THE ROLE OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT IN ADDRESSING HOMELESSNESS

Literature Review

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The Role of Local Government in Addressing Homelessness

Literature Review

The University of Adelaide

Centre for Housing, Urban and Regional Planning

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### Acronyms

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Acronym</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>BBU</td>
<td>UK Break and Breakfast Unit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CAP</td>
<td>Crisis Accommodation Program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>COAG</td>
<td>Council of Australian Governments</td>
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<tr>
<td>CSHA</td>
<td>Commonwealth State Housing Agreement</td>
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<tr>
<td>DETR</td>
<td>UK Department of Environment, Transport and the Regions</td>
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<tr>
<td>EU</td>
<td>European Union</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HHS</td>
<td>US Department of Health and Human Services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HOME</td>
<td>Household Organisational Management Expenses Advice Program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HUD</td>
<td>US Department of Housing and Urban Development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ICH</td>
<td>US Interagency Council on the Homeless</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FEANTSA</td>
<td>European Federation of National Organisations Working with the Homeless</td>
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<tr>
<td>NAP</td>
<td>National Action Plan</td>
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<tr>
<td>NAEH</td>
<td>National Alliance to End Homelessness</td>
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<tr>
<td>NAHA</td>
<td>National Affordable Housing Agreement</td>
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<tr>
<td>NAYSS</td>
<td>Newly Arrived Youth Support Services</td>
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<tr>
<td>ODPM</td>
<td>UK Office of the Deputy Prime Minister</td>
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<tr>
<td>RSI</td>
<td>UK Rough Sleepers Initiative</td>
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<tr>
<td>RSU</td>
<td>UK Rough Sleepers Unit</td>
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<tr>
<td>SAAP</td>
<td>Supported Accommodation Assistance Program</td>
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<tr>
<td>SEU</td>
<td>Social Exclusion Unit</td>
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<tr>
<td>VA</td>
<td>US Department of Veterans Affairs</td>
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Executive Summary

Local government is commonly considered to be the tier of government closest to the people of Australia. It provides a range of frontline services that underpin the management of our cities, contributes to the wellbeing of our communities through the provision of infrastructure and services and undertakes important regulatory roles.

To date, local governments in Australia have not played a major part in addressing homelessness. However, the recent decisions of the Council of Australian Government (COAG) have committed all tiers of government – including local government – to reducing homelessness. It is important therefore to understand what actions local governments currently undertake in addressing homelessness, how other programs and policies implemented by local government may affect the homeless population and how ‘good practice’ in the area of local government and homelessness could be conceived.

This report reviews the literature on homelessness and local government as it relates to both Australia and international experience. It finds that relatively little has been written on this topic in Australia and this almost certainly reflects the relatively minor role local government plays in mitigating the impacts of homelessness. It does, however, conclude that local governments have important impacts on homelessness and that there is scope for them to more actively engage with the homeless agenda. While accepting the considerable diversity between local governments, some of the critical ways that local governments interact with homelessness include:

- Some local governments take a direct role in addressing homelessness and assisting them with accommodation, services and support;
- Local governments may play an important part in the regulation of boarding houses and other accommodation used by homeless persons;
- The nature of Australian Government, State and local government relations to date has not highlighted a role for local government in dealing with homelessness;
- Local governments may lack the resources to make a significant impact on the direct provision of homelessness services but they can assist in other ways – through information provision, via pro-active planning policies and through engagement with the community sector;
- The planning policies of local governments can assist or impede the provision of affordable housing that constitutes exit points from homelessness; and,
- Local governments may enact by-laws that exclude homeless persons from their territory.
This review also considers the role of local governments in addressing homelessness in a number of other developed nations, including the US, Canada and European nations. It concludes that differences in the nature of government between these places and Australia make it difficult to draw out direct policy implications but they are suggestive of potential roles for Australian local governments into the future.

Overall, the evidence from the literature suggests that the role of local government in addressing homelessness is growing, but that local governments should look to become the facilitators of the solutions to homelessness, not the providers.

There is also evidence to suggest that local governments need to review how their policies and management practices may negatively impede the wellbeing of the homeless and those at risk of homelessness. One positive action is to adopt a Charter of Rights for the Homeless, or a protocol for dealing with the homeless.

This literature review will be followed by a Final Report that includes the outcomes of empirical and policy work across Australia.
Section One: Introduction

Introduction

This paper is the first output of a project entitled, *The Role of Local Government in Addressing Homelessness* that examines how local governments currently contribute to the task of addressing the challenge of homelessness in Australia. It also considers what roles local government could potentially take in the future and whether it is possible to identify ‘best practice’ or ‘good practice’ with respect to local government and homelessness. This research has an overt policy focus and is funded by the Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FaHCSIA) as part of its work in meeting the Australian Government’s targets with respect to homelessness, as set out in the White Paper on Homelessness, *The Road Home*. The project has been funded as part of FaHCSIA’s National Homelessness Research Partnership.

The issue of local government and homelessness is important because local government is the tier of government closest to the Australian people: it is the level of government that most people will have direct experience of, it provides an important array of services to individual households and communities, and it is an important source of local leadership. *The Road Home* notes that local governments are already playing a significant role in addressing homelessness, especially in regional Australia. However, little is known about these activities or the way in which the sector’s involvement could productively develop over time.

This project seeks to address this gap. The project examines the role local governments currently play in addressing homelessness and considers the part they could play in the future. The research also investigates how local government actions can, and should, dovetail with those actions being undertaken by other tiers of government. This research should ensure more effective public sector action, as well as more effective programs at the local level.

The aims of this research project are to

1. Develop an understanding of good practice in the way local government can address homelessness. This project aim will examine good practice in terms of current national and international actions and programs;

2. Document examples of good practice in homelessness amongst local government in inner suburban, outer suburban and regional localities;

3. Provide advice to central governments on how they can better empower local governments to address homelessness within their jurisdictions;

4. Identify barriers to local governments more effectively dealing with homelessness; and,

5. Raise awareness of homelessness and effective strategies for dealing with it within the local government sector.
The research undertaken as part of this project has been informed by two key questions.

First, what role does local government currently play in addressing homelessness and in achieving the targets established in The Road Home? and,

Second, drawing upon best practice nationally and internationally, what role, or roles, could local governments play in reducing homelessness and its impacts in Australia?

These two questions underpin every aspect of the research and drive the structure and intent of this first report. The research undertaken under this project has been structured into a six stage methodology that produces a number of outputs, including a Handbook of Best Practice for local governments and a Final Report.

1. This literature review is the first stage of the methodology and it will be used to inform the project overall and, more specifically, the development of a web-based national survey of local governments;

2. A web-based national survey of local government officers will be used to capture a snapshot of how local government deals with the issue of homelessness currently;

3. Nine case studies of local governments in inner city, suburban and rural areas will provide an in-depth understanding of the nature of homelessness challenges in these localities and the role of local governments in responding to homelessness;

4. Six workshops with local councils in different States/Territories will present the interim findings and investigate the strategies, opportunities and constraints that are critical to more effective actions by government in this sphere;

5. A final workshop with policymakers in Canberra will be used to discuss the interim results and tease out the implications of the research for governments;

6. A Final Report will be prepared and the Handbook for local governments readied.

Structure of this Report

The remainder of this report has been divided into a number of sections. The substantive discussion begins in Section Two with an examination of local government and homelessness in Australia. It considers the constitutional and fiscal basis of local government in Australia and its role in providing services to the population. Section Three then examines the evidence on local government and homelessness in Australia. It considers the conclusions drawn by earlier research into this topic and the implications for this project. Section Four then considers the international literature and reviews major homelessness initiatives in a number of nations that include local government
as part of the solution to this social and economic problem. Section Five then reviews current arrangements in each of Australia’s States and Territories. Section Six then draws out the conclusions and foreshadows the next stages in this research project.
Section Two:
Local Government and Homelessness In Australia

Any discussion of the role of local government in addressing homelessness in Australia must commence with an examination of distribution of powers and responsibilities across the three tiers of government. Australia has a three-tier system of government that includes one Commonwealth, six States, two Territories and five hundred and sixty five local councils (Dunn, 2001 p. 2480). Commonwealth powers and responsibilities are outlined in the Australian Constitution with all other powers and responsibilities vested in State Governments. The Commonwealth Government uses income tax and other revenue to fund its housing priorities, including directly funding home ownership schemes and the provision of indirect assistance through non-taxation housing benefits (Purdon, 1992 p. 35). Assisting home ownership has remained the Commonwealth’s primary role in Australian housing policy and has traditionally consisted of tax foregone rather than direct payment of money or services provision (Paris, 1993 p. 68). Commonly the Australian Government sets national policy objectives that shape the framework for action and policies by all tiers of government, largely through its funding powers. Importantly, local government occupies the other end of this spectrum, with Brown (2005) noting that local government in Australia is amongst the least powerful local governments within federated nations.

Despite the relative fiscal strength of Australia’s Commonwealth Government, Purdon and Burke (1991, p. xiii) suggest that the planning, production, consumption and management of housing cuts across all spheres of government. Homelessness, which includes issues of service provision, housing and policy integration, is similarly affected by the actions and regulations of all three tiers of government in Australia. In large measure, however, the potential impact of local governments on the homeless population has largely escaped attention (though see Tsorbaris, 2004) in both the academic and policy literature. In part this reflects the history of homeless policy and programs in Australia, but it is also a function of the origins of local governments themselves.

Local governments first developed in the 1850s to allow local communities to levy rates and build local roads in rural areas (Purdon, 1992 p. 41). Local municipalities were established ‘by State parliaments to exercise delegated powers and, as such, it is part of the State’s administrative apparatus (whose) powers can be readily changed and the manner in which it exercises them is subject to overall control by the State (Advisory Council for Inter Governmental Relations, 1984 p. 23). Over time, urban local governments were formed to address rising public health and housing concerns.

Local governments are commonly viewed as a ‘creature of the states ‘ because their powers and responsibilities are determined by the relevant State Government. Gurran (2003, p. 393) describes the current situation
Unrecognised in the Australian constitution, local governments are regulated by State legislation, which defines their policy, administrative, procedural and financial responsibilities. They are also subject to a variety of State laws (and agencies) in the exercise of their particular urban development and environmental functions.

Although local councils are an elected tier of government, representative of and directly accountable to its local community, local government is not a sovereign sphere of government and consequently, can only perform those functions established under State legislation and especially; the Local Government Act (Purdon, 1992 p. 41). Nevertheless, town planning responsibilities and zoning policies mean that local governments have a pivotal influence on the housing sector and many councils restrict certain types of housing development such as walk – up flats (Paris, 1993 p.67). Local governments also hold ancillary powers that can be important for the homeless population with respect to their access to and use of public open space, the regulation of boarding houses and the co-ordination of services. It is important to note that there are considerable differences amongst local councils with respect to their capacity and engagement with issues of housing and homelessness.

The ACELG (2011, p. 2) notes that

Australian local government accounts for around $24 billion in public expenditure and over $10 billion in taxation, employs in excess of 170,000 people across seven different states and territory systems and provides an essential range of local services vital to national wellbeing.

Local governments are therefore a significant part of Australian society and the economy but they are also very diverse. Local governments vary across Australia with respect to their powers and functions, their level of financial resources, population size, geographic area, location and human resources. In consequence, any consideration of the participation of local government in measures designed to address homelessness or influence the housing market must take this diversity into account. Moreover, the range of actions potentially available to local governments that seek to influence the incidence and experience of homelessness is substantial and this also prohibits generalisations about the role of local government in homelessness. The Australian Local Government Association (ALGA, 2003 p.4) notes that

The balance of explicit housing activities that local councils embark on depend on a range of factors, including the statutory responsibilities given to them by State/Territory Governments, their own initiatives to meet particular needs in their local communities, in response to requests or suggestions from their local communities or the private sector, as well as the policies and programs of other spheres of government.
The availability of funding is widely recognised as a key factor in determining whether local governments become involved in housing and homelessness issues, as well as the policies and directives of the other tiers of government. In South Australia, for example, the government has required each local government to plan for forecast population growth and make provision for affordable housing as part of that planning process.

The Relationship Between the Three Tiers of Government

Intergovernmental relations in Australia have a profound impact on the delivery of housing programs and the implementation of social welfare measures. Under the Australian Constitution responsibility for most aspects of the management of urban and regional society is vested in the State Governments. Under the Constitution the Australian Government has specific responsibilities for income support. The Australian Government has the strongest fiscal base of any tier of government and makes payments to State Governments to support the delivery of services. Many of these services are relevant to the discussion of homelessness, as they include hospital and mental health funding, payments to support public housing and specific homelessness programs. The Australian Government also provides – indirectly – grant funding to local governments to support them in their activities. Some of this grant aid is tied to specific needs – such as road funding – but no specific funding is provided to local governments for homelessness or associated issues.

The development and implementation of statutory planning is one area where local governments, working at the direction of state governments, play a significant role. Also known as planning schemes, local environmental plans, development plans or development controls, statutory planning aims to ensure land use and development meets present and future community needs, reflects minimum community standards, provides a conflict resolution process and ensures there is a reasonable level of diversity in the housing market (ALGA, 2003 p.4). State and Territory Governments have responsibility for establishing the statutory framework for land use planning and development; including statutes that regulate the ownership of land, the sale and purchase of land and housing, land use, and planning and development. What is more, States provides the legislative and administrative framework which authorises local government to perform certain planning functions.

Financial relations in Australia are characterised by a circumstance commonly described as vertical fiscal imbalance. That is, the three tiers of government do not have equal financial resources with the Australian Government having the greatest tax base and local governments the least. The Commonwealth’s taxation base far exceeds its expenditures, whereas the States do not necessarily have robust income streams independent of the Commonwealth to meet their responsibilities and aspirations (Sansom, 2010 p.180). While the States are responsible for major infrastructure and services including health care, education, transportation, environmental management, their
revenue base is weak and restricted to relatively minor taxes, such as payroll tax, stamp duty, land tax, mineral royalties, taxes on gambling, licence fees and user charges (Sansom, 2010 p. 180). More than half of the outlays of State Governments are funded by Federal grants and tax transfers (Sansom, 2010 p.181).

By contrast, local governments are able to meet 80 per cent of their expenditure from their own tax bases because their outlays are comparatively limited (Sansom, 2010 p. 181). Local governments raise three per cent of the total taxation burden in Australia and derive this income from property rates, user charges and licence fees. Smaller local governments, typically including rural councils, often find it more difficult to raise sufficient revenue to meet their obligations and rely upon Federal and State grants. Federal assistance to the states and local government includes four main elements (Sansom, 2010 p.181)

1. Revenue from the goods and services tax (GST), distributed to the States;
2. Additional general – purpose payments to the states made under the 1995 National Competition Policy (NCP) agreement;
3. Financial assistance grants (FAGs) to local government, allocated to the states per capita and then distributed to individual councils by state local government grants commission applying ‘horizontal fiscal equalisation’ – but with all councils receiving a minimum per capita payment; and,
4. Specific purpose payments (SPPs) to the states and local government for particular functions such as education, health care, transportation, and environment.

The financial position of local government is discussed in greater detail below.

The National Homelessness Agenda

The Rudd Labor Government came to power at the 2007 Australian Federal election with a number of social and economic objectives. The Government has implemented its social inclusion agenda to support its vision of a socially inclusive society in which all Australians feel valued and have the opportunity to participate fully in community life (Australian Government, 2009 b p.21). Six priority areas have been identified as a focus for the Government’s work to support groups in the community who may face challenges to social inclusion. Major reforms are currently being implemented or piloted to address these. These social inclusion priorities are (Australian Government, 2009 d p.12)

1. Targeting jobless families with children to increase work opportunities, improve parenting and build capacity;
2. Improving the life chances of children at greatest risk of long term disadvantage;
3. Reducing the incidence of homelessness;
4. Improving outcomes for people living with disability or mental illness and their carers;
5. Closing the gap for indigenous Australians; and,
6. Breaking the cycle of entrenched and multiple disadvantage in particular neighbourhoods and communities.

These social inclusion policies are based on a number of important principles, including (Australian Government, 2009 p.12)

1. Building on individual and community strengths,
2. Building partnerships with stakeholders,
3. Developing services tailored to the needs to communities,
4. Early intervention and prevention,
5. Joined up government services,
6. The greater use of evidence to inform innovative policy making,
7. Using a locational approach to tackle entrenched poverty; and
8. Planning to build future resilience in disadvantaged families and communities.

Federal social inclusion policy also strives to operate in three distinct ways (Australian Government, 2009 d p. 12)

1. Improving the quality of essential government services particularly in areas like education and training, employment, health and housing;
2. Ensuring those services work more effectively in the most disadvantaged communities, and
3. Developing partnerships between governments, business, not-for-profit organisations and the community and engaging disadvantaged communities to help find solutions to address their particular needs.

Homelessness is a major objective of the Labor Government’s social inclusion agenda. Despite over a decade of relative national prosperity, the most recent estimate of the number of homeless people at the 2006 Census suggested that there were 105,000 homeless people in Australia (Australian Government, 2009b p. 1). The UN Special Reporteur on Adequate Housing, Mr Miloon Kothari concluded that (Australian Government, 2009b p.1)

Australia has failed to implement its international legal obligation to progressively realise the human right to adequate housing to the maximum of its available resources, particularly in view of its possibilities as a rich and prosperous country.

after his mission to Australia to examine progress towards the realisation of adequate housing in Australia and to review Australian policies to protect human rights relating to adequate housing. The Rudd and Gillard Governments have also recognised the impact of homelessness upon effective services provision and the necessity of overhauling the Supported
Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP), the Crisis Accommodation Program (CAP) and homelessness legislation.

**The Supported Accommodation Assistance Program and the Crisis Accommodation Program**

Established in 1985, the SAAP was Australia’s primary policy and program response to homelessness (Australian Government, 2009b p.13). The SAAP was designed as a Commonwealth and State/Territory program to provide a national approach to funding and administering service delivery for people who were homeless or at risk of homelessness. Throughout the program, efforts were made to provide comprehensive assistance that catered for people’s immediate short term housing needs and long term housing options. However, it’s widely recognised that the SAAP failed to offer flexible services, effective case management and successful strategies to assist homeless people transition into independent living (Australian Government, 2009b p.13). These shortcomings are documented in *Which Way Home?* The Australian Government Green Paper on Homelessness (2008a). The Government’s first consultation paper recognised that (2008a p.3)

> Despite the goals of SAAP and attempts over the last fifteen years to focus the program more on early intervention and prevention, it remains largely a crisis response to homelessness. Evaluations of the SAAP have pointed to the program’s inability to deliver sustainable long term outcomes for clients in critical areas of housing, employment, training and education.

The Crisis Accommodation Program (CAP) was also introduced in 1985 under the Commonwealth State Housing Agreement (CSHA). The CAP was primarily responsible for providing capital grants to supplement funding for salaries and operating costs for SAAP services (Australian Government 2009b p.15). According to *Housing the Homeless*, the Report on the Inquiry into Homelessness Legislation (2009 b) p.15

> CAP funding was mainly used by SAAP funded services to construct or purchase buildings for use as crisis accommodation or medium term housing for people in transition from crisis accommodation to longer term, more stable housing.

In addition to critiquing the SAAP and CAP, *The Road Home* examined the Government’s targeted early intervention programs; such as the Reconnect Program, the Newly Arrived Youth Support Services (NAYSS) and the Household Organisational Management Expenses (HOME) Advice Program (Australian Government, 2009b p.13).

**The Road Home**

deficiencies in homelessness policies and program and established a new response to homelessness in Australia. *The Road Home* recognised the complex drivers and of homelessness; such as the shortage of affordable housing, long term unemployment, mental health issues, substance abuse, family or relationship breakdown and family violence. In consequence it set out to target the needs of particular groups within the homeless population (Australian Government, 2008b p.vii).

*The Road Home* aims to halve overall homelessness and offer supported accommodation to all rough sleepers who seek it by 2020 and outlines a three– stage response to homelessness (2008b p.ix)

1. **Turning off the tap:** services will intervene early to prevent homelessness. Homelessness can be prevented by tackling the structural drivers of homelessness such as entrenched disadvantage, unemployment and the shortage of affordable housing; and targeting groups who are at risk of homelessness, such as older people in housing stress, women and children leaving violence, Indigenous Australians and people leaving state care. Initiatives under this strategy include

   a. Increasing support for people in public and private rental housing to maintain their tenancies;

   b. Assisting up to 9,000 additional young people between 12 -18 years of age to remain connected to their families;

   c. Assisting up to 2, 250 additional families at risk of homelessness stay housed;

   d. ‘No exists into homelessness’ from statutory, custodial care, health / mental health and drug and alcohol services;

   e. Helping women and children who experience domestic violence to stay safely in the family home;

   f. Delivering community based mental health services under the Personal Helpers and Mentors Program (PHAMs) to 1000 difficult to reach Australians, including people who are homeless; and,

   g. Establishing a network of 90 Community Engagement Officers to improve access to Centrelink services for people at risk of homelessness.

2. **Improving and expanding services:** services are to be more connected and responsive to achieve sustainable housing, improve economic and social participation and end homelessness for the clients of mainstream services. Moreover, mainstream services must identify people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness so they can receive all the support they need. Specialist homelessness services are needed to provide a crisis response to people who have no
accommodation, to assist with their transition to stable housing and to provide a source of expertise on homelessness. Legislation was posited in the White Paper that would underpin the national response to homelessness, setting standards to deliver the best quality services possible. Initiatives under this strategy were to include

a. A workforce development strategy for specialist homelessness services;
b. Testing new funding models that reflect the complexity of clients’ needs;
c. Improving information technology systems for services; and,
d. Developing quality standards for specialist homelessness services.

3. Breaking the cycle: people who become homeless were to move quickly through the crisis system to stable housing with the support they need so that homelessness does not recur. An increase in the supply of affordable housing and specialist housing models that link accommodation and support was seen to be critical in reducing homelessness. People who are chronically homeless were to be provided with wrap-around support that addressed all their needs. Initiatives under this strategy included

a. Building up to 2,700 additional public and community housing dwellings for low income households,
b. Allocating aged care places and capital funds for at least one new specialist facility for older people who are homeless in each of the next four years,
c. Building up to 4,200 new houses and upgrading up to 4,800 existing houses in remote Indigenous communities
d. Providing assertive outreach programs for rough sleepers, and
e. Improving services for older people experiencing homelessness.

The National Affordable Housing Agreement

In order to achieve these goals and rollout the three stages of policy reforms detailed above, The Road Home was accompanied by the new National Affordable Housing Agreement (NAHA). The objective of the NAHA is ‘that all Australians have access to affordable, safe and sustainable housing that contributes to social and economic participation ‘ (Australian Government, 2009e p.3) and commits parties to achieve the following outcomes (2009e p.4)

1. People who are homeless or at risk of homelessness achieve sustainable housing and social inclusion;
2. People are able to rent housing that meets their needs;
3. People can purchase affordable housing;
4. People have access to housing through an efficient and responsive housing market;
5. Indigenous people have the same housing opportunities (in relation to homelessness services, housing rental, housing purchase, and access to housing through an efficient and responsive housing market) as other Australians; and
6. Indigenous people have improved housing amenity and reduce overcrowding, particularly in remote areas and discrete communities.

$6.1 billion was allocated to achieving the goals articulated in the NAHA. In addition, COAG committed $1.2 billion to addressing homelessness and $5.6 billion was dedicated to social housing via the National Building – Economic Stimulus Plan. The funding associated with these policy reforms are outlined by McLoughlin and Wilson (forthcoming p.16) in Table 2 below.
Table 2. The National Affordable Housing Agreement: Goals and Initiatives

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Homelessness Reforms Funding under the National Affordable Housing Agreement (NAHA)</th>
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<tr>
<td>The NAHA is a funding agreement between Commonwealth, State and Territory governments intended to improve housing affordability, housing assistance for private renters, supported accommodation for people experiencing homelessness, and to address housing shortages and living conditions issues for remote Indigenous communities. Under the NAHA, a total of $1.2 billion in Commonwealth/State/Territory government funding is being provided over five years to specifically address homelessness, beginning 2008-09. This raft of funding is comprised of two National Partnership Agreements (NPA) established under the NAHA.</td>
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<td>The National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness: an $800 million combined Commonwealth and State/Territory government commitment over five years, to meet the headline goals of <em>The Road Home</em>, and the NAHA outcome to ‘achieve sustainable housing and social inclusion’ (FaHCSIA 2008) for people experiencing or at risk of homelessness. Under the National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness, the states and territories will deliver the following four core outputs:</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Implementation of <em>A Place to Call Home</em> initiative to build 600 homes for people and families experiencing or at risk of homelessness;</td>
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<td>• <em>Street to home</em> initiatives for chronic homeless people (rough sleepers);</td>
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<td>• <em>Tenancy support for private and public tenants</em>, including advocacy, financial counselling and referral services to help people sustain their tenancies; and</td>
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<tr>
<td>• <em>Assistance for people leaving child protection, jail and health facilities</em>, to access and maintain stable, affordable housing.</td>
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<td>The National Partnership Agreement on Social Housing: a $400 million Commonwealth commitment over five years – to boost the supply of public and community housing, and supported accommodation for people experiencing homelessness. Includes provisions for approximately 1600 to 2100 new dwellings to be built from 2009-10.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Funding through the National Partnership Agreement on Remote Indigenous Housing</td>
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<td>A total of $1.94 billion will be provided over ten years under this NPA, with approximately 4,200 new houses to be built in remote Indigenous communities, and 4,800 existing public housing properties to be upgraded, with repairs having commenced in 2008-09.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Funding through the Nation Building Economic Stimulus Plan (NBESP)</td>
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<td>Through the $5.6 billion committed to Stimulus housing under the NBESP from February 2009, up to 21 000 new public housing dwellings have been earmarked for construction and repairs and upgrades slated for a further 70,000 dwellings. Fifty per cent of this Stimulus housing stock has been allocated to people experiencing, or at risk of, homelessness.</td>
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<td>National Rental Affordability Scheme (NRAS) funding</td>
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<td>A scheme that provides a National Rental Incentive to approved business and community organisations who build and rent dwellings to eligible low and moderate income households at a rate that is at least 20 per cent below the prevailing market rate (Australian Government 2010).</td>
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Policy actions under the NAHA to reform both the housing and homelessness sectors include (Australian Government, 2009e p. 7)

1. Improving integration between the homelessness service system and mainstream services;
2. Taking joint action and a nationally coordinated approach on homelessness;
3. Creating mixed communities that promote social and economic opportunities by reducing concentrations of disadvantage that exist in some social housing estates;
4. Improving access by Indigenous people to mainstream housing, including home ownership;
5. Contributing to the achievement of ‘Closing the Gap’ housing targets;
6. Establishing a nationally consistent approach to social housing to create a more transparent, accountable and efficient sector, including common costing and financial management reporting, practices and methodologies;
7. Providing compulsory rent reductions and improved information exchange between the Commonwealth and the States/Territories to improve the operational efficiency of public housing and to reduce evictions from public housing;
8. Creating incentives for public housing tenants to take up employment opportunities within the broader employment framework;
9. Enhancing the capacity and growth of the not-for-profit housing sector, supported by a nationally consistent provider and regulatory framework;
10. Planning reform for greater efficiency in the supply of housing;
11. Improving supply of land for new dwellings identified through audits of Commonwealth, State / Territory surplus land; and,
12. Increasing capacity to match new housing supply with underlying demand, including as a result of work undertaken by the National Housing Supply Council.

The roles and responsibilities for achieving these goals are specified for each tier of government. Paragraph 11 of the NAHA states that the Commonwealth is responsible for (Australian Government 2009e p.5)

1. Leadership for national housing and homelessness policy including Indigenous housing policy;
2. Income support and rental subsidies;
3. Immigration and settlement policy and programs;
4. Financial sector regulations and Commonwealth taxation settings that influence housing affordability;
5. Competition policy relating to housing and buildings;
6. Provision of national infrastructure;
7. Housing – related data collected by the Australian Bureau of Statistics and Centrelink; and,

8. Coordination of homelessness data collection from States and Territories.

States and Territory responsibilities are outlined in Paragraph 12 (Australian Government, 2009e p. 5)

1. Leadership for housing and homelessness policy, including Indigenous housing policy;
2. Housing and homelessness services, administration and delivery;
3. Housing for Indigenous people, including in remote areas;
4. Land use, supply and urban planning and development policy;
5. Housing – related financial support and services for renters and home buyers;
6. Housing – related State and Territory taxes and charges that influence housing affordability;
7. Infrastructure policy and services associated with residential development;
8. Tenancy and not – for – profit housing sector legislation and regulation; and,
9. Collection and publication of data from housing providers and agencies that provide services to people who are homeless.

While local governments operate under State regulation, paragraph 13 of the NAHA states that local governments are responsible for (Australian Government, 2009e p.5)

1. Building approval processes;
2. Local urban planning and development approval processes; and
3. Rates and charges that influence housing affordability.

Importantly, the role envisaged for local government in addressing homelessness under NAHA is tightly delimited and reflects the conventional role of local government in the management of their territory and in the direction of housing markets.

These responsibilities and policy steps are accompanied by one set of performance indicators for all tiers of government. Paragraph 15 in the Agreement states that, ‘all parties are accountable to the community for their performance, against the agreed objectives and outcomes, and in respect of their allocated roles and responsibilities ‘ 2009e p.6). A set of performance indicators are provided to assist communities assess the performance of governments towards achieving these outcomes. These indicators include the

1. Proportion of low income households in rental stress;
2. Proportion of homes sold or built that are affordable by low and moderate income households;
3. Proportion of Australians who are homeless;
4. Proportion of people experiencing repeat periods of homelessness;
5. Proportion of Australian households owning or purchasing a home;
6. Proportion of Indigenous households living in overcrowded conditions; and,
7. Proportion of Indigenous households living in houses of an acceptable standard.

The Intergovernmental Agreement on Federal Financial Relations requires the COAG Reform Council to report annually against baseline performance data relating to the NAHA indicators outlined above. However, it remains the community’s responsibility to hold each tier of government to account and judge performance against these indicators. The Steering Committee for the Review of Government Service Provision doesn’t assess each tier of government separately against these indicators.

In order to support the NAHA, the National Partnerships Agreements (NPs) on Social Housing, Homelessness and Indigenous Australians Living in Remote Areas were created.

National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness

The National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness aims to assist achieving the goals outlined in the NAHA and more specifically, ‘that people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness achieve sustainable housing and social inclusion’ by contributing to the following outcomes (COAG Reform Council, 2010 p.66)

1. Fewer people will become homeless and fewer of these will sleep rough;
2. Fewer people will become homeless more than once;
3. People at risk of or experiencing homelessness will maintain or improve connections with their families and communities, and maintain or improve their education, training or employment participation; and,
4. People at risk of or experiencing homelessness will be supported by quality services, with improved access to sustainable housing.

The Agreement aims to address the outcomes outline above by focusing upon three key strategies (COAG Reform Council, 2010 p. 66)

1. Prevention and early intervention;
2. Breaking the cycle of homelessness; and
3. Improving and expanding the service response to homelessness.

The Agreement also commits the government to delivering the following core outputs

1. Implementation of the ‘A Place to Call Home’ initiative;
2. ‘Street to Home’ initiatives for chronic homelessness people;
3. Support for private and public tenants to help sustain their tenancies, including through tenancy support, advocacy, case management, financial counselling and referral services; and,

4. Assistance for people who leave child protection services, correctional and health facilities, to access and maintain stable, affordable housing.

Under the Agreement, the Australian and state and territory governments provide $1.1 billion in funding. State/Territory governments are required to submit Implementation Plans that set out new initiatives and additional services which will make a substantial contribution towards achieving interim targets for reducing homelessness. State and Territory governments are also required to provide Annual Performance Reports detailing progress towards the milestones set in their Implementation Plans. The Housing Ministers’ Advisory committee (HMAC) has been working to assist Ministers and Housing Portfolios meet their obligations.

Following the 2009 Housing Ministers’ Conference, a Progress Report to the Council of Australian Governments from Commonwealth, State and Territory Housing Ministers was released. It stated in the Forward that (2009 p.1)

Housing Ministers across Australia, through the Housing Ministers’ Conference, are committed to working together with Planning, Local Government and Community Services to implement fundamental reform to our housing and homelessness systems.

However, with the exception of the limited roles specified under the NAHA, the role of local government in housing reforms, and specifically in meeting the targets specified in the The Road Home, remains elusive.
Section Three: Homelessness and Local Government:
Evidence from the Literature

Definitions and Conceptions of Homelessness
Definitions of homelessness are widely debated and contested. It is important to briefly review the differing conceptions of homelessness because they have important ramifications for quantifying homelessness figures, the allocation of funding, policy direction and the provision of services. Indeed, Minnery and Greenhalgh (2007 p.652) suggests that clearly defining homelessness is a fundamental starting point because

Narrow definitions lead to many people being excluded from the reach of programs that would otherwise support them. Narrow definitions lead to underestimation of the scope of the homelessness population. And narrow definitions exclude the growing number of the new homeless, including families, women and children. Definitions are also the connecting link between the problem of homelessness and agency responsibility.

The definition of homelessness has recently shifted towards understanding homelessness as a career, pathway or trajectory. In particular, McKenzie and Chamberlain (cited in Minnery and Greenhalgh, 2007 p.644) identify three principal pathways into homelessness in Australia

- a housing crisis,
- family or relationship breakdown; and,
- a transition from youth to adult homelessness.

In order to distinguish people who are at risk of homelessness from people who are currently homeless, the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) uses the 'cultural definition' of homelessness.

The ABS suggests that definitions of homelessness and inadequate housing are culturally bound and geographically located. Therefore, definitions of homelessness make sense in a particular community and at a given historical period. The ABS notes that a cultural definition first identifies shared community standards about the minimum housing that people have the right to expect in order to live according to the conventions and expectations of a particular culture. Then, the definition identifies those groups that fall below the minimum community standard.

Based on this cultural conception of homelessness, the ABS further distinguishes between three categories of homelessness (Australian Government, 2009 p. 9)
1. **Primary homelessness**: includes all people without conventional accommodation, such as people living on the streets, sleeping in parks, squatting in derelict buildings, or using cars or railway carriages for temporary shelter.

2. **Secondary homelessness**: includes people who move frequently from one form of temporary accommodation to another. On census night, it includes all people staying in emergency or transitional accommodation provided under the SAAP. Secondary homelessness also includes people residing temporarily with other households because they have no accommodation of their own and people staying in boarding houses on a short-term basis; operationally defined as 12 weeks or less.

3. **Tertiary homelessness**: refers to people who live in boarding houses on a medium to long term basis, operationally defined as 13 weeks or longer. They are homeless because their accommodation is below the minimum community standard of a small self-contained flat.

**Good Practice and Best Practice in Addressing Homelessness**

It is important to critically examine the notion of ‘best’ or ‘good’ practice because understandings of this concept differ and have implications for both policy and practice. Good practice describes the way things ought to be done or identifies another location where things are done in the best possible way (Greenhalgh, 2004 p.133). The process of identifying good practice involves defining what is ‘best’, developing a set of benchmarks or performance indicators and changing current practices to gradually include elements of good practice. Greenhalgh (2004 p.134) proposed criteria for good practice in the homelessness sector. Her criteria are based on FEANTSA’s assessment of best practice in the EU and the concept of innovation. Good practice indicators include

- Using a clear definition of ‘homelessness’; one that can easily be incorporated into legislation and ongoing statistics are available to enable ongoing assessment and monitoring;
- Resting on a solid regulatory basis to ensure the effectiveness of political measures and enable their operation to be monitored;
- Targeting the homeless in order to respond adequately to problems of the homeless;
- Considering homelessness in all its multidimensional aspects and provide solutions for each problem in the lives of the homeless, such as housing, health, work, mental illness, education;
- Recognising the variety of kinds of current homelessness captured by the term the ‘new homeless’. They do not focus on just, for example, those who are sleeping rough or older males;
- Dealing with the problem both before it develops and while it is being dealt with; and,
Implementing strategies for increasing independence through capacity building.

These indicators were designed for use across the homelessness sector and across national boundaries countries but it is important to acknowledge that good practice is very dependent upon both location and timeframe (Greenhalgh, 2004 p.133). Applying a generic policy and practice template to the local context is neither recommended nor deemed good practice.

In the United State, the ‘continuum of care’ model is also associated with good practice because it’s believed to facilitate independence. The model stresses the importance of developing life skills through counselling, education, job training and economic support (Greenhalgh, 2004 p.135). Integrated service provision and ‘wrap around support’ are also key elements of this approach.

Local Government Roles and Responsibilities

Local governments share many features with the other tiers of government in Australia in that they include democratically elected representatives and are administered by professional staff (Dunn, 2001 p.2480). However, unlike the other spheres of government, each local authority undertakes a wide range of functions and the delivery of services through a single administrative structure (Purdon, 1992 p. 42). The exact form and nature of each municipality varies considerably. For example, the powers and functions, financial resources, population, geographic area, location and human resources of each local government can differ considerably (Purdon and Burke, 1991 p. xiv).

Established by State legislation, local government powers operate in a number of social and economic areas; including community services, economic development, regulatory activities and capital works or infrastructure (Purdon, 1992 p. 84). More specifically, Purdon (1992: 43) suggests local government service functions broadly include, but are not limited to, the provision, management or operation of

1. Community services and facilities;
2. Public health services and facilities;
3. Cultural, educational and information services and facilities;
4. Sporting, recreational and entertainment services and facilities;
5. Environment conservation, protection and improvement services and facilities;
6. Waste removal, treatment and disposal services and facilities;
7. Pest eradication and control services and facilities;
8. Energy production, supply and conservation;
9. Water and waste water services and facilities;
10. Stormwater drainage and flood prevention, protection and mitigation services and facilities;
11. Land and property development;
12. Housing;
13. Industry development and assistance; and,
14. Tourism development and assistance.

The role of local government in social and economic planning and development are illustrated in Table 3 below (Purdon, 1992 p. 56).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Planning</th>
<th>Provision</th>
<th>Management</th>
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<tr>
<td>Strategic planning</td>
<td>Land and building regulation</td>
<td>Rate rebates</td>
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<tr>
<td>Land use planning</td>
<td>Infrastructure provision (social and physical)</td>
<td>Aged care workers</td>
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<td>Social planning</td>
<td>Trading enterprises</td>
<td>Community development officers</td>
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<tr>
<td>Economic planning</td>
<td>Local employment initiatives</td>
<td>Land grants and concessions</td>
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<td>Transport planning</td>
<td>Job creation</td>
<td>Lobbying / advocacy</td>
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<td>Corporate planning</td>
<td>Land development</td>
<td>Coordination</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Service delivery</td>
<td>Management of property portfolio</td>
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<td>Promotion</td>
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Recently, there has been increasing international pressure for local governments to play a more substantial role in housing through their planning and service delivery functions. Local government planning powers enable councils to ‘facilitate the provision of different housing types, opportunities for economic and community activities, the range of local services, the location of housing in relation to the location of services and employment opportunities and the ease with which other sectors can provide services and facilities in the broadest sense’ (Purdon, 1992 p.56). In addition to these planning powers, it’s commonly suggested that there are several factors which can position local councils to grapple with housing issues effectively; such as (Purdon and Burke, 1991 p. xvi)

1. Its closeness to the community;
2. Ability to plan and coordinate a range of local services;
3. The multi – functional organisational structure; and
4. Its increasing social planning function.
Opportunities for local governments to effectively contribute to housing in Australia are further discussed below. Though it should be acknowledged that local governments are often reluctant to further develop their roles in housing because of their overarching concern with cost shifting and the potential impact on their financial sustainability (Hawker Review 2003).

**Local Government and the Housing Sector**

Local governments have the capacity to influence the production, consumption and management of housing; both directly and indirectly. Direct involvement refers to the provision of housing by local governments acting individually or in partnership with others. Indirect involvement refers to the role that local governments play in facilitating the provision of housing by others (ALGA, 2003 p. 2). At the local tier, production related functions include ‘development controls, management of the approvals process and subdivision controls as well as direct provision. Consumption related functions include the provision of employee housing and housing for special needs groups....[and] management related functions include the direct management of council owned stock and the provision of services to residents ‘ (Purdon and Burke, 1991 p. xv). Thus, local governments have the power to shape the housing sector in a number of ways.

Local governments influence housing via statutory responsibilities, the provision of infrastructure and housing and rating policies (Purdon and Burke, 1991 p. 6). State legislation requires local governments to produce a range of legally binding statutory planning documents. These include planning schemes, by – laws and codes and regulations (ALGA, 2003 p.5). The ALGA (2003 p. 5) highlights that, ‘there is considerable variation in the format and content of these instruments within and between jurisdictions and the level of authority and autonomy given to local government to regulate ‘. The range of housing initiatives that local governments engage in is also emphasised by Gurran (2003 p.395) who noted that

 Broadly speaking, local housing functions include identifying the current and prospective needs of the community, coordinating the provision of infrastructure and services, managing the supply of residential land and housing stock and, in some cases, directly providing housing to special groups.

Hence, the scope for local councils to affect housing initiatives is extensive. Planning schemes, by – laws, codes and regulations enable local governments to regulate housing within their municipality (Purdon and Burke, 1991 p.36). Planning powers that specifically relate to housing include (Gurran, 2003 p.396)

1. Identifying strategic social, economic, and environmental objectives for the future development or management of the local government area, in close consultation with their local communities;
2. Deciding, also in consultation with their local communities where new residential development should be located, having regard to these objectives, and to issues such as transportation, services, land capacity, and existing urban structure;

3. Setting the rules for the configuration and design of new residential development, and regulating changes to existing housing stock, including the range of factors that must be considered when a decision is made;

4. Assessing proposed residential developments against these rules, and against State and regional planning policy or regulations;

5. Specifying conditions to manage the social or environmental impact of approved developments, including developer contributions to fund community infrastructure, and potentially, affordable housing;

6. Monitoring the implementation of their planning objectives, and if necessary, intervening where possible; and

7. Ensuring that the legal planning framework complements the local authority’s broader corporate objectives.

In addition to these land use planning responsibilities, local government regulates land and development in several ways (Purdon and Burke, 1991 p.36)

1. **Development control**: local government has power over development approvals and place conditions on new housing including allowable densities, height, building materials and open space provisions. Local government may prevent the demolition of buildings; including housing;

2. **Subdivision control**: local government has discretion over engineering standards such as road widths, drainage and allotment size which impacts on the cost of land servicing; and

3. **Building regulation**: local government administers the building codes determined by state regulations. There is little room for flexibility by local government in interpretation of these regulations. Such regulations ensure the safety, health and integrity of buildings and construction. In some states local government also has control over substandard buildings.

Despite the multitude of opportunities for local councils to effectively engage with the housing sector, involvement remains sporadic and patchy. Indeed according to Gurran (2003 p.393) it’s ‘rare for local governments to articulate an explicit policy framework for managing housing decisions ‘. The challenges and constraints impeding the effective engagement of local government in the housing sector are outlined below.

**Challenges and Constraints for Local Governments**

While local governments have the capacity to successfully contribute to housing and homelessness reforms in Australia there are a number of
impediments to councils undertaking an enhanced role. Purdon and Burke (1991 p. xvi) highlight the detrimental effect of

1. Financial constraints;
2. Lack of housing policy skills at the local level;
3. The apparent reluctance of some state governments to consistently support an enhanced role for local government;
4. A local political unwillingness to take on a greater role; and
5. The complexity of inter – government relations.

The influence of financial, political, planning and internal pressures on the ability of local councils to contribute towards housing policy are illustrated in greater depth below.

The major source of revenue for municipalities in Australia is the property tax base, charges and user fees (Torjman, 2003 p. 2). In addition, councils raise funds from the sale of services, obtain monies from other spheres of government and win special purpose grants (Dunn, 2001 p.2489). It is commonly perceived that the best way for local councils to improve their funding position is via property development (Purdon, 1992 p.94) because they are not permitted to run deficits on their operating budgets (Torjman, 2003 p. 2). Councils must consequently raise taxes or cut programs in order to meet their commitments without taking out loans (Torjman, 2003 p. 3). Such concerns can act as a barrier to engagement with issues of homelessness and affordable housing as local governments may be concerned that concentrations of persons on low income may reduce their rate base while adding significantly for the demand for services (Dunn, 2001 p.2489). Moreover State governments in some jurisdictions have recently capped property tax increases below inflation rates and thus heightened the financial pressures felt by local government. Financial and political tensions between the various spheres of government also impede the capacity of local governments to address housing concerns effectively.

Housing and homelessness cuts across sectors, government departments and tiers of the political framework and consequently requires an integrated, whole of government approach. However, confusion regarding the roles and responsibilities between the spheres of government complicates the delivery of housing policies and programs in Australia (Purdon, 1992 p.95). The opportunities for local government to contribute to the development and implementation of housing policies is often restricted by other spheres of government who are uncertain about the direct and explicit roles of local authorities (Purdon, 1992 p.95). Many local municipalities feel that inherent weaknesses within state planning frameworks limits their potential to address housing or homelessness concerns and lack of a federal policy for housing and urban development further compounds these flaws (Gurran, 2003 p.409).

Motivation for local government to address housing concerns are constrained by the perception that housing is solely a State and Federal responsibility or the sense that housing policies are programs are ‘imposed’ upon them from ‘above’ (Gurran, 2003 p.395).
According to Graham and Byers (cited in Purdon, 1992 pp. 85-86) the following problems frequent impede public sector improvements involving the public and private sectors

- The multiplicity of relationships;
- Local government is expected to operate as an agent for the state without proper resources or funding;
- Intergovernmental relations have evolved in response to the particular need of professional interests and in response to particular issues;
- State policies are poorly defined in the social and economic fields;
- Many relationships are based on power being given to specific positions in local government rather than local government as a sphere of government; and,
- Many relationships refer to a particular aspect of development rather than allowing local government develop a comprehensive view.

In addition to these financial and political constraints, local governments have recently felt escalated planning pressures. Accompanying the ‘smart growth ‘ movement, many planners in local councils have recently become concerned about the impact of urban enhancement strategies, such as design initiatives, streetscape improvements and gentrification upon housing affordability and low to middle income residents (Gurran, 2003 p. 406). Other problems include ‘planning legislation that fails to require adequate social assessment of development proposals and uncertainty associated with specific planning mechanisms to promote or retain affordable housing ‘ (Gurran, 2003 p. 409). Indeed, Torjman (2003 p.3) notes that planners in local councils are increasingly being pressured to

Recognise the need for more intelligent growth that respects the links between a healthy environment and a good quality of life, including human – well being broadly defined.

Many councils are not fully aware of the impact their planning and regulatory functions have on the housing sector. In order to improve understanding amongst municipalities, BBC Consulting Partners developed a continuum of housing roles for local government. Regardless, many municipalities lack the dedicated staff or resources to adequately address these planning pressures and prepare housing policies and programs that cope with the pressures outlined above.

Local governments may also experience pressure from rate payers and residents who either do not understand the nature of homelessness or who are opposed to local government engaging with this agenda. Greenhalgh (2004a) noted from her work in Brisbane that few community members had a clear understanding of the causes of homelessness, with most focussing on
the characteristics of individuals. Other authors have been more critical, with Spivak (2004 p.15) noting that

Local government’s strength is paradoxically also its weakness: it is the most democratic level of government yet also the most parochial and, consequently, susceptible to conservatism.

Despite Spivak’s (2004) concerns, many local governments have developed full or partial approaches to homelessness within their jurisdictions. Greenhalgh (2004b) notes that the Brisbane City Council developed a Charter of Rights for homeless people to ensure that the homeless continue to enjoy the same level of rights available to others in society. These rights included

- Not blaming or punishing people for being homeless;
- Working with homeless people to address their homelessness;
- Ensuring that Council’s plans, policies and procedures do not disadvantage homeless people;
- Addressing homelessness as part of wider objectives to establish a more inclusive city;
- Recognising homeless people’s rights and responsibilities are the same as everyone else’s;
- Recognising that homeless people may have an affiliation with certain public spaces;
- Recognising that homeless people have a right to be in public space without fear of harassment, as well as the responsibility not to infringe on others;
- Consulting on homeless people on decisions that affect them;
- Recognising that homeless people need to access infrastructure in public spaces to meet some of their basic needs; and
- Recognising that some Indigenous people have a preference for living and conducting social activities outdoors (Lawson 2002 quoted in Greenhalgh 2004b p. 29).

Comparable commitments to respecting the needs of homelessness persons are evident in other local governments, including the City of Port Phillip (Spivak 2004), the City of Sydney (Reynolds 2004), Adelaide (Boyd 2004) and Perth (House 2004). Critically, less is known – or documented - about the role of outer suburban or regional local governments in dealing with homelessness. There is evidence to suggest that some local governments adopt a negative approach to homelessness, with Farrell (2011) reporting that at least one Victorian local government was looking to criminalise rough sleeping by imposing a maximum fine of $2,400 for persons sleeping in their cars. Farrell (2011) listed six other local governments that already have such penalties within their by-laws.

Overall, the evidence from the literature suggests that the role of local government in addressing homelessness is growing, but that local governments should look to become the facilitators of the solutions to homelessness, not the providers. As Burke (2004) noted, contemporary
public policy innovation emphasises the need to address many social and economic problem from a bottom-up perspective and that

Empowering local people and communities to take control of their future, rather than imposing top-down solutions is becoming the new paradigm....In housing, this means local governments, in the role of facilitators, not providers (Burke 2004 p. 48).
Section Four: Lessons from International Experience

Homelessness is an international phenomenon and around the world governments at all levels have adopted varying approaches to this social, personal and economic challenge. The analysis of developments in other nations can shed light on the range of policy options potentially available to governments in Australia – including local governments – and highlight key strategies that are likely to be effective. The role of local government in addressing homelessness is considered in this section with reference to the European Union, the USA and Canada. Within each analysis we attempt to capture the diversity of outcomes and approaches evident in that jurisdiction.

Approaches to homelessness in the European Union

Approaches to homelessness and good practice differ throughout the European Union (EU). But while there is considerable diversity across Europe, Edgar et al (1999) were able to identify a number of common trends across Europe in the governance of homelessness. The key developments they recognised included:

- An on-going raft of legislative changes and nations examine new approaches to homelessness;
- Changing social welfare housing, with homelessness policy moving from social welfare interventions per se, to being part of the housing portfolio;
- An increase in the powers and responsibilities of municipal authorities with respect to homelessness; and,
- New legislated roles for housing associations and equivalent organisations.

Critically, Edgar et al (1999) noted that there had been a decentralisation of powers to municipalities in places such as Ireland, Austria, Germany, Sweden and Finland, though not always with a commensurate increase in resources. There had also been a change in the role played by local governments with ‘a shift to the enabling role where the municipality acts as strategic planning and co-ordinating authority for the municipality’ (Edgar et al 1999 p. 50). Within this paradigm, there is a contractual relationship with non government agencies to provide services.

Definition and Enumeration

Launched in 2005, member countries of the European Union (EU) use a four part classification of homelessness and social exclusion. Developed by the European Federation of National Organisations Working with the Homeless (FEANTSA), the definition includes rooflessness, houselessness, living in insecure housing and living in inadequate accommodation (Minnery and Greenhalgh, 2007 p. 646). Nevertheless, most European countries still consider homelessness to simply include rough sleepers and enumeration efforts vary from country to country (Minnery and Greenhalgh, 2007: 647).
According to Minnery and Greenhalgh (2007 p. 647), many of the statistics are based on those who are accepted as being homeless by a service provider and many homeless counts are simple snapshots with limited coverage. As a result, most countries have developed individual working definitions and enumeration measures.

**Legislation**

Across the European Union, most countries have a statutory responsibility for housing but not for homelessness. Homelessness often remains positioned at the peripheries of both housing and social policy (Minnery and Greenhalgh, 2007 p. 646). The EU and the European Commission do not have direct constitutional responsibility for housing. Housing is seen as a matter for individual nations within the EU because ‘there is no legal basis in the European Commission Treaty that allows housing policy to be developed at the level of the European Union.’ (FEANTSA Working Group for Housing 2002, cited in Greenhalgh, 2004: 15). The effective provision of homelessness services in the EU is also hindered by the necessity of identification papers and certain visa requirements (Greenhalgh, 2004 p.16). The barriers for developing good practice in the EU are highlighted by the European Committee of the Regions and their statement (cited in Greenhalgh, 2004 p. 15)

Although homelessness assumes different forms from country to country in the EU, and may not at first appear to fall within the Country’s remit, the presence of homelessness people in our towns and cities nevertheless remains one of the most serious signs of social exclusion in the EU, primarily affecting local and regional authorities.

Lack of consensus regarding the definition, enumeration methods and legislative responsibility for homelessness impedes efforts to develop a co-ordinated approach to good practice across the European Union. Yet, member countries endeavour to effectively address homelessness within their broader housing platforms.

**Housing Policies and Projects**

Two main bodies are associated with homelessness and housing initiatives in the EU; the European Federation of National Organisations Working with the Homeless (FEANTSA) and the European Observatory (Greenhalgh, 2004 p.16). Although not part of the European Commission, FEANTSA receives funding from the Commission, is supported by the European Parliament and has consultative status at the Council of Europe (Greenhalgh, 2004 p. 16). Established in 1989, FEANTSA has a total of 70 member organisations across 15 members of the EU (Greenhalgh, 2004 p. 16). Established by FEANTSA, the European Observatory coordinates research on homelessness across the EU and advocates for a greater role for the European Commission in homelessness strategies.
Examples of Good Practice

In 2000, the European Council launched a campaign to eradicate poverty and social exclusion by 2010. Each member state was required to develop and implement a National Action Plan (NAP). The overarching objective of all the NAPs was ‘providing access for all to decent and sanitary housing, preventing homelessness; helping the most vulnerable and mobilising all relevant actors’ (Minnery and Greenhalgh, 2007 p.646). To assist with the creation and implementation of the NAPs, FEANTSA held a European Seminar on Best Practice in the Fight Against Homelessness in May, 2003.

A policy declaration by FEANTSA proposes that good practice in the fight against homelessness in Europe should have the following characteristics:

1. It should rest on a solid regulatory basis;
2. It should particularly target the homeless to be able to respond adequately;
3. It should consider homelessness in all its multidimensional aspects and so provide solutions for the different problems in the lives of the homeless;
4. It should introduce measures to prevent homelessness;
5. Improve the facilities for helping the homeless, and
6. Create reintegration programs adapted to the homeless (cited in Minnery and Greenhalgh, 2007: 646).

Whilst FEANTSA has pushed for all member states to include best practices concerning homelessness in subsequent NAPs, Minnery and Greenhalgh (2007 p. 650) assert that very few strategic approaches to homelessness are evident in the EU. In fact, a shift towards punitive responses to homelessness has been evidenced. Examples of punitive homelessness policies in the European Union include

- categorising homeless people as deserving or otherwise because their experiences are seen as a choice or tradition, denying housing as punishment for antisocial behaviour; and,
- making it illegal for services to assist anyone who doesn’t present appropriate identification or prove residency (Minnery and Greenhalgh, 2007 p. 650).

Thus, specific homelessness interventions directly contravene the European Union’s social inclusion agenda and attempts to incorporate good practices for addressing homelessness.
Approaches to homelessness in the United Kingdom

Approaches to homelessness are included within the Government’s social inclusion agenda and demonstrate many principles of good practice. Below is an account of the UK’s approaches to defining and counting the homeless, homelessness legislation, housing policies and projects and examples of good practice.

Definition and Enumeration

Homelessness statistics in the United Kingdom (UK) are based on persons or households being accepted as homeless. Being accepted as homeless means that there is nowhere they can be reasonably expected to live, they are not intentionally homeless and they have been assessed as having a priority need (Minnery and Greenhalgh, 2007 p. 648).

The 1977 Housing Act defines homelessness as

If there is no accommodation...which that person can reasonably occupy together with anyone else who normally lives with them as a member of their family or in circumstances in which it is reasonable to that person to do so.

The Housing Act 1977 suggests that priority groups include families with dependent children, single people determined to be vulnerable, elderly people with a serious mental illness and those with a connection to the local area (O’Connell, 2003 p.161). The 2002 Homelessness Act broadens the definition of priority need groups to also include 16 – 17 year olds other than those who social services are responsible for accommodating; care leavers under 21 who were looked after by social services when they were 16 or 17; people who are vulnerable as a result of fleeing domestic violence, racial or other forms of violence and people who are vulnerable as a result of prison, being in the armed forces or having a care background (Greenhalgh, 2004 p. 71).

In addition, eligibility is assessed according to specific vulnerability criteria; including age, health, mental health and disability (O’Connell, 2003 p. 161). Assessments of vulnerability must demonstrate that the applicant is less able to cope when homeless or in finding and keeping accommodation and is at risk of harm in situations where a less vulnerable person could cope without harmful effects (Greenhalgh, 2004 p. 72). As a result, people who are not eligible for services, do not present to a service or are deemed as intentionally homeless, are excluded from homeless figures.

Legislation

The United Kingdom is the only European state with a statutory responsibility toward the homeless and the only country to have set up a specific homelessness task force (Minnery and Greenhalgh, 2007 p.648). The 1977
Housing Act was the first specific piece of legislation devoted to homelessness in the UK and initially applied to England, Wales and Scotland. It was later introduced to Northern Ireland and remained essentially the same across the UK throughout the 1990s (O’Connell, 2003 p.160). The Act established a priority for permanent social housing and temporary housing if housing was not immediately available and provided a definition of the ‘statutorily homelessness ’ (O’Connell, 2003 p.161). Local authorities were charged with a two year timeframe to rehouse families and other priority need persons who were not intentionally homeless (Minnery and Greenhalgh, 2007 p.648).

The Blair Labour Government introduced new legislation, the 2002 Homelessness Act, which repealed the two year limit on the housing duty imposed on local authorities and increased the scope for local councils to contribute towards homelessness initiatives. The Act allowed local authorities greater flexibility to assist non priority homeless households and encouraged a more strategic approach to the prevention of homelessness and the rehousing of homeless households. The Act required every local authority to review homelessness in its area and develop a strategy for tackling the issue (Greenhalgh, 2004 p. 71). These homelessness strategies must be publicly available and demonstrate how the strategy can be achieved (O’Connell, 2002 p.162).

The importance of local councils within the UK’s homelessness agenda is enhanced by the regulatory framework in England. The 1990 Town and Country Planning Act and the 1991 Planning and Compensation Act both empowered local councils to implement a number of good practice approaches; such as building partnerships across multiple agencies, strengthening support services and developing networks with associated social service authorities (O’Connell, 2002 p.162). Under Section 106 of the 1990 Act, local authorities are also sanctioned to demand a percentage of affordable housing in new urban development projects or charge fees in lieu of affordable development. Although there is no fixed percentage or pre – established requirement, Section 106 enables local authorities to negotiate with developers and inform major development projects (Minnery and Greenhalgh, 2007 p. 648). Thus, planning legislation such as the use of density controls to provide smaller housing units and mixed – use developments, provide another avenue for local councils to address housing affordability and homelessness (Gurran, 2003 p. 3970).

Despite the UK’s early push towards implementing good practice strategies for addressing homelessness and recognising the numerous opportunities for local authorities, a number of weaknesses remain. Numerous studies have detected problems in negotiations between local municipalities and developers because local council staff members have poor market awareness and inadequate resources (Meda, 2009 p.163). The number of affordable housing units built remains below the forecast figures and the formal negotiations processes remains weak (Meda, 2009 p.163). Nevertheless, the British Government has made efforts to implement a number of good practice projects over the past three decades and more recently, Prime Minister David
Cameron has introduced a number of radical policy and legislative reforms intended to decentralise power from Westminster to local councils.

The Department of Communities and Local Government (DCLG) released the DCLG Business Plan 2011 – 2015 in November 2010. The Plan is part of the Coalition Government’s public sector reforms which have an announced focus on decentralisation to support local growth. The Business Plan details how the Coalition is ‘putting decision making in the hands of local people, giving power away from the centre and making central and local government more transparent’ (Department for Communities and Local Government, 2010 p. 1). Key reforms include:

- the abolition of the Comprehensive Area Assessment and disbanding of the Audit Commission;
- the end of central monitoring of the targets associated with Local Area Agreements, giving councils the freedom to amend or drop LAAs and the associated targets; and,

The DCLG Business Plan was accompanied by the Localism Bill. The Bill was introduced to Parliament on December 13, 2010 and became an Act on November 15, 2011. The Localism Act shifts power from central government to local councils using the rhetoric of ‘Big Society’. The approach to decentralisation is directed by five key measures and changes the role and responsibilities of local councils. The five key measures of David Cameron’s ‘Big Society’ are:

1. Community rights;
2. Neighbourhood planning;
3. Housing;
4. General power of competence; and
5. Empowering cities and other local areas.

It is worth noting that the reforms introduced by the Cameron Government have had profound implications for local governments and the communities they serve. Virtually all local governments across the UK have experienced a significant loss of staff and reduced revenue as a consequence of these reforms. Academic commentators (see Gallent and Robinson 2012) have noted that the ‘new’ paradigms of development being rolled out by the Cameron Government largely mirror previous policy settings that emphasised localism and largely failed to provide sufficient accommodation for the general population, let alone meet the needs of the homeless.


**Housing Policies and Projects**

In response to the rising visibility of rough sleepers during the 1980s, in 1990 the UK Government created the Rough Sleepers Initiative (RSI) to assist people sleeping rough in central London (O’Connell, 2003 p. 161). The initiative funded outreach services, move on accommodation and resettlement services and contributed to a drop in rough sleepers of 64% by 1994 in London (O’Connell, 2003 p.161). Elected in 1997, the Blair Labour government established the Social Exclusion Unit (SEU) to coordinate the government’s response to social exclusion and homelessness. After creating the Rough Sleepers Unit (RSU) within the Department of Environment, Transport and the Regions (DETR), responsibilities expanded in 1999 to include coordinating the actions of local authorities across England (O’Connell, 2003 p.161).

The Homelessness Directorate was then created within the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM) and charged with responsibility for reducing rough sleepers by two thirds and ensuring that no families with children live in bed and breakfast accommodation by 2004 (O’Connell, 2003 p. 161). Two units were created within the Homelessness Directorate to achieve these goals; the Rough Sleepers Unit (RSU) and the Bed and Breakfast Unit (BBU). The common themes in these homelessness responses are

1. Preventing homelessness, such as sustaining tenancies and financial management;
2. Providing ‘joined up’ solutions at a national government and local authority level;
3. Providing employment and training strategies;
4. Providing health care, particularly for addictions and mental health; and
5. Providing housing by removing barriers to creating rental accommodation and finding better quality temporary accommodation (O’Connell, 2002 p.162).

The Rough Sleepers Unit assumed responsibility for national rough sleeping policy and focused upon preventative measures. Strategies include (Greenhalgh, 2004 p.73)

1. The provision of services when most needed, particularly in terms of time of the day;
2. The provision of workers for those with addiction and mental illness;
3. The provision of resettlement support, including capacity building such as education or training and;
4. Multi – departmental initiatives including but not limited to the ODPM, the Department of Health, Prison and Probation Services and the Ministry of Health.

The Bed and Breakfast Unit started in 2001 and aims to reduce the number of homeless families being accommodated in bed and breakfast accommodation by 2004 because the use of B&Bs accounts for 15.1% of all households placed in temporary accommodation (Greenhalgh, 2004 p. 74). B&B
conditions are generally cramped and poorly located in relation to schools and services. As a result, they impinge upon the health, education and well being of homeless families (Greenhalgh, 2004 p. 74). These initiatives allow an examination of good practices demonstrated in the United Kingdom.

In 2011, the Ministerial Working Group within the Cameron Government published, *Vision to End Rough Sleeping: No Second Night Out Nationwide*. The Department for Communities and Local Government is investing in a new program - the Preventing Homelessness Grant – which available over four years to support the work of local authorities and the voluntary sector.

**Examples of good practice**

The updated homelessness legislation and projects within the Homelessness Directorate demonstrate many aspects of good practice. Expanding the definition of priority need to include more groups of vulnerable persons acknowledges the 'new' homeless. The British Government has also recognised the diverse pathways to homeless by extending priority need groups to include people leaving different forms of care and institutions and the iterative homeless (Minnery and Greenhalgh, 2007 p. 649). However, the current definition of homelessness and the process of assessment means that people do not feel they can be frank with assessors regarding their housing careers and people remain excluded from services (Minnery and Greenhalgh, 2007 p. 649).

In conclusion it is important to reiterate that the UK is distinctive within Europe in being the only nation to specify a statutory responsibility for homelessness. Critically, much of the focus for action has been directed to local governments who have, in the main, delivered against the homelessness agenda. It is worth noting that independent researchers such as Fitzpatrick and Pleace (2012) concluded that the UK’s local government-dependent statutory homelessness system has been both fair and effective. Local governments, therefore, have a track record of success.

**Approaches to homelessness in the United States of America**

The social policy environment in the United States of America (USA) markedly differs from European nations and Australia. The distinctive political and policy setting in America significantly shapes responses to homelessness and engagement with good practice strategies. The USA’s approaches to defining and counting the homeless, homelessness legislation, housing policies and projects and examples of good practice are highlighted below.

**Definition and Enumeration**

The following definition for homelessness is only used for specific programs that receive federal funding in the United States (US). The 1987 *Stewart B.
McKinney Homelessness Assistance Act states that homelessness refers to (O’Connell, 2003 p.162)

An individual who lacks a fixed, regular and adequate night time residence; an individual who has a primary night time residency that is a supervised publicly or privately operated shelter designed to provide temporary living accommodation, an institution that provides a temporary residence for individuals intended to be institutionalised...or ordinarily used as, a regular sleeping accommodation for human being.

Attempts to enumerate homelessness are confined to people who access services (O’Connell, 2003 p. 162).

Legislation

Congress provided $50 million to the Federal Emergency Management Agency in 1983 to construct and improve emergency shelters and create a Federal task force on homelessness to assist localities identify ways to use surplus federal properties (O’Connell, 2003: 162). This effort marked the first national effort to address homelessness in the United States. The Stewart B. McKinney Homelessness Assistance Act (1987) was passed four years later and remains the major legislative response in which current homelessness policy is rooted (O’Connell, 2003 p. 162). In addition to providing a definition of homelessness, the Act created a range of programmes in the Departments of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), Health and Human Services (HHS), Veterans Affairs (VA), Labour and Education to fund homelessness prevention, emergency shelters, transitional housing, health care, mental health care, education and job training (O’Connell, 2003 p. 163). This legislation was amended in 1988, 1990, 1994 and 2001 and additional programmes were created; such as the 1990 Shelter Plus Care Programme and the Safe Havens Programme in 1992.

The No Child Left Behind Act (2001) or the McKinney Vento Homeless Education Assistance Improvements Act was introduced to ensure educational rights and protection for homeless children and youths. The purpose of the Act is to ensure that homeless youth and children have equal opportunity for the free public education that is provided to others and argues that the need was for

Access to the education and other services that such children and youths need to ensure that such children and youths have an opportunity to meet the same challenging State student academic achievement standards to which all students are held (SERVE 2002, cited in Greenhalgh, 2004 p. 89).

The Act requires every American state to have an education coordinator and every school district to have a liaison officer for homeless students. The statute also directs grants for state and local authorities for the education of homeless children and youth, local education agency sub – grants for the
education of homeless children and youth, secretarial responsibilities and authorization of funding appropriations (Greenhalgh, 2004 p. 89).

Housing Policies and Projects

There is a wide range of public and private initiatives aimed at reducing or alleviating homelessness in the States; such as the National Centre on Family Homelessness, National Law Centre on Homelessness and Poverty, National Health Care for the Homeless Council, HomeAid America, Home Base and Homes for the Homeless (Minnery and Greenhalgh, 2007 p.651). Most federal resources for health and social services are provided to states in block grants and then redistributed to local governments who forward funds onto non – profit organisations that provide front line services (O’Connell, 2003 p. 164). Local housing authorities also have the power to determine priorities for housing resources and apply for HUD funding (O’Connell, 2003 p. 163). Since 1994, HUD funding applications require local governments to develop annual continuum of care plans. This requires localities to ‘collect needs analysis data, inventory system capacity, determine and prioritise gaps in services, develop their strategies and implement continuum care plans ‘ (O’Connell, 2003 p. 164).

Established by the McKinney Act, the Interagency Council on the Homeless (ICH) also plays a lead role in homelessness policy and services provision. The objective of the ICH was to coordinate the numerous programmes funded by 18 federal agencies, however funding was not renewed for the ICH in 1994 and it wasn’t reactivated until 2001. The ICH works to promote the importance of preventative measures within homelessness strategies and advocates for the importance of providing technical assistance to help states mainstream resources in homelessness initiatives (O’Connell, 2003 p.164).

Outside these federal and state government initiatives to address homelessness, a number of non – profit organisations work to alleviate homelessness. The National Alliance to End Homelessness (NAEH) pushes both private and public sector bodies to work collaboratively. The NAEH recommends four proactive steps to be taken simultaneously to end homelessness (Minnery and Greenhalgh, 2007 p.651)

1. Planning for outcomes by identifying real needs;
2. Closing the front door by shifting the flow of incentives towards prevention;
3. Opening the back door by helping people exit homelessness quickly; and
4. Building the infrastructure by changing homelessness assistance to improve the supply of affordable housing and providing adequate income and services for the disadvantaged.

These cases provide many examples of good practice.
Examples of good practice

The Homes for the Homeless organisation’s program, ‘American Family Inn’ demonstrates many aspects of good practice. The organisation ‘considers that scattered emergency services for meal and bed provision are insufficient to guarantee that a family will maintain a home and that interrelated issues of homelessness all must be addressed (Greenhalgh, 2004 p.103). The transitional housing model focuses upon improving levels of education because it’s believed that low levels of education are the initial causal factor of homelessness. According to Greenhalgh (2004 p.103)

Every family receives individual needs assessment, counselling, access to healthcare and housing search assistance (in the American Family Inns Program). Once these basic needs have been fulfilled, adults are encouraged to participate in the literacy, job readiness, and independent living skills training that will equip them with the necessary skills to successfully move to permanent housing with long term stability.

Advocates of the American Family Inn programs highlight that this education based program is provided at the same cost as operating a traditional emergency shelter and approximately 94% of the families who have participated in the program have remained in their original permanent housing placement (Greenhalgh, 2004 p.103).

In America, there are many opportunities for local municipalities to adopt good practices within the homelessness sector. Local governments commonly use inclusionary zoning ordinances to improve the provision of affordable housing without increasing public spending on housing policy. Also known as incentive zoning and mixed income housing programmes, inclusionary zoning establishes a certain percentage of affordable dwellings in new residential development projects at prices below market rates for lower income households (Meda, 2009 p.160). Inclusionary zoning requires considering the percentage of inclusionary housing to be built, the tenure system, the price and target group, the length of affordability of these dwellings and the alternatives offered to developers if they later consider that it is best not to build (Meda, 2009:161). Other strategies include using development agreements or density bonuses to establish affordable housing schemes, protecting local income shelter supplies through development approval processes, trust funds and taxation mechanisms (Gurran, 2003 p.397). The US County of Fairfax (Virginia) was the first to enact an inclusionary zoning ordinance in 1971. Major cities such as Boston, Washington, New York and Chicago have since adopted such strategies (Meda, 2009 p.160).

Approaches to Homelessness in Canada

In many respects, Canada’s approach to homelessness and affordable housing mirrors that of Australia. Both Australia and Canada, like the USA, have a federal system of government and in consequence, homelessness policies and projects are significantly influenced by intergovernmental relations. Canada’s approach to defining and counting the homeless,
homelessness legislation, housing policies and projects and examples of good practice are highlighted below

**Definition and Enumeration**

The Canadian Council on Social Development first attempted to estimate the Canadian homelessness population in 1987. Since then, Statistics Canada, the Homeless Individuals and Families Information System (HIFIS) and various cities across Canada have also attempted to enumerate homelessness figures (Frankish, 2005 p. 24). Efforts to accurately depict homelessness figures are impeded by lack of a consistent definition, difficulty identifying homeless persons and poor local agency participation. According to Frankish (2005 p. 24), most researchers and advocates working within the homelessness sector believe that figures from the census are not accurate and under represent the homeless population.

**Legislation**

The federal government became formally involved in housing through the *Dominion Housing Act* and the *National Housing Act* in the 1930s (Pierre, 2007 p. 3).

**Housing Policies and Projects**

Housing policies and projects have followed a distinct trajectory in Canada. Most reviews suggest that during the 1970s, the federal government was active in social policy and the housing sector. Housing priorities during this period focused upon quantity and availability and the federal government invested in the construction of subsidised housing for the very poor (Pierre, 2007 p. 3) and offered tax incentives for private developers to help augment the amount of private funding and increase housing affordability (Evans, 2007 p. 3). During the mid 1980s, a shift towards conservative fiscal measures meant that emphasis was placed upon the private market to supply public goods and services (Pierre, 2007 p. 3). As a result, social housing essentially fell off the policy agenda and it was not reinstated by the Liberals after their election to office in 1993 (Evans, 2007 p. 2).

In an attempt to address a growing national deficit, the Liberal federal government in the 1990 handed responsibility for the administration and provision of housing to the provinces (Evans, 2007 p. 2 and Schuk, 2009 p. 2). The provision and administration of social housing was devolved from the federal government to the provinces and consequently, funding for new social housing developments were cancelled (Schuk, 2009 p. 5). The consequences for housing affordability and services provision for homeless persons has been widely reported by the Canadian Policy Research Networks (CPRN) and social policy researchers in Canada. A large majority of researchers suggest that this process increased the number of households in housing need and decreased funding for social housing operations (Schuk, 2009 p. 4).
Between 1999 and 2007, the Ministry of Human Resources and Skills Development ran the National Homelessness Initiative (NHI) in Canada. The first phase ran from 1999 to 2003 and focussed on meeting the short term emergency needs of people at risk of or suffering from homelessness. Phase 2 focused on implementing measures to assist individuals and families to achieve and maintain self sufficiency through longer term solutions, such as transitional housing and continued support for emergency assistance (Evans, 2007 p.6). Phase 2 ran between 2003 and 2007 and received funding of $539.8M.

In 2007, the NHI was replaced with the Homelessness Partnering Strategy (HPS). Funding is secured until 2014 and is worth $1348M between April 2011 and March 2014. HPS is a community – based program that relies on communities to determine their own needs and develop local solutions to homelessness. The program favours a ‘housing first ‘ approach that emphasises the effectiveness of transitional and supportive housing for helping people become self sufficient and independent.

Examples of good practice

The ‘housing first ‘ approach adopted by NHI demonstrates many principles of good practice. In Canada, the approach provides an effective solution to chronic homelessness. The program provides a house before any treatment and doesn’t require abstinence from alcohol or drugs. Once housed, individuals can voluntarily choose to access a range of support services. The program is particularly successful because tailored programs and services promote individual choice, dignity, recovery opportunities and community. According to Trypuc and Robinson (2009 p. 13), the program has achieved an 88 per cent success rate in keeping people housed compared with a 47 per cent rate for those using the usual mental health system. This program is also seen to be less expensive saving $10,000 for each chronically homeless person assisted each year.

Conclusion

Adequately addressing homelessness is a challenge for governments across the globe. The review of European, USA and Canadian experience has shown that approaches vary significantly but there remains an enduring tension between centralised services/supports and those which are more locally focussed and resourced. One of the critical issues is how homelessness is understood. International best practice currently highlights homelessness as a housing problem in a first instance, rather than a function of centralised welfare services. Such an approach is more amenable to the participation of local governments in addressing the core of the homelessness challenge.

It is worth noting that all the nations reviewed have used a number of different policy interventions over time. However, centralised funding and attention – in some form – remains a common theme, largely because the nature of homelessness can overwhelm the fiscal and other resources available to local
governments to deal with this challenge. A second important observation is that the capacity of local governments to address homelessness is largely contingent on their relative impact – and funding – within the nation’s system of government. The UK, with relatively strong local governments, has long relied upon this tier to address homelessness, while Canada has weaker local governments and greater reliance on centralised systems.
Section 5: Comparative Review of Approaches to Homelessness in Australia

Although strategies to address homelessness differ across Australia and between the tiers of government, there are many examples of good practice. This section outlines the Commonwealth’s approaches to defining and counting the homelessness, legislation and housing policies and projects. The final section provides a number of good practice case studies before examining the state and local homelessness policy agendas in Australia.

Commonwealth Initiatives

To a large extent, the Federal Government steers homelessness policies and projects around the country.

Definitions and Enumeration

An overview of differing conceptions of homelessness is provided at the beginning of this report. Australia’s definition of homelessness is considered good practice because it accounts for homeless pathways and particularly vulnerable groups. The Commonwealth uses a three part cultural definition of homelessness that includes primary, secondary and tertiary homelessness. Homelessness statistics are robust in Australia because the Federal Government collects homelessness data every five years during the national census and from service providers (Minnery and Greenhalgh, 2007 p. 652). There is, of course, ongoing debate on the definition and enumeration of homelessness in Australia with the ABS recently reviewing its methods and re-estimating the population without a home for the 2006 Census (ABS 2011).

Legislation

The Supported Accommodation Assistance Act (1994) and the Housing Assistance Act (1996) replaced the Homelessness Persons Assistance Act from 1974. Further reform took place in November 2009 when the Parliament’s Family, Community, Housing and Youth Committee tabled its report with the recommendation that homelessness legislation be reformed to support the targets and strategies outlined in The Road Home. Critically it recommended the linking of initiatives of the National Affordable Housing Agreement (NAHA) and the work of the Prime Minister’s Council on Homelessness (Australian Government, 2009b).
Since election in 2007, the Australian Labor Government has introduced a number of new housing policies and projects. These are outlined in greater depth at the beginning of this report. The Government’s homelessness framework is presented in *The Road Home* report and is built on a social inclusion agenda. Housing affordability measures also feature in the Government’s strategy.

**Examples of Good Practices**

As previously mentioned, Australia’s approach to homelessness demonstrates many aspects of good practice. These include using a definition that is evidence based and takes into account homelessness pathways, as well as the specific characteristics of homeless people.
The Federal Government recognises the importance of developing partnerships between public and private bodies and building a network between each tier of government (Tiley and Hil, 2010 p.267). The Government’s promise to examine shared equity models, to involve Federal government, to protect consumers from predatory lenders and to find ways to leverage private investment in low – income housing illustrates the Government’s approach and eagerness to adopt good practices (Tiley and Hil, 2010 p.269).

Since the 1980s, the Federal Government has recognised that the adoption of good practice approaches to homelessness demands working with each tier of government and especially, local authorities. In an effort to encourage local governments to pick up good practices in the housing / homelessness sector, the Commonwealth has conducted a number of studies. The first initiative in the 1980s funded a number of individual housing research projects in Victoria and New South Wales (NSW). These studies aimed to promote awareness within local government bodies about their ‘direct’ and ‘indirect’ impacts upon the housing market however they were considered largely ineffectual (Gurran, 2003: 397).

The National Housing Strategy that commenced in 1991 drew upon background research on local government and housing. This study concluded that ‘the majority of local governments had been both inactive and resistant to innovation, responding to conservative public attitudes rather than attempting to influence community opinions’ (Guran, 2003 p.398). Another survey of Australian local governments found that ‘while they (local authorities) recognised physical planning considerations such as availability of residential land, housing design quality, construction and density, strategic policy issues such as affordability, adequacy and appropriateness for special needs groups and energy efficiency of designs were rarely taken into account in 1994’ (Gurran, 2003 p.398). The most recent survey of local governments occurred in Victoria in 1998. This project found that while some councils were proactive within the housing and homelessness sector, a majority did not even refer to housing within their broader planning frameworks (Gurran, 2003: 298).

**State and Territory Initiatives**

State and local government engagement with homelessness good practices differs markedly across Australia. The proceeding section outlines how each state and relevant local councils grapple with housing and homelessness concerns.

**New South Wales**

The New South Wales (NSW) state government is comparatively advanced in the homelessness and housing arena. NSW has introduced a number of measures to both facilitate the involvement local authorities and directly address homelessness. Since the 1990s, mechanisms and programs designed to strengthen local government responsibilities have included the provision of funding for housing initiatives, establishing the Affordable Housing
Advisory Service to develop low cost affordable rental housing, community and private sector partners and State planning policies to retain low cost housing (Gurran, 2003 p.398). A number of instrumental policies and legislative changes have also significantly contributed to the breadth of good practice homelessness ventures in NSW.

Legislation

Under the *Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979*, section 79C, all NSW councils are required to consider the social impacts of development applications. Some councils have consequently considered whether proposals will reduce opportunities for low cost housing (Gurran, 2003 p.407). Section 8 of the *1993 Local Government Act* demands that local authorities adhere to a prescribed Charter (Tiley and Hil, 2010 p. 272). In several locations, this grants the local authority permission to engage in affordable housing activities.

The *1997 State Environment Planning Policy (SEPP) 53 – Metropolitan Residential Development* provides a mechanism for the State Government is intervene in the development approvals process and requires all councils in metropolitan Sydney to prepare residential development strategies (Gurran, 2993: 398). This process requires local governments to analyse housing market trends, identify strategies to provide a mix of housing choices appropriate to their local needs and essentially, develop some form of housing strategy (Gurran, 2003 p. 398). Established in 1999, the Partnership Against Homelessness (PAH) is a regionally based approach to homelessness; rather than a state-wide policy (Greenhalgh, 2004 p. 122). This network of NSW Government agencies aims to improve services for the homeless and has created the Inner City Homeless Action Plan and the Homelessness Action Team (Greenhalgh, 2004 p. 123).

Housing Policies and Projects

The NSW Homelessness Action Plan (HAP) was released in 2009 and articulates a commitment to work in partnership with a broad stakeholder base in pursuit of its goals and targets (Giles, 2009 p. 31). The HAP sets the direction for state – wide reform of the homelessness service system in NSW and focuses upon prevention and exists, individual rights, flexibility, integrated approaches and working from an evidence base (Giles, 2009 p. 31). Funded through the National Partnership on Homelessness NSW Implementation Plan, the HAP aims to improve responses to homelessness by changing the way that the State government engages with the non – government sector and the broader community. The NSW Homelessness Action Plan’s three strategic directions align with the Commonwealth Government’s priority areas on homelessness. They are listed in Table 4.1 below.
Table 4.1 - *NSW Homelessness Action Plan* Strategic Directions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strategic Direction</th>
<th>Goal</th>
<th>Priorities</th>
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| Preventing homelessness | People never become homeless | • Prevent eviction from all kinds of tenure  
• Transition and maintain people exiting statutory care/correctional and health facilities into appropriate long-term accommodation  
• Provide safe, appropriate long-term accommodation and/or support to people experiencing domestic and family violence, relationship and family breakdown and at key transition points |
| Responding effectively to homelessness | People who are homeless receive effective responses so that they do not become entrenched | • Improve identification of and responses to homelessness by mainstream and specialist support services  
• Deliver integrated service responses  
• Streamline access to crisis accommodation and specialist homelessness services  
• Transition people who are homeless to appropriate long-term accommodation and support |
| Breaking the cycle | People who have been homeless don't become homeless again | • Provide models of accommodation with support that are suitable for different target groups  
• Increase and upgrade supply of affordable and social housing  
• Promote partnerships between all levels of government, business, consumers and the not-for-profit sector  
• Improve and better utilise of homelessness data and evidence-based responses to homelessness |

**Good Practice**

The NSW Homelessness Action Plan (HAP) includes key performance indicators and measures to help determine the impact of actions on homelessness. Progress against these performance indicators is monitored in annual reports. The HAP also
includes a program of evaluation and research to determine the effectiveness of activities. These performance measures are accompanied by the Good Practice Guidelines for DoCS Funded Services (or Guidelines). ‘The Guidelines are to be implemented through a cycle of continuous quality improvement, using the DoCS quality self – assessment and quality work – plan support tools. It is suggested that the cycle is completed annually and is aligned with the service’s regular review schedules or reporting requirements ‘ (Urbis, 2009 p.29). A manual has been developed to assist this process and suggests that the continuous quality improvement cycle involves four steps:

2. Step 2: Develop quality work-plan.

In addition, the NSW Government has introduced a variety of innovative homelessness service delivery models which place homeless people directly into longer-term supported housing arrangements, based on the Housing First approach.

**Victoria**

**Legislation**

Legislative provisions for evaluating the social impacts of housing developments are less clear in Victoria. For *Victoria Planning and Environment Act 1987* requires each local government to prepare a planning scheme in accordance with the Act and states that local municipalities are solely responsible for administering all sections of the planning scheme (Purdon and Burke, 2011: 33). However the importance of the social aspects of development is not stressed in the Act. Section 60 (b) only directs local councils to consider, ‘any significant social and economic effects of the use or development ‘ and ‘any strategic plan, policy statement, code or guideline ‘ which has been adopted by a public authority, ‘if the circumstances appear to so require ‘ (Gurran, 2003 p. 407). Nevertheless, the State Government has attempted to improve its engagement with homelessness via the *Victorian Homelessness Strategy* (VHS).

**Housing Policy and Projects**

In 2000, the Victorian Government commissioned a study to investigate the State’s response to homelessness and to identify actions and approaches that would improve that response for the future (Greenhalgh, 2004 p. 123). The final report, *Direction for Change*, provides an action plan and strategic framework. The strategic framework identifies a number of broad strategies that aim to stimulate an integrated response to preventing and addressing homelessness. These include (Greenhalgh, 2004 p.124)

1. Improving client focus and client outcomes;
2. Developing an integrated and sustainable service system;
3. Working across government and with the community to prevent homelessness;
4. Increasing access to and supply of affordable housing and
5. Support and driving change.

The Minister for Community Services and Housing released the *Victorian Homelessness Strategy* (VHS) in 2002. The *Strategy* aimed to assist services to deliver and manage business in accordance with program objectives. The State Office for Housing has worked in partnership with a number of Departments to coordinate the Government’s framework for tackling homelessness, provides funding for a number of programs that both directly and indirectly assist the homeless and provide a comprehensive network of homelessness services. In addition, the *Victorian Homelessness Strategy* includes the Homelessness Assistance Program Guidelines (2006 – 2009) and the Homelessness Assistance Services Standards (HASS). These guidelines integrate with existing guidelines to simplify compliance for homelessness support services.

Elected in 2010, the new Liberal Premier, Ted Baillieu MP quickly released the *Victorian Homelessness Action Plan 2011 – 2015*. The Action Plan commits $76.7 million to a range of initiatives that provide greater assistance to vulnerable Victorians and aims to address the underlying causes of homelessness. The Action Plan focused on supporting innovative approaches to homelessness, the investigation models that focus specifically on early intervention and prevention and better targeting of resources when and where they are most needed and where they will make the biggest difference (State of Victoria, 2011 p. 3). To support the implementation of the Action Plan, the Government also established the Ministerial Advisory Council on Homelessness and an Inter – Departmental Committee. These bodies both work across government departments to ‘join up ‘ sectors, service providers and experts and consequently develop a comprehensive and coordinated response to homelessness (State of Victoria, 2011 p.3).

**Good Practice**

In 2002 the Victorian Government allocated $2.1 million over three years to improve the standard of homeless support services. A major aspect of improving services was the development of a formal accreditation system for the Office of Housing. This system was referred to as the Homelessness Assistance Service Standards (HASS). The development of the HASS was intended to ensure a minimum level of service quality for homeless people, to promote best practice and to encourage ongoing improvement of service quality. HASS was developed through an extensive consultation process with service providers, consumers and experts within the sector. The accreditation process was based on a quality improvement model, and was not legislatively based. The accreditation process was run by a third party, Quality Improvement and Community Services Accreditation Inc, chosen through a formal selection process. The success of this model was highlighted in the
White Paper on Homelessness and it was praised for working collaboratively across programs, agencies and tiers of government.

Whilst the Victorian Action Plan has not been evaluated yet, the approach contains many aspects of good practice. The Government has committed funds to exploring new and innovative approaches to services provision. At the same time, the Department of Human Services has attempted to evaluate program performance and only allocate funds where needed most.

Queensland

Legislation

The relationship between the State and local authorities is somewhat different in Queensland. The Brisbane City Council was created in 1924 and is responsible for both local and broader metropolitan functions (Stilwell and Troy, 2000 p. 910). Unlike other local councils in Australia, Queensland local authorities have considerable autonomy and prepare strategic plans under the Local Government Act. According to Purdon and Burke (1991 p.33) ‘there are no metropolitan or regional planning schemes prepared by the state to guide development, and the state government only becomes involved when the council recommends rezoning to the Minister for Housing and Local Government ‘.

Housing Policies and Projects

Responding to Homelessness (R2H) Strategy was released by the Queensland Government in June 2005 and strove to ‘create an integrated homelessness service system and to reduce, over time, the number of people who are completely without shelter by enhancing existing and implementing new initiatives, responding to homelessness and public intoxication ‘ (Urbis, 2009). R2H was a whole of government program that dedicated $235. 5 million to 32 initiatives in five targeted ‘hot spots ‘. These locations were Brisbane, the Gold Coast, Townsville, Cairns and Mt Isa. The strategy was focused upon six key themes

1. Providing more accommodation and support options.
2. Connecting people with services.
3. Responding to homelessness and public space issues.
4. Meeting the health needs of people experiencing homelessness.
5. Meeting the needs of people experiencing homelessness in the legal system.
6. Helping residential services stay open (through accreditation).

Opening Doors: Queensland Strategy for Reducing Homelessness 2011 – 2014 aims to help people avoid becoming homeless, help people get ahead and build collaborative networks of people working together for stronger services (Queensland Government, 2011 (b)). Each of these priorities is linked to a headline reform that will lead to real changes and improvements in the way people access and receive services. These headline reforms include
reducing exists into homelessness, adopting a housing first approach and realigning specialist homelessness services (Queensland Government, 2011 (b)).

Good Practices

There are many aspects of good practice in the Queensland Government's approach to homelessness. It's important to note that intergovernmental relations regarding regional planning are unique in Queensland. Until recently, regional plans were not formally prepared under state legislation. Instead, senior political representatives from both levels of government have attempted to reach consensus on key issues. More recently, the state government has started to assume a larger role and more responsibilities in the planning process (Sansom, 2010 p. 202).

The Standards for Community Service were introduced in 2007 and apply to all Non – Government Organisations (NGOs) funded by the Department of Communities. The series of 11 standards set out minimum expectation of those NGOs providing homelessness services and relate to three key areas on service delivery (Urbis, 2009)

1. **People using services:** Standards one to six focus on 'ensuring that clients receive individually tailored, culturally sensitive services delivered with respect for their individual rights'.

2. **People working in services:** Standards seven to nine focus on 'ensuring that client services are provided by staff and volunteers who are appropriately selected, competent, and supported in performing their roles'.

3. **Governance:** Standards 10 and 11 focus on 'ensuring that client services are based on a clear vision and set of organisational values, and strong governance arrangements'.

Phase One, between 2008 and 2011 focused on self assessment and quality improvement. The second Phase commenced in 2011. All organisations who received more than $100,000 per annum in triennial funding from the Department will be monitored for compliance with the standards.
**South Australia**

**Legislation**

The *Housing Act 2005* established the current legislative framework for housing development in South Australia. The Act included provision for inclusionary zoning and provides the basis for the operation of the state housing authority, Housing SA.

**Housing Policies and Projects**

The SA Government established the Social Inclusion Initiative and appointed a Social Inclusion Board in 2002. Subsequently, the Rann Labor Government created a Social Inclusion Unit within the Department of Premier and Cabinet and released a Discussion Paper that provided an overview of levels and homelessness trends in 2003. It also released the State’s Homelessness Strategy, *Reducing Homelessness in South Australia*. In 2012 the Weatherill Government abolished the Social Inclusion Unit and disbanded the Board, but has continued to be active in addressing homelessness. The South Australian framework for reducing homelessness has four key elements and recognises that homelessness responses must include strategies to alleviate unemployment and low income levels, as well as improving access to affordable and appropriate housing. These four key elements are (Greenhalgh, 2002 p. 126)

1. An integrated, multi dimensional and multi agency approach;
2. A focus on aboriginal homelessness;
3. Interventions across the continuum of homelessness;
4. Interventions that will have a maximum impact in reducing homelessness.

The Social Inclusion Board’s report, *Reducing Homelessness in South Australia* was accompanied by an Action Plan. This 14 point Action Plan involved 22 government departments and community organisations and sought to collaboratively improve homelessness services provision.

The South Australian Government also funded a number of related homelessness projects and commissioned Rosanne Haggerty, the founder of Common Ground Community not for profit housing provider in New York to investigate suitable approaches to homelessness for the State Government. This ‘housing first’ model has a mix of diverse tenants and includes on – site support services. Other initiatives include the SA Integrated Homelessness Initiative, Street to Home, the SA Preferred Support Provider system and the Ceduna Assertive Regional Engagement (CARE) (Australian Government, 2009 (a)): 9, 16 and 17).

**Good Practice Examples**

The diversity of the South Australian Government’s approach to homelessness and willingness to pilot new approaches means that the State provides many examples of good practice.
Western Australia

Legislation

The State Department of Planning and Urban Development controls the development process in Western Australia (WA). The capital city of Perth has a Metropolitan Region Scheme which controls the major rezoning of urban land. Local councils manage land use zoning within this Scheme (Purdon and Burke, 1991 p.33).

Housing Policies and Projects

The State Government commissioned the State Homelessness Taskforce to address the causes of homelessness in 2001. The taskforce released an Issue Paper in September 2001 and the report, *Addressing Homelessness in WA* in 2002 (Greenhalgh, 2004 p.126). One of the defining features of the strategy in Western Australia is that the Government focuses upon consistently monitoring the implementation and outcomes of the strategy. This program was evaluated in 2006 and a total of 72 per cent of clients surveyed said that their ‘needs had been met, and requests for housing and accommodation were significantly reduced in the period following the implementation of the Strategy’s initiatives’ (Urbis 2009).

Other homelessness programs include

- The private *Rental Support and Advocacy Program* works with people having difficulty maintaining tenancies and provides assistance structured around the needs of each person or family. Success is defined as maintaining or moving to sustainable accommodation and avoiding eviction.
- The *Supported Housing Assistance Program* (SHAP), managed by the state Department of Housing and Works, provides support to public tenants at risk of being evicted as a result of rent arrears or anti-social behaviour. Success is defined as sustaining a tenancy or avoiding eviction.
- The *Strong Families Program* works across government and non-government service providers to provide a coordinated response to families with complex needs. Success is measured by outcomes including increased access to services, family and agency participation, improved stability in clients' lives, achieving stable housing, and improved school attendance.
- *Home Connect* assists families and individuals who need accommodation to access private housing, and success is measured by the number of clients and how long it takes for them to acquire a tenancy.

Tasmania

Legislation

The introduction of planning controls was relatively late in Tasmania compared to the other States. By 1991, only 80% of the State was covered by planning controls because of the ‘laissez faire’ approach adopted by local
Since the inception of planning policies, the State Government has steered strategies towards an integrated planning approach (Purdon and Burke, 1991 p.33).

**Housing Policies and Projects**

In 2004, Tasmania did not have a state homelessness strategy. Instead, the Tasmanian Department of Health and Human Services established the ‘Integrated Continuum of Support Model for Homeless People and Those at Risk of Homelessness’. ‘Based on the understanding that homelessness is not caused merely by a lack of shelter but involved a variety of underlying unmet needs including physical, economic and social’, the strategy focused upon four key functions (Greenhalgh, 2004 p.129)

1. Assessment and support: including early intervention, crisis assessment and support and information – referral services;
2. Immediate emergency shelter: including management of crisis beds, shelter based on crisis accommodation, and increased access to non-shelter based crisis accommodation;
3. Transitional support: including long term case planning and support, transitional support, access to sustainable and long term accommodation; and provision of high level supported accommodation for specific groups; and
4. Service system development: including training, quality assurance, community and knowledge network maintenance at a local, regional and state – wide level and evolution.

The Tasmanian Government renewed its commitment to addressing homelessness in 2008 and established a Housing Innovation Unit (HIU) within the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS). Working under the NAHA and National Partnership Agreements, the HIU endeavours to implement new affordable housing and homelessness initiatives.

**Examples of Good Practice**

The Tasmanian Specialist Homelessness Services (SHS) system demonstrates many aspects of good practice. Based on the Integrated Continuum of Support (ICOS) model, the homelessness service system is delivered by approximately 20 organisations and comprises:

- an integrated service system within each of the three regions of the state;
- A clearly defined set of service types detailing service specifications and functions;
- An equitable funding rationale based on input unit-costs; and
- Proportional regional funding based on regional populations.

This approach to homelessness services provision is praised for increasing flexibility and better services to clients because the model demands that service providers work collaboratively to address different aspects of the clients’ needs (Urbis, 2009).
**Northern Territory**

**Legislation**

The housing, homelessness and planning legislation in the Northern Territory (NT) is significantly different from the remainder of Australia. Purdon and Burke (1991 p.33) accurately describe the unique situation in Darwin, stating

> The Northern Territory Planning Authority exists under provisions of Part 2 of the Northern Territory Planning Act 1980. Members of the Northern Territory Planning Authority are drawn from members of the Northern Territory Legislative Assembly or member of local authorities. Municipalities are designated as local areas and the minister appoints local members. Local members cannot act as members in relation to land outside their own local areas. The planning authority for each local area consists of three territory members, four local members plus a chairman and deputy chairman who are territory members. Planning authorities make recommendations on planning policies and proposals to the relevant minister, but the minister is not bound by such recommendation.

**Housing Policies and Projects**

In 2004, the Territory did not have a homelessness strategy or policy framework for addressing homelessness. The majority of homeless people in the Northern Territory (NT) are classified as ‘itinerants’ or long grasses’. The ‘Itinerants Project’ was consequently the State Government’s primary response and aimed to provide service responses to itinerant Indigenous people in Darwin. Implemented from 2003, project priorities included (Greenhalgh, 2004 p.130)

1. A community education campaign in both urban and remote communities;
2. Intervention through extended night patrol hours;
3. Expansion of outreach and referral work;
4. A day centre facility with diversionary activities;
5. A proof of identification service; and
6. Data collection and research.

Since the inception of the NAHA, the Department of Housing, Local Government and Regional Services (DHLGRS) has assumed responsibility for social housing, homelessness and Indigenous Australians living in remote areas in the Northern Territory. The Department of Children and Families (DCF) and the Family and Individual Support Services Branch (FISS) also contribute to the Homelessness Policy Team.

The Homelessness Policy Team is responsible for policy and advocacy in relation to homelessness issues, administering NAHA funding to specialist homelessness services and implementing new projects funded under the
National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness. There are 36 NAHA funded Service Providers in the Northern Territory that deliver 50 specialist homelessness services. Initiatives under the National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness in the Northern Territory are targeting the urban centres of Darwin, Katherine, Tennant Creek and Alice Springs. Initiatives include

1. A Place to Call Home (APTCH);
2. Assistance for Rough Sleepers;
3. Youth Development Crisis Accommodation;
4. Tenancy Sustainability Program;
5. Assistance for People Leaving Correctional Services; and

The DCF and DHLGRS have also established the Housing and Homelessness Advisory Group (HHAG). This advisory group was established to engage with local community housing and support providers and provider high level knowledge to the Minister for Public and Affordable Housing.

**The Australian Capital Territory**

**Legislation**

The ACT has recently introduced a Homelessness Charter and a Service Guarantee (the Supported Accommodation Assistance Program Guarantee). The Homelessness Charter, which includes a Statement of Rights, sets out the broad principles protecting homeless people. The Service Guarantee explains what people can expect from homelessness service providers, including the types of support and services that are available.

**Housing Policies and Projects**

The ACT State Government released, *Breaking the Cycle: the ACT Homelessness Strategy* for the period 2004 – 2008. This strategy endeavoured to create a systematic approach to homelessness, deliver a stable housing continuum and improve the provision of front line services in Canberra. In conjunction with the National Affordable Housing Agreements and the National Partnership Agreements, the ACT released the *Affordable Housing Action Plan* in 2007. This initiative included 63 initiatives to provide affordable housing and rental accommodation for people living in Canberra and focused upon

1. Home ownership;
2. Private rental;
3. Community and not for profit housing; and
4. Public housing and supported accommodation (including emergency housing).
The Affordable Housing Action Plan Phase 2 was released in August 2009 and contains a further 21 initiatives designed to increase the supply of affordable housing for older local residents.

Within these broad homelessness frameworks, the Government has also introduced a number of projects; such as

1. First Point: a central intake service for people experiencing homelessness;
2. Street to Home;
3. Managed accommodation program and women exiting corrections program;
4. A place to call home; and
5. A new Foyer youth homelessness service.

Examples of Good Practice

Since the launch of Breaking the Cycle and the Good Practice Standards in 2002, key achievements include (Urbis, 2009)

- development of Pathways groups;
- development of the 'any door is the right door' policy through the Joint Pathways group;
- additional outreach services;
- additional families and men's services;
- establishment of the multi-disciplinary priority panel within Housing ACT and the involvement of a range of stakeholders on the panel; and
- development of protocols between the Office for Children Youth and Family Support (OCYFS) and the youth SAAP sector and between Mental Health ACT and the SAAP sector.
Section 6. Conclusions and Future Research Directions

This Literature Review is the first output of the project *The Role of Local Government in Addressing Homelessness*. The project overall examines how local governments contribute to the task of addressing the challenge of homelessness in Australia. It also considers what roles local government could potentially take in the future and whether it is possible to identify ‘best practice’ or ‘good practice’ with respect to local government and homelessness. This research has an overt policy focus and is funded by the Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FaHCSIA) as part of its work in meeting the Australian Government’s targets with respect to homelessness, as set out in the White Paper on Homelessness, *The Road Home*.

The issue of local government and homelessness is important because local government is the tier of government closest to the Australian people: it is the level of government that most people will have direct experience of, it provides an important array of services to individual households and communities and it is an important source of local leadership. *The Road Home* notes that local governments are already playing a significant role in addressing homelessness, especially in regional Australia. However, little is known about these activities or the way in which the sector’s involvement could productively develop over time.

This project seeks to address this gap. The project examines the role local governments currently play in addressing homelessness and considers the part they could play in the future. The research also investigates how local government actions can, and should, dovetail with those actions being undertaken by other tiers of government. This research aims to ensure more effective public sector action, as well as more effective programs, at the local level.

The aims of this research project are to

1. Develop an understanding of good practice in the way local government can address homelessness. This project aim will examine good practice in terms of current national and international actions and programs;
2. Document examples of good practice in homelessness amongst local government in inner suburban, outer suburban and regional localities;
3. Provide advice to central governments on how they can better empower local governments to address homelessness within their jurisdictions;
4. Identify barriers to local governments more effectively dealing with homelessness; and,
5. Raise awareness of homelessness and effective strategies for dealing with it within the local government sector.
Overall, the research aims to answer two key questions

*What role does local government currently play in addressing homelessness and in achieving the targets established in The Road Home?* and,

*Drawing upon best practice nationally and internationally, what role, or roles, could local governments play in reducing homelessness and its impacts in Australia?*

This report reviews the literature on homelessness and local government as it relates to both Australia and international experience. This report has found that relatively little has been written on this topic in Australia and this absence reflects the relatively minor role local government plays in mitigating the impacts of homelessness. It does, however, conclude that local governments have important impacts on homelessness and that there is scope for them to be more actively engaged with the homeless agenda. It is worth noting also, that historically homelessness in Australia has been addressed as a question of social welfare/social work. Local governments have few powers or responsibilities in this area and therefore limited engagement. However, the trend toward considering homelessness as primarily an issue of housing - with a philosophy of housing first – opens up the question of local government and homelessness. Critically, local government has many responsibilities with respect both to the provision of housing – land use planning, affordable housing targets, the regulation of boarding houses in some places – and the management of urban spaces. This trend to reconceptualising homelessness and repositioning it within public policy domains, therefore has had significant impacts on local government’s engagement with homelessness. It is worth noting that this trend has been evident in other nations, including the European Union (Edgar *et al* 1999).

At a practical level, the available literature suggests that local governments in Australia consider homelessness in different ways depending upon their location, history of engagement with questions of social policy and resource base. While accepting the considerable diversity between local governments, some of the critical ways that local governments interact with homelessness include

- Some local governments take a direct role in addressing homelessness and assisting them with accommodation, services and support;
- Local governments may play an important part in the regulation of boarding houses and other accommodation used by homeless persons;
- The nature of Australian Government, State and local government relations to date has not highlighted a role for local government in dealing with homelessness;
- Local governments may lack the resources to make a significant impact on the direct provision of homelessness services but they can assist in other ways – through information provision, via pro-active planning policies and through engagement with the community sector;
- The planning policies of local governments can assist or impede the provision of affordable housing that constitutes exit points from homelessness; and,
Local governments may enact by-laws that exclude homeless persons from their territory.

This review also considers the role of local governments in addressing homelessness in a number of other developed nations, including the US, Canada and European nations. It concludes that differences in the nature of government between these places and Australia make it difficult to draw out direct policy implications but they are suggestive of potential roles for Australian local governments into the future. It is, however, restating that the trend internationally is for local governments to become more involved with addressing homelessness, not less, and that often this engagement takes the form of strategic planning and priority setting, rather than direct provision.

Overall, the evidence from the literature suggests that the role of local government in addressing homelessness is growing, but that local governments should look to become the facilitators of the solutions to homelessness, not the providers.

There is also evidence to suggest that local governments need to review how their policies and management practices may negatively impede the wellbeing of the homeless and those at risk of homelessness. One positive action is to adopt a Charter of Rights for the Homeless, or a protocol for dealing with the homeless.

Given the issues outlined above, it is possible to map out key research questions to be addressed through the latter parts of this project. These include

- What is the range of activities being undertaken by local governments in 2012 to address homelessness? Can we produce a snapshot of current practice?
- What are the issues that local governments are grappling with as they consider homelessness as a policy domain?
- What impact do State and National Policy frameworks have on local government engagement with homelessness?
- How are local governments and their efforts perceived by service providing organisations? And,
- Are there instances of good practice in dealing with homelessness that can be transferred to other local governments?

These questions will be addressed in the subsequent stages of the research with the findings presented in the Final Report.
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