

Evicted and dying of cancer, Tammie spent her final months desperately house-hunting in Brisbane



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A month before she died of cancer, Tammie Thrower was evicted and thrust into homelessness.

The mother of three had battled stage-four bowel cancer since 2023, undergoing round after round of chemotherapy. But in January of this year it spread to her brain.

Six months later she was kicked out of her home in Manly in Brisbane's south. She spent her last months house-hunting in vain.

Tammie's 77-year-old mother, Coral Clarke, slept on the two-seat couch of her one-bedroom retirement home apartment to give her daughter a bed.

Even while dying, one of Tammie's main worries was finding somewhere to live.



Photograph: David Kelly/The Guardian

Coral says she always managed to make sure Tammie's rent got paid no matter what.

"Those last couple of weeks in [palliative care at] St Vincent's, every so often she'd say to me, you know, 'I wonder if this or that would give me a better chance at finding a house,'" Coral said.

Tammie died on 23 August.

Though shocking, her story is common. Homeless outreach service, Micah Projects, has records of 21 people who died of diagnosed terminal illnesses while homeless in 2025 in Brisbane alone. The youngest was 27 and oldest 83. Several of them spent their last days sleeping rough before being taken to hospital to die.

That number does not include homeless people who died suddenly. Three homeless people died on the streets of Brisbane in a single week in October, two of them at the doors of a homeless drop-in service.

"I'm suffering from as much rage as I am grief, because for so long I had managed to keep her in her own home," Coral said.

I'm on a pension, so I'm not particularly financially flush. But I always managed to make sure her rent got paid no matter what and that she had everything she needed to be as happy as she could be. And I wasn't able to give her that at the end."

There are 53,874 people on Queensland's social housing waiting list, a record high. At 0.7%, the city's rental vacancy rate is at a near-record low, which means people facing eviction have fewer options, forcing thousands into homelessness.

The fruitless search

Her mother remembers Tammie as both practical and compassionate. A dental nurse and swimming instructor for kids with special needs, who even on chemotherapy days put others before herself and never complained about the intense pain.

Chemotherapy took her teeth, her hair, much of her hearing and her strength.

In January she was involved in a serious car accident, flipping the vehicle with her mother in the passenger's seat. Coral's heart stopped twice and Tammie broke multiple bones. While she was in hospital the doctors detected that her cancer had spread.

In June, her lease ran out. Despite pleading for a reprieve, the landlord gave Tammie a no-fault eviction notice in order to do repairs, though they were able to convince her to allow Tammie to stay an extra month.

Tammie and her carer searched for months, inspecting dozens of homes. Due to the housing shortage, she was always losing out to someone making a better offer, Coral said.



Photograph: David Kelly/The Guardian

Coral says her daughter Tammie was constantly stressed by the search for housing during her final months.

“You keep thinking, maybe tomorrow, maybe tomorrow, you know, maybe the next place. I was prepared to go on the lease with her, or we were prepared to pay rent in advance, anything that would make it happen,” she said.

She stopped telling real estate agents she was dying of cancer, because she thought that might be the reason she was turned away. It didn’t help.

“I understand. If I was a real estate agent and I was managing your property, I would infinitely prefer a two-income tenant to someone who’s on a disability pension. That’s the reality of it,” Coral said.

“And people don’t want someone dying on them, there’s that too.”

Coral said one of her daughter’s last hopes was to survive long enough to see her first grandchild born, even getting a whooping cough vaccination in palliative care. She didn’t; the baby was born in September. Coral said the stress of homelessness accelerated Tammie’s death.

“She didn’t have peace of mind, she was constantly stressed,” Coral said.

‘Homelessness is a failure of multiple systems’

According to the [Australian Institute of Health and Welfare](#) homeless people die an average of 22 to 33 years younger, largely due to preventable causes. About 1,500 homeless people [die prematurely each year](#), according to the institute.

Homelessness is increasing in Brisbane. Micah revealed this week that the number of homeless children living in motels had increased 48% in the last year, half of them under four and the number of families had near tripled to 1,230. [Hundreds of people sleep in Brisbane parks](#) every night, risking eviction by city councils.

The CEO of Micah Projects, Karyn Walsh, said the service is helping more than two dozen homeless people with various life-threatening health problems, including cancer and would help more if they had more funding.

Unlike other capital cities, Brisbane has no available respite care dedicated to homeless people, Walsh said. She wants both better funding and coordination of existing services.

“Often we get people into housing and they die soon after, we think that’s better than dying on the streets, but people need in-home support when they’re in housing,” she said.

Walsh said there also needed to be more support from commonwealth and state governments to reduce homelessness in the first place, [particularly “supportive accommodation](#), which is supervised and permanent.

“A lot of people die in hospital, because they get there at the very end, but the process before that, they’ve been left without support, without health care, it’s been really isolating and painful for many people,” she said.

“Homelessness is a failure of multiple systems, and we need to connect up those systems so that we can get better outcomes, and connecting social services, healthcare and housing is a no-brainer.”

The Queensland housing minister, Sam O’Connor, said “too many Queenslanders with complex health needs are falling through the cracks because the systems around them haven’t been properly connected”. He said the government is “working to change that” with more funding and a “more coordinated homelessness support system which connects housing, health and social services”.

One of Coral’s last memories of her daughter is a happy one – she asked for a Bertie Beetle showbag from [the Ekka](#) – the Royal Queensland Show. With the assistance of a local Facebook group, and a stranger named Fiona who refused reimbursement, she managed to get two delivered to the hospital. Seeing them, Tammie asked for one of the chocolates.

“Because her hearing was so bad she said ‘sent me a birthy beeful,’” Coral said.

“And she started laughing. We both laughed. And that was sort of, that was real.”

Coral’s daughter died holding her hand a week later. She was 50.

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