



ACT Shelter calls for coronial reporting of homelessness deaths

ACT Shelter is calling on the ACT Government to amend the *Coroners Act 1997* so that the death of a person experiencing homelessness becomes a reportable death – a reform that would make the ACT the first jurisdiction in Australia to systematically count these deaths.

ACT Shelter CEO, Corinne Dobson, made the call for such reporting while speaking at last night's inaugural Havelock Memorial Vigil to Canberra's Homeless, an event which brought together community members, advocates and people with lived experience to remember those whose deaths have too often gone uncounted, unexamined and unseen.

Despite evidence that people experiencing homelessness die decades earlier than the broader population, the ACT has no system to identify how many people experiencing homelessness die each year, what caused their deaths, or whether those deaths could have been prevented.

ACT Shelter CEO Corinne Dobson said every death represented a profound human loss, and an opportunity to learn and prevent future tragedies.

"People experiencing homelessness do not become less valuable because they do not have a home. Every life matters, and every death should count," Ms Dobson said.

"Homelessness is not only a housing issue – it is a profound public health issue and a major driver of premature death."

Australian research shows people who have experienced homelessness die, on average, between 22 and 33 years earlier than people who are housed. Recent analysis by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare found that people who had used specialist homelessness services died at a median age of just 47 years when support had been received in the preceding year, compared with a life expectancy of 82 years across the broader Australian population.

Many of these deaths are not simply a consequence of illness or ageing. Homelessness increases exposure to risks including untreated health conditions, mental ill-health, violence, social isolation, unsafe living environments and barriers to accessing healthcare.

"We know people experiencing homelessness are far more likely to die from causes that are preventable or treatable. But in the ACT, we do not know how many people are dying, why they are dying, or whether our systems could have done more to prevent those deaths.

"We investigate road deaths, workplace deaths and deaths in custody because understanding why people die helps prevent future deaths. People experiencing homelessness deserve that same commitment.

"This would not solve homelessness on its own, but it would help make the hidden visible, strengthen accountability, and build the evidence we need to save lives."

ACT Shelter says mandatory coronial reporting would not require every death to proceed to an inquest, but would ensure homelessness is identified, recorded and examined where relevant, allowing systemic patterns to be identified and future deaths prevented.

“This achievable reform will allow authorities and services to pinpoint opportunities for intervention to save people’s lives. We cannot tolerate a situation where some deaths are deemed less worthy of investigation simply because the person did not have a home,” Ms Dobson said.

The organisation is also urging continued investment in the measures most likely to prevent premature deaths, including more social and affordable housing, Housing First responses, better hospital discharge pathways, stronger coordination between services, and accessible healthcare.

“Preventing homelessness is the most effective way to prevent avoidable deaths,” Ms Dobson said.

“But while people are homeless today, we also need a system that recognises and values their lives, and that treats every death with the seriousness it deserves.”

ACT Shelter is calling on the ACT Government to:

- Amend the *Coroners Act 1997* (ACT) to make homelessness-related deaths reportable;
- Establish clear protocols to identify and record homelessness status;
- Publish annual data on homelessness deaths and systemic findings; and
- Continue strengthening homelessness prevention through investment in social and affordable housing, healthcare access, Housing First approaches and coordinated support.

Download ACT Shelter’s briefing on mandatory coronial at: https://actshelter.net.au/wp-content/uploads/2026/08/Counting_the_Uncounted_Mandatory-coronial-reporting_Briefing_FINAL_2.pdf

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ACT Shelter is a not-for-profit peak body providing an informed and independent voice on housing policy issues affecting the ability of Canberrans on low, moderate or no incomes to have an affordable, safe and secure home.