

# Bold new model breaks homelessness cycle

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The majority of 575 people in South Australia with a history of chronic homelessness have found stable housing and are well on the way to a better life after three years of intensive support under the "Aspire" program—Australia's first social impact bond targeting homelessness.

"It's a gift that I can't even begin to explain to you," one participant says, ahead of an event to launch the final evaluation of the program at Flinders University Victoria Square, Adelaide. Watch a recording of the launch summary online.

SA Premier Peter Malinauskas says: "Aspire is clearly a successful program which has had a positive impact on so many lives, not just helping people in their moment of crisis but setting them up for the longer term."

Minister for Human Services Nat Cook says the results show the benefits of intensive wrap-around supports for people who have experienced lengthy or re-current homelessness, complex needs and multiple barriers to housing.

"These barriers can be incredibly difficult to overcome, and this report shows what really works in terms of helping people overcome those barriers," she says.

Flinders University Professor of Social Impact Ian Goodwin-Smith says: "What Aspire shows is that if you stick with people experiencing chronic homelessness and work with them closely, you get great results for people and great results for the community.

"That's what the evidence shows. That's what the investment in Aspire has achieved—massive improvements in people's lives and a significant return on investment in terms of savings to the public purse."

The evaluation, by experts from the Center for Social Impact at Flinders University and the University of Western Australia, found many major achievements from the 'intensive wraparound' program which included help with securing stable housing and support for trauma, disability, or tri-morbidity issues (co-existing physical, mental health and drug and

alcohol issues).

The [final report](#) found:

- By June 2021, 369 Aspire participants had secured a tenancy, mostly in public housing, and among those participants, 93% were maintaining their tenancies.
- Participants accessing Specialist Homelessness Services—down 78%; hospital emergency department visits—down 27%; and inpatient stays—down 26%.
- Aspire participants court system interactions—down 70%.
- So far this has led to \$8.9m in service costs saved by the South Australian Government.
- Aspire participants' overall well-being scores increased by 15% and they reported improvements in their interpersonal relationships and community connections.
- Another indicator of enhanced well-being was that participants recorded significant reductions in their access to hospital services for mental health and alcohol/drug related issues.

"Some of the Aspire participants said no other program had worked for them, and they had lost all hope by the time they came to the program," says Flinders University research fellow Dr. Veronica Coram.

"However, the [final report](#) finds Aspire was a life-changer for many participants who avoided continued rough sleeping, jail or hospitalization, and whose health and well-being would otherwise have declined further."

"What Aspire has done for so many people is to give them the sustained support they needed to maintain a stable tenancy and achieve the dignity of having their own home, secure employment and undertake education," says Ian Cox, who leads the Office for Homelessness Sector

Integration at the SA Housing Authority.

Aspire was made possible by a strong, cross-sectoral collaborative partnership between multiple SA Government agencies, the Hutt St Center and housing providers, Social Ventures Australia (SVA) and private investors.

The benefits of providing wrap-around services has given participants a sense of purpose and the confidence to live with more certainty, says Hutt St Center CEO Chris Burns.

"By providing wrap-around services we can lessen the demands on our health and hospital services, correctional services and on [social services](#) including emergency accommodation. It has also given our participants a sense of purpose and the confidence to live with more certainty."

Social impact bonds (SIBs), which were pioneered in Australia by Social Ventures Australia, involve [private investors](#) financing the delivery of social service programs, with governments repaying the investors when positive outcomes are achieved.

Social Ventures Australia CEO Suzie Riddell says: "SVA's vision is for an Australia where all people and communities can thrive and we're delighted that the Aspire SIB has made a lasting difference to hundreds of people experiencing persistent homelessness in Adelaide," says Ms Riddell.

"We design SIBs to generate very high quality evidence about whether a program works, as well as show how governments can save money across departments—including health, housing and justices—by investing in high-quality programs that can change lives.

"We know that this SIB and the evaluation will contribute to the growing

evidence base for intensive 'housing first' approaches, with sustained wraparound support for people experiencing homelessness which can be used to create impact at an even greater scale," she says.

Other participants, who are not named to preserve anonymity, said:

- "I don't think I'd be here now if it wasn't for Aspire." And "Usually they help you, then it's see ya later."
- "They went above and beyond for me ... without them I wouldn't be here at all... they've been absolutely invaluable to my [mental health](#), my emotional health and my stability in the house."
- "Knowing that you've got support for three years makes a major difference. I can't stress it enough, how comfortable they make you feel, it's a whole non-judgmental thing. Aspire has helped me gain the confidence to tell the truth, I can be honest with people."

Provided by Flinders University

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