CHANGING THE STORY

A communications toolkit for narrative change about homelessness in Tāmaki Makaurau

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This toolkit complements the Auckland Homelessness Communications Strategy by providing the practical messages, evidence, protocols and templates needed to put the strategy into action.

COORDINATED BY

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How to use this toolkit

This toolkit is for organisations who communicate about homelessness in Auckland. Use it when you need to:

- Find a key message and its evidence quickly, for a media call, a funding application, or a conversation with a decision-maker.
- Adapt a message to the audience in front of you, using the audience map.
- Prepare for a media opportunity involving someone with lived experience, safely and ethically.
- Respond to a media request using a consistent framework.

It does not replace your organisation's own communications judgement, sign-off processes or relationships.

Use this toolkit alongside two guiding principles:

- **Borrow, don't build.** Use the shared messaging and evidence in this toolkit, and seek permission before using another organisation's data, images or video.
- **Follow your sign-off process.** Decision rights, approvals and escalation remain with each organisation and its own processes.

Core narrative and key message bank

Core narrative: changing the story from problem to solution

The core story brings those experiencing homelessness into the "we" and centres solutions that work:

> *Everyone deserves a place to call home - somewhere to find their feet, feel safe, and build a future. Yet too many Aucklanders are going without one, living in unsafe conditions that often stay hidden from view.*
>
> *But we know how to solve that. When homes are available, warm, safe, and affordable - and support is there when people need it - whole communities become stronger, healthier, and more connected.*
>
> *This isn't about one group solving it for another - it's what we can achieve together, by investing in what works. That's how we prevent and end homelessness.*

Key message 1: Homes end homelessness. Let's invest in them.

The key solution to a housing need is more housing - secure, affordable, accessible, and available without a mountain of conditions to meet first.

Key message 2: A home lasts long-term when the person in it feels secure. That takes a coordinated approach to support.

People stay housed when health, income and social supports are connected around them. Right now, those services often operate separately, and a sudden change in circumstances can be enough to push someone into homelessness. Joined-up, wraparound support, alongside connection to whānau, hapū, iwi and community, closes that gap. The evidence shows it works.

Key message 3: With a secure home and coordinated support, people can build the lives they aspire to.

A stable, affordable home isn't just shelter - it's the ground people need under their feet to find work, care for their families, and belong to a community. When we invest in homes, we're investing in people's ability to live with dignity and contribute to Auckland.

Key message 4: Ending homelessness is the fiscally responsible choice, not just the compassionate one.

Every year we manage homelessness instead of ending it, we continue to invest in costly crisis responses rather than lasting change. Evidence shows that providing permanent homes with the right support can reduce reliance on health, justice, and emergency services, while delivering significant social and economic benefits. Investing in solutions is not just the compassionate choice; it is a responsible use of public resources.

Key message 5: Te ao Māori-led solutions put people at the centre and they work, not just for Māori, but for everyone.

Taking a te ao Māori-led approach, grounded in Te Tiriti o Waitangi, serves all our communities. Research shows tangata whenua-led solutions for whānau Māori are critical to preventing homelessness and that holistic, te ao Māori-informed responses work for others too.

Quick-reference language guidance

- **Solutions, not complexities.**
- **Lead with stories, then back them with statistics.**
- **Use collective, humanising language.**
- **Speak in "can," not only "should."**
- **Avoid partisan blame.**
- **Replace inevitability with solvability.**
- **Say "home," not "housing," wherever possible.**

Audience-specific messages

Core audience: the persuadable majority

This is the largest audience and the largest opportunity. They already believe homelessness is serious, but many doubt it can be solved. The task is to make the solution visible, credible and practical.

Key message	Audience-specific messages
Homes end homelessness. Let's invest in them.	When someone moves into a stable home with the right support, they are less likely to cycle back onto the street – we've got evidence of that right here in Auckland. Many of us already agree homelessness is serious. Now it's time to invest like we mean it.
A home lasts long-term when the person in it feels secure. That takes the right support around them.	A home isn't enough on its own. What keeps someone in a home for good is a long-term tenancy and the support that comes with it - help with health, connection, and the steps back to stability. That's what makes a home last.
With a secure home, people can build the lives they aspire to.	Once someone has somewhere safe to call home, everything else becomes possible - a job, a routine, reconnecting with whānau, and building the future they want for themselves.
Ending homelessness is the fiscally responsible choice, not just the compassionate one.	Cycling people through emergency housing (where it's available), hospitals and the justice system costs all of us far more than solving the problem for good. Investing in homes now is the responsible choice - for our city's books, and our communities.
Te ao Māori-led solutions put people at the centre and they work, not just for Māori, but for everyone.	Solutions designed with Māori, for Māori, work better for everyone. Te ao Māori-led approaches put people and their whānau at the centre and that's exactly what makes them effective across the board. And not just for Māori.

> Evidence: 88% of respondents to the Housing First Auckland survey already say homelessness is serious, but 55% believe it can only be managed, not prevented, and only 43% are confident it can be reduced. Public belief in solvability is the gap this audience needs closed

Businesses and employers

Business audiences fall into three priority segments: businesses directly affected by visible homelessness, the wider Auckland business community, and organised business advocates or city-centre leaders.

Business segment	Homes end homelessness. Let's invest in them.	A home lasts long-term when the person in it feels secure. That takes the right support around them.	With a secure home, people can build the lives they aspire to.
Directly affected (visible day-to-day impacts)	Investing in proven, permanent housing solutions is what changes the picture long-term, for all those impacted.	Ending homelessness requires a collective effort. Businesses can be part of the solution by partnering with housing and social service providers to support lasting housing outcomes.	When someone gets the secure home and support they need, the day-to-day impacts you see start to ease too – with a community able to genuinely move forward.
Wider business community	Auckland's business community already backs the case for change through advocacy, funding and partnerships. Now's the moment to align that effort behind what actually works: permanent homes with the right support.	Evidence-based, wraparound solutions turn one-off goodwill into lasting impact. Backing them means your investment keeps working long after the initial support ends.	A city where people have secure homes is a city where your customers, employees and community can thrive. That's good for Auckland, and good for business.
Organised advocates and city-centre leaders	You already have the platform and the relationships to shift this conversation. Use them to champion the solution that works - homes, not just management.	Your public voice carries weight with decision-makers. Lending it to a coordinated, evidence-based approach helps turn goodwill into the sustained investment needed to make homes last.	A thriving city centre and a city where everyone has a home go hand in hand. Your leadership can help make both a reality.

> Call to action for this audience: partner with us to advocate for increased investment in proven solutions — or, for organised advocates specifically, lend your public voice and platform to the coordinated response.

Decision-makers

> 62% of respondents to the Housing First Auckland research look to central government to lead, 39% to council.

Local and central government, councillors, MPs and Ministers act when a solution is politically safe, well-evidenced and backed by an aligned sector. This audience needs a clear case for investment and a practical path to implementation.

Key Message	Audience-Specific Message
Homes end homelessness. Let's invest in them	A well-evidenced, cross-party investment in permanent homes - not another round of temporary fixes - is the workable, fundable solution Aucklanders are already asking government to lead on.
A home lasts long-term when the person in it feels secure. That takes the right support around them	Homes work best when they are permanent and come with the wraparound support that helps people reconnect to health services, to whānau, to community. Backing that support is what makes the investment in homes pay off.
With a secure home, people can build the lives they aspire to.	The goal isn't just a roof - it's a genuine pathway to the life people want, whether that's work, study or reconnecting with whānau. That's the outcome this investment delivers, and it's one your constituents will see and feel.
Ending homelessness is the fiscally responsible choice, not just the compassionate one	It is more expensive for taxpayers and ratepayers to address the symptoms of homelessness through emergency responses. Homes with wrap around support have been proven to be more cost effective.

Other audiences

Audience	Message
The ready and willing	You already believe this is solvable. The most useful thing you can do now is turn that belief into action - volunteer, donate, or simply talk about how homelessness can be ended. Every voice adds momentum.
The potentially under-reached	You might not think this is your issue to weigh in on, but it touches the whole city, and there's a role for everyone. Whether that's learning more, talking about it, or backing the organisations already doing the work, your support counts.
The resistant	It's easy to assume this problem is too big, or the government's to fix. But homelessness isn't inevitable, it's solvable, and the evidence backs that up. We're not asking you to solve it alone; we're asking you to back what already works.
Funders and philanthropic partners	Proven models exist, backed by evidence, with a clear pathway from investment to outcome. Partnering with us means funding a solution that lasts - not managing a crisis that repeats.

Evidence library

Public belief in solvability and support

- 75% of Aucklanders surveyed agree government should guarantee access to decent, affordable housing.
- International examples, including Finland, may help demonstrate that long-term, housing-led approaches can reduce homelessness when backed by sustained investment. From 2008 to 2023, Finland reduced long-term homelessness by 71 percent, in contrast to most other countries where homelessness increased over the same period (Parsell et al, 2025).

The case for permanent solutions

- People who have experienced homelessness are more than ten times more likely to experience it again. Temporary responses need to be backed by permanent homes and support.
- Between 2018/19 and 2024/25 hospital discharges linked to homelessness have more than doubled, a 101% increase .
- Estimated homelessness increased from at least 41,000 people in 2013 to 102,123 in 2018, and then to 112,496 in 2023.

Housing First outcomes

- There is a large international evidence base for the effectiveness of Housing First approaches and local research affirms these findings.
- Housing First approaches significantly improve housing stability, thereby ending homelessness for people (Baxter et al. 2019), with these outcomes remaining after 6 year follow up (Aubry et al, 2020). In Perth, 81 percent of Housing First participants sustained their tenancies for 12 months after being housed (Vallisi et al. 2020).
- The five-year follow-up of Housing First participants in Hamilton, NZ found significant impacts across health, justice and income outcomes.
- Health: 44% fewer hospitalisations and 63% fewer inpatient mental-health bed nights. For people with mental health needs, housing with support produced an 80–85% reduction in the most severe presentations — declining sharply in the second year after housing and remaining low five years later. (Housing First Hamilton evaluation)
- Justice: 36% fewer police offences, 43% fewer criminal charges and 23% fewer corrections events. (Housing First Hamilton evaluation)

- Income: a 138% increase in income from paid work, though incomes remained very low compared with the general population — and five years on, outcomes still differed substantially from the general population, showing the lasting disadvantage created by homelessness. (Housing First Hamilton evaluation)
- For every $1 invested in Visionwest's Housing First programme, an estimated $4.60 of social value is returned to Aotearoa New Zealand.

The cost of inaction

- Chronic homelessness is estimated to cost around $88,000 per person each year through avoidable hospital use, emergency response, justice and crisis services (University of Otago).
- Homelessness can be life-threatening. Research on Housing First participants in Hamilton found the average age of death was 44, compared with 62 for a comparable group in the general population.

Aspirations and dignity

- People experiencing homelessness describe aspirations that include secure kāinga, stability, employment, study, business ownership, connection to whakapapa, home ownership and being better parents.
- Women with experience of homelessness have very clear hopes and dreams for their futures and for their homes. Women want to learn, connect with family, earn money and to give back to the community (Lifewise, 2018).
- A recent evaluation of Housing First and Rapid Rehousing found that these programmes are transforming whānau lives. Whānau experienced improved physical and mental wellbeing, enhanced social relationships, steps toward their aspirations, and personal growth. Whānau attributed their outcomes to the programmes and did not believe they would have gotten there without them (Lau et al, 2023).

Māori-led and culturally grounded solutions

- Mā Te Huruhuru's marae-based approach at He Pā Hiringa: outcomes include nearly 100% of rangatahi transitioning to permanent social housing, with zero property damage.
- Te Whare Hīnatore: 69% of wāhine (22 of 32) transitioned into secure homes in 2023, through a kaupapa Māori-led, marae-based model with tapu, mana, mauri and wairua embedded in daily life (Groot and Sarich, 2024).

- Challenges include the transitional housing model (12-week duration of stay is too restrictive), a lack of sustainable multi-agency funding and a limited range of permanent housing options tailored to the specific needs of wāhine (Groot and Sarich, 2024:63).

Working with lived experience experts: ethical storytelling

People's experiences should be treated as expertise, not as fundraising or public relations material. These protocols are designed to help build trust and honour personal agency.

Source and credit: adapted from the Coalition to End Women's Homelessness ethical media engagement resources.

Seven principles of ethical storytelling

- **Purpose - who benefits?** Stories must serve both the community and the cause. Does this story uplift as much as it inspires?
- **Permission - informed consent.** No consent, no story. Has the person fully understood why the story is being told and how it will be used?
- **Participation - subject review.** People deserve to see and shape how their story is told. Have they reviewed and approved the narrative?
- **Positivity - asset-framed language.** Does the language show the person's agency, leadership and aspirations, not just their hardship?
- **Protection - avoid retraumatisation.** Could this detail retraumatise the person or the audience?
- **Presence - community access.** Will the person and their community see the final content?
- **Promise - follow up.** Storytelling is a commitment. Is there a clear plan to follow up and share outcomes, even months or years later?

Before someone shares their story: what they need to know

Before any news article, television story, social media post or video, make sure the person has time to consider the opportunity and understands they can change their mind.

Cover:

- **Anonymity options.** They can use their real name, an alias, or remain anonymous - including in photos and video (e.g. filmed from behind, hands only, blurred).
- **Consent is time-limited.** They can give or withdraw consent up until publication. Once published - especially broadcast or online — removal usually can't be guaranteed, though outlets will often consider it.

- **Privacy and safety risks.** Using a real name may make it identifiable to family, landlords, or employers, now or in future. Talk through this explicitly - don't assume it's obvious.
- **Support during the interview.** At a time and place that suits them, with their kaimahi present if they wish. They don't have to answer every question, and can pause or stop at any time.
- **A plan for the attention.** Who they can talk to if the response feels like too much - agreed before the story goes out, not after.

Aftercare: staying connected after a story is told

Support does not end at publication. Build follow-up into the process from the start.

1. **Immediately after publication -** share a copy of the story and any photos; share engagement feedback supportively, not comparatively; acknowledge their contribution publicly if they consent.
2. **Short-term (1–3 months) -** check in on how they feel about the story being out publicly, and whether they'd like any extra support.
3. **Medium-term (6–12 months) -** check in again; ask about any ongoing impacts, positive or negative; offer opportunities to re-engage if they choose.
4. **Long-term (2 years)-** reconnect, thank them again, and ask how they feel about it now.

> The goal: people who share their story feel valued, safe and supported — not just at publication, but well beyond it.

Rights and permissions for images, video and content

- **Not-for-profit status doesn't remove copyright.** Check licensing on every image, video and piece of music - don't assume anything found online is free to use.
- **"Non-commercial" licences can still be restrictive for organisational use**. Prefer content you created yourself, Creative Commons material, paid NZ stock libraries, or content with written permission.
- **Seek consent for identifiable peopl**e in photos even if the photo was originally taken with their knowledge - people may not have expected later use in campaigns, fundraising or long-term public communications.
- **Take particular care with images involving children or young people**, sensitive topics (homelessness, housing insecurity, health, justice involvement).
- **Ensure cultural considerations around imagery are always applied.**

- **If consent can't reasonably be obtained, consider: is the image necessary?** Are individuals identifiable? What are the dignity, privacy, cultural or reputational implications? Would the people in the image reasonably be comfortable with this use?
- **A written consent form** (audiovisual and photography use, or talent release) should accompany any planned, organisation-led filming or photography.