

Youth Housing and Homelessness Forum

14 September 2026

Summary Report



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Introduction

About the Summary Report

This document collates the information shown to participants and conversations shared in the Youth Housing and Homelessness Forum (YHHF). The audience of this document is intended for both direct participants and other members of the YHHF (as well as those who wish to join the renewed YHHF).

The document includes green callout boxes with questions. The **Youth Coalition is seeking feedback** on these topics, as well as any other topics and issues relevant to young people at risk of or experiencing homelessness which the YHHF might look to discuss over the next 12 months.

You can provide your feedback via:

- email with your answers to some/all questions;
- marking up this document through the comment function;
- in person or online conversation with the Secretariat (*see contact details at end of draft Terms of Reference*); or
- another method that best suits you.

If possible, **please provide your feedback on the questions throughout this report by Friday 16 October**. Feedback on the Terms of Reference is requested by Friday 9 October.

Background

The Youth Housing and Homelessness Forum (YHHF) has been hosted by the Youth Coalition of the ACT for over two decades. Following commissioning, the Youth Coalition held a showcase of youth homelessness services to understand what the new service landscape looked like.

Building on that work, the YHHF is now reconvening to bring the sector back together around shared challenges and opportunities for young people.

In May 2026, the Youth Coalition, working with Housing ACT, convened a Youth Homelessness Roundtable focused on young people's transitions out of the youth homelessness sector: where they can go when they leave a service, and what supports they need to stay housed rather than cycle back through the system. The roundtable began from a shared understanding that more housing is needed, and set out to identify what can be improved within the current system to create more exit points.

At the roundtable, multiple services requested that the YHHF recommences as a way to address the significant systemic challenges that young people and the youth homelessness sector face. It was suggested that future direction could include:

- coordinated approaches to service delivery for young people;
- shared problem identification and problem solving; and
- shared advocacy around issues that impact on young people experiencing or at risk of homelessness.

Framing

The meeting was opened by the YHHF Chair Hannah Watts, CEO of the Youth Coalition of the ACT. The Chair outlined the intention for the meeting to be a “reestablishment meeting” with a focus on the strategic and systemic issues being faced by both young people at risk of or experiencing homelessness, and the services that support them.

The majority of participants were at Team Leader / Program Manager level and above to support the strategic and systemic focus of the meeting. The intention is for this core group of members to refresh the direction of the YHHF, with a view to develop a work plan that creates spaces and opportunities for all levels of the youth workforce and youth representative voices.

The Chair provided a brief overview of youth homelessness work to date, as well as the vision for the renewed YHHF. She asked the room to consider what is the collective responsibility of the organisations in the room to deliver on that vision.

All young people in Canberra have a safe place to live and the support they need.

Questions

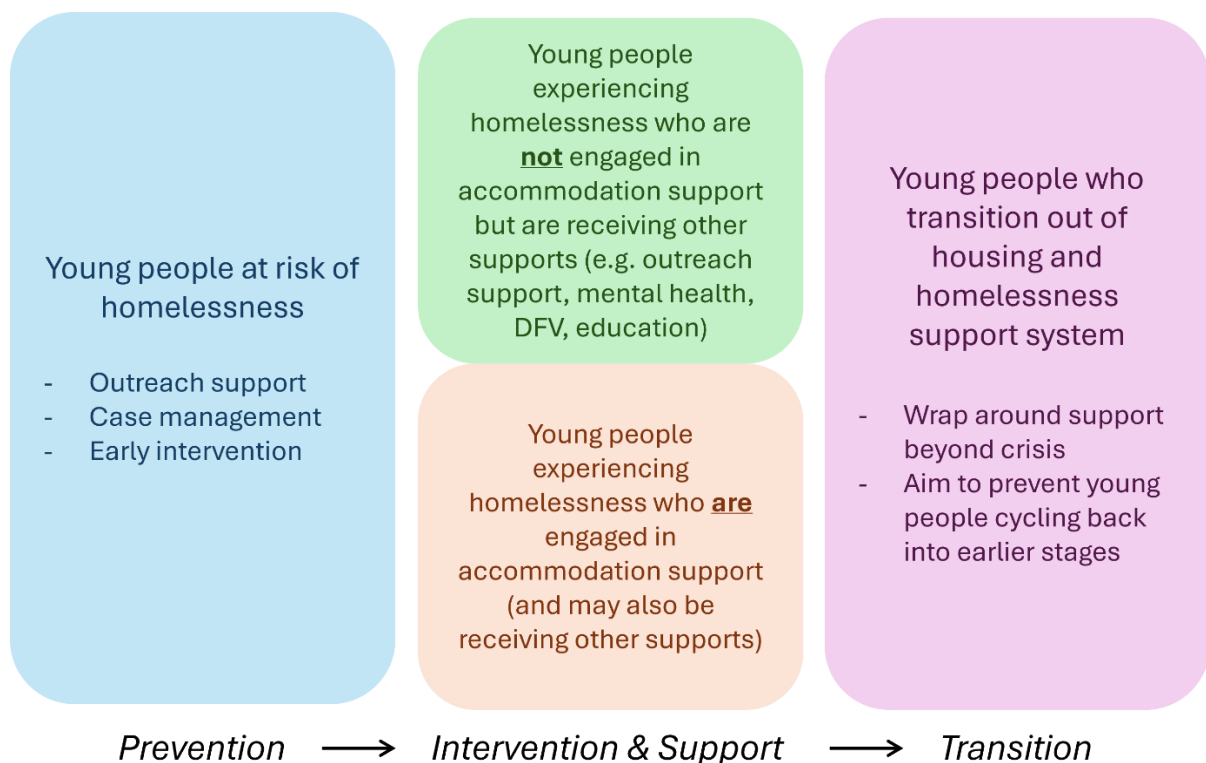
1. Do you have feedback about this draft vision statement?
2. Do you endorse this vision statement?

Discussion

Current system overview

The Youth Coalition of the ACT developed a draft diagram (*Figure 1*) articulating a systems view of the prevention, intervention and support, and transition continuum within the youth homelessness support sector.

Figure 1| Prevention, intervention and support, and transition continuum (draft for discussion)

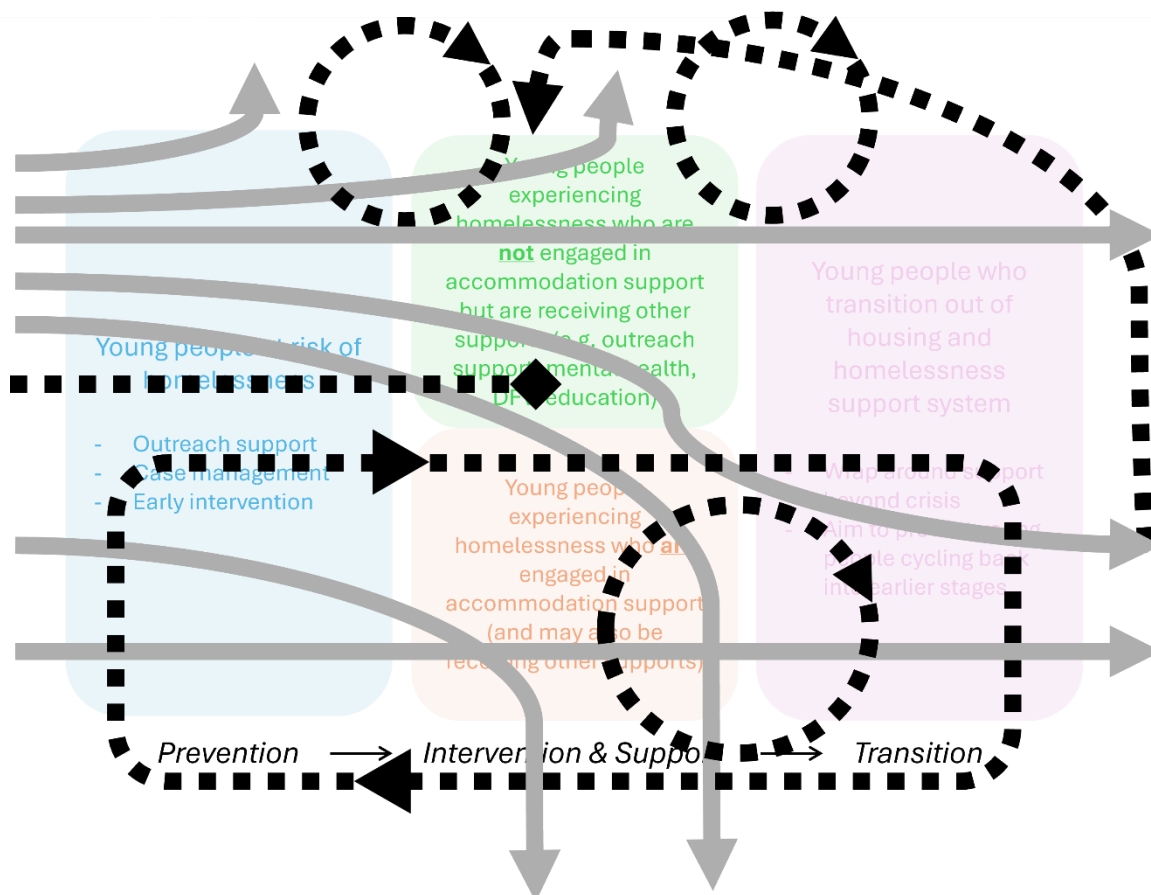


Question

3. Do you have any additions or edits to the draft continuum?

The Youth Coalition developed a complementary diagram (*Figure 2*) showing some of the possible service journeys of young people at risk of or experiencing homelessness. While *Figure 1* presents the continuum as a sequence, young people's journeys are rarely linear. *Figure 2* illustrates common pathways through and out of the continuum (grey lines) and frequently experienced cycles within it (black dashes).

Figure 2 | Frequently experienced cycles within the continuum (black dashes)



Participants noted that the representative cycles resonated with the frontline experience. They reflected on the way these cycles can be made even more complex due to the interplay between cycles from this system and cycles within and in/out of other systems, such as education and justice.

Question

4. Do you have any additions or edits to the cycles?

Note: this is representative of common cycles, not a perfect image of all possible cycles.

Services across the continuum

Participants were asked to map where their services sit on the prevention, intervention and support, and transition continuum (*Figure 1*). The **majority of services self-described as working across all three sections of the continuum**, with a few services not delivering services relating to transition. **All services provide intervention and support.**

Question

5. Where does your service sit?

Sector relationships

Participants were asked to name services and organisations that they collaborate with who are beyond the youth housing and homelessness sector. The answers have been turned into the below map (*Figure 3*).

Participants came from most of the services that provide homelessness support to young people in Canberra. However, general population housing and homelessness services without youth programs did not participate and were not named by participants, so they do not appear in *Figure 3*. This does not mean these services have no role in supporting young people.

Figure 3 | Draft snapshot of youth homelessness sector as identified by participants



Questions

6. What other youth focused services and programs should be included?
7. Which general population housing and homelessness and/or wrap around services does your service work with that should be included?
8. Do you have any edits to or feedback about the map?

Needs of young people

Participants were asked to provide insights on the needs of young people who access their service. 60 answers were provided by participants. Once answers were provided, participants were then given up to five votes each to upvote answers which resounded with them and their service.

The Youth Coalition has undertaken a thematic analysis of all answers and their associated upvoting. There are 10 main themes emerging:

- alcohol and other drugs (AOD) support, as well as AOD and mental ill health comorbidity support;
- capacity building across finances, goals, independence and relationships;
- case management;
- domestic and family violence support;
- education, training and life skills support;
- employment support;
- health;
- material support (finances, food, housing, medication, transport);
- mental health; and
- system navigation.

When cumulating the individual upvotes of each answer within a theme, given the focus of the YHHF unsurprisingly **material support for housing was most upvoted theme** (n=16).

Beyond housing, the next most upvoted themes were **mental health support** (n=12), **capacity building** (n=11), **education, training & life skills** (n=10), and **employment support** (n=8). The most upvoted single answer (n=7) was “isolation – social connection” followed closely by “capacity building and independence” (n=6).

Additional themes identified include family/relationship counselling, immigration and interstate move support, mentoring, child support, and participation and engagement.

Question

9. Are there other needs of young people not identified?

Needs of services

Participants were then asked to reflect on the needs of their service to best support young people and meet their needs. 35 answers were provided by participants. Again, once answers were provided, participants were then given up to five votes each to upvote answers which resounded with them and their service.

The **most upvoted single answer (n=6)** was **“Provision of affordable housing for young people who do not need to be in supported housing** would divert a significant proportion of young people in the service system to move into independent housing.” The next most upvoted single answer (n=5) was **“collaboration across the sector.”**

The Youth Coalition has undertaken a thematic analysis of all answers and their associated upvoting. There are five main themes:

- collaboration (including improved information sharing and joint case reviews);
- material need – affordable housing in private market;
- resources & capacity;
- system reforms; and
- workforce training and mentoring.

When cumulating the individual upvotes of each answer within a theme, **collaboration was by far the most upvoted theme (n=31).**

Within system reforms, suggested changes include:

- opportunities for young people to work with services as a lived experience worker and support other young people;
- adjustments to the affordable housing system to lower financial windows; and
- reduced red tape and restrictions on processes, including flexibility of regular pathways to support young people falling through the gaps.

Additional themes identified include: improved awareness, material need – transport, participation and advocacy, and system navigation.

Collaboration

Given that collaboration was the strongest theme, the Chair asked participants to consider:

- What does collaboration look like?
- What are the barriers?
- How do we overcome these to improve?

Participants reflected that the answers depend on the outcomes being sought by both young people and the services that support them. The room agreed it is **very important that services work together not just for continuation of support but so that the young person is in the driver seat of their life.**

It was identified that many young people with complex needs are experiencing siloing between their needs, an example being a young person with an offending history who requires mental health support, education support, and is experiencing homelessness. There is no one service in the ACT that can provide adequate, wrap around support for this situation; rather there are several services with their own area of expertise who need to collaborate.

Some participants expressed a view that a centralised case coordinator role could improve this young person's experience navigating multiple systems and services, but that there is minimal funding to and/or authority for any organisations to undertake this.

A participant provided an example of cross-sector collaboration in another jurisdiction; the Safety Action Meetings (SAMs) model used by the NSW Government in their Safer Pathway program¹ supporting victim-survivors of domestic violence could be translated and implemented in the ACT youth homelessness system. SAMs are called to support victim-survivors, and consist of fortnightly meetings of key service providers in local areas for the purpose of reducing serious threats or harm through targeted information sharing and service coordination. There was comment in the room that it would be important to involve the young person, where safe to do so (the SAMs model is between service providers only).

Participants identified **strong, enduring relationships between services which build trust and understanding of each other's roles as a tool to overcome collaboration challenges.** These relationships were identified in the room as being somewhat ad hoc currently, with a desire to formalise the relationships and partnerships to insulate against changes and keep the focus on the young people receiving support.

Participants identified that strong relationships have formed, and are continuously forming, within the community sector, but that interactions with statutory services and systems are not working as well. Staff turnover within statutory services was identified as a key barrier to forming relationships and trust which enable warm handovers and referrals. The reconvened YHHF will look to strengthen these relationships by providing a regular space for collaboration across the community sector and statutory services.

¹ <https://dcj.nsw.gov.au/legal-and-justice/safer-pathway/information-for-victim-survivors/general-information-about-safer-pathway.html>

Next steps

Terms of Reference

Participants were informed that the Youth Coalition has been refreshing the Terms of Reference (see end of document for a draft copy for comment).

Following input from members, the Youth Coalition will circulate a final draft Terms of Reference with a view to seek endorsement at the next YHHF.

Governance

Participants both at the Roundtable and in follow-up conversations, expressed interest in forming smaller working groups within the YHHF to progress particular priorities. Some participants requested that in addition to the main forum, frontline staff have opportunities to come together to share practice knowledge, discuss challenges and build connections with other workers in the sector.

Future YHHF Activities

As with earlier iterations of the YHHF, the Youth Coalition will continue to provide Secretariat activities. This includes scheduling, hosting and facilitating meetings, managing membership, as well as collecting feedback to ensure the YHHF is functioning well.

The Youth Coalition proposes the following areas of focus:

- Practical steps YHHF members and their organisations can take to integrate into the broader housing and homelessness sector to ensure young people and their needs are met not just by specialist youth homelessness services, but all housing and homelessness services. This could include the Youth Coalition acting as a conduit between the YHHF and the Joint Pathways Network and Executive groups – noting some YHHF members also participate in that Network/Executive and can reinforce the views of the YHHF.
- Opportunities for enhanced collaboration, including development and trial of case coordination processes.
- Opportunities for participants to collaborate and align (where appropriate) input to the development of the ACT Government's *Youth Homelessness Strategy*, committed to in May 2026.

Question

10. Do you have any additional areas of focus you would like the YHHF to consider?
11. Do you endorse these areas of focus?

Participants

- ACT Housing
- Barnardos
- Conflict Resolution Service
- FIRST Canberra (The Salvation Army)
- Marymead CatholicCare Canberra Goulburn
- Oasis Youth Services (The Salvation Army)
- RAW Potential
- Ted Noffs
- Woden Community Service
- Youth Coalition of the ACT.

Draft Terms of Reference

1. Purpose of the Youth Housing and Homelessness Forum (YHHF)

The aim of the YHHF is to bring together specialist homelessness services and the broader youth sector to advise on strategic and systemic issues related to supporting young people in the ACT who are homeless or at risk of homelessness.

The objectives of the YHHF are to:

- provide opportunity for youth housing and homelessness providers, as well as those from services which support young people at risk of homelessness, to discuss, identify and address both strategic policy and systemic practice issues;
- identify and contribute to the evidence base informing policy and practice;
- share information and identify collaboration opportunities;
- facilitate members directly informing the Youth Coalition, and other members, of the issues that affect young people accessing their service; and,
- collectively progress strategic issues relating to housing and homelessness services in the ACT and surrounding area.

2. Membership

The membership of the YHHF includes representatives from youth housing and homelessness services, youth and/or family services who support young people experiencing or at risk of homelessness, as well as government representatives. Anyone with an interest in youth homelessness is welcome to join the YHHF.

3. Secretariat and Project Management Support for the YHHF

The Youth Coalition of the ACT, the peak body for youth affairs, provides secretariat and project management support to the YHHF. Responsibilities include:

- providing secretariat support including maintaining the membership contact list and a work-plan, writing and circulating minutes and agendas;
- providing a meeting venue (as deemed appropriate by members);
- following up and actioning recommendations from the YHHF;
- implementing the YHHF in collaboration with stakeholders; and
- documenting and progressing issues that are raised through the YHHF through its core business.

4. Meeting frequency

The Youth Coalition proposes trialling the below format in 2026-2027.

All members are invited to attend the YHHF, which will meet quarterly for 2.5 hours, guided by the standing agenda items proposed below.

Standing Agenda

- Data-driven updates on sector by FIRST Canberra
- Updates from Housing ACT
- Updates from Joint Pathways Network
- Deep dive topic(s) of the meeting.

Deep dive topics could include working with Housing ACT To develop the *Youth Homelessness Strategy*, development and trial of case coordination processes, and a focus on transitions, building on the Youth Homelessness Roundtable in May 2026.

The proposed 2026-2027 dates are:

- 14 September 2026 (*re-establishment meeting*)
- Late November 2026
- Quarterly from February 2027.

Between the quarterly meetings, working group(s) will be held which focus on topics and challenges identified by YHHF participants. While the Youth Coalition will provide support for these groups (such as a meeting space), each group will identify someone who will lead the group, including in reporting back to the quarterly YHHF and liaising with the YHHF Secretariat.

5. Contact for the Youth Housing and Homelessness Forum

For further information or questions about the YHHF please contact:

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(02) 6247 3540

