

Australian study finds increased risk of homelessness for youth leaving out-of-home care

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New research from the University of South Australia (UniSA) and Curtin University finds that up to 36% of young people leaving out-of-

home care (OHC) in Australia wind up homeless—compared to less than 10% of the general youth population.

In a paper [published](#) in the journal *Child Abuse & Neglect*, [mental health](#), alcohol, and [substance abuse disorders](#) were identified as increasing the risk of homelessness, emphasizing the importance of employing systems and resources to improve the outcomes for OHC leavers.

Professor Melissa O'Donnell, Deputy Director of Research at UniSA's Australian Center for Child Protection, says more needs to be done to support [young people](#) who haven't had the typical growing-up experience that could otherwise help them with the transition to adulthood and [independent living](#).

"Young people leaving care need help securing stable housing, financial assistance, mentorship support, education and employment services, and life skills training," Prof. O'Donnell says.

"We need to diversify our approach to supporting these groups, with tailored strategies unique to each person and their needs.

"These young people often have minimal social and/or [financial support](#) to transition smoothly from OHC to adulthood, which leads to homelessness, substance misuse, and poor mental health.

"Providing transition programs which offer a range of support and resources is vital so that they are tailored to individual needs and goals."

Curtin University Ph.D. student Fadzai Chikwava says a lack of extended support post-care contributes significantly to homelessness.

"There's a lack of follow-up on OHC leavers, which is contributing to these poor outcomes," Chikwava says.

"Evaluation and monitoring systems need to be strengthened as a form of early intervention, and leavers need to be involved in developing support and transition plans to ensure security and success post-care.

"All Australian states have committed to extending leaving care until age 21, however the frequency and extent of this varies depending on the child welfare system in each state.

"Even though leavers have these extra years of support, the quality of this care needs to be improved to ensure young people are provided trauma-informed care and that the support and resources they receive are meeting their needs."

More information: Fadzai Chikwava et al, Trajectories of homelessness and association with mental health and substance use disorders among young people transitioning from out-of-home care in Australia, *Child Abuse & Neglect* (2024). [DOI: 10.1016/j.chiabu.2024.106643](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chiabu.2024.106643)

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