THE ROLE OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT IN ADDRESSING HOMELESSNESS

The University of Adelaide

Centre for Housing, Urban and Regional Planning

National Homelessness Research Agenda 2009-2013

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The opinions, comments and/or analysis expressed in this document are those of the author or authors and do not necessarily represent the views of the Minister for Housing and Homelessness and cannot be taken in any way as expressions of government policy.
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<tr>
<th>Acronym</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ABS</td>
<td>Australian Bureau of Statistics</td>
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<tr>
<td>ALGA</td>
<td>Australian Local Government Association</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DEEWR</td>
<td>Department of Employment, Education and Workplace Relations</td>
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<tr>
<td>FaHCSIA</td>
<td>Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs</td>
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<tr>
<td>RAI</td>
<td>Regional Australia Institute</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BBU</td>
<td>UK Break and Breakfast Unit</td>
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<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>CCLM</td>
<td>Council of Capital City Lord Mayors</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>
</tr>
<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>
</tr>
<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>
</tr>
<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 the tier of government that is closest to the people of Australia. It provides a range of 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 (Megarrity 2011).

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 councils, 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 this area could be conceived.

This report builds upon national and international evidence presented in the first report, The Role of Local Government in Homelessness: Literature Review and aims to improve our understanding of what constitutes good practice in the sector. Material from six case study sites, an online survey of current local government practices and seven policymaker workshops is analysed in relation to four key research themes:

1. Regulatory roles and local government as public space managers;
2. Affordable housing and homelessness: exploring the link;
3. Matching responsibilities and resources; and,

In broad terms, the overall conclusions presented in this report match the findings of the Literature Review: a majority of councils in Australia currently play a relatively minor role in mitigating the impacts of homelessness and few have a role in preventing homelessness. The most common role played by local governments is in planning for affordable housing. A significant number of councils across Australia have by-laws that affect the homeless, though many do not actively enforce these regulations. A small number and percentage of councils take an active role in enforcing such regulation, largely within the framework of public safety and the control of public space.

The majority of councils do not have formal or informal policies to manage interactions with the homeless population. However, a majority of councils recognise that the nature of their engagement with homeless residents – or those at risk of homelessness – could expand and more effective partnerships could be developed with the not-for-profit sector and State/Federal Governments. A lack of financial and human resources were identified as the most significant impediments to making a greater commitment to addressing homelessness.

Most respondents to our survey of local governments believed that all three tiers of government should take responsibility for homeless and work in a
partnership to reduce its impact and the number of persons affected. A lack of clarity around the current division of responsibilities was identified as a major impediment to more effective outcomes in dealing with homelessness at the local level.

The Australian government should investigate the potential for broader policy vehicles to drive change in local government involvement in homelessness such as the National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness.

This report found that more attention needs to be paid to understanding the role of local government in bridging the gap between affordable housing and homelessness policy. In many instances, local governments saw land use planning for the provision of affordable housing as their key contribution to addressing homelessness. Other local governments went further via the provision of land for services and/or involvement in projects aimed at boosting the supply of housing for the most vulnerable. There is a need to generate greater awareness of the full range of policy options available to local governments in this area, and to disseminate better information on the topic.

Many local governments had strong links with community service organisations and non-government organisations who deal with the homeless. The part local governments play in supporting these organisations deserves greater acknowledgement in public discussion.

The need for well-targeted public education campaigns needs to be acknowledged and such initiatives could be addressed with the active participation of philanthropic organisations. Research from a forthcoming report *Beyond charity: the engagement of the philanthropic and homelessness sectors in Australia* indicates that philanthropic bodies are keen to engage with the homelessness sector.

This research has found that there is clearly both the capacity and a willingness for local governments to become more involved in addressing homelessness in Australia and that the roles local governments can play include:

1. Advocacy on behalf of vulnerable groups within the community;
2. Raising awareness amongst elected councillors and the general population about the nature, causes and consequences of homelessness;
3. Facilitating networks and building connections with the human services sector; and,
4. Planning because zoning, planning and building regulations are the vehicle that controls development processes and housing supply.

The report makes a number of policy recommendations:

- First, we suggest that the Australian Government considers funding 15-30 pilot studies across Australia where local government can demonstrate good practice in the homelessness sector.
Councils would be able to nominate as individual case studies or in partnerships with others from their region in order to access funding for three years to demonstrate an innovative approach to the challenges of homelessness.

The aim of the pilot program is to demonstrate the diverse array policies and programs that could be applied by local governments to the challenges of homelessness.

This recommendation is a direct consequence of feedback from local governments who reported that learning by example is the most effective means for encouraging local governments to take up new policy agendas.

Funding of $30 million per year over three years would have enormous leverage within local government and significantly reduce public sector outlays in other areas of Federal, State and local government expenditure.

Second, we recommend that the Australian Government fund and support a series of ‘Homelessness and Local Government’ networks across Australia, where both elected officials and professional staff can share experiences and exchange ideas.

Third, we recommend that the ‘Local government and Homelessness Toolkit’ is circulated widely. It is important that it is placed both on the website for the National Clearinghouse for Homelessness, but it should also be promoted through the Australian Local government Association’s website and, perhaps more importantly, through the websites of the state Local Government Associations.

The Toolkit recommends a non controversial strategy for developing more appropriate responses to homelessness within local governments, via five steps:

- Review
- Plan
- Decide
- Implement
- Promote

Respondents noted that elected officials are, at times, an impediment to policy innovation within local government with respect to homelessness. We recommend the development of a training package for elected officials in local government on the topic of homelessness. It could include modules on human rights, the benefits of developing formal policies and protocols with respect to homelessness, planning modules and training in community service impacts and benefits. The Australian Centre for Excellence in Local Government may be an appropriate entity to roll out such training.

Fifth, we recommend that a library of exemplar policy documents relevant to local government and its efforts to deal with homeless be developed and be made available through multiple channels, including the National Homelessness Clearinghouse, Local Government Associations, and the professional organisations associated with the local government sector.
Introduction

This paper is the second 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 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 roles local governments currently play in addressing homelessness and considers the part they could play in the future. The research 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.

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

Secondly, 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 report. The research undertaken during this project has been structured into a six stage methodology:

- A literature review was the first stage of this project and has been published on the Australian Homelessness Clearinghouse\(^1\). The literature review findings were used to inform the project overall and, more specifically, the development of a web-based national survey of local governments.

- The web-based national survey of local government officers captured a snapshot of how local governments deal with the issue of homelessness. Through the use of a database that included the name, email details and postal address for every council Chief Executive Officer we were able to make contact with all local governments across Australia. The recruitment strategy included:
  - writing to the CEO and asking them to work in partnership with relevant community engagement staff members to complete the survey;
  - Sending two follow-up emails and a postcard to remind council staff about the deadline for submissions. The survey was available online for fourteen weeks between Monday 21 May and Monday 3 September 2012.
  - The response rate was 51 per cent for any response and 39 per cent for fully completed questionnaires.

- Nine case studies of local governments in inner city, suburban and rural areas were undertaken to provide an in-depth understanding of the nature of homelessness in these localities and the role of local governments in responding to homelessness. The cases study sites were:
  - Adelaide City Council;
  - District Council of Ceduna;
  - City of Port Phillip;
  - Moreland City Council;
  - Mildura Rural City;

\(^1\) http://homelessnessclearinghouse.govspace.gov.au/).
• Blacktown City Council
• Clarence Valley Council;
• City of Perth; and,
• City of Armadale in Western Australia.

• Fieldwork undertaken in each site included meeting with relevant council staff and frontline service providers working in their jurisdiction. This allowed data to be collected regarding the policy context and the ‘on the ground’ lived experience of responding to homelessness.

• Six workshops were undertaken across Australia with local governments and other key stakeholders and these meetings were used to present the interim findings and investigate the strategies, opportunities and constraints that are critical to more effective action. The policy workshop locations, dates and number of participants are outlined in the table below.

Table 1: Location, Date and Participation Rates of Workshops

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Participation Rate</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Adelaide</td>
<td>Friday 6 July</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perth</td>
<td>Monday 11 July</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Melbourne</td>
<td>Tuesday 12 July</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ballarat</td>
<td>Wednesday 13 July</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hobart</td>
<td>Thursday 14 July</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brisbane</td>
<td>Friday 10 August</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sydney</td>
<td>Tuesday 14 August</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td></td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1. A final workshop with policymakers was held in Canberra on Friday 27 July. Eight participants attended from the FaHCSIA, DEEWR, The Regional Australia Institute, the ABS and the ALGA. This workshop was used to discuss the interim results and tease out the implications of the research for governments.

2. The final stage involves preparing this report and a Toolkit for Local government staff who are looking to change the nature of their engagement with homelessness.
Structure of this Report
The substantial part of this report begins with a brief review of the major outcomes from the review of the literature. This is a summary of the literature review that has been published and is available via the Australian Homelessness Clearinghouse. The remainder of this report has been divided into a number of sections that explore the key themes that have emerged. These are (1) regulatory roles and councils as public space managers, (2) the link between affordable housing and homelessness; (3) matching responsibilities and resources; and, (4) formal or informal homelessness strategies. In each section, we present and analyse material from every stage in the methodology to discuss why these themes are important and the policy ramifications for each tier of government. Case study reports are provided in the Appendix.
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, Chapman & Wood 1984). 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 differ 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 (Grimsey, Jones & Hemingway 2012).

The Australian government should investigate the potential for broader policy vehicles to drive change in local government involvement in homelessness such as the National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness.

Over recent years there has been positive evolution in the relationship between the three tiers of governments in Australia. The *Inter-governmental Agreement Establishing Principles Guiding Inter-governmental Relations on Local Government Matters* (the IGA) sets out fundamental principles to encourage positive and productive working between the three spheres of government (Australian Government 2006). The IGA specifically addresses the issue of cost-shifting. We note that the IGA provides a potentially useful framework for enhancing the role of local governments in addressing homelessness.

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, and 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 Road Home

The White Paper, The Road Home: A National Approach to Reducing Homelessness (Australian Government 2008b) set an agenda to address 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 (Australian Government 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.
Through this process $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.
The National Affordable Housing Agreement (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.

**The National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness:** A $800 million combined Commonwealth and State/Territory government commitment over five years, to meet the headline goals of *The Road Home*, 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:

- Implementation of **A Place to Call Home** initiative to build 600 homes for people and families experiencing or at risk of homelessness;
- **Street to Home** initiatives for chronic homeless people (rough sleepers);
- **Tenancy support for private and public tenants**, including advocacy, financial counselling and referral services to help people sustain their tenancies; and,
- **Assistance for people leaving child protection, jail and health facilities**, to access and maintain stable, affordable housing.

**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 1,600 to 2,100 new dwellings to be built from 2009-10.

**Funding through the National Partnership Agreement on Remote Indigenous Housing:** 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.

**Funding through the Nation Building Economic Stimulus Plan (NBESP):** 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.

**National Rental Affordability Scheme (NRAS) funding:** 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).
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 provides 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 defined 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’ (Australian Government 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 outlined above by focussing 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 (Australian Government 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.

**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;
- Targetting the homeless in order to respond adequately to problems of the homeless;
- Considering homelessness in all its multidimensional aspects and providing 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, 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 States, 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, p. 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 3: The Role and Functions of Local Government in Social and Economic Planning

<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>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Land use planning</td>
<td>Infrastructure provision (social and physical)</td>
<td>Aged care workers</td>
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<tr>
<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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<tr>
<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 pressure for local governments internationally 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 is 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. 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 (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):

- **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;

- **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,

- **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 is ‘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 remains 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 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 to the demand for services (Dunn 2001, p. 2489). Moreover, State governments in some jurisdictions have 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. 85-6) the following problems frequently 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 wellbeing 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).

The need for well targeted public education campaigns needs to be acknowledged and such initiatives could be addressed with the active participation of philanthropic organisations. Research from a forthcoming report Beyond charity: the engagement of the philanthropic and homelessness sectors in Australia indicates that philanthropic bodies are keen to engage with the homelessness sector.
Conclusion
This section has provided a summary of the literature on homelessness and local government in Australia. It 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 what role local government should play in addressing 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.
Section Three: Key Themes

Section Three summarises material from each stage of the research and presents the findings under four key research themes. These are:

1. regulatory roles and councils as public space managers;
2. the link between affordable housing and homelessness;
3. matching responsibilities and resources; and,
4. formal or informal homelessness strategies.

The four themes emerged from both the case studies and the outcomes of the survey to local governments. They found further endorsement in the workshops towards the end of the project and in many respects reflect both attitudes to homelessness within local governments across Australia, as well as the impact of institutional frameworks/resource constraints.

Theme One: Regulatory roles and councils as public space managers

The role of councils as public space managers emerged consistently as an important theme throughout the project. Councils frequently reflected upon their responsibility to maintain public safety and security in community space. The methods adopted by councils to meet this responsibility varied greatly: whilst some inner-city councils tended to enforce by-laws, outer metropolitan and rural councils did not consider by-laws the most effective means of managing public space. Similarly, approaches to the regulation of boarding house and tourist caravan parks varied by state, the degree to which the council area was remote or urban, and the size of the population within the local government area, resources and political support.

It is worth noting that some councils – such as the City of Port Phillip and to a certain extent the City of Sydney – adopt an atypical approach to the regulation of public space. Some of these councils emphasise the human rights of homeless people and seek to manage the perception of public nuisance within the wider public by positive measures that seek to educate, and via the provision of facilities that improve the wellbeing of homeless persons while simultaneously reducing negative impacts for the wider public.

By-laws

Local governments are commonly viewed as a ‘creature of the states’ because their powers and responsibilities are determined by the relevant State Government. Local government can only perform those functions established under State legislation and especially; the Local Government Act (Purdon 1992, p. 41). Nevertheless, local governments 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 use of by-laws and public space management techniques.
The national survey of local government practices undertaken as part of this project found that in relation to by-laws:

- 58 per cent of councils have by-laws that have an impact upon homeless people; such as regulations that may control unwanted behaviours in public space (Figure 1); and,
- 87 per cent of councils who employ inspectors/rangers/local law officers have not issued an expiation notices or fine to a homeless person for breach of the by-laws during the past year (Figure 2).

The latter statistic is significant and reinforced an important message communicated in the case studies: that most local government see little value in using punitive measures to control homelessness. However, the survey findings, case studies and focus group material all suggest that local government by-laws that have the potential to exert a profound impact upon homeless people are common. Enforcement of these by-laws and the issuing of expiation notices or fines are uncommon because council staff considers that this is counter-productive.

**Figure 1:** Does your local government have any by-laws that impact upon homeless people such as regulations that may control unwanted behaviours in public space?
Significantly, the survey of local governments found that while 76 per cent of councils who issued fines for homelessness had issued fewer than five expiation notices over the past year, 12 per cent of councils had issued 16 or more. Clearly, a small minority of councils were very active in the use of by-laws and associated measures to control homelessness and what were seen to be its negative effects.

The use of by-laws in capital city councils is often considered differently when compared with suburban and rural councils because the nature of homelessness in these jurisdictions is significantly different. Homeless people tend to congregate in inner city locations because of service availability. This includes both specialist homelessness services and mainstream services, such as hospitals, magistrates’ courts and Centrelink offices. Strategies that effectively attempt to ‘move people on’ are therefore less likely to be effective in the Central Business District. That said, at least one capital city council – the Adelaide City Council – has recently introduced by-laws prohibiting extended camping in nearby parks.

By-laws provide a statutory ‘next step’ for local councils but powers of discretion are required for their enforcement. Inner city councils suggest that a close working relationship with the State Government is crucial for effectively managing the homeless population, rough sleeping, public safety and community expectations.

Participants attending the Sydney focus group felt that the NSW State Government managed an innovative policy framework for dealing with rough sleepers in public space and managing community expectations about homelessness in the CBD. One participant noted:
The NSW State Government is proactive when dealing with rough sleepers in public space. Local government can consider informally adopting the policy, but councils cannot be signatories. The City of Sydney is an observer to the State Government policy. In this sense, they always look to uphold State Government mandates and replicate their approaches to ending homelessness.

The leadership role played by the State Government was also stressed during the Adelaide City Council fieldwork.

Participants from the Adelaide City Council suggested that a strong partnership between state and local government enables the council to play a role in public safety management and meaningfully contribute to the homelessness sector. One staff member stated, "We support the Federal Government’s policy position and the State’s role as a services provider. [Our] role is in community safety, building neighbourhoods and public space management". Similarly, a manager explained:

**We have a responsibility to manage public space. This requires showing compassion to vulnerable persons. We see ourselves as advocates for the disadvantaged in our city and we help the State Government implement their homelessness policy.**

Local councils highlighted the importance of State Government frameworks and policy environments for determining the existence and use of by-laws.

**Boarding Houses and Caravan Parks**

Boarding and rooming houses must be registered with the relevant local government in each state. The regulation of this accommodation is the responsibility of local councils in some jurisdictions. According to the survey results, some 54 per cent of respondents have dedicated staff, such as environment, health and welfare officers focussed on the regulation of boarding houses. Their roles include inspections for adequacy, standards and safety and it is important to note that some informal boarding houses go unregulated.

The Victorian Government has recently changed the Act regarding standards and the length of stay in caravan parks across the State. Now referred to as “tourist parks”, State legislation prohibits long term stays. However according to policymakers and council officers in Ballarat reported that, “residents are taking them to the Supreme Court regarding the (eviction) notice they were given”. They believe their eviction is open to challenge and wish to bring attention to the negative impacts arising from the closure of caravan parks.

During the Melbourne policy-maker workshop, a participant shared the experiences of Monash Council in relation to boarding houses. The comment below demonstrates the capacity for local government to shape the homelessness sector to a large extent. Monash Council’s active and human-rights based approach ensured residents did not experience homelessness:
In Monash, issues surrounding the boarding houses are very serious. We have a large number of international students who have sleeping shifts and practice bed hopping because there are insufficient affordable and appropriate housing options in the area. Our OH&S Officers have encountered many unsafe conditions and practices. Other unsatisfactory consequences are the number of students who have started gambling at the Crown Casino because it is one of the only places open 24hours/day. We try to avoid closing rooming houses because this will exit people into homelessness. We provide a Rooming House Subsidy that tries to encourage rooming houses to stay open despite the gentrification process.

However, many councils felt that they did not have adequate staff resources or funding to effectively manage boarding/rooming houses. Whilst the need for boarding houses and more affordable accommodation was recognised by all participants, policymakers who attended the Sydney focus group suggested that:

monitoring boarding houses has been cost shifted to councils. New boarding houses are not catering for vulnerable groups. Now they are being taken up by students and particular religious groups.

Summary
Local governments in Australia recognise that they play a significant regulatory role as public space managers. Managing public safety is commonly acknowledged as an important responsibility for local governments. By-laws provide a mechanism for councils to maintain community safety and wellbeing. However, the enforcement of local government by-laws can have negative repercussions for rough sleepers that are not readily understood within councils. On the other hand, many capital city councils, such as City of Adelaide, have created innovative partnerships with frontline service providers to ensure that homeless people are not discriminated against. Appropriately managing boarding/rooming houses is another important task undertaken by local governments. While some local governments have adopted a positive attitude to engagement with this policy area, many councils feel that the responsibilities that are increasingly passed to them are not adequately matched by resources.
Theme Two: Affordable housing and homelessness: the link

The link between homelessness and affordable housing was identified as an important issue throughout the project. A majority of participations recognised that the lack of affordable housing was creating a relatively new cohort of homeless persons/families who could not enter, or remain in, the private rental market. Increasing the supply of affordable and appropriate housing was identified as an ideal ‘exit’ from homelessness. It was also acknowledged as the most appropriate strategy for reducing the number of persons cycling through the public housing system. While the need for affordable housing was readily identified and understood, participants expressed confusion about the best ways to achieve affordable housing. Clarence Valley Council (discussed below and in the Appendix) provided a number of practical examples for councils interested in pursuing affordable housing options.

The national survey provided a number of insights into the role of local government in the provision of affordable housing. One of the most important conclusions to emerge from the analysis was that there is a considerable gap between the identification of housing need and the development of appropriate plans to fill that need: some 57 per cent of respondents to the survey reported that there is a demand for affordable housing options in their council area however, only 28 per cent of respondents had affordable housing targets articulated in a “Development Plan” or “Planning Scheme/Strategy” for their local area.

**Figure 3:** To what extent do you feel that there is a demand for affordable housing options in your council area?

![Chart showing survey results]

The survey results also suggested a poor understanding of the available options for increasing the supply of affordable housing. For example, 67 per cent of participants did not actively pursue partnerships with not-for-profit providers to ensure a supply of affordable housing in the area, and 60 per cent of councils did not work in conjunction with other State/Commonwealth housing providers to improve housing options. These statistics suggest that
local councils either do not attach priority to the provision of affordable housing, or have a limited understanding of how they can achieve affordable housing outcomes.

Many council representatives felt that within council planning teams there was a lack of understanding about how housing and development policies indirectly affect the homeless population. This concern was reflected in the survey results. Fully 41 per cent of survey participants stated that local government planning legislation and policies impact upon the homeless to a limited extent. This statistic reflects a lack of awareness around the impact of development approval process on housing options and those experiencing homelessness. Policymakers attending the Adelaide focus group reinforced this concern, stating:

A key problem facing councils is lack of understanding about the consequences of their policy decisions. Council staff are often unaware of the indirect effects of their policies for vulnerable groups within the community.

Policymakers attending the Melbourne focus group suggested that the role of local government is to change the perception of affordable housing amongst developers and help clarify the economic and social rationale for partnerships between all tiers of government and developers. Participants agreed upon five roles of local government in relation to affordable housing:

1. Facilitator and advocate;
2. Providing land in partnership with developers for affordable housing;
3. Entrepreneurial role: providing a business model/mechanism;
4. Using air rights usefully; and,
5. Developing a land trust model.

The City of Darebin is recognised for designing innovative policy options in the affordable housing sector. A representative from the City explained the council’s work during a focus group session:

We won funding for a pilot project that asks the question, “How much affordable housing is required to address homelessness?” The main outcome of this study is a push for relaxed planning regulations. The three year pilot project was funded by Housing VIC and aims to establish an Action Plan. Housing VIC has been unwilling to consider reforming the Planning Act to include inclusionary zoning, so the council has started forming MOUs (Memorandums of Understanding) with developers. Our strategy includes bringing all stakeholders into the same room and starting a conversation about the economic benefits of affordable housing. We have learnt that in the first instance, it’s easier to deal with homelessness under the umbrella of affordable housing and housing stress.

This example suggests that councils have the capacity to pursue pioneering affordable housing strategies in partnership with the not-for-profit sector, commercial developers and State/Federal Government.
Case Study: Clarence Valley Council

Clarence Valley Council’s Affordable Housing Strategy was recognised by the Planning Institute of Australia in 2010 as a national leader. Local issues and conditions were taken into consideration when designing the strategy because the nature of homelessness, available services and development industry are different in regional Australia. The Affordable Housing Planner noted that NRAS funding opportunities, local developers, lending institutions/banks and potential investors are different in Grafton when compared with many other places. The council accessed capital from the Housing Affordability Fund (HAF) to kick-start three affordable housing projects:

35 lot subdivisions were released for sale on the private market with a $10,000 discount on land prices. This project aimed to encourage supply of affordable housing and increase available stock. Some 28 sites were sold in the first year, mostly to private/local residents.

Planning reforms. This project involved reviewing and updating many policy documents, such as planning mechanisms, adaptable housing guidelines, affordable housing policies, the development application process, community and open space plans.

14 affordable housing dwellings on three sites were built in conjunction with a local community housing provider. These dwellings were allocated to the affordable rental market. These properties have secured funding for the next 10 years through NRAS.

At the same time, Clarence Valley Council is also involved in a number of homelessness ventures. Affordable housing and homelessness are understood as closely related problems that require a joined-up policy and services response. The engagement of council staff with the homelessness sector includes:

- Being a member of the Northern Rivers Affordable Housing Forum;

- Establishing the Clarence Valley Housing Interagency. This includes representatives from all the relevant stakeholder groups, including disability, Indigenous affairs, domestic violence and youth services. Council convenes the interagency, provides the meeting space and funds related activities. If the Interagency wishes to conduct activities or programs, the council will provide funding for these initiatives. For example, the Interagency identified a cohort of clients who couldn't apply for housing or go on the housing register if they couldn't prove their identity or ethnic status. The council, through the Interagency, funded 100 clients to receive their birth certificates;

- Overseeing a number of training workshops for frontline service providers in the housing/homelessness sector. These initiatives have helped foster good relations between service providers;

- Supporting the Regional Homelessness Action Plan. This document stresses that policy and service integration is important. Clarence Valley Council helps service providers remain abreast of policy changes in the sector. The council encourages
service providers to work together and incorporate new programs into their care plans; and,

Providing one off community events and programs. Such as providing funds for the Information Referral Centre to upgrade their soup kitchen.

The experiences of Clarence Valley Council suggest that “good practices” in the homelessness sector include location-specific knowledge, effective partnerships with frontline service providers and innovative affordable housing strategies. The council and its staff achieved success in both affordable housing and homelessness policy domains by approaching the issues as one policy problem.

Summary
A majority of research participants identified a high level of association between homelessness and affordable housing. Affordable housing was understood as an effective means to reduce the number of people/families falling into homelessness and providing an appropriate exit from homelessness support services. For example, Clarence Valley Council has successfully developed an Affordable Housing Strategy that aims to improve housing options for vulnerable groups in the community. Nevertheless, local governments have not taken-up opportunities in this policy domain. It was felt that planning teams within local government do not have sufficient information or resources to pursue innovative affordable housing strategies.
Theme Three: Matching responsibilities and resources

The relationship between local government roles, responsibilities and allocated resources was a common area of discussion throughout the course of this research project. Some 83 per cent of respondents to our national survey identified common challenges, barriers or issues that prevented local government engaging with homelessness. Fully 209 respondents provided extended responses to highlight the diversity and complexity of the challenges confronting local government and the uptake of good practice with respect to homelessness. The reasons most commonly cited for preventing engagement with the homelessness sector (listed in descending order) were lack of:

- resources;
- funding;
- clarity regarding the division of responsibilities between governments;
- affordable housing stock;
- political leadership within council;
- community understanding; and,
- innovative planning teams.

The multitude of forces make the adoption of good practice policies with respect to homelessness is demonstrated by the extended response below:

*Macedon as a regional area close to Melbourne is being impacted by rising rents in metropolitan areas, and the subsequent on-flow of population (Gisborne is only 1 hour from Melbourne), creating a highly elevated rental market. Long term residents and families from the area are being moved to Sunbury and Bendigo for private rental and breaking connections with family and community. The homelessness service is completely overwhelmed as housing issues are often a result of family breakdown and family violence and the community does not have the housing to support this. SAAP can only work with people in a limited capacity because of this. No community housing has been built in Macedon Ranges since the introduction of the Housing Registrar system, meaning that the limited public housing and scarce private rental is not meeting the needs of the community. In the past few years the Kyneton Caravan Park, which was a place for emergency housing, was shut due to a heritage overlay creating an unsustainable future for the Park. Macedon Council will continue to advocate for more public and social housing and will update its Housing Strategy in the next two years. Inclusionary Zoning principles and legislation would assist local government to ask for further inclusions of social housing in further housing developments in the Shire.*

The clear need to clarify the division of responsibilities amongst each tier of government and allocating adequate staff resources and funding was also highlighted by all the focus group participants. Ballarat policy makers suggested that:

*The argument should be focussed upon what the role of each tier should be. It needs to be remembered that councils are not in the*
business of direct service provision. They could provide preventative programs, such as those for youth. Outside of that, council roles could focus upon advocacy and research. But we must avoid duplication, vertical fiscal imbalance and unfunded mandates.

In addition to these concerns, Brisbane policymakers suggested that all tiers of government should agree upon a common definition of homelessness and use this to collate information that is accessible and useful for federal/state/local government policy interventions.

**Case Study: City Of Perth**

The arguments against local governments assuming a greater role or responsibilities in the homelessness sector were presented during discussions with the City of Perth.

Key staff within the City of Perth felt that the roles and responsibilities with respect to homelessness needed further clarification before local governments could become involved. Legislation, funding and political support were identified as pre-requisites before council engagement:

*There is no legislation or obligation for local government to play a role in the homelessness sector. It would be silly to get involved without a partnership with the State Government. Otherwise it just contributes to the messy policy settings. There is only so much that local government can do because of limited funding. We are not looking to expand the scope of our involvement beyond the Homelessness Count and Connect event. I can’t see anything changing, not unless there was a significant political shift inside this organisation. Unless the state legislated things – you run the risk of spending huge volumes of funding for no gain.*

Informants suggested that poor collaboration with the State and Federal Governments regarding homelessness and limited involvement with the *Road Home* reforms had soured political relations. The informants suggested that a poor understanding of the roles and responsibilities in the homelessness sector had caused political relations to decline:

*State government haven’t come to us for discussions regarding what we could do or what we would like to contribute. We feel we have been left out. Federal funds go directly to the State Government. The State government undertakes limited consultations and often contracts out services.*

As a result, the City of Perth has no intention to expand their formal involvement in the homelessness sector beyond the Homelessness Connect event held annually and the Homelessness Count, facilitated by the Council of Capital City Lord Mayors (CCCLM).

Perth focus group participants agreed that the Local Government Association in each state can play a helpful role in discussions between the three tiers of government. Representatives from the Australian Local Government Association (ALGA) suggested that the Local Government Association in each state could play a pivotal role in facilitating the adoption of homelessness
issues amongst councils, creating a platform for sharing experiences and communication networks. ALGA representatives stressed the importance of working to prevent cost and responsibility shifting to local councils without adequate resourcing.

A majority of participants in the focus groups agreed that local government roles and responsibilities in the homelessness sector should include:

1. Advocacy on behalf of vulnerable groups within the community;
2. Raising awareness amongst elected councillors and the general population about the nature, causes and consequences of homelessness;
3. Facilitating networks and building connections with the human services sector; and,
4. Planning because zoning, planning and building regulations are the vehicle that controls development processes and housing supply.

In particular, the role of local government in providing education and improving community awareness was emphasised. Local government already plays a significant role in educating elected council members and the general population regarding the problem of homelessness. Many participants suggested that ill-informed councillors prohibit the implementation of innovative homelessness responses at the community level. For instance, Ballarat policymakers noted:

The focus of council tends to be upon their constituents. Homeless people who are from elsewhere are not considered “our problem” because they aren’t rate payers. These perceptions are important because most people only consider rough sleeping. Discussing what the homelessness population looks like is a good place to start.

Similarly, participants attending the Adelaide focus group proposed:

It would be a good idea to run an awareness campaign about the nature of homelessness. This would help councils realise that homelessness is a problem everywhere. It’s especially important to educate the elected members because they hold the political power that is necessary to address homelessness effectively.
Summary
The issue of roles, responsibilities and resources was important for all local governments throughout the research project. Many expressed concern about homelessness reforms and services becoming another unfunded mandate for councils and reflected upon prior experience in other policy domains where state governments or the Australian Government had shifted a funding burden onto their community. The City of Perth outlined the multitude of factors that complicate the allocation of roles and responsibilities within the sector. At the same time, participants also recognised the potential for local governments to play a larger role in the homelessness sector and increase the scope of responsibilities associated with housing and community welfare.
Theme Four: Formal and Informal homelessness strategies

The distinction between formal and informal policies and procedures was stressed throughout the project. Only 14.2 per cent of survey respondents had a formal homelessness policy or set of strategies. The most common reasons for not having a homelessness policy included:

- lack of political support within the council chamber;
- poor understanding of the problem and possible solutions; and,
- insufficient funding, resources and staffing.

Policymakers who attended the focus group in Perth identified a number of challenges associated with developing formal homelessness policies:

*The issue of council politics is very important. The role of the Mayor and the politics of local government are important. The elected members set your agenda and determine what is possible (in regards to formal policies). The leader is instrumental in setting the tone for projects.*

Figure 4: Does your council have a formal homelessness policy or set of strategies?

![Pie chart showing 14.2% Yes and 85.8% No]

In contrast, a much larger portion of survey participants (46 per cent) reported that their council has informal policy or practices to support homeless people.

Amongst respondents there was a general sentiment that informal policies enabled council staff to engage with local homelessness service providers without the structure and regulations associated with formal policies. Informal procedures do not require the approval and political support of elected council members. In this way, council staff has more freedom to change internal procedures as required and respond to community issues as they arise.
Case Study: Blacktown City Council

Blacktown City Council does not have a formal homelessness policy. Instead, the council participates in a number of community engagement initiatives that aim to assist vulnerable groups in the community. This involves partnering with various not-for-profit organisations and social welfare departments to design and deliver targeted programs. For example, Blacktown City Council identified food security as a major priority in its 2007 Social Plan. In partnership with the Cross Roads Community Church, Housing NSW, a series of job network providers and Woolworths, the council now manages two drop-in soup kitchens that feed 70-80 people three days per week and a series of food vans for the homeless.

One of the managers at Blacktown City Council understood the council’s role in homelessness as a program facilitator. The manager emphasised:

*Local government is in a good position to work with all stakeholders. We are better placed to respond to local needs and well placed to take a leadership role in local issues. This model requires councillors to grant a certain level of permission for us to have some free licence (to pursue policy options and reform). In turn, we keep them informed and allow them to participate in the process and successful outcomes.*

The council has also established strong working relationships with the police and youth services in the area. The Community4Unity program was designed for youths occupying public space on Friday and Saturday nights. The first phase involved establishing a drop in facility and offering dance/drama/music training programs for youth. Once the young adults had cycled through the program, they became mentors for the next wave of participants. The second phase involves one third of the programs’ graduates gaining access to TAFE training, a retail certificate three and work experience options.

**Figure 5:** If your council does not have a formal homelessness policy, does your council have an informal policy for practices to support homeless people?

![Figure 5](chart.png)

- Yes: 46.1%
- No: 53.9%
Informal homelessness strategies involve providing grants funds, direct or indirect assistance to specialist service providers in the area and providing access to council facilities. The national survey found:

- 63 per cent of local governments who responded provide Community Grants or Land Grants to organisations assisting homeless people specifically; and,
- 89 per cent provide direct or indirect assistance to specialist services working with vulnerable groups such as youth services, women escaping domestic violence, older persons, newly arrived immigrants or those suffering from a disability.

Councils often have strong working relationships with service providers in the area. The national survey found:

- 72 per cent of participants had an awareness of specialist service providers operating in their local area; and,
- 67 per cent of respondents suggested they would approach the non-government welfare sector for assistance with a homelessness problem first.

Canberra policy workshop participants agreed that, “an important strength of local government is their capacity to form successful partnerships with NGOs and the community sector. This is a strength that policy should draw upon when designing reform packages”.

Internal procedures for council staff, rather than formal policies have many benefits:

- “A customer service response to homelessness would be relatively easy to implement and useful for front-counter staff. It’s also a risk management strategy for council staff because of what could happen to staff during encounters with homeless people” (Ballarat Council policymakers);
- “Homelessness requires a whole of government response. There is a role for councils to ensure that police don’t abuse council by-laws and educate the community and frontline service providers about appropriate responses and the network of available services” (Melbourne policymakers); and,
- “We have an internal document for use when we know a boarding house is going to close. Now we give notice in a particular way and ensure that there is clear consultation and information is transparent. This helps residents to locate [and prevent falling into homelessness]” (Moreland Council policymaker).
Case Study: Adelaide City Council

Despite the magnitude of the Adelaide City Council’s engagement with homelessness and affordable housing initiatives, the council does not have a formal homelessness policy. Instead, ACC has a set of informal internal procedures to guide the council’s approach to homelessness. This means that the council can support the work of the Homelessness Project Officer, run community awareness campaigns and educate council staff about the most appropriate ways to produce positive outcomes in the homelessness sector. Informal homelessness procedures do not need political support from the elected council members. The ACC Community Engagement Program Manager explained:

*Our homelessness policy is not overt and it’s not binding. It enables us to be a good advocate, build camaraderie with the State Government and keep our common goals in mind.*

The council supports the implementation of the State Government’s formal homelessness policy. This requires an effective partnership between both tiers of government and clarity about the allocation of roles and responsibilities. The Homelessness Strategy Unit CEO emphasised that local government is definitely part of the solution for ending homelessness:

*There is no question that local government should play a role in the homelessness sector. There is no doubt that there should be a partnership between all tiers of government to effectively address homelessness. There needs to be proper governance structures to support this partnership, otherwise they are ineffectual. Roles and responsibilities for each party in the partnership should be clearly articulated.*

Summary

The overwhelming majority of local governments in Australia do not have a formal homelessness policy. This does not mean that councils are not contributing to efforts to address homelessness in their municipality. Almost half (46 per cent) of all survey participants suggested that their council has a set of informal policies or strategies to help the homeless, such as providing access to community services and facilities, community grants and facilitating sector taskforces. Focus group and case study participants suggested that internal strategies are the most effective mechanism to adopt homelessness “good practices” because they are less overtly political, provide more flexibility and require less specialist knowledge.
Section Four: Policy Recommendations

Policies and Actions for Local Government

Perhaps the greatest challenge confronting local government in the area of homelessness policy and programs is recognizing that there is a role to play and that role is separate and distinct from that of the State and Australian Governments. In large measure, there is already recognition that local governments are central to the provision of affordable housing. From there it should be a relatively small step to make further connections to the provision of housing measures that meet the accommodation needs of the most vulnerable in society.

The research undertaken as part of this project has demonstrated that there is both scope, and capacity, for local government to increase its effort in:

- Planning for affordable housing, including setting targets for the provision of affordable housing;
- Advocating for the most vulnerable within society, including the homeless;
- Liaising with welfare services in their region, and acting as a point of referral when necessary, while supporting the individual services through information provision, networking, et cetera;
- Reviewing by-laws to remove the capacity for negative impacts on homeless persons;
- Seeking to liaise with other local governments in their region, and other public sector bodies, to share best practice and discuss concerns around homelessness and its manifestation;
- Developing formal and informal policies on homelessness, to ensure that every staff member and every member of council is able to have the most positive interaction possible with homeless persons;
- Educating staff and council members on the nature, impacts and challenges of homelessness; and,
- Assisting social housing providers through land grants or other forms of assistance in the development of affordable housing.

We do not find that local governments should take on a direct role in addressing homelessness through the provision of accommodation or support services. Even local governments with a long history of success in this area – such as the City of Port Phillip – have recognised that the greatest impacts can be achieved by maintaining a focus on those roles and responsibilities in which local government excels.

As part of this project we have developed a ‘toolkit’ for local governments and we recommend that the ‘Local government and Homelessness Toolkit’ is circulated widely. It is important that it is placed both on the website for the National Clearinghouse for Homelessness, but it should also be promoted through the Australian Local Government Association’s website and, perhaps
more importantly, through the websites of the state Local Government Associations.

o The Toolkit recommends a non controversial strategy for developing more appropriate responses to homelessness within local governments, via five steps:
  ▪ Review
  ▪ Plan
  ▪ Decide
  ▪ Implement
  ▪ Promote

Policies and Actions for State and Territory Governments

Local governments should not go unsupported in addressing homelessness. It is notable that most State and Territory governments have set targets for addressing homelessness and are party to the National Affordable Housing Agreement and the National Partnership on Homelessness. The obligations and efforts embedded in these agreements will be best achieved if the energies and capacities of local governments are harnessed. It is worth noting that respondents to our national survey reported that they believed responsibility for dealing with homelessness should lie with all three tiers of government working in partnership. Only 36 per cent of respondents believed that all three tiers of government currently hold that responsibility.

State and Territory Governments potentially play a pivotal role in shaping the engagement of local government with homelessness. In part this reflects their part in creating and directing local government, but it is also an outcome of their significant service provision responsibilities. As a primary source of social housing, child protection, justice and health services, State and Territory Governments are central to every discussion of homelessness and homelessness responses.

The research undertaken as part of this project indicates that State and Territory Governments should:

- Work to clarify the division of responsibilities between themselves, local governments and the Australian Government in responding to homelessness;
  o Memoranda of Understanding could be established with the relevant Local Government Association (or equivalent) in each jurisdiction and/or with key local governments with significant homeless populations;
- Review their Local Government Acts to make clear their expectations of individual councils with respect to homelessness;
- Review the use of by-laws affecting homeless people within their jurisdiction and work with local governments who have issued a significant number of expiation notices to develop better management strategies;
- Place priority on the provision of affordable housing within the planning system, and establish housing affordability targets (number and percentage of affordable housing units provided) for local governments; and,
• Work to see the expansion of affordable housing options for the most needy in society, including the provision of social housing provided by either State Government entities or the community sector. The additional supply of affordable housing will provide additional exit points from homelessness.

**For Federal Government**
Key policy documents such as *The Road Home* and the National Housing Affordability Agreement place considerable expectations on the Australian Government and its agencies in addressing homelessness. **This study has shown that local governments can make a significant contribution in assisting the Australian Government achieve these goals.** There are a number of concrete actions that the Australian Government should consider:

First, we suggest that FaHCSIA fund 15-30 pilot projects where local governments across Australia are able to secure funding and demonstrate good practice in addressing homelessness sector. The program should allow for tailored responses to the needs of individual areas. Councils could nominate themselves individually or work together to form regional partnerships to access funding for a three year period. A majority of research participants suggested that project funds should be largely allocated towards staff costs for the three year project in 30 different sites (either individual councils or regional partnerships).

The aim of the pilot program is to demonstrate the breadth of approaches potentially available to individual local governments and the depth of impact these will have in the local area. An interactive information platform – such as a website – and a network of participating local governments should be established to allow councils to share their experiences and successes. Learning by example was commonly cited as the most effective means for encouraging local government uptake of new policy agendas.

Perth policymakers suggested:

*The concept of 30 local government good practice pilot study sites would be welcome. Councils should be encouraged to hold tours for other councils in their region to demonstrate their practices and relevant structures and mechanisms. Considering regional approaches to homelessness is a good idea because homeless people don't adhere to boundaries. Rural towns and centres are natural catchments for vulnerable people.*

This comment highlights two important features of the pilot study design. Focus group participants across Australia agreed that the pilot studies should be regionally based and provide networking opportunities for council staff to learn from good practice examples. Policymakers in Sydney agreed that:

*the funding for the pilot projects should be for staffing because otherwise they don't have the resources to apply for grants and then spend the project money. A regional model may be the best approach because individual councils don't have the capacity.*
The funding model attached to the pilot projects was identified as a crucial issue for the scheme’s long term success. Stakeholders commonly agreed that a majority of funds should be allocated towards staffing costs initially and State/Federal Government should be willing to consider ongoing funds for successful pilot projects. This will ensure that community expectations are met and councils are not left with an unfunded mandate. Canberra policy workshop participants suggested:

*The State and Federal Governments could step in and fund policies after the pilots are completed. This addresses issues surrounding sustainability.*

Brisbane policymakers suggested developing a “strengths-based approach” to pilot study designs and focussing upon “existing strengths and resources to create a framework to integrate resources” would help to “establish processes and frameworks in the community first”. A number of Brisbane participants expressed concerns about funding projects that aren’t built upon community networks and partnerships between all relevant stakeholders:

*Perhaps we should look to existing strengths and resources to create a framework to integrate resources. We need to learn how to work better with what we’ve got, rather than expecting more funds. We need to work smarter not harder with our money and resources. Money won’t fix things.*

Hence, the funding model developed for the pilot projects should build upon existing council strengths and communication pathways. This will help to provide ongoing opportunities for councils to demonstrate “good practices” in the homelessness sector.

Second, the Australian Government should look to fund networks of local governments where individual councils (independent of the receipt of pilot funding) could share their experience and work to solve common problems. As part of this process Australian Government funded entities, such as the Regional Development Australia Committees, Medicare Locals, police services and employment agencies could be integrated into the discussions to help find solutions. Clearly, the Australian Local Government Association and the various state Local Government Associations should be central in the establishment of such networks.

Third, there is a need for education and training directed at staff, and most especially, elected officials. Modest funding for the development of training packages for staff and elected officials would have a long term beneficial impact on councillor attitudes to homelessness. The Australian Centre for Excellence in Local Government may be an appropriate vehicle for the delivery of the training. Other options would also exist.

Fourth, there is scope to develop a library of best practice with respect to local government and homelessness that can inform initiatives in other regions. The National Clearinghouse on Homelessness would be an appropriate
destination, as would a local government entity such as the Council of Capital City Lord Mayors, or the ALGA.

**Conclusion**  
This report has noted that comparatively little attention has been given to the role local government can play in addressing homelessness. In consequence, we conclude that there are a number of effective actions that all three tiers of government can take to achieve much better outcomes at the local level. Importantly, policy initiatives at this level will have spillover benefits for others within the community, including lower housing costs and better access to affordable housing, improved urban amenity, stronger social cohesion, reduced public health expenditures and better co-ordinated services. The Australian Government is best placed to lead this initiative and such action is entirely consistent with *The Road Home* and its goals. However, it should not act in isolation: it needs to work in partnership with the States and Territories, local governments and Local Government Associations to solve the challenges of homelessness. Finding long term solutions will ultimately serve to benefit all three tiers of government, as well as improve the welfare of individuals.
Section Five: Conclusions and Future Directions

In many respects, this research has highlighted the fact that the role of local government in dealing with homelessness is poorly understood and even less well documented. It is a fact that local governments are very active in this policy domain, via their community development policies, their regulation of public spaces, their setting of by-laws and their influence on land use planning and development. To date, however, policy makers and local governments alike have not acknowledged the depth of their influence on homelessness, and this has resulted in partial policies and lost opportunities in dealing with homelessness. The recent decisions of the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) have reflected this limited understanding of the importance of local governments for homeless persons with the NAHA, for example, prescribing a role for local governments in addressing homelessness that is largely limited to their planning role. There is no acknowledgement of local government’s role as an agent for social change and wellbeing, a role made more powerful by its presence in many aspects of day to day life.

All tiers of government in Australia need to acknowledge the many faceted roles played by local government in ensuring the health and wellbeing of the Australian people. Homelessness is an exemplar of how local governments can be a positive force for change at the community level. The broader community also needs to acknowledge that councils play a wide ranging role, and that community members have a responsibility to support each other. There is therefore a need for a wide-ranging debate, in both public policy circles, and within the broader community on accepting broader roles for local governments and their councils. In many respects, councillors need to emerge as leaders within their communities. This is a question of both better education and training for councillors, but also greater transparency in the decision making of councils.

This research has found that there is clearly both the capacity and a willingness for local governments to become more involved in addressing homelessness in Australia and that the roles local governments can play include:

1. Advocacy on behalf of vulnerable groups within the community;
2. Raising awareness amongst elected councilors and the general population about the nature, causes and consequences of homelessness;
3. Facilitating networks and building connections with the human services sector; and,
4. Planning because zoning, planning and building regulations are the vehicle that controls development processes and housing supply.

The four roles identified above reflect a relatively conservative approach to local government’s engagement with homelessness. More far reaching approaches would also see local government:
• Set specific targets for the provision of affordable housing within their strategic planning frameworks, and then take actions to achieve those frameworks;
• Become directly involved in the supply of affordable housing through the establishment of community housing providers or the provision of land for low cost housing;
• The formal repeal of by-laws that adversely affect the homeless;
• The adoption of a formal protocol for all council dealings with the homeless; and,
• Acceptance of a broad ranging commitment for local government to work toward improving the wellbeing of all groups in the community.

The formal appeal of by-laws is, perhaps, a more contentious suggestion but given that few councils make use of them to a great degree, and that those who do use by-laws make frequent use of them, the evidence suggests that by-laws simply mask a problem that requires more fundamental solutions. In these places, the State and Australian governments should be willing to step in and work towards long term solutions.

Finally, it is important to recognise that homelessness is not a phenomenon that exists in isolation. In many respects the homeless represent just one end of a spectrum of disadvantage and therefore it is important to consider a more holistic approach or perspective. Throughout the research participants suggested that local government involvement in the homelessness sector should be informed by a social inclusion agenda. A social inclusion agenda involves recognising homeless people as an important group within the community that have rights and responsibilities; equal to those of other residents.

To give one example, the City of Port Phillip is recognised for demonstrating “good practice” in relation to building diverse communities, working to protect the rights of vulnerable groups and improve community awareness about the nature of homelessness. The City of Port Phillip’s Social Justice Charter is based on six principles2 and sets a goal for the community to work together in pursuit of the common good, whilst also recognising the important individual human rights that all community members have. The council’s incorporation of a social inclusion approach to homelessness and housing policy is illustrated in the Community Plan Vision Statement 2007-2017:

> The goals of social equity, economic viability, environmental responsibility and cultural vitality remain central to our desire to foster a sustainable and harmonious future. We acknowledge there is a shared responsibility to ensure that everyone, regardless of age or cultural or socio-economic background, can access services that meet their needs and can participate in community life. We want our council to demonstrate leadership in community,

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2 “We strive for a genuine partnership with our Indigenous community; we will build respect, not just tolerance; we will celebrate people’s right to have a say; we will work with the community to achieve access to information and services” (City of Port Phillip, Social Justice Charter, p. 2).
participation, strategic planning, advocacy to other levels of government and accountability to the community.

The council's adoption of a social inclusion mandate has enabled them to implement a number of "good practice" approaches to reforming the housing and homelessness sector within their municipality.

The strengths of a social inclusion agenda were identified by Canberra policy workshop participants who agreed:

> Embedding homelessness in other projects rather than separate pilot projects is a good idea because often local governments don't have the staff and resources to apply for many separate programs. Integrating homelessness within the broader social inclusion agenda and community engagement will avoid 'siloing' homelessness. It [homelessness] needs to be linked with other policy agendas.

The usefulness of casting homelessness within the framework of social inclusion/poverty reduction was also highlighted by Sydney policymakers who suggested that the rhetoric of social inclusion could be used to link affordable housing and homelessness and overcome a divide between those who work in planning and those who work in human services. This approach should ensure that council services are linked because 'quarantining a service is problematic for local government and should be avoided'.

*The Road Home* and associated policy documents set ambitious targets for addressing homelessness across Australia. It is clear that local governments are central to achieving those goals and that the best possible approach is for the three tiers of government in this country to work in partnership, and to develop their program of action within a social inclusion framework.
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Adelaide City Council

Critical Issues

- Adelaide City Council (ACC) is located in the CBD and has a long history of engagement with homeless issues;
- There is a high concentration of homeless people and frontline service providers within the City; and,
- In partnership with the State Government, the ACC has pursued a number of innovative policy responses to homelessness.

Location

Theme 1: Regulatory Roles and Councils as public space managers
Adelaide City Council recognises its responsibility to manage public space and advocate on behalf of the disadvantaged living in the city. According to one worker, “We do have a role in community safety, building neighbourhoods and public space management. We play a significant role in managing community expectations regarding the service response”. The potential for councils to play a lead role in community education and awareness was stressed by the SACOSS Executive Director:
Councils can play a useful role building awareness, helping people from their electorate and connecting services. They can significantly change public sentiment and bring visibility to the issue in their area because they are the level of government that is closest to the people.

The ACC has by-laws that directly and indirectly affect Adelaide’s homeless population. ACC by-laws prohibit staying overnight in public space and erecting temporary structures. City Precinct Officers are responsible for enforcing these by-laws and issuing fines to perpetrators. ACC Homelessness Officers work in partnership with central frontline service providers to manage this process. The council feels that the by-laws provide a necessary ‘step’ that allow them to address problems associated with rough sleepers, such as anti-social behaviour and littering. At the same time, the council realises that issuing fines or ‘moving people on’ is a last resort because it doesn’t provide a long term solution. One ACC employee explained:

“We use the services approach first, but if that doesn’t work, we resort to enforcement. We need to give an adequate time of response to allow services to engage and to give people the best opportunity out of homelessness. We want to support the Federal government’s housing first response. [Plus], issuing an expiation notice is counter-productive because it’s difficult for services to track them (homeless people) if they start moving around. It’s irresponsible for us to force them to move because it doesn’t address the problem.”

Theme 3: Formal and informal homelessness strategies

Despite the magnitude of the Adelaide City Council’s engagement with homelessness and affordable housing initiatives, the council does not have a formal homelessness policy. Instead, ACC has a set of informal internal procedures to guide the council’s approach to homelessness. This means that the council can support the work of the Homelessness Project Officer, run community awareness campaigns and educate council staff about the most appropriate ways to produce positive outcomes in the homelessness sector. As one manager explained:

“Our homelessness policy is not overt and it’s not binding. It enables us to be a good advocate, build camaraderie with the State Government and keep our common goals in mind.”

The council supports the implementation of the State Government’s formal homelessness policy. This requires an effective partnership between both tiers of government and clarity about the allocation of roles and responsibilities. The Homelessness Strategy Unit CEO emphasised that local government is an important part of the solution for ending homelessness:

“There is no question that local government should play a role in the homelessness sector. There is no doubt that there should be a partnership between all tiers of government to effectively address homelessness. There needs to be proper governance structures to support this partnership, otherwise they are ineffectual. Roles and responsibilities for each party in the partnership should be clearly articulated.”

Theme 5: Affordable housing and homelessness – the link

The Adelaide City Council Residential Growth Team is committed to facilitating the growth of affordable housing options in the CBD and forming innovative partnerships with the community sector and developers. It aims to provide exceptional housing options for residents.
experiencing homelessness or those at risk of homelessness. The ACC understands its role in affordable housing to involve supporting the State Government’s vision for development, expressed in the 30-Year Plan for Greater Adelaide and provide land and financing for affordable housing developments. Adelaide was the first city to approve a Common Ground site and has since been heavily involved with the release of affordable housing dwellings; such as the Uno and Foyer apartments.

The South Australian government works closely with all councils to help staff understand the concept of affordability and its usefulness for planning and the development process. The Development Act legislates that councils must produce three policy documents that report to the State Government. This allows a conversation between local and state governments and gives the State Government input into local government processes. According to one State Government officer, this program works because “we consistently engage with local councils, build relationships and constantly provide education and awareness campaigns. We go back to basics every time and talk at a policy level about the affordability requirements in planning”. The program started in 2005 and has received ongoing support from the State. In addition to State government affordable housing targets, the ACC mandates 15 per cent affordable housing on council owned sites.

Summary
The Adelaide City Council (ACC) has a long history of engagement with homelessness issues in the CBD. The Rann Labor Government established the Social Inclusion Board in 2007 to advocate for a socially progressive reform agenda. One of its achievements was to reinvigorate homelessness policy in South Australia. When the Rudd Labor Government came to power federally, these policy reforms were coupled with Australian Government funds and the services sector was significantly refreshed. The State Government and ACC have both signed a Social Inclusion Partnership and a Sustainability Agreement. Housing SA and the ACC continue to jointly fund a Homelessness Office role in the council. The council remains a member of the Council of Capital City Lord Mayors (CCCLM) and facilitates a rough sleeper count annually. Homelessness Connect has been held in Adelaide for five consecutive years.

Adelaide City Council provides many examples of good practice in the homelessness sector. Good practice examples are provided for theme 1: regulatory roles and councils as public space managers; theme 2: affordable housing and homelessness, the link and theme 3: formal and informal homelessness strategies.
City of Armadale

Critical Issues

- The City of Armadale is a metropolitan local government area, located approximately 25-40km South-East of the Perth CBD. It includes the outer suburbs and fringe urban areas of Perth’s south-eastern growth corridor. The population is expected to double by 2031, from 56,000 in 2008 to 128,000.

- A significant Indigenous population (2.8 per cent of the population compared to 1.5 per cent across Perth) reside in the area. The Indigenous population is very young, with over 50 per cent aged under 18 years of age.

- There is great diversity amongst Armadale’s suburbs, with those along the railway line and Albany Highway corridor mainly serving as affordable home ownership and rental options for lower socio-economic families. Outer suburbs provide first home buying opportunities for young families. Communities in the east provide a semi-rural environment for higher income families with older children. There is a significant number of highly disadvantaged rental areas along the railway line.

Location

Theme 1: Regulatory roles and local government as public space managers

The role of council rangers was emphasised during discussions with staff members at City of Armadale. Staff from the Community Development Department stressed, “City Rangers are the face of the Council in the community”. Although the homeless population in Armadale is largely “invisible”, council rangers have come across residents rough sleeping in the parklands and camping in public space.

Key staff within the City of Armadale noted that the Ranger’s response depended upon the individual’s personality. While some Rangers contact the council for advice and information,
other rangers enforce council by-laws strictly. One council staff member commented, “Their response is dependent upon the person. Some rangers are more compassionate than others”. The behaviour of council rangers and management of public space raises important questions about the usefulness of internal procedures and formal policy positions.

**Theme 4: Formal and informal homelessness strategies**

The City of Armadale does not have a formal homelessness strategy or set of standard practices to guide council responses to homelessness. Council staff and frontline service providers working in the region felt that an absence of political support from elected council members constrained the council’s capacity to become more actively involved in the homelessness sector, or take on a greater role in the provision of services for vulnerable groups within the community. It was felt that councillors were primarily interested in pursuing economic development and infrastructure projects to increase commercial opportunities. Indeed, one person suggested, “It has been an uphill battle getting youth (and all social justice issues) on the agenda of council”.

Nevertheless, the City of Armadale is in the process of deepening relationships with not-for-profit service providers in the region. Drug Arm has worked in partnership with City of Armadale to deliver a “Youth Activity Area” (a skate park) and school holiday program recently. A Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) was initially created to oversee this partnership; however, both parties are now working towards the development of a formal contract. In addition, the council has provided funds for Drug Arm’s Street Van. A Street Van operates in Armadale and provides a mobile referral centre, with access to services for youths at risk of homelessness.

The Community Development Officer suggested that it was politically “easier” for council to become involved with community service projects that target young people, rather than the homeless, because the problems associated with youths are readily apparent and easily understood by councillors and the community. Youths was described as an “easier” or “cleaner” political issue to get involved with, when compared with homelessness. As a result, the council has also acted as a facilitator for the “Fruit in Schools Program” and provides small grants for high schools to provide breakfast clubs because it was realised that many young people who were couch surfing were arriving at school without breakfast.

**Theme 2: Affordable housing and homelessness: exploring the link**

The City of Armadale includes a broad mixture of green-field and brown-field sites and large pockets of traditional “housing estates”. The council plays an important role in housing disadvantaged communities, such as a significant Indigenous population and single parent families (Informed Decisions, 2009: 5). Relatively low cost housing, which is attractive to lower income groups, provides an entry into the housing market for low income earners.

On the socio-economic index of disadvantage for metropolitan Perth, Armadale ranks third after Kwinana and Belmont. According to the 2006 census, rental stress in Armadale is considerably higher than the average in Perth. 30.1 per cent of households in Armadale, compared with 24.1 per cent in Perth, experience rental stress due to the concentration of highly disadvantaged groups in the private rental market. The high levels of housing stress occur despite the relatively low rental costs in the area. Mortgage stress is also higher than the average in Perth; at 8.5 per cent of households compared with 7.4 per cent for the metropolitan area (Informed Decisions, 2009: 32). At the same time, greenfield land in the western part of the council is
expected to attract a more diverse mix of households seeking a variety of housing options. As a result, the council is considering affordable housing strategies.

One local government officer explained:

> Our council is positioned in a growth corridor. There is a large number of new development estates being established. We are looking to increase the number and variety of affordable housing options. This will involve changing the diversity and density of suburbs. We are hoping to include a number of mixed-use community centres and work with service providers to create a “one-stop-shop”.

The importance of affordable housing options and support services is recognised by the City of Armadale. Located in a growth corridor, with extensive greenfield sites and significant population growth targets, the City of Armadale is focussed upon catering for suburbs and communities as they transition through the “suburb lifecycle” and harnessing economic development opportunities as they arise. The council’s role in the housing sector has involved:

> Providing a mix of home ownership opportunities to relatively low income groups in new growth areas, and upgrading options to more affluent households in semi-rural areas, while at the same time having a large affordable rental market in the accessible central areas, serving populations such as single parent families and Indigenous households (Informed Decisions, 2009: 33).

Whilst the council may be active in the affordable housing space and undertaken a number of activities dedicated to improving the diversity and volume of affordable housing options, this does not mean that the council is working specifically to assist households at risk of homelessness.

**Summary**

The City of Armadale does not have formal or informal policies and practices dedicated to assisting the homeless or those at risk of homelessness. The council has formed a number of partnerships with frontline service providers in the region to indirectly assist vulnerable groups in the community; such as working with Drug Arm to deliver the Street Van. Council staff and elected council members agree that working to achieve successful outcomes for youths is politically easier than seeking to address homelessness. It is also acknowledged that such strategies directly assist young people at risk of homelessness.
Blacktown City Council

Critical Issues

- Blacktown City Council is the largest local council area by population in NSW. The current population of 312,000 people live across 48 suburbs and 5 wards (Blacktown City Council Annual Report 2012).

- In 2010, the council adopted the Delivery Program 2010-2013 to implement the vision and long term objectives articulated in the strategic plan, Blacktown Council 2025. The council has 9 “Trigger Projects” to help meet the 2025 targets. These are 1) Blacktown Showground, 2) Environmental Sustainability Framework, 3) Second Sydney AFL Team, 4) Urban Planning Framework, 5) Bridging the Digital Divide, 6) Becoming a Regional City, 7) Commuter Car Park, 8) Motor Sport Precinct and 9) Blacktown International Sports Park Sydney (Blacktown City Council Annual Report 12).

- Blacktown City Council is one of the fastest growing areas in the Greater Western Sydney region with nearly 30,000 new residents making it their home in the past year. Providing appropriate and affordable housing options for all residents is an ongoing development challenge facing the council (Blacktown City Council Annual Report 12).

Location

Theme 2: The link between affordable housing and homelessness

Situated in the Greater Western Sydney region, the demand for affordable housing options in Blacktown City Council is great. Rapid growth throughout the region is set to continue for the next 25 years with Blacktown being a major focus in the development of the North West Growth Centre. This will mean the delivery of more than 94,000 new homes and, a population increase of almost 230,000 residents.

Council resources have been stretched by the difficulties associated with managing the planning and approval process, the provision of services and working with developers to meet increasing demand. The emphasis upon growth and development has also complicated discussion around homelessness and provisions for vulnerable groups within the community. Indeed one staff member noted that, “The line between homelessness and affordable housing is very grey”. Support agencies working in the council area felt that the council could be using
the development approval process to better assist those experiencing housing stress. One staff member within one of the services suggested:

Whilst they are involved with the release of affordable housing stock, there is a huge need for crisis accommodation. Temporary accommodation from Housing NSW is inappropriate; the dwellings are in the wrong location and full of the wrong mix of client groups. Council should release funding to the community sector to redevelop/refurbish current stock.

Nevertheless, the council is involved in a number of affordable housing initiatives that aim to prevent people falling into homelessness and provide an exit for people looking to become more independent and leave social/community housing. The council:

- Works in partnership with Housing NSW to tender for affordable housing funding opportunities;
- Provides leadership development at the Luxford Road apartments. These properties are owned by Housing NSW and managed by MA Housing. There are approximately 70 units in this location. Most of the residents have complex needs. We have tried to up-skill leaders within this community so that they can address resident concerns and tensions before they become problems;
- Has established resident action groups in public housing estate areas, such as Mount Duritt. They have worked with leaders for four or five years to help them address topical issues and work in partnership with service providers in their area to address local needs and concerns; and,
- Supported Delfin Lend Leases’ application for Federal funding to the Affordable Housing Innovations Fund. This allowed them to drop the price and increase the number of affordable allotments.

**Theme 4: Formal and informal policies**

Blacktown City Council does not have a formal homelessness policy. Instead, the council participates in a number of community engagement initiatives that aim to assist vulnerable groups in the community. This involves partnering with various not-for-profit organisations and social welfare departments to design specifically targeted programs. For example, Blacktown City Council identified food security as a major priority in the 2007 Social Plan. In partnership with the Cross Roads Community Church and Housing NSW, a series of job network providers and Woolworths, the council now manages two drop-in soup kitchens that feed 70-80 people three days per week. It also funds a series of homelessness food vans.

The council has established strong working relationships with the police and youth services in the area. The Community4Unity program was designed for youths hanging around in public space on Friday and Saturday nights. The first phase involved establishing a ‘drop in’ facility and offering dance/drama/music training programs for youths. Once young people cycle through the program, they become mentors for the next session. The second phase involves one third of the programs’ graduates gaining access to TAFE training, a retail certificate at level three and work experience options.

One manager from Blacktown City Council understood the council’s role in homelessness as a program facilitator. The Manager emphasised:

*Local government is in a good position to work with all stakeholders. We are better placed to respond to local needs and well placed to take a leadership role in local issues. This model requires councillors to grant a certain level of*
permission for us to have some free licence (to pursue policy options and reform).
In turn, we keep them informed and allow them to participate in the process and successful outcomes.

In addition to indirectly working to assist the homelessness sector, the council has implemented a number of initiatives to specifically focus on homelessness since the 2007 Social Plan. These include:

1. Sitting on the Nepean Homelessness Task Force. Blacktown City Council representatives include a councillor, community representative and senior policy analyst;
2. Assisting with a rough sleepers count in May 2010. The council trained 30-40 previously homeless people to participate in the counting process. Some 131 rough sleepers were counted in the city on one night, not including secondary and tertiary forms of homelessness. The team counted those homeless sleeping in public space but not in private properties or empty buildings. Later the council met with ABS staff and offered to assist in subsequent homelessness counts; and
3. Participating in Project 40. Along with 5 other councils, this project provides supportive housing for chronically homeless, highly vulnerable people. Local agencies provide tailor-made, wrap-around services to help tenants settle and eventually become independent. Fully 80 services have committed to providing 60 permanent supportive houses for the chronically homeless by 2013.

Summary
Blacktown City Council has three representatives on the Nepean Homelessness Taskforce and contributes to a number of initiatives that aim to indirectly assist those experiencing homelessness; such as community soup kitchens and the Community4Unity program. Yet, Blacktown City Council has not established an interagency approach to link support services and accommodation providers who are working within its jurisdiction. The council has limited direct contact with homelessness support and accommodation service providers. Whilst planners within the council are working to meet the growth targets articulated in the Local Environmental Plan (LEP), affordable housing strategies deserve further consideration.
District of Ceduna

Critical Issues

- Ceduna is a relatively remote settlement on South Australia’s Far West Coast. It is an important location for services – including health services – and provides a range of supports for those residents across a very broad region.

- A substantial Indigenous population lives within the broader region, in a range of circumstances that includes settlements that were formerly missions, on small homelands and within the town itself. It was estimated by some informants that between 40 and 70 individuals are sleeping rough in and around Ceduna at any time.

- The District Council of Ceduna has adopted a relatively assertive approach to the management of anti social behaviour within town boundaries, which has had implications for homeless persons.

- There have been a number of homelessness initiatives in and around Ceduna, but with some degree of disagreement amongst State and local government about their impact and future direction.

Location
Fieldwork Data
Homeless is an important, and often topical, issue in Ceduna. Many of the homeless are Indigenous persons who come from one of the settlements in the region and who may spend a considerable period of time in and around the township of Ceduna. Some of this visitation is necessary in order to gain access to health and other services, others could be considered more discretionary. Not all of the homeless are Indigenous: Ceduna’s position as the last major settlement on the eastern side of the Nullarbor Plain means that persons moving through the region may spend a period in the town with, or without, formal accommodation. There are a number of caravan parks and informal motels that provide temporary accommodation at relatively low cost. Some members of this group, however, resort to rough sleeping.

Theme One: Regulatory roles and councils as public space managers
In the past Ceduna was affected by a significant problem with a large, and highly visible homeless population. There has been a perception that Indigenous people from outlying settlements were attracted to the town because of the access it offered to alcohol and that this had a negative impact on community life and wellbeing (Coleman 2001). The District Council of Ceduna (DCC) subsequently enacted by-laws to limit both public intoxication and rough sleeping. As several reports have noted, Ceduna has been a ‘dry’ town for several years, but access to alcohol is relatively unproblematic when compared with the outlying communities such as Oak Valley and Yalata (Coroner’s Report 2011; Senior Officers Group, 2010). Since 2008 these measures have been enforced by a canine patrol and the DCC is not the only local government in South Australia to use such measures. Its application, however, is controversial and attracts strong criticism from some members of the community. Some argue that the by-laws and their enforcement simply force the problem out of sight where it is more difficult for services to meet needs. They also impose a significant financial impost on individuals, with $70,000 in expiation fees in 2012. There are a number of known places where persons sleep rough, and over recent years there have been deaths linked to rough sleeping in the town’s vicinity (Coroner’s Report 2011).

Theme Two: Affordable housing and homelessness
In common with many other country towns, housing supply is constrained in Ceduna resulting in a relatively unaffordable supply of housing for the poorest within the community. Service providers noted that there was a shortage of permanent accommodation for low income people, and that the rental market had a relatively low vacancy rate. Informants noted that some houses have more than 20 residents, and therefore represent a different form of homelessness with respect to overcrowding. Over recent years the region as a whole has benefited from Federal investment in affordable housing with a total expenditure of $4.24 million, including 11 houses for Ceduna and additional dwellings for Koonibba and Oak Valley.

Theme Four: Formal and Informal homelessness strategies
The South Australian Government funded a transition camp in 2003 (Littlely 2011) just outside the town to provide secure accommodation for Indigenous people visiting Ceduna to gain access to health and other services. The transition camp builds upon the experience of a similar facility in Port Augusta, and while there is evidence for the success of the Lakeview accommodation in Port Augusta, several commentators have been critical of the facility (Grant 2006). Stays in the transition camp in Ceduna are intended to be limited to three weeks, but it is argued that many stay for much longer periods, and this has been a source of tension between the State Government and the local government. There is also a perception that alcohol remains a problem within the camp (Littlely 2011) with people sleeping in the ‘bush’
when too intoxicated for admission to the camp (Coroner’s Report 2011). The local government provided the land for the facility and remains the landowner. It contributes $15,000 per year to the running of the facility and is therefore an important stakeholder in this initiative. Some councillors have called for the closure of the transition camp, and this proposal has been staunchly opposed by the State Government.

In response to the Coroner’s Report (2011) the South Australian Government has also recently invested in a sobriety facility that includes the provision of breakfast and provides a secure a daytime location. Many professional staff believe that the DCC has an antagonistic attitude to homeless people in general and the camp in particular. In addition, it was argued that the council owns several liquor outlets that add to the problem of homelessness.

**Summary**

The discussion of homelessness in Ceduna is largely shaped by a focus on the experience of Indigenous homelessness and some of the associated behaviours. The concentration on Indigenous homelessness may well be misplaced, but it reflects a real dynamic within the community. The District Council of Ceduna has taken a strong role in ensuring public safety within the town and, on occasions, has invested in positive solutions to the challenge of homelessness. However, a number of its actions and pronouncements are seen to split the community.
Clarence Valley Council

Critical Issues

- The Clarence Valley Affordable Housing Strategy was released in partnership with Housing NSW and Community Housing Limited, a registered community housing provider in 2012. The council is recognised as a leader for its proactive and innovative approach to meeting housing needs in the region.

- Clarence Valley Council has a significantly higher percentage of persons who identify as Indigenous Australian living within the jurisdiction (4.8 per cent compared to the NSW average of 2.1 per cent and the national average of 3.8 per cent). There are three jails in the municipality and over 60 per cent of those in custody are Indigenous Australians. Many family members temporarily move into the area during the period of custody, but do not have ready access to accommodation. This leads to overcrowding and homelessness. The council area includes three Indigenous Nations; Bundjalung, Gumbaingirr and Yaegl.

- The council has a relatively high number of young people living in the area. 19.8 per cent are in the 5-14 years age group compared with the NSW average of 13.4 per cent. Problems associated with youth homelessness, poor education levels, teen pregnancy and unemployment are common. For example, the rate of unemployment for persons aged 15-24 years of 16.46 per cent, compared with the state average of 11.5 per cent.

Location

Theme 1: Regulatory rules and councils as public space managers

Clarence Valley Council’s Social Plan 2010-2014 identifies a number of concerns in relation to young people in the community. In particular, a lower than average school retention rate and significantly higher rate of unemployment for persons aged 15-24 years are issues that have been identified by the council as challenges. The need for youth-friendly public spaces, entertainment, sport facilities and public transport were identified by the community as necessary pre-conditions for greater youth safety and wellbeing. The council also recognises that it has a responsibility to provide public spaces and activities that cater for the needs of young people in the community.
“Out of the Box” is a youth driven response to a lack of designated youth spaces in the council. The program comprises three architecturally designed, transportable, robust and low maintenance boxes that provide access to training, places to showcase skills, safe positive recreation options, mentoring and outreach space for service providers across the region. The program aims to give young people the “opportunity to make connections, engage with their communities and express themselves in safe, positive, alcohol and drug free recreational environments” (Clarence Valley Council Annual Report 2011-2012: 12). The scheme demonstrates the council’s proactive approach to community engagement, youth services and managing public space.

**Theme 2: Affordable housing and homelessness**
The Planning Institute of Australia awarded Clarence Valley Council an award in 2010 for its Affordable Housing Strategy. The Affordable Housing Planner is recognised for being a leader in the field and helping to shape an affordable housing strategy that aims to address the problem of homelessness and housing stress.

Local issues and conditions were taken into consideration when designing the strategy because the nature of homelessness, available services and development industry differ across regional Australia. The Affordable Housing Planner noted that NRAS funding opportunities, local developers, lending institutions/banks and potential investors are different in Grafton when compared with other centres. The council accessed capital from the Housing Affordability Fund (HAF) to kick-start three affordable housing projects:

1. 35 lots were released for sale on the private market with a $10,000 discount on land prices. This project aimed to encourage supply of affordable housing and increase available stock. Some 28 sites were sold in the first year, mostly to private/local residents.
2. Planning reforms. This project involved reviewing and updating many policy documents, such as planning mechanisms, adaptable housing guidelines, affordable housing policies, the development application process, community and open space plans.
3. Some 14 affordable housing dwellings on 3 sites were built with the local community housing provider. These are allocated for the affordable rental market. The council secured funding for the next 10 years.

The council is represented by a staff member on the Northern Rivers Affordable Housing Forum and that individual chairs the Clarence Valley Homelessness Interagency in Grafton.

**Theme 4: Formal and informal homelessness policies**
Clarence Valley Council staff is involved in a number of homelessness ventures. Affordable housing and homelessness are understood as closely related problems that require a joined-up response. The council’s engagement with the homelessness sector includes:

1. Establishing the Clarence Valley Housing Interagency. This includes representatives from all the relevant stakeholder groups, including disability, Indigenous affairs, domestic violence and youth services. Council convenes the interagency group, provides the meeting space and funds related activities. If the interagency group wishes to conduct activities or programs, council provides funding for these initiatives. For example, the interagency identified a cohort of clients who couldn’t apply for housing or enter the housing register as they couldn’t prove their identity or ethnic status. They funded 100 clients to receive birth certificates;
2. Overseeing a number of training workshops for frontline service providers in the housing/homelessness sector. These initiatives help foster good relations between service providers;

3. Supporting the Regional Homelessness Action Plan. This document stresses that policy and service integration is important. The council aims to help service providers remain abreast of policy changes in the sector and encourages service providers to work together and incorporate new programs into their care plans; and,

4. Providing one off community events and programs; such as providing funds for the Information Referral Centre to upgrade their soup kitchen.

Despite these direct efforts to address homelessness, the council does not have a formal homelessness policy. The Social Plan does not explicitly mention homelessness. The role of key staff members allows the council to engage with homelessness issues without being ‘held to account’ by a formal strategy. Council staff are able to engage with the homelessness sector without the approval of the elected councillors. This means that council can be involved in homelessness initiatives that do not require funding.

**Summary**

The experiences of Clarence Valley Council suggest that “good practices” in the homelessness sector include location-specific knowledge/data, effective partnerships with frontline service providers and innovative affordable housing strategies. Council staff achieved success in both affordable housing and homelessness policy domains by approaching the policy problem simultaneously. The council does not have a formal homelessness policy. Instead, council works informally to develop strategies that address community concerns and assist vulnerable groups.
Mildura Rural City Council

Critical Issues
- Mildura Rural City Council is located on the borders of Victoria, New South Wales and South Australia. A significant transient population moves through the municipality each year to find work.
- The council is also situated on the traditional lands of the Latji Latji and Bakandji people. In addition, a significant Indigenous population moves through the region following traditional pathways.
- The resident population in Mildura Rural City Council is ageing and placing increased demands on existing services.

Location

Theme 1: Regulatory roles and councils as public space managers
Council staff, accommodation providers and support service providers acknowledge that public space management in the city centre of Mildura is an ongoing problem. Large groups of Indigenous Australians sleeping rough in the CBD or congregating in large groups during business hours has been identified as an important community concern. Drug and alcohol abuse is blamed for anti-social behaviour. Complaints from the business community and residents are common.

In order to address these concerns, the council enforces a dry zone in the CBD and has instituted by-laws that prohibit sleeping rough in public spaces. The by-laws enable the police to move people on from the city. At the same time, the council and police allow transient
Indigenous groups to camp on the banks of the Murray River. The council and police use their discretion in managing Indigenous persons camping on the river banks. The complexity of managing public space in Mildura was discussed by the managers of key service providers:

*The council has a number of by-laws in place. There is a dry zone in the CBD of Mildura. This has enabled police to move people on. They do not tend to move people who are camping on the river. They prefer the homeless to be out of sight.*

*The council does use by-laws. They move people on from the Mall and around the fountain. But I actually agree with this to a certain extent. It’s a public safety concern if drunk Indigenous people are hanging around the mall and displaying anti-social behaviours. But it’s not the only answer to a long term problem.*

Informants recognised the usefulness of by-laws for ensuring public safety. However participants expressed concerns about relying upon by-laws as a long term strategy, because “moving people on” is only a temporary solution that does not address the underlying problems or provide satisfactory assistance for people sleeping rough.

**Theme 3: Matching responsibilities and resources**

In 2006 and 2008 the council commissioned an independent research team to develop the *Mildura Social Indicators Report*. The Reports are informed by quantitative data from the ABS, Monash University, Medicare, Centrelink, DHS, DIMIA, the Department of Human Services Victoria, Mildura Police Station and Mildura Council records. The social indicators are designed to provide a tangible evidence base for social planning.

Results are used to inform a Community Development framework developed by the council. The framework identifies four key priorities that dictate the council’s operational groups. These working groups determine the council’s work agenda/actions plans and corresponding funding allocations over a four year period. Housing and homelessness have not been identified as top priorities to date. One manager explained the Council’s Community Development Framework, stating:

*Mildura Rural City Council hasn’t entered [the] housing [sector]. They don’t have a long history of engagement with broader development issues or initiatives. They initially started with youth services. They are starting to develop a “community development” approach to address local issues. The Community Development team works with four working groups that have a formal partnership with the service providers. They are also a fund holder for “Best Start” from DECD (Department for Education and Childhood Development). This is a state program for 0-8 year olds that focusses upon providing education regarding breast feeding, nutrition and the treatment of children for young mothers in the community.*

Local government staff agreed that the Social Indicators Report and Community Development Framework provides an effective method for addressing community concerns and assisting vulnerable groups. However, if these approaches do not identify particular issues or population cohorts that require assistance, they go unaided. The framework means that funds are not available for activities outside those determined by the working groups. The difficulties associated with this approach were explained by staff from Mildura Rural City Council in relation to homelessness and housing stress:
We aren’t involved with homelessness because someone else is doing it. We have too much else to do and practically, we don’t have the resources.

The council’s commitment to social planning is demonstrated by the Social Indicators Reports and Community Development Framework. The Mildura Rural City Council has developed a means to meet council obligations and fund them accordingly. However, to date, homelessness has not been identified as a priority and the council is not active in this space.

Summary

Mildura Rural City Council does not have a formal homelessness policy or informal set of strategies to assist those sleeping rough. Instead, the council works with the Police to enforce a dry zone in the Mildura CBD and uses by-laws that outlaw sleeping in public space. The local government started working on the Mildura Housing and Settlement Strategy in September 2012. A local developer won stimulus funding from the Federal Government to build affordable public housing and smaller units. However, the development has received significant negative attention from the media and local residents. The council did not express any intention to pursue affordable housing options in the future Housing and Settlement Strategy.
Moreland City Council

Critical Issues
- The City of Moreland covers the inner and mid-northern suburbs of Melbourne. It lies between 4 and 14 km north of central Melbourne.
- The estimated resident population in 2011 was 152,255 people. Since 2001 the population has increased by 12 per cent (City of Moreland Annual Report, 2011: 8).
- The City of Moreland is highly diverse culturally and linguistically. Residents of Moreland speak approximately 140 different languages at home. In 2011, more than one-third of residents were born overseas (City of Moreland Annual Report 2011: 9).

Location

Theme 2: Affordable housing and homelessness: exploring the link
The Moreland Affordable Housing Strategy (MAHS) reaffirms the council’s commitment to municipal housing issues as addressed in its 1996 Housing Strategy. The MAHs identifies the decreasing supply of affordable housing options, uncertainties surrounding the re-structuring of public and community housing and escalating housing stress for tenants and purchases as the council’s priority housing concerns (MAHS, 2006: 3). In order to address these concerns, the council has been working since 2000 to actively promote affordable housing options. Some of these initiatives include (MAHS, 2006: 5):

- The Social Housing Innovations Project (SHIP) between 2001-2006;
- A Framework Agreement and feasibility studies with Melbourne Affordable Housing to undertake social housing projects;
The design and construction of a 12 unit community housing project in Fawler for elderly and disabled residents; and,
The design and construction of an 8 unit community housing project in Coburg for single person households.

The Moreland Municipal Public Health Plan (MPHP) also demonstrates the council’s commitment to pursuing affordable housing opportunities. The plan identifies 14 goals to improve and support the health and wellbeing of the community. Housing is Goal 4 and proposes that all residents should have access to suitable, well-located and affordable housing. Recommendations include (MAHS, 2006: 15):

- Ensuring a range of housing options that appropriate to all life stages, those with a disability and the diversity of the community; and,
- Monitoring increases in land and housing prices to inform council policies.

The corresponding actions proposed to address Goal 4 include (MAHS, 2006: 15):

- Using the Moreland Affordable Housing Fund for community housing;
- Developing and implementing a Housing Strategy to address long-term housing need in Moreland;
- Facilitating policies that promote affordability; and,
- Supporting people to ‘age in place’.

The council’s emphasis upon affordable housing was reiterated by the appointment of a Senior Housing Strategist. Council staff suggested that the council’s role in housing is providing affordable housing options to indirectly assist those experiencing homelessness or at risk of homelessness. One staff member explained:

*Moreland City Council sees its role as advocacy rather than getting directly involved in services provision. We think it’s more beneficial to be involved in getting housing stock up or available. This means that we have no direct commitment to homelessness but there is [a formal commitment] for affordable housing.*

Moreland City Council recognises an obligation to pursue affordable housing opportunities and provide appropriate housing options for vulnerable groups in the community. The Moreland Affordable Housing Strategy (MAHS) and Moreland Municipal Public Health Plan (MPHP) illustrate the council’s commitment to delivering affordable housing policies.

**Theme 4: Formal and informal homelessness policies**

Moreland City Council does not have a formal homelessness policy or informal set of strategies to assist those at risk of rough sleeping. However, staff noted that:

*Recently, there was a case of a homeless person setting up camp on the front lawns on the night of the council elections because he wanted to raise public awareness about homelessness in the area. This wasn’t well received by the councillors! Outside of this, councillors and council staff are broadly aware of people sleeping in cars. However, we don’t have an official policy about moving people on who are in public space. If our staff do identify a homeless person, we approach the Royal District Nursing Service and ask their outreach team to become involved.*
The comment suggests that although the council does not have a formal or informal homelessness policy, it has developed an adhoc system for helping those in need. In addition, the council deals directly with housing providers and developers. Community groups and front line service providers have access to council services (such as meeting spaces) and the council provides small grants to facilitate social welfare fundraising campaigns.

**Summary**

Moreland City Council understands that it has an important role to play in affordable housing initiatives. The Moreland Affordable Housing Strategy demonstrates the council's commitment to provide affordable and appropriate housing options for all community members. The council's approach to homelessness includes providing access to services, funding and connecting those in need to the appropriate front line service provider.
City of Perth

Critical Issues

- The City of Perth attracts a disproportionate number of homeless people, particularly rough sleepers in the inner city area.
- The City of Perth has a 2029 Vision for diversity and inclusiveness. The Four Year Strategic Plan that commenced in 2009 states that as a primary action within the Community Services Strategies the City will “develop effective interventions to reduce levels of homelessness in the city”.

Location

Theme 1: Regulatory roles and councils as public space managers
The City of Perth believes that the provision of homelessness services and affordable housing options are the primary responsibility of the Commonwealth and State Governments. The council understands its key roles as a planning authority and manager of public space. The planning authority of the City is delivered within the legal and political framework established by planning, building and other laws determined by the State.

In Western Australia, the State Government plays a lead role in homelessness and housing discussions. All informants agreed that the State Government was responsible for determining the nature of local government engagement. Focus group participants in Perth suggested, “The
State Government directs policy to a large extent and determines how councils engage with the sector. A lack of political support within the State Government for affordable housing projects was blamed for slow uptake of affordable housing measures at the local government level. Indeed some argued that:

_The State Department of Planning doesn’t see housing as their problem. There is only one Affordable Housing Officer in WA! Our council consequently has a policy and targets. All affordable housing items are handled by this person. There is no support from the State Planning Department for local governments. This means that there are no tool kits or guidelines to facilitate the uptake of affordable housing reforms. [Similarly] no state framework for homelessness means that getting involved is a risk for local governments._

The role of the State Government was also emphasised during discussions about the use of by-laws within the City of Perth. Participants recognised that it was necessary to use by-laws to maintain public safety and protect community assets. However, the State Government’s failure to increase the volume of emergency accommodation and stock available for transitional housing was blamed for the increasing numbers of rough sleepers. Focus group participants explained:

_Lack of emergency housing means that rough sleepers are left if they aren’t causing damage or public safety concerns. It’s the elephant in the room, because the response to rough sleeping in WA isn’t perceived as a housing problem. The housing first approach is hugely debated in WA. For example, there is no Common Ground here but a Foyer is being built at the moment._

Nevertheless, the City of Perth adopted a proactive approach to rough sleepers within the CBD during preparations for the CHOGM meeting in October 2011. According to the Manager of Bartholomew House:

_The council was looking to close off certain streets and restrict access to the area for security reasons. All agencies came together to develop an action plan to assist homeless people rough sleeping in the neighbouring parks. Homeless people were given security passes to access the sites and continue their normal [living] patterns._

Similarly, the council also participates in the Parks People Project. This project aims to facilitate the collaboration and exchange of expertise and information between key government and non-government stakeholders on matters relating to antisocial behaviours exhibited by people frequenting a number of parks close to the Perth CBD. First run by the Department for Child Protection (DCP), this group is now chaired by the City of Vincent with support from the City of Perth.

**Theme 3: Matching Responsibilities and Resources**

The arguments against local governments assuming a greater role or responsibilities in the homelessness sector were discussed.

Some informants felt that the roles and responsibilities for homelessness needed further clarification before local governments should consider becoming involved. Legislation, funding and political support were identified as pre-requisites before council engagement:
There is no legislation or obligation for local government to play a role in the homelessness sector. It would be silly to get involved without a partnership with the State Government. Otherwise it just contributes to the messy policy settings. There is only so much that local government can do because of limited funding. We are not looking to expand the scope of our involvement beyond the Homelessness Count and Connect event. Unless the state legislated things – you run the risk of spending huge volumes of funding for no gain.

These informants suggested that poor collaboration with the State and Federal Governments regarding homelessness and limited involvement with the Road Home reforms had soured political relations. One participant implied that poor understandings of roles and responsibilities in the homelessness sector had caused political relations to decline:

State Government haven’t come to us for discussions regarding what we could do or what we would like to contribute. We feel we have been left out. Federal funds go directly to the State Government. The State Government undertakes limited consultations and often contracts out services.

At the same time, City of Perth staff suggested that poor political support within the council further constrained greater involvement. The Community Engagement Manager stated, “Our elected members don’t want to be involved beyond Homelessness Connect. I can’t see anything changing, not unless there was a significant political shift inside this organisation”. Some felt that:

There is not much appetite to grapple with the issue [homelessness] internally. Elected members are too busy worrying about growth to get involved with dealing with homelessness. ...... There is no driving support from within council to pursue this agenda item.

As a result, City of Perth has no intentions to expand their formal involvement in the homelessness sector beyond hosting a Homelessness Connect event annually, and its involvement in the Homelessness Count facilitated by the Council of Capital City Lord Mayors (CCCLM).

Summary
The City of Perth does not have a formal homelessness policy or affordable housing reform agenda. Instead, the council participates in a number of homelessness events and workshops; such as Homeless Connect Perth and the Parks People Project. These initiatives aim to complement the other tiers of government through civic leadership, advocacy, coordination and facilitating partnerships that address homelessness in the Perth inner city area. Monitoring public space and providing adequate services for Indigenous transient populations were identified as key challenges facing the council. Clarifying the roles and responsibilities of different stakeholders in the homelessness sector was named as the main impediment to the council assuming a greater role in the sector.
City of Port Phillip

Critical Issues

- The City of Port Phillip emerged from an amalgamation of the existing local governments of Port Melbourne and St Kilda in the 1980s. The council continues to pursue St Kilda's innovative approach to housing and homelessness issues in the area.

- The City caters for a significant number of disadvantaged and vulnerable groups. Drug and alcohol abuse problems are relatively common, unemployment rates are disproportionately high and the community is culturally, linguistically and religiously diverse.

- The council established a Homelessness Protocol in 2001 and the Port Phillip Housing Association was set up in 2005 as a provider of housing for those most in need.

Location

Theme 1: Regulatory roles and local government as public space managers

When discussing local government regulatory roles and responsibilities to manage public space, the City of Port Phillip look to the local government Act 1989. The Act states that local government responsibilities include ensuring safety; community cohesion; social, economic and environmental viability and sustainability of the municipal district; and quality of life for all members of the community. The council’s Vision Statement 2007-2017 in its Community Plan clarifies the councils' responsibilities, stating (cited in the Homelessness Action Strategy, 2008: 14):

We acknowledge there is a shared responsibility to ensure that everyone, regardless of age or cultural or socio-economic background, can access services that meet their needs and can participate in community life.
The council’s vision of equal community participation and access to services is underpinned by three housing principles. These are 1) housing is a basic human right; 2) support services are necessary to prevent homelessness and help those trying to exit homelessness; and, 3) council’s role is to co-ordinate a response that addresses the needs of people experiencing homelessness.

These housing principles were also used to inform the Homelessness Protocol. In 2001 Local Law No. 3 (2003) within the Council Community Amenity, the Procedure and Protocol Manual was developed to outline a range of processes council officers need to consider when regarding a person who is camping or may be sleeping rough. These are now used in conjunction with the Victorian Protocol for People who are Homeless in Public Places 2006 and the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities 2007 that all public authorities must use to inform their decision making in Victoria. The Charter states that all Victorians have the right to freedom of association and movement; freedom from discrimination and protection of privacy and reputation (cited in the Homelessness Action Strategy, 2008: 16). The City of Port Phillip considers these human rights important for residents rough sleeping within their municipality and endeavours to protect them.

**Theme 2: Affordable housing and homelessness: exploring the link**

The City of Port Phillip understands homelessness is a housing problem. As a result, affordable and appropriate housing options are considered vital for assisting those who are sleeping rough or experiencing housing stress within the municipality. St Kilda local government and now the City of Port Phillip have a long history of pursuing affordable housing opportunities. The staff of the St Kilda Community Housing described this trajectory:

> In order to first develop housing capital, the council decided to place a levy on all rental accommodation. They wanted to raise $250,000 across the entire council per year. The council first approached the State to match their capital and enter into joint development ventures. But they would only listen to an economic, not a social argument. The council started a housing association to manage the properties and tenancies. They also handed over sites that were set aside for other forms of development, such as car parks. After the State turned them down, they approached the Commonwealth to match their investment in joint ventures; such as the St Kilda railway site. Once this started to work, the State Government started to buy properties for public housing.

In 2005 the council identified a conflict of interest because in that they were behaving as planners, developers and the statutory authority for housing. Council was also concerned that political support for housing initiatives may diminish amongst councillors in the future and jeopardise the council’s capacity to assist those experiencing homelessness.

The Port Phillip Housing Association (PPHA) was established to allow council to behave as the statutory authority regulating development, rather than as a developer. The council transferred all properties and assets into a trust managed by PPHA. The trust is worth over $800 million today. The council grants $440,000 to the PPHA for administration costs annually and the PPHA manages their waiting list according to the council’s motto, “housing for the locals”. This means that people are prioritised according to their links to the local area.

Affordable and appropriate housing options are a vital component of the City’s strategy for assisting those experiencing homelessness. The Port Phillip Housing Association is a testament to the council’s commitment to addressing housing needs in their municipality.
Summary
The City of Port Phillip is renowned for its proactive and innovative approaches to housing and homelessness. Homelessness is understood as a housing problem. Affordable housing is consequently an important element of the council’s strategy to help those experiencing housing stress. A human rights based approach informs the council’s approach to rough sleepers and managing public space. Since 2001, the council has worked to protect the rights and interests of vulnerable people sleeping in public space. The City of Port Phillip provides many examples of best practice.