

WHAT IS STAYWITCH'S?

In April 2021, Homeless Healthcare opened StayWitch's, to provide short-term accommodation for people who are medically well enough to be discharged from hospital but who have no appropriate accommodation options available.

The key aims of StayWitch's are to:

- Provide non-medical respite care for people to recover and recuperate after their hospital stay.
- Enable support workers to connect people to housing, accommodation, and community support.
- Provide therapeutic activities to support people to develop skills for independent living and to transition out of homelessness.

The development and operation of the StayWitch's facility has, to date, been funded almost entirely from philanthropic donations to Homeless Healthcare.

BACKGROUND

Data captured by the Home2Health team at UWA showed that, in 2019: around 20% of hospitalised people who were experiencing homelessness were discharged back to the street as no other options were available; 16% were discharged to short stay backpacker hostels or similar; and a further 14% returned to squats or to living in a car. The lack of safe and secure accommodation makes it difficult for a person to manage their medical conditions.

Previous UWA data has indicated that the average length of an inpatient stay for people experiencing homelessness was more than twice that of people with stable housing. Access to safe, appropriate and supported accommodation can reduce the likelihood of re-presentation to emergency departments (EDs), and allows case workers to build rapport and link people in with services and community.

"Many of the homeless patients we see have no other option but to go back to the streets. Their day to day lives are chaotic, and they often don't have the capacity or resources to go out and source a suitable place to stay, and we are struggling to find options for them. Repeated presentations are a consequence of this cycle." – Hospital Social Worker



StayWitch's, located in Highgate, Perth

TARGET GROUP

People who are currently sleeping rough and are medically well enough for hospital discharge who:

- require short term "home equivalent" accommodation for recovery;
- at time of discharge, have limited mobility due to injury or illness; or
- have circumstances that mean that they are not suitable for or are excluded by other short term or crisis accommodation options.

Also, people who are living in unsuitable environments for recovery after hospital discharge, e.g., sleeping in cars or living in squats or severely overcrowded dwellings.

WHO HAS BEEN SUPPORTED BY STAYWITCH'S IN ITS FIRST 5 MONTHS?



67
PEOPLE



79% MALE
21% FEMALE



30%
ABORIGINAL
& / OR TORRES
STRAIT ISLANDER



21%
BORN
OVERSEAS



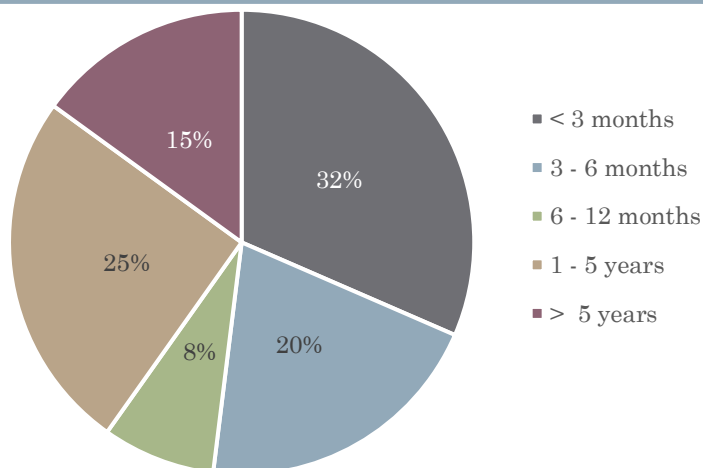
22 – 70
AGE RANGE

LENGTH OF TIME PEOPLE HAVE BEEN HOMELESS

The length of time StayWitch's residents have been experiencing homeless varies considerably.

Prior to being discharged from hospital to StayWitch's, 40% of residents had experienced homelessness for a year or more. A further 15% had experienced homelessness for more than 5 years, and 10 years was the longest experience of homelessness by one resident to date.

About half of StayWitch's residents had become homeless recently (i.e. in the 6 months prior to discharge from hospital).



"The opening of 10 non-medical respite beds at StayWitch's has been amazing. The two weeks stays have allowed rough sleepers to move from a survival mentality to planning a different future for themselves. Some have been chronically homeless individuals who have finally been able to move forward, out of entrenched rough sleeping. Others are recently homeless individuals who have been catapulted back into mainstream life rather than continuing on to long term homelessness. It's incredible to see how such a short period of the right support can change peoples' lives."

- Dr Amanda Stafford, Clinical Lead, Royal Perth Hospital Homeless Team

"With generous support from philanthropic donors, StayWitch's has been set up to provide a welcoming and therapeutic space, enhancing wellbeing of people experiencing homelessness as they recover from a hospital admission." – Zoe Thebaud, Manager, StayWitch's Homeless Healthcare

StayWitch's residents had a wide range of health needs and conditions, including:

- **Mental health issues** (e.g. anxiety, depression, schizophrenia, suicidal ideation, psychosis);
- **Alcohol and other drug (AOD) use issues** (e.g. alcohol, opiate, ethanol and methamphetamine dependence, recovery from overdose, withdrawal, intoxication);
- **Physical health issues** (e.g. skin and other infections, heart conditions, hepatitis C, diabetes, back and abdominal pain, cellulitis, respiratory conditions, blood clots, ulcers, seizures, stroke, arthritis, liver disease); and
- **Injuries and poisonings** (e.g. fractures and broken bones, including from assaults, concussion).



Living room- often used by residents to relax

HOW PEOPLE ARE SUPPORTED

KEY ELEMENTS OF STAYWITCH'S

Length of stay of up to 14 days, and longer if required.

24-hour staffing to provide support, safety, and to respond to matters of concern.

Three nutritious meals daily, and opportunities to contribute to cooking.

Support for smoking cessation/reduction and with other AOD issues.

Access to home visits from Homeless Healthcare General Practitioners.

Referral and service coordination with other homelessness services.

IT'S THE LITTLE THINGS THAT COUNT...

- **Giveaway** – One resident when leaving for more permanent accommodation donated his reading glasses to another resident so he could finish his book.
- **Community Cooking** – A resident who used to work in his family's kitchen often cooked delicious food with his fellow residents and staff.
- **Ironing service** – One resident offered to iron her fellow resident's clothing one morning so they would all look amazing at their respective appointments.
- **Fossicking at StayWitch's** – A resident discovered treasure under the floorboards and found the history of the house.
- **Pizza nights** – with stone-fired pizza.
- **Chess competition** – between residents and staff.
- **Puzzle nights** – once all pieces counted and confirmed to be present!



Dining Room and computer access for residents



Welcoming residents

CASE STUDY ONE: HEALTH & EMPLOYMENT SUPPORT

Background

Martin* is a man in his mid-thirties who has a history of family violence and trauma. His mother left the family home when Martin was a child, leaving him to care for his other siblings. Martin has struggled with alcohol and other drug use and anxiety for many years. Martin has type 2 diabetes and he recently presented to the hospital emergency department with alcohol intoxication and uncontrolled diabetes, which he did not have any medication for.

Support from StayWitch's

Martin stayed at StayWitch's for two weeks after being discharged from hospital. During this time, the StayWitch's team supported Martin across multiple life domains.

He was supported through an employment process, including help with preparing for a job interview, testing and inductions, and he was provided with new clothing in order that he be 'job ready'.

Because of Martin's diabetes, he was also supported to learn how to cook healthy recipes. By the time Martin left StayWitch's he had learnt a week's worth of recipes with low-sugar content that he could cook.

"Martin says he wants to stop drinking and make a change to his life. He has been to rehab twice in the past, feels as though his alcohol intake is due to not having stable accommodation and he would like to eventually get back to work." – StayWitch's staff

CASE STUDY TWO: SUPPORT WITH HOME & RELATIONSHIPS

Background

Kate* is a woman in her mid-fifties who recently became homeless after deteriorating health forced her to give up work. She moved in with one of her children, but this relationship broke down and she eventually had to leave.

Kate presented to emergency department with abdominal pain and other health issues including anxiety, heart disease, reflux, and post-traumatic stress disorder. Kate is not an Australian citizen and is therefore unable to access social security benefits or Medicare.

Kate has struggled to find accommodation due to having no income. This has been Kate's first experience of homelessness, and she is therefore extremely vulnerable.

Support from StayWitch's

Kate stayed at StayWitch's for four weeks, post-hospital discharge.

During her stay, the StayWitch's team supported Kate to reconcile with her family. They also supported her to obtain identification documents and collaborated with the International Organisation for Migration to get her a priority processed passport and ticket back home, before border restrictions would prevent travel.

Prior to leaving Western Australia, Kate had dinner with her daughter and reconciled their relationship. The StayWitch's team organised transport for Kate on arrival home, so that she could return to her community and support.

Kate gave the StayWitch's team a gift of framed artwork when she left, to thank the team for their support.

"There are a lot of things about how to deal with my situation that I can't think of for myself or don't know about. I'd become so isolated. You were instrumental in supporting me out of homelessness." – Kate