

15 February 2024

The Hon. John Quigley MLC Attorney-General
The Hon. John Carey MLC, Minister for Housing

Dear Attorney-General and Minister,

Since 5 February 2024, Guardian Australia has published nine articles in a series ([Out in the cold](#) | [Australia-news](#) | [The Guardian](#)) highlighting a distressing life expectancy gap for people who have experienced homelessness in Australia. In the deaths notified to coroners investigated by The Guardian, the average age of death was 44 – more than 30 years younger than the median age of death for the general population. This concurs with published Australian and international data examining age at death of people with lived experience of homelessness. These deaths are in circumstances that are often violent. The people are dying deprived of the dignity we would want for our own loved ones. And, most disturbingly, they are often dying unnecessarily from easily treatable illnesses and injuries.

As noted by The Guardian, deaths currently notified to a coroner of people who have experienced homelessness are a vast undercount because deaths are only reported to the coroner in limited circumstances, and homelessness is rarely routinely documented. For this reason, the WA Alliance to End Homelessness is writing to you as the Attorney-General asking that the necessary policy and/or legislative changes be made so

that a) a death in Western Australia of any person experiencing homelessness must be reported to the Coroner and b) the status of being homeless is routinely recorded in medical, police or other records associated with deaths.

We ask you to make a minor amendment to the WA Coroners Act 1996 stipulating that the death of a person experiencing homelessness must be reported to the Coroner. This would require adding homelessness as one of the categories of reportable deaths under the Act. Importantly, homelessness as defined by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) in its census data collection is not confined to rough sleeping, but also includes people who are couch surfing, living in boarding houses/temporary lodgings, and in overcrowded dwellings. This definition of homelessness is mirrored in the WA Government's 10 year strategy on homelessness.

We also urge a whole of government response to improving identification and recording of homelessness in administrative government data such as hospital, police, justice and child protection records. There are many instances of people accessing health or homelessness services in WA who are experiencing chronic homelessness, but 'on paper' have an address recorded, and data systems that are not set up to enable 'no fixed address' as an option.

It is unacceptable for people who have experienced homelessness in Western Australia to be dying more than three decades earlier than the general population. To respond effectively, our state urgently needs to understand the full scope of this problem – but this is not currently possible as the Government does not have systems in place to record deaths among people who have experienced homelessness.

We write to you asking for urgent action to end this tide of needless, invisible deaths.

Thank you for your time and consideration of this urgent matter.

Sincerely, we the co-signed

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Executive Officer, Western Australian Alliance to End Homelessness



Janine Wood

Chairperson, No Limits Perth



Kate Greenway

State Manager, The Salvation Army Australia



Evan Nunn

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**WA Primary
Health Alliance**
Better health, together

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