

Which Way Home?

A new approach to homelessness

May 2008

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Foreword

After 17 years of continuous economic growth it is simply unacceptable that, each night, 100,000 Australians are homeless.

Half are under 24 years-old, and 10,000 are children.

Human dignity begins the day you can call a place home.

That's why homelessness is now a very important part of the Australian Government's social inclusion agenda.

In January we announced that we would develop a new approach to reduce homelessness over the next decade. This Green Paper is the first step.

The causes of homelessness are complex; the effects of homelessness are debilitating and the costs of homelessness to individuals, families and the community are huge.

Homeless Australians lose opportunities to be part of their families, their community and the economy. They miss out on things the rest of us take for granted—a good education, decent health care and a secure place to call home.

Our response to homelessness needs to be improved. The truth is that we are not having enough impact on the lives of homeless Australians.

To make our new approach work we need national commitment and strong leadership. Reducing homelessness must be a shared responsibility. We need to work harder to prevent homelessness and this means intervening earlier.

Government, community, business and the homeless all have a role to play.

It means improving the crisis and emergency response and working this in better with mainstream health, education, justice and employment services. Only this will stop the cycle of homelessness.

This is a once in a generation opportunity.

Our new approach to homelessness will look beyond providing a bed and a hot meal. It will offer homeless Australians new opportunities to be part of their community. These will be the same opportunities as other Australians—to get training, to find work, to get health care and build social networks.

This Green Paper aims to promote discussion.

It also puts forward principles, targets and concrete options for reform.

Now we want to know what you think, because the Government doesn't have all the answers.

So read the Green Paper and send in your response. Or come along to one of the public consultations we are holding around the country.

We look forward to your active participation.

We owe it to 100,000 Australians—as well our future generations—to get this right.



The Hon Kevin Rudd MP
Prime Minister



The Hon Tanya Plibersek MP
Minister for Housing

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A new approach to homelessness

Increasing homelessness is a source of national shame.

Every night 100,000 Australians, including 10,000 children under the age of 12, are homeless. Around half rely on the hospitality of friends, nearly a quarter bed down in boarding houses and caravan parks, and the rest rely on emergency accommodation or sleep rough under bridges, in cars or in parks.

It is difficult to believe that over the past decade, when national prosperity has soared, homelessness has increased. This should be a source of national shame—and a spur to action. Reductions in the rates of homelessness can be achieved, but not overnight.

The causes and consequences of homelessness are complex. Economic factors such as unemployment, limited housing supply and neighbourhood disadvantage sit alongside individual triggers such as family breakdown, drug addiction, domestic violence and mental illness.

For older people, homelessness often involves mental illness and poor health, for men, family breakdown, unemployment, and gambling. For women, homelessness often follows domestic violence, child abuse or sexual assault. For children, homelessness brings trauma, and affects school routines and friendships. Worse still, experiencing homelessness as a child makes adult homelessness more likely.

As a nation we have failed to address these issues. Our response to homelessness is not nationally coordinated or strategically focused. While there are excellent programs, many lack sufficient scale or coordination to adequately address the multiple causes and effects of homelessness.

The cost of homelessness to individuals and their families is large. The cost to society of our failure to reduce homelessness is even greater. While tackling homelessness involves additional investment, not tackling homelessness will only cost more.

The task of reducing homelessness will take some time. We have, however, a good understanding of homelessness and a unique opportunity to act. This means we are now better placed than ever before to succeed.

In January 2008 the Prime Minister, the Hon Kevin Rudd MP, and the Minister for Housing, the Hon Tanya Plibersek MP, announced the development of a comprehensive long-term plan to tackle homelessness as a matter of national priority.

The Prime Minister appointed a steering group to oversee this process:

- Tony Nicholson, Executive Director of the Brotherhood of St Laurence (Chair)
- Anna Buduls, company director and philanthropist
- Heather Nancarrow, Director of the Queensland Centre for Domestic and Family Violence Research.

A Green Paper and a White Paper

This Green Paper is the first step in developing a new approach to homelessness. It will be followed by a White Paper.

The Green Paper seeks to promote public discussion of homelessness, highlight the challenges faced by people who are homeless, and suggest ways forward. There will be public consultations to provide feedback on the issues raised in the paper and identify other important issues and possible strategies. People will be able to contribute at public meetings and provide written submissions.

A White Paper will then set out the Australian Government's response to the Green Paper, including feedback from the consultation process. Expected to be released in September 2008 the White Paper will provide a national plan of action for the years leading up to 2020.

What should a new approach achieve?

The new approach will form an essential part of the Australian Government's social inclusion agenda. It must demonstrate a practical commitment to social inclusion by bringing people who are homeless and people at risk of homelessness from the margins into the mainstream, and maximising their opportunities to participate in the work and life of the broader Australian community.

The new approach should be truly national. We need to focus more on prevention and early intervention strategies. Stable housing is essential and we need to improve outcomes in areas that protect against homelessness - like jobs, health, financial management and family safety.

For the best results, we need all levels of government and service providers to commit to a joint effort and integrate their policy and program approaches. Without a joint effort, which combines responses to homelessness with wider social support services, individuals will continue to fall through the cracks. As well, we must harness the contributions and efforts of the business sector. We can only solve this problem if the whole community is involved.

Goals and targets to drive our efforts

Other countries that have made a real impact on homelessness have signed up to clear 'headline' goals. A goal should be ambitious but achievable: a goal should drive a focus on what must be achieved.

To achieve an ambitious goal, we will need to collectively rethink how current homelessness-specific and mainstream policies and programs operate, how they can work together more effectively, and what new initiatives are needed.

It would be useful to agree on a number of targets that focus on prevention and improving outcomes. We must also measure our success and be accountable.

It is clear that our targets must focus on both stable housing and better results in areas that protect - like jobs, health, financial management and safety.

This paper suggests some targets as well as a range of possible reform initiatives that go beyond providing shelter. It recognises the complex factors that impact on homelessness and the range of services that need to collaborate to reduce it.

Green Paper overview

The development of this Green Paper was overseen by the Steering Group who held preliminary consultations with leaders and experts from the not-for-profit, academic and business sectors. The paper aims to lay the groundwork for public debate, propose several options for reform, and encourage further thinking.

Section One summarises what we know about the experience and common causes of homelessness. It identifies structural drivers and critical life events that can tip people from enjoying a social or economic attachment to their communities into the crisis and instability of homelessness.

Section Two provides an overview of current responses to homelessness, including their strengths and limitations. It outlines the way in which governments work with the not-for-profit and business sectors to deliver services to those at risk of or experiencing homelessness. It also analyses the efforts of homeless-specific services and mainstream services to deliver long-term outcomes for homeless people.

Section Three focuses on some of the more innovative programs that are working well to prevent and address homelessness, either in a locality or with a particular group. It also set out the lessons that can be drawn on to guide our new approach.

Section Four presents proposals for future directions. These include 10 core principles that should underpin a new national approach and action plan, and ideas for change that could help us meet the challenge. Along with specific reform proposals, this section aims to begin the dialogue about goals and targets we should set in order to drive our efforts. It also discusses how we should measure our progress over the life of the action plan.

Section Five outlines the public consultation process that is designed to collect responses to ideas presented in this Green Paper. It extends an invitation to interested organisations and individuals—people who have experienced homelessness, service providers, the business sector, academics, and the broad community—to share their views on specific reforms, goals and targets proposed in this paper, as well as suggest other ideas that could be effective.

Introduction

Each night in Australia, approximately 100,000 people are homeless. Half of these people are under 25 years-old, and 10,000 are children.¹

Homelessness negatively affects individuals and their friends and family. It also has long-term social and economic implications for the community.

There is no evidence that homeless Australians have shared in the advantages of 17 years of continuous strong economic growth. Anecdotal evidence suggests that the number of homeless Australians has increased. This highlights a lack of national leadership to help ensure that all Australians have the opportunity to share in the benefits of a strong economy. It also demonstrates our failure to invest in innovative, new ways of helping homeless Australians—approaches that could have led to better outcomes.

The unacceptable prevalence of homelessness in our prosperous nation can, however, be reduced. Other countries' efforts show that where there is leadership and commitment, in-roads can be made to addressing homelessness. In 1998 the United Kingdom set a target of reducing rough sleeping by two thirds and has achieved a 78 per cent reduction in a decade. In the United States, 300 cities and counties have signed up to Ten Year Plans to End Homelessness.

Here in Australia, efforts at the state and territory level have also been successful. South Australia has driven its response to homelessness through a three-way partnership between the non-government sector and the policy and program arms of relevant government agencies.² South Australia set a target to halve rough sleeping by 2010 and is now on the way to meeting it.³

Identifying the problem

We know that the causes of homelessness are multiple, inter-related and directly linked with the breakdown of social and economic support.⁴ It is not only the most vulnerable who face the prospect of losing their homes and exclusion from mainstream society.

For the vast majority of Australians the cornerstones to building a good life are a home and a job. Changes in the housing and labour markets have put additional financial pressures on people on low-to-middle incomes, placing many more at risk of unemployment, default or eviction and increasing their risk of homelessness.

Finding stable and secure housing for low-income families has become a significant challenge. Australia now has the least affordable housing market in the world with rental vacancies at critically low levels.⁵ Despite relatively low unemployment rates, in an economy driven by education, people with few skills and those with a disability or mental illness may still have difficulty finding employment.

These factors are driving changes in the profile of people who are homeless and at risk of homelessness. Between 2002 and 2007, the number of families seeking assistance from homeless services increased by 30 per cent.⁶

In its 2007 report, *Don't Dream It's Over*, the St Vincent de Paul Society describes the untenable situation of families forced to live in substandard accommodation, and the circumstances beyond their control that took them there—including forced evictions when properties are sold and the rising costs of private rents. St Vincent de Paul reports that nearly 50 per cent of people coming into homelessness services across Australia are private renters in difficulty.⁷

Developing more effective solutions

In response to these problems, the Australian Government's new approach to homelessness must be national and long-term.

Providing a bed and a hot meal is necessary, but not enough to address homelessness. Many innovative services have shown how to make a long-term difference. These services need to be expanded and linked in more effectively with existing services across all levels of government.

We need to work harder to prevent the causes of homelessness, such as domestic and family violence, mental illness, family breakdown and poverty.⁸ We need to review national and state and territory government policies and procedures that may contribute to or increase homelessness—and fix them. Efforts need to focus on identifying and assisting people at risk, as well as those who are already homeless.

We need to be honest about what works and what does not.

We need to increase the supply of safe, well-located and affordable housing. Governments have already taken steps to improve housing supply, but this problem will not be solved overnight.

All government social policies and programs need to share the common goal of reducing homelessness. There are important roles for schools, employment, child protection, mental health and substance abuse services, Centrelink and the justice systems. State and territory governments have shown a strong desire to work collaboratively with the Australian Government on a national policy framework for homelessness.⁹

Governments cannot tackle this issue alone. The not-for-profit sector is already deeply involved as are many committed individuals, foundations and businesses. Finding solutions to the problem of homelessness is a shared responsibility.

Social inclusion as a primary goal

People who are homeless are among the most marginalised people in Australia. Homelessness is one of the most potent examples of disadvantage in the community, and one of the most important markers of social exclusion.¹⁰

Homelessness freezes people out of opportunities that most Australians enjoy. We can reduce homelessness if we focus on giving people the chance to get a job and be part of their families and the community. Business can be involved as benefactors of homeless services, or more directly by offering supported employment to people who are or have been homeless.

We must also assist people to increase their engagement in the community, and build their capacity to participate. Our efforts need to include ‘participation’ in the broadest sense—that is, in employment, training and education, volunteering, effective parenting, and caring for family or friends.¹¹ Overseas evidence on social capital suggests that giving homeless people opportunities to participate in these kinds of mainstream activities will increase their resilience, social networks and improve their lives.¹²

Stable long-term employment should be the ultimate goal for most, even if it does take time to achieve improvements in people’s life and job skills. For those escaping domestic and family violence, connecting them with support in their local community, including engagement with school and friends for their children, will be a positive outcome. For a minority of people who have very complex needs such as severe mental illness, acquired brain injuries or an intellectual disability, better social and community participation will in itself be an achievement.

Reaching the goal of improved participation requires investment. Effective responses must meet all clients’ needs, including safe and secure housing, addressing health and personal problems, improving life skills for people who don’t have them, and developing vocational and employment skills. Different and separate services must be delivered in an integrated way that reflects their essential inter-dependence. Some clients who have particularly complex needs will need ongoing support to maintain their accommodation, their relationships and their engagement with the community.

Preventing homelessness is a key priority for social inclusion. It is also an investment that will reap broader social and economic benefits. With proper support, people can become more resilient and better able to manage their personal, financial and housing needs, and gain the confidence and skills they need to participate in mainstream economic and social life. This will deliver considerable benefits for the whole community as well as for those directly affected by homelessness.

Improving data collection and research

Data and research on homelessness in Australia is limited, especially on the cost-benefit and cost-effectiveness of homelessness strategies and programs. Strengthening data collection is central to a new approach to reducing homelessness. It will also help us to monitor progress and measure the impact of efforts. Better reporting is likely to increase our estimate of the number of people experiencing homelessness—possibly at the same time that we see evidence of new strategies working.

Data and research on homelessness—strengths and limitations

Our understanding and evaluation of homelessness and its risks relies on two main sources:

- the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) Census of Population and Housing collected every five years
- the National Data Collection from the Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP) which collects information on people who use services funded under Australia's largest homelessness funding program.

While these sources are robust by international standards they do not capture the wider, dynamic picture of homelessness or vulnerability to homelessness over time.

The ABS Census has been collecting information on homelessness since 1996, and is continuing to improve the methodology and accuracy of its reporting. People experiencing homelessness may spend time in boarding houses, nights on the street, nights with friends or relatives, and nights in crisis shelters. It is hard to find and count people in most of these settings.

The Census can only tell us how many people are homeless on Census night. It does not tell us how many people are homeless across a year, nor how long or often people are homeless.

Full analysis of information about the homeless population from the 2006 Census will be available later in 2008.

Similarly, the SAAP data collection is improving. SAAP data, however, can only tell us about people who sought assistance from a funded service provider. It misses the many thousands who did not approach a SAAP service, those who use mainstream services, or people who receive a service from one of the smaller homelessness programs.

With these limitations in mind, we have used the most comprehensive information available. This means using SAAP data to augment ABS data to analyse the experience and causes of homelessness.

Other institutions and organisations carry out research on homelessness. Service providers, for example, hold small but richly-detailed data sets about homelessness. SAAP has its own research funds, which are primarily dedicated to projects related to SAAP clients and the SAAP service system. The Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute has undertaken a small number of research projects in this area, particularly in relation to housing outcomes.

In 2007, a national homelessness research seminar was held to explore ways of developing a more comprehensive national research agenda. The national homelessness research seminar was conducted by the Council to Homeless Persons, Victoria, and funded through the Supported Accommodation Assistance Program Coordination and Development Committee. The seminar came up with the idea to establish a national network to better coordinate research efforts.

Section One: Experiencing homelessness and its causes

Key messages:

- Homelessness is caused by personal, social and economic factors. The causes are complex and inter-related.
- Personal factors include disability, mental illness, alcohol and drug abuse, family breakdown, poverty and violence.
- Social and economic factors include housing affordability, access to work, education and training, and entrenched disadvantage.
- People who experience homelessness lose opportunities to be part of Australia's mainstream economic and social life.
- Homelessness affects our whole community.

What does it mean to experience homelessness in Australia?

People experiencing or at risk of homelessness live in cities, towns and remote communities right across Australia. They can be young or elderly, single or partnered, and include overseas born and Indigenous Australians. Many have accompanying children.

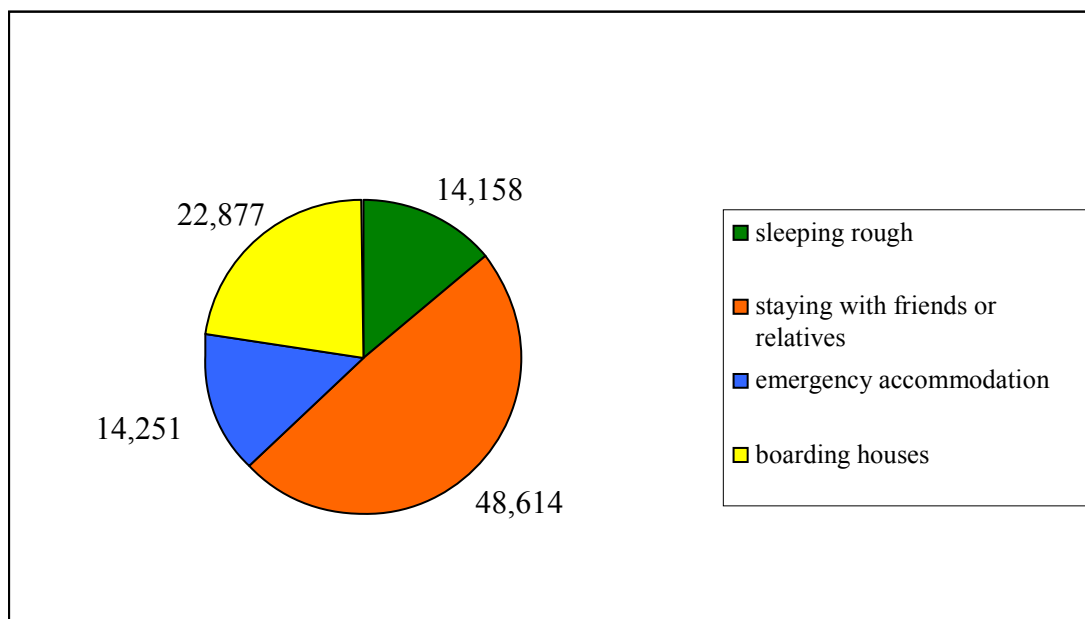
Some homeless people have jobs—many more would like to. Some people are unable to work and many others are concentrating all their efforts on keeping their families together and their children in school. Most homeless people survive on very low incomes. A single financial or personal crisis, family breakdown, or job loss can trigger homelessness—this may be a short-term, once-in-a-lifetime experience, or it may begin a cycle of homelessness.

The experience of homelessness falls into three broad categories:

- sleeping rough—called 'primary' homelessness
- temporary accommodation such as in a crisis service or staying with friends or relatives—called 'secondary' homelessness
- boarding houses or caravan parks with no secure lease, and no private facilities, such as a bathroom—called 'tertiary' homelessness.

Figure 1 shows that of the 100,000 Australians estimated by the 2001 Census to be homeless on any one night, most were staying temporarily with friends or relatives (49 per cent).¹³ A further 23 per cent were counted as homeless because they were staying in boarding houses, caravan parks or other insecure and transitional accommodation. More than one in four were sleeping rough or staying in emergency accommodation.¹⁴

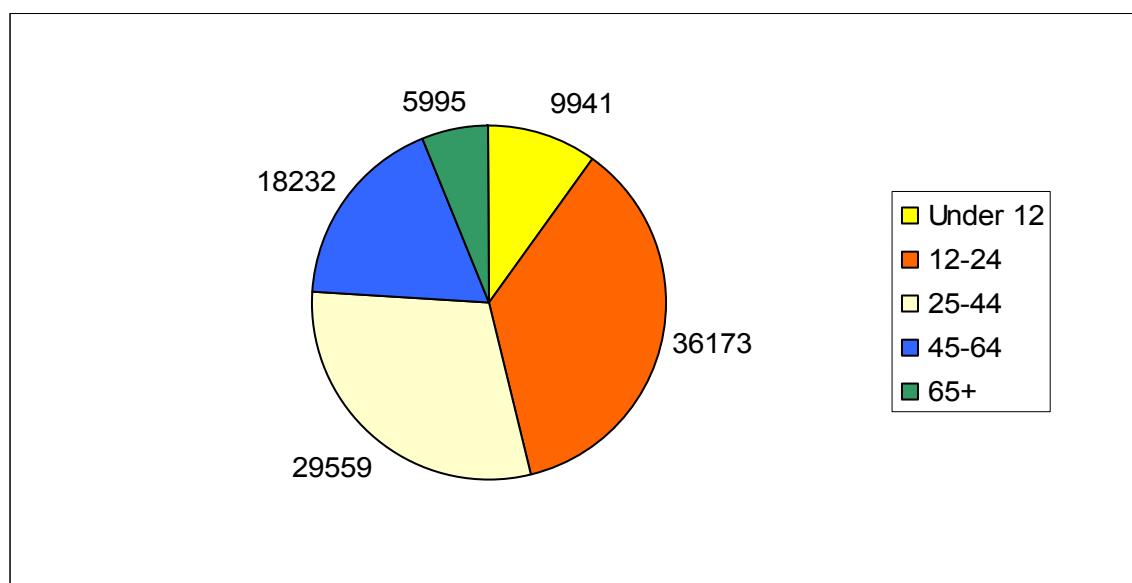
Figure 1: Number of homeless people per homeless category, 2001



Who is homeless?

The face of homelessness has changed over the past few decades. Figure 2 shows that almost half of all people experiencing homelessness in Australia are now aged below 25 years, and nearly 10,000 of these are under the age of 12 years.¹⁵ Of immense concern is the nearly 2 per cent of Australian children under the age of five who will sleep in crisis accommodation at some stage during any year.¹⁶

Figure 2: Homeless population by age, 2001



People who are homeless or at risk of homelessness reflect the make-up of our diverse community. Many people are dealing with multiple problems, and are likely to have different needs depending on their household type and whether they live in remote, rural or urban areas.¹⁷

Population groups

Males

Over half (58 per cent) of Australians who experience homelessness are males.¹⁸ They are more likely than females to sleep rough or live in boarding houses. Males aged 25 years and older who asked for support from SAAP services said financial difficulty was the most common reason for their homelessness, followed by drug, alcohol or substance abuse.¹⁹ Many males also become homeless following separation and family breakdown, and receive relationship counselling and emotional support as well as crisis accommodation.²⁰

Females

Females make up 42 per cent of adults experiencing homelessness in the Census count,²¹ and comprise 60 per cent of those who used SAAP services in 2005–06.²² Children accompany many women. When they become homeless, women with children tend to seek crisis accommodation, rather than sleeping rough or trying to find a bed in a boarding house. When crisis accommodation is unavailable or inadequate there is a risk that women and children will stay or return to a situation of violence.

Domestic violence, family violence and family breakdown are the major reasons females approach homeless services for assistance.²³ Domestic violence was cited as the main reason for seeking support in 54 per cent of SAAP support periods for women with children, and 37 per cent for females alone aged over 25 years.²⁴

Other reasons females seek assistance from SAAP services are relationship/family breakdown (22 per cent of females aged under 25 years in SAAP services) and financial difficulty.²⁵

Children

Almost one in 10 homeless Australians are aged under 12 years. The vast majority of homeless children are accompanying their parents.²⁶ Three-quarters of the 54,700 children who accompanied their parents into SAAP services in 2005–06 were under 10 years old.²⁷ Most children who use these services have either witnessed or experienced family violence and sexual abuse. This increases their risk of developing mental health and behavioural problems.²⁸

Data show that 65 per cent of accompanying children aged under 12 years received counselling or support for sexual or physical abuse.²⁹

Families

Of all SAAP support episodes, 22 per cent were provided to single parent families headed by a woman and two per cent to single parent families headed by a man.³⁰

While the number of two parent families with children accessing SAAP services comprised only 4 per cent of all SAAP support periods in 2005–06 this number has increased by 46 per cent from 2000–01 to 2005–06.³¹ The number of SAAP agencies providing services to families increased from 108 agencies in 2000–01 to 120 agencies in 2005–06 (an 11 per cent increase).³²

For couples entering SAAP with children, the main reasons for seeking assistance were 'eviction/previous accommodation ended' (24 per cent); 'financial difficulty' (20 per cent); and 'usual accommodation unavailable' (13 per cent).³³

Couples with children have the highest turn-away rate of all client groups, at 77.9 per cent compared to 53.6 per cent for all groups in 2005–06.³⁴ The main reason for turning couples away was because of 'insufficient accommodation being available'. This accounted for 68 per cent of all valid requests—higher than for all other groups at 59 per cent.³⁵

Young people

Not all children come to SAAP services with their families. More than one in three people experiencing homelessness are young people aged 12 to 24 years. This is the largest proportion of the homeless population.³⁶ A recent report by the National Youth Commission says that, despite various interventions, youth homelessness has doubled over the past 20 years.³⁷

In 2005–06 SAAP services assisted 13,200 unaccompanied children aged under 17 years.³⁸

Family breakdown (29 per cent) and time out from family (16 per cent) were the most common reasons children sought help from SAAP on their own.³⁹ Many children and young people received support for reasons related to domestic violence and family breakdown.⁴⁰

Older young people aged 15 to 24 years have the highest rate of SAAP service usage.⁴¹ Overall, the number of young people aged 12 to 24 years seeking help from these services rose 10 per cent over the seven years to June 2006.⁴²

Older people

On Census night in 2001 around 14,000 people aged 55 years and over experienced homelessness. This represents 14 per cent of the homeless population.⁴³ Older homeless people often have complex needs, are in poorer health, and face a lower life expectancy compared with the general population of older people.

An estimated 10 per cent of users of homeless services for older Australians are veterans.⁴⁴ A high incidence of disability, mental illness and alcoholism results in the

majority of older people who experience homelessness receiving income support, particularly disability support payments.

Indigenous Australians

In 2005-06 Indigenous homelessness was three times the rate for other Australians. Indigenous clients made up almost 17 per cent of SAAP clients across Australia but only 1.9 per cent of the total population. Indigenous people were over-represented in their use of SAAP services in all states and territories⁴⁵:

Table 1: Indigenous SAAP Clients – 2005-06

State/Territory	% of Indigenous Clients	% of total population
New South Wales	17.6	1.6
Victoria	5.4	0.5
Queensland	21.7	2.7
Western Australia	40.1	2.8
South Australia	18.8	1.4
Tasmania	9.8	3.0
Australian Capital Territory	9.9	1.0
Northern Territory	62.2	25.5

Source: AIHW SAAP Collection 2005-06

Twenty seven per cent of accompanying children in SAAP were of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander origin⁴⁶.

Both urban and remote Indigenous people cited domestic and family violence as the most common reasons for seeking SAAP assistance.⁴⁷ Indigenous clients were less likely to name accommodation difficulties as their reason for seeking support, but were twice as likely to cite overcrowding as a reason for seeking help⁴⁸.

Indigenous Australians are more likely to experience homelessness because of their social and economic disadvantage.⁴⁹ Among those who were renting in 2001, 80 per cent of Indigenous households had incomes that fell into the lowest 40 per cent. In 2002, 43 per cent of Indigenous households experienced days without money in the last 12 months.⁵⁰ Forty-nine per cent reported that they could not raise money in an emergency, compared to only 15 per cent of all households.⁵¹

Homelessness is an issue for Indigenous people living in both urban and remote environments. In 2003 Indigenous people comprised 10 per cent of clients in SAAP services in urban areas, 21 per cent in regional areas, and 71 per cent in remote areas.⁵² Eviction was a more common reason for accessing a SAAP service for Indigenous people in urban and rural areas than for Indigenous people in remote areas.

In several regional towns and centres, and especially in Northern Australia, the shortage of affordable and accessible short-term and emergency accommodation is the driver of homelessness. Visitors often live rough.⁵³ In Darwin, for example, this group are known as 'long grassers' and is made up of temporary visitors to Darwin

from remote communities across the Northern Territory. The group also includes itinerant people who have severed ties with their home community and do not expect their circumstances to change.⁵⁴ For some of these people, living outdoors has become a way of life.

In 2006 14 per cent of Indigenous households across Australia were over-crowded compared with 61 per cent of Indigenous households in the Northern Territory.⁵⁵

People from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds (CALD)

People who come from non-English-speaking countries are consistently under-represented in their use of SAAP services (11 per cent of clients) compared to their representation in the wider population (16 per cent). They also return to SAAP services less often for support.⁵⁶

An analysis of 2005–06 SAAP clients by county of birth shows that while migrants from North Africa and the Middle East and Sub-Saharan Africa were over-represented in the SAAP population, overall migrants were generally under-represented.⁵⁷ The reasons for this under-representation are not well known—there could be extra barriers for these clients accessing SAAP, particularly cultural barriers, or they may not know about the services. People from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds may also have access to different support networks in their own communities or have extensive family and community links that assist when people are at risk of homelessness.

Risk factors, effects and causes of homelessness

Drivers, causes and triggers of homelessness are complex. Specific issues such as job loss or ongoing domestic or family violence can trigger homelessness. Sometimes these combine with broader factors such as upward spikes in the cost of housing, a change in the labour market, or loss of support networks.

When personal trauma or a financial crisis occurs, people with resources and support to draw on are likely to escape homelessness relatively quickly. Others without networks or personal resilience can become homeless and may be homeless for a longer time.

Risk factors

Common factors that often work together to increase the risk of homelessness include:

- housing stress, as a result of rising costs, eviction, mortgagee sales, or unavailable or inadequate housing
- unemployment or insecure employment
- domestic and family violence
- family conflict, or a recent change in family structure
- mental illness
- being Indigenous
- being a refugee on a Temporary Protection Visa
- being a disadvantaged young person
- legal problems
- any event that leads to further social and economic marginalisation.⁵⁸

The risk of homelessness can be exacerbated by other personal factors such as mental health issues, drug and alcohol abuse, problem gambling, a history of physical or sexual abuse, limited life skills, and poor financial literacy. At times, government policies or procedures that respond to these factors may inadvertently increase the risk of homelessness.

Vulnerability to homelessness is also heightened during important life transitions such as going from school to work, leaving the child protection system, family breakdown, retirement, leaving prison, or relocating.

Effects of homelessness

Homelessness removes stability and connection in people's lives. People who leave their home and local community often leave behind important relationships and networks. This makes it harder to participate in employment, education, and family and the community, and can effectively exclude people from mainstream life. The experience of homelessness can also lead people into substance abuse or trigger mental health issues.

Homeless people tend to have poorer health than the general population. Rates of acute mental illness and chronic health problems amongst homeless people are high.⁵⁹ Other health effects of homelessness can include poor dental health, eye problems, podiatry issues, infectious diseases, sexually transmitted diseases, pneumonia, lack of preventative and routine health care, and inappropriate use of medication.⁶⁰ Compared to the general population, homeless people are also greater users of hospital emergency services.⁶¹

Children are particularly vulnerable to the traumatic effects of homelessness. Homelessness disrupts education and other important resilience-building opportunities that come, for example, from participation in sporting and cultural activities. In turn, poor education is a risk factor for future episodes of homelessness. Children who have been homeless are more likely to experience emotional and behavioural problems such as distress, depression, anger and aggression.⁶² A review of data on juveniles on remand in Tasmania showed that unstable home environments and a lack of suitable accommodation were factors that contributed to high rates of remand.⁶³

The homelessness experience can often be a cycle through various types of marginal accommodation rather than a single episode of being without conventional housing. When this cycle repeats a number of times, it drives people to the margins of society. The trauma and financial impact of these experiences make it harder for people to hold down a job, keep up a tenancy, complete education, and maintain regular contact with family and friends. Social exclusion resulting from homelessness has enormous personal and community costs.

Causes of homelessness

The complexity and diversity of homelessness means that there are often many interacting and cumulative causes. Drawing on work undertaken for the South Australian Social Inclusion Unit, Table 2 shows these factors can be categorised under the three inter-related headings of socio-economic factors, social exclusion, and individual issues.⁶⁴

Table 2: Factors relating to causes of homelessness

Socio-economic factors	Social exclusion	Individual issues
• Housing under-supply • Unaffordable housing • Unemployment • Deinstitutionalisation • Poverty • Poor education • Relationship breakdown and changes to family restructures • Limited access to public housing • Lack of coordination between agencies • Barriers to accessing services • Discrimination by landlords	• Lack of personal capacity and resources • Domestic and family violence • Sexual, physical or emotional abuse • Living in overcrowded accommodation • Lack of education • Problems with employment • Lack of social networks • Lack of knowledge of resources • Non-cohesive family unit • High levels of family conflict or stress • Low levels of social attachment	• Poor life skills • Cultural factors • Alcoholism • Substance abuse • Mental illness • Poor physical health • Disability • Criminality • Homelessness as a lifestyle choice

Lack of affordable, secure housing is a substantial factor in homelessness and contributes to the cycle of homelessness. Unstable and unaffordable housing puts financial pressure on households. Sudden rises in rent or other housing costs may cause people to lose their home.

The under-supply of affordable housing also makes it difficult for people to leave crisis services. Seventeen per cent of those leaving SAAP services find accommodation only in boarding houses, and 5 per cent end up sleeping rough.⁶⁵

It should also be recognised that in many parts of rural and remote Australia, the issue for Indigenous people is not so much about the affordability or otherwise of housing, rather it is simply that the existing housing stock does not have the capacity to house the Indigenous population at reasonable household occupation levels.⁶⁶

Public and community housing does not provide a safety net for all people at risk of homelessness. Overall, Australian Government funding for public and community housing has declined in real terms over the past decade.⁶⁷

The private rental market has become less affordable. Many people now at risk of homelessness are private renters. Rent rises are a source of pressure for households and can trigger homelessness. The proportion of households renting privately rose from 19 per cent in the mid-1990s to more than 21 per cent in 2004.⁶⁸ Average rents for three-bedroom homes have risen by 82 per cent since 1996.⁶⁹ There are 685,000 private renting households on low to moderate incomes in housing stress.⁷⁰ There is also a critical shortage of affordable, private rental housing: vacancy rates are below 2 per cent in all capital cities.⁷¹

A growing group of Australians are at risk of homelessness because of rising mortgage payments which can force mortgage foreclosures. Australia is now the least affordable housing market in the world.⁷² The average Australian now needs 7.5 times their annual after-tax income to buy a home compared with five times the average annual income a decade ago.⁷³ By mid-2008, 300,000 households are predicted to experience severe mortgage stress, while another 700,000 will experience mortgage stress by June 2009.⁷⁴

Lack of affordable housing can also result in overcrowding, which strains household relationships and household utilities and may lead to poor health and wellbeing, and ultimately homelessness.⁷⁵ This is particularly so in many Indigenous communities—13,380 Indigenous households are classed as ‘overcrowded’, mainly because of lack of housing in remote areas.⁷⁶

Domestic and family violence is the single greatest reason people seek SAAP service support.⁷⁷ The causes of violence are complex and include factors at individual, family, community and society levels.

Although all women and children escaping domestic and family violence need safe, secure, appropriate and affordable housing, their immediate needs are not all the same. For their safety, some will need immediate access to high-level security. Others will require medium or low-level security. Some may be able to remain safely in their own homes because the perpetrator of the violence is re-located, rather than

the victims, and appropriate support and security measures are put in place. Without the right support, women may have to return to abusive partners.

Women with children who find accommodation in a crisis service often struggle to get into longer-term housing due to a lack of supply of suitable housing stock, discrimination and cost of private rental accommodation.⁷⁸ Some women return to the home where the violence occurred rather than remaining homeless or allowing their children to be homeless.⁷⁹ Women escaping family violence often need specialist support services such as counselling, financial and legal assistance, and physical protection.⁸⁰

Forty-three per cent of Indigenous women in remote areas and 32 per cent of Indigenous women in urban areas reported that domestic and family violence was their main reason for seeking SAAP assistance.⁸¹ Women from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds—particularly recent migrants—face additional barriers to seeking help such as lack of professional interpreters, negotiating access to Centrelink benefits if on a sponsored visa, limited education, fear of being ostracised by families and communities, and concern about discrimination in the wider community. In 2005–06 17 per cent of non-English speaking women born overseas returned to their partner after accessing SAAP assistance because of domestic and family violence.⁸²

Family breakdown and family violence are also the major reasons young people seek services.⁸³

Unemployment and inadequate income can prevent individuals and families from securing and staying in housing. Increases in the cost of living are putting pressure on many low-income families.

Data obtained through the Emergency Relief program demonstrates a shift in the profile of people seeking financial assistance. In 1997–98, 94 per cent of Emergency Relief recipients were on a Centrelink payment or allowance.⁸⁴ In 2007–08 only 62 per cent were receiving income support. This suggests that more employed people on low to middle incomes are seeking emergency relief because of financial hardship.⁸⁵

The incidence of casual employment has remained broadly stable at around 25 per cent over the past ten years. Various studies have shown that casual employment is often a useful 'stepping stone' in a person's transition to more permanent forms of employment.⁸⁶

Similarly, while Australia's strong economy has given young people more opportunities to leave school, find jobs and begin independent lives, homelessness among young people remains a major problem.⁸⁷

Mental illness is a barrier for many people to get into and stay in stable housing, and this can lead to homelessness. In a study which sampled people experiencing homelessness in inner Sydney, up to 75 per cent of those aged 18 years and over were found to have a mental health concern. The study also found that the

prevalence of mental disorder is four times higher among homeless men and women than in the general population.⁸⁸

A broader study has estimated that almost 30 per cent of SAAP service users experienced an intensive mental health problem.⁸⁹

The Australian Institute of Criminology found that homeless detainees were more likely to have been admitted to a psychiatric hospital in the past 12 months. This was the case for one in three (31 per cent) homeless detainees, compared to around one in six (15 per cent) for non-homeless detainees.⁹⁰

When people experience episodic mental illness, their ability to live independently and maintain housing can fluctuate. They risk falling behind in rent or mortgage payments because of employment difficulties, higher medical costs, hospital admissions and social isolation.⁹¹

One in three SAAP users experience **alcohol or other drug use** issues. In many cases, intensive and ongoing addiction impairs their health and ability to live independently.⁹² A study exploring drug and alcohol use among young people who experienced homelessness found that they use considerably more drugs than their peers who have homes. The study also found that the longer a person was homeless, the more likely it was that they would abuse alcohol or other substances.⁹³

Living in a disadvantaged community can also increase the risk of homelessness. Jobless families make up 13.5 per cent of all families with children under the age of 15 years, with 500,000 children living in families where workforce-age parents are not in work.⁹⁴ Australia has the fifth highest proportion of people of workforce age in jobless households among Organisation of Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) countries.⁹⁵

Communities with high levels of joblessness can create cultures of dependency and experience social and economic isolation. Other factors contributing to higher risks of homelessness, such as domestic violence, mental health, and drug and alcohol dependence are geographically concentrated in areas of higher socio-economic disadvantage. As a result, individuals and families in disadvantaged areas may have less economic and personal resources to maintain stable and secure housing. Research shows that this disadvantage can be passed from one generation to the next.⁹⁶ Other features of disadvantaged communities—such as poor transport and infrastructure and poor access to essential services—can also increase the risks of homelessness.

Legal issues and lack of access to legal advice can also contribute to or increase homelessness. Many homeless people have previously had some interaction with the legal system, either as a defendant or victim of violence in a criminal matter.⁹⁷ In a survey of 50 homeless people across Victoria, over 75 per cent reported a direct causal link between their homelessness and their legal problems.⁹⁸ For example, a person may have outstanding fines that have resulted in warrants for their arrest. Applying laws that criminalise conduct in public places such as drinking alcohol, moving around in groups, or sleeping or swearing in public can effectively 'criminalise' homelessness. Homeless people are nearly twice as likely to have been in prison in the previous 12 months.⁹⁹

People leaving prisons or juvenile justice institutions can face particular challenges in re-establishing themselves in the community. In 2005–06 5 per cent of people leaving prison or juvenile justice institutions sought accommodation from SAAP services. Professor Vinson argues that the higher than average rates of people leaving prison seeking SAAP accommodation is driven by insufficient housing and reintegration support from state and territory government corrections' services.¹⁰⁰

In 2005–06 12 per cent of SAAP clients reported that they had spent time in the criminal justice system and 11 per cent reported that they had repeated admissions to correctional facilities. Younger adults are particularly vulnerable, as they may not have completed their education before imprisonment and lacked the skills to obtain paid work.¹⁰¹ These issues are particularly important for Indigenous Australians who continue to have higher rates of imprisonment and juvenile detention.¹⁰²

There is a complex inter-relationship between homelessness and offending behaviour, with each contributing to increases in the other, compounded through social disadvantage. An Australian Institute of Criminology study of housing and homelessness outcomes for ex-prisoners found that stable accommodation was likely to contribute to a decrease in offending and drug use. Many ex-prisoners said that at least some of their offending was due to not having stable accommodation.¹⁰³

The study also found that clients released from prison under supervision and with ongoing support were more likely to be living in stable accommodation and less likely to re-offend than those released unconditionally and without support.¹⁰⁴

The impact of the **state care systems** on young people is well-documented.¹⁰⁵ Lack of support for young people making the transition from state care to independent living can also increase the risk of becoming homeless.¹⁰⁶

The National Youth Commission advised that in the 2006 Census of homeless school students some 15 per cent of students had been in care and protection.¹⁰⁷ About one in five young people entering SAAP were estimated to have been in care and protection.¹⁰⁸ An RMIT study found 42 per cent of young adults and other adults in SAAP had been in care and protection.¹⁰⁹ The interaction between the state care

and homelessness systems needs to be improved to support young people at risk of homelessness.

There is good evidence to suggest that youth homelessness can be the beginning of long-term homelessness. Analysis of 4,000 people experiencing homelessness in Melbourne reported that more than 1,600 had been homeless before they turned 18. Of these 40 per cent had spent time in state care.¹¹⁰

Lack of financial literacy, combined with unemployment, minimal education and high living expenses, puts many families and individuals at risk of homelessness. Financial difficulty is one of the main reasons people seek accommodation through SAAP services. Indigenous people on low incomes are at particular risk.¹¹¹ Gaining the financial skills needed to manage expenses helps people to gradually improve their living standards and to participate more in work and community life.

Section Two: Current responses to homelessness

Key messages:

- Our current response to homelessness is shared between specialist crisis services and mainstream services. Charities, churches, philanthropic organisations and the business community also play a role.
- Australia's primary response is delivered through SAAP. Long-term housing, employment and education outcomes for clients of SAAP are poor.
- There is a lack of integration and coordination between crisis services like SAAP and broader mainstream services.
- Our mainstream health, welfare and employment programs do not routinely support people who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless. Policies, procedures and systems may inadvertently contribute to or increase homelessness.

Australia's response to homelessness is delivered mainly by not-for-profit organisations and charities. These organisations offer services that range from transitional support and accommodation through to early intervention and prevention initiatives and include a bed and a hot meal, legal information and advocacy, emotional support, emergency relief and material aid, as well as specialist health and employment services.

Most of these services are funded by different levels of government. Some services augment government funds with funds from the private sector through private donations, fund raising through churches and charities, philanthropic funds, and with contributions and involvement from the business sector. It would not be uncommon, particularly amongst some of the large not-for-profit organisations, for \$25 to \$30 of every \$100 spent on homelessness to be sourced from private donor funds. One national community service agency reports that only 25 per cent of its annual funding coming from government sources.

The private sector is also directly involved in the provision of homelessness services through supported job placement, provision of volunteers, and pro bono financial or legal services. It is not possible to estimate what level of private sector philanthropic giving is currently targeted at the problem of homelessness.

Coordination between the Commonwealth, state and territory and local governments, and with not-for-profit organisations, charities and the business sector is poor. These arrangements have resulted in a patchwork of services and funding programs, with no clear focus on long-term solutions to homelessness. It also results in critical service gaps, and chronic cycling of homeless people through the services and systems.

Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP)

Australia's primary policy and program response to homelessness is the Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP). SAAP was established in 1985 by the Hawke Government, and created, for the first time, a national system of homelessness services. SAAP was conceived as and continues to be a last resort safety-net for homeless Australians or those at risk of homelessness.¹¹²

Funding and direction for SAAP services is determined by the SAAP Agreement. The current Agreement – SAAP V – commenced on 1 July 2005. The total estimated spending on homelessness specific services in 2007-08 is \$642 million. SAAP makes up 58 per cent of this expenditure (see Table 3).

Table 3: Government funding for homelessness programs

Program	\$ million
Commonwealth SAAP contribution	186
State and territory SAAP contribution	184
Commonwealth: other initiatives specifically targeting homelessness, including Reconnect, HOME Advice	91
State and territory: other initiatives specifically targeting homelessness ¹¹³	179
Total	640

Early intervention programs by state and territory governments also target homelessness. For example, justice and corrective services departments fund initiatives that facilitate transitional housing, referral programs.

Over the past 23 years, SAAP has grown in size and scope. The program began with 500 funded services in 1985. It now allocates approximately \$333 million each year to 1,300 agencies to assist 161,200 Australians who are homeless or at risk of homelessness.¹¹⁴ While this represents an average of \$256,500 in SAAP funding per year for each agency, funding can range from \$2,000 to \$3.7 million per agency depending on funding contracts and service levels.¹¹⁵

The original focus of SAAP was to provide supported accommodation for the 'permanently homeless'. SAAP I had three broad sub-programs—general services, youth services and women's emergency services. These service models were carried over into SAAP from former programs which were residential-based and featured large hostel, refuge and shelter accommodation.¹¹⁶

Early SAAP evaluations found the program failed to move clients through to independence. There were concerns that the program tended to perpetuate people in homelessness. SAAP II in 1990 included growth funding in an attempt to overcome these issues by moving away from providing crisis assistance and instead

helping clients through the transition to independent living. The changes also recognised the need to deliver services for new groups of homeless people.

The SAAP Act in 1994 was introduced to drive further reform and address these deficiencies along with SAAP III in 1995. The aim of SAAP, as set out in the *Supported Accommodation Assistance Act (1994)*, is to:

... provide transitional supported accommodation and related support services in order to help people who are homeless to achieve the maximum possible degree of self-reliance and independence.¹¹⁷

While SAAP III did not include growth funding it focused on developing better client outcomes from SAAP service delivery agencies. It encouraged more flexible service, stronger data collection and improved case management. These aims carried forward into SAAP IV in 2000 and SAAP V in 2005.

The primary aim of SAAP V is to provide transitional supported accommodation and related support service to assist homeless people and those at risk of homelessness to achieve self reliance and independence. The specific goals of SAAP are:

- (a) to resolve crisis
- (b) to re-establish family links where appropriate
- (c) to re-establish a capacity to live independently of SAAP.¹¹⁸

Structure of the Supported Accommodation Assistance Program

The SAAP service system is a joint Commonwealth state funded program.

The Australian Government oversees the program and provides national co-ordination. The state and territory governments hold responsibility for planning and funding the delivery of services by non-government agencies. Each SAAP agency collects data on its clients and this information is then delivered to the National Data Collection Agency for program reporting purposes.

SAAP continues, by and large, to specialise in supporting sub-groups of the homeless population—young people, women and children escaping violence, and single men and women, including those sleeping rough.¹¹⁹

In effect this has created a dominant service model, with homelessness services operating in three distinct service streams:

- women's refuges and safe houses
- youth refuges
- hostels for adult single men and women.

Not surprisingly, services for other groups of homeless people are very limited. For example, SAAP funded services providing accommodation for two-parent families are scarce—only 9 per cent of all SAAP agencies target families.¹²⁰ This is despite the number of families seeking SAAP assistance increasing by 46 per cent over the past ten years.¹²¹

Single fathers with accompanying children are another growing client group with limited access to SAAP accommodation, because of a lack of suitable accommodation.¹²² Support periods for males with children increased 50 per cent from 2000–01 to 2005–06, albeit from a low base of 1,600 periods to 2,400 in 2005–06. This is 2 per cent of all client support periods.¹²³

The needs of homeless children accompanying one or both parents are also not systematically addressed by SAAP.¹²⁴ Children are not counted in SAAP data collection as clients, and funding for responding to the needs of children is not specifically allocated through SAAP.¹²⁵ The state and territories have noted that there is an urgent need to provide early intervention supports for these children to reduce the impact of family violence.¹²⁶

Effectiveness of the Supported Accommodation Assistance Program

Despite the goals of SAAP and attempts over the past 15 years to focus SAAP more on early intervention and prevention, it remains largely a crisis response to homelessness.

The most recent review of SAAP was completed in 2004. Noting that SAAP remains largely a band-aid solution for many clients, the SAAP IV evaluation recognised that the existing service delivery model is a necessary, but **not sufficient** response to the broader issue of homelessness.¹²⁷

The SAAP IV evaluation concluded that:

the current program lacks the national drivers and leadership to ensure that services are equipped and linked into providing solutions that address the root causes of why people seek assistance.¹²⁸

The SAAP IV evaluation clearly recognises that there are limits to what might be reasonably expected from SAAP in its current form.

SAAP data reflects the duration of support episodes provided, but says nothing about the effectiveness of support provided. In a significant number of support periods (45 per cent) clients are accommodated in SAAP services for only a short time (1 week or less), including 16 per cent who spend one day in SAAP accommodation.¹²⁹ The average number of support periods in one year per client was 1.8.¹³⁰ This means that on average clients receive nearly two SAAP support periods each year. Delivering crisis accommodation is still a major emphasis of SAAP services.

Requests for other services to meet the broader needs of homeless Australians are often not provided. In 2005-06, SAAP services were unable to meet 38,400 of the total requests for services by clients.¹³¹ The supports most commonly provided were for crisis services.

Most SAAP services do not have the capacity or expertise to provide comprehensive disability and mental health services. Not surprisingly, in 2004-05 a substantial number of adult users of SAAP services who had a mental health issue reported that their mental health needs were not being addressed by homeless services.¹³² Other services not commonly provided were specialist services such as drug and alcohol support or intervention and services for people with physical or intellectual disabilities.

In effect, in the current model of service delivery, homeless people entering SAAP only ever get **some** of the services they need.

Many people seeking SAAP assistance lead complex lives, and successful interventions demand more than simply providing a meal or a bed. It is estimated that 29 per cent of SAAP clients need ongoing support with mental health problems and 34 per cent need intensive support because drug or alcohol use has impaired their capacity to live independently.¹³³

The SAAP IV evaluation noted that SAAP services should not and cannot meet the needs of many homeless people. In effect, many of the services required are beyond the program capacity and skills set of SAAP workers to deliver.¹³⁴ SAAP funding does not allow for the range and kinds of sophisticated interventions that are needed to address clients' complex needs. The SAAP IV evaluation questioned whether SAAP and SAAP workers are best placed to be the brokers or case managers of people who have complex needs, where they don't have professional brokerage skills.¹³⁵

Previous evaluations of SAAP have pointed to SAAP's inability to meet its program goals and deliver sustainable long-term outcomes for clients in critical areas of housing, employment, training and education for clients.

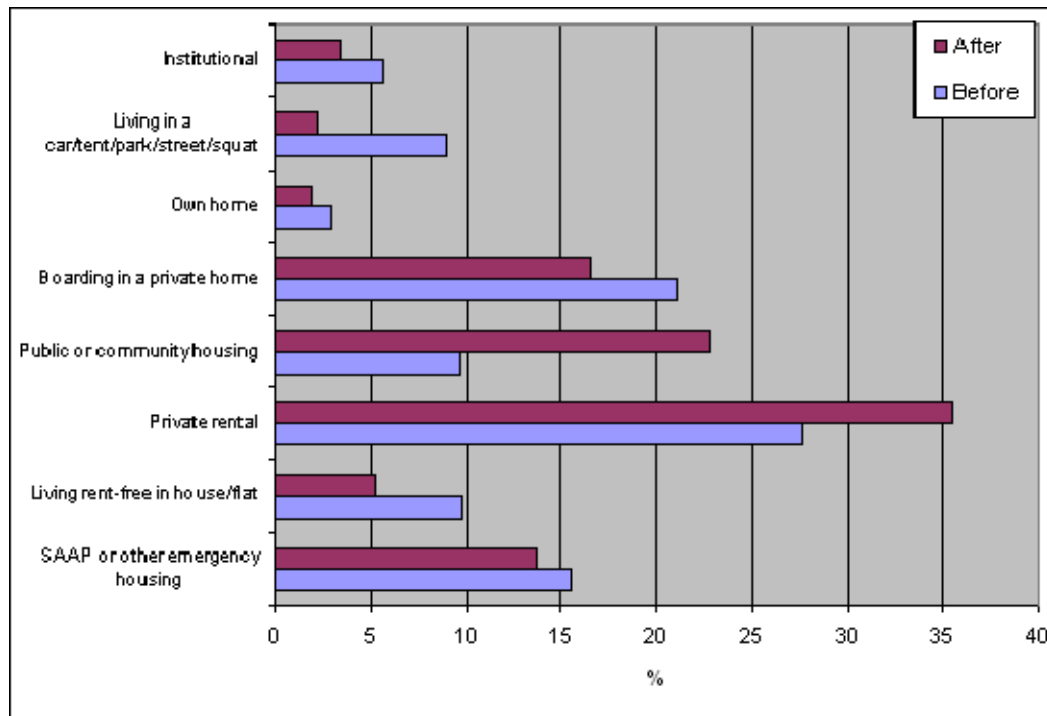
As the SAAP IV evaluation report states 'many SAAP clients are not much better off after their SAAP experience other than not being roofless'.¹³⁶

Housing outcomes

Based on 2005-06 data, Figure 3 shows that SAAP delivers modest improvements in housing outcomes for clients after SAAP intervention.

Figure 3 demonstrates the significant cycling of SAAP clients through emergency and crisis accommodation: 16 per cent of clients come into SAAP from another SAAP or emergency accommodation service and 14 per cent of SAAP clients exit to another SAAP or emergency accommodation service.¹³⁷

Figure 3: Accommodation before and after SAAP support period where SAAP clients needed housing assistance, 2005–06



While SAAP support resulted in an exit to public and community housing for 23 per cent of clients, 35.5 per cent of SAAP clients exit from SAAP into the private rental market.¹³⁸ With rising rents and historically low vacancy rates, renting in the private market may have been the cause of their homelessness and for that reason, a return to the private rental market may not be sustainable for many homeless people leaving emergency accommodation. Private rental and boarding house accommodation are the least stable forms of tenure in the current housing market. Similarly, the public housing system may not deliver a suitable housing outcome for homeless young people or others of working age seeking flexibility to move to areas where there are work and training opportunities.

As Table 4 shows women who escape domestic violence exit more often to public housing than to private rental. Twenty percent of single men (over 25 years old) exit from SAAP to other SAAP services or emergency housing and a further 19 per cent of single men exit from SAAP to the private rental market. Single men also have the highest proportion (14 per cent) of exits from SAAP to rough sleeping. Young people and single men have the lowest proportions of exits to public or community housing.

For housing outcomes to be sustainable and long-term, SAAP should deliver housing outcomes targeted to the needs of SAAP clients. While this may be the case for some SAAP clients it is not, overall, a strong feature of the current SAAP system.

Table 4 Housing Outcomes by Target Group (percentage)

	Target group						Total
	Young people	Single men only	Single women only	Families	Women escaping DV	Cross target/multiple/general	
Type of accommodation	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
SAAP or other emergency housing	18	20	17	13	17	15	17
Living rent-free in house/flat	16	5	4	4	4	4	6
Private rental	26	19	28	40	26	26	26
Public or community housing	12	13	26	25	29	21	21
Boarding in a private home	20	14	10	13	10	21	17
Own home	1	1	4	2	9	1	3
Living in a car/tent/park/street/squat	2	14	3	1	2	7	5
Institutional	5	14	8	2	3	4	5
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	100

FaHCSIA (2008), Table: Housing outcomes by target group, NDCA data 2005-06, (unpublished)

One in four SAAP clients are repeat clients, about half of whom access services three or more times a year. Around 13 per cent of older SAAP clients have been using homelessness services over three consecutive years.¹³⁹

Employment outcomes

Data shows that SAAP's impact on clients' employment outcomes is variable. In 2005–06 there was an increase in the number of clients employed full-time after SAAP support—from 3.2 per cent for all support periods to 4.2 per cent after support. The improvement was more marked for those who approached SAAP agencies requesting specific assistance with employment or training.¹⁴⁰

While those who were engaged in work before SAAP were more likely to maintain or slightly improve their status after SAAP support, those who were not working before seeking SAAP support generally remained unemployed.¹⁴¹

While it might be expected that homeless people would achieve lower rates of employment than others seeking assistance from employment services, outcomes are still very poor.

A study by the Social Policy Research Centre, which looked at the impact of SAAP on client self-reliance, concluded that SAAP had not been effective in assisting homeless people to achieve or maintain employment. Most clients (84 per cent) who were unemployed before being assisted by SAAP remained unemployed or stayed out of the labour force.¹⁴²

Education outcomes

SAAP support has very little positive impact on participation in education. In 2005–06, 35 per cent of school students aged between five and 17 years were in education before entering a SAAP service. Following the period of SAAP support this figure dropped slightly to 34 per cent.¹⁴³

Contact with SAAP did not increase school attendance for children and young people who were already not attending school. In 2005–06, 57 per cent of young people aged under 17 years of age were not in education before SAAP, and 56 per cent were not in education after SAAP support.¹⁴⁴

The evaluation of SAAP IV concluded that the ability of SAAP to achieve better long-term outcomes is questionable. While we should not diminish the achievements of SAAP, nor the hard work of the sector, there are aspects of the design and operation of the program at present that do not facilitate a change at the pace and scale that is needed to reduce homelessness.¹⁴⁵

SAAP's inability to meet demand

The SAAP service system is currently only able to meet a portion of the demand for its services. Each night 620 new people seek SAAP accommodation and almost 360 are turned away.¹⁴⁶ Over 50 per cent of those turned away are individuals with children.¹⁴⁷ Data presented by the National Data Collection Agency indicate that, on a national basis, SAAP agencies are operating to capacity, with the demand for SAAP accommodation unable to be met.¹⁴⁸

These high turn away rates are caused by a lack of exit points, a mismatch between number of crisis beds and demand for crisis accommodation and no new crisis beds. These high turn-away rates are also a result of the amount of 'churning', or repeat use of emergency accommodation, by clients. Almost one in four homelessness service users are repeat clients and about half of this group access services three or more times a year.¹⁴⁹

Links between SAAP and the mainstream service system

To improve outcomes for homeless people and achieve a longer-term reduction in homelessness the underlying risks and causes of homelessness need to be addressed. Links with the broader service system are essential to improving outcomes for SAAP clients and achieving a longer-term reduction in homelessness. The states and territories submission to this paper advises that it is essential for mainstream service systems to recognise homelessness as a priority.¹⁵⁰

Lack of formal coordination arrangements and the complex nature of homelessness can make it extremely difficult to integrate the range of specialist services needed to reduce homelessness. Mental health, disability, income support, education and employment and domestic and family violence services are generally not well integrated. States and territories noted that support services for people experiencing homelessness tend to be tied to their crisis accommodation. Once the client leaves, support often ceases. Coordinated case management is unusual.¹⁵¹

The SAAP IV evaluation found that while some SAAP providers have sought opportunities at a local and regional level to collaborate and build partnerships with

the mainstream service system, these efforts have been piecemeal and fragmented.¹⁵² The evaluation stated that:

Until a more systematic whole-of-government approach is adopted, major challenges will remain in providing the joined up services needed to both reduce homelessness occurring and providing appropriate pathways out of homelessness.¹⁵³

Current capacity of the SAAP service sector

Capacity constraints in the SAAP sector undermine its ability to produce long-term outcomes. Funding constraints have limited the ability of organisations to offer employment packages necessary to attract and retain specialist staff to provide quality services for clients with complex needs.

Current SAAP funding models do not support investment in organisational infrastructure such as staff training, skills development and information technology. Many SAAP providers argue that funding constraints have resulted in little training and professional development for staff, and less than satisfactory financial management and governance arrangements.

This has placed increased pressure on SAAP service staff who are already on low wages, predominantly female, ageing, and have limited career paths and development opportunities. Intense work with challenging clients and unpredictable shifts place substantial burdens on staff, causing high turnover and a loss of skill and expertise. The SAAP sector's capacity is also hampered by skills shortages and duplicated and complex funding and reporting models.¹⁵⁴

The SAAP IV national evaluation found that there were strong reasons to improve working conditions for those within the sector, including recognition of a need for more equitable salary and award conditions, increased security, and further professional development.¹⁵⁵

Reconnect

Reconnect is a long-running and successful early intervention program that has almost 100 services operating nationally at an annual cost of \$20.9 million. Reconnect uses community-based early intervention services to bring about family reconciliation for young people and their families. Reconnect helps young people improve their level of engagement with family, work, education, training and their local community.

Program evaluations, sector studies and data analysis demonstrate that the program is meeting its key outcomes to improve the capacity and resilience of young people and their families and to increase the social and economic participation of young people.

For example, in 2005–06:

- the program supported 5,040 young people
- more than 90 per cent were in stable accommodation at the end of the intervention

- 79 per cent of young people reported that their overall situation had improved
- 69 per cent reported improvements in their family relationships.

The majority of Reconnect services operate independent of SAAP and are delivered by specialist family, youth and local community organisations. Reconnect services have proven effective in implementing early intervention and prevention strategies within family and youth services and community organisations.

Household Organisational Management Expenses (HOME) Advice Program

The Household Organisational Management Expenses (HOME) Advice Program assists families who face difficulty in maintaining tenancies or home ownership due to personal or financial circumstances. A unique feature of the program is its ability to respond effectively to a family's situation through a partnership between a dedicated Centrelink HOME Advice social worker and a HOME Advice worker from a non-government organisation.

Since 2003 a total of 2,190 families have been assisted, comprising 3,177 adults and 4,584 children. Some outcomes achieved include:

- 92 per cent of families avoiding homelessness and remaining in their homes or improved housing
- 93 per cent of families who identified financial crisis as a major issue had their immediate financial crisis resolved
- 97 per cent of families improved their debt situation
- 85 per cent of families, who wanted to learn new skills in managing their household budget, improved their financial management skills.

Mainstream service system

Given the limits of the SAAP service system and the high level of unmet demand, it is more likely that people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness will interact with the mainstream service system. In fact, homeless people can be very high users of mainstream services. In general terms, mainstream services focus on the specific issues people present with and play only a limited role in addressing the broader causes of homelessness.

There are a wide range of mainstream services at the Commonwealth, state and territory and local government levels to assist people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness.

These include:

- the social security system
- public housing services run by state and territory governments
- the health system run by public, private and community health services
- employment services
- education and child care services
- correction and juvenile justice services

- child protection services
- specialist services such as mental health, drug and alcohol, financial counselling and legal services; relationship counselling; advocacy and information services; and
- general support services.

Crucial links between these mainstream services and specific homelessness services are often not made, although some states and territories are introducing approaches which attempt to integrate support across those systems.¹⁵⁶ Lack of coordination and integration can heighten risks of homelessness or, at worst, cause a person to become homeless. Addressing these issues must be a priority in a new approach.

In a study for the Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute, Dr Paul Flatau found that homelessness programs were able to achieve savings from avoidable health, justice and police spending.¹⁵⁷ If homelessness was effectively addressed, the potential cost offsets to both the health and justice systems could be between \$7,500 and as much as \$40,000 per person a year.

Access to income support

Income support policy and delivery can affect a vulnerable person's risk of homelessness.¹⁵⁸ The number of people citing financial difficulty as the primary cause for seeking assistance from SAAP services increased from 9 per cent in 2001–02 to 13 per cent in 2005–06.¹⁵⁹

A number of Australian Government departments and agencies set policies and procedures that determine and deliver income support to disadvantaged people. The main departments with policy responsibility for these payments are the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations and the Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs.

Centrelink, as the agency responsible for delivering these payments, can also affect outcomes for people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness. In recognition of the particular income support needs and barriers experienced by homeless people, Centrelink operates a network of 100 homelessness outreach workers based in Customer Service Centres located in areas with high homelessness rates.

The income support payments which most affect people experiencing homelessness include Newstart Allowance, Youth Allowance, Disability Support Pension, Crisis Payment and Age Pension. Other payments often accessed by this group include Parenting Payment and Sickness Allowance.

Welfare advocates argue that the current compliance requirements can cause homelessness for people who are activity tested.¹⁶⁰ Imposing an eight-week non-payment period can mean additional hardship for vulnerable individuals and their families.¹⁶¹ In the eight months from July 2007 to February 2008 participation requirements for people on income support resulted in 25,359 people incurring eight-week no payment penalties.¹⁶² Based on research undertaken by the Social Policy Research Centre, it is estimated that between 10 and 20 per cent of people who are

'breached' like this lose their accommodation or have to move to cheaper housing.¹⁶³

A National Youth Commission report found that the rate and amount of assistance provided to young people who report that they are unable to live at home can also affect their housing options.¹⁶⁴ As the commissioners stated in their report:

The level of income support available to homeless young people is insufficient for the costs of living independently: this needs review, as does inadequate rental assistance in a market where rents are rising steeply. The administration of benefits using 'breaching' causes many consequential problems. Compliance for homeless and at-risk young people should be approached differently.¹⁶⁵

A new compliance framework was announced in the 2008-09 Budget, based on a 'No Show No Pay' approach focused on promoting participation rather than punishment. An eight week waiting period will apply to people responsible for their own unemployment and an eight week penalty will be retained as a last resort for wilfully non-compliant job seekers, with a comprehensive compliance assessment replacing the automatic escalation in the severity of the penalty. However, eight week penalties or waiting periods will also be able to be waived. It is therefore not necessary to retain the current Financial Case Management Scheme.¹⁶⁶

Access to affordable housing

Stable and affordable housing plays a critical role in preventing homelessness. Access to sustainable and affordable housing can also prevent homeless people cycling in and out of crisis and temporary accommodation.¹⁶⁷

At present, there is no overarching framework or policy intent to guide state and territory approaches to addressing homelessness, and homelessness and housing funding arrangements and agreements are separate. Currently, SAAP and the Commonwealth State Housing Agreement (CSHA) are established through separate multilateral and bilateral agreements. The agreements have different commencement and end dates. Responsibility for administering these agreements may be split across agencies in each jurisdiction.

The availability and quality of public and community housing stock has declined over the past decade. The Australian Government's yearly share of funding for the CSHA has fallen by over 30 per cent in real terms since 1996.¹⁶⁸ Increased targeting of housing services and support to people with the most complex needs has meant that even homeless people can wait for months before they are able to get public or community housing. At the same time, it has become more difficult to either buy or privately rent a home.

The maximum weekly rate of Commonwealth Rent Assistance has increased from \$37 to \$54 for single people and from \$35 to \$50 for couples without children over 10 years. Total expenditure for Commonwealth Rent Assistance has risen from \$1.5 billion per annum to \$2.2 billion per annum over the last decade. The Australian Government's Rent Assistance program is now greater than the Commonwealth's contribution to public housing. While Rent Assistance provides some rent relief it is a demand side response and has no impact on increasing the supply of affordable

rental housing. It is well recognised that the supply shortage is currently the greatest driver of rising rents.

The Australian Government's housing reform agenda will increase the supply of housing. New measures include the National Rental Affordability Scheme, which will provide incentives to institutional investors to build 50,000 new, affordable rental dwellings for rent at 20 per cent below market rents by 2011-12. If market demand remains strong, a further 50,000 houses will be built from 2012 onwards.

The Australian Government has allocated capital funding to increase the supply of housing for homeless people through its A Place to Call Home initiative. Together with the states and territories this will deliver 600 new dwellings for homeless people.

Other initiatives such as the First Home Saver Accounts and the Housing Affordability Fund will assist first home buyers. As well, the Australian Government has made a significant new investment in Indigenous housing, particularly in the Northern Territory.

Indigenous Housing Infrastructure Agreements are agreed between the Australian Government and state and territory governments. As part of these agreements states and territories that receive Aboriginal Rental Housing Program funding provide operational plans that include strategies to address homelessness.

In April 2008, \$647 million in Australian Government and Northern Territory Government funding was made available for Indigenous housing and related services in the Northern Territory. The living conditions of up to 80 per cent of Indigenous people will be improved through capital works that will now go ahead in 73 targeted communities.

Although these initiatives will make housing more affordable, it will take time.

Increasing the supply of affordable housing will create more exit points for homeless people leaving crisis accommodation. Other support, however, is also essential. Currently there are few incentives for program providers, including SAAP providers, to move people into long-term housing.

People who are homeless often need assistance to sustain their new tenancies once they leave crisis accommodation. Modest strategies to improve tenancy support have been put in place in some states and territories, including budgeting advice, debt management, direct debiting of rent payments for those in financial stress, and use of brokerage funds to obtain and maintain private rental.

Health and mental health services

Homeless people are large users of health and mental health services.¹⁶⁹ While links between the health and crisis accommodation systems are vital there are a number of identified service gaps for people who have a mental illness which increase their risk of homelessness.

Service gaps include:

- lack of coordinated case management and clinical care for people with severe mental illness who are at high risk of unstable housing and homelessness
- limited availability of step-up (pre-acute hospital admission) and step-down (post-acute) clinically supported residential rehabilitation facilities
- inadequate coordination across clinical, rehabilitation, drug and alcohol, SAAP and community support services, including aged care services, often resulting in individuals ‘falling between the cracks’.¹⁷⁰

There are also system barriers to an integrated approach to care for homeless people with mental illness. The ‘silo’ approach to service delivery across health, mental health and the homelessness sectors is a barrier to integrated care.¹⁷¹ It is estimated that in South Australia, 2,000 people in public housing who are also clients of the public mental health system are likely to require additional support.¹⁷²

There is strong evidence that linking short and long-term accommodation with clinical support for people with severe or ongoing disability caused by mental illness would enable early intervention at points of crisis and instability, and would prevent avoidable homelessness for many people in this population group.¹⁷³

It is estimated that over 40 per cent of acute mental health inpatients could be discharged if appropriate accommodation, care and support services were available.¹⁷⁴ It is estimated that the average recurrent cost of providing a unit of public housing is \$5,990 per year (2006–07 figure) compared with the average recurrent cost of providing one mental health hospital bed at \$150,000 per year (2002–03 figure), or prison bed at \$65,000 per year (2005–06 figure).¹⁷⁵

With better integration of community-based clinical care and supported accommodation, the frequency of hospitalisation can also be reduced—currently 15 to 20 per cent of people with mental illness and at risk of homelessness will be re-admitted to hospital within 28 days of discharge.¹⁷⁶

Recent demand pressures on acute inpatient units have highlighted the lack of bed-based treatment and rehabilitation options for people with serious and persistent conditions requiring specialist care, but who do not need the intensity of treatment provided in acute hospital units. Lack of development of such services by most jurisdictions remains a significant issue in relation to the commitment by all states and territories to develop a full range of community services to replace the historical functions of the stand-alone psychiatric hospitals.¹⁷⁷

Broadening the scope of existing co-morbidity responses would help mental health services to better identify and appropriately respond to the needs of people with co-existing mental illness and drug and alcohol problems. It could also lead to lower rates of homelessness among this particularly vulnerable group.

Several states and territories have suggested that clients with multiple and complex needs require a tailored service response that may involve more intensive and long term support. This could help prevent future crises developing into homelessness.¹⁷⁸

Links with employment and education

Despite historically low unemployment, major barriers to employment remain for disadvantaged jobseekers. Each year 40,000 18 to 35 year-olds become both homeless and unemployed.¹⁷⁹ Most are early school leavers who, without help, will struggle to ever get a permanent job and stable housing.

The recent Homelessness Roundtable recognised the essential inter-dependency between housing and employment assistance. The Roundtable report stated that this has been inadequately recognised by both the providers of SAAP services and of employment services, as well as by government agencies such as the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations and Centrelink.¹⁸⁰

Reviews of the employment service system have argued that it has failed to engage disadvantaged job seekers, particularly those who are homeless.¹⁸¹ Many disadvantaged and marginalised job seekers are overwhelmed by inappropriate compliance obligations and were disadvantaged by the previous penalty regime. A Melbourne Citymission survey of 186 marginalised and vulnerable job seekers found that over half had at some stage been breached or had their payments suspended by Centrelink.¹⁸²

The employment service system has become increasingly fragmented, complex and inefficient, and the complex payments structure for providers has led to skewed incentives and perverse outcomes.¹⁸³ Clients who have the greatest needs do not attract extra resources for employment services. Links between crisis services and employment and training providers must be strengthened. Employment services need to look specifically at the needs of homeless people and use targeted strategies to encourage pre-employment skills training and other forms of economic participation which may eventually lead to work.

The education system is an important early intervention point for young people and children who are homeless or at risk of homelessness. It also provides a pathway out of homelessness—re-engaging homeless young people in education is crucial to preventing further disadvantage.

The National Youth Commission found that young people at risk of homelessness have lower participation rates in education than their home-based peers. This is echoed by other data—the Reconnect program evaluation found that one-third of young teenagers assisted by the program had been suspended from school and 9 per cent had been expelled from one or more schools.¹⁸⁴

Lack of education has the potential to create long-term adverse outcomes including poverty, unemployment and social exclusion.¹⁸⁵ For an estimated 25,000 homeless young people, the total cost of foregoing education is \$964 million in lifetime earnings.¹⁸⁶

Over the past decade there have been some improvements in the ways schools identify and support at-risk children and young people and their families.¹⁸⁷ Some schools work more closely with support services or employ specialist support staff.

While better support in mainstream schooling is important, it is also necessary to increase the range of flexible learning environments to meet the diverse education needs of homeless young people.¹⁸⁸

Child care is also an important issue for families experiencing homelessness—especially for women who have separated following domestic and family violence. Having safe, affordable and quality child care means that those parents who have found stable housing can focus on employment, education and training. It also gives children the chance to benefit from quality early childhood education and care.

Special Child Care Benefit can be offered to pay for extra hours of care for a child at risk of abuse. Jobs, Education and Training (JET) Child Care Fee Assistance, which pays the 'gap fee' not covered by Child Care Benefit, is also available to help parents re-enter the workforce. Eligible parents can access this child care support to undertake activities such as job search, work, study or rehabilitation, to help them re-enter the workforce.

The 2008-09 Budget extended JET Child care Fee Assistance to two years for eligible parents and provided funding to establish the first 38 of 260 new child care centres. The 2008-09 Budget also increased the Child Care Tax Rebate (CCTR) from 30 per cent to 50 per cent of out of pocket costs to help families with costs of living pressures.

Despite these provisions, families experiencing homelessness or at risk of homelessness continue to face significant barriers to accessing child care services. Child care costs have increased by 50 per cent over the past six years.¹⁸⁹ This has made child care difficult to use for many low-income families. Enrolment and regular attendance at child care can also be a problem when families are often on the move.

Section Three: Models of innovation and good practice

Key messages:

- There are many examples of programs in Australia and overseas that achieve good outcomes for people who are homeless. We should build on what works well.
- Effective programs are not yet available nationally.
- Community involvement is broadening with some businesses working in partnership with the not-for-profit sector to tackle homelessness.

Cross-government and cross-sector approaches achieve the best results

A national approach to homelessness has to be constructed with all services and systems in mind, with a much stronger focus on prevention and early intervention.

Some states and territories have developed this model at a state government level.¹⁹⁰ The approach links mainstream state and local government services and specialised homelessness programs with services delivered by the not-for-profit sector.

The Victorian Homelessness Strategy aims to improve client outcomes, with a focus on prevention and early intervention and cross-government approaches. New initiatives and services which cater for the differing needs of Victorians who are experiencing homelessness include:

- an Integrated Family Violence Response, which supports people escaping family and domestic violence through initiatives such as the Private Rental Access Program. The program integrates housing expertise with family violence support services. An evaluation found that good client outcomes are being achieved in the areas of housing, children and parenting, personal safety, health, mental health, money management, and accessing social support
- the Youth Homelessness Action Plan, which established Creating Connections for Young People, targets young people who are disconnected from social, education and employment networks. It has a strong focus on early intervention and provides tailored support services with links to new accommodation, private rental initiatives, and intensive case management for young people with high and complex needs.
- cross-government pilot projects such as support and transitional housing for people leaving correctional and juvenile-justice institutions, people using the drug court program, and people with mental health issues.¹⁹¹

South Australia has driven its response to homelessness through the state's Social Inclusion initiative.¹⁹² Implementation is a partnership between the non-government sector and the policy and program arms of relevant government agencies.

The Social Inclusion approach involves developing an action plan based on independent advice, embedding the plan in government policies and programs, and delivering the plan through the Social Inclusion Board. The Commissioner for Social Inclusion then closely monitors joined-up implementation of the action plan. The aim is to ensure quantifiable results that deliver benefits to people, especially to the most marginalised people. The South Australian Social Inclusion strategy focuses on:

- preventing people identified as being at high risk of becoming rough sleepers from becoming homeless—over 2,050 households since 2004
- housing people who are chronic rough sleepers—the Street to Home initiative has housed 130 rough sleepers in the past two years, 40 of whom had been sleeping rough for between five and 15 years
- minimising the time people spend sleeping rough when they do become homeless—Social Inclusion homeless programs are supporting over 700 people each year out of homelessness and into housing, together with other support when it is needed
- advocating for increased allocations of high-needs housing places in targeted locations—for example, establishing Common Ground Adelaide as a partnership with the business community to deliver long-term supported housing is one of several strategies
- integrating mainstream health, housing and disability service responses to people experiencing chronic homelessness.

The strategy also includes a Community Liaison Team based in the emergency department of Royal Adelaide Hospital. The service targets homeless people attending or admitted to hospital to support them into accommodation on discharge. The Housing Information and Referral Program helps to prevent homelessness among prisoners and offenders by finding them accommodation when they are released from custody.

In these and all South Australia's Social Inclusion homeless programs, the focus is on assertive, flexible and personalised responses that do not give up on people. Through this process people previously thought to be too hard to house have been able to turn their lives around.

Getting off the streets for good

Patrick was a homeless man who between 1997 and 2004 had over 1,000 admissions to hospital at a cost to the state budget of about \$1 million. He was also over \$100,000 in debt to the South Australian Ambulance Service. Patrick has now had the aged care assessment he should have had some years ago. He was given a social housing tenancy and was supported to remain in his home with an aged care package and an Exceptional Needs Unit Package. Through this 'joined-up' approach, others like Patrick are getting the help they need to get off the streets—not just for a night, but for good.

Service delivery strategies that achieve good outcomes

The best programs focus on improving the social and economic participation of people as well as providing shelter and immediate assistance. Effective programs typically tailor their service delivery to each individual and are supported by a joint effort across the service system.

In recent years a number of projects have demonstrated innovation, particularly models that focus on prevention and early intervention. Many SAAP services have also worked to change their models of service delivery to achieve better long-term outcomes.

Employment, education and training are critical paths out of homelessness and disadvantage. Several programs have shown good employment, education and training outcomes for people who become homeless and people at risk of homelessness. Many have focused on young people. There is also good reason to believe that improved employment outcomes are possible for older people who are homeless.

Effective strategies include:

- linking long-term accommodation to participation in education and training—particularly for young people
- providing pre-employment support and training
- targeting the transition from school to work
- working with employers and employment services to provide work skills and experience
- identifying young people at risk of homelessness while they are still at school.

Australian Foyer model in the Illawarra¹⁹³—Southern Youth and Family Services, New South Wales

This initiative provides accommodation and employment, training and education support 'under one roof' to improve employment prospects for 15 to 23 year-olds who are homeless or at risk of homelessness. Young people use onsite training facilities to help them with study, research, personal development, skills development and looking for work. A recent evaluation found that the service was good at meeting the needs of young clients. The evaluation reported that offering support for issues which affected a client's housing situation led to increased housing stability. The service was also very successful in supporting Indigenous young people in culturally-appropriate ways.

No Dole Program—The Beacon Foundation¹⁹⁴

Run in over 100 schools Australia-wide, this program works with local businesses and students to address unemployment issues, break the cycle of welfare dependence, and improve school-to-work transitions. Students make a conscious and public commitment to go on to further education, training or employment. The focus is on individual career planning, and all types of local businesses (ranging from hairdressers and panel beaters to large manufacturers) offer apprenticeships, cadetships, on-the-job training, full-time jobs and mentoring.

Second Step Program—The Toll Group, Victoria ¹⁹⁵

Offering people who have a history of drug abuse or incarceration the chance to change their lives, the Second Step Program supports clients back into work and community life. The service helps people to:

- replace their previous lifestyle with a safer, more constructive one
- re-establish themselves within the working world
- develop strategies for coping with difficulties in daily life
- establish lifestyle and work habits that help them from returning to self-destructive behaviours
- move on to the next stages of their lives with skills and experience, and a solid reference for future employment.

Toll works with not-for-profit services in the pre-job phase of the program because many participants need a lot of pre-employment preparation. Support can include finding accommodation, establishing new support networks, providing training, dealing with physical or mental health issues, and helping clients to access various community resources.

EQUAL project—Department of Employment—Luxembourg

The EQUAL project is a partnership between local homelessness and community services and the Department of Employment (PDD), which focuses on providing access to employment. The PDD has developed a database of skills and characteristics of the project's homeless job seekers, including psycho-social and occupational skills and competencies. The EQUAL project offers activities which increase the psycho-social and occupational skills of job seekers and training for professionals supervising homeless job seekers in workshops and worksites. The aim of the EQUAL project is to establish an assistance network for people excluded from the employment market and to deliver a personalised social integration package based on the actual skills of the homeless job seeker.

Several services have achieved improved **health outcomes**.¹⁹⁶ Ill health causes and is caused by homelessness. Effective strategies include:

- employing health staff within homelessness services to focus on major health problems and act as a 'bridge' into the mainstream system
- focusing directly on those homeless people who regularly use emergency department services
- undertaking comprehensive assessments of health needs
- introducing integrated cross-sectoral service programs for people with mental illness
- establishing community-based psychosocial rehabilitation services (day programs) for people with severe mental illness, appropriately linked to system referral pathways
- making agreements between local homelessness and health services, with agreed protocols to respond to health needs or to gain access to important services such as detoxification beds.

Homeless Drug Dependency Program—Hanover Welfare Services, the Salvation Army and the Society of St Vincent de Paul¹⁹⁷

Providing coordinated health, drug treatment and housing support, this program involves 'joined-up' case management at the three major crisis centres in Melbourne, with a focus on community engagement and development activities. Drug and alcohol specialists are employed at each centre, with access to dedicated beds at drug treatment centres a priority. The program also employs a mental health practitioner at each crisis centre, who provides direct client care, consults with other centre staff, and acts as a 'bridge' into mainstream mental health services.

Not all people who use homelessness services are able to sustain a long-term tenancy when the crisis is over. Without **sustainable and affordable housing**, people are likely to become homeless again.

Effective strategies include:

- providing continuing support after someone leaves a crisis service, particularly with essential living skills
- helping people to access housing assistance programs such as help with paying the bond.

Homelessness to Home—Micah Projects, Queensland¹⁹⁸

A National Homelessness Strategy demonstration project, 'Homelessness to Home' used intensive case management to provide families who are homelessness or at risk of homelessness with affordable, secure housing. The project also offered 'wrap around' support services designed to help families:

- access appropriate services
- maintain tenancies
- engage in education and employment services
- improve family relationships
- achieve self-management
- increase participation in community life.

The project involved 44 families in the 10-month project (from June 2006 to April 2007). An evaluation found that many families experienced increased stability in housing—13 families remained in their accommodation, and seven families who had been homeless got into stable housing. Families also reported that the project had increased their access and knowledge of support services, and enabled them to develop better skills to cope with daily life challenges.

Loca-Pass Program, France

The Loca-Pass program provides access to public or private rented housing for young people aged under 30 years who are working or looking for work in the for-profit sector. Young people receive a free financial guarantee or advance so they can pay the deposit on rented housing and pay up to 18 months of rent and maintenance charges. The tenant is required to pay back the financial advance, interest-free, over three years.¹⁹⁹ The financial guarantee is granted automatically when the applicant submits an application to the public housing collection office and meets the Loca-Pass conditions.²⁰⁰

Loca-Pass is funded by employers' contributions to construction costs, which is a 1 per cent tax to the state. The European Federation of National Organisations Working with the Homeless stated that this housing program is a possible example of good practice.²⁰¹ The 13th Meeting of the Ministers of Housing of the European Union found that Loca-Pass was effective in assisting young people to achieve independent housing within a very short time (up to 15 days to approve an application).²⁰²

A number of programs have addressed **financial and legal factors** that cause homelessness. Programs focus on improving financial literacy and resolving minor legal matters that can prevent people from achieving greater stability.

Effective strategies include:

- providing financial counselling and budgeting assistance for families at risk of homelessness—this may include assistance to negotiate payment schedules on outstanding bills
- homeless persons' legal clinics using pro bono lawyers to deal with outstanding fines, criminal matters and to appeal government decisions
- supporting people to use systems such as Centrepay to pay their rent and prevent them falling behind financially
- agreeing protocols between homelessness agencies, police and local courts that support removing perpetrators of domestic and family violence from the family home.

Homeless persons' legal clinics²⁰³

Drawing on free services from solicitors, homeless persons' legal clinics currently operate in four states—South Australia, Victoria, New South Wales and Queensland. Another clinic is planned for Western Australia. The solicitors come from both small and large firms, and help homeless people deal with fines, victims compensation matters, criminal cases and to appeals to government departments about decisions that relate to their homelessness.

Most of these clinics work in partnership with local homelessness services, and provide their services through an outreach model in community venues. In Queensland, for example, the clinic works in regional areas with clinics running in Townsville and Toowoomba.

In New South Wales, the Homeless Persons' Legal Service started in mid-2004. Since then, solicitors have worked around 15,000 pro bono hours (valued at \$5 million) on 1,900 homeless client matters. The Victorian clinic run by the Public Interest Law Clearing House receives \$220,000 in government funding each year and negotiates pro bono legal services through private law firms, worth \$3.5 million a year. This represents \$16 of private sector funding for every \$1 spent by the Victorian Government.

Social participation can be an important element in supporting people out of homelessness. Community choirs—such as the Choir of Hard Knocks and the

Sydney Street Choir—and sporting competitions make a real difference, particularly for those individuals who are unable to work.

RecLink Australia²⁰⁴

Funded mainly through public donations, RecLink Australia oversees a network of almost 200 community agencies across Australia.

RecLink's activities all involve elements of personal development and include organised AFL football competitions for the homeless in Melbourne and in three remote Indigenous communities in the Northern Territory. Recreation and cultural programs such as lawn bowls, swimming, squash, badminton, dancing, knitting, camps and the Women's Leadership program are all designed to encourage physical and emotional health and wellbeing, and build social and life skills, self-esteem and community connections in a way that mirrors involvement in mainstream clubs, associations and the community.

The Choir of Hard Knocks in Melbourne and Choir of High Hopes in Hobart are successful RecLink Australia programs.

Stichting Voilà (Voilà Foundation) Netherlands²⁰⁵

The Voilà Foundation is a voluntary organisation where current and former homeless people work with other homeless people. The aim of the foundation is to ensure that homeless people help each other by developing, initiating and launching projects **by and for** homeless people, thus boosting their independence. The Voilà Foundation runs a temporary employment agency and offers walking tours led by homeless people around places commonly occupied by homeless people. The foundation also runs a bureau offering expertise on the issue of homelessness. The Voilà Foundation offers trainee welfare workers an experience of living the life of a homeless person for one day.

Many projects have focused on **specific groups of people affected by homelessness**. Often these projects have grown out of individual organisations and communities. Many of the models work extremely well for each group and could be supported in other areas.

Effective models include:

- aged care facilities with a specific focus on homeless people, which use aged care funding to provide the care and support that older people need
- 'Foyer models', which provide accommodation to homeless or disadvantaged young people on the condition that they participate in education and training or are starting a job. Many provide other health and social services on the same site
- having a small amount of money available that is used to assist children to get back to school. Funds can be spent on new uniforms, books or tutoring to help children catch up with their class
- placing families escaping violence directly into public housing with ongoing support from crisis services, with the aim of reducing the number of house moves a family needs to make
- common ground models, which accommodate homeless people in mixed tenancy buildings, often with low-income earners. Support is available onsite for those who need it. Once people no longer need support they do not need to move house and become like any other individual renting in the building

- programs to resolve conflict between young people and their families before young people leave home and become homeless.

Lakeview Transitional Accommodation Program—Port Augusta, South Australia²⁰⁶

Since 2005 the Port Augusta Transitional Accommodation Program has responded to the increased numbers of Aboriginal people visiting the region, mainly from remote traditional communities, and particularly in summer. Lakeview is a partnership project run by the Aboriginal Housing Authority, the High Needs Housing Unit, Supported Accommodation Assistance Program and local Port Augusta service providers.

The program provides transitional accommodation for vulnerable, homeless, transient and mobile Aboriginal people from remote traditional communities. It also offers integrated support services 24 hours a day, including case work and needs-based case management, advocacy and referrals to agencies most able to meet clients' needs, and assistance for residents to return to their communities or move into longer-term, independent accommodation. An evaluation found that most people returned to their original accommodation after leaving Lakeview.

Housing and Support for the Elderly Homeless²⁰⁷—Wintringham

Wintringham is a not-for-profit welfare company that, each night, provides high quality care and services to 800 elderly men and women who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless. This idea is that the long-term solution to homelessness lies with accessing broad community programs. Wintringham considers its clients to be aged and homeless, not homeless and aged. This means the focus is on providing assistance through the aged care system rather than through crisis accommodation funding.

Support includes permanent care and housing through the mainstream aged care system to people who would otherwise be excluded from this type of care. Wintringham's facilities include three low-care residential facilities with 129 residents, plus the newly-built Ron Conn Nursing Home in Avondale Heights in Melbourne which provides high-care support to 60 residents. They are currently building another 60-bed facility in Dandenong. The organisation also delivers an extensive recreation program which runs across all Wintringham sites.

Live N Learn—Miller Campus, New South Wales²⁰⁸

With funding from the New South Wales Government, Live N Learn provides accommodation assistance to young people aged 16 to 25 years who are in secondary education, TAFE or an apprenticeship. Residents have an affordable fully-furnished unit with their own bathroom and kitchen. Live N Learn is adapted from the United Kingdom's 'Foyer' model, which recognises that stable and affordable accommodation plays an essential part in allowing young people to finish their education and go on to live independently.

The Miller campus has 29 units located near shops, the TAFE, library and schools and has an IT room, swimming pool, gym and sports ovals. Residents pay a bond and weekly rent. The program offers courses to help prevent and reduce youth homelessness and encourage young people to stay engaged with their community. A number of courses are provided to assist young people to finish studying, obtain employment and live independently.

Youth Bail Accommodation Support Service, Queensland²⁰⁹

Using prevention and early intervention approaches, this program aims to reduce the number of young people in detention on remand and to find appropriate placements for young people on bail. The service organises for its clients (particularly Indigenous young people) to stay with either immediate or extended families or in youth accommodation services, rather than in detention on remand. A recent review found that 34 per cent of clients completing the program were sentenced to community-based accommodation rather than detention. Evidence shows that the service also reduces the likelihood of a client offending during their bail period.

Common features of effective programs and services

While each service is different, depending on its client group and services, effective services do have a number of common features.

Effective programs **'wrap' services around an individual**, particularly those with high needs. The support of a case manager means clients with high and complex needs can access wrap around services. Regularly reviewing progress and the suitability of those services is essential.

The case manager has a coordination role to ensure that services are provided across the system in a 'seamless' way. Ideally, case managers are trained in the specific needs of their clients (such as in aged care) and are involved in assessing the needs of clients, brokering services, monitoring client progress, and playing an advocacy role to assist in community resource development.²¹⁰ Wrap around services work best when links between all sectors of the community are strong and a case management approach is used which focuses on the individual and all their needs.

The support period required may range from a few weeks to several years, or even in the most difficult case, the rest of the client's life. The intensity of the support also varies, with more intense support often needed in the early period of intervention.

Violence Against Women Partnership—South West Community Legal Centre²¹¹

Over the past two years, the South West Community Legal Centre in Victoria has developed a Violence Against Women Partnership with police, courts, a domestic violence service, the Salvation Army, Lifeline and others. Under the partnership, a fax-back system means police and the courts will fax a formal referral to the service when a woman applies for an Intervention Order or reports domestic violence. Arrangements are made with police and local hotels so that women and children can stay in their homes and abusers have somewhere to stay. Intervention Order matters are then scheduled for days when a duty lawyer and domestic violence support worker can offer support.

Outcomes have included more women and children being able to stay in their homes, and a good working relationship between the legal centre and the police. The domestic violence support service involved in the partnership service reports that they are now assisting more clients than before.

Home but not Alone— Housing Support Project, Catholic Healthcare, Mercy Arms Community Care²¹²

This project targets older homeless people or those at risk of becoming homeless who are aged over 45 years. The project aims to prevent recurring homelessness by providing long-term monitoring and case management. It uses a collaborative case management model of support and works alongside existing homeless services, so clients receive support while they are in the process of settling into their accommodation. Although the evaluation of the project is not complete, program data suggest that a high proportion of clients have not become homeless or re-entered the cycle of homelessness while participating in the program.

Good programs are underpinned by a **commitment to ‘joined-up’ service delivery** at all levels.²¹³ Joined-up initiatives mean diverse areas of government and the service delivery sector jointly address the needs of common clients.²¹⁴

An integrated service system may mean the difference between someone at risk of homelessness staying in stable housing or repeatedly cycling in and out of homelessness.²¹⁵ Often there are boundaries, barriers and inflexibility that exist in service delivery, program funding streams and reporting requirements that make an approach like this difficult. In these cases, clients (especially those who have high and complex needs) can fall through gaps and fail to access the full range and benefits of services available.

Housing and Accommodation Support Initiative—New South Wales

The HASI initiative is based on an innovative partnership between NSW Health, the NSW Department of Housing and community sector organisations. It assists people with mental illness who need help with accommodation to participate in community life, maintain tenancies and improve their quality of life. The main features include:

- high-level support for people who are homeless, at risk of homelessness or inappropriately housed
- lower-level support for people in public and community housing who may be at risk of losing their accommodation without support.

The program provides an integrated support system from housing providers, area mental health services, and accommodation support providers. The support is broad-ranging and tailored to each client’s needs. Assistance is provided in the areas of domestic, emotional,

employment, educational, advocacy, and social and life-based support. The 2007 HASI Stage 1 Evaluation Report^[i] identified some significant outcomes for participants, including:

- 70 per cent stayed in the same home for 12 months or longer, and 85 per cent remained with the same housing provider, ensuring that they maintained secure and affordable housing;
- 84 per cent experienced reduced rates, frequency and duration of hospitalisation—the time spent in hospital emergency departments decreased by 81 per cent.

^[i]New South Wales Department of Health 2007, *Housing Accommodation Support Initiative (HASI) Final Evaluation Report*.

Brisbane Homeless Service Centre, Queensland²¹⁶

The Brisbane Homeless Service Centre is a one-stop shop for people who are experiencing or are at risk of homelessness. As one of the dedicated homelessness 'hubs' in Brisbane, it brings together five permanent organisations and has space and support for several other specialist organisations who visit regularly. The permanent organisations are Micah Homelessness Projects, Centacare, St Luke's Nursing, Brisbane Boarders Ltd and Murri Watch. Extra services include bulk-billing doctors, a Queensland Homeless Persons Legal Clinic, and access to Centrelink homeless outreach services. The project aims to provide a single entry point for a diverse range of homelessness services and to reduce overheads by using a single assessment tool and directly referring customers to the most appropriate organisations for assistance.

Early intervention and prevention of homelessness gets better results. The most effective homelessness services are those that complement crisis accommodation and support with a long-term plan for clients to achieve greater engagement in the community and eventual self-reliance. This includes strategies to address the fundamental sources of disadvantage, reduce risk factors, as well as strategies to catch people before they fall into homelessness. It also includes programs to prevent homelessness becoming an inter-generational cycle.

Safe at Home, Tasmania²¹⁷

Safe at Home is a whole-of-government initiative developed in response to family violence in Tasmania. Government agencies, in consultation with other stakeholder groups, have an integrated service delivery system built around the principle that the safety of the victim comes first. It has two main elements:

- managing the risk that the offender might repeat or escalate their violence
- implementing strategies to improve the safety of victims of family violence.

A major focus of Safe at Home is to support adult and child victims so that, whenever possible, they can remain or quickly return to their own home in safety. Enacted in 2004, the Family Violence Act gives police the authority to intervene in family violence incidents. Since then, there has been a 40 per cent increase in family violence reporting.

Evidence shows Safe at Home has increased cooperation and communication between police and family violence service providers, and has improved police responsiveness to reports of family violence. The evidence also indicates that the safety of adult victims, particularly females, has improved, especially at the first point of contact with police.

Hanover Family Focus, Melbourne²¹⁸

Targeting families that typically live in private or public rental properties or have mortgages,

staff from the Dandenong Centrelink Office and Hanover develop individual support plans to assist families in trouble who are at risk of losing their housing. Together with practical assistance and support, staff help families identify their strengths and deal with the things that make them at risk of homelessness. As well, families learn to increase their coping skills and build up their resilience, so they can better resolve problems in the future. Assistance is also provided to address clients' health, education and employment issues and families are encouraged to participate more in social and community life.

An evaluation showed that the program was successful in reaching and stabilising the situation of vulnerable families before they became homeless. Many families made significant improvements in the areas of housing, finances, social participation, education and employment.

An independent longitudinal evaluation also found that:

- 90 per cent of families had not experienced homelessness since leaving the program
- significant gains in labour market participation were made, with around 40 per cent of clients employed in full-time, casual, part-time or a period of work
- 62 per cent felt that their circumstances improved after the program, and 71 per cent of families were optimistic about the future.

School homelessness programs—two examples

Hobart College's response to the needs of at-risk and homeless young people includes:

- working collaboratively with Colony 47 (a non-government organisation) to support a student housing complex
- providing staff with professional learning to understand poverty and disadvantage
- developing close links with Centrelink Social Workers
- operating a weekly free dinner for independent students—catered by staff
- working with youth-specific employment, education and training services.²¹⁹

Taminmin High School in the Northern Territory works with students and parents to build the school's capacity to support at-risk and homeless young people. Strategies include:

- developing peer support networks with students supporting students and parents supporting parents
- conducting home or off-site visits for families in crisis when necessary
- providing families with transport to come into parent teacher nights
- offering professional development for teaching staff, including mental health first aid
- having a youth-friendly, school-based police constable.²²⁰

Housing and homeless responsibilities in Scotland

Under the *Housing (Homeless Persons) Act 1977*, local Scottish authorities must assist people who are at an imminent risk of homelessness. The *Housing (Scotland) Act 2001* requires the authorities to develop homelessness strategies to prevent and combat homelessness in the local community. The *Homelessness (Scotland) Act 2003* states that all private sector landlords and mortgage lenders must give notice to local authorities of new eviction or repossession proceedings.

The most effective homelessness prevention programs were found to be the ones supporting and assisting council tenants to retain their tenancies. This was achieved through tenancy support schemes when homelessness prevention workers work with tenants at risk of eviction and make referrals to support services. Tenancy support

schemes also assist clients with budgeting, financial literacy and employment to enable clients to maintain tenancies.²²¹

UK Government - Sustainable Communities: Settled Homes; Changing Lives²²²

In the United Kingdom, all local authorities are required to produce 'prevention focused' strategies. These strategies include family mediation, rent deposit guarantee schemes, provision of housing advice, landlord liaison or mediation scheme, sanctuary schemes to enable women under threat from former partners to 'stay put', assistance to ex-prisoners via prison-based housing advice, and support initiatives and tenancy sustainment measures.

In the four years to mid-2007, the annual number of households assessed as unintentionally homeless and in priority need in the UK declined by more than 50 per cent—a return to the levels of the early 1980s.

Addressing and preventing homelessness requires **flexibility and creativity among the service sector** as well as a clear **focus on client outcomes**. Services must have enough freedom to respond to the specific needs of individuals and communities. Government funding arrangements can make this difficult.

Service providers need to be willing to question their own work and think creatively about how to get better and long-term results for their clients. All services need to innovate and learn from one another. The entire system needs to measure the impact of its work.

Mission Australia Centre—Surry Hills, Sydney²²³

Previously called Campbell House and accommodating 100 residents, the service made a very deliberate shift to providing high quality crisis accommodation placements for 40 men. The service operates a suite of services that 'wrap around' the client, based on their individual needs and strengths. It provides intensive case management services, with a case load ratio of one worker for eight clients. It encompasses assessment, service coordination, review and transition for all clients accommodated within the centre's apartments.

Around 32 different professional and training and education services are delivered on-site. Professional health services also give clients access to health and wellbeing services such as medical, dentistry, optometry and chiropractic services.

Many of the best services find a **role for the entire community**. Homelessness is a collective responsibility. Effective services create connections with local neighbourhoods and communities and may involve business as philanthropists and employers. Effective services use diverse partnerships to bring different skills together to help tackle homelessness.

Young People Connected—Vodafone²²⁴

Using special software provided by Vodafone and stored on their donated mobile phones, this program helps young clients of Barnardos and Mission Australia to stay connected with their friends, families, agencies and support services. An agency worker develops a living plan with the client, programs this into the agency computer, and text messages are sent to remind clients of what they need to do to and when. Helping young people to better manage their lives, the program has improved young people's connectedness, assisted them in

times of crisis and enabled case workers to provide round-the-clock support. Being contactable by phone also improves the chance of employment.

A partnership between Grocon, the Victorian Government, Yarra Bay Community Housing and HomeGround

Melbourne company, Grocon, agreed to build a \$50 million supportive housing facility for homeless people at cost price. This represents a corporate donation of around \$15 million. The project is being delivered in partnership with the Victorian Government, Yarra Bay Community Housing, and HomeGround as the service provider. The service will be based on the United States' common ground model of providing accommodation and support for long-term homeless people.

Section Four: Future directions

Key messages:

- To reduce homelessness over the long term we need a more efficient and affordable housing market and a better service system that achieves outcomes in addition to housing.
- Contact with crisis response services needs to offer a **gateway** into safe, appropriate accommodation, and a **pathway** to social and economic participation.
- Both mainstream and homelessness-specific services have to play a role in a comprehensive homelessness response.
- Three options are proposed. They focus on improving the way we respond to crisis and better linking our response to homelessness with mainstream services.

To reduce homelessness we need to achieve better outcomes for homeless people and work harder to prevent homelessness.

To make an impact over the long-term we need a better functioning, more affordable housing market, increased social and economic participation by homeless people and a more responsive and effective service system.

Goals and Targets

While it is unrealistic to end homelessness, for Australia to do better we need clear goals that are ambitious and achievable.

There is good evidence that a strong simple goal will focus the efforts of government and the community and reduce homelessness over the long term.

The Government suggested during the 2007 election campaign that an initial goal could be to halve the turn-away rate from homeless shelters. Early feedback from service providers is that this may not adequately capture the size and scope of the problem we face as only a proportion of homeless people access crisis shelters.

In 1998, the UK Government set the goal of halving homelessness in 10 years. It then established a number of targets including:

- reducing the numbers of rough sleepers by at least two-thirds by 2002
- halving the number of households in temporary accommodation by 2010.

Possible targets for Australia could include:

- a decrease in the number of people moving from public housing and private rental to crisis accommodation services
- an increase in the number of women and children remaining in their own home following domestic and family violence
- a decrease in the number of people seeking crisis accommodation who first experienced homelessness as children
- an increase in the percentage of school-age children who remain in school, education or training after being in crisis accommodation.

We will need to invest more in data and research to measure outcomes for homeless people, drive our efforts and measure our success. This could include developing longitudinal datasets on the experiences of homeless people, undertaking cost–benefit analyses, and capturing the returns on any new investments in homelessness. Consistency in data collection and robust evaluation of performance measures will be vital.

Principles for change

Ten key principles are proposed to guide the development of our new approach:

1. **A national commitment and strong leadership from all levels of government, the not-for-profit and business sectors and the general community is needed.** Homelessness must be seen as a shared responsibility.
2. **Preventing the causes of homelessness is a main focus.** Appropriately funded programs can divert people into secure and affordable housing. Early intervention support mechanisms need to be part of the homelessness service system within the broader community.
3. **Social inclusion drives our efforts.** Homelessness is more than shelter and support. The focus must be on building human capacity to maximise everyone's potential for social and economic participation.
4. **Everyone is treated with dignity and respect.** People who are homeless or at risk of homelessness are entitled to the same respect, opportunities and support as other members of the community.
5. **Safety and wellbeing are a prime concern for all clients.** The service system needs more capacity to protect women and their children escaping domestic and family violence. This also requires recognition of accompanying children as clients in their own right who also need support.
6. **Rights and responsibilities of individuals and families are paramount.** Assistance should be balanced to reflect the social and economic objectives appropriate to age, capacity and aspirations.

7. **Joined-up service delivery needs joined up-policy.** An overarching policy framework is needed to guide all government approaches to addressing homelessness. Program funding and program boundaries must allow governments and funded organisations to take a multi-disciplinary approach to addressing people's needs.
8. **Transition points are a priority.** People are more vulnerable at times of change, including early childhood, school-to-work, retirement, family breakdown, leaving state care and prison. These changes can be more difficult if compounded by poor health, limited education, and geographic or social isolation. Support at these points can prevent problems later on.
9. **Evidence-based policy helps to shape our priorities for action.** Clients' needs should drive policy and program design. Achievements will be measured to assess the economic and social returns on investment. Developing the evidence means investing in research (including longitudinal research), data collection and information sharing.
10. **Targets are set to reduce homelessness and build government and community accountability.** Rigorous and regular reporting against targets will keep the Australian, state and territory and local governments and service providers accountable and ensure measurable progress is made in reducing homelessness.

Questions

1. What goal(s) should we set to reduce homelessness?
2. What targets will best help us reach our goal?
3. What are the best ways to measure the targets we set?
4. What are the three research priorities for a national homelessness research agenda?
5. Have we got the principles right?
6. How can the business sector best be involved in reducing homelessness?
7. How can we develop broader community involvement and maximise the contribution of the philanthropic sector?

Housing for everyone

All people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness need access to stable, affordable housing.

A proper functioning, efficient and accessible housing market is crucial to reducing homelessness. Investment by government in housing must deliver sustained housing outcomes.

Housing support should also aim to see people achieve a housing outcome equivalent to their peers and appropriate for their circumstances. For families a successful housing outcome will be a stable long-term home connected to schools, jobs and transport. For adults with mental health issues or chronic illness, or who are elderly, access to accommodation with support or a low care aged facility may be appropriate. For young people secure accommodation for one to two years may be the most appropriate outcome. In some cases, family reunion will appropriately address housing need.

Improving housing outcomes will require an increase in the supply of affordable housing and strategies to ensure that homeless people and those at risk of homelessness have access to that housing. Affordable housing comes in many forms - public, community and private - made affordable through government programs such as Commonwealth Rent Assistance or the National Rental Affordability Scheme.

We need to get the right **m**ix of supply as well as a significant **i**ncrease in supply.

Most homeless people will also require support once they are housed. Follow up as required after leaving crisis accommodation should be routinely available.

Signs of housing stress provide clear opportunities for early intervention and prevention. Families paying greater than 50 per cent of their welfare payments on housing costs represent a clear target group for intervention to maintain a secure tenancy. Similarly, support for people who are a long way behind on mortgage payments may assist people to negotiate mortgage refinancing or move to a rental property before becoming evicted.

Effective responses to homelessness may require consideration of current housing stock. Boarding houses provide accommodation for some people who may not do well in the private rental market. While many boarding houses are of poor quality and offer poor conditions we may need to add better quality boarding houses to our housing stock that also offer quality support to meet the needs of this group. Similarly there is a need for new affordable housing to meet accessibility standards – especially for disabled and older clients.

Beyond housing—providing support for different groups of people

Housing is a vital part of the response. Different forms of support are also required. For housing outcomes to be sustainable in the long-term, the homelessness

response also needs to address the reasons people become homeless and achieve outcomes in areas that will prevent people becoming homeless.

A new national effort on homelessness needs to provide housing **plus** a support package for homeless people. This will allow people to stay accommodated and reduce homelessness over time. Support needs to be tailored to each individual and focused on the outcomes that will make the greatest long-term difference to their lives.

For **younger people** who experience homelessness we need to improve education, training and employment outcomes as well as family connections, where appropriate. This will be decisive in achieving long-term economic participation and housing security and could mean:

- integrating SAAP and employment service providers to enable delivery of both housing and employment outcomes
- requiring SAAP, health and employment services to collaborate to support young people to work towards agreed goals
- raising school retention programs by providing accommodation for young people on the condition that they participate in education, training and employment, which are all provided in the one location
- improving education and personal support options for teenagers with low school attainment to stay in learning and find pathways to employment
- increasing programs to resolve conflict between teenagers and their families that allow people to stay in the family home and complete secondary school
- funding non-government organisations to hold leases for houses on behalf of young people, possibly with extra support
- providing mentoring, counselling and life skills training to build resilience and address the effects of past traumas
- providing job search support as part of an integrated case management approach
- building up local networks of employers and community support to offer informal support to young people who are in insecure housing and employment
- recognising that more intensive support may be required for the large group of young people aged 21 to 25 years who may have poor work histories, educational outcomes and entrenched health or behavioural issues
- giving young people leaving child protection systems access to Foyer models that link accommodation to education and training
- providing a range of legal, accommodation and support options to reduce the incidence of homelessness, including for people experiencing domestic and family violence
- linking prisons with business and TAFE providers to supply skilled workers who are ex-prisoners in areas of skills shortages, including apprenticeships and traineeships
- requiring the use of Centrepay facilities to pay rent for public housing tenants. This could be linked to financial literacy training. A similar system could be used for managing rent arrears.

For **families and individuals escaping violence**, we need to stop the violence and abuse that threatens wellbeing and housing stability and disrupts work, educational and community connections.

We need to align homelessness responses to domestic violence with law and justice services. Policing, court, justice and family relationship services all have a key role. This could mean:

- changing laws to require the removal of perpetrators of violence from the family home, where safe and appropriate, allowing families to stay in their own home and close to their local community
- making a concerted effort to create alternative accommodation, custodial and treatment options for perpetrators, and offer family counselling and support services for victims of family violence
- co-locating support and accommodation services with other services such as child care centres, health clinics or recreational facilities
- providing flexible assistance packages that help people move back into safe and permanent housing in a timely manner
- changing laws and procedures that encourage courts and police to work more closely with domestic violence service providers
- counting children as SAAP clients and providing brokerage funds to pay for counselling, school books and uniforms so children can go to school
- forming partnerships between schools and family health services to identify children at risk and respond early, to minimise the disruption to children's schooling and address the effects of homelessness on their ability to learn.

For **adults who are homeless including those with chronic health issues** we need to improve health outcomes and social participation opportunities. To do this we need to align service responses more closely with rehabilitation, health, mental health, aged care and community health services. This could mean:

- operating specialist homelessness services through hospitals, health and aged care service providers
- providing case management and support services on a needs basis, with no set time limits, and having the right mix of health, community and social services for each individual
- joint assessment between homelessness services and community mental health teams or aged care assessment teams, which focuses on housing and better health
- providing homeless people with more valuable opportunities to participate in employment, volunteering, training and social activities
- having homeless support specialists in mainstream services—particularly health and mental health - to link people to accommodation, especially on discharge from hospitals.

For **families and individuals** who are under extreme financial stress, often due to housing costs, we need to improve financial stability and economic independence.

We need to introduce 'early warning systems' to identify families at risk, and align them more closely with family support, employment and child care services, financial literacy programs, and affordable, quality housing. The availability and range of services need to increase. This could mean:

- providing flexible funding to assist families to avoid eviction, such as using housing subsidies to target need, regardless of tenure
- improving access to family support and children's services to enable prevention and early intervention
- offering access to housing, low-fee child care places, rehabilitation and training as part of an income support contract
- maintaining support after stable housing is secured to prevent further homelessness
- requiring automatic deductions, for some families, for rent and utilities from Centrelink payments or bank accounts
- community housing services auspicing crisis services and enabling better pathways to housing assistance such as providing bonds, rental guarantees or head leasing for people with default records
- extending support services to help manage high-risk tenancies, and address complex family needs for those at risk of defaulting or eviction regardless of tenure
- improving access to financial management advice and building financial literacy skills
- using legal mechanisms to address issues for tenants who have poor rental histories
- monitoring the consequences of income support policies, and payment delivery systems so that the risk of homelessness is not exacerbated
- establishing social enterprises with homeless service providers to assist people who have experienced homelessness transition into training and jobs
- integrating service delivery including case assessment, case management and support.

Some smaller, more isolated, or disadvantaged communities have limited access to important health and community services. There will be a need to develop flexible and tailored responses based on local or regional planning. Broad program policy settings must allow for, and encourage, creative and collaborative local solutions to meet the needs of homeless people and those at risk of homelessness.

Multi-disciplinary services could offer a more holistic approach to clients in some of these locations. Funding models would need to change so that service providers could increase the range of services they provide to clients. For example, a crisis accommodation service could have brokerage funds to source local specialist assistance for rehabilitation or therapeutic services. Centrelink and Employment Service providers could increase outreach services to people accessing crisis accommodation.

Common reforms across the service sectors

There are a number of common reforms that could be made across the service sectors including:

- delivery of wrap-around services with an emphasis on bringing tailored services to the person for however long they need assistance
- sector development that addresses inflexible funding, information technology infrastructure, capital and equipment issues, reduces red tape and improves governance, and that fosters the collection of data that measures outcomes and provides quality assurance
- workforce development that focuses on the skills and competencies for delivering integrated case management, service partnerships and improved health, housing, education and employment outcomes. Salaries would reflect these competencies to attract and retain high quality staff
- development of regional/local goals and targets for reducing homelessness and improving social inclusion across the homelessness and mainstream sectors. This aligns the efforts of the service system with a common objective and ensures shared responsibility for reducing homelessness
- development of local protocols which formalise partnerships between services to encourage integrated service delivery

Options for a reformed homelessness service model

Our aim is that contact with crisis services, wherever and whenever it occurs, offers a swift and secure **gateway** into safe, appropriate accommodation, and a **pathway** to the longer-term goals of personal security, self-development, and social and economic participation.

To achieve this we need to improve and reform our existing homeless response—primarily SAAP—and to establish strong, direct connections with mainstream services.

In reforming our current response to homelessness there are fundamental tensions between:

- improving the existing service framework or extensively redesigning its basic elements to build stronger links with the housing, education, health and employment systems
- driving change through the SAAP service model or through the mainstream service system
- delivering an immediate crisis-only response and longer-term support packages focusing on prevention
- providing innovative and flexible solutions to homelessness and a nationally consistent service framework.²²⁵

This Green Paper suggests three options for discussion:

1. transform SAAP to build a national homelessness response focused on distinct streams
2. improve the current SAAP response
3. improve the mainstream service response to homelessness and restrict SAAP to responding to crisis interventions.

These options are intended to focus discussion, not limit the debate.

Option one proposes reform of SAAP by redirecting program funding to critical mainstream services to achieve long-term outcomes. Option two proposes maintaining SAAP and investing in improvements to the program. Option three proposes driving reform through the mainstream service system and maintaining SAAP as a crisis response to homelessness.

Option One - Transform SAAP to build a national homelessness response focused on distinct streams

This option would provide a new national homelessness response which focuses on four streams of support, tailored to particular life events and circumstances:

- youth
- people experiencing or escaping domestic and family violence
- single people
- families in housing stress.

Current crisis services, including SAAP, would be aligned to the critical areas of employment, health, justice and housing. Support from these broader systems could encourage a greater focus on prevention and early intervention and produce more stable and long-lasting outcomes.

Restructuring within government and the service system could disaggregate current homelessness programs and relocate specific elements to areas where the strongest links need to be formed, for example:

- assistance for young people could sit with education, training and employment services—providing greater focus on homeless people building skills and establishing themselves within the community
- support for people experiencing and escaping domestic violence could sit with the justice system—giving greater emphasis to supporting victims and their children
- single homeless people could be assisted through the health and ageing systems—focusing on individual needs and support
- families in housing stress may be better assisted through the housing system with a combination of family support, help to secure and maintain employment, and practical housing assistance.

Such a comprehensive reform process would have risks, and would require cultural change to ensure its success. This approach could be trialled in selected regions to provide learnings for a broader implementation. In this way, SAAP funding and services could be more gradually moved to operate within mainstream service systems.

Funding and accountability frameworks that currently enforce program boundaries would be adapted to allow governments and funded organisations to take a multi-disciplinary approach to needs. The state and territories have suggested that pooled funding, though challenging to administer, has great potential to create an integrated approach. Current budget allocation processes, which encourage competition among programs, could instead foster cross-program collaboration.²²⁶ Partnership agreements between the Australian and state and territory governments would need to contain measures to ensure that common policy intent translates into joined-up delivery.

Questions

8. What are barriers to radical change in homelessness services and how could they be overcome?
9. How do we develop collective accountability for outcomes in a 'joined-up' system?
10. Taxpayer funds are limited—where, across the range of possibilities under option one, should we direct our effort to give us the biggest impact?

Option Two—Improve the current SAAP response

Option two would provide extra investment to reform the current crisis accommodation service system to give a greater focus on long-term outcomes. This could include:

- removing time limits on interventions—so that people get support for as long as they need it
- increasing the amount of crisis accommodation targeted to different population groups to meet unmet demand
- encouraging one-stop assistance by putting people directly into long term housing with varying levels of support
- implementing sector wide reform to standardise good practice approaches, including case management methods aimed at independent living and greater economic and social participation
- introducing clear inter-governmental and agency accountabilities so that protocols are established at the local level to make it easier for SAAP agencies to interact with other services so that clients receive a joined-up approach
- implementing national accreditation for SAAP agencies
- developing improved data collection systems and agreed indicators to measure long-term outcomes and track progress
- providing services with flexible funding and reducing red tape
- ensuring employment packages for SAAP are more competitive and linked to competencies as well as offering professional development and training, and updating information technology.

Questions

11. How would the investments and reforms proposed in option two improve outcomes for SAAP clients and reduce homelessness?
12. What else might be needed to ensure collaboration between SAAP services and the mainstream service system?
13. What incentives are needed to forge strong, ongoing links between homelessness response services and mainstream services?
14. What would be needed to drive innovative forms of support within SAAP and accelerate their take-up across Australia? Who should be the drivers of this process?
15. Taxpayer funds are limited—where, across the range of possible improvements to SAAP in option two, should we direct our effort to give us the biggest impact?

Option Three—Improve the mainstream service response to homelessness and restrict SAAP to responding to crisis interventions

Option three boosts the capacity of mainstream services to respond to homelessness with a particular focus on early intervention and prevention. The mainstream service system would share responsibility for reducing homelessness. As in the first two options, assistance would be tailored to meet each person's specific needs. Support would still be available through a homeless-specific service sector, but this would be restricted to short-term and crisis-based interventions.

There would need to be much stronger links between the homeless service sector and mainstream services. Attention would still need to be given to improving the crisis response and ensuring effective case management and referral processes were in place.

Appropriate structures would need to be developed to ensure mainstream services were better equipped to respond to people who are homeless and able to identify people at risk early. This could mean:

- an incentive system with additional funding linked to the achievement of outcomes for homeless people through mainstream service systems—such as schools, TAFE and universities, employment services, hospitals and health clinics, housing, and the justice system
- extra subsidies for child care centres and aged care facilities to take homeless children and older homeless people respectively
- including specific goals and targets to reduce homelessness in national funding agreements with the states and territories (for example, housing and health agreements), and measuring performance each year against these goals. Incentive payments could reward those states/territories that achieve progress and realise goals
- developing specific strategies for mainstream services to assist people at risk such as:
 - embedding specialist counsellors in schools
 - family services providing brokerage funds to help families re-establish their lives
 - public and community housing providers making referrals to financial counselling services for households that fall behind in their rental payments
 - Centrelink referring customers who move house frequently to appropriate support services
 - Centrelink having face-to-face meetings with parents of young people who claim Youth Allowance (Unable To Live At Home) with an aim to reconnect young people with their families
 - Centrelink identifying people who are homeless and initiating additional support to meet their needs
 - health services funding outreach support workers to assist people with a mental illness to maintain their housing.
- improving the quality of assessment and transition planning in existing services to ensure clients are provided with the assistance they need, when they need it.
- investment in new integrated service delivery models such as the Housing Accommodation Support Initiative (HASI) which assists people with mental

illness who need help with accommodation to participate in community life, maintain tenancies and improve their quality of life.

- shared strategic plans at state or regional levels that spell out longer-term goals and mandate targets.²²⁷
- joint planning between mainstream and crisis services and other key partners at local and regional levels
- strengthening the capacities of staff in service delivery agencies to take on this new specialist role by funding professional development.

This option would enable the gradual winding back of SAAP, as mainstream services increasingly took responsibility for preventing and addressing homelessness.

Questions

16. Will option three bring change at a pace and scale to reduce homelessness and over the long term?
17. What else is needed to help mainstream services better respond to people who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless?
18. Taxpayer funds are limited—where, across the range of possibilities for mainstream services, should we direct our effort to give us the biggest impact?

Section Five: About the Green Paper consultations

Key messages: We want to know what you think and we want your ideas.

Consultation process

In January 2008, Prime Minister, the Hon Kevin Rudd MP, and Minister for Housing and for the Status of Women, the Hon Tanya Plibersek MP, launched *Homelessness: A New Approach*. With the aim to significantly reduce homelessness, developing a new approach is an important part of the Australian Government's social inclusion agenda.

The Government appointed an expert steering group to develop a Green Paper.

On 28 March 2008, Homelessness Australia hosted a Roundtable meeting of stakeholders in Sydney to discuss key themes and approaches to addressing homelessness. Feedback and advice from the Roundtable were used to help develop this Green Paper.

This Green Paper aims to promote discussion, draw out bold ideas and identify evidence-based approaches which reduce homelessness. Its release marks the beginning of a period of widespread public consultation.

We encourage individuals and groups to play a role in developing the new approach to homelessness by giving us views on the issues raised here. Responses and any other ideas will feed into the Government's White Paper. The White Paper will include a comprehensive national action plan to reduce homelessness in the lead up to 2020.

Consultation sessions

To get direct feedback from the public, consultation sessions will be held in 12 locations across Australia. When possible the Minister for Housing, the Hon Tanya Plibersek MP and/or members of the expert steering group will attend sessions.

Location	Date
Perth	28 May
Karratha	29 May
Townsville	4 June
Darwin/Palmerston	6 June
Brisbane	10 June
Sydney	11 June
Melbourne	12 June
Canberra	13 June
Lismore	16 June
Hobart	17 June
Adelaide	19 June
Albury–Wodonga	20 June

For more information about timing and venues for the consultation sessions, go to www.fahcsia.gov.au.

Consultation questions

The Government is serious about tackling homelessness. To do this, we need suggestions from people who have experienced homelessness, service providers, business and the general community. Everyone needs to contribute to solving this problem. This is your opportunity to express your views and put forward the 'big ideas' you believe can make a real difference to reducing homelessness.

We want your input on any issues included in this Green Paper. You may want to use the following questions to guide your responses to the three options for reforms set out in Section Four. Please also tell us about any other ideas or proposals you think might work.

1. What goal(s) should we set to reduce homelessness?
2. What targets will best help us reach our goal?
3. What are the best ways to measure the targets we set?
4. What are the three research priorities for a national homelessness research agenda?
5. Have we got the principles right?
6. How can the business sector best be involved in reducing homelessness?
7. How can we develop broader community involvement and maximize the contribution of the philanthropic sector?
8. What are the barriers to radical change in homelessness services and how could they be overcome?
9. How do we develop collective accountability for outcomes in a 'joined-up' system?
10. Taxpayer funds are limited—where, across the range of possibilities under option one, should we direct our effort to give us the biggest impact?
11. How would the investments and reforms proposed in option two improve outcomes for SAAP clients and reduce homelessness?
12. What else might be needed to ensure collaboration between SAAP services and the mainstream service system?
13. What incentives are needed to forge strong, ongoing links between homelessness response services and mainstream services?
14. What would be needed to drive innovative forms of support within SAAP and accelerate their take-up across Australia? Who should be the drivers of this process?

15. Taxpayer funds are limited—where, across the range of possible improvements to SAAP in option two, should we direct our effort to give us the biggest impact?
16. Will option three bring change at a pace and scale to reduce homelessness and over the long term?
17. What else is needed to help mainstream services better respond to people who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless?
18. Taxpayer funds are limited—where, across the range of possibilities for mainstream services, should we direct our effort to give us the biggest impact?

Making a submission

The closing date for receiving submissions is **20 June 2008**. You can put forward your views by:

- visiting www.fahcsia.gov.au, selecting the 'Housing and Homelessness' link and selecting the 'Homelessness Green Paper' link. When making a submission, you can use the online template to make an online submission responding to the Green Paper consultation questions
- writing to:
Homelessness Green Paper Submissions
PO Box 7442
CANBERRA BC ACT. 2610
- participating in public consultation sessions—for information about locations, timing and venues, go to www.fahcsia.gov.au. Details will also be advertised in local and national papers.

For additional copies of the Green Paper please contact 1800 774 055.

Important: Please indicate clearly if you want your submission to be treated as confidential or anonymous.

Confidentiality Statement

All submissions will be treated as public documents, unless the author of the submission clearly indicates the contrary by marking all or part of the submission as 'confidential'. Public submissions may be published in full on the website, including any personal information of authors and/or other third parties contained in the submission. If your submission contains the personal information of any third party individuals, please indicate on the cover of your submission if they have not consented to the publication of their information. A request made under the *Freedom of Information Act 1982* for access to a submission marked confidential will be determined in accordance with that Act.

Government reforms that will affect homelessness

Several government reforms are currently under way or planned. Designed to reduce homelessness, they broadly focus on social and economic participation and prevention strategies for various population groups.

Financial Counselling Program Enhancement

To help Australians experiencing rental or mortgage stress, the Government is increasing funding for financial counselling services. Funding for Centrelink's Financial Information Service will be increased by \$10 million over four years, and funding for the Commonwealth Financial Counselling program will be doubled, bringing it to \$10 million over four years. This funding is aimed at improving financial literacy and management skills in the community, particularly in those areas with little or no access to financial counselling services. The extra funds will be used for practical tools and resources to provide individuals and families with support and information to better manage their personal financial affairs, including coping with increased mortgage payments.²²⁸

Australia's Future Tax System

In the 2008-09 Federal Budget, the Government announced that it will undertake a review of Australia's taxation system. The review will be broad ranging and cover taxes levied by the Australian Government and the States. A complete Australian tax review, including State taxes, has not been undertaken for over 50 years.

The review will consider:

- the balance of taxes on work, investment and consumption and the role for environmental taxes
- further improvements to the tax and transfer system facing individuals, working families and retirees
- the taxation of savings, assets and investments, including the role and structure of company taxation
- the taxation of consumption (except GST) and property and other state taxes
- simplifying the tax system, including across the Australian Federation
- interrelationships between these systems as well as the proposed emissions trading system.
- the review will release an initial discussion paper by the end of July 2008 and will provide a final report to the Treasurer by the end of 2009.²²⁹

National housing initiatives

The Australian Government takes housing affordability very seriously and is implementing a range of new initiatives, including:

- a *Housing Affordability Fund* to lower the cost of building new homes by working with other levels of government, particularly local government, to reform infrastructure and planning requirements
- a *National Rental Affordability Scheme* to increase the supply of affordable rental dwellings by up to 100,000. Rent for these properties will be charged at 20 per cent below the market rate for eligible tenants
- increasing the supply of land for housing by releasing surplus Commonwealth land for residential and community development
- a *National Housing Supply Council* to improve the evidence base for housing policy development by providing research, forecasts and advice to government on issues such as the adequacy of housing and land supply to meet future housing needs
- *First Home Saver Accounts* to help potential first home buyers to save a bigger deposit through superannuation-style, low-tax savings accounts.

National Child Protection Framework (Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs and Attorney-General's Department)

The Australian Government is developing a national child protection framework, recognising that the safety and wellbeing of Australia's children is essential.

The Minister for Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs, the Hon Jenny Macklin MP, is now leading an important consultation process which involves state and territory governments and the child protection sector to develop a practical, action-focused framework that will make a positive and real difference to children's lives.

The development of the framework is built around:

- a stronger prevention focus
- more integration and collaboration
- improving responses for children in care and leaving care
- improving responses for Indigenous children
- attracting and retaining the right workforce
- improving child protection systems.

The specific impact on homelessness will be in the preventative aspects of improving the responses for young people leaving care, and building the resilience of all children at risk.

Employment Services Review (Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations)

An Employment Services Review has examined concerns with the current employment services' system, including:

- issues of red tape hampering innovation and client services
- a 'work first' approach that can be too narrow and prevents access to training and developing new skills
- an ineffective and counter productive compliance regime
- a review of the Government's employment service contracts to ensure that providers are able to focus on their clients and not paperwork.

In relation to homelessness, the review looked at the effects of the compliance regime and whether it is possible to provide greater flexibility to take account of a person's individual circumstances.

Outcomes and recommendations of the review of employment services have been announced as part of the Budget in May 2008.

National Mental Health and Disability Employment Strategy (Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations and Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs)

The National Mental Health and Disability Employment Strategy will include clear and practical steps to overcoming barriers that people face in gaining and keeping employment. This strategy is a major element of the Government's social inclusion and productivity agendas.

There are over 700,000 people on Disability Support Pension and the strategy will provide assistance to ensure those who can work are working, and that those who cannot work are adequately supported. The strategy will be developed in close consultation with people with disabilities, people with a mental illness, employers, employment service providers, peak bodies, state and territory governments and other experts.

In relation to homelessness, the strategy will identify ways to help people either gain employment or receive appropriate benefits, so they can more easily access and remain in housing and build up better connections within their community.

A discussion paper calling for submissions was released on 14 April 2008, with contributions closing on 30 June 2008. Following the consultations, a detailed strategy will be developed for release later in 2008.

Supported Accommodation for People with Disabilities (Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs)

The Australian Government has announced an extra \$100 million in capital funding for supported accommodation delivered by the states and territories. The funding is for up to 35 new accommodation facilities, housing up to six people each.

The new facilities are for people with a disability who do not have appropriate accommodation. The package also responds to concerns that older carers often have about the future accommodation support needs of their children with disabilities. Assisting people with a disability who have to move out of the family home, this initiative will help give many older carers peace of mind about their children's future.

The ongoing operation of the new accommodation facilities is assured, with the transfer of \$900 million into the new Commonwealth, State and Territory Disability Agreement, which is currently being renegotiated. The \$100 million investment is a small but important step in addressing unmet demand and supporting carers, allowing them to plan for the future care and dignity of family members with a disability.

Indigenous housing measures and other initiatives to reduce family violence

For 2007–08, the Australian Government has \$404.5 million appropriated for Indigenous housing and infrastructure. As well, \$96 million is available through the Aboriginal Rental Housing Program, which is a tied program under the Commonwealth State Housing Agreement.

State and territory governments also contribute funds for Indigenous housing. Most States and Territories' Indigenous Housing and Infrastructure Agreement's Annual Indigenous Housing Plans have strategies which can address Indigenous homelessness in the context of overcrowding and inadequate housing.

The Australian Government is providing \$813 million for the years to 2010-11 for Indigenous housing and infrastructure in the Northern Territory. On 12 April 2008 the Australian Government and Northern Territory Government jointly announced the Strategic Indigenous Housing and Infrastructure Program. This program will use \$547 million of the \$813 million to provide Indigenous housing and related services in the Northern Territory. The Northern Territory Government is also providing \$100 million. Under the program, capital works in the 73 targeted communities and urban living areas will improve the living conditions of up to 80 per cent of Indigenous people in the communities.

Capital works include:

- around 750 new houses, including new subdivisions
- over 230 new houses to replace houses to be demolished
- over 2,500 housing upgrades
- essential infrastructure to support new houses
- improvements to living conditions in town camps.

Of the \$647million, \$420 million will be used in 16 high-need communities for major works of new and replacement houses and refurbishments to existing dwellings. More than \$124 million will go on refurbishments in another 57 communities. A further \$98 million will help to improve town camps and urban living areas, and \$5 million will be spent on a small number of existing housing programs.

In April 2008, \$647 million in Australian Government and Northern Territory Government funding was made available for Indigenous housing and related services in the Northern Territory. The living conditions of up to 80 per cent of Indigenous people will be improved through capital works that will now go ahead in 73 targeted communities.

National Council on Violence Against Women and Children (Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs)

The Government's National Council on Violence Against Women and Children is developing a National Plan to Reduce Violence Against Women and Children. The plan will provide a national strategic framework for identifying gaps and delivering responses to domestic and family violence and sexual assault. Homelessness will be one of the important factors under consideration. The national plan already includes:

- \$1 million over four years for White Ribbon Day education activities in rural and regional areas, which started in March 2008
- a Respectful Relationships campaign—the Stage 1 resource kit for high school students was distributed in Term 2, 2008
- work with the states and territories to develop tougher and nationally consistent domestic violence and sexual assault laws and best practice
- \$500,000 to boost the Australian Institute of Criminology's National Homicide Monitoring Program
- \$200,000 for research into international best practice models for working with perpetrators of violence, with a contract of work to be let in July 2008
- \$150 million to build 600 extra houses to for homeless people, including women and children escaping domestic violence.

In May and June 2008, consultations with a wide range of service providers, program managers and policy makers are taking place. Consultations will also be held with victims and survivors of domestic and family violence and sexual assault, as well as with perpetrators.

The Australian Government has started the process necessary for Australia to become a party to the Optional Protocol to the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women. The Government will also continue to spend around \$15 million each year under the Women's Safety Agenda to take a lead role in eliminating domestic violence and sexual assault in the Australian community.

Initiatives that address domestic violence or provide support services to women escaping abuse are significant in preventing homelessness and in assisting victims to re-establish safe and secure accommodation and links to the community.

National Mental Health Reform

The Australian Government is committed to building on a whole-of-government approach to further mental health reform nationally. Identified priorities for mental health include:

- placing mental health firmly on the Council of Australian Governments' (COAG) agenda
- working with the states and territories on an integrated national approach to service delivery
- undertaking an evidence-based approach which re-orientes mental health policy towards prevention and early intervention
- ensuring mental health services are well integrated with other primary care and specialist services, for example through general practitioner 'super clinics'
- developing an open, transparent system of evaluation and accountability of existing mental health services.

The COAG National Action Plan on Mental Health 2006-2011 has contributed to building on a whole-of-government approach to mental health reform. The whole-of-government approach is further being strengthened in partnership with the states and territories under the National Mental Health Strategy. The strategy, endorsed by all Australian Health Ministers in April 1992, is a commitment to improving the lives of people with a mental illness. Elements of the strategy that are currently under review include:

- the National Mental Health Policy 1992—being revised to align it with a whole-of-government approach
- National Mental Health Plan 2003-08—being evaluated with results to contribute to informing consideration of a potential future mental health plan
- National Standards for Mental Health Services—being reviewed to reflect current practices and broaden their application
- new Australian Health Care Agreements, which have been used to fund the mental health reform activities—being negotiated for consideration by COAG in December 2008 and to start on 1 July 2009.

The Australian Government's progress on mental health reform includes refocusing the Access to Allied Psychological Services component of the Better Outcomes in Mental Health Care Program. This is to help ensure a more targeted approach to providing psychological therapies.

The aim is to address service gaps, particularly in communities not well serviced by private Medicare-eligible services, as well as vulnerable population groups such as people at risk of homelessness or suicide and Indigenous people.

The Australian Government has also identified peri-natal depression as an important issue for many Australian women and their families. Announced before the 2007 election, the new \$85 million plan aims to reduce the impact and prevalence of this condition.

On 28 March 2007, the Senate established a new Inquiry into Mental Health Services, convened by the Community Affairs Committee. The inquiry is expected to focus on progress since July 2006 in providing community-based mental health services. The committee will report by 26 June 2008. Establishing the National Advisory Council on Mental Health, also announced before the 2007 election, will provide expert, independent and balanced advice to the Australian Government on mental health issues, including improvements to the coordination of existing mental health programs.

Glossary

Affordable housing—housing that is affordable for lower to middle-income households, when housing costs are low enough to enable the household to meet other basic, long-term living costs. For example, housing costs should be less than 30 per cent of the household income for occupants in the bottom 40 per cent of household incomes²³⁰.

Brokerage funds—flexible funds that are available to buy and deliver services that are specific to the needs of their clients.

Case management—a process of assessment, facilitation and advocacy on behalf of the client to obtain services to meet the client's needs and desired outcomes.

Census—the Census of Population and Housing carried out by the Australian Bureau of Statistics. It aims to accurately measure the number of people in Australia on Census night, their key characteristics, and the dwellings in which they live. Census 2006 is the most recent Australian Census, however limited data are available at this stage.

Centrelink—an Australian Government statutory agency which assists Australians to become self-sufficient and supports people in need by delivering a range of services, including income support payments.

Centrepay—a free, voluntary, direct bill paying service offered to customers receiving payments from Centrelink. Deductions are made directly by Centrelink from customers' fortnightly payments.

Council of Australian Governments—the peak inter-governmental forum in Australia, comprising the Prime Minister, state premiers, territory chief ministers and the President of the Australian Local Government Association. The council's role is to initiate, develop and monitor the implementation of policy reforms that are of national significance and require cooperative action by all levels of government.

Commonwealth State Housing Agreement—a multi-party agreement between the Australian Government and each state and territory government that aims to provide appropriate, affordable and secure housing assistance for those who need it most, for the duration of their need. The agreement provides six housing assistance programs:

- public housing
- state and territory-owned and managed Indigenous housing
- community housing
- crisis accommodation program
- private rent assistance
- home purchase assistance.

Crisis accommodation—for people who are experiencing or are at risk of homelessness, provides short-term accommodation in temporary accommodation including refuges, shelters, motels, flats, boarding houses or caravan parks.

Domestic and family violence—Domestic violence occurs when one partner in an intimate relationship attempts by physical or psychological means to dominate and control the other. It is generally understood as ‘gendered violence’, and is an abuse of power within a relationship or after separation. In most cases the offender is male and the victim female.

Family violence is the term preferred by many Indigenous communities. ‘Family’ covers a diverse range of ties of mutual obligation and support, and perpetrators and victims of family violence can include, for example, aunts, uncles, cousins and children of previous relationships.

A wide range of behaviours may be involved in domestic or family violence, including physical, sexual, spiritual, verbal, emotional, social and economic abuse.²³¹

Early intervention—strategies which aim to reduce risk factors through timely identification and tailored advice and support for those at risk of homelessness.

Emergency accommodation—(see also **Crisis accommodation**) short-term accommodation provided for people who have recently lost their housing (crisis) or are homeless (in, for example, shelters, motels, flats or caravan parks).

Family violence—see **Domestic violence**

Homelessness—people who are homeless fall into three broad groups, that is, those who are:

- ‘sleeping rough’, such as living on the streets
- living in temporary accommodation, such as crisis accommodation (see **Crisis accommodation**) or staying with friends or relatives
- staying in boarding houses or caravan parks with no secure lease and no private facilities.

Mainstream services—generalist services provided by either government or non-government agencies which are available to the general population, such as Centrelink, public and community housing (see **Social housing**), aged care and community health centres.

National Affordable Housing Agreement—the National Affordable Housing Agreement will replace the Commonwealth State Housing Agreement. The new agreement will encompass housing assistance provided at all levels of government (Commonwealth, state and territory and local government).

Not-for-profit sector—non-government organisations providing a broad range of social services, including in relation to homelessness, education, health, conservation, and recreation. The sector is an integral part of Australia’s economic, social and political systems.

Prevention—programs and opportunities that enable and encourage individuals to address possible risk factors before they are vulnerable to homelessness.

Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP)—a joint Commonwealth and state and territory government funded support program, which assists people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness through a range of support and supported accommodation services.

SAAP Innovation and Investment Fund—a joint Commonwealth and state and territory government initiative which provides the capacity to develop and implement innovative service models that will identify and promote best practice and achieve improved and sustainable outcomes for SAAP clients.

Social housing—rental housing which is provided and/or managed by government or non-government organisations. This housing is mainly targeted at people on low incomes who are in greatest need. This includes those who are homeless; living in inappropriate housing; or have very high rental costs.

In public housing, the majority of tenants pay less than the market rent (that is, 25 per cent or less of their income). In community housing, rent payments range from less than 25 per cent to more than 30 per cent of income. Tenants also receive a range of support services (such as personal support and employment support) and are encouraged to be involved in managing community dwellings.²³²

Social inclusion—To be socially included, all Australians need to be able to play a full role in Australian life, in economic, social, psychological and political terms. To be socially included, all Australians must be given the opportunity to:

- secure a job
- access services
- connect with others in life through family, friends, work, personal interests and local community
- deal with personal crises such as ill health, bereavement or the loss of a job
- have their voice heard.²³³

Specialist support services—services to address specific needs, such as domestic violence services or mental health services.

Steering Group—Tony Nicholson, Executive Director of the Brotherhood of St Laurence (Chair), Anna Buduls, a company director and philanthropist, and Heather Nancarrow, Director of the Queensland Centre for Domestic and Family Violence Research.

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