accordwest

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BUSSELTON CONNECTIONS WEEK 2026

Acknowledgements

Partners

Supporters

Hairdresser Lynnley

Southwest Community Alcohol and Drug Service

Tuart House

Donors

Thank you to the generous Busselton community organisations and businesses that contributed practical supports to individuals and families in need. We acknowledge the support of Rotary Club Busselton (SWAGS), Mitre 10 Dunsborough (tarps and butane cans), Corryne's Soaps (soaps), Dunsborough Veterinary Clinic (pet food and pet care items), Woolworths Dunsborough (dry food and personal hygiene products), and Coles Busselton and GIVIT (food vouchers).

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Executive Summary

Connections Week 2026 brought together community organisations, government agencies, businesses, volunteers and people with lived experience to better understand homelessness and housing insecurity in the City of Busselton, with the knowledge gained during the week making it possible to strengthen local responses.

86 people experiencing homelessness or severe housing instability engaged with the initiative, including individuals, families, young people and older adults.

52 participants completed the full Australian Homelessness Vulnerability Triage Tool (AHVTT) providing valuable insight into local experiences and support needs. Additional demographic and living situation information was collected through engagement with people who did not wish to complete the full survey.

The findings confirm that homelessness and housing insecurity in Busselton is consistent with trends already identified by local service providers, the City of Busselton, and published state and national research and data. The Connections Week data indicates that homelessness is driven by a combination of interrelated factors, including:

- Housing affordability pressures
- Family and domestic violence
- Low incomes and financial hardship
- Experiences within institutional systems
- Disability
- Mental health challenges
- Social disadvantage

These are well-established drivers of homelessness across Western Australia and Australia more broadly, reinforcing that the experiences of participants in Busselton reflect challenges being experienced in communities across the country.

This highlights that alongside housing challenges, many people are struggling to meet basic day-to-day needs. Participants identified difficulties accessing facilities and supports including showers, laundry facilities, toilets, food, water, safe places to park and access to medication.

Many participants described experiences of discrimination, social isolation and difficulty accessing services. These findings demonstrate that homelessness is not solely a housing issue but also impacts health, dignity, safety and community participation. While many organisations and individuals are already making an important contribution, gaps remain in both housing access and practical supports.

The results highlight vulnerabilities among young people, families, older adults, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, and individuals living with disability, chronic health conditions, mental health challenges or alcohol and other drug issues. These groups often require different forms of support and may face additional barriers to accessing and sustaining housing.

Importantly, Connections Week demonstrated the strength of the Busselton community's commitment to addressing homelessness. Community organisations, local businesses, government agencies, volunteers and community members worked together to provide support, share knowledge and identify opportunities for action. The voices, experiences and insights shared throughout the week contributed to a stronger understanding of local needs and opportunities. This collaborative approach provides a strong foundation for ongoing local solutions.

This report presents the key findings from Connections Week in the Busselton area. It highlights the experiences, needs and circumstances shared by participants and identifies common themes emerging from those experiences. While this reflects the perspectives of those who chose to participate, they provide valuable insight into local experiences of homelessness and severe housing instability and should be considered alongside other local knowledge, service data and evidence.

Key Findings at a Glance

- 86 people experiencing homelessness or severe housing instability engaged in Connections Week.
- Housing affordability and financial hardship remain key drivers of homelessness.
- More than half of participants reported leaving or losing housing due to violence in the home.
- Sleeping rough was the most common living situation reported.
- Significant levels of mental health concerns, chronic health conditions and disability were identified.
- Participants reported challenges accessing food, showers, laundry facilities, healthcare, medications and safe places to stay.
- Young people, families, older adults, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people were disproportionately represented.
- Strong community collaboration exists and provides a foundation for coordinated local action.

Background and Methodology

Connections Week Overview

Connections Week is a nationally recognised key initiative of the Advance to Zero movement, and one of the strategic priorities of the Australian Alliance to End Homelessness. Designed to help communities better understand local experiences of homelessness and strengthen coordinated responses.

Connections Week utilised a structured methodology that combined direct engagement with people experiencing homelessness, the collection of consistent demographic and needs-based data, and the active provision of information, referrals and support services. This approach was intentionally selected to ensure that local data was gathered through a nationally recognised framework, enabling reliable identification of trends, service gaps and emerging issues within the community. By applying a consistent data collection methodology, the project not only strengthened the local evidence base but also ensured that the experiences and needs of participants contributed to broader state and national homelessness monitoring, advocacy and policy development.

In the City of Busselton, Connections Week was initiated and led by AccordWest, with strategic partnership and support from the City, The Salvation Army and Lamp Inc. The initiative was further supported by a broad network of community organisations, service providers, businesses, volunteers and people with lived experience who contributed throughout the week.

Held during National Homelessness Week (03-09 August 2026), the initiative provided opportunities for people in the local community experiencing homelessness or severe housing instability to share their experiences, access support and contribute to a stronger understanding of local need.

Participants were invited to complete a survey or register and have a conversation with trained staff, volunteers and service providers. Community organisations, service providers and outreach workers were available throughout the week to provide information, referrals and practical assistance, creating opportunities for people experiencing homelessness to connect with support and services.

Q. What do you and your family need to be safe and well?

“Long term stable affordable housing and a normal life”

The City of Busselton Context

Busselton is one of Western Australia's premier regional tourism destinations and the gateway to the Margaret River Region. The City of Busselton population was estimated at approximately 46,184 people in 2025 and continues to experience strong growth at 2.3% which outpaces growth across the South West region as a whole.[1] The increasing population is impacting demand for housing, services, and health support, as well as access to basic amenities and professional services.

The City of Busselton has many strengths that contribute to community wellbeing, including social connections, participation levels, and access to the natural environment. However, population growth is placing ever-increasing pressure on local infrastructure and community services.

Responding effectively to these changes will be important to ensure that people who may be more vulnerable to the impacts of growth are not left behind, while maintaining community wellbeing over the longer term.

Survey Methodology

Australian Homelessness Vulnerability Triage Tool (AHVTT)

The Australian Homelessness Vulnerability Triage Tool (AHVTT), developed by the Australian Alliance to End Homelessness (AAEH) and partners, including OrgCode Consulting and Micah Projects, is the standard survey tool used by Advance to Zero communities across Australia. It provides a consistent framework for understanding the housing, health and support needs of people experiencing homelessness and severe housing instability, while enabling local findings to be considered alongside information gathered in other communities. In Western Australia, the tool supports communities participating in Advance to Zero by strengthening local understanding of homelessness and informing coordinated responses,

To support the consistent and appropriate use of the tool, AccordWest facilitated two training sessions for volunteers and partner organisations involved in delivering Connections Week and administering the survey. The training covered the survey methodology, trauma-informed engagement, participant safety and referral pathways for people requiring support.

Survey Locations

While Connections Week typically involves intensive early morning outreach to engage people sleeping rough, the Busselton initiative supplemented this approach through coordinated, place-based engagement across the community. Alongside static survey and engagement sites operating throughout the week, partner organisations, outreach services and local rangers worked together to identify and connect with people experiencing homelessness, including those who were unable or unwilling to attend a survey site. This enabled surveys to be completed where people were already located, supporting a person-centred approach and extending the reach of the initiative.

[1] *City of Busselton Community Health and Wellbeing Plan 2026-2031*

Survey locations included:

- Busselton Youth Precinct
- Bay Life Café
- St Georges Church
- St Mary's Church
- Accordwest
- The Salvation Army

Limitations

As participation in individual survey questions was optional, response numbers vary throughout this report. Percentages have been calculated using the number of participants to each question rather than the total number of participants. This approach ensures the findings accurately reflect the views and experiences of those who provided a response.

Throughout this report, the terms homelessness and housing instability are used to reflect the broad range of housing circumstances experienced by participants. These include rough sleeping, couch surfing, living in vehicles or temporary accommodation, staying in crisis accommodation, or being at imminent risk of homelessness due to unaffordable, unsafe or unstable housing arrangements.

More than a survey

The week-long initiative demonstrated to people experiencing homelessness in Busselton - many of whom share the broader experience of feeling overlooked or commonly having their views dismissed - that people are listening, particularly those with the capacity and capability to provide meaningful support.

Connections Weeks are not research projects or street counts. Instead, they're a way of giving people in your community experiencing homelessness an opportunity to be known by name and to begin the process of helping to find safe housing for each person – all while building out a bigger picture of the community's unique housing and support needs.

Connections Week reinforces the importance of engaging directly with people experiencing homelessness to better understand their experiences, needs and priorities, and to inform more meaningful and effective responses.

This report builds on those conversations by drawing on Connections Week findings, other key publications and community insights to identify emerging local trends, service gaps, barriers to support, and opportunities for collaboration and investment. Together, these insights provide a clearer picture of local need and help ensure future discussions and decisions are informed by lived experience, local knowledge and broader evidence.

> "People experiencing homelessness face violations of a wide range of human rights. Access to safe and secure housing is one of the most basic human rights. However, homelessness is not just about housing."
>
> (Australian Human Rights Commission)[2]

Who Participated?

Participant Overview

Connections Week attracted strong participation from people experiencing homelessness and housing insecurity in Busselton. Amongst the 86 people that engaged were 78 individuals and 8 families.

Key findings:

- 28 participants were aged 24 or younger, 17 were aged under 18 years
- 6 children were experiencing homelessness alongside their parents

Age Profile

The survey findings highlight that homelessness and housing insecurity are affecting people at both ends of the age spectrum. The presence of significant numbers of both young people and older adults among participants demonstrates that homelessness is not confined to any one life stage, and that pathways into housing insecurity can differ considerably depending on age and circumstance.

Participants represented a wide range of ages (see below).

[2] *https://humanrights.gov.au/resource-hub/search-all-our-publications/reports-and-projects/projects/housing-homelessness-and-human-rights*

Note: Numbers in the table exceed 86. The figures include children and second participants who were recorded for demographic purposes but were not counted as separate survey participants.

Age Groups	Number of People
Unknown age	2
0 – 5	3
6 – 9	2
10 – 19	22
20 – 29	21
30 – 39	9
40 – 49	13
50 – 59	12
60 – 69	8
70 – 79	2
80 – 89	5

Table 1 - Age ranges for Connections Week survey participants

Young People

Almost one-third of participants (28 people) were aged 24 years or younger, highlighting the vulnerability of young people to homelessness and housing insecurity in Busselton.

Connections Week also identified 17 children and young people under the age of 18 experiencing homelessness or housing instability, demonstrating that housing insecurity is affecting children, young people and families within the Busselton community.

Families

The survey identified a number of families experiencing housing insecurity.

- 6 participants had children currently living with them
- 4 reported their children would join them once suitable housing was secured
- 4 indicated their children were living elsewhere, including with relatives or in out-of-home care arrangements.
- 3 participants reported that homelessness affected their ability to remain engaged with their children.

These findings highlight the importance of early intervention, family-focused responses and access to stable housing to improve outcomes for children, young people and families experiencing housing insecurity.

Older Adults

The survey identified a notable number of older adults experiencing homelessness and housing insecurity, with 10 participants aged 65 years and over, including 6 aged 70 years and over.

Given the relatively small survey sample, this is a significant finding and demonstrates that homelessness is affecting older members of the Busselton community

Older adults may be particularly vulnerable to housing insecurity due to fixed incomes, rising housing costs, declining health, relationship breakdown, bereavement and limited access to affordable or age-appropriate housing.

These findings highlight that homelessness and housing insecurity among older adults is an important local issue that warrants ongoing attention. Given Busselton's ageing population, understanding the experiences and needs of older people experiencing housing insecurity will become increasingly important. Housing affordability, health needs, social isolation and access to appropriate accommodation are often closely interconnected for older adults and require consideration across a range of community planning, housing and wellbeing initiatives.

Gender Profile

While the ratio of men to women experiencing homelessness among participants is broadly consistent with the national picture, Accordwest employees noted that their observations whilst working in the Busselton community suggested that the number of women experiencing homelessness locally has increased substantially recently. This is worth investigating to monitor future trends.

39% of participants experiencing homelessness were female

Outreach workers also observed that despite growing awareness of women experiencing homelessness locally, comparatively few women attended the Connections Week sites. Research suggests that women can be under-represented in homelessness counts and service data because they are often less visible than men when experiencing homelessness, including through staying temporarily with family or friends, remaining in unsafe housing situations, or not identifying themselves as homeless. As a result, the 39% recorded here may under-represent the number of women experiencing homelessness and housing insecurity within the Busselton community.

> "Women were often invisible in homelessness data... many avoided obvious rough sleeping, and so were under-estimated in street counts."
> (AHURI, 2026)

"Patterns of homelessness have shifted over time. Older women have emerged as a growing and increasingly vulnerable cohort...

This reflects structural factors including lifetime income inequality, lower superannuation balances, insecure or low-paid employment histories, relationship breakdown, family and domestic violence, and limited access to affordable rental housing later in life."

(Homelessness Report 2026, Salvation Army)[3]

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Participants

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people make up around 2% of the population in Busselton yet accounted for 15% of Connections Week participants.

This finding is consistent with broader Western Australian trends, which also show a significant over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people among people experiencing homelessness.

While making up only 3.3% of the general population, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders represented 35% of the homeless population at the 2021 Census.[4]

Research suggests that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people experience higher rates of multiple and intersecting needs arising from a complex range of social, historical and structural factors.

"Aboriginal people experience significant cultural, social or economic impacts and injustices, and historical impacts of past laws, policies and practices enforced upon Aboriginal people including those targeted at preventing the accumulation of intergenerational wealth and assets...

Aboriginal people are heavily overrepresented in homelessness support – about 30% of presentations related to Aboriginal people...

Higher service use is similarly seen in justice, welfare and health sectors. While these elevated rates reflect ongoing social inequity, they also indicate an opportunity to identify and support people earlier and more effectively."

(Pathways To Homelessness, 2026)

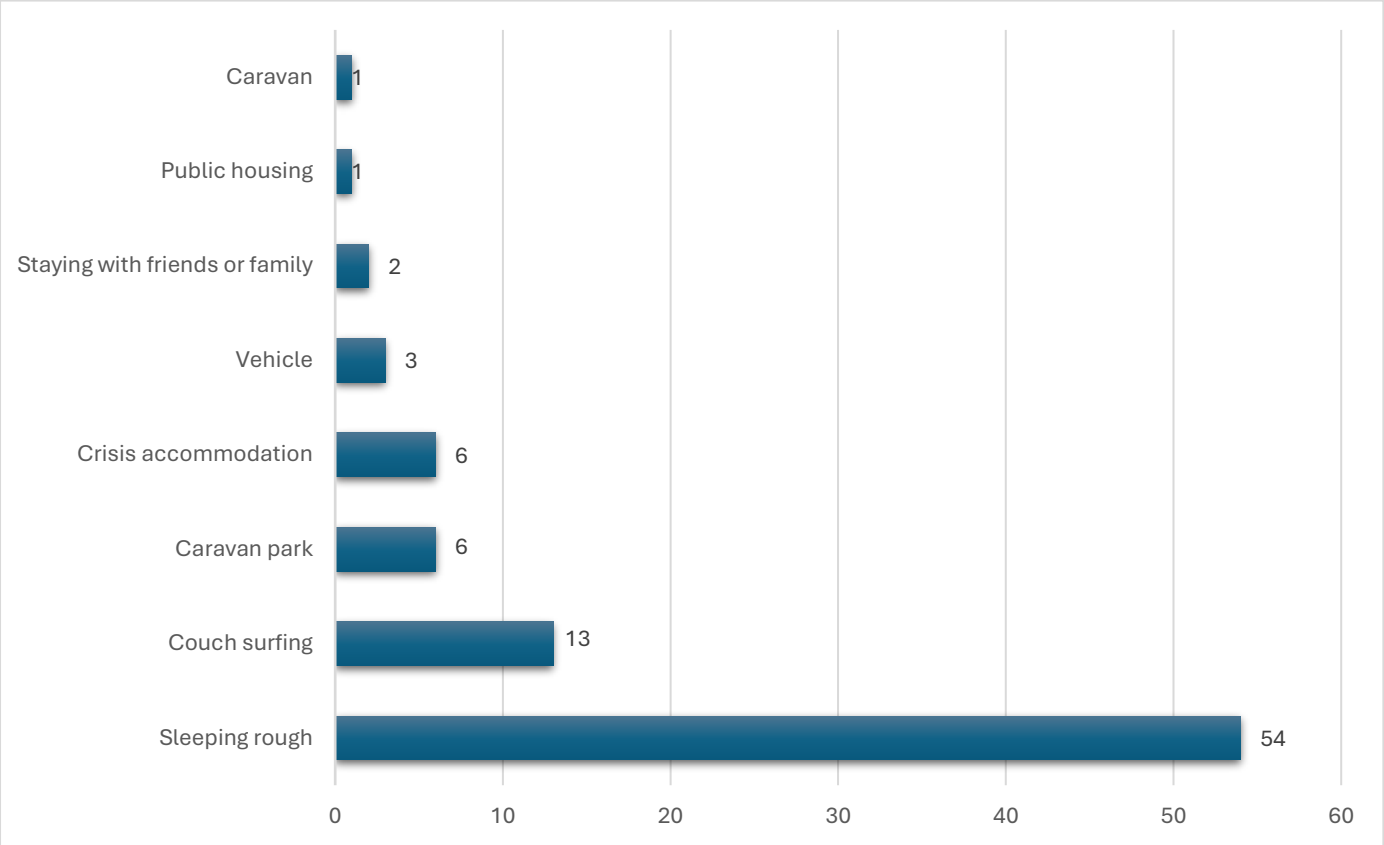
[3] *https://www.salvationarmy.org.au/news/homelessness-report-2026/*

[4] *https://waaeh.org.au/knowledge-hub/homelessness-dashboard/trends-in-homelessness/*

Current Living Situation

Most participants were sleeping rough, with significant representation from both young people and older adults.

Q. What is your current living situation?



The prevalence of rough sleeping among survey participants suggests that, for many participants, housing insecurity had progressed beyond temporary housing stress or unstable accommodation arrangements and into more acute forms of homelessness. This is significant, as people sleeping rough often face heightened risks to their health, safety and wellbeing, while also experiencing greater difficulties accessing services, maintaining employment and securing long-term housing stability.

People sleeping rough are more likely to require additional support for mental health issues (21%), followed by drug and alcohol use (17%), DFV (13%) and legal issues (9%).[5]

(Pathway to Homelessness)

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[5] *https://www.nsw.gov.au/departments-and-agencies/homes-nsw/social-housing-resources/pathways-to-homelessness*

Housing Supply and Affordability

Housing Supply

Housing supply in Busselton is being influenced by strong population growth, sustained tourism demand and a significant short-term accommodation market. At the time of reporting, more than 1,700 short-term accommodation listings were recorded within the City, compared with just 38 long-term rental properties. These conditions have contributed to ongoing housing availability and affordability pressures.

As of July 2026, Busselton had 27,771 dwellings and a residential vacancy rate of 1.44%, indicating a constrained housing market. Housing availability has declined significantly, with only 38 rental properties available in August 2026 compared with 60 in 2018.

During the same period, median rents increased from $361 to $771 per week, while the average house price increased from $671,000 to $1.6 million.

Housing Affordability

Housing affordability pressures extend beyond rental availability. While median rents have increased by 23% since 2023, weekly wages have increased by approximately 13% over the same period. This widening gap between housing costs and income is placing increasing pressure on local households.

Measure	Busselton
Vacancy Rate	1.44%
Properties Available for Rent	38
Median Weekly Rent	$771
Median Weekly Individual Income	$749
Average House Price	$1.6 million
Income Required to Afford Median Rent	$2,550-$3,080 per week
Income Required to Afford Average Mortgage	$4,162-$6,418 per week

Table 2. Housing affordability indicators, Busselton (2026).

The Busselton data highlights a growing disconnect between local incomes and housing costs. With median weekly rent ($771) exceeding median weekly individual income ($749), housing insecurity is increasingly linked to structural housing affordability pressures rather than simply an absence of income. As housing costs continue to outpace both wages and government support payments, more people are being excluded from the private rental market despite having a legitimate source of income.

Housing affordability pressures have an even greater impact on people reliant on pensions and income support payments.

"Across the entire state, there is not a single property, even a room, affordable to someone on JobSeeker, Disability Support Pension or Youth Allowance."

[shelterwa.org.au]

Employment Context

The 2021 Census reported that 57.5% of Busselton residents aged 15 years and over were employed, 34.7% were not in the labour force and 1.8% were unemployed.

Despite relatively high employment levels, housing affordability remains a significant challenge, demonstrating that employment alone does not necessarily protect people from housing stress or homelessness.

"A yearly salary of $130,000 is still not enough to safeguard against rising rents in Western Australia..."

(Sydney Morning Herald - Why $130,000 a year is no longer enough to avoid housing stress in WA, Aug 2026)

Factors Contributing to Homelessness and Housing Insecurity

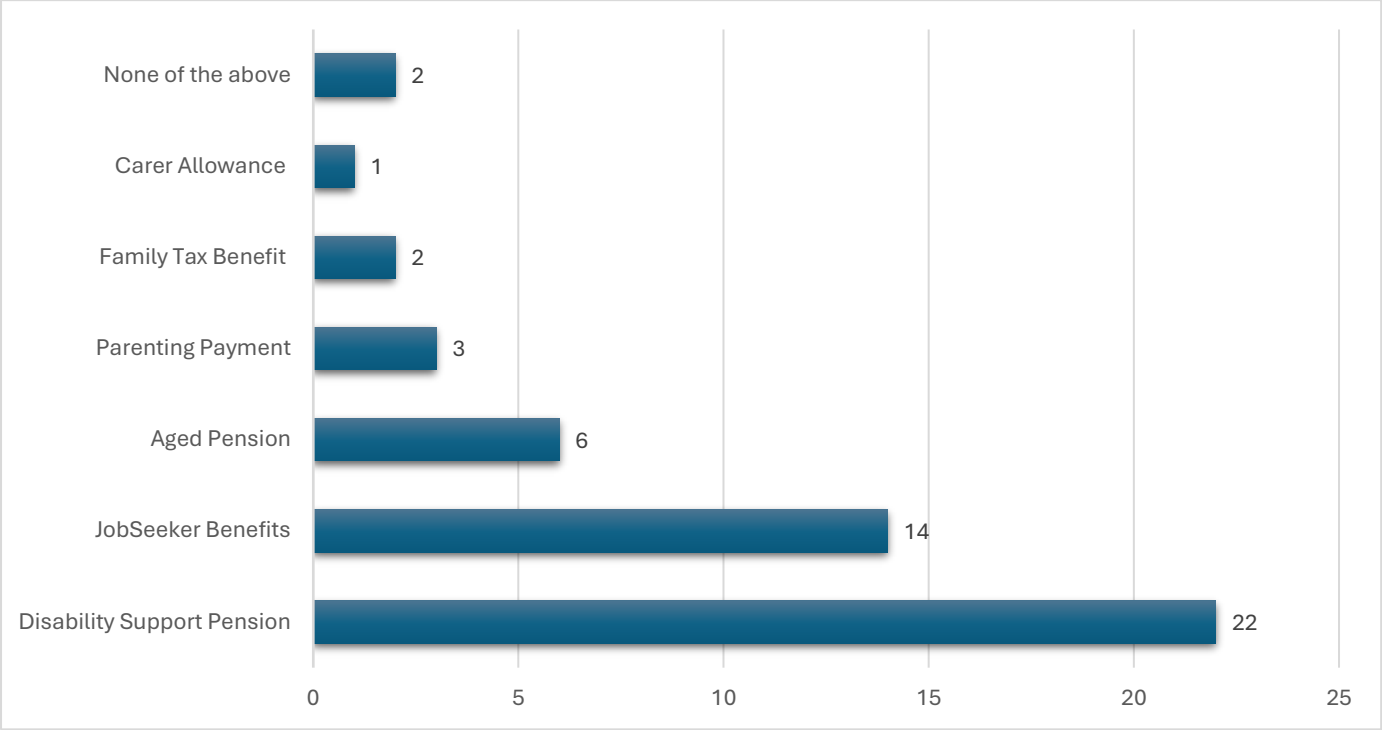
Participant responses indicate that homelessness and housing insecurity in Busselton are shaped by a combination of economic, social, health and systemic factors. While these factors do not operate in isolation and are not necessarily causal in every individual case, they are commonly associated with increased vulnerability to homelessness and housing instability.

Financial Barriers to Housing Stability

Low income, whether derived from government payments or insecure employment, is a significant contributor to homelessness and housing insecurity.

None of the participants who completed the full survey reported being employed. Instead, participants relied on a range of income sources, including government support payments and pensions.

Q. How do you make your money?



Q. What do you and your family need to be safe and well?

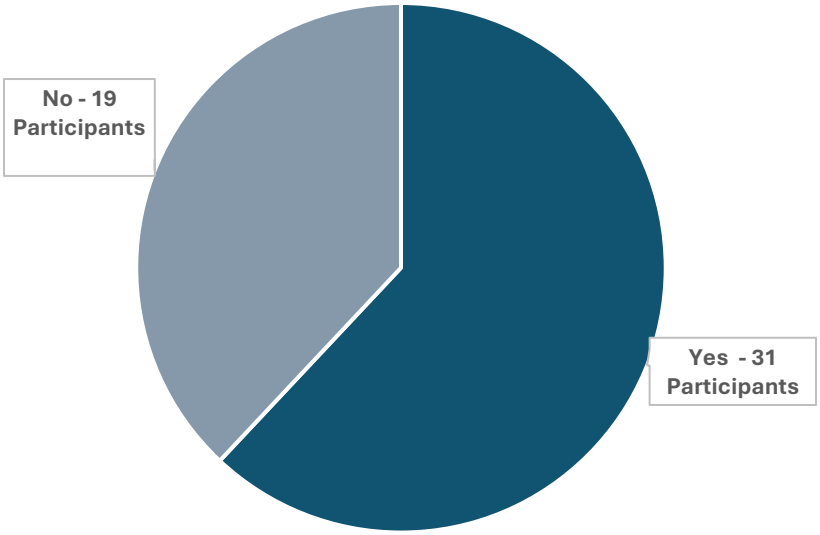
"Increase in payment benefits."

Importantly, all participants reported having some form of income and none reported earning money through illegal or high-risk activities. This evidence suggests that access to a legitimate income alone is not sufficient to prevent homelessness.

Combined with rising housing costs, low incomes can create significant financial stress and limit a person's ability to secure or maintain stable housing. While participants had access to income, many remained unable to meet housing costs or re-enter the housing market.

The survey findings suggest that homelessness is often not the result of people never having had stable housing. Many participants reported previously maintaining a tenancy or owning a home before becoming disconnected from the housing market.

Q. Have you (or any members of your family) ever owned a house in your name or had a tenancy in your name?



Once out of the housing market, regaining stability can be extremely difficult. This is reflected in participants' experiences of recurring homelessness.

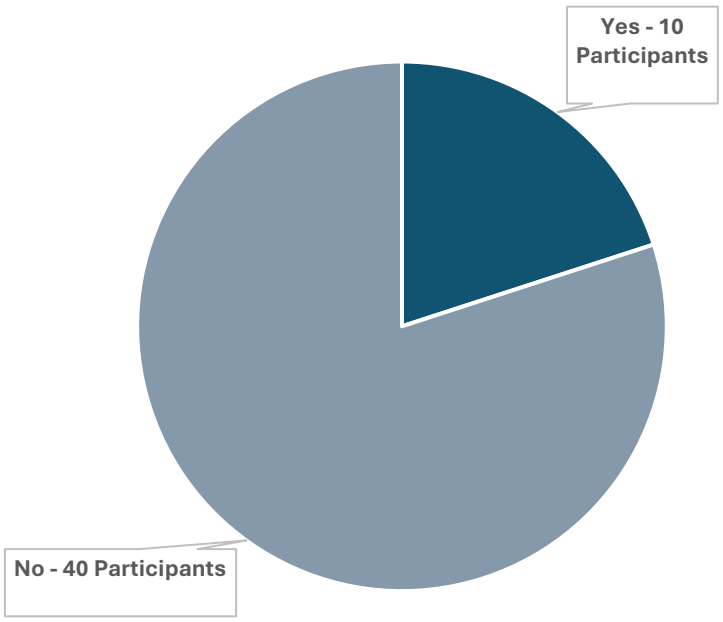
11 out of 52 people who answered, said they'd experienced homelessness 3 times or more

These findings reinforce broader evidence that housing affordability, rather than income alone, is an increasing driver of homelessness. As housing costs continue to outpace wage growth, people on low or fixed incomes face growing barriers to securing and maintaining stable housing.

Financial hardship extended beyond housing costs. Many participants reported difficulty meeting everyday living expenses, while debt and unpaid fines placed additional pressure on already limited household budgets.

Only 19.23% of participants reported having enough money each fortnight to meet their day-to-day needs, highlighting the extent of financial stress experienced by many participants.

Q. Other than money for housing, do you (and your family) have enough money every fortnight to take care of your day-to-day needs?



29% of participants said they had fines right now that they couldn't afford

33% said that a company, bank or government department thinks the participant owed them money

Family and Domestic Violence

Family and domestic violence is a recognised pathway into homelessness and housing insecurity. For many people, leaving a violent or unsafe environment can mean leaving their home, often with limited housing alternatives available.

The survey findings demonstrate a strong relationship between family and domestic violence and housing insecurity. Of the 52 participants who answered the question, 28 (54%) reported that they or their family had left or lost housing because of violence in the home.

54% of participants who answered the question reported having left or lost housing because of violence in the home.

While the survey identified 28 participants affected by violence in the home, an additional nine people experiencing family and domestic violence were identified through demographic data but did not complete the full survey. This suggests the number of people affected during Connections Week may be higher than the survey results alone indicate.

Family and domestic violence can disrupt housing stability, separate families, contribute to financial hardship and increase vulnerability to ongoing homelessness. The impacts often extend beyond the individual experiencing violence, affecting children, family relationships and long-term wellbeing.

These findings reinforce the strong relationship between family and domestic violence and housing insecurity and highlight the importance of coordination between housing and family and domestic violence support services. Access to safe accommodation, coordinated support and pathways to stable housing remain critical in helping people rebuild safety and stability following experiences of violence.

> "FDV remains a serious and growing issue in Western Australia, with FDV call outs resulting in a Family Violence Incident Report rising from 47,818 in 2020–21 to 63,137 in 2024–25."
>
> (A Review of Family and Domestic Violence in Western Australia, 2026, Ombudsman, WA.)[6]

Institutional and System Pathways

Research consistently identifies an association between experiences within institutional systems and an increased risk of homelessness and housing insecurity. While experiences vary significantly between individuals, interactions with systems such as the justice system, child protection and out-of-home care can influence housing stability and access to support.

The Connections Week findings identified notable levels of interaction with both the justice system and out-of-home care settings amongst participants. These findings are consistent with broader research demonstrating that people experiencing homelessness often have complex histories involving multiple support and institutional systems throughout their lives.

Justice System Involvement

Research consistently identifies a strong relationship between justice system involvement and increased vulnerability to homelessness. People leaving custody often face barriers to securing stable housing, including limited accommodation options, financial disadvantage, and difficulties accessing employment and support services.

[6] *https://ombudsman.wa.gov.au/publications-resources/review-family-and-domestic-violence-western-australia-2026*

The Connections Week findings reflect this broader evidence. 35 participants reported having spent time in a judicial facility, highlighting the overlap between housing insecurity and involvement with the justice system.

Of the 21 participants who reported being released from prison, 11 had been released more than 5 years ago, 4 within the previous 5 years, and 6 within the previous 12 months. These findings demonstrate that experiences of incarceration were reported by participants across both recent and longer-term timeframes.

"People exiting custody are vulnerable to experiencing housing insecurity (AIC 2018). In 2022, nearly half (48%) of those set to be released expected to be homeless, with 45% planning to stay in short-term or emergency accommodation and 2.8% anticipating sleeping rough.

Returning to accommodation with family and friends may also be unsafe or not appropriate for successful reintegration, due to family and domestic violence, exposure to offending behaviours and/or access to alcohol and other drugs in the home."

(Drake et al. 2025; POA 2020).

Foster Care and Out-of-Home Care

Research also identifies an increased risk of homelessness amongst people who have experienced foster care, group homes or other forms of out-of-home care. Challenges associated with transitioning to independent living, disruption to family and support networks, and experiences of trauma may contribute to increased vulnerability for some individuals.

The Connections Week findings reflect this broader evidence, with 17% of participants reporting that they had lived in a foster home, group home or another out-of-home care setting at some point in their lives.

17% of participants reported a history of foster care, group home care or another out-of-home care placement.

While not all people who experience out-of-home care will experience homelessness, the presence of this cohort within the survey findings reinforces the importance of early intervention, transition planning and ongoing support for young people leaving care.

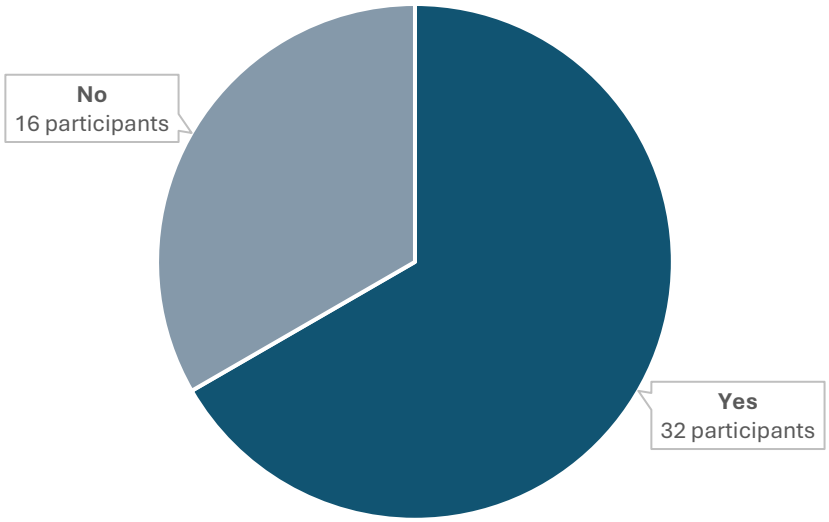
Taken together, these findings highlight the importance of coordinated responses across housing, justice, child protection and community support systems. They also reinforce that experiences of homelessness and housing insecurity often intersect with other service systems throughout a person's life.

Long-Term Health Conditions

Chronic health issues can affect a person's ability to work, maintain an income, access services and secure stable housing. At the same time, homelessness and housing insecurity can worsen existing health conditions through reduced access to healthcare, medication, nutrition, safe shelter and appropriate living conditions. As a result, people experiencing homelessness often experience poorer health outcomes than the broader population.

The Connections Week survey identified a high prevalence of long-term health conditions among participants, with 66.7% reporting that they or a member of their family had an ongoing serious health issue. Participants reported a range of conditions, including respiratory disease, neurological conditions, cancer, diabetes and heart disease.

Q. Do you (or any member of the family) have any ongoing serious health issues?



When compared with Busselton Census data, participants reported significantly higher rates of several chronic health conditions, reinforcing the complex health challenges experienced by people facing homelessness and housing insecurity. These findings highlight the importance of housing responses that are integrated with healthcare, disability and wellbeing supports to improve long-term outcomes and housing stability.

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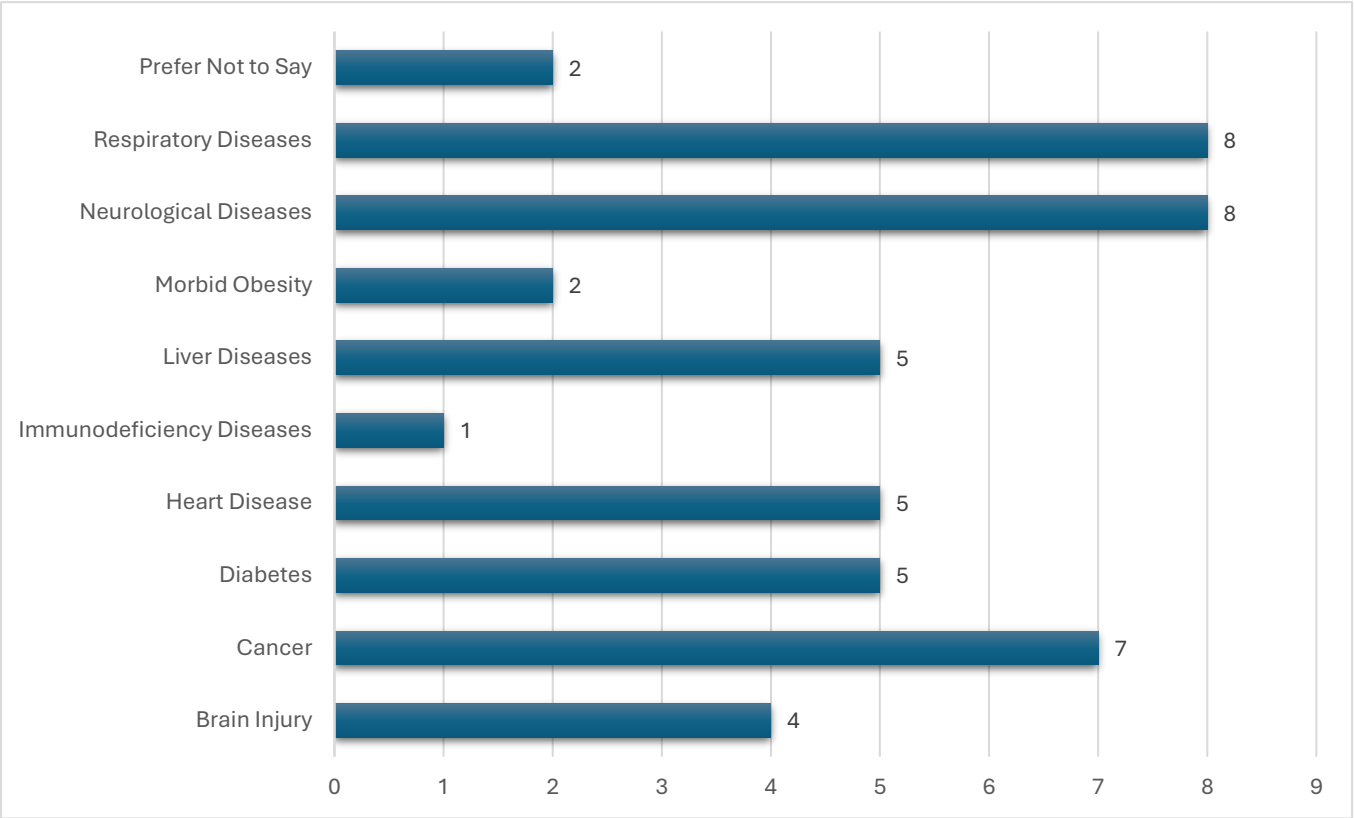
Q. What are the serious health issues?



Note: Only conditions reported by participants and directly comparable with Census data are included.

Health Condition	Busselton LGA Census	Connections Week Participants	Higher or Lower
Cancer	3.6%	13.5%	↑
Diabetes	4.1%	9.6%	↑
Heart disease	4.2%	9.6%	↑
Respiritory diseases	1.9%	15.3%	↑

Table 3 – Medical conditions which are also counted in the Census

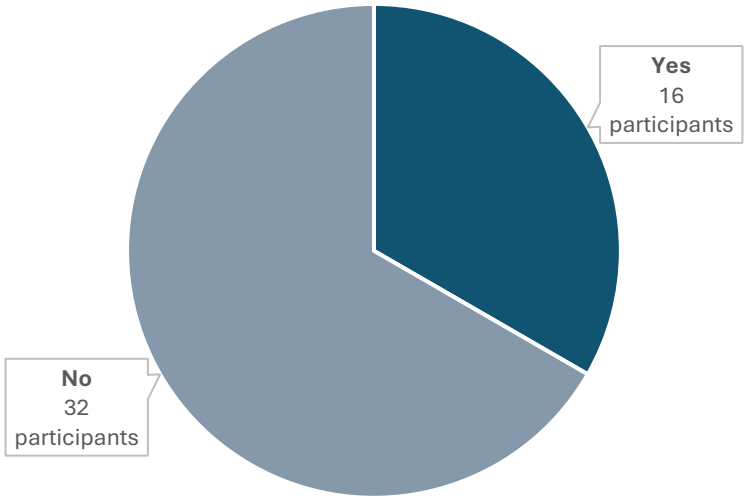
Disability and Additional Support Needs

Disability can increase vulnerability to homelessness and create additional barriers to securing and maintaining stable housing. People living with disability may experience reduced workforce participation, lower incomes, higher living costs and greater reliance on support services. In regional communities, these challenges can be compounded by limited access to specialist services, accessible housing and appropriate support options.

The Connections Week findings indicate that disability and additional support needs are significant factors in the lives of many participants. Disability Support Pension was the most reported source of income among survey participants, highlighting the prevalence of disability and reduced workforce participation within the cohort.

42% of participants were on disability support pension

Q. Do you (or any member of your family) have any issues that will likely make it difficult to live independently or where you would need more help?



The survey found that 33% of participants reported an issue they believed would make independent living more difficult, including physical disability, chronic health conditions, cognitive impairment, mental health challenges or substance use issues. These findings suggest that access to housing alone may not be sufficient for some individuals to achieve and maintain long-term housing stability. As is the case across Australia, specialised housing and support options for people requiring long-term, individualised assistance remain limited, with these challenges often amplified in regional communities such as Busselton.

"Anyone can be affected by homelessness; however, some groups, such as people with disability, may face additional risk factors, such as limited engagement with the labour market, discrimination and low income (AIHW 2022). These factors increase their likelihood of experiencing homelessness, or present additional barriers to exiting homelessness."

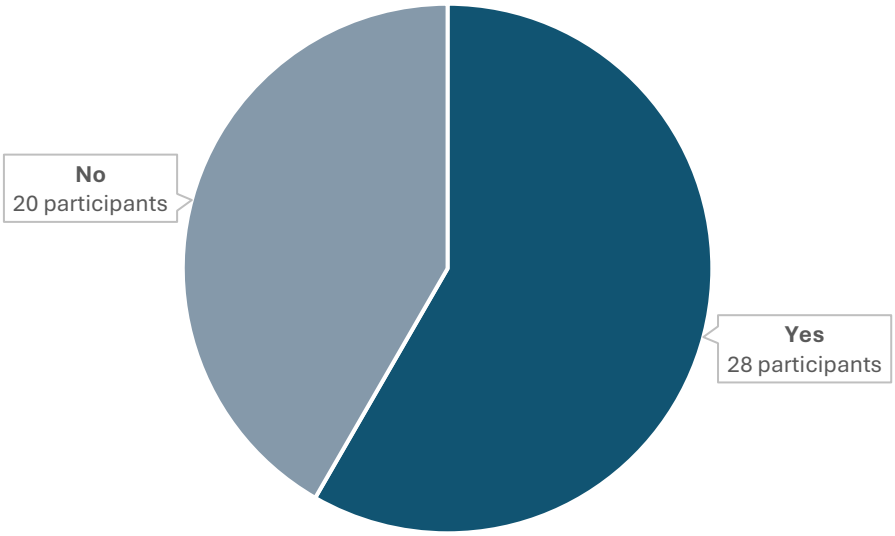
(Australian Institute of Health and Welfare)[7]

Mental Health conditions

More than half of participants (58.3%) reported that they or a member of their family had a diagnosed mental health condition.

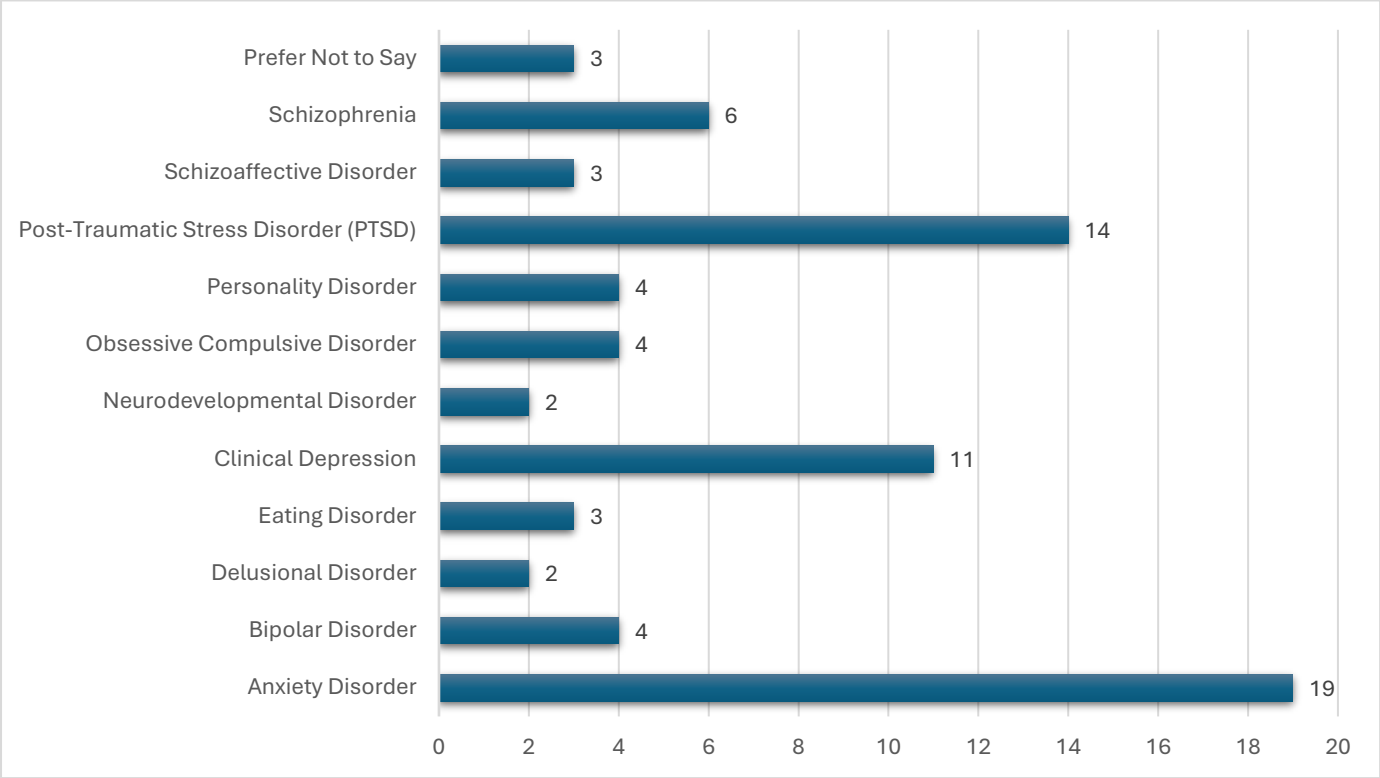
This finding highlights the significant prevalence of mental health conditions amongst people experiencing homelessness and housing insecurity who participated in Connections Week. Research consistently demonstrates a close relationship between mental health and homelessness. Mental health conditions can increase vulnerability to housing instability and homelessness, while the experience of homelessness itself can contribute to psychological distress and worsen existing mental health conditions. Together, these findings reinforce the importance of responses that address both housing needs and mental wellbeing.

Q. Do you (or any member of the family) have a diagnosed mental health condition?



[7] https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/disability/people-with-disability-in-australia/contents/housing/homelessness-services

Q. What are the mental health diagnoses?



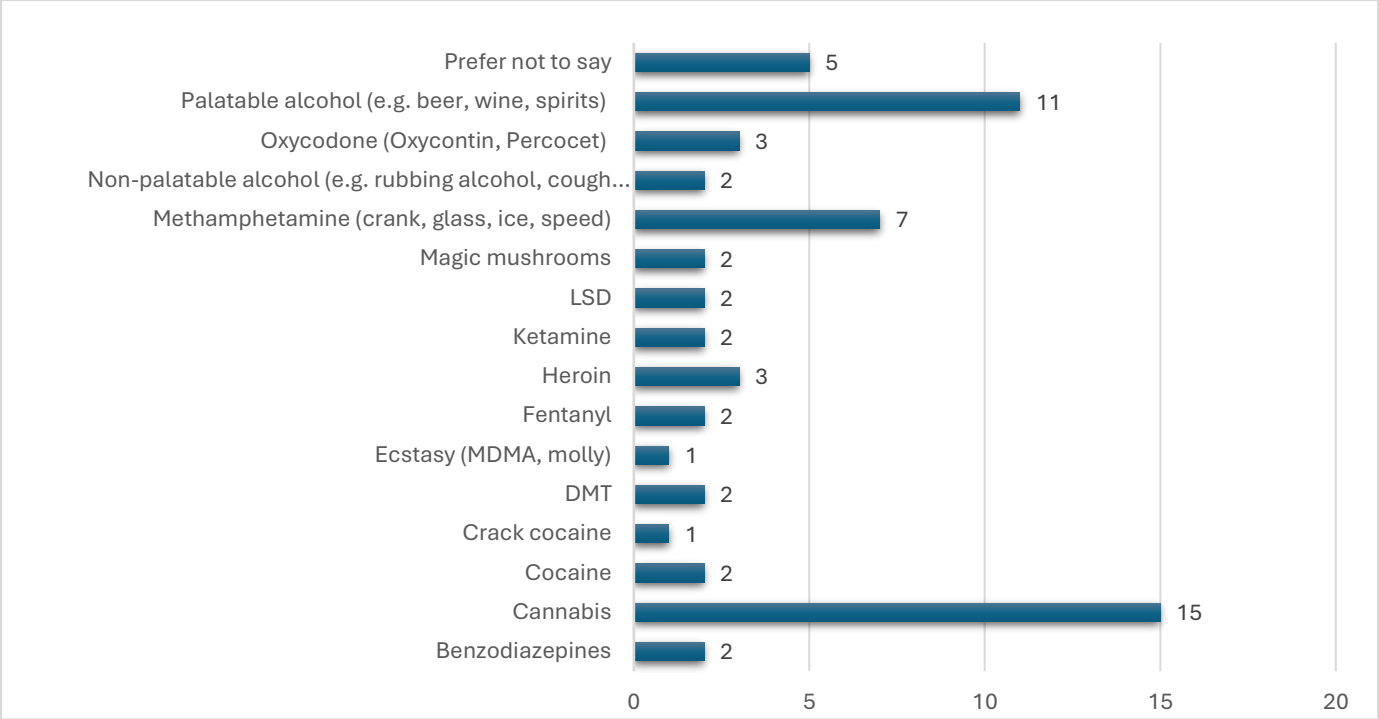
Alcohol and Other Drug Use

The survey found that 40% of participants reported regularly using alcohol or other drugs.

Alcohol and other drug use is commonly reported by individuals experiencing homelessness and housing insecurity. These experiences should be understood within the broader context of trauma, stress, limited safety, and reduced access to support. For some participants, alcohol and other drug use may have served as a way to cope with overwhelming stress, manage the impacts of trauma, remain awake to feel safer, or respond to feelings of hopelessness. The range of substances reported reflects the varied and complex circumstances of participants, rather than a single pattern of use.

40% of participants reported regularly using alcohol or other drugs

Q. What type of substance do you use?



"Alcohol and other drug (AOD) use among people experiencing homelessness in Australia is a significant public health concern that requires urgent attention and support. There is a strong association between AOD and experiences of homelessness, with each exacerbating the other."

*(*Tayla Payne, Queensland University of Technology)*8*

Brain Injury and Cognitive Impacts

Brain injury and cognitive impairment are increasingly recognised as important factors in homelessness and housing insecurity. Cognitive challenges can affect memory, planning, decision-making, communication and the ability to navigate complex systems, creating additional barriers to securing and maintaining stable housing. People living with an acquired brain injury may also experience difficulties engaging with services, managing appointments, maintaining employment and completing administrative requirements associated with housing and support programs.

The Connections Week survey identified a significant number of participants experiencing these challenges.

[8] https://www.aph.gov.au/DocumentStore.ashx?id=c2fcf02a-6ad9-4e97-a0c1-2a6fe25af8cc&subId=775521

16 participants reported that they had, at some point, been told they had a brain injury or head trauma.

While not all brain injuries result in long-term impairment, the prevalence reported by participants suggests that cognitive and neurological challenges are an important consideration when designing responses to homelessness and housing insecurity. These challenges can be compounded by co-occurring mental health conditions, substance use, physical health issues and financial hardship.

These results reinforce the importance of trauma-informed and person-centred approaches that recognise the potential impact of cognitive impairment on a person's ability to access housing and support services.

"An acquired brain injury can exacerbate and magnify the risk factors associated with homelessness including family breakdown, loss of social support networks, lack of affordable housing, family violence, unemployment, illness, drug and alcohol use, violence and/or criminal behaviour."[9]

(Brain Injury Australia)

Daily Challenges and Barriers

Participants consistently identified access to basic amenities as a key need. Many described the challenges of securing essential items and services required for daily living while experiencing homelessness.

Q. What do you and your family need to be safe and well?

"A safe area to park in, access to shower, toilet and power."
"Accessible showers and laundry facilities."
"Food vouchers."

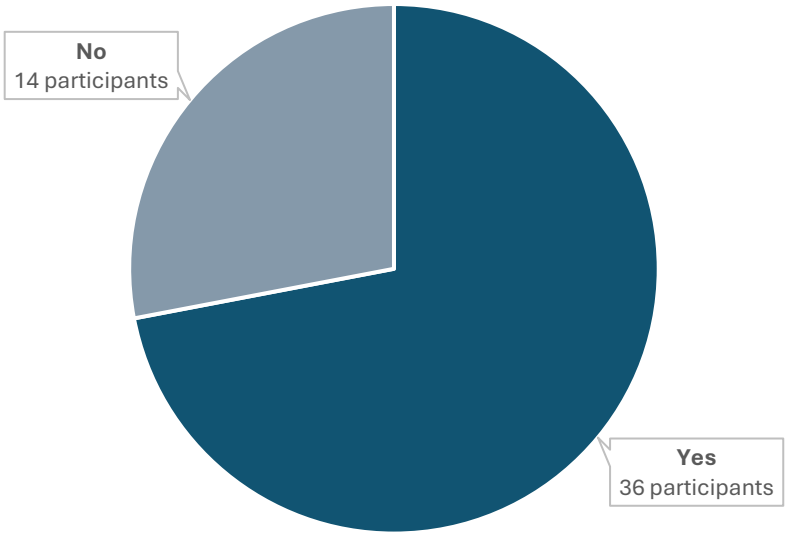
[9] https://www.braininjuryaustralia.org.au/homelessness-brain-injury/

Access to Essential Amenities

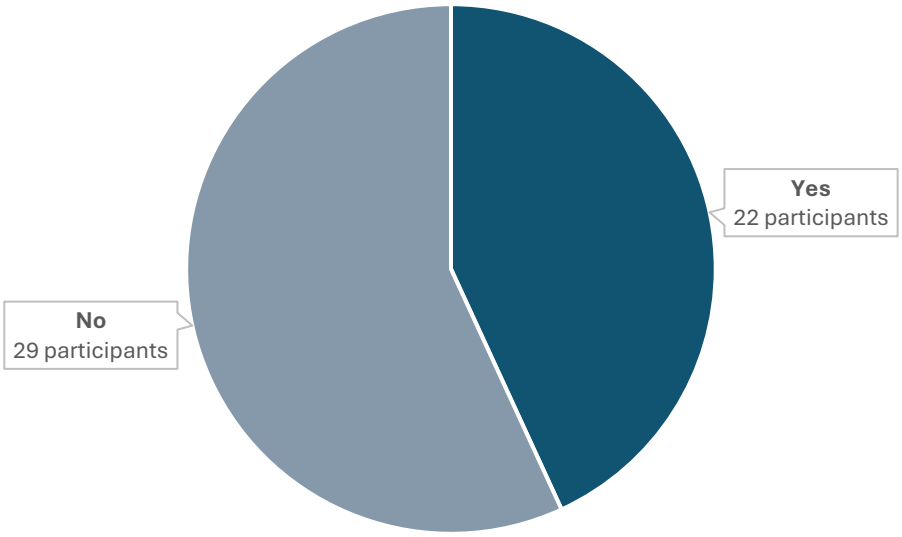
Access to food, water, toilets, showers, laundry facilities and clean clothing plays a critical role in maintaining health, safety, social participation and dignity. However, survey responses identified significant gaps in access to these basic amenities.

28% of participants reported not having easy access to food, water or a toilet when needed, highlighting the practical challenges associated with homelessness and housing insecurity.

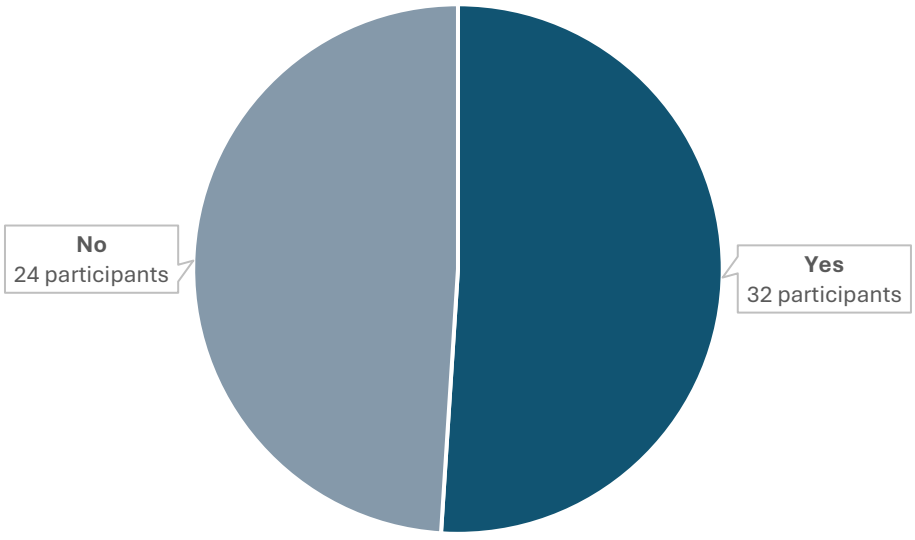
Q. Do you (and your family) have access to food and water when needed?



Q. Do you (and your family) have access to a shower when you need it?



Q. Do you (and your family) have access to a laundry or replacement clothes when you need them?



These findings demonstrate that, for many participants, the challenges associated with homelessness extend beyond housing alone. Limited access to essential amenities can affect health, dignity, employment opportunities and engagement with services.

Access to Healthcare

Access to healthcare is critical to maintaining health, wellbeing and housing stability. People experiencing homelessness often face additional barriers to accessing healthcare, including transport difficulties, competing priorities, financial hardship and challenges navigating health and support systems.

The Connections Week survey identified significant barriers to healthcare access among participants.

23% of participants had been denied medical help while experiencing homelessness

29% of participants did not seek medical help when they needed it

The survey also highlighted challenges relating to medication management. 21% of participants reported either not taking prescribed medications when required or using them differently from how they were prescribed. These findings may reflect the difficulties associated with managing health conditions while experiencing housing instability.

In addition, participants reported high levels of interaction with hospital services:

- 5 participants had been transported to hospital by ambulance more than five times in the previous year.
- 18 participants had attended an emergency department more than five times in the previous year.
- 12 participants had been admitted to hospital for five or more nights during the previous year.

These findings suggest that people experiencing homelessness and housing insecurity often have complex health needs and may rely heavily on crisis and acute healthcare services. They also highlight the important role that access to primary healthcare, medication support and integrated healthcare services can play in supporting health, wellbeing and housing stability.

Discrimination and Marginalisation

The survey also identified experiences of discrimination and social exclusion among participants. For people experiencing homelessness, barriers to housing and support services can be compounded by discrimination based on personal circumstances, contributing to ongoing disadvantage and housing insecurity.

Participants faced a range of interconnected challenges relating to safety, dignity, access to essential services and social inclusion. Addressing these barriers will require coordinated responses that combine access to housing with practical supports that enable people to maintain their health, wellbeing and connection to the community.

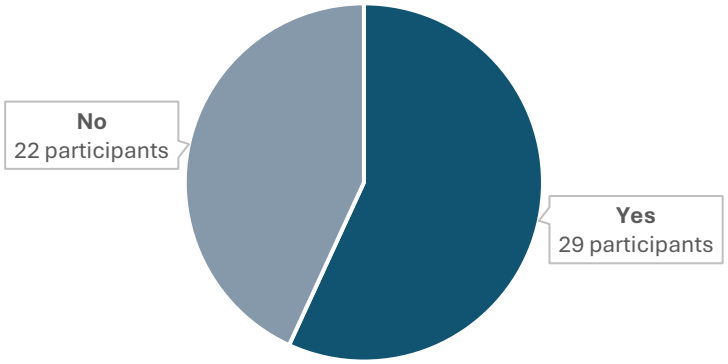
Safety and Personal Security

Safety and personal security were also identified as significant concerns. For people experiencing homelessness, concerns about personal safety can influence where they sleep, their willingness to access services and their overall wellbeing.

43% of participants reported that they did not feel safe

This highlights the vulnerability experienced by some participants and the challenges associated with living without secure and stable housing.

Q. Do you (and your family) currently feel safe where you sleep?



Responses throughout the survey suggest that safety concerns were often linked to family and domestic violence, rough sleeping, limited access to secure accommodation and the absence of safe places to stay or park overnight. These findings reinforce the importance of homelessness responses that address not only housing needs, but also personal safety, security and wellbeing.

Social Connection and Support Networks

Social connection and supportive relationships can play an important role in helping people maintain their wellbeing, navigate crises and access housing and support services. Strong social networks can provide practical assistance, emotional support and a sense of belonging during periods of housing instability.

The Connections Week survey found that while many participants experienced significant hardship, some remained connected to family members, friends or other trusted individuals.

29 of the 52 participants who answered the question reported having people they could rely on and who cared about them.

However, this highlighted that a substantial proportion of participants lacked these support networks. Of the 52 participants who answered the question, 23 reported that they did not have people they could rely on and who cared about them. Social isolation can increase vulnerability to homelessness and make it more difficult to access housing, maintain wellbeing and recover from setbacks. The impacts of homelessness can also place significant strain on family relationships and social connections, creating additional barriers to stability.

For some participants, homelessness affected their ability to maintain relationships with family members and children. Others reported circumstances that had disrupted their support networks, including family violence, relationship breakdown, financial hardship and extended periods of housing instability.

"Article 25: Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care and necessary social services, and the right to security in the event of unemployment, sickness, disability, widowhood, old age or other lack of livelihood in circumstances beyond his control."

(United Nations)[10]

Police Interaction

The Connections Week survey identified a notable level of interaction with the justice system among participants and their families. While contact with police does not indicate criminal behaviour, repeated interactions can reflect the complex challenges often associated with homelessness, including housing instability, unmet health or support needs, financial hardship, and limited access to appropriate services.

Q. Have you (or any member of your family) had 5 or more interactions with the police in the last year, for any reason?

15% of participants (or their family) spent 5 or more nights locked up in the last year.

29% of participants (or their family) had ongoing legal issues that could result in fines they cannot afford or being locked up

[10] https://www.un.org/en/about-us/universal-declaration-of-human-rights

These findings suggest that housing insecurity, legal issues and financial hardship are often interconnected, with each creating additional barriers to achieving and maintaining stable housing. They highlight the interconnected nature of housing, legal, financial and support challenges experienced by people at risk of homelessness.

Implications for Local Action

The findings of this report highlight the complexity of homelessness and housing insecurity in the Busselton community and provide opportunities for coordinated local action. While many of the issues identified require broader structural responses, including increased housing supply and targeted support programs, Connections Week demonstrated a strong commitment across local organisations, businesses, government agencies and community members to work collaboratively to improve outcomes for people experiencing homelessness and housing insecurity.

Importantly, many of the issues identified align closely with priorities already recognised in the City of Busselton's Community Health and Wellbeing Plan, providing a strong foundation for collective action and shared community objectives.

Building on Local Momentum

Connections Week was designed to do more than collect data. It brought people together around a shared understanding of local need and created a platform for action.

What emerged was more than a collection of survey responses. Connections Week demonstrated the strength, compassion and commitment that already exists within the Busselton community. Community organisations, government agencies, businesses, volunteers and people with lived experience came together with a shared commitment to improving outcomes for people experiencing homelessness and housing insecurity.

The relationships strengthened during Connections Week, combined with the willingness of stakeholders to contribute their time, expertise and resources, provide a strong foundation for ongoing collaboration and coordinated community responses. The Week demonstrated a strong foundation for the work ahead.

Addressing these challenges requires coordinated action across all levels of government, community service providers, the private sector and the broader community. The evidence presented in this report underscores the importance of clearly understanding the different roles and responsibilities that contribute to both immediate support responses and longer-term housing solutions. Connections Week demonstrated a strong local commitment to addressing homelessness; however, community commitment alone cannot address the structural drivers that contribute to housing insecurity and homelessness.

The City of Busselton has an important role to play as a community leader, convener, advocate and partner, supporting collaboration across sectors and ensuring local issues are visible within broader policy discussions. Community service organisations, including Accordwest and other local agencies, play a critical role in delivering frontline support, outreach, crisis assistance, housing support and early intervention services. Community members, local businesses, landlords, volunteers and community groups also contribute to building a more inclusive and supportive community through social connection, practical assistance, advocacy and opportunities for participation. The State and Federal Governments remain central to addressing the structural drivers of homelessness through housing supply, social and affordable housing investment, funding of specialist support services, health and mental health services, and broader housing policy settings.

Next steps

As a next step, the City of Busselton will establish a Local Housing and Homelessness Leadership Group, bringing together relevant agencies, service providers and community stakeholders to support a coordinated response to local housing and homelessness issues.

Bringing together representatives from housing, homelessness, mental health, family and domestic violence, disability, health and community services, alongside government, businesses and people with lived experience. The group will provide a forum for strengthening service collaboration, supporting local housing initiatives, identifying shared priorities, and advocating for solutions that respond to local need.

Similar collaborative approaches have been successfully implemented in other regional communities, including the City of Bunbury, where cross-sector partnerships have supported collective responses to complex social issues. These experiences demonstrate the value of shared leadership, coordinated action and a common understanding of community priorities, while recognising that any approach adopted in Busselton will need to reflect local circumstances, strengths and needs.

Alongside this work, Accordwest will work with local organisations to establish an Immediate Relief Collective. Bringing together services already supporting people experiencing homelessness and hardship, the collective will improve coordination, identify service gaps, reduce duplication and develop practical responses to the immediate needs highlighted through this research. Similar approaches in communities such as Bunbury have demonstrated the value of coordinated service delivery and shared planning.

Advocacy Priorities

The findings of Connections Week also identify several areas where ongoing advocacy will be important. While local initiatives can improve collaboration and service coordination, sustained progress will require continued investment and policy support from State and Federal Governments.

Key advocacy priorities emerging from this work include:

- Increased social and affordable housing supply within the Busselton region.
- Improved access to crisis, emergency and transitional accommodation options for young people and adults in Busselton
- Increased availability of housing models that combine stable accommodation with ongoing support for people experiencing disability, mental health challenges, complex health conditions or other barriers to independent living.
- Greater access to specialist housing, homelessness, mental health, domestic violence and family support services in regional communities.
- Improved coordination between housing, health and community support systems.
- Continued investment in prevention and early intervention initiatives that reduce the risk of homelessness and housing insecurity.
- Improved access to essential facilities and supports that promote health, safety and dignity for people experiencing homelessness, including showers, laundry facilities, food and water.

Working Together for Change

The evidence contained within this report provide a strong evidence base for future action. The need has been identified, community support has been demonstrated, and local priorities are broadly aligned.

Through continued collaboration, stronger coordination between service providers, the establishment of the Local Housing and Homelessness Leadership Group, and targeted advocacy to State and Federal Government, Busselton has an opportunity to build on the momentum generated through Connections Week.

While no single organisation can address homelessness alone, collective action can strengthen local responses, improve wellbeing outcomes and contribute to longer-term solutions for people experiencing homelessness and housing insecurity in the Busselton community.