

Victorian Government Submission to the Australian Government's Green Paper on Homelessness

June 2008



1. Background

This paper provides the Victorian Government's response to the Australian Government's Green Paper on Homelessness *Which Way Home?* It builds on the Joint Submission on Homelessness from State and Territory Ministers responsible for Housing and the Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP) informing the Green Paper.

The Victorian Government recognises that the Green Paper has provided three possible options for comment. There is merit in aspects of all three options. The Victorian Government response seeks to provide a strategic framework to guide the policy directions of the forthcoming White Paper. This framework draws on the lessons and experiences within Victoria since the release of the *Victorian Homelessness Strategy*. Building on the framework, the Victorian Government proposes an alternative fourth option, for consideration by the Australian Government.

The paper is structured into the following sections:

1. Background
2. Executive Summary
3. Introduction
4. What we have learnt – demonstrating innovative outcomes, building on achievements
5. A Fourth Option
6. Conclusion
7. Attachments
 - Profile of homelessness in Victoria and investment to reduce it
 - Joined up initiatives and Youth Homelessness Action Plan

The Victorian Government places a major emphasis on the importance of a whole-of-government policy framework and responses to address disadvantage and reduce inequality. This is fundamental to addressing homelessness.

The release of this document should be authorised by the Victorian Government.

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2. Executive Summary

The Australian Government's new approach to homelessness, through its Green and White Paper process presents a significant opportunity to improve existing responses to people who are homeless, at risk of homelessness, and women escaping family and domestic violence.

The Victorian Government has examined the three options proposed in the Green Paper, *Which way home?* There is merit in elements of all three options however these options are not mutually exclusive. Victoria has built on elements of the three options, and reflecting on the learnings from recent approaches in this State, is proposing a 'fourth option' for consideration.

Victoria believes that given the strong links between the Green and White Papers, and the negotiation of a National Affordable Housing Agreement (NAHA), it is essential that this fourth option sits within a national policy framework to reduce homelessness.

Option Four

This option is structured around the following themes:

1. Develop the capacity for mainstream government programs to identify and divert potential homeless clients through prevention and early intervention

- Strengthening the capacity of mainstream and universal services to prevent homelessness is essential. This preventative focus consists of a number of elements that are targeted at a population wide basis, through to programs to assist specific groups with a propensity to homelessness.
- Firstly, it should start with building an increased understanding and awareness by all mainstream services about the causes and drivers of homelessness and the role they can play in preventing homelessness on a population wide basis. Strategies that would fall under this include those to improve the health and well-being of communities and populations including community building strategies or initiatives such as Victoria's Best Start; strategies to increase the retention rate for young people finishing year 12; through to public health campaigns such as advocating the importance of mental health awareness.
- Mainstream services also need to be aware of how their structures, program barriers and policies can precipitate vulnerable people into homelessness. For example, someone who has been admitted to hospital with a psychotic episode requires a more holistic assessment beyond their mental health issues, to ensure that on their exit from care, they have access to safe and secure accommodation, along with other necessary supports. This may be through family or being linked into the local GP so that if such an episode were to occur again, they would have the appropriate supports in place and would not spiral into an unstable situation such as homelessness.
- Also within this sphere is the role that services need to play in preventing homelessness for those groups who have a higher propensity to become homeless. This includes people exiting prison, youth justice, young people leaving care, people exiting from clinical settings such as secure mental health facilities or drug and alcohol treatment settings. For example, supports provided to young people in care should include appropriate life skills such as cooking, cleaning and budgeting, and appropriate plans should be put in place well before their guardianship order ceases to facilitate an effective transition. In addition to supports provided whilst in care, there is also a need for support

post care. Across Australia young people leave care at the age of eighteen (at the latest). Their youth, combined with their experiences of abuse and neglect and the absence of the type of family supports most young people can rely on, makes their transition to 'independence' particularly challenging. Such support is essential in ensuring they are able to sustain tenancies and deal with issues as they arise. Homelessness agencies may play a role in providing these 'SAAP-like' supports. This approach has been instituted in Victoria through joined up initiatives such as the mental health pathways program amongst many others.

- Programs with a preventative role sit across the Commonwealth and State agencies and include: affordable housing; health and community services including mental health and drug & alcohol; disability services; justice; employment; education and training; and income support.

2. Continue reform of SAAP, increasing capacity and diversity of service responses to get better results

- It is essential that a specific homelessness response is maintained and enhanced. A more responsive and sustainable homeless system should be able to provide a diverse range of responses of different intensity and duration. This homelessness response would include a function of intervening early in situations where people become homeless and only require support that is time-limited to achieve stability and access to sustainable housing. Increased affordable housing has a crucial role in providing exit points from homelessness, as well being able to prevent a return to homelessness.
- However, the capacity of the homelessness sector to provide specialist responses to those client groups who require more intensive and prolonged support should also be strengthened. This sector should be able to assist those groups such as young people leaving care or those exiting prison, along with others accessing the system for whom a mainstream response has not been adequate to achieve long-term stability. It is clear that mainstream responses are ineffective for some people who require highly targeted efforts delivered by staff with specialist skills and knowledge in the area of homelessness. Within this system, there also needs to be the scale and diversity of services to enable specialist service responses to young people, Indigenous people, women escaping family and domestic violence and those with multiple and complex needs.
- To support those clients who require more intensive supports, this sector should have the capacity to broker in appropriate 'specialist' responses such as clinical supports, life skills, education, employment and training programs and family reconciliation or counselling services which can assist the needs of the client more holistically. Enhancing the capacity of the homeless sector to be the central, case management point who performs 'traditional SAAP' roles such as stabilising the client and providing support, along with flexible funding to buy in appropriate supports for individual clients can cut down on the disconnection clients feel with multiple caseworkers only working on one specific need. This approach recognises the relative strengths of mainstream and specialist services.

3. Improve linkages between specialist homelessness programs and programs targeted to at risk groups to enhance interventions, mainstreaming pilots in this area

- To enable the enhanced homelessness system to broker in the range of assistance homeless clients might need, it is essential that there are improved linkages between Commonwealth and state programs that focus on higher 'at risk' or recurring homeless populations. This includes programs such as Jobs Placement Employment & Training program, Community Connections, Personal

Support Programme, and Reconnect along with more clinical supports such as mental health and drug and alcohol services. These programs should be more flexible and responsive, working closely with homelessness agencies and not being bound by unnecessary program boundaries or guidelines. Enabling homelessness agencies to broker in support as necessary will mean that all the individual's needs will be at the forefront rather than just the one that a particular service can address.

- These kinds of supports could be provided by a range of services who may also deliver homelessness responses. It is important that the client is not forced to move unnecessarily through multiple systems with different criteria to access the range of supports they need. It would be expected that by consolidating and integrating these kinds of programs, that those groups requiring targeted prevention as identified under theme 1 (for example people leaving justice settings), would also be able to access these kinds of programs, again acting as a preventative measure. It needs to be acknowledged that primary responsibility for these kind of supports sits with other service sectors, and not necessarily with the homelessness system.

Key actions to sustain a new approach to homelessness

This section details the specific strategies and actions to support the key themes of option four.

Victoria encourages the consideration of reform strategies with early and quick wins and medium to long-term actions. This will maximise the likelihood of sustained improvement in reducing homelessness.

As noted in the following submission, Victoria welcomes the opportunity presented by the Green Paper to raise the issue of homelessness as a national priority. The negotiation of the NAHA will provide a means to better integrate homelessness assistance with broader housing outcomes for people. In pursuing reforms this paper also highlights a number of other areas that need to contribute to addressing homelessness. These areas may sit outside the NAHA and it will therefore be important to consider opportunities to change and influence improved responsiveness and responsibility in these areas.

Victoria believes it is well-placed to provide leadership in considering approaches for reform with a good track record of whole-of-government responses that seek to secure positive outcomes for people who are homeless. These whole-of-government responses recognise that people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness often have a range of issues requiring more than one type of response.

Through the COAG and Specific Purpose Payment reforms, Victoria notes the opportunity to commit to jointly agreed national priorities with flexibility to consider and tailor priorities in the context of this State. Victoria seeks to work collaboratively with the Australian Government in the further development of: outcomes; objectives; policy directions; strategies and principles; and performance and accountability measures as part of the negotiations for the NAHA.

There are areas where further reform is possible and necessary; these are outlined in detail in our submission. Victoria urges the Australian Government's action on the following:

- **National priority:** Homelessness must be national priority within a clearly defined, agreed and supported policy framework.
- **Collaborative effort across Governments, sectors, the community and business:** Continued efforts to work across levels of government, departments, sectors, with the community and business are required to jointly effect change and provide connected supports when needed.

- **Increased housing supply:** There must be increased investment in the supply of affordable, well-located housing through adequate capital funding at a national level. This is critical to providing a base upon which an individual can find a way out of homelessness, address other issues such as mental health and substance abuse and achieve improved health and wellbeing. Availability of adequate housing is fundamental to preventing homelessness and providing an exit point from homelessness.
- **Responding to individuals' needs:** Placement of the individual at the forefront of consideration is required, to enable the necessary supports to be identified and provided, whether this be from mainstream or the specialist homelessness response. This focus will dictate the duration of care and type of response, driving options for support and accommodation options. This focus will also be considerate of the need to minimise disruption to individuals and families. It will identify the particular needs of some groups that require specific responses, e.g. people escaping family violence; Indigenous people; people exiting prison; people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds; people with a disability; and young people.
- **Strengthened mainstream services:** Strengthening the capacity of mainstream services to better respond to people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness is essential. These services have a key role in preventing homelessness and acting early to minimise the likelihood and impact of homelessness. An increased understanding of the causes of homelessness and a commitment to providing more effective responses will support a stronger focus on prevention and early intervention. This is a necessary plank of national reform.
- **Improved access to employment, education and training:** Homeless people and those at risk must be supported to access education, employment and training when their situation has been stabilised, thereby building their capacity to maximise their economic participation.
- **Adequate income support that reinforces positive outcomes:** A review of the income support system is required to ensure that people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness are provided with an adequate income that can support them to access affordable housing.
- **Maintaining, supporting and valuing a specialist homelessness system:** Maintaining, valuing and supporting a specialist homelessness system that can provide crisis responses, intensive support to those who need it and facilitate improved responses from mainstream systems through sharing of information, expertise and knowledge. This system must be sustainable and supported to respond to the challenges of reform. An important issue worthy of national attention is the issue of appropriate remuneration of the workforce, who are the key foundation for the delivery of quality services to those in need.
- **Building blocks to support reform:** In addition to the above are the tools and infrastructure that can strongly influence the ability of successful responses to people who are homeless. These include improved data and information, research, and funding.

Fundamental to any change is the adequate resourcing of reform at the national level, with continued strong leadership from the Australian Government working collaboratively with States and Territories in the development of this new approach to homelessness.

3. Introduction

The Australian Government's commitment to addressing homelessness is to be commended. The Victorian Government appreciates the opportunity to provide a response to the Green Paper on Homelessness titled *Which Way Home?* and contribute to the development of the White Paper.

Australia is experiencing a strong period of growth in prosperity and in order to sustain this growth, it is important that all citizens are able to actively participate as members of the community, both socially and economically. To build on the strengths of this prosperous and democratic nation, it is beholden on federal, state and local governments, the not-for-profit sector, business and the broader community to provide support and assistance to those people who are vulnerable, with people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness being amongst the most disadvantaged in our society.

Being without a home can lead to social isolation and exclusion from vital supports such as education, employment and health services.¹ The impact of homelessness on people's health can be severe and also costly to government. Canadian research found that 'providing government healthcare, criminal justice and social services (excluding housing) to homeless individuals cost on average, 33 per cent more than for those people who were housed'.²

Identifying the causes and drivers of homelessness is critical to the development of responses to it. A shared understanding between stakeholders of these causes, such as illness, poverty, discrimination, lack of affordable housing and income support, is important to achieving successful outcomes for those who are homeless.

Through its social policy action framework, *A Fairer Victoria* (AFV), addressing disadvantage and reducing inequality, has been a key tenet of the way the Victorian Government operates. AFV has a focus on improving access to vital services; reducing barriers to opportunity; strengthening assistance for disadvantaged groups and places; and ensuring that people get the help they need at critical points in their life. Through such approaches, the drivers of homelessness can be tackled and capacity can be built to promote cohesive and strong communities optimising social and economic participation for all.

In addition to this broader social reform agenda, the Victorian Government has also placed significant effort and investment in both reducing homelessness, and improving the way in which we respond to those who are homeless, at risk of homelessness, or escaping family and domestic violence. The Victorian response to homelessness incorporates wider program participation beyond the Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP) and includes a strong emphasis on access to long-term housing outcomes, through the Public Housing Segmented Waiting List, amongst other initiatives. The response to homelessness has been and continues to be informed by the *Victorian Homelessness Strategy*, which provides the blueprint for changing the way we respond to homelessness, with a focus on prevention and early intervention.

Learnings from these approaches support and reinforce a number of conclusions that actions to address homelessness need to respond to. These are below:

- Homeless people will fall through gaps in service delivery, needing further resources to reconnect to community and family life.
- For some people, the standard service response (for example, fixed periods of support) has not been adequate to prevent recurring homelessness. Many people who are homeless need a range of supports beyond a housing response, such as mental health service support. The provision of extended periods of

support and a greater range of coordinated services that can be tailored to meet individual circumstances is required.

- Currently, people move into crisis and then through various forms of transitional housing, before accessing stable, long-term housing. More effective utilisation of all types of housing coupled with appropriate supports to assist people to access and retain tenure, can remove unnecessary movement between these systems. This can result in stable housing more quickly, providing a base for social and economic participation.

Through the development of a national, collaborative policy framework to prevent and reduce homelessness and the consequent reform and reconfiguration of service systems, the lives of hundreds of thousands of Australians can be improved. The Victorian Government believes that a national approach must actively engage States and Territories in the change.

In accordance with Specific Purpose Payment (SPP) reforms, Victoria is committed to developing a mutually agreed, national framework which encompasses outcomes, policy directions, performance measures and priority reform areas on homelessness. It is essential that this framework form a concrete part of the broader National Affordable Housing Agreement (NAHA), given that funding through the Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP) will now sit within this Agreement.

The NAHA will have a broad focus on achieving improved affordable and social housing outcomes. Being able to promote home ownership, improve access to the private rental market; improve housing outcomes for Indigenous people and ensure the viability of the social housing system together with growing the supply of affordable housing are all inherently linked to achieving the aim of reducing homelessness in our community.

This paper identifies a fourth option for consideration that is underpinned by a national policy framework that provides an overarching goal; objectives; and strategies for reform, and identifies the enablers that can be put in place to achieve the overarching goal.

4. Innovation – what we have learnt

Utilising SAAP, CSHA and new investment, Victoria has developed new approaches to both tackling the needs of homeless people and preventing recurring episodes of homelessness.

In pursuing new approaches to homelessness, Victoria has gained a valuable insight into what kind of responses and programs work well, and has also been able to identify the critical gaps in the system that can impede action. We recognise that government and the housing, homelessness and other support services need to work together in partnership to provide joined up services for people to address their individual needs as well as assist them to obtain and maintain affordable accommodation.

An overview of the homelessness service system in Victoria, including a profile of the population, along with the investment into this system is provided at Attachment 1.

Key joined up initiatives

A number of joined up initiatives have been implemented to meet the needs of people who are at risk of homelessness or are homeless and have other support needs such as mental health issues, substance abuse issues or are leaving

correctional facilities. Further information on a number of these initiatives is provided at Attachment 2.

Joined up projects include:

- Mental Health (DHS) – *Mental Health Pathways Program*
- Children Youth and Family (DHS) – *Youth Justice Housing Pathways Initiative and Young People Leaving Care Housing and Support Program*
- Alcohol and Other Drugs (DHS) – *Homeless Drug Dependency Program and Alcohol and Drug Supported Accommodation Program*
- Justice – Prison Exit Programs (Link Out - men and WISP - women), *Bail Credit Support, Better Pathways for Women (bail program), Court Integrated Services Program (CISP – Magistrate court), Drug Court, Neighbourhood Justice Centre, Family Violence Neighbourhood Court Program.*

The Housing and Community Building division of the Department of Human Services is working closely with the Mental Health and Drugs division in the implementation of a 'supportive housing' model in the central business district of Melbourne. This model will provide safe, long-term affordable housing with health and other support services for people who have been chronically homeless with high needs.

An innovative response that exemplifies how joining up services can be effective is showcased below through the Integrated Family Violence Response. A further example of an innovative policy responding to the specific needs of young people can be found at Attachment 2.

Integrated Family Violence Response Case Study

The Integrated Family Violence Response has seen major reform of the family violence service system across police, courts and support services (including those funded through Housing and Community Building). These reforms recognise the need for leadership and coordination from government, working closely with sector agencies to build a stronger system that will reduce family violence in the longer-term. The reforms have been well-resourced, with the Victorian Government allocating \$74.3 million since 2005.

Exploration of new human services and justice responses highlighted the fact that the personal, social and economic consequences of family violence cannot be tackled effectively by either human services or the justice system working alone. All services need to work together to break the cycle of violence. It is now acknowledged that there are a number of reasons for moving to an integrated service response where human services including health services complement the actions of police and the courts. For example:

- Over 64% of assaults against women due to family violence are not reported to the police.³
- Reasons for non-reporting may include lack of confidence in the justice system and its processes and penalties, or conversely, reluctance to potentially expose the person who uses violence to jail, as well as anxiety about the possible consequences of intervention by human services.⁴
- Violence has complex emotional consequences and these can affect a woman's capacity to participate in legal processes. Women are much more likely to seek a justice solution when they are well supported and have the assistance of services who can advocate on their behalf.⁵

The Victorian Integrated Response to Family Violence has resulted in a new Police Code of Practice for responding to family violence incidents. Police must record the incident by undertaking a family violence risk assessment, take appropriate action which may include removing the perpetrator and seeking an interim intervention order, and provide either referral information or an actual referral for support to both the victim and perpetrator.

Court reforms have included the establishment of two demonstration courts and four specialist courts where magistrates, registrars and other court staff have undergone specific training in responding to family violence. Applicant support workers and outreach workers provide support to the applicants. Defendant support workers and court directed men's behaviour change programs are also available in the demonstration courts.

As part of the whole-of-government response, Victoria is diversifying its approach to providing housing and support, moving beyond the secure refuge model. We are developing more housing choices for women and children, including the option of remaining in the family home with extra support when it is safe to do so. Alternative emergency accommodation is provided for men if this will help women and children to remain in the family home.

These housing responses are complemented by improved men's behaviour change programs, more counselling for women and children, and stronger linkages between support services, police responses and legal processes through the courts. Assessment and data collection continue to provide additional information on the level of risk experienced by women and children and whether women require a more intensive case management response.

This suite of services offer women and children choices to take action against family violence, remain in the family home when it is safe to do so, make men more accountable for the violence and provide a coordinated response between police, courts and support services.

The Victorian 10 Year Plan to address Indigenous Family Violence incorporates a range of service responses required including access to education and promotion of Indigenous history and culture in schools, support for children and families, healing services for Indigenous men and increased support for Indigenous women and children experiencing family violence linked to the newly established healing and time out centres.

Key characteristics underpinning success in the Integrated Family Violence Response and informing future joined up approaches are:

- strong leadership from all areas at a senior level
- unity of purpose
- appropriate resourcing
- strong governance arrangements
- effective data sharing to build communication and better responses
- diversity of responses to tackle a range of issues and target groups.

5. A fourth option within a national framework

The Green Paper describes three options for reform. Victoria believes that there is value in parts of all three options proposed, however, to guide effective, enduring reform any option needs to sit within the context of a strategic national policy framework to reduce homelessness. Victoria believes there is merit in a fourth option.

5.1.1. Overview

Victoria supports the development of a collaborative, national policy framework to address homelessness that 'espouses the rights of all Australians not to be homeless'.⁶ The Australian Government's commitment to reduce homelessness aligns with their agenda that 'aims to launch a new era of governance to mainstream the task of building social inclusion so that all Australians can share in our nation's prosperity.'⁷

The concept of social inclusion has underpinned the social policy agenda in *A Fairer Victoria*, and Victoria supports the suggestion in the SAAP IV evaluation that 'social inclusion' can act as a new paradigm for approaching homelessness, which stated:

*'A social inclusion platform shifts the conceptualisation of homelessness from a residual, welfare framework to a mainstream issue for service systems and the community, and empowers and legitimates a high-level, cross-agency and cross-sector focus. By strengthening the link between economic policy and social policy in addressing homelessness, the emphasis is shifted from crisis intervention to also take in prevention and early intervention strategies.'*⁸

Developing solutions to homelessness is a shared responsibility across the community. Achieving more for people who are homeless relies heavily on a community that is well-engaged and accepting of the issue of homelessness, encouraging social participation and citizenship. These align with the policy of social inclusion.

The Victorian Government would urge the Australian Government to actively engage with those people who will be assisted through the new approaches to homelessness, to ensure that these approaches are reflective of the needs and rights of the client group.

5.1.2 Goal

All Australians have access to affordable, safe and sustainable housing and support that contributes to their social and economic participation.

5.1.3 Imperatives

There are four imperatives that must drive our approach to addressing homelessness:

Leadership: An agreed and shared vision for change is clearly articulated. This should be evidenced across the three tiers of government.

Commitment: A strong commitment to reducing homelessness is visible, reinforcing this as a national priority with accountability for key actions clearly assigned. It is important that this commitment transcends individuals and builds into an ongoing national priority sustained over political cycles and the years. This could be formalised in legislation or policy statements.

Responsibility: Builds an increased understanding of the causes of homelessness and the part that governments, business, the community sector and the broader community play in addressing homelessness - this covers all areas of government policy and service delivery. All parties accept responsibility for their role and contribution with active endeavour to realise improvement.

Partnership: Approaches reinforce a collaborative approach to addressing homelessness to provide better outcomes for those affected by it. Partnerships are formed: across government in delivering responses to homeless people; and through new initiatives that invite both the corporate and philanthropic sectors to participate. Further, new directions include increased involvement of local government and the community more broadly.

5.1.4. Objectives

To provide more timely and effective responses to people who are at risk of homelessness through an increased focus on prevention and early intervention.

To deliver responses that are centred on and tailored to an individual's needs, to provide a pathway out of homelessness.

To build an improved understanding and responsibility for addressing homelessness across governments, business, the not for profit sector, and the community that facilitates the engagement of people who are homeless in their community.

To develop a strong and sustainable homelessness sector that responds well to an individual's needs providing high quality services.

5.1.5. Strategies for reform – A Fourth Option

This section outlines key strategies, with supporting strategies further detailed.

The Victorian Government believes prevention and early intervention approaches to homelessness are essential to achieving the intent of the Australian Government's reform. In the pursuit of a prevention and early intervention focus however, it needs to be acknowledged that responsibility for delivering a prevention approach predominantly sits outside the parameters of the homelessness service system.

It is recognised that through the Council of Australian Governments' reform agenda, social inclusion has been made a priority for consideration in all new SPPS. It is important that the SPPs for health, early childhood and schools, vocational education and training, and disability services acknowledge the role these services can play in the prevention and early intervention of homelessness. An explicit goal identified in these SPPs regarding the importance of sustaining housing as a prevention and early intervention measure to protect against housing insecurity, could be pursued. This requirement will also facilitate improved support outcomes for individuals.

Victoria would stress however, that any additional investment to these agreements to achieve this, should not be at the expense of the Housing SPP.

Building on the above, Option 4 would have the following themes:

Theme 1: Develop new capacity for mainstream government programs to identify and divert potential homeless clients through prevention and early intervention

- Strengthening the capacity of mainstream and universal services to prevent homelessness is essential. This preventative focus consists of a number of elements that are targeted at a population wide basis, through to programs to assist specific groups with a propensity to homelessness.
- Firstly, it should start with building an increased understanding and awareness by all mainstream services about the causes and drivers of homelessness and the role they can play in preventing homelessness on a population wide basis. Strategies that would fall under this include those to improve the health and well-being of communities and populations including community building strategies or initiatives such as Victoria's Best Start, strategies to increase the retention rate for young people finishing year 12, through to public health campaigns such as advocating the importance of mental health awareness.
- Mainstream services also need to be aware of how their structures, program barriers and policies can precipitate vulnerable people into homelessness. For example, someone who has been admitted to hospital with a psychotic episode requires a more holistic assessment beyond their mental health issues, to ensure that on their exit from care, they have access to safe and secure accommodation, along with other necessary supports. This may be through family or being linked into the local GP so that if such an episode were to occur

again, they would have the appropriate supports in place and would not spiral into an unstable situation such as homelessness.

- Also within this sphere is the role that services need to play in preventing homelessness for those groups who have a higher propensity to become homeless. This includes people exiting prison, youth justice, young people leaving care, people exiting from clinical settings such as secure mental health facilities or drug and alcohol treatment settings. For example, supports provided to young people in care should include appropriate life skills such as cooking, cleaning and budgeting, and appropriate plans should be put in place well before their guardianship order ceases to facilitate an effective transition. In addition to supports provided whilst in care, there is also a need for support post care. Across Australia young people leave care at the age of eighteen (at the latest). Their youth, combined with their experiences of abuse and neglect and the absence of the type of family supports most young people can rely on, makes their transition to 'independence' particularly challenging. Such support is essential in ensuring they are able to sustain tenancies and deal with issues as they arise. Homelessness agencies may play a role in providing these 'SAAP-like' supports. This approach has been instituted in Victoria through joined up initiatives such as the mental health pathways program amongst many others.
- Programs with a preventative role sit across the Commonwealth and State agencies and include: affordable housing; health and community services including mental health and drug & alcohol; disability services; justice; employment; education and training; and income support.

Theme 2: Continue reform of SAAP, increasing capacity and diversity of service responses to get better results

- It is essential that a specific homelessness response is maintained and enhanced. A more responsive and sustainable homeless system should be able to provide a diverse range of responses of different intensity and duration. This homelessness response would include a function of intervening early in situations where people become homeless and only require support that is time-limited to achieve stability and access to sustainable housing. Increased affordable housing has a crucial role in providing exit points from homelessness, as well being able to prevent a return to homelessness.
- However, the capacity of the homelessness sector to provide specialist responses to those client groups who require more intensive and prolonged support should also be strengthened. This sector should be able to assist those groups such as young people leaving care or those exiting prison, along with others accessing the system for whom a mainstream response has not been adequate to achieve long-term stability. It is clear that mainstream responses are ineffective for some people, who require highly targeted efforts delivered by staff with specialist skills and knowledge in the area of homelessness. Within this system, there also needs to be the scale and diversity of services to enable specialist service responses to young people, Indigenous people, women escaping family and domestic violence and those with multiple and complex needs.
- To support those clients who require more intensive supports, this sector should have the capacity to broker in appropriate 'specialist' responses such as clinical supports, life skills, education, employment and training programs and family reconciliation or counselling services which can assist the needs of the client more holistically. Enhancing the capacity of the homeless sector to be the central, case management point who performs 'traditional SAAP' roles such as stabilising the client and providing support, along with flexible funding to buy in appropriate supports for individual clients can cut down on the disconnection clients feel with multiple caseworkers only working on one specific need. This

approach recognises the relative strengths of mainstream and specialist services.

Theme 3: Improve linkages between specialist homelessness programs and programs targeted to at risk groups to enhance interventions, mainstreaming pilots in this area.

- To enable the enhanced homelessness system to broker in the range of assistance homeless clients might need, it is essential that there is improved linkages between Commonwealth and State programs that focus on higher 'at risk' or recurring homeless populations. This includes programs such as Jobs Placement Employment and Training program, Community Connections, Personal Support Programme, and Reconnect along with more clinical supports such as mental health and drug and alcohol services. These programs should be more flexible and responsive, working closely with homelessness agencies and not being bound by unnecessary program boundaries or guidelines. Enabling homelessness agencies to broker in support as necessary will mean that all the individual's needs will be at the forefront rather than just the one that a particular service can address.
- These kinds of supports could be provided by a range of services who may also deliver homelessness responses. It is important that the client is not forced to move unnecessarily through multiple systems with different criteria to access the range of supports they need. It would be expected that by consolidating and integrating these kinds of programs, that those groups requiring targeted prevention as identified under theme 1 (for example, people leaving justice settings), would also be able to access these kinds of programs, again acting as a preventative measure. It needs to be acknowledged that primary responsibility for these kind of supports sits with other service sectors, and not necessarily with the homelessness system.

The strategies that follow provide more detail on the themes of the fourth option and identify areas where reform could occur to support these directions.

In doing so, this section also highlights some of the key challenges we face in addressing homelessness and provides some suggested actions to improve our responses.

Prevention and Early Intervention (Themes 1 & 3)

The Green Paper foreshadows a focus on prevention and early intervention as key mechanisms to reduce homelessness across Australia. While this is featured strongly in parts of the options proposed in the Green Paper, Victoria considers that it cuts across and shapes other possible strategies. For example, the provision of housing can be seen as a preventative approach to avoid homelessness, an early intervention through organised responses on exit from institutional care or a tertiary response through crisis accommodation.

A useful paradigm on the prevention of, and early intervention in homelessness has been proposed in New Zealand through a public health approach that notes 'there is no doubt homelessness is bad for your health. This is the basis stimulus for public health concern'⁹. It suggests the following approach:

- Primary prevention aims to stop people becoming homeless and involves two complementary strategies:
 1. Population based: seeking to address the structural forces that generate homelessness: this means building healthy public policy based on human and Indigenous rights with the aim of mitigating social disadvantage. It requires integration across many sectors including housing, employment,

income support, justice, health and education. Population-wide responses to mental illness and addiction, and the reduction of family violence need special attention. Strategies to development community awareness and understanding of homelessness and its causes are also vital for creating supportive, inclusive communities that will aid efforts to prevent homelessness at primary, secondary and tertiary levels.

2. High-risk individual strategies targeting those groups and individuals known to be most at risk of homelessness: youth, family breakdown (particularly due to domestic violence), unstable social and private rental tenancies due to issues such as eviction for rent arrears, people exiting public systems such as prisons, hospitals, protection, mental health and disability care facilities.

- Secondary prevention: is early intervention. This means providing prompt and permanent exits for homelessness – the key to a successful exit is access to appropriate, affordable accommodation with adequate support. For some, the timely provision of affordable housing will be enough to resolve their accommodation problems and prevent homelessness; for others more support will be necessary.
- Tertiary prevention: is aimed at minimising suffering and maximising quality of life. It can refer to measures to support those who are currently homeless such as temporary accommodation, food and medical care.¹⁰

In conceptualising what and which levels of government could take responsibility for, or facilitate the prevention of homelessness, the Victorian Government suggests the following as a guide:

	<i>Affordable housing provision</i>	<i>Health & Community Services</i>	<i>Justice</i>	<i>Education & Training</i>	<i>Employment & related support structures (e.g. Job networks)</i>	<i>Income support</i>
<i>Commonwealth</i>	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓
<i>State</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓		
<i>Local</i>	✓	✓				

The role of universal and mainstream programs such as schools or community health centres in preventing and intervening early on homelessness and its impacts must be emphasised and their capacity around this function strengthened.

Health, Community Services and Justice

The Green Paper acknowledges that homeless people tend to have poorer health than the general population and that the 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.¹¹

We also know that many people who are homeless have alcohol and drug and/or mental health issues. Research undertaken in Melbourne found, however, that the experience of homelessness can lead to these conditions occurring. For a sample group of over 5000 cases:

- 43% of the sample had problems with substance use. However 66% of these had developed the problems after they were homeless.
- 30% had mental health issues. However 53 per cent of these had developed mental health problems after they became homeless.¹²

In considering the above it is clear that the incidence of homelessness has significant and on-going cost impacts (incurred over both the short and long term) on individuals and the health system. Where possible, preventative measures and targeted early intervention programs specifically developed and oriented towards chronic disease risk factors and chronic diseases amongst homeless people should be provided. This is necessary so that vulnerable people get the health assistance they require in a community setting, rather than later on through the more expensive tertiary settings.

In response, Commonwealth programs such as the Innovative Health Services for Homeless Youth (IHSY) and specialist programs, for example Royal District Nursing Service Homeless Person's Program and Victoria's Royal Children's Hospital Young Peoples' Health Service, operating via both clinic ('drop-in') and outreach models are worthy of support and expansion. Such initiatives that are co-located, coordinated and integrated with recognised homeless support services, offering access to a full range of allied health services (such as primary medical, dental, psychosocial care) are vital.

The Australian Government could consider reforms to Medicare which makes it attractive for General Practitioners to provide holistic and linked responses within a primary or community health setting. For example, consideration of an appropriate Medicare item, enabling medical and/or allied health (i.e. nursing) support for those experiencing homelessness via both preventive (i.e. immunisation, screening), restorative and comprehensive primary care. This item could replicate Medicare items designed to support other recognised and marginalised groups such as Refugees, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders and people with mental health issues.

Improving access to mental health, and drug and alcohol services are also important with specially tailored responses to people who are homeless, such as the supportive housing model.

Family Breakdown

Family breakdown is a predominant factor in many young people becoming homeless. Prevention and early intervention to better support families would also have merit in addressing this area of increasing demand.

Justice

Prisoners exiting from justice settings and offenders form a specific target group within the homeless population. The Australian Institute of Criminology found that 'overall...homeless people who come into contact with the criminal justice system have a complex set of risks and needs, many of which might underlie their current criminal offending patterns as well as their future propensity to re-offend.'¹³ In this way, the risk of homelessness is inextricably linked to the risk of re-offending and therefore has key impacts on community safety and confidence and financial costs that arise from the cycle of re-offending and homelessness.

Supporting people to transition from care

'Australia's children: safe and well – a national framework for protecting Australia's children' released by the Australian Government in May 2008 has rightly identified the need for enhanced support for this vulnerable population.¹⁴ The National Youth Commission reported that 42 per cent of young adults and other adults in SAAP had been in State Care and Protection programs when they were young.¹⁵ Effective and early planning to support people at key transition points (e.g. leaving state care, mental health, drug and alcohol or other health facilities) is clearly a pivotal factor in preventing homelessness.

Potential areas for reform – Prevention and Early Intervention

Strengthening the capacity of mainstream services, such as primary health settings to assist people who are vulnerable.

Targeted health programs to those at risk, e.g. those residing in rooming houses.

Improving access to mental health and drug and alcohol programs for at risk individuals.

Encouraging child and family services to work closely with families to support children who are experiencing homelessness.

Increased support to families/parents/guardians/kinship support.

Ensuring that Australian Government services such as Centrelink are accessible to, and sensitive of the needs of this vulnerable population.

Enhancing supports to young care leavers making the transition to independence.

Supporting families and schools to assist vulnerable young people to remain at school.

Expanded early intervention initiatives could focus on Health, Protection & Care, Mental Health and Drug and Alcohol facilities. Planning appropriate pathways in the transition from care is a key area where prevention and early intervention can minimise homelessness and other issues.

Assisting people exiting from justice settings to access safe, appropriate housing coupled with support can reduce the risk of homelessness and recidivism.

Increased supply of affordable housing (Themes 1, 2 & 3)

Homelessness is intrinsically linked to a lack of affordable housing. There is a significant shortage of housing across many metropolitan, regional and remote areas in Australia which is having significant flow-on effects for low-income and vulnerable people. A shortage of housing is pushing house prices and rents up. More people are remaining in the private rental market as they cannot afford to buy their own home. These people are competing with lower-income people for available rental properties.

As a consequence, people on low incomes, or people without good rental histories are often struggling to find an affordable home and are experiencing significant housing stress. They are forced to pay a substantial proportion of their income on housing or move away from jobs, transport and services to access more affordable accommodation. For example, in Victoria in 2005-06 some 78,000 households in the private rental market were paying more than 30 per cent of their income in rent.¹⁶

In the worst cases, people are becoming homeless. Many young people who are in employment or education are finding it difficult to access the private rental market, and it is acknowledged that affordable home ownership is beyond the reach of this cohort.

With limited options people are moving to rooming houses and caravan parks. In many cases this accommodation is of a poor standard and may be inappropriate for those people, many who are vulnerable and have a number of complex issues and needs. The absence of appropriate housing can propel people further into

homelessness and accelerate mental health, substance abuse and other issues. International students are also increasingly accessing low-cost and at times inappropriate housing, for example, through sub-lets. In addressing the supply of affordable housing, it is vital that the Australian Government, who has responsibility for these students works with State and Territory Government to ensure appropriate protection and responses to them.

It is acknowledged that the Australian Government's election commitments around housing affordability – such as the National Rental Affordability Scheme (NRAS) and A Place to Call Home will begin to address supply, however, these are not immediate solutions and are also not likely to meet the predicted demand for housing into the future.

Potential areas for reform – Increased supply of affordable housing

Increased investment in the supply of affordable, well located housing is essential. Accommodation needs to recognise the diversity of need and provide a standard that supports a person's health and wellbeing. It is also essential that stock can respond to all household types, from single people to large families.

Continuing efforts to assign priority allocation of people who are homeless to public/social housing.

Other mechanisms could include financial assistance to meet rent in advance or rent in arrears, private rental brokerage, bond assistance, or flexible funds to provide for additional expenses experienced when re-establishing the family in private rental following family violence or family breakdown.

Improved targeting of Commonwealth Rent Assistance could also be pursued and the Australian Government may wish to consider expanding or increasing its allocation to the most vulnerable groups in the community.

Ensure adequate support is linked to affordable housing for specific cohorts of homeless people where required, such as young people.

Adequate income support (Theme 1)

There are significant issues associated with the existing income support system in Australia and its adverse impact on homelessness. The current income support system can perpetuate problems of long-term homelessness by offering sporadic, uncoordinated and short-term fixes. In particular, youth allowance payments and unemployment benefits for single people are insufficient to cover increasing living costs. The structure of Centrelink payments needs to be considered, given they are far less generous for single beneficiaries without children. In 2006, just 9 per cent of Centrelink Commonwealth Rent Assistance recipients who were couples with children were in housing stress, compared to 35 per cent of youth and singles recipients.¹⁷

Pressure is also placed on the homelessness system to provide accommodation and support to people who are ineligible to access entitlements, such as asylum seekers and New Zealanders in the first two years of residing in Australia.

It is also recognised that the current application of Commonwealth income support policy may not appropriately take into account the real risk of homelessness for vulnerable people when their Centrelink benefits are suspended. Insufficient linkages between Centrelink, housing providers and support services is also contributing to the risk that vulnerable people will lose their tenancies when they breach Centrelink rules.

Potential areas for reform – Income Support

Review youth allowance and benefits for singles, with a focus on eligibility and the level of income support.

Review breaching and compliance policies for marginalised and disadvantaged members of the community.

Review income support eligibility to New Zealanders and groups such as asylum seekers and provide appropriate support and access to accommodation.

Commonwealth legislative change to enable direct debit for rental payments, for those receiving Centrelink benefits.

Employment, education & training (Themes 1 & 3)

The relationship between stable housing and successfully accessing employment, education or training programs has been identified by service providers and acknowledged by government agencies. The relationship is complex and requires a differentiated response for each homeless person.

Victoria notes that the Australian Government is reforming the employment assistance system. It is critical that these reforms support increased access to education, employment and training for people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness.

Creating Connections, the Victorian Government's blueprint for a reformed homelessness service response to young people, recognises that many homeless young people are not engaged in formal education, employment and training. Particular barriers young homeless people face in this area include a lack of resources and income to pay for study and employment costs, multiple pathways to education, employment and training opportunities and that some schools may find it difficult to work with marginalised young people without increased capacity. The strategy contains a multi-pronged approach to engage young people in study, training and work.

The National Youth Commission Inquiry also found that 'school based responses for recently homeless young people, such as the Reconnect program and other related early intervention support activities have been effective in reducing homelessness.'¹⁸

Potential areas for reform – Education, Employment and Training

In recognising the role that schools can play in both preventing and intervening early in homelessness for young people, in Victoria the School Focused Youth Services program provides an innovative model that could be mainstreamed across Australia. SYFS funds workers across Victoria to facilitate coordinated service delivery between schools and community agencies.¹⁹

An expansion of additional programs with brokerage funds to facilitate young people's access to education, employment and training opportunities.

The capacity of TAFE and other training settings to engage with people who have been homeless should be enhanced.

Through the reform of Job Networks, the Australian Government should consider moving from a compliance response to one of engagement to encourage participation by disadvantaged and marginalised people in employment and training opportunities. Agencies with explicit experience in delivering services to vulnerable client cohorts should be encouraged to deliver aspects of employment support programs.

Commonwealth programs such as Job Placement, Employment & Training (JPET) program and the Personal Support Program (PSP) place an emphasis on pre-vocational and advocacy issues as a first step towards achieving employment outcomes.

Social enterprise and mainstream employment opportunities are identified for homeless people who are ready to access these.

Working with individuals and families, to tailor responses to their needs (Themes 2 & 3)

Victorian experience demonstrates diversity in client need which requires different approaches across age and complexity. For example, young people, people with a disability, older people and those from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds may all require different responses to assist them out of homelessness. Providing support to people escaping family violence is also a key priority.

Program guidelines, parameters and systems can often constrain responses to a generic response that may ultimately prove to be inefficient.

Potential areas for reform – working with individuals and families to tailor responses to their needs

Fundamental reform is needed to place the persons' needs at the centre of the response with assistance specifically tailored to address those needs. This would assist to enable increased flexibility in responses, driving a freedom to consider responses of differing intensity, duration and scale.

Consider the holistic needs of the individual and facilitate how these responses could be met by a variety of mainstream and specialist service responses, forming a vehicle for improved partnerships. This approach could be implemented through moving to individualised funding. Victoria believes that this approach could work well for people who are homeless and is worthy of a trial to assess its effectiveness.

Within this context of the range of individual and family needs there are some major issues relating to client groupings that need to be considered:

Improved responses to family violence

Building on the response outlined in Section 4, integrated family violence reform should be guided by the premise that responding to family violence needs to ensure the safety of women and children and make the men (perpetrators) accountable for their behaviour. In that context we need a continuum of whole-of-government responses from prevention, police, and court responses and support that ensures safety and accountability.

Potential areas for reform – Improved responses to family violence

A specific focus on family violence within the Police and Courts, linked to service responses and referral pathways.

A range of accommodation and support options from women's refuge outreach support, support to remain in the family home and support to access community housing and private rental.

Responses that provide accommodation and support options for perpetrators so that women and children remain safely in the home.

Expansion of responses to assist women and children access counselling services and additional men's behaviour change programs.

Enhanced responses that assist CALD women, Indigenous women and women with a disability experiencing family violence.

Specific responses and capacity building for the mainstream services to respond to Indigenous family violence.

Review of the Family Law Court response and the requirement for the provision of mediation where family violence is present.

Complex Clients

Housing and homelessness services in Australia are increasingly accommodating people with multiple and complex needs (people who are not only low-income, but present with other issues, including disability, mental illness, substance abuse, behavioural problems, people leaving prison etc.). For people with complex needs, the capacity to sustain long-term independence and housing requires more than just a roof over their head, it also requires access to appropriate support services. Clients with multiple and complex needs require a tailored service response that may involve a more intensive, longer term support service to prevent future crises developing into homelessness, including tenancy support.

With access to appropriate housing and long-term support to maintain this, the costs to government, the community and the person with complex needs can also be lessened. A study undertaken by the Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute (AHURI) in 2003, found there was a direct association between lack of access to adequate accommodation and support, and recidivism. In particular, one of the highest predictive factors of the likelihood of re-offending was the number of times an offender moved.²⁰

In Victoria, the Multiple and Complex Needs Initiative (MACNI) has been implemented in partnership between the Department of Human Services and the Department of Justice to provide specialist interventions to those people who meet legislated criteria. These people are in need of intensive supervision and support and would derive benefit from receiving coordinated services in accordance with a care plan under the *Human Services (Complex Needs) Act 2004* that may include welfare services, health services, mental health services, disability services, drug and alcohol treatment services or housing and support services.

Potential areas for reform – Complex Clients

To achieve better outcomes for people with complex needs, it is important that they are supported to develop and maintain links in one community, rather than moving multiple times which can exacerbate their feelings of isolation and disconnection from the community. Underpinning this, it is essential that housing is provided to complex clients in conjunction with support to assist them to sustain and maintain the tenancy.

Access to dedicated accommodation with flexible, ongoing support is critical for this client group.

Client assessment needs to canvass a broad range of issues.

Young people

Young People between 15 and 25 years of age make up the largest group assisted by the homeless service sector in Victoria. Homeless young people are a diverse cross-section of young people who face severe structural and personal disadvantage, such as poverty, poor access to health care, absence of a home environment and connection to community, little participation in education, and marginal employment prospects.

To successfully move on from homelessness, all young people need to have achieved a level of personal development and independent living skills to live safely and confidently. With timely and appropriate support and affordable accommodation, young people experiencing homelessness can avoid the possibility of ongoing cycles of economic and social disadvantage, and successfully transition to adulthood as secure and productive members of the community.

One way in which to better understand young people's experience of homelessness is to adopt a 'pathways' approach. Examining the 'pathways' into and out of homelessness, in order to understand the triggers and effects of homelessness, can illuminate the long term effectiveness or otherwise of practice interventions. Pathways approaches also shed light on the interaction between structural, personal and family factors in people's individual journeys into and through homelessness.

Using a pathways approach, *Project i* longitudinal research of homeless young people in SAAP services (partly funded by the Victorian Government) identified four distinct cohorts (of young people) which are assisting in the development of appropriate responses for this specific group.²¹ They are:

- Street based group – unstable homeless
- Service based group – stable homeless
- Part-time family home group – unstable home and
- Family home private rental group – stable home

Potential areas for reform - Improved responses for these young people

Strengthen the early intervention focus in homelessness service responses through improved connection to family, significant others and the community.

Provide tailored accommodation and housing support options for individual homeless young people, including the development of innovative support and housing models.

Improve access to complementary primary and specialist health services for homeless young people.

Enhance the capacity of youth homelessness and mainstream services to respond to the specific needs of homeless young people.

Responses for accompanying children and unaccompanied young people under 15

Evidence clearly articulates that early intervention approaches developed to proactively respond to the needs of children and families can significantly increase the likelihood of them overcoming personal and systems barriers to reaching their full potential. This ultimately leads to a decreased dependence on the welfare system in the future, benefiting society as a whole.

Potential areas for reform – accompanying children and unaccompanied young people under 15

A model of service delivery that provides children and families with an innovative and tailored response embedded with the principles of early intervention is required. The model also needs to effectively address the existing barriers to service system improvement by providing key opportunities for workers and service providers to integrate family oriented case management practices into their work place culture.

The model would consist of three integrated streams:

- Stream One: Assessment and case planning support
- Stream Two: Enhanced case management
- Stream Three: Therapeutic Group Work

Investment in support programs that assist children and strengthen families in a timely and effective manner are recommended.

Further programs are required to assist those young people who are unable to remain in the family home. Public housing is not always an appropriate option for young people. Vulnerable, young public housing tenants may require additional support in order to sustain tenancies.

Indigenous homelessness

The Victorian Indigenous population of approximately 30,800 people represents 0.5 per cent of the total Victorian community. In 2005-06, Indigenous people accessing SAAP services were 4.4 per cent of the total or ten times the percentage of the Victorian Indigenous population.²² Indigenous people are disproportionately represented in the Victorian homelessness service system. While a fewer number of the Victorian Indigenous population are located in remote areas they still face many of the obstacles to employment, education, health and other social interactions as other Indigenous populations.

It is crucial that there is a strategic approach to Indigenous housing and homelessness in urban and regional areas, especially given that 76 per cent of Indigenous people live in urban areas nationwide. Victoria's Indigenous population is thinly spread geographically across the State, not unlike in the Northern Territory and Queensland. Therefore, like these jurisdictions, Victoria requires ongoing and adequate investment for Indigenous-specific homelessness services in the State's regional locations, particularly where the Indigenous population is small. Further, there is no Indigenous-specific housing in Victoria that is classed as rural and remote according to the Commonwealth Government's rating system. However, there are a number of communities that are remote by Victorian standards which are in need of continued financial support.

More Indigenous housing in remote and discrete areas, on its own, will not address the underlying cause of poverty, homelessness and social exclusion among Indigenous people.

Victoria's response has been to both strengthen capacity of Indigenous managed services as well as ensure mainstream services provide culturally accessible assistance. Work has been undertaken to mentor and link Indigenous organisations with mainstream services to strengthen the service system and capacity for Indigenous organisations.

Responses for Indigenous people in Victoria incorporate existing SAAP services including family violence responses, the Indigenous Tenancies at risk program supporting Indigenous people to stabilise their living arrangements in all forms of

social housing and funding for the Indigenous Network responses. Other initiatives include the Sunraysia Indigenous Private Rental Project. This project is designed to maximise access to the private rental market and promote sustainable tenancies among the Indigenous community within the Sunraysia area, through community education and capacity building.

In addition, Aboriginal Housing Victoria (AHV) manages over 260 properties and is working towards independent registration. AHV is progressing the transfer of a further 750 public housing Indigenous tenants to their management.

Potential areas for reform - Indigenous homelessness

Further investment to increase the supply of affordable Indigenous housing in urban and regional areas is vital to increasing the level of Indigenous employment.

Further strengthening the capacity of mainstream services to provide culturally appropriate responses, strengthening and accrediting the Indigenous organisations and encouraging collaborative working partnerships between mainstream and Indigenous organisations.

Development of refuges for Indigenous women experiencing family violence that is sensitive to their cultural needs.

Older People

Australia has an ageing population which is going to impact across the spectrum, through areas such as increased demand on the healthcare system and declining levels of workforce participation. As people age, they can experience disruption in their lives such as the death of a partner, or experiencing ill-health and having low-levels of income support. All these circumstances can contribute to difficulty in them accessing or sustaining appropriate accommodation.

In considering the needs of older people who are homeless, or at risk of homelessness it is essential that responses that address both their accommodation and support needs, as well as their aged care needs are provided. In Victoria, the programs below have been introduced to support people at risk of homelessness, or those who are homeless. These are:

- Older Persons Hi Rise Support Program which provides onsite support to tenants of 11 older persons' high rise towers in inner Melbourne.
- Community Connections program which uses an assertive outreach model to assist people who are homeless or living in insecure or low cost accommodation to gain access to services and find suitable accommodation where needed.
- Housing Support for the Aged program which supports people 50 years and over with complex needs and a history of homelessness to maintain public housing and improve their health and wellbeing.

Another innovative model that assists elderly homeless men and women operates through Wintringham. Wintringham is a highly specialised non-government organisation that provides housing and care to elderly, frail homeless men and women. Wintringham is quite different from most other aged care providers in that they view themselves as essentially being housing providers into which we provide quality and appropriate aged care services.

Potential areas for reform – Older People

Strengthening the capacity of health and aged care services such as HACC to engage with older, vulnerable people who have a history of homelessness.

Expanding locally-based responses to ensure that older people are able to engage with services and be connected to their community.

Supporting at risk tenancies – investing to prevent a return to homelessness (Themes 1 & 3)

Within Victoria, as in other States and Territories, in the past five years or so there has been an increasing emphasis on both supporting people who have a potential risk of housing breakdown to sustain their current housing, as well as on better supporting people who have been homeless and are moving into long term housing. A key driver of these approaches is that as a result of targeting to social housing in Victoria to those in greatest housing need (70 per cent of all annual allocations), the social housing system is now housing some of the most disadvantaged people in Victoria, many of whom were previously housed in institutional settings or are young and homeless and/or who have significant support needs. A similar pattern is evident for people with a range of complex needs who are living in boarding and rooming houses, as well as the more affordable parts of the private rental market.

In these situations, sustaining housing is highly problematic. Without appropriate support the potential to return to homelessness is high. Concerted effort is required to sustain these tenancies, requiring the provision of support beyond the allocation of housing. Given the propensity for instability in these tenancies, providing longer-term support makes economic and social sense.

Potential areas for reform - Sustaining tenancies

Better structuring of tenancy management and related services to address the increasing complexity of support needs of tenants, and the consequential risk of tenancy breakdown.

Increased tenancy support from community based organisations that can both assist tenants with linkage to their local communities and in resolving potential crisis, but also facilitate tenants' access to mainstream services. Victorian models include:

- The Social Housing Advocacy Support Program that both assists tenants in establishing their tenancies and can intervene when tenancies are failing.
- The Indigenous Tenancy at Risk response, which provides a case managed more holistic approach.
- The High Risk tenancies initiative providing both coordination of services, through Department of Human Services regional offices, and brokerage funds to address the needs of tenants across a range of program areas.

5.1.6. Enablers (Themes 1, 2 & 3)

Victoria believes that there are a number of key areas that are fundamental to maximising reform efforts. These enablers will support the achievement of the objectives and strategies identified above and include:

- Data and information
- Research
- Industry Development
- Funding

Data and information

Building a strong base of data and information will support an improved understanding of an individual's needs to enable responses to more comprehensively address these needs. The development of holistic responses requires the sharing of this information across program boundaries that are respectful of, but not stifled by privacy provisions.

Potential areas for reform – Data and information

The development of agreed data standards and definitions that can be consistently applied across program areas; client assessments that scope a broader consideration of a person's circumstances and needs; protocols that support information sharing across service systems; implementation of a Common Statistical Linkage Key across programs, improved IT systems and capabilities to enable better recording and management of information.

Research

While there have been some major and significant studies in Australia into the causes, effects and impacts of homelessness, Australia lacks a national coordinating body dedicated to this work. Robust research is critical to better understanding what works and what does not work to inform policy and service responses and resource allocation.

Potential areas for reform - Research

Dedicated investment in homelessness research coordinated at a national level; a focus on longitudinal studies and measuring the cost and benefit impacts of homelessness responses; fostering research capabilities of the not for profit sector, research and academic institutions in homelessness research.

Industry Development

There is a need to retain, reform and build the capacity of a specialist homelessness system as there are some people who will need intensive and focussed support that mainstream systems cannot offer. The specialist system can also provide improved support to the mainstream system, through the provision of expertise and advice, better connections with mainstream services and specialist responses. These are important roles for a strengthened specialist response.

A person who is homeless in many cases has a variety of needs requiring responses from a range of support services be they generalist or specialist services. For a person who is in crisis, navigating their way through these services may be insurmountable. The location and coverage of these services may also not reach to all parts of the state and may not be well aligned with demand, making access difficult, time consuming and sometimes impossible.

In an environment of increasing demand; increasing complexity of clients; continued pressures to drive and increase efficiency in service provision; and an increasing competition for a skilled workforce, the viability of service agencies is being placed under pressure.

The implementation of Opening Doors will address many of these issues. Key features of the Opening Doors model are:

- Homelessness services formed into **Local Area Service Networks** responsible for local application of the Opening Doors framework.
- **Visible entry points** staffed by **initial assessment teams** who are backed up by formally agreed protocols and procedures.
- **Consistent, high quality practice** that reduces multiple assessments and unsuccessful referrals, freeing up time to work with more people or with people for longer.
- **Interim Response – a strategy for service continuity** to eliminate 'run-around'.
- **Tools** to support service coordination and practice.

In Victoria, Opening Doors will draw together agencies to share expertise and build more holistic responses to people who are homeless. Opening Doors will have the capacity to work in partnership with other agencies, for example, drug and alcohol and mental health and in time can link into Primary Care Partnerships. These networks will make the connections across agencies more seamless for the individual and provide improved responses that have been informed by a broader base of expertise. They will also facilitate greater coverage of resources across the state and offer increased opportunities to deploy pooled funding across a local area network.

Victoria believes that the development of local area based responses have merit in the utilisation of local resources and knowledge to drive solutions. This has been demonstrated through the Neighbourhood Renewal Strategy in Victoria. Using local area planning approaches may also encourage greater community engagement and the deployment of a broader range of services that can assist people in need.

There is still a need to consider other strategies that can support the sustainability of agencies. Accreditation and registration has been introduced in Victoria as a means of strengthening the quality of sector agencies. Consideration could also be given to the development of an industry plan that supports the development of the skills, knowledge and resources to reposition the sector to deliver on the reforms that will emanate from the White Paper. This could also include strategies to supplement and build capacity within mainstream services to better respond to people who are homeless.

Providing high quality service responses requires a professional, robust and sustainable sector employing a qualified and contemporary workforce. The homelessness sector, like other industries, is facing increasing competition for labour, skill shortages, significant demographic changes including an ageing population, and the expectations and values of a new generation of workers. Responding to these challenges requires all organisations; government, for profit and not-for-profit, to create new approaches to recruitment, retention, career development, and learning and professional development including qualification and career pathways.

Worker remuneration remains a significant issue for many not-for-profit organisations, with qualified, experienced staff electing to transfer to other sectors offering better pay and conditions. This fundamental issue continues to be raised by workers, not-for-profits and peak agencies. This is an industrial matter and individual jurisdictions are limited in their capacity to address this issue.

Potential areas for reform – Industry Development

Ensuring that streams within the specialist system that focus on the specific needs of young people, people escaping family violence and Indigenous people are retained and enhanced.

Consideration of local area planning approaches as the basis for service provision.

A coordinated national approach in key areas such as accreditation contributing to a regulated and accountable sector focussed on a systemised approach to high quality service delivery with well developed governance capabilities. A coordinated and shared approach to sector capacity building will enable all jurisdictions to participate in sector development activities that improve outcomes for all clients.

Development of a comprehensive approach to industry planning nationally and at an individual jurisdiction level.

Development of a workforce strategy for the homelessness sector.

Providing appropriate remuneration to the workforce, commensurate with the broad range of skills required to provide support to people who are homeless, at risk of homelessness or escaping family violence.

Funding

The way funds are allocated and managed can reinforce or undermine policy objectives. It will be important for funding to facilitate reform with incentives to pursue improvements and greater flexibility.

Potential areas for reform - Funding

Pooling of funds across program boundaries to achieve multi program benefits, individualised packages that place increased purchasing power with the individual, pooling of funds across a group of providers to promote joint responses and collaboration in a local area.

5.1.7. Accountability

Key performance measures will need to be set to identify targets, assess progress, consider policy and service effectiveness and to facilitate reporting to the community on achievement against intent. Victoria notes that outcome measures will be set as part of the NAHA and will be framed around agreed objectives.

6. Conclusion

Victoria believes that the above themes and strategies and enablers of option four are fundamental to reform. Some elements need to be sustained with ongoing investment; some lend themselves to time limited and early investment. Victoria urges the Australian Government to consider the need to underpin reform with a strong resource infrastructure, together with a well-paced reform timetable.

In moving forward, it is essential that people who are homeless, or have experienced homelessness are encouraged to actively participate in the design and implementation of innovative new responses. This participation would be an exemplar of a Federal Government truly committed to social inclusion.

Victoria is keen to work in collaboration with the Australian Government to progress policy reform on homelessness that is closely linked to the SPP reform process and the development of the NAHA. In seeking to address homelessness, Victoria contends that efforts to address disadvantage, maximise economic participation and promote social inclusion must be at the forefront of any reform, and would encourage the Australian Government's serious consideration of the 'fourth option' proposed in this paper.

Attachment 1 What homelessness looks like in Victoria

A snapshot of people who are homeless

Victoria provides more accommodation for homeless people through our crisis and transitional properties than the rest of Australia, with 25 per cent of homeless Victorians in homelessness accommodation in 2001. The percentage of homeless Victorians sleeping rough was the second lowest in Australia in 2001 at 9 per cent.²³

In the 2001 Australian Bureau of Statistics, 'Counting the Homeless' Census Victorian data showed:

- 23,713 people were recorded as being homeless in Victoria - this is a lower rate of homelessness than most other states and territories in Australia.
- 1,871 (8 per cent) were recorded as living on the streets, cars, squats, tents and other improvised dwellings;
- 8,024 (34 per cent) were recorded as living temporarily with friends or family (i.e. 'couch surfing');
- 5,146 (22 per cent) were recorded as living in homelessness assistance accommodation;
- 5264 (22 per cent) were recorded as living in boarding houses; and
- 3,408 (14 per cent) were recorded living as marginal residents in caravan parks.

Key responses to homelessness services in Victoria

Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP)

SAAP services are provided through 150 agencies that are funded to deliver over 500 programs. SAAP services in Victoria include:

- larger sized crisis facilities for all target groups;
- youth and women's refuge crisis accommodation;
- transitional support including outreach;
- developmental support programs (e.g. living skills program);
- brokerage funding to access private rental; family reconciliation services and education, employment and training opportunities.

SAAP assists over 38,000 Victorians every year. In fact, Victoria provides more support through SAAP than any other state.

Transitional Housing Management (THM) Program

THM services are delivered through 20 agencies that are funded to:

- manage housing stock and tenancies for homeless people (3,500 properties)
- provide housing information and referral services
- administer the Housing Establishment Fund (HEF).

The THM program provides accommodation to over 10,700 people per annum or 4,240 at a point in time. Over 32,500 people per annum are provided with HEF assistance to access emergency accommodation, pay rent in advance or arrears and meet other costs such as essential whitegoods to assist them to access private rental.

Profile of Homelessness Service Users in Victoria

- Young people between the ages of 15 and 24 years comprise the largest single category of clients receiving homelessness support and crisis supported accommodation in Victoria, representing 31 per cent of clients.²⁴
- Victoria has a high representation of females receiving homelessness support and crisis accommodation, at 62 per cent of total clients. The weighting of assistance to females in Victoria is due to the high number of women's refuges and family violence services, with women and children experiencing family violence making up approximately 20 per cent of the SAAP service system user group.²⁵
- Single males comprise approximately 36 per cent of SAAP clients.
- Indigenous Victorians are over-represented as clients of homelessness services, at over 10 times the rate of their number in the general population (they make up 5.4 per cent of SAAP users while only representing 0.5 per cent of the total Victorian population.)
- Children living in homeless families are a large and growing proportion of all people accessing the homelessness service system (with 18,500 accompanying children using SAAP services). The overwhelming majority of these children are aged 12 years or younger, with close to half of all children aged 5 years and under. Many of these children are already in the child protection system.
- Unaccompanied young people and children account for 2,000 SAAP clients nationally. Of these, Victoria had 350, (or 17.5 per cent).

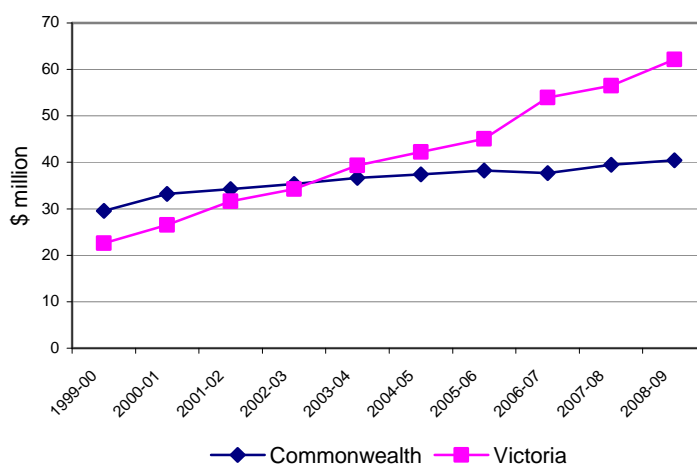
Prioritising homeless people for public housing

In Victoria, people who are homeless or at imminent risk of homelessness get priority access to long term public housing. Approximately 2,800 people enter public housing each year on these grounds and account for over 50 per cent of all new public housing allocations.

Investment in homelessness assistance

Since 1999, Victoria has increased funding for SAAP and SAAP-like services by 150 per cent (from \$22.6m to \$62.1 in 2008-2009). Total homelessness service funding in Victoria (including both Commonwealth and State) has grown from a total of \$52.1 million in 1999-00 to \$102.5 million in 2008-2009. As illustrated in the graph below, increases in homelessness funding are largely attributable to additional State Government investment.

Homelessness service funding in Victoria:
Commonwealth and State funding



State Commitment to Meet the Gap in Reduced Core SAAP Funding

Victoria currently receives only 19.6 per cent of Commonwealth SAAP funding, despite having nearly 25 per cent of the population.

Beyond funding provided under SAAP and SAAP-like programs, in 2008-09 the Victorian Government has allocated \$50.6M for other homelessness assistance programs:

- transitional housing – providing around 50 per cent of all transitional housing and crisis accommodation in Australia (continuing the growth of THM funding from \$14.9 million in 1999-00 to over \$35 million in 2008-2009).
- flexible funding to help over 32,000 households access private rental and emergency accommodation every year (with HEF allocations more than doubling since 1999-00); and
- \$6.3m capital grant funding to develop 'UK Foyer' style accommodation linked with onsite support as part of the *Support for Young People that Really Counts* Program.

The 2008-09 State Budget delivered:

- \$3.1m over four years to assist 50 long-term homeless people to achieve stability in accommodation and other aspects of their lives through a \$50m supportive housing facility. On site support services for residents, including case management, clinical services and training/employment support will be provided.
- \$6.75m over four years to implement The Opening Doors initiative. This funding is to build a range of coordinated entry points for assessment and referral into the homelessness service system across Victoria.
- \$9.44m over four years to improve the integrated family violence service system including responding to Indigenous family violence, women from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, women with a disability and assistance for perpetrators.
- \$3.989m over four years to provide housing for up to 44 ex-offenders who would otherwise be at risk of homelessness upon exiting prison.

The scale and components of homelessness funding in Victoria are highlighted in the table below which estimates key Government funding for homelessness in Victoria:

	2007-08 \$m	2008-09 \$m	2009-10 \$m	Total \$m
Commonwealth	39.5	40.4	41.3	121.2
State	56.5	62.1	64.9	183.5
Total	96.0	102.6	106.2	304.8
Transitional Housing Management	35.2	36.1	37.0	108.3
Housing Establishment Funding	8.3	8.5	8.7	25.6
Contribution to 'joined up' initiatives				
Department of Human Services: Mental health	6.0	6.0	6.0	18.0
Department of Human Services: Alcohol and other drugs	5.0	5.0	5.0	15.0
Department of Human Services: Child, youth and family services	0.6	0.6	0.6	1.8
Department of Justice	2.0	2.0	2.0	6.0
Total funding	153.1	160.8	165.5	479.5

Attachment 2 Joined Up Initiatives and Youth Homelessness Action Plan

Mental Health

People with mental health issues are particularly vulnerable to becoming homeless. In 2006-07 in Victoria, homelessness services provided over 5440 support services for people needing assistance with mental health issues.

Two joined up approaches provide assistance for people with mental health issues through the mental health pathways initiatives.

Funding of over \$1 million per annum is provided through SAAP to assist people who are inpatients of mental health facilities to find suitable accommodation prior to their exit from these facilities. Support workers establish a case management relationship with the individuals in the few months before their discharge. The program prevents people from becoming homeless on discharge from hospital and other mental health facilities.

The Mental Health Pathways initiative receives over \$6 million per annum in Psychiatric Disability Rehabilitation Support Services to provide support for people with a mental health illness who are homeless. These people are provided transitional housing with flexible support and once stabilised they move to long term accommodation, or in some instances the property is transferred to long term housing. Up to 145 people at any one time are assisted through this program. 140 THM properties are allocated to this program.

The Victorian Government has issued a Green Paper *Because Mental Health Matters* for consultation. A key focus area outlined in this paper is responding better to vulnerable groups. Under this focus area, the paper notes this can be done through:

- Promoting a more coordinated and tailored approach to people who require support from multiple services;
- Improving access to stable and affordable housing, together with appropriate and scaled support to reduce homelessness and housing risk;
- Focussing on the needs of people from particular vulnerable and disadvantaged groups; and
- Maximising people's potential for recovery by supporting their social and economic participation.²⁶

Mental Health and Housing and Community Building Division are working together to identify improved approaches to the support people with a mental illness and housing need. An innovative 'supportive housing' model designed to assist the chronically homeless including those with a mental illness is being developed in the centre of Melbourne.

Child Youth and Family Services

Funding through SAAP of \$600,000 per annum and funding through Youth Justice CY&FS of \$600,000 per annum provide programs for young people leaving care who are at risk of homelessness and young people leaving youth justice facilities who are homeless. 70 THM properties are allocated to this program.

Alcohol and Other Drugs

The Homeless Drug Dependency Program receives \$3 m per annum to provide an innovative response to people utilising the three inner city crisis accommodation services. A multi disciplinary team, providing on-site health care, recreational activities, drug treatment and housing support engages with men and women with

chronic drug and alcohol use. The multi-disciplinary team also provides training support and consultation to housing service workers at the crisis accommodation services. The program aims to stabilise and reduce people's drug use, while working towards stable long term accommodation options. Participants in the program have stayed longer in drug and alcohol treatment programs, have reduced or stopped their use of drugs or alcohol, have reduced criminal behaviour or self harm, made connections back to their families and successfully moved from crisis accommodation to transitional accommodation.

Justice programs

People leaving prisons are particularly vulnerable to homelessness. Each year, housing placement workers in Victoria's prisons assist about 300 people who are at risk of homelessness to find suitable accommodation on release. Over 100 housing and specialist support packages are available for people leaving prison. People on bail who are homeless are also provided with access to transitional housing while waiting for their court hearing.

However, with approximately 5000 individuals leaving prison each year the current funding and housing assistance available is not able to meet the increasing levels of demand. A study undertaken by AHURI found that there was a direct association between lack of access to adequate accommodation support or stable housing, and recidivism. In particular, the number of times an offender moved was one of the highest predictive factors of their likelihood to re-offend (Baldry et al 2003).²⁷

In addition, security of tenure is vital to the successful long-term integration of exiting prisoners. The *AHURI Research & Policy Bulletin ISSUE 78* found that "security of tenure gives people a sense of autonomy, identity and control over their living environment resulting in increased residential stability and reduced stress. This in turn benefits children's education and neighbourhood social cohesion, and in some contexts enables workforce participation."²⁸ Such a finding is of relevance to the general homelessness population, not just offenders.

Corrections Victoria believes that additional funding to extend housing supply and support services to widen the eligibility criteria would prove efficacious in reducing homelessness and recidivism rates amongst exiting prisoners and offenders, thus preventing homelessness, improving community safety and providing significant savings to the Victorian community.

Young people leaving youth justice centres also receive help from housing support workers to find suitable housing before they leave the centres. About 120 transitional housing and support packages are available each year for young people who need extra help after leaving youth justice centres.

Youth Homelessness Responses

The Victorian Government's Youth Homelessness Action Plan (YHAP) was launched in 2004 and has been implemented in two stages. The first stage (YHAP1) responded to some of the immediate gaps in service provision and trialled new service models for homeless young people. Key initiatives include:

Youth Employment, Education and Training Initiative

This initiative provided brokerage funding to homeless young people to access education, training or employment opportunities, to support their transition from the homelessness service system towards independence.

Youth Transitions Model (now Step Ahead)

The Youth Transitions Model provides medium term (up to 3 years) transitional supported accommodation. Aspects of the model are based on UK 'foyer' type models where education, employment and training are integrated into support and tenancy services.

Family Reconciliation and Mediation Program

This initiative has expanded services for families and young people to assist family reconciliation. The project acts as an early intervention response in that it has capacity to divert young people from the homelessness service system by working with them and their families where appropriate towards a return to the home outcome. In addition the program aims to re-establish positive links with close relatives and remain in education. The program comprises three elements:

- a developmental role in strengthening the capacity of the current service system;
- new practice models and tools to work with young people who have been homeless for extended periods of time; and
- brokerage funding to provide front-end family mediation and reconciliation responses

Young People Leaving Care – Housing and Support Initiatives

Young People Leaving Care – Housing and Support Initiatives operate in each DHS region, provide case managed support to assist young people participating in the program to develop life skills; access long-term housing; link into community supports; and employment, education and training options. An Indigenous specific project has also been implemented to focus on the specific cultural needs of Indigenous young people. Transitional Housing Management Properties are also attached to the projects.

Building on YHAP 1, the second stage, *Creating Connections* (YHAP2), was launched in 2006, providing the framework to deliver more strategic development of homelessness responses for young people. *Creating Connections* directions include:

- a strong focus on early intervention and interdependence
- tailored accommodation and housing support options for each individual homeless young person
- greater access to complementary services for homeless young people with complex needs
- enhanced youth homelessness service capacity.

Each Department of Human Services region has at least one youth transition hub model incorporated into their existing youth service system, the structure of which varies according to regional service configuration, funding opportunities and partnership arrangements. The youth transition hub model is designed to assist homeless young people aged 15-25 who require extra support to sustain independent living.

The hubs provide intensive support for homeless young people beyond the standard SAAP period of support, including:

- individualised living and life skills programs
- access to education, employment and training opportunities
- intensive case management
- youth focused housing placement
- linking young people to the private rental market
- programs to support young parents and pregnant young women

Total funding of \$28.7 million has been allocated to support the implementation and delivery of YHAP Stage 1 and 2. This includes funding of \$2.5 million for capital

development, which will be used to link the youth hubs in each region. The hub, through its partnership approach will provide a response that sits between the existing support provided in crisis accommodation, and independent or low support living arrangements in the community.

Further the *Support for Young People That Really Counts* program, announced in the May 2007 budget, will deliver a combination of accommodation and support to young people in housing crisis. An allocation of \$7.5 million over four years will be used to build or purchase housing linked with onsite support in the growth areas of Casey, Melton, Whittlesea and Yarra Ranges. New support will help young people to connect to community, employment, education and training opportunities and to rebuild relationships with families or significant others. The length of stay will vary but young people will be eligible to stay in the program for up to two years.

In addition YHAP 2 is undertaking a range of other service system development projects including:

- Youth Homelessness Service Coordination Projects have been set up centrally and in each DHS region to develop regional integrated service coordination models for youth specific service provision, with the participation of all youth specific and youth relevant services funded through the Office of Housing. These projects aim to develop innovative approaches by responding to young peoples' current issues as well as the geographical and demographic changes and learnings from the mix of regional models.
- Development of consistent and sustainable youth refuge (crisis responses) service delivery and funding models.
- Introduction of new and evidence based practice approaches that includes strategies to embed key themes and frameworks for youth specific homelessness practice,

Evaluation is a key component of the YHAP initiatives. Thomson Goodall Associates were engaged in February 2007 to conduct a review of YHAP1 and have completed a comprehensive report on the outcomes and possible improvements to the initiatives. The evaluation found that many of the initiatives were successful in promoting early intervention for young people at risk of homelessness and improved the capacity of homeless young people to participate in and contribute to society.²⁹

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