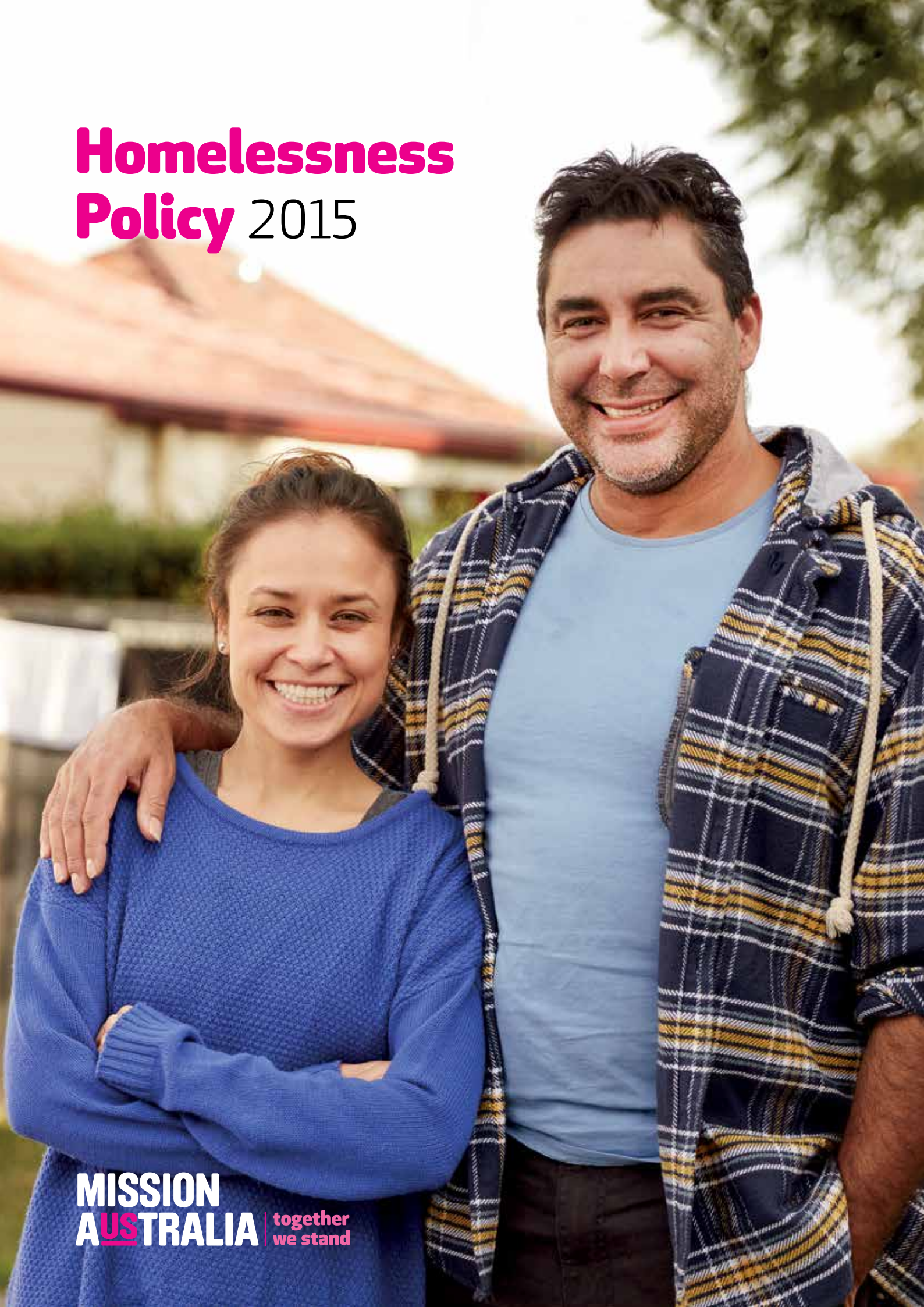


Homelessness Policy 2015



MISSION
AUSTRALIA | together
we stand

Mission Australia has a plan to halve homelessness by 2025.

We know what works to prevent and stop homelessness – and we are delivering results.

With the right commitments from governments and community partners, working together, Australia can achieve this goal.

What we want to see:

- ➔ Youth homelessness halved by 2020
- ➔ Total homelessness halved by 2025
- ➔ The number of lower income Australians living in rental stress halved – to reduce the risk of homelessness

Achieving the targets depends on commitment and funding

Commonwealth and State and Territory Governments should sign a new agreement that recommits to halving homelessness in Australia and funds it over the next 5 years.

The new agreement should include a new target for youth, commit to a net year-on-year increase in social and affordable

housing in each state and territory and give certainty to homeless services.

Governments should facilitate private investment in innovative and proven homelessness and housing initiatives. The right policy settings can leverage institutional, philanthropic and social impact investment.



What needs to happen to achieve these goals

Preventing homelessness – helping people before they reach crisis point

- 1** **Income support and rental assistance should be sufficient for people on low incomes to avoid rental stress** and live in areas where they have opportunities to participate in work and their communities. Over 450,000 low income households (in the bottom 40 per cent of the income range) live in rental stress (pay over 30 per cent of their income in housing costs). Reducing rental stress would relieve some pressure on currently rising homelessness rates.
- 2** **Helping someone keep their home is much more effective than responding to their increased needs once they become homeless.** Services that help people at high risk of homelessness to maintain their housing should be expanded. This includes providing tenancy support to people experiencing mental illness or substance abuse issues, people with a disability and people in need of financial counselling.
- 3** **Young people** experiencing family conflict are still significantly over-represented in the homeless population. **Proven early intervention models should be expanded** – especially family engagement services like Reconnect (which works with young people and their families in flexible ways, including counselling, mediation and practical support) and place-based models such as the Ryde Project (which works with schools to identify and support young people at risk).
- 4** Domestic and Family Violence (DFV) is the number one reason people seek help from a homeless service, particularly women and children. **Efforts to reduce DFV need to be drastically expanded** including high quality education in schools, broader public awareness, law and policing reforms, perpetrator programs and significant efforts to boost gender equality.
- 5** **A ‘zero tolerance’ approach should be adopted to people becoming homeless when they exit state care** including hospitals and drug and alcohol facilities, correction facilities, detention centres and mental health institutions, as well as young people in the out of home care system. Supports need to be provided to people well before they exit institutions and governments should be held accountable for these outcomes over the medium term.

Funding the services that work

When someone becomes homeless, there is both a social and economic case for acting early to assist them to exit homelessness as soon as possible.

6

Homeless services must be tailored to the individual needs of the people that they serve and deliver trauma informed care. Many people fall into multiple at-risk groups and closely coordinated 'wrap-around supports' are needed to deal with the underlying causes of their homelessness. Services must also be sensitive to the specific needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, those from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds and other at-risk groups.

7

Scattered site **Housing First models**, where people have a secure long-term tenancy that provides a solid foundation for wrap-around service provision, should be scaled up to reduce the incidences of chronic homelessness.

Building more homes and strengthening communities – the right housing in the right place

8

Affordable housing is critical national infrastructure. Commonwealth, State and Territory governments should facilitate **funding of at least 200,000 new social homes by 2025** and capital works programs to update existing social infrastructure. A pipeline of new affordable housing should also be facilitated by leveraging private investment. This needs to reflect the increasing demand for homes which are accessible for older people and those with a disability and which are located close to transport and job markets.

9

This should include a further **4,200 new Aboriginal owned and controlled homes** in remote communities and regional centres, to combat the very high number of Indigenous people living in severely overcrowded dwellings and double the impact of the current inter-governmental agreement on indigenous housing.

10

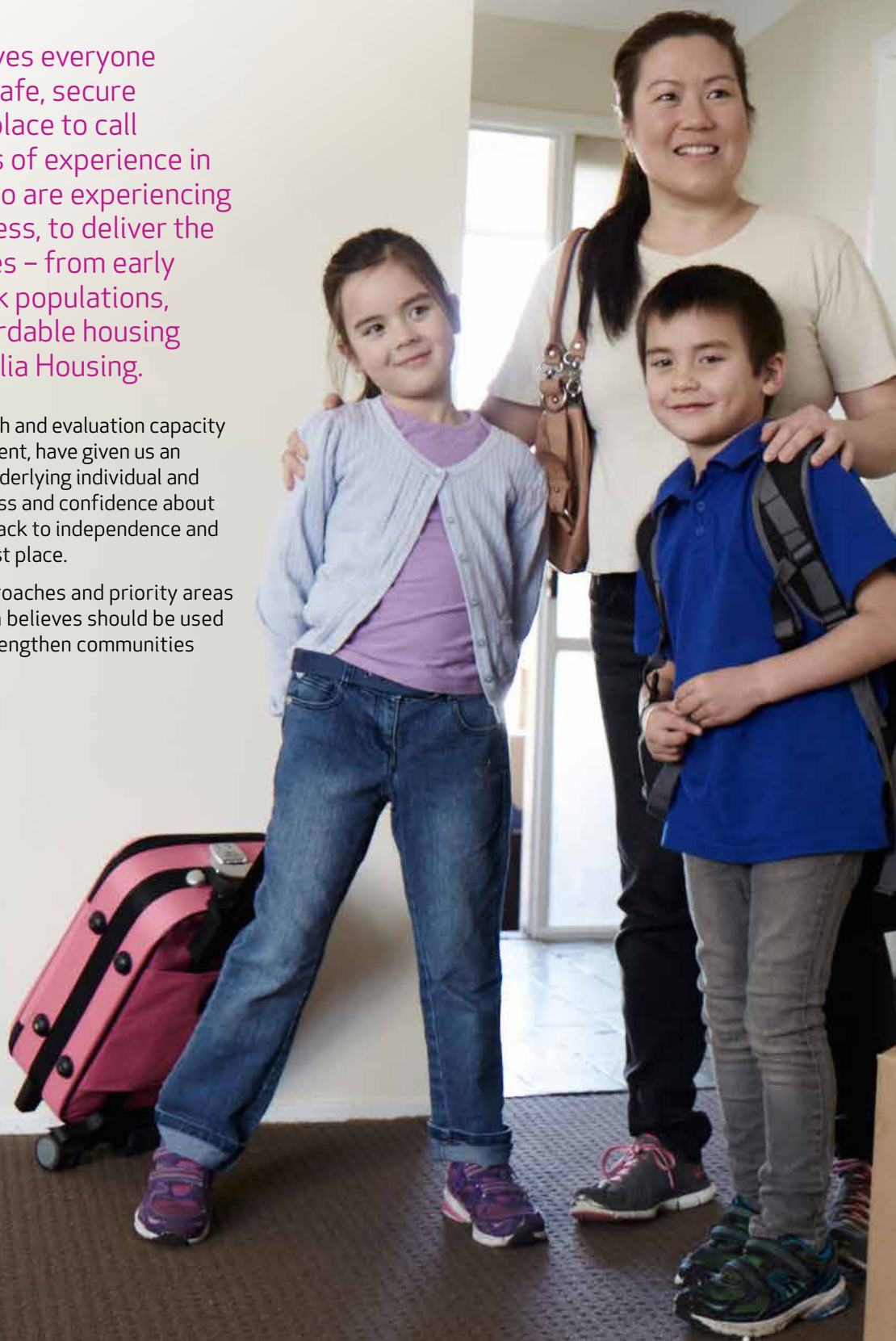
A 10 year commitment is needed to **strengthen communities of significant and persistent disadvantage through place-based models** of integrated services provision that are aligned with housing regeneration.

Background & purpose

Mission Australia believes everyone should have access to safe, secure accommodation and a place to call home. We have decades of experience in working with people who are experiencing or at risk of homelessness, to deliver the full spectrum of services – from early intervention with at-risk populations, to the provision of affordable housing through Mission Australia Housing.

This experience, plus our research and evaluation capacity and innovative service development, have given us an in-depth understanding of the underlying individual and structural drivers of homelessness and confidence about what works in assisting people back to independence and in preventing homeless in the first place.

This policy sets out the key approaches and priority areas for action that Mission Australia believes should be used to reduce homelessness and strengthen communities across Australia.¹



The issue

The ABS definition of homelessness used in the Census includes when a person does not have suitable accommodation alternatives.

People are considered homeless if their current living arrangement:

- is in a dwelling that is inadequate; or
- has no tenure, or if their initial tenure is short and not extendable; or
- does not allow them to have control of, and access to space for social relations.

However, homelessness is more than just 'rooflessness' and in order to effectively reduce homelessness people must feel safe, secure and connected and this requires stable, adequate and appropriate housing. This includes access to housing which is safe, not overcrowded, in a suitable condition to live in, close to infrastructure, meets any cultural needs,

is accessible for people with a disability and has secure tenure. The housing must also be sustainable in terms of both affordability and maintenance. These are additional considerations to the cultural definition that includes primary, secondary and tertiary homelessness.

Census data from 2011 shows that 105,237 Australians were homeless, while a further 78,342 Australians were living in marginal housing and at possible risk of homelessness. Census data includes a measure for overcrowding, but does not take into account people who were housed but unsafe.

In 2013–14, an estimated 254,000 Australians were supported by specialist homelessness services—an increase of 4 per cent from the previous year. This is equivalent to 110 clients for every 10,000 Australians.² In addition there were 154,429 unassisted requests, almost 80% of which included a need for some type of accommodation support.³

The 2011 Census provided the following breakdown of where people stay.

Where do they stay?



All of Government and community commitment

Homelessness is a problem faced by the entire community that requires joint action from governments, community organisations, businesses and individuals.

There is now clear evidence, from effective service models both in Australia and overseas, including those delivered by Mission Australia, on what works to prevent people becoming homeless in the first place and to assist them to exit homelessness and rebuild stable lives.

Together, we can prevent and reduce homelessness. But this is dependent on strong commitment and leadership from Commonwealth, State and Territory governments to deliver housing reform and long-term service funding.

This commitment and leadership is best articulated through a new national multi-year housing and homelessness agreement between the Commonwealth and all State and Territory governments to replace the National Affordable Housing Agreement (NAHA); the National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness (NPAH); and the National Partnership Agreement on Remote Indigenous Housing (NPARIH).

The new agreement should be developed through dialogue with clients, the not-for-profit sector which is responsible for most service delivery, relevant industry sectors, researchers and other experts.

The new agreement should include:

- national targets for reducing homelessness, including a commitment to:
 - halve the homelessness population by 2025; and
 - halve youth homelessness by 2020;
- a national target to halve the number of low income people living in rental stress - to reduce the number of people falling into homelessness;
- a commitment to increased funding for housing and homelessness, guaranteed for the next 5 years - to avoid the churn and disruption that has been a feature of recent short-term funding extensions;
- a mechanism to facilitate and kick start investment by other partners - including the for-profit and not-for-profit sectors and the community - in innovative and proven homelessness and housing initiatives;
- a commitment to a net year-on-year increase in social and affordable housing in each state and territory; and
- a new outcomes measurement framework with clear responsibilities from the Commonwealth and States and Territories - to improve accountability across the different levels of government.



The Service Response Continuum

A key element of the joint government/community commitment to prevent and reduce homelessness is the role played by for-purpose organisations in working closely with clients, delivering solutions, implementing programs, developing innovative models and evaluating practice to continuously improve service delivery.

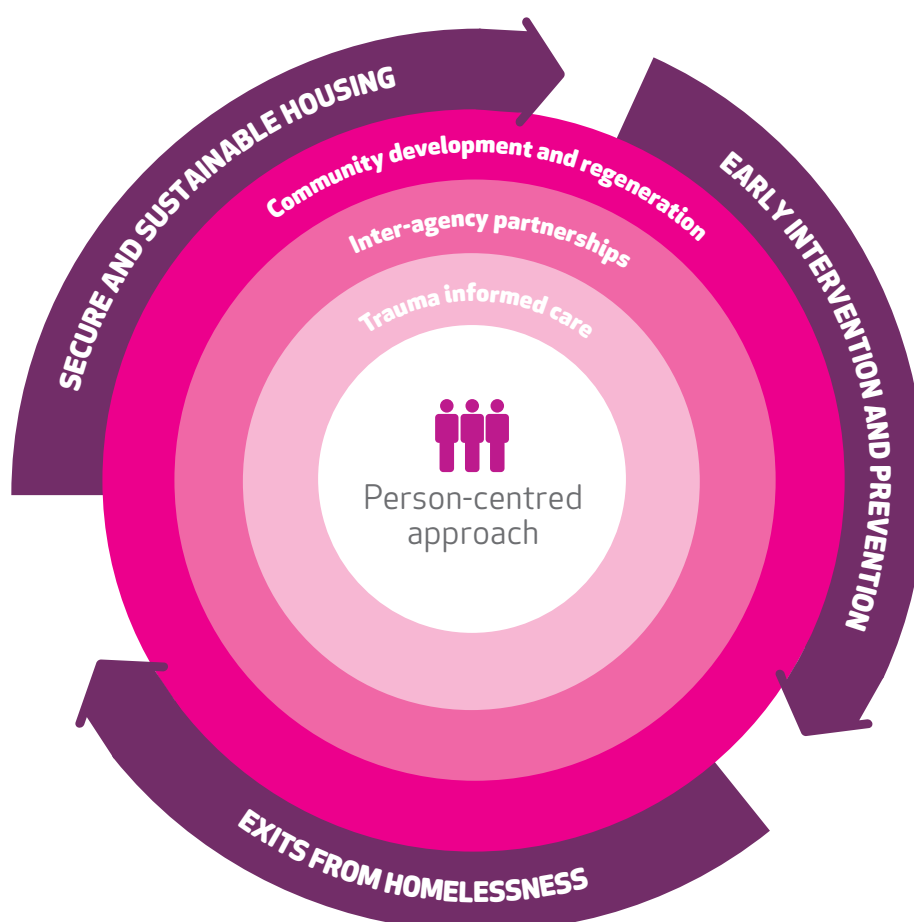
Mission Australia works to reduce homelessness across all points in time from prevention and early intervention, to promoting exits from homelessness, to supporting sustained and secure tenancies, through to housing provision. We aim to respond to clients' immediate and long-term needs.

Secure & sustainable housing

- Mission Australia Housing
- Charles Chambers Court and Annie Green Court, NSW (Aged)
- MISHA program
- Common Ground
- Reconnect (Youth)

Early intervention & prevention

- Housing and Accommodation Support Initiative /Partners in Recovery (Mental Health)
- Inner City Drift Project, NSW (ICDP)
- South East Community Connections, NSW (SECC)
- SEE (Skills for Education and Employment)
- Hoarding and Squalor Intervention and Treatment



Exits from homelessness

- Springboard program, Vic (youth)
- Aherlkeme Village, NT (ATSI)
- Mission Australia Centre (Surry Hills)
- Roma House, Douglas House, Qld
- Drug and Alcohol Youth Service, WA (DAYS) and Triple Care Farm, NSW (substance abuse)

Preventing homelessness: supporting people at risk

Homelessness has a number of causes which can be structural and/or individual in nature.

Structural factors include poverty levels, unemployment rates, lack of affordable housing, and macro-level social policy settings.⁴ Individual factors can include poor mental or physical health, being subjected to domestic and family violence (DFV), family and relationship breakdown, intellectual disability, discrimination, gambling, physical and sexual abuse, substance use or specific 'trigger' events such as losing a job, being evicted from housing or going through a period of high financial stress.⁵ There is no one program that works for all people at risk of homelessness.

There are often multiple ways in which risk factors can play out into an actual experience of homelessness.⁶ However, there are particular groups at risk of homelessness and experiencing homelessness who have specific needs requiring tailored solutions as set out below. Many people will fall into more than one group based on a combination of their demographics and risk factors. Clients receiving support from homelessness services often have multiple and intersecting needs.



Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people

Indigenous Australians made up 25 per cent of the homeless population in 2011 even though they comprise only 2.5 per cent of the general population.⁷

Three quarters of homelessness amongst Aboriginal people relates to severely over-crowded housing, mostly in remote locations. Supply responses have to ensure fit-for-purpose housing is developed where it is needed most.

Indigenous Australians are also significantly over-represented in many at-risk groups including those in contact with the justice and out of home care systems and those experiencing DFV. Responses to homelessness need to recognise the impact of multi-dimensional disadvantage over generations including as a result of dispossession and disconnection from land. Indigenous people, governments and service delivery agencies should partner to solve the complex problems around homelessness including poverty, disadvantage and the lack of appropriate housing.⁸

- There is a need for priority place-based investment in housing supply and transitional accommodation to address overcrowding in remote Indigenous communities and regional centres.
- Governments should build the capacity of Aboriginal community housing providers and deliver the additional housing required through these organisations, either directly or in partnership with other providers where desirable. Housing can be effectively sustained where community members are engaged in tenancy management and maintenance activities.⁹
- Homeless services that work with Aboriginal people need to be culturally appropriate and tailored to local needs, including being staffed by Aboriginal people and other staff with high levels of cultural competence and cooperating with local Aboriginal organisations.
- Housing First approaches should be supported to provide stability and wrap around supports to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people at risk of homelessness and significantly reduce long-term health, justice and social support costs to government.



What works

Aherlkeme Village in Alice Springs provides transitional accommodation with access to support services for homeless Territorians or those at risk of homelessness, including a large proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander clients.

The service works to enhance individuals' and families' ability to access maintain and secure tenancies in either the private or public markets.

Mission Australia's Going Places program in Cairns involved homeless outreach which moved long-term homeless people into sustainable housing.

This program worked with significant numbers of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander clients. For every \$1 invested, the government saved \$5.10 in public services no longer required. The savings reflect reduced need for crisis accommodation, incarceration, court proceedings, police time, diversionary services, time in hospital, and participants being able to support their own children amongst other benefits.



Preventing homelessness: supporting people at risk (cont)

Women and children experiencing domestic and family violence

Domestic and family violence (DFV) continues to be the major driver of homelessness.¹⁰ DFV was the main reason for seeking assistance for nearly one quarter of specialist homelessness services clients in 2013-14.¹¹

While DFV is not limited to one group, culture, gender, or sexuality, overwhelmingly it is violence perpetrated by men against women and it is women and children who are at greatest risk of homelessness as a consequence.

- Reducing homelessness will require concerted effort and more investment in reducing DFV including: education on healthy relationships in schools; family early intervention programs; improved training of first to know agencies; legal and policing reform to protect the rights of people experiencing DFV; men's behaviour change programs and broader efforts to address underlying gender equality and rigid gender stereotypes.
- For those women who need to leave home to be safe, resources are also required including crisis accommodation and rapid rehousing programs.¹²

- Efforts to remove violent men from the home should be continued to enable women to stay safely where they are, remain connected to social networks, community support and schooling and prevent homelessness. This includes 'Safe at Home' in Tasmania and Victoria and 'Staying Home Leaving Violence' in New South Wales.
- DFV training and trauma-informed care should be mandated across the homeless service system because of the evidence of women experiencing DFV presenting to diverse services and with different experiences of DFV. Culturally appropriate models (including those suitable for women in remote Indigenous communities and for women from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds) need to be integrated into a flexible and responsive homelessness service system.



What works

Mission Australia has three safe houses located in Western New South Wales - Lightning Ridge, Walgett and Brewarrina.

These Safe Houses operate as crisis centres and assist women and children escaping family and domestic violence and homelessness, with a focus on Aboriginal women. In addition, we provide transitional accommodation for women and families who have been through the Safe House program and cannot return home.

Yaralla in Central Sydney provides 23 one bedroom units and Mission Australia provides case management support.

The program caters for women over 35 who have generally been homeless for more than 12 months. Presenting issues include: domestic and family violence; untreated co-morbid health issues (such as poor physical health, mental illness, diabetes); alcohol, other drug and gambling addictions; and family breakdown. Women stay for 6 months or more until they can be supported into long term housing options.

Young people

Some 42 per cent of the recorded homeless population at the time of the last Census in 2011 were aged less than 25 years. More than a quarter of specialist homelessness services clients were aged under 18 in 2013-14.

Homelessness among young people is widely thought to be under reported because of the high instances of 'couch surfing'. Family breakdown and DFV are major risk factors for young people becoming homeless, and services focussed on young people need to strengthen family connection. Further, 63 per cent of homeless young people surveyed in a joint Mission Australia research project had been placed in some form of out of home care before the age of 18,¹³ highlighting the need to target high risk young people especially those exiting out of home care and juvenile justice. Early intervention measures are particularly vital for young people to prevent a transition to chronic homelessness.

- Early intervention programs focussing on family reconnection for young people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness should be significantly expanded.
- Governments should take a 'zero tolerance' approach to young people exiting state care into homelessness, with increased service supports.
- For young people who cannot live with family, service models that address multiple life domains including education and training as well as housing should be expanded and funded over the long-term such as Youth Foyer models; as well as promising place-based approaches such as the Geelong Project.



What works

In Victoria, Mission Australia delivers the Springboard program which provides intensive youth focussed assistance to those aged 16 to 18 in residential out-of-home care, or up to 21 years who have left residential care.

It supports these young people to gain secure long-term employment by re-engaging with appropriate education training and/or supported employment opportunities.

Reconnect is an example of a successful early intervention program for young people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness.

It is a Commonwealth-funded program that works with young people and their families in flexible ways, including counselling, mediation and practical support. It has a focus

on responding quickly to referrals. Reconnect results in significant positive outcomes for young people and their families, particularly in terms of housing stability and family reconciliation.¹⁴

The Ryde Project is a joint initiative between schools and local agencies including Mission Australia, that assists young people who need support to better engage with school or who are experiencing difficulties in their lives.

The Ryde Project is based on a proven early intervention model first developed in Geelong which recognises that the best outcomes for young people can be achieved if difficulties are identified, and support provided, as soon as possible.

Preventing homelessness: supporting people at risk (cont)

Older people

A fifth of all people experiencing homelessness are over the age of 55¹⁵ and there are new and emerging groups of older people at risk of homelessness, such as older women with limited retirement savings.

As Australia's ageing population is predicted to more than double numerically from 2010 to 2050¹⁶, greater policy attention needs to be given to strategies to prevent homelessness amongst this group. Further, older people who have histories of chronic homelessness require more specialised support and integrated services than are currently available through the mainstream aged care system.

- Policies around retirement incomes, home ownership, housing affordability and secure tenure should be reviewed in order to prevent homelessness in older age, with a particular focus on older people who do not own their own home.¹⁷
- More new social and affordable housing should incorporate universal design standards, to reflect the increasing numbers of tenants with access needs and improve opportunities to age in place.
- People who are homeless or formerly homeless with high levels of frailty, comorbid or complex needs may need residential aged care. Construction of one new homeless aged care service every year would generate a pipeline of new places for older people who have been chronically homeless.

People with disability

Almost 1 in 5 Australians are estimated to have some form of disability.¹⁸ People with disability have a greater exposure to the risk of homelessness than the general population and different disabilities predispose individuals to different levels of homelessness risk.¹⁹

There is a statistically significant relationship between physical health problems, housing instability and homelessness, especially where financial resources decrease and housing costs cannot be paid.²⁰ However, the proportion of people with disability who are homeless is not known and is poorly reported in existing service and population data.

- Good service provision is crucial and where the impairment is severe the client may need intensive and constant support.
- There is a need for better integration of disability and homelessness services and a more holistic approach that also considers employment, socialisation and other needs of the individual.²¹
- There is a need for increased housing supply that is appropriate to the needs of people with various disabilities, affordable on their incomes and of a decent quality.²² The goals of the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) are jeopardised by the absence of a plan to enable recipients to achieve secure, safe and appropriate housing; this should be an urgent priority.



What works

Mission Australia manages specialised aged care facilities that offer a permanent response to the needs of elderly vulnerable people who would otherwise be homeless or living in poor quality accommodation.

This includes Charles Chambers Court in Surry Hills, Annie Green Court in Redfern and Benjamin Short Grove which is being constructed in Orange. Charles Chambers Court has received several awards for high quality service provision since it opened in 1998 and provides the model for the other services.



What works

The Common Ground model focusses on those formerly homeless individuals that 'fall through the cracks' and require a high need for support in conjunction with permanent housing.

This includes clients with significant cognitive impairment. This permanent housing provides stability for the individual, whilst onsite support from both housing and case management enhances opportunities for personal improvement.



People experiencing mental illness

People with severe mental health issues and who lack supports are at particular risk of homelessness. In 2013–14, 22 per cent of people who received assistance from a specialist homelessness agency were identified as having a current mental health issue.²³

Poor mental health can lead to homelessness and difficulty sustaining employment. On the other hand, unstable housing can deteriorate mental wellbeing.²⁴ A quarter of clients identifying a need for mental health assistance did not have that need provided for.²⁵

- Community based supports need to be strengthened to support people with a mental illness to live in the community and continue the process of deinstitutionalisation. This includes localised mental health services and the utilisation of NDIS supports including tenancy support.
- Several existing programs have been shown to have strong positive outcomes for people experiencing mental illness in terms of housing and wellbeing and should be expanded with state based programs replicated.



What works

The Commonwealth Government's Personal Helpers and Mental Health Support Program (PHaMS) has been shown to significantly improve clients' wellbeing and satisfaction with housing through Mission Australia's Client Wellbeing Pilot.

Partners in Recovery (PIR) aims to better support people with severe and persistent mental illness with complex needs and their carers and families, by getting multiple sectors, services and supports they may come into contact with (and could benefit from) to work in a more collaborative, coordinated, and integrated way.

In the NSW Government's Housing and Accommodation Support Initiative (HASI), 90 per cent of tenants had maintained their tenancy since joining. Of those who left, 86% did so for planned reasons such as moving to more appropriate or long-term housing.

The Queensland Government's Resolve Program has been found through a cost benefit analysis to achieve a return of \$13.50 to the government for every dollar invested and a return of \$19.50 for each dollar for society as a whole.

Preventing homelessness: supporting people at risk (cont)

People with substance abuse issues

Prevalence rates of substance use disorders among homeless persons exceed general population estimates. Co-morbidity of substance use and other mental disorders is common.²⁶

Substance abuse can be a cause of homelessness for some people and a response to prolonged homelessness for others.²⁷ A quarter of drug and alcohol assistance needs identified by specialist homelessness services were unmet in 2013-14.²⁸

- Where individuals are treated for their drug and alcohol issues in an institution such as a hospital, prison, residential program or foster care, they must have a carefully planned transition into the community to ensure they are not exited into homelessness.
- Housing First models that provide stability for a person with substance abuse issues to engage in treatment and integrated service models that approach the risk of homelessness and substance abuse in holistic ways should be developed, funded and implemented.
- Effective rehabilitation and treatment programs such as Mission Australia's Triple Care Farm, Mac River, Junaa Buwa and Drug and Alcohol Youth Service (DAYS) should be supported as successful early intervention strategies for people with substance abuse issues who are at risk of homelessness.



What works

Triple Care Farm (TCF) is a residential Alcohol and Other Drugs (AOD) rehabilitation and treatment program for young people aged between 16 and 24 years.

Located on 110 acres in the NSW Southern Highlands, TCF is a national service receiving referrals Australia-wide which has been operating for more than 20 years. The program specialises in treating young people with co-morbid mental illness and drug and alcohol problems. The treatment model is a holistic psychosocial rehabilitation program based on harm minimisation and health promotion. A recent social return on investment (SROI) study showed \$3 of value created for every \$1 invested.





People in contact with the criminal justice system

People leaving prison are at high risk of homelessness, particularly those who spent a considerable amount of time (12 months or more) in juvenile detention.²⁹ On the other hand, stable housing may contribute to a decrease in reoffending and drug use.³⁰

The growth of the prison population means there are a growing number of people at risk of homelessness. Accommodation is a primary need at the time of release.³¹

- More resourcing is required for through-care programs in which people are supported going into prison, during incarceration and after release to prevent homelessness and reduce re-incarceration.
- Securing employment is a particular barrier for this group and should be included in support services, as should drug and alcohol rehabilitation where required.
- Integrated approaches and intensive case management are needed for people who are homeless, have a cognitive impairment, mental disorder or complex needs and are enmeshed in the criminal justice system.³²
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people's over-representation in the criminal justice system should be addressed as an urgent priority, which will require broader policy reform as well as a culturally appropriate program of justice reinvestment.

- Legal advice such as the free advice provided by community legal services and Shopfront youth legal centre is important to help people understand their rights and assist them with criminal and civil matters.



What works

Shopfront is a free legal service for homeless and disadvantaged young people aged 25 and under.

Established in 1993 and based in Darlinghurst in inner city Sydney, the Shopfront is a joint project of Mission Australia, the Salvation Army and the law firm Herbert Smith Freehills. The Shopfront's main area of practice is criminal law.

Common to nearly all clients is the experience of homelessness: most have been forced to leave home due to abuse, neglect, domestic violence or extreme family dysfunction. In its first 21 years (1993-2014), Shopfront assisted over 5,000 young people with over 10,000 legal matters.

Preventing homelessness: supporting people at risk (cont)

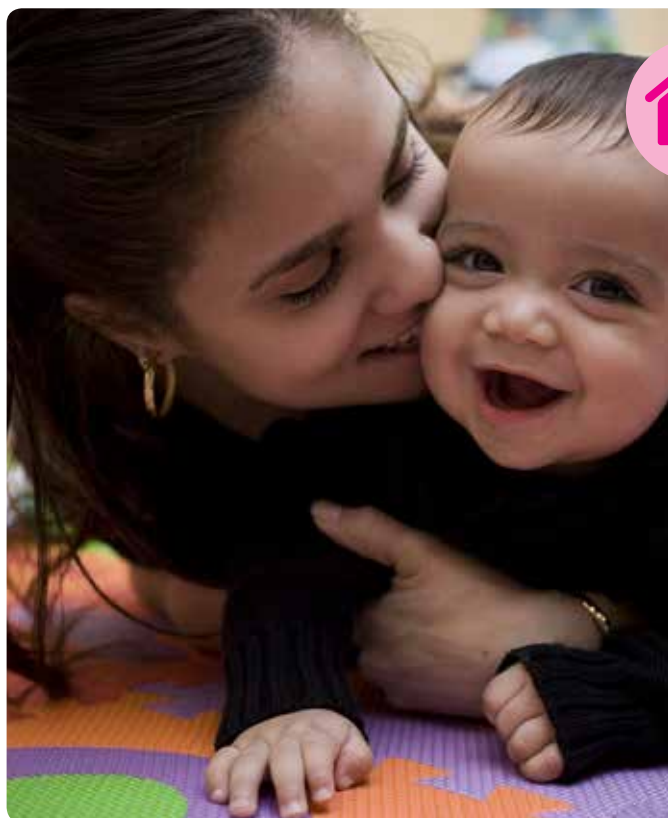
Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) Communities

Severe overcrowding and moving between friends' and family members' houses are common features of homelessness for people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.

People newly arrived into Australia are more likely to be living in severely crowded households. The increase in the number and rate of people born overseas living in severely crowded dwellings was the major contributor to the overall increase in homelessness between 2006 and 2011.³³ Of the 12,990 persons born overseas living in a 'severely' crowded dwelling in 2011, nearly half had arrived within the last five years (48%) and about two-thirds had arrived within the last 10 years (67%). These severely crowded households were likely to be low-income multi-family households.³⁴

- Urban planning for new social and affordable housing should incorporate demand from CALD communities, particularly where there is severe overcrowding which is spatially concentrated, and reflect the location and kind of housing required.

- Service providers should link to cultural and community groups as these are often the first to know agencies and can offer their cultural knowledge and identify vulnerability.
- Services available to prevent homelessness should also be promoted amongst CALD communities to increase early access.
- Person-centred approaches should be adopted that include culture as a key factor and organisations should endeavour to hire and recruit staff who reflect the cohort in terms of culture, language and religion.



What works

Mission Australia Housing (MAH) has built effective partnerships with culturally specific services and recruited staff to mirror the cultural diversity in the regions where tenancies are managed.

For example, in Blacktown, there is a strong partnership in place with the United Muslim Women Association (MWA). The Association provides a wide range of services such as counselling, information and referrals, advocacy and crisis accommodation.

MAH began a partnership with MWA back in 2010, since when over twenty women have been housed in MAH properties in South Western Sydney, with support being provided by MWA.

Refugees and asylum seekers

Refugees and asylum seekers have been an under-reported group at risk of homelessness. Young people from refugee backgrounds are six to ten times more likely to be at risk of homelessness than Australian-born young people.³⁵

While some issues like overcrowding and adjustments to language and culture are similar to CALD communities, refugees may face additional issues including trauma, disrupted education and a lack of recognised qualifications.³⁶ Very limited income support and restrictions on ability to work add significantly to the risk of homelessness amongst this group in comparison with other CALD communities.

- Settlement, youth, health and housing services should be better coordinated and a more holistic approach taken to refugee and asylum seekers' needs.³⁷ Adequately resourced casework models can improve support to refugees and asylum seekers.³⁸
- Services need to be culturally aware and appropriate, sensitive to gender issues within this context and take a trauma-informed approach.
- Prevention and early intervention efforts should address the risk of family breakdown, which is significant amongst this group.
- Current work and study restrictions on asylum seekers need to be relaxed, as they result in many being unable to afford safe and stable housing and being pushed into overcrowded situations.

- Targeted programs such as AMEP and SEE improve language, literacy and numeracy and in turn increase participation in training and employment and should be extended.



What works

Mission Australia's Home Tutor Scheme provides an individualized and personalized tutorial service to newly arrived adult migrants, 18 and over, to help them learn the basics of the English language.

The service is provided by trained volunteers on a one to one basis, generally in the client's home. **The Enhancement Program** provides support to community groups such as libraries, schools, ethnic associations and churches to set up and run English language classes for migrants no longer eligible for the Home Tutor Scheme. In 2013-14 Mission Australia supported 84 partners across 6 contract regions to provide informal ESL classes and workshops.



Preventing homelessness: supporting people at risk (cont)

Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex and gender Questioning (LGBTIQ)

LGBTIQ people are over-represented in homeless populations due to both the complexity of their experiences and difficulty accessing services.

In the 2014 General Social Survey, gay or lesbian people and people with 'other' sexual orientations were more likely to report at least one past experience of homelessness (34% and 21% respectively) compared with heterosexual people (13%).³⁹

- Safe and secure accommodation is required to assist homeless LGBTIQ people including crisis, transitional, medium and long term options.⁴⁰
- Homelessness services need to understand and be sensitive to the specific issues faced by LGBTIQ people. A holistic and wraparound approach is also required to address complex needs.
- Service providers need to demonstrate a commitment to equality and acceptance and LGBTIQ people need to be involved in the development and implementation of programs that can assist them.⁴¹



What works

Roma House is a 31 bed temporary accommodation service for people experiencing homelessness that provides trauma informed care.

The trauma informed model aims to create a respectful, safe and supportive model for all including the provision of enhanced privacy where possible.

People who identify as transgender are placed in the male or female dorm on the basis of the gender they identify as without judgment based on physical characteristics, even when people are newly transitioning.

Prevention and early intervention: what is needed

Different cohorts, such as those described, have different risk factors; programs and initiatives to prevent homelessness work best when they target these individual factors.

Prevention not only helps to reduce the number of people who experience homelessness but also helps to reduce the personal and societal costs associated with homelessness. Intervening early to quickly resolve homelessness when it occurs is crucial.

- Greater investment is needed in prevention programs and services that work to keep people from becoming homeless as well as broader policies that address structural causes of homelessness including housing affordability and supply.
- When homelessness does occur, early intervention measures are vital in quickly resolving it. There have been some welcome shifts towards early intervention

homelessness programs, but this cannot occur at the expense of crisis services. It should instead boost the capacity of the service system overall.

- Homelessness is highly spatially concentrated and initiatives to support people in their local areas are an important part of early intervention. Investment in areas with large at-risk populations, through models such as the inner-city drift project (see box on page 24) can help to prevent people moving away from their support networks to access crisis services.
- Greater emphasis and accountability is required from State and Territory governments on preventing people exiting institutions and state care from becoming homeless. This includes young people in out of home care, those in the justice system, people with mental illness and those being discharged from hospitals.

Delivering services to support people exit homelessness

It is not possible to prevent everyone from becoming homeless. When people do become homeless, an effective service system will respond quickly to the different needs of different people.

- Responses to homelessness should ensure the equitable treatment of people experiencing or at risk of homelessness, including those with particularly complex needs who are hardest to reach and who require more intensive support over longer periods of time.

- Funding strategies should allow for services that provide support to people over the short, medium and long term; and flexibility in the length of time that clients can be supported.
- As immediate needs are met and new priorities emerge for individuals and families, the service system needs to have the flexibility and resources to continue supporting people all the way along the continuum to sustained tenancies and social and economic participation.



Delivering services to support people exit homelessness (cont)

Person centred approaches – housing and support

The provision of integrated wraparound services to people across a range of life domains can help people achieve positive outcomes.

- Responses to homelessness should focus on the strengths of people who are homeless and work with them to further develop their sense of agency in effecting change in their lives.
- Responses should be multi-dimensional, since solving the issue of homelessness is about more than just housing. They should address support needs across a range of areas including health and mental health, education, employment and connection to family and community.
- Services should be culturally appropriate for the clients being supported, particularly for ATSI and CALD clients with staff trained in culturally aware approaches and practice.
- Integrated models such as MISHA (Michael's Intensive Supported Housing Accord) should be supported which provide a range of quality, timely and individualised services and supports including health and mental health supports in conjunction with accommodation.

Housing First

As demonstrated by strong Australian and international evidence, the Housing First model of support services linked to housing is the most effective way to maintain tenancies and improve wellbeing.

Housing First models prioritise the provision of permanent housing as the critical stabilising factor for homeless clients, over and above addressing whatever personal factors may have led to homelessness.

- Housing First models should be funded to end homelessness for the chronically homeless, saving substantial costs for government as well as delivering strong positive outcomes for vulnerable clients.
- MISHA and Common Ground should be built on as best practice housing first models and further evaluations conducted to assess sustained outcomes.

The MISHA project

Mission Australia's Michael's Intensive Supported Housing Accord (MISHA) project

was an innovative homeless program funded by a private donor that provided men experiencing chronic homelessness in the Parramatta area of Sydney with immediate access to long-term, stable accommodation while supporting them to build the lives they would like to live.

How we helped



What difference it made

Sustained housing

On entry, our participants were chronically homeless.

After 2 years with MISHA:

 **89%** were still in secure housing

Substance use disorder

The drop in substance use disorders was particularly dramatic:

37% Before MISHA → **7%** After 2 years

Mental health disorders

Were **halved**

I'm still kicking myself. Every time I'm waking up in the morning I go, ok, is this real? (Client aged 59)

Yeah, it's me little kingdom compared to where I've sort of come from. (Client aged 38)

What it saves

Health, justice and welfare cost to Government per person per year

Before MISHA

\$32,254 → **\$24,251**

After 2 years



That's a saving to government of

\$8,002 per person per year

Delivering services to support people exit homelessness (cont)

Trauma informed care

Trauma is both a cause and consequence of homelessness. According to a range of studies within Australian homelessness services, the rate of reported exposure to at least one incident of trauma is between 91-100%.⁴²

- Homelessness services need to engage in trauma-sensitive practice which requires practitioners to be knowledgeable about trauma and also takes the likely concentration of complex trauma as the starting point for service delivery. Routine use of screening tools for trauma should be incorporated and links should be provided to trauma-specific services.⁴³
- More broadly, political commitment is required to address the root causes of trauma including racial inequality, gender inequity and poverty and to prevent traumatic events such as domestic violence, childhood abuse and neglect and intergenerational trauma in Indigenous communities.⁴⁴
- Trauma informed service provision models such as Mission Australia's Douglas House and Roma House should be expanded and replicated.

Working together - interagency partnerships

Responses to homelessness should facilitate the involvement of the whole of community. They should promote shared responsibility and collaboration for preventing and addressing homelessness amongst the community, all levels of government and business sectors.

- Mainstream service agencies such as Centrelink need to know about homelessness in order to be able to identify and work with people who are at risk of homelessness. They also need to be equipped to respond to those who are homeless or at risk of homelessness to ensure that there are 'no wrong doors'.
- Greater cooperation can enhance service provision including identifying those at risk of homelessness, providing services to those who become homeless and locating housing options to exit people from homelessness. Greater collaboration should be encouraged in recognition of the complex and multidimensional nature of people's needs.
- Strong cooperation between government departments and service providers is particularly important to ensure that people are not exited into homelessness from state institutions including prisons, juvenile detention, out of home care, hospitals and mental health care.



What works

Douglas House is a Cairns based, 22 bed supported accommodation facility, working with individuals who have experienced long term chronic homelessness.

Prior to being accommodated, many of the Douglas House residents were excluded from other services, with frequent hospital and mental health presentations and regular contact with police for minor offences.

Douglas House works from a trauma informed framework, which incorporates recovery-oriented practice, strengths based and individually tailored approaches. Douglas House recognises the social, physical, emotional, cultural and spiritual needs of its residents.



What works

Inner City Drift Project (ICDP) was a NSW program aimed at stemming the flow of homeless people from western Sydney into the inner city.

An evaluation found that all participants followed-up at six months had remained within their community of origin.

The service model identified assessment and referral pathways as critical to the early intervention and prevention focus of the ICDP. Integral to this was the need to work with 'first to know' agencies, two key agencies being Housing NSW and Centrelink, since most people with financial and/or accommodation difficulties will have contact with one or both of these services. There were also other important partnerships that the ICDP developed including a productive relationship with a real estate agency in Fairfield.

Secure, sustainable and affordable housing

We need more housing to solve homelessness and this housing needs to be affordable for low and moderate income earners.

In 2011, there was a national shortage of 271,000 affordable and available dwellings for households with very low incomes, mainly attributable to a lack of affordable supply.⁴⁵ Across Australia there are more than 220,000 people on social housing waiting lists and only six per cent of tenants exit social housing each year.⁴⁶

Many people stay longer than necessary in transitional accommodation because they can't find a rental property they can afford, which increases the rate of homeless people turned away from those services.

The lack of affordable housing is a break on productivity as well as leading to social problems. Social and affordable housing needs to be treated as critical social and economic infrastructure to facilitate the engagement of the infrastructure debt markets.

Addressing the undersupply of social and affordable housing requires a coordinated approach across all governments which covers the full continuum of housing policy including tax, planning, welfare, and security of rental tenure.

Community housing providers including Mission Australia Housing (MAH) have a key role to play in this space.



Secure, sustainable and affordable housing (cont)

Targets for new social and affordable housing

- New Commonwealth and state government agreements should set a common target of 200,000 net new social homes by 2025 and capital works programs to update existing social housing infrastructure.
- A pipeline of mezzanine level housing at 40 to 60 per cent of market rent is also required to improve social mobility and reduce demand on social housing.
- Over 450,000 low income households (in the bottom 40 per cent of the income range) live in rental stress (pay over 30 per cent of their income in housing costs).⁴⁷ This increases their risk of homelessness and feeds into the rising homelessness rate. Targets should be included for reducing rental stress.
- New social and affordable housing needs to be appropriate to the needs of high risk groups including people with a disability, older people, those from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

Taxation and Commonwealth Rent Assistance

- Taxation settings that currently favour owner-occupiers over other household types have skewed the market towards investment in higher cost housing and compounded issues around affordability. Adjustments to current tax settings to address housing affordability must be an important consideration for the Commonwealth's taxation review.
- 42 per cent of households who need rental assistance are still in rental stress after receiving Commonwealth Rent Assistance

(CRA).⁴⁸ Income support and CRA should be increased so it is sufficient to stop recipients living in rental stress.

Secure tenancies, institutional investment and planning

- Institutional investment is required to begin bridging the gap between supply and demand for social and affordable housing. Government facilitation is required to underpin institutional investment.
- Improvements to tenancy protections are needed and this could be achieved through reforms to the tenancy laws, longer tenancies in a mezzanine level of housing and increased supply of social housing.
- Redesigned planning systems can encourage, enable and expedite approval processes for construction of affordable housing or mainstream property developments that include a proportion of affordable housing.

Community renewal

- Traditionally social housing has been concentrated in particular locations entrenching disadvantage. Where there is entrenched disadvantage and high concentrations of social housing, a community development approach should be taken which aligns housing regeneration with locally tailored service and capacity building.
- Individual service responses are not sufficient alone to address the challenges of deep, persistent and concentrated disadvantage. An additional place-based model that co-ordinates services and targets intergenerational disadvantage through education and employment is required.

Community Renewal – Clarendon Vale and Rokeby

Clarendon Vale and Rokeby are disadvantaged communities where Mission Australia Housing has been commissioned to manage 500 homes for Housing Tasmania over a 10 year period and has developed a decade long plan to provide management, maintenance, property upgrades and new homes.

In partnership, Mission Australia has developed a community renewal model, involving a 10 year community development plan encompassing community improvement projects which will see generational change.

The plan is designed to generate social and physical change within the community. Early initiatives include the creation of a residents group to prioritise projects and address concerns within the community. An initial

focus has been on improving safety and the group has successfully lobbied local government to improve amenities including street lights.

Using funding from the Commonwealth Department of Social Services, Mission Australia has also been able to develop a community regeneration and workplace training program which helps residents to learn about and develop skills in some of the niche agriculture and food industries established in Tasmania.

And by rebuilding relationships with the local high school, Mission Australia has sought to create paths out of intergenerational poverty for young people living in the community and provide access to education for other residents to improve long-term employment opportunities.

Further research, planning and evaluation

Ensuring good data collection

Research into homelessness is vital in helping us to better understand and address this significant issue. Good data collection can play a critical role in informing the development and implementation of policies to address homelessness.

- Government should maintain its investment in reporting frequently, consistently and as early as possible on data collected on homelessness through the Census of Population and Housing and the Specialist Homelessness Services (SHS) collection.
- The ABS should continue to work with the sector to improve Census collection where there is a recognised undercount, for example better capturing young people who are couch surfing. The service sector should also be consulted on counting homeless and at-risk populations in local areas.
- Governments should also provide greater access to administrative data sets to allow researchers and practitioners to identify trends, to improve accountability and transparency in funding allocation and encourage new innovations.
- Other attempts to track homelessness should also be supported including council street counts which capture primary homelessness in various locations at different times of year and longitudinal studies such as the Journeys Home research which provide more in-depth information about transitions in and out of homelessness and the factors associated with these transitions.

Mission Australia and other service providers play an integral part in collecting data about their clients' needs and outcomes.

The need for long-term investment in outcomes

For homelessness assistance to be effective, funding should be long term and tied to evidence-based outcomes measurement.

- Funding for homelessness services should be for a minimum of 5 years to allow for continuity and certainty.
- Governments need to ensure funding for the collection, analysis and reporting of meaningful quality performance measures. All levels of government need to be held accountable for their results.
- Outcome measures should be comprehensive. As well as measuring housing and economic circumstances, governments should consider funding service providers to implement a client wellbeing measure such as the Personal Wellbeing Index (PWI)⁴⁹ (described below) which could be applied across community services programs to assess client impact.
- Evidence based practice and proper needs analysis should form the basis for service funding.



What works

Mission Australia is committed to understanding the outcomes for clients who receive our services, as well as the overall impact we make in reaching our goal of reducing homelessness and strengthening communities.

For this reason, Mission Australia has developed an outcome framework which works alongside the mandatory data collection systems to help us understand our clients' concerns and issues when they enter our services as well as how they change over time.

The foundation of our data collection is a measure of wellbeing (the Personal Wellbeing Index [PWI]) which is a measure of life satisfaction as a whole and includes the domains of satisfaction with standard of living, health, achievements, relationships, safety, being part of the community and future security. We then further supplement this with service specific outcome measures. This will be implemented across Mission Australia in 2015-16 to enable us to report on outcomes and our impact against our strategic vision of reducing homelessness.

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**Mission Australia helps
people regain their
independence - by
standing together with
Australians in need,
until they can stand for
themselves.**

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