800 152 152 (24/7)
 - **QLD: Homeless Hotline**, 1800 47 47 53 (24/7)
 - **SA: Homelessness Connect**, 1800 003 308 (24/7)
 - **NT: Shelter Me**
 - **WA: EntryPoint Perth**, 6496 0001 or 1800 124 684 (Mon – Fri, 9am – 7pm, Saturday, 9am – 5pm)

- Services regarding mental health, suicide and AOD support, including:
 - **Lifeline** (13 11 14 or text 0477 13 11 14, 24/7)
 - **Beyond Blue** (1300 224 636)
 - **QLife** (1800 184 527)
 - **13YARN** (13 92 76)
- Services regarding issues such as family violence, including **1800Respect**, Australia’s national sexual assault, domestic and family violence counselling service (1800 737 732, 24/7).

It is also important to consider your audience and whether other tailored services should be highlighted. For example, if communicating to/about Veterans, it may be most appropriate to include information about **Open Arms** (1800 011 046), who provide crisis accommodation to current and former members of the ADF, their partners and children.

It may also be important to consider whether your audience has access to the means of communication you are suggesting (e.g., mobile phone, internet access).