

parity

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The Future of National Homelessness Policy



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Council to Homeless Persons

Jenny Smith	Chief Executive Officer
Kate Colvin	Manager — Policy and Communications
Ian Gough	Manager — Consumer Programs
Lynette Deakes	Office Manager
Noel Murray	Parity Editor
Lanie Harris	Communications Coordinator
Belinda Lack	Digital Communications Officer
Angela Kyriakopoulos	HAS Coordinator
Cassandra Bawden	Peer Education and Support Program Team Leader
Trish Westmore	Capacity Building Coordinator
Damien Patterson	Policy and Advocacy Officer
Natasha Trajanovska	Accountant
Address	2 Stanley Street Collingwood Melbourne VIC 3066
Phone	(03) 8415 6200
Fax	(03) 9419 7445
E-mail	parity@chp.org.au
Website	www.chp.org.au

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Write for *Parity*!

Contributions to *Parity* are welcome. Each issue of *Parity* has a central focus or theme. However, prospective contributors should not feel restricted by this as *Parity* seeks to discuss the whole range of issues connected with homelessness and the provision of housing and services to people who are homeless. Where necessary, contributions will be edited. Where possible this will be done in consultation with the contributor.

Parity on the CHP Website

www.chp.org.au/services/parity-magazine/
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Proposed 2017 *Parity* Publications Schedule

NB: Please note that this may be subject to change. Please check out the CHP website: www.chp.org.au for updates.

August: The Future of National Homelessness Policy

September: Current Issues in Housing Tenancy

October: Responding to Homelessness in Aotearoa New Zealand

November: Responding to Homelessness in Queensland

December: Victorian Homelessness Conference edition

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The Future of National Homelessness Policy: No Direction Home?



The need for a national housing and homelessness policy, plan and related investment has never been greater. More than 100,000 people are homeless each night across our country; 280,000 people a year seek help from our specialist homelessness services; and as we struggle with the weight of demand each year, our services turn away 70,000 desperate people. As more and more rough sleepers line the streets of our cities and become increasingly visible in our regional centres, access to affordable housing slips further out of grasp and 195,000 people languish on our national social housing waiting lists.

Since the initial Road Home policy (2008) and related three year National Partnership on Homelessness (NPAH) investment first expired, the Australian homelessness and housing sectors have operated in a policy vacuum. The housing and support models funded by the NPAH, which clearly demonstrated their effectiveness, beg to be taken to scale across the country. The ramp up of social housing investment begun so promisingly with the Nation Building Stimulus Package, has needed repetition to maintain the

momentum of growth. Instead, funding has stagnated, resulting in a constantly falling proportion of our national housing stock that is affordable to low income earners.

State and territory governments have undertaken local reform and made some important investments. However, progress overall is hampered by both the ongoing reduction in real terms in federal government funding allocations as well as the absence of federal leadership and coordination. We lack both a federal Minister for Housing and a will in Parliament to deliver the change needed in the housing market.

As a community it often feels we are 'fiddling while Rome burns'. Initially this is leading to dire consequences for the most vulnerable in our community who are on the lowest incomes and either at risk of or experiencing homelessness. As time passes, it is dividing and affecting us all.

The rise in rough sleeping in both Sydney and Melbourne is a publicly visible consequence of our policy inaction. How best to respond to this ongoing reminder of our housing and homelessness policy inaction is dividing our community. Some sections of our media seem to have no compunction about demonising our most vulnerable citizens and blaming them for their circumstances. This victim blaming also fuels the fire of enthusiasm for punitive social policies that ignore structural disadvantage, such as the impact the cost of renting has had on the viability of a Centrelink income. The compassion we as a community show in the face of fire and tempest is sadly not replicated when responding to the consequences of poverty.

And yet, our b-b-q conversation has changed and there is increasing acceptance across the country that there is a lack of affordable housing and that this is, to some degree a problem. Media reports suggest that many mortgagees across Australia are only one interest rate rise away from mortgage default and the threat of homelessness.

This edition of *Parity* provides a range of informed perspectives clearly articulating what should be our country's homelessness and housing policy, plan and investment. It puts forward well thought out policy approaches, that if implemented, would make a real and tangible difference to both homelessness and the lack affordable housing.

Underpinning many of these proposals is the recognition that our current tax settings are fuelling house price inflation, and have failed to deliver rental housing that low and middle income earners can afford.

Relying on the market alone cannot meet the demand for affordable housing. A suite of solutions needs to start with reforming housing taxes. Planning reform at the state level is needed, to ensure we plan for low cost and affordable housing as we develop and redevelop, through mechanisms like inclusionary zoning.

Critically, Government must also subsidise the provision of social housing to those excluded from that market. A new paradigm for the provision of social housing through both state owned public housing and state subsidised community housing has to be developed and implemented.

Whatever, the faults of the National Affordable Housing Agreement

(NAHA) and the NPAH, they were the first attempt to put together a truly national response to tackling homelessness and providing affordable housing. While we are promised that the quantum of funding currently in the system will be retained, the reality of the National Housing and Homelessness Agreement is yet to be negotiated, and certainly requires a much greater resource commitment to be effective.

In the last few years we have had to fight hard to maintain the status quo with a funding reduction in real terms, which in the face of the housing

affordability crisis, is in effect hurling us backwards. A recognition of the need for a national housing and homelessness strategy and plan with related investment, will be a good first step.

Acknowledgements

The Council to Homeless Persons would like to thank Mission Australia for their sponsorship of this edition of Parity. In particular, we thank Marion Bennett who saw the need for an edition looking at the future of national homelessness policy, and also thank Joanne Fildes who organised the contributions from Mission Australia.

Post Script: Vale Fiona Richardson

The Council to Homeless Persons joins with many, many others in mourning the recent death of Fiona Richardson, Australia's first Minister for the Prevention of Family Violence. Fiona was tireless in her work and advocacy on behalf of women and children dealing with the consequences of domestic and family violence. Her hard work both leading up to the Victorian Royal Commission into Family Violence and in the implementation of its recommendations, leaves a legacy that will be permanent.

News

Martin Place: No Place for Those Who are Homeless

Digby Hughes, Senior Policy and Research Officer, Homelessness NSW

Rough sleeping in Sydney is escalating. Rapidly.

According to the City of Sydney Street Count there were 394 people rough sleeping in Sydney in August 2016. In August 2011 the number was 307. This is a 28 per cent increase. Why are these dates relevant? In August every five years we conduct our national Census. This is a major source of homelessness data. In August 2011 the Census advised that over 28,000 people in New South Wales (NSW) were experiencing homelessness. If we extrapolate the City of Sydney data we can surmise that close to 36,000 people may have been homeless in NSW on Census night 2016.

All of this is while the NSW economy has been going gangbusters, according to the NSW Government. And the data seems to support their boasts. Almost \$58 billion worth of private business investment was recorded in the state in 2012–13, representing real growth of 8.7 per cent over the previous year.

NSW has recorded real average increases of 7.0 per cent per annum in business investment in the 10 years to 2012–13.¹

Over the last few years we have seen a number of 'homeless camps' spring up in Sydney. Wentworth Park and Belmore Park being two of the more prominent. In December 2016, a camp appeared in Martin Place. This was a well organised group. Quickly there was a 24/7 kitchen and the residents had a strong social media presence — advertised as a safe space — run by and for people experiencing homelessness. For many months it operated under the public glare — but also out of sight. There was little public commentary — despite the fact it was within 200 metres of the NSW Parliament. This was probably because the majority of the camp operated under the hoarding of a construction zone and did not interfere with the thoroughfare. Eventually the developer required access to their site and the camp moved from 'hidden' to out in the open.

Still there was not much action. The NSW Government through the Department of Family and Community Services regularly visited the site, offering Temporary Accommodation to people who wanted permanent housing, specialist homelessness services regularly visited and engaged with people and the City of Sydney visited and ensured that the camp was clean and safe.

All of this changed on Tuesday 1 August. On this day the most popular breakfast shock jock in the country raised the issue as an 'eyesore' and called for action. In response, the Premier, Gladys Berejiklian, described the camp as making her feel 'uncomfortable'. Very quickly both the NSW Government and the City of Sydney became embroiled in blame shifting over who was responsible for dealing with the camp.

The response of Homelessness NSW was to call for all concerned parties to

work together. We pointed out that rough sleeping represents only six per cent of the broader homeless population. We thought it also worth noting that in 2015/16 NSW specialist homelessness services provided support to over 69,000 people; an increase of 35 per cent over two years. The service system had no capacity. Other relevant facts we reiterated were that there are 60,000 people on the wait list for housing in NSW and that less than one per cent of private rentals in Sydney are affordable for people on low incomes. Our message was that homelessness can be addressed but there needs to be investment in affordable housing combined with appropriate support.

Things ticked over into National Homelessness Week and ironically, the level of rhetoric increased and media that had ignored the camp for months decided they had a pressing need to head down there and 'talk to a homeless person'. While much of the media was sympathetic, not all were. They parroted lines of 'protesters, not genuine homeless' and 'their tents look very nice for homeless people'. Pressure grew for a quick fix. Calls increased for the City of Sydney Council to be sacked for their inaction.

The City of Sydney Mayor, Clover Moore, attempted to broker an arrangement that would see people move on and a 24/7 facility open in another part of the city — noticeably out of the business district. When this arrangement broke down, NSW Premier Gladys Berejiklian said her government would introduce legislation to Parliament that would pave the way for it to remove the people 'from the tent city in Sydney's Martin Place as soon as the end of week.' In announcing this move the Premier stated 'It is concerning that the motives of some on that site are not what they should be, and we will not let protestors play political games with those in genuine need of support.'²

Yet again Homelessness NSW pointed to the increase in inner city homelessness over the past six years and reiterated our position that we can end inner city homelessness by:

1. setting targets to reduce and end homelessness in inner city Sydney

2. allocating dedicated and recurrent social housing supply to a Housing First approach
3. adequately funding specialist support to people who have experienced homelessness that can be provided flexibly and over the long term on a recurrent basis
4. supporting a co-ordinated assertive outreach approach to people sleeping rough in the inner city
5. establishing a cross-government and NGO taskforce that monitors both the implementation of the Housing First approach, prevention of homelessness and progress against the agreed targets
6. investing in and expanding the availability of social housing and developing strategies to reduce high private rental costs.

The legislation was pushed through NSW Parliament within one sitting day. A few days later, the camp voluntarily disbanded before the legislation could be enforced, under the watchful eye of the media and the

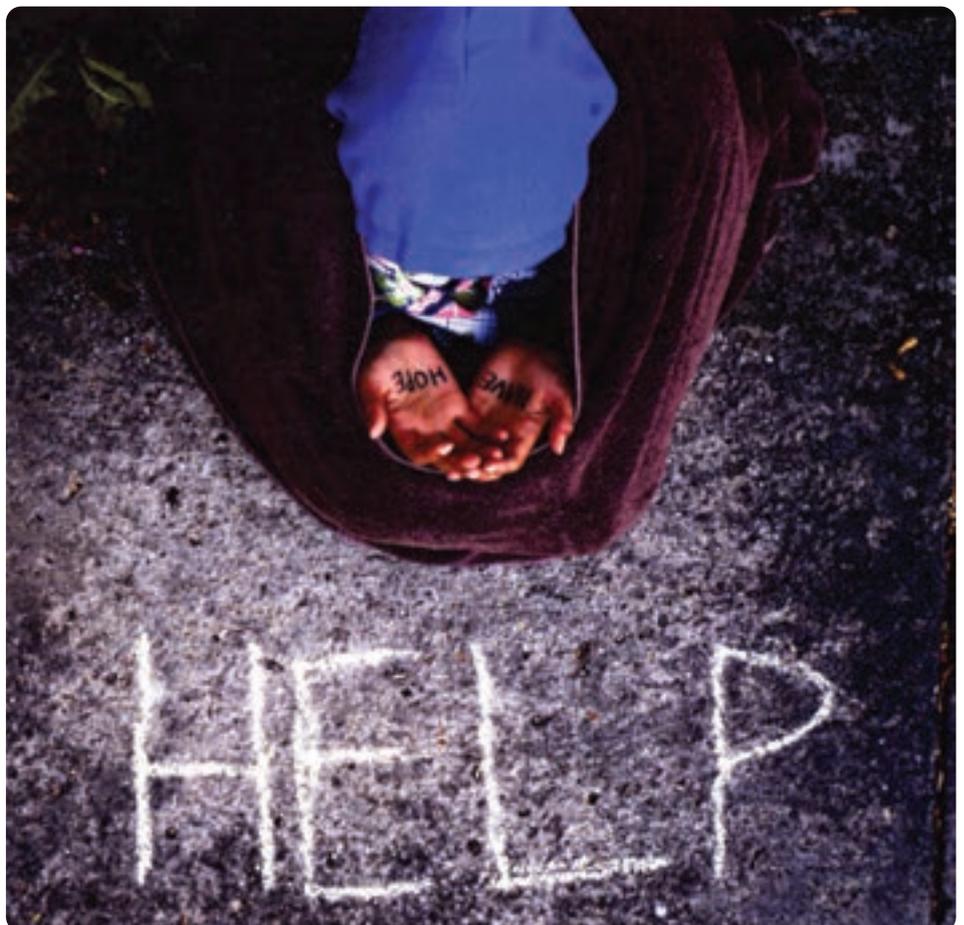
police. Some rough sleepers took up the offer of Temporary Accommodation, many more disappeared back into the shadows. Others moved into the 'housing' offered — despite the lack of beds, crockery, cutlery etc and post-crisis support.

The following week the City of Sydney again held their street count. It was the second highest winter count on record at 386 people. Over 160 people were staying in Temporary Accommodation and the crisis beds were at 86 per cent capacity. There was little media interest in the numbers with only one or two outlets reporting. The circus had packed up and moved on.

Homelessness NSW would like to publicly thank CHP Victoria and DV NSW for their practical and moral support during this period.

Endnotes

1. <https://www.industry.nsw.gov.au/invest-in-nsw/about-nsw/economic-growth/Size-of-NSW-economy>
2. <http://www.theaustralian.com.au/national-affairs/state-politics/gladys-berejiklian-to-bring-in-new-laws-to-dismantle-martin-place-homeless/news-story/56f4e96752dfe71593f729cb854bb731>



Finding Innovative Solutions to Homelessness at #NHCSydney

The highly anticipated program for the National Housing Conference 2017, *Building for better lives*, is now available.

With more than 1000 delegates and 150 international and Australian speakers expected to participate in 35 sessions over three days, #NHCSydney is set to be the largest cross-sectoral event in Australia for the social housing, homelessness and urban sectors.

A key focus will be homelessness and related housing issues, which have dominated the media and much of the political debate this year. It is widely recognised by policymakers, housing experts and the public that Australians need greater access to safe, secure and affordable housing.

The recently released National Housing Conference program outlines the wide range of sessions focussing on this important issue. These sessions will provide a wealth

of knowledge for specialist homelessness services providers, policymakers, and allied practitioners working to improve homelessness and housing outcomes.

The Conference will also examine the important role of housing in the domestic and family violence policy response, as both the National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children and Victoria's Royal Commission into Family and Domestic Violence have stimulated important policy reflection and reform across Australia.

Other major sessions in the National Housing Conference 2017 program include supplying social and affordable housing in global cities; state housing policy under a new national agreement; examining the

new National Housing Finance and Investment Corporation; building Australia's affordable housing industry; social outcomes from social housing; Indigenous housing outcomes; and the relationship between affordable housing and cities policy.

Convened by AHURI, in partnership with the NSW Department of Family and Community Services, the National Housing Conference runs from 29 November to 1 December 2017 at Sydney's International Convention Centre.

The conference program is available for download at www.nhc.edu.au/program

Visit the National Housing Conference website to register: www.nhc.edu.au

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Feature: The Future of National Homelessness Policy

Social and Affordable Housing is Key to the Future of National Housing Policy

Catherine Yeomans, Chief Executive Officer and Chris Bratchford, Executive, Mission Australia Housing

As the Commonwealth negotiates bilateral housing and homelessness agreements with each state and territory, there is an opportunity for not only more accountability, but for genuine progress towards real and lasting change. Reducing homelessness will require efforts by all levels of government, businesses and the community sector — and now is the time to get the settings right.

It is vital that any strategy to address homelessness must include a commitment to provide an adequate number of homes that are genuinely affordable and appropriate. The market has failed to deliver for households on low incomes, putting too many people in precarious housing situations or even pushing them into homelessness.

It is in this context that we set out ten recommendations for boosting the supply of social and affordable housing which will make a significant contribution to preventing and addressing homelessness:

1. Deliver 200,000 new social homes and revive current social housing stock

Targets for social housing growth must be set in each state. Increases in social housing stock need to meet the housing needs of the 200,000 people currently on waiting lists across Australia. Renewal of social housing that has been left to languish without vital maintenance and repairs also needs to be a priority.

While this is not an easy task, there have been recent efforts to grow social housing stock that we can learn from. For example in New South Wales the Social and Affordable Housing Fund is providing the subsidy needed for community housing providers,

developers and financial institutions to invest in social housing and support for tenants, while Communities Plus will revive ageing estates and deliver more homes. There are good models out there, but they need to be scaled up into a comprehensive national approach, through a long-term consistent government investment program.

2. Create a new class of truly affordable housing and deliver 250,000 new affordable rental properties

We will always need social housing, as a critical part of the housing continuum. But more affordable private rental housing is also necessary, especially given sky rocketing rents in many areas which are now pushing unprecedented numbers of people into rental stress.

For rental housing to be truly affordable to households on low incomes, a substantial discount of up to 50 per cent is needed on market rents. While the current gap between social housing rent and market rent is impossible for many people to meet, a new class of 'mezzanine' level affordable housing will allow some social housing tenants to move into the private rental market, reducing pressure on social housing waiting lists.

Over 500,000 low-income households across Australia are in rental stress, so planning for 250,000 new affordable homes will make a big impact on reducing the prospect of homelessness for many high-risk families.

3. Bridge the funding gap for both social and affordable housing

The States cannot deliver any significant increase to social or affordable housing in isolation.

It takes a multi-government approach to address the funding gap over the long term and in any meaningful way.

The Commonwealth's recent announcement of a bond aggregator model will make a useful contribution by assisting Community Housing Providers (CHPs) to finance new developments. But it is insufficient in itself to generate greater investment in social and affordable housing. Cheaper finance is not the key problem stalling delivery of new below-market rental stock. What is desperately needed is a clear subsidy from government, so that investors in affordable rental housing have surety around the future viability of their investments.

A direct government subsidy would address the funding gap in both social and affordable housing.

4. Adjust tax settings to address housing affordability and fund new social and affordable housing stock

Many governments across Australia have professed housing affordability to be a key policy priority, but all too often this is narrowed to providing assistance to first home buyers. The Federal Government has shown an ongoing reluctance to address the significant tax breaks given to investors through negative gearing and capital gains tax discounts and little attention is given to those struggling to pay the rent in increasingly difficult markets.

Tax breaks provided to property investors come at an annual cost of \$11.7 billion to government revenue. If the significant tax concessions provided to investors were re-directed to social and

affordable housing we could significantly boost supply.

To see this approach in action, we only need to look to the United States where a stable funding mechanism has been in practice for 30 years. Introduced in 1986 with bipartisan support, the Low Income Housing Tax Credit provides a mechanism for private institutional investors to purchase tax deductions. The funding generated from this deduction goes directly into the creation of new below market housing. Since 1986 it has stimulated the production or rehabilitation of nearly 2.97 million affordable homes.

Reviewing concessions for property investors will also begin to level out the playing field for first home buyers while providing investors with a tax advantage in a social good — greater supply of social and affordable housing.

5. Deliver permanent supportive housing for vulnerable groups

For vulnerable people including those who have experienced chronic homelessness, have health issues, are ageing or are leaving institutional care, the Housing First model is the most effective way to maintain tenancies and improve wellbeing. These models have been shown to achieve strong positive outcomes for vulnerable clients, as well as providing substantial savings to governments. The MISHA Housing First project delivered by Mission Australia demonstrated savings of \$8,002 per person per year as well as 89 per cent of tenancies sustained; a halving of mental health disorders; and a decrease of substance use disorders from 37 per cent to 30 per cent over two years.

Supported accommodation models such as Common Ground provide a wrap-around person-centred approach for people with complex needs such as trauma, mental illness, disability and substance abuse. Permanent housing is the critical stabilising factor for vulnerable cohorts, and provides a base for the supports they need for improved wellbeing and greater independence.

6. Deliver supportive accommodation in a stepped care approach

There are many effective models of supported accommodation that cater for particular needs. This includes: Youth Foyers which link young people to education and employment while they are safely accommodated; rehabilitation facilities for people seeking treatment for substance misuse; and supported accommodation for people experiencing mental illness and exiting institutions.

This intensive service provision delivers good results, but what is missing is the next step in their journey to independence which would include a safe place to live and scaled back support. The expectation that people can exit directly to the community can create unsustainable outcomes, putting people into a cycle of insecurity and homelessness. Capital investment is required in purpose built or adapted buildings for a stepped care model with person-centred services.

7. Listen and facilitate solutions for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander housing needs

The pressing need for investment in Aboriginal owned and controlled social and affordable housing to address over-crowding and the shocking over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people among those experiencing homelessness in Australia is well documented. Such investment must be directed by Indigenous organisations, with local responses developed to suit each community's strengths, housing needs and development aspirations. At a minimum, immediate investment is required to provide 4,200 new Aboriginal owned and controlled homes in remote communities and regional centres.

8. Reforming Planning laws

Inclusionary zoning — where planning instruments require a component of below-market rental housing in specified areas — is an effective and proven way to stimulate new supply. It is widespread and effective across the United States, but only has fragmented and small-scale use in

Australia. Along with planning experts and economists, we have advocated for a minimum target of 15 per cent of all new developments on private land, and 30 per cent on government land in order to have a long-term and significant effect on the housing crisis. The affordable housing stock should be managed by CHPs in accordance with current regulations and allocation processes, in order to significantly boost community housing stock. To be effective this will also require changes to affordable housing planning rules. Reforms to planning laws should also ensure that a proportion of value gained through rezoning and public infrastructure investment is captured for broader community benefit.

9. Use housing investment to build stronger communities

Communities of entrenched disadvantage need more than just new homes. To enable long-term change and facilitate true transformation, community housing providers must work with community service providers to enable understanding of each local community's social assets, strengths and focus areas for improvement. The best prospect for community development comes when support provision is coordinated and communities are empowered to be directly involved in decision making around construction or renewal.

Mission Australia and Mission Australia Housing have taken such a long-term community development approach in Clarence Plains in Tasmania. A ten year plan was developed by the community to achieve both physical and social change including improved safety, links to jobs and training and better health and nutrition.

10. Set Clear targets to reduce homelessness

We have been consistently advocating for whole of government commitments to halve youth homelessness by 2020 and to halve overall homelessness by 2025. These are achievable targets but depend on strong commitments and immediate action from the Commonwealth Government and from States and

Territories. What gets measured is what gets done and we are hoping for genuine commitments to targets in the National Housing and Homelessness Agreements.

Conclusion

While we welcome ongoing funding for homelessness services, a secure pipeline of social and affordable

housing is needed to curb the growing numbers of Australians experiencing homelessness and housing stress, let alone start reducing the problem. Now that there is a national dialogue about the 'housing crisis', this is the time to set the agenda for the future of national homelessness policy with courage and vision.

We cannot continue to tinker around the edges of the supply side, waiting for the market to provide for those desperately in need. The National Housing and Homelessness Agreement must include targets and investment in social and affordable rental housing that are of a scale that will actually make an impact on homelessness.



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A National Homelessness Strategy: Why We Need It

Damien Patterson, Policy and Advocacy Officer, Council to Homeless Persons

Australian homelessness services support nearly 300,000 people a year to prevent or end their homelessness. Supporting people to keep their housing and resolve underlying issues are critical to breaking the homelessness cycle.

A myriad of life events cause homelessness, as do structural conditions beyond any one person's control. Responding to homelessness requires different responses depending on the cause and systemic issues. However, too often, services are hamstrung by funding structures that do not reflect the needs of the people in the waiting room.

Currently Australia has no national homelessness policy. We have funding that reflects historical agreements and that has lagged behind the growing demand.

This is not what the future of homelessness policy in Australia should look like.

Homelessness Australia (HA), the national peak body for homelessness, has identified ten recommendations for a future national homelessness strategy.

A National Homelessness Strategy

A new homelessness strategy would provide adequate funding that reflects the needs of people experiencing homelessness today. Funding the strategy for five years means services can plan for the future, allowing innovation.

So much of homelessness funding relies on short-term agreements, leaving it at risk of major funding cuts. Funding for five years would mean agencies could focus on doing their job, instead of campaigning against

cuts to funding that is already too little.

Funders want innovation, and the sector has delivered some incredible responses to homelessness. But having built that knowledge base, there is no commitment to roll these projects out. We need to be able to replicate what works. A new strategy would allow us to bring our successes to scale and help more people in more locations.

Streamlined Access

Access to services varies based on where you live and what services are available. Getting good support should be a given, regardless of where you present.

This requires clear access points for homelessness support. Highly visible entry points benefit from a 'no wrong door' ethos where related services undertake warm referral and support for clients to access homelessness support.

States and Territories need output measures that promote cross-sector collaboration and strong pathways.

Housing First

Readers of *Parity* will be familiar with the success of Housing First models, where housing is the basis for recovery, with supports available as needed. Delivering Housing First more widely in Australia will need dedicated housing. To this end we are calling for:

- A supply of social housing to meet demand.
- Housing First to be the foundation of all social housing allocation.
- Resourcing services to provide the support people need to establish and maintain tenancies.
- Different approaches for different people, including rough sleepers,

people leaving custody, people with complex needs, families and young people.

Housing First does not just mean access to a house. Services need funding to provide tailored support for as long as required. This includes funded packages for those with complex needs.

Rapid Rehousing

Many people who experience homelessness do not need long term homelessness support. Women and children escaping family violence make up a large proportion of those experiencing homelessness and many require little housing focused support once re-housed.

Rapidly Rehousing women and children in those situations relies on having enough secure, permanent housing. Rapid Rehousing can prevent a crisis situation from spiralling into chronic homelessness.

Preventing Tenancy Breakdown

It is an old truism that prevention is better than a cure. Homelessness services can work with real estate and housing providers to sustain tenancies and avoid evictions. But tenancy support programs are currently limited. A key recommendation is to fund more of these early intervention programs.

Social housing exists to support many of the community's most housing insecure. Output measures for social housing must include the number of evictions into homelessness.

Short- and Medium-Term Accommodation

While Homelessness Australia calls for an increase in affordable, permanent housing, there remains a need for crisis and transitional housing. There

must be exits available to long term housing if people are to achieve positive outcomes.

The new homelessness strategy must include crisis and transitional options. Services also need the resources to provide crisis support to women and children who have experienced family violence, in line with the National Plan to Reduce Violence Against Women and their Children.

Better Integration with Other Services

The work of homelessness services intersects with a range of other sectors. Homelessness often reflects the failure of another human service system to provide all necessary supports. Governments must provide support to other sectors who have a vital role in homelessness intervention. These sectors include child protection, mental health, disability, aged care and housing supply.

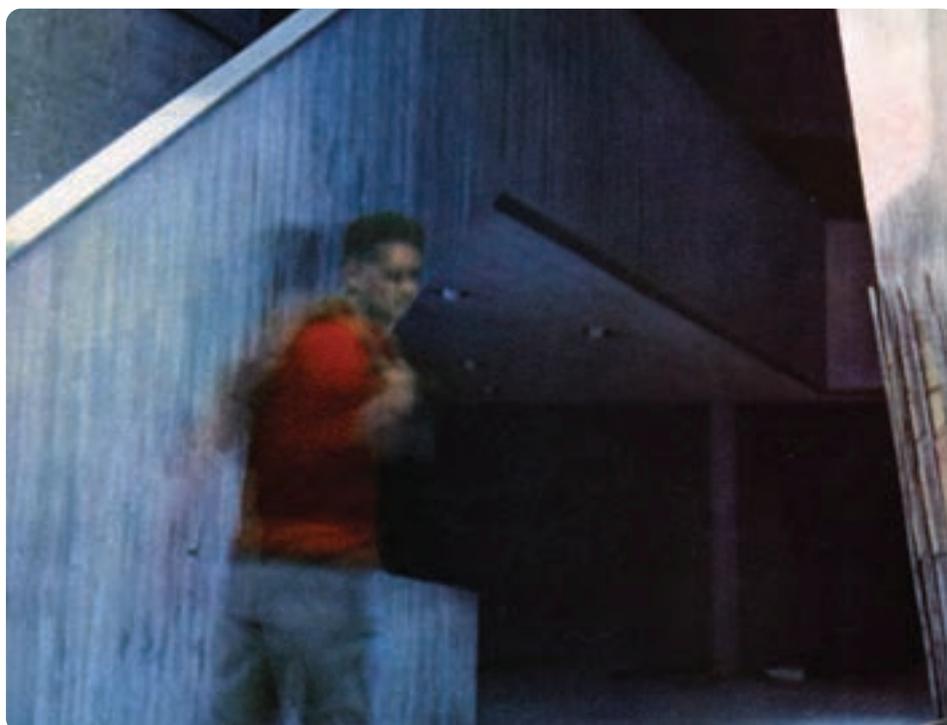
Achieving this will be complex, but HA has many recommendations.

Firstly, homelessness early intervention must be part of all reforms, establishing responsibility to undertake homelessness early intervention within mental health, drug and alcohol, domestic and family violence, out of home care, and justice.

Young people must be a key cohort requiring investment to prevent and respond to homelessness within the strategy. The strategy must set targets and identify the required resources to integrate responses across child protection, youth justice, disability and youth homelessness. Further, Reconnect funding for young people must be restored across all high need areas in Australia.

Older people must be a key cohort, including improving coordination and collaboration between homelessness, housing and aged care health services to prevent homelessness and facilitate ageing in place, prioritising the particular vulnerabilities of older women.

The National Disability Insurance Agency needs to respond with early intervention for people who have disabilities and experience homelessness. Further, universal



design standards are needed so that new housing stock meets the needs of future tenants.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Responses

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples make up 25 per cent of those experiencing homelessness — an enormous over representation. All homelessness agencies must be able to support this cohort. To be effective we also need services delivered by Aboriginal people for Aboriginal people.

A focus on prevention is key. To address this over-representation, homelessness early intervention need measurement across government programs.

Measuring Outcomes

Previous funding agreements included outcomes related to access to housing. This issue is beyond the influence of the homelessness sector. A future national strategy will include a homelessness outcome framework and a housing framework. To get this right, the sector needs to be part of developing the framework.

Increase the Availability of Affordable Housing

The Commonwealth Government needs to urgently develop an affordable housing strategy. The strategy must lay out a plan for increasing supply of social housing, and improving affordability and

access to the private rental market for people on low incomes.

The housing strategy must also ensure that nobody exits social housing into homelessness. We need to reform negative gearing and capital gains taxes on rental housing. Savings from this failed \$12 billion program must go to affordable housing. Lastly, Commonwealth Rental Assistance needs to increase, and it needs to be indexed to the rental component of the Consumer Price Index.

Conclusion

Homelessness Australia have been calling for a new national homelessness strategy for some time now. Our desire to see such a strategy in place is so great, that we have drafted the blueprint already, in the form of these recommendations.

With the Commonwealth committed to delivering a new National Housing and Homelessness Agreement, we now have the opportunity to test whether it meets the needs reflected in these ten recommendations. Australia's homelessness services are keen to do more to end homelessness in Australia. Ultimately, the new strategy will determine whether this eagerness is shared by the Government.

There is no time to waste; homelessness in Australia is increasing daily.

The Visibility of Homelessness Exposes the Invisibility of Housing Policy

Adrian Pisarski, Executive Officer, National Shelter

Recent stories about the establishment and removal of large camps of people experiencing homelessness in Sydney and Melbourne provide the media with dramatic images and stories replete with tragic victims, nasty villains and heroic defenders. However, these images and stories that mask a general indifference and collective national culpability that has allowed our housing policy to fall victim to greed and division.

Homelessness is at times the visible consequence of the failure of housing policy and good planning that feeds a growing Australian value of selfishness and a willingness to accept the inevitability of chasmic social division. However, most homelessness is invisible with people living hand to mouth in caravan parks and boarding houses or staying in spare rooms, even bathrooms, of friends and family until no longer tolerated. Too many live out of cars and tents or huddle in the nooks and crannies of our cities awaking from their cardboard beds to the contempt of commuters ignorant of the ease in which the same fate may befall them.

We bemoan the fate of the homeless but all too often secretly condemn them as individual failures, our selfishness refusing to see the long decline of the principle of fairness that once insisted we ensure no one can fall that far. That is of course unless you were Aboriginal, Torres Strait Islander or some form of otherness that sanctioned your dismissal as irrelevant by previous generations indifferent to your lack of life's opportunities.

At the same time, the growth of homelessness has come about and because of the decline of public housing, or social housing as it is

now generally known, including the one illuminating feature of our housing system, community housing. The story is now so familiar to me I recite it in my dreams while battling imaginary monsters. But rather than looking back to retell the sad tale of our housing policy failure, I wish to look forward to a possible bright and positive future of affordable housing for all who need it and set out how we might get there.

It necessarily begins with tax reform because we already have sufficient, currently wasted and market distorting resources available now for any party willing to use it. Re-application of our current tax expenditures on Capital Gains Tax discounts, Negative Gearing excess, over generous depreciation allowances, superannuation concessions and trust accounts, would provide a sufficient subsidy essential to the provision of affordable and social housing. It would also start to rebalance our markets by eliminating the distorting policy settings of the current market.

So to establish some basic points:

No amount of encouragement and cajolement of private market processes will build affordable housing let alone social housing. There is always a subsidy gap, it's a range depending on the outcome for the occupant, the type of housing, location and amenity.

Most social housing is occupied by people who cannot find their housing in the general housing market. For example, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders who are often excluded from housing via discrimination, people with disabilities, frail elderly people,

traumatised people, sole parents, people who previously experienced homelessness. Apart from any ethical/moral issue involved in our current policy settings, not providing housing to these households costs us far more than providing it.

The broader housing system as a whole is broken and this manifests itself in a failing social housing system that is incapable of meeting demand or need because it has been insufficiently funded for decades and only houses those most in need and with the lowest incomes. You virtually have to become homeless before you are housed. This is crazy policy.

Various inquiries, reports, studies and government announcements have all failed to produce tangible responses to the need for affordable housing.

So, to accentuate the positive. We have the makings of a new vibrant affordable housing system through the growth and development of community housing as a supplement to private housing, and taking over (in a planned and evidence tested way) from our current failing public housing system. This was begun via cooperative housing and the local government community housing program in the seventies and eighties, expanded via small transfers of public housing and then boosted by the Rudd and Gillard government's stimulus and National Rental Affordability Scheme (NRAS). However, it is now languishing in an attempted but insufficiently robust and national regulatory framework. The creativity and ingenuity of this sector need to be unleashed to achieve ongoing benefits.

Recently the Turnbull government through Scott Morrison's leadership and budget have added some



important system architecture with the extension of tax breaks to Managed Investment Trusts, the establishment of the National Housing Finance Investment Corporation (NHFIC), that will oversee a Bond aggregator and an infrastructure fund. It is also ready to unlock parcels of federal government land and state contributions through a renegotiated National Affordable Housing and Homelessness Agreement (NHHA) with the state and territory governments.

These are reasonable measures but they will not find the essential subsidy needed to get the growth that is required.

Instead we need a new approach. The elements for this already exist and it only takes the political will to make it happen. It starts with admitting the reality of the problem; it proceeds by developing a national plan led by a national Minister with the ability to weave the available threads of government, private finance and community contributions into a robust fabric.

The threads are:

1. establishing accurate data on current housing and need and establishing targets to be met and measured

2. tax reform to create the financial capacity to make long term commitments and negotiate outcomes with states
3. establishing a capital fund for net new growth able to be measured and transparent to all
4. transfer of the existing social housing 'estate' over time to community housing providers (CHPs) with the title to establish the capital base from which growth and renewal may occur
5. encouraging a broad mixed tenure approach to affordable housing including ownership, and a range of negotiated rental points including full market and discount to market tested against benchmarks which don't exceed a set percentage of income
6. negotiating outcomes in planning and state tax reform with states
7. establishing tax credit arrangements to meet a range of subsidy levels and to attract equity scale investment
8. establishing minimum portfolio requirements to allow bidders to utilise tools flexibly
9. Be focussing on outcomes for the occupants

10. allowing CHPs to manage a range of real estate within established parameters.

All of these elements create a suite of tools and facilities that CHPs would be able to apply for and draw upon without having to submit to programs or wait for the next new bucket of funding.

Together they would allow approval to proceed based on meeting clear objectives and meeting robust national regulatory requirements.

These measures would create the condition to grow affordable housing and allow tenants to move between tenures as their circumstances change and without having to change dwellings unless need requires it.

They would allow the Commonwealth and States to become the backer and regulator of a system of housing provision to fill the gaps in our current system without challenging the role of private housing markets and at the same time offers genuine choices to households.

Private markets may work for the majority, but they fail a large minority who deserve another option than ongoing housing insecurity. If we grasp the opportunity to fight for and win a new way forward, we might even have a chance of ending homelessness.

Homelessness Policy with Women at the Centre: Surveying the Connections between Housing, Gender, Violence and Money

Hannah Gissane, Equality Rights Alliance and
Merrindahl Andrew, Australian Women Against Violence Alliance

Not all women who experience housing stress or need homelessness services are (or will identify as) 'escaping domestic violence', but all are affected by being women in a society with entrenched patterns of women being subjected to violence of various kinds. They may also have ongoing impacts from experiences of violence throughout their life-course. Conversely, not all women trying to build lives free of violence need or want homelessness services, but all are affected by housing affordability and need safe and secure homes.

Forty years ago, the main responses to violence were centred on helping women and children escape domestic violence to safe temporary accommodation, often refuges/shelters run and staffed by women working initially in unfunded and informal structures. These organisations have since become more numerous and more formal in their governance, and have become part of the broader semi-funded homelessness services system. In empirical terms, they provide services to an ever-increasing number of women who for various overlapping reasons need crisis accommodation and related support.¹

At the same time, policy-makers and non-government organisations have developed a rapidly-expanding range of initiatives to respond to violence against women, including Safe at Home programs, perpetrator interventions and men's behaviour change programs, and workplace-based responses, as well as prevention programs.² These include bystander training, improvements to media reporting of violence, and numerous initiatives to promote gender equality in the workplace,

online and in community settings such as sporting clubs. However, specialist women's homelessness services (and the other women's services against violence that they work alongside) have never been accorded the secure, central, self-determining place in policy responses to violence that they should have had.

Therefore, while the service and prevention landscape is changing rapidly, we need to maintain a focus on respecting and securing the role of women's services including refuges and shelters, while being clear that these services do not represent the full range of responses needed to prevent violence and support women who have been subjected to it.

Likewise, homelessness services generally have adapted to embody the understanding that housing and accommodation is not just about 'heads on beds' or 'a roof for the night'.

Homelessness is a social, familial, interpersonal, health, legal and especially economic condition and the term 'homeless' represents experiences that are structured by those conditions. The concept of what is a 'home' and the attendant connotations of 'safety', comfort and security are clearly, from a feminist point of view as well as other perspectives, deeply problematic.³ If a key feature of 'home' is 'safety', then perhaps we should consider as 'homeless' women who have a fixed address but are subjected to violence and abuse in both 'private' and 'public' life, and who lack the economic and legal power to successfully and without repercussion remove violent people from their homes.⁴

What implications do these issues have for national homelessness policy?

Firstly, the policy area is deeply related to gender and violence. Women are the primary beneficiaries of housing support systems, making up the majority of public housing tenants, Commonwealth Rent Assistance (CRA) recipients and people approaching specialist homelessness services.⁵ Domestic and family violence is the single largest reason for people to seek homelessness services and six out of ten homelessness service clients in 2014–15 were female.⁶ Therefore issues of gender and violence are not marginal to the 'main problem' of homelessness and housing; they are central. An effective national homelessness policy has to put these issues at the centre.

Secondly, an effective national homelessness policy needs to address and respond to the longer-term legacy of funding and service arrangements, and to be realistic about the different sectors and purposes within which services work. Specialist women's services funded with 'homelessness money' are part of broader service sectors addressing women's needs arising from their experiences of violence and oppression. These linkages, common projects and connected forms of support need to be recognised and strengthened in any new policy framework.

The National Housing and Homelessness Agreements (NHHA) heralds a long-awaited recognition of the Federal Government's role in responding to housing unaffordability and homelessness. The size, scope and ambition of this role remains to be seen as negotiations for the NHHA get under way, noting that funding remains at much the same levels as in the previous agreements.

For the NHHA to work for women, it needs to be supported by Federal Government initiatives that relate to gender equality, such as measures to boost participation in the paid workforce and reduce violence against women and their children, and ideally a national strategy for gender equality across all policy areas. As Kennet and Chan articulate, 'housing systems and opportunities are embedded within structured and institutional relations of power which are gendered.'⁷ Recognition that the feminisation of poverty and violence shapes women's housing outcomes is vital if the NHHA is to reshape housing systems in a way that does not unduly disadvantage women.

The key features of a gender-responsive housing and homelessness policy framework would:

Revitalise housing support systems with a significant and renewed commitment to direct Government investment in public housing. The swelling numbers of (particularly) older, single women approaching homelessness services have become a 'symbol of housing insecurity in Australia'⁸ and underline the chronic, long-term underinvestment in housing support systems.⁹ Long-term housing is the biggest gap in specialist homelessness provision with only 11 per cent of older people in need of it able to be assisted.¹⁰

Recognise the diversity of responses needed across the housing continuum and the need for structural, as well as, individualised responses: The Productivity Commission's draft report into Introducing Competition and Informed Consumer Choice into Human Services¹¹ makes recommendations to replace income-based rent setting in public housing with a standardised CRA regime. Standardised approaches such as this need to be resisted, as a diversity of housing supports is needed to respond to the multiplicity of housing stress and homelessness experiences.

Recognise and support a diversity of tenures: The majority 2015 Senate Inquiry report on housing affordability, *Out of Reach*, recommended renting be recognised as a mainstream form of tenure with corresponding policy and legislative reform to ensure

'longer, safer and secure tenancies.'¹² Likewise, alternative forms of ownership such as shared equity schemes and community land trusts offer a possible pathway into housing security for some mid-life women experiencing housing insecurity, and should be supported with appropriate safeguards.¹³

Recognise and support a diversity of housing types: All new builds should be accessible for people with disability and our ageing population. All Commonwealth funding for States and Territories for new build housing must meet the Silver Standard Design in the Liveable Housing Australia guidelines.

Recognise and respect women's specialist services through increased and longer funding terms and embedded standards reflecting the good practice principles developed by specialist women's services over decades.

These entail:

1. a rights-based approach that enables understanding of the gendered nature of the violence, its causes and consequences and
2. empowers survivors / victims by enabling self-determination, control over processes and choice. Good-practice service provision, taking
3. a client-centred approach, remains accountable to victims/survivors and
4. places their safety, needs and interests at the centre of all decisions. It also works to ensure that
5. perpetrators are held accountable for their use of violence. Good-practice service provision delivers
6. culturally-sensitive, holistic and accessible services to diverse groups of women.¹⁴

Include specialist gendered and ageing services and advice: as highlighted in a number of reports, programs like Assistance with Care and Housing for the Aged will need to be expanded to accommodate projected demand,¹⁵ and should include 'light-touch' support for older single women presenting with 'low needs.'

Direct funding to providers and services with demonstrated expertise and experience in service and housing provision to people on low incomes and experiencing

disadvantage and marginalisation.¹⁶ Opt against systems that outsource housing and homelessness services to for-profit private sector providers and/or favour large generalist services over more stand-alone specialist services. Recognise the expertise and experience of non-government services and the need to promote service sectors that are diverse in organisational form and focus.

Be accountable and transparent about funding for gendered services, including services responding to violence against women. The difficulty in tracking funding for these services has been articulated by the COAG Council; 'with funding provided under a mix of different funding streams that have a range of stated objectives, it is difficult to ensure domestic violence services have appropriate levels of funding, or to monitor where government funds are being directed in the context of changing levels of demand.'¹⁷ More generally, we need a dedicated framework for the funding of prevention and response programs relating to violence against women at the Commonwealth level, which transparently tracks and measures funding both in aggregate and through separate programs and portfolios, including housing and homelessness.

Link with an increase in income support payments: the combination of an unaffordable housing market and a wholly inadequate income support system works to 'trap people in severe rental stress.'¹⁸ Adequate income support payments, including rent assistance, are critical to ensuring women are able to access affordable and appropriate housing, particularly single mothers.¹⁹

Create space to research and respond to other issues that are often sidelined or invisible in policy and public debates on homelessness, including the link between sexual violence and housing/homelessness;²⁰ responses to the distinct needs of people who are trans, non-binary, lesbian, gay and bisexual (particularly young people in these groups);²¹ access to public and community housing for people who are not citizens or permanent residents; and access to income support for people on temporary visas.

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Unison Housing Research LaB PhD Scholarships x 2

The Union Housing Research LaB (UHRL) is a unique education and research collaboration between RMIT University and Unison Housing, Victoria's largest social housing provider. The LaB is situated in the Centre for Applied Social Research in the School of Global, Urban and Social Studies. The LaB was established in 2017 and is funded for five years to undertake an innovative research program informed by the experiences of service users and providers.

We are seeking highly motivated and qualified applicants for two PhD scholarships to commence in March, 2018. The scholarships will be for two studies:

1. an ethnographic study of two mixed tenure sites that examines the aspects that contribute to successful (or otherwise) communities; and
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For more information about the scholarships, how to apply, eligibility and selection criteria contact:

Unison Professor of Urban Housing and Homelessness
Director, Union Housing Research LaB
guy.johnson@rmit.edu.au
03 9925 9893

Dr Juliet Watson
Deputy Director, Union Housing Research LaB
juliet.watson@rmit.edu.au
03 9925 3477

Homelessness Policy: Where to Now?

Associate Professor David MacKenzie, Swinburne University

Homelessness continues to be a significant social problem in Australia. In 2015–16, 279,000 men, women and children sought help from homelessness services at a cost of \$763.6m; a decade or so earlier, it was 187,000 individuals at a cost of \$383 million. The affordability of housing continues to be a major public issue. From time to time, the visibility of homelessness becomes a dramatic public spectacle such as in Melbourne when police cleared encampments from outside Flinders Street Station or the more recent case of the Martin Place clearance of the rough sleepers.

All social policy, including homelessness policy, is shaped by values and principles. These may be explicit or not so explicit. Also, there are principles underpinning policy at the highest level and then there are principles of implementation and practice that shape how policy is turned into actions and activities on the ground. Good high level policy can be poorly implemented and not achieve the intended outcomes. Likewise, good practice and hard dedicated work by support workers and agencies can be hampered by poor policy and/or insufficient resources.

Finally, external factors in the economy or in other policy areas may have significant adverse impacts on homelessness and overcome modest positive outcomes achieved by sound policy settings and effective implementation and good practice.

Policy development processes are usually complex, always political and often idiosyncratic. However, a core principle for good policy is a commitment to basing policy on the best evidence available from research so that policy can advance to meet

emerging needs and changing circumstances. In the real world though, talking the talk of evidence-based policy comes easily, but too often politicians find walking the walk much more difficult.

Human Rights and Social Policy

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights,¹ adopted by the General Assembly of the United Nations in 1948, declared in article 25(1) that:

'... everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care and necessary social services...'

In 1975 and 1980, Australia signed and ratified the United Nations International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR). In doing so, Australia assumed responsibility for upholding the provisions of the two covenants. The two Treaties articulate standards by which signatories could measure how well they are addressing 'homelessness' and other forms of social exclusion.

In 1991, the Committee on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights (CESCR), responsible for monitoring the ICESCR, issued a 'General Comment No. 4'² to clarify the terms of the treaty on the right to adequate housing. These comments include: legal security of tenure, the availability of services, materials, facilities and infrastructure'; 'affordability'; 'accessibility'. 'location', and 'cultural adequacy'.

Of that short list, housing affordability has become a mainstream continuing

issue for Australians. The under-investment in social housing over a long period of time has produced a huge backlog of need and population growth and immigration has fuelled increasing demand.

Australia may be a signatory to an international covenant/treaty, but unless domestic legislation is enacted to incorporate its provisions directly into Australian law, international covenants/treaties are not legally enforceable under Australian law. Neither the ICESCR nor the ICCPR have been incorporated into Australian legislation. Currently, only two states have a legislative version of a Bill of Rights — the *Victorian Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities 2006*³ and the *Human Rights Act 2004*⁴ in the Australian Capital Territory. There is also a campaign underway in Tasmania for a Tasmanian Human Rights Act. Elsewhere, there have been reports proposing human rights legislation but no legislation has been yet been enacted.

Social Inclusion and Social Exclusion

The power of the concept of social exclusion is that it is about more than just material deprivation. Poverty remains an important dimension but social exclusion extends to a range of forms of discrimination and exclusions that may exist.

Beginning in 2008, the Australian Government created a Social Inclusion Board to identify long-term strategies for ending poverty and addressing disadvantage in Australia. In the government statement on social inclusion, *A Stronger, Fairer Australia*,⁵ 'reducing the incidence of homelessness' was one of the six priority social inclusion areas.

Australia's program of homeless services has been the envy of other countries on many grounds. However, in retrospect, and from a critical perspective, it must be said that the former Supported Accommodation and Assistance Program (SAAP) was not designed around the concept of social inclusion. The development of our homelessness service system concentrated on helping people who had become homeless. There was little or no early intervention and beyond the exit into some form of secure housing little thought about post-homelessness support. The implicit premise was that once somebody had been assisted into housing, then they were expected to function more or less independently. For many people, this is a perfectly reasonable expectation, but for some people it is not. In terms of social inclusion, the final death blow came in September 2013, when then Prime Minister Tony Abbott scrapped the Social Inclusion Board.

From Principles to Policy

So how can a broad human rights framework and a commitment to social citizenship and social inclusion be translated into principles for policy? By no means an exhaustive list, the following propositions come to mind:

- A reformed social housing sector — major long-term government investment in the development of a social housing sector that should not be thought of as just housing for the most disadvantaged. Perhaps we need to rethink social housing and government investment in social housing as a more open access affordable housing option for young people, families and individuals for those periods in their lives when they need more support, but not necessarily a long-term or lifetime housing destination.
- Supportive housing for people recovering from homelessness. In some cases, this is housing linked with support packages for people with high and complex needs; in the case of young people, the support is what young people need as they make the transitions to adulthood, independence and a sustainable livelihood.
- Support and accommodation linked to education, training and supported pathways to

employment. Youth Foyers embody this idea, but from a needs and life course perspective, all work with homeless young people needs to be linked to keeping young people engaged in education and training. Other adults experiencing have similar needs.

- A whole of government, integrated place-based approach to prevention, early intervention, service provision and post-homelessness support and reintegration into community life.

Principles of Practice and Standards of Service Provision

In the 2008 White Paper, *The Road Home: A National Approach to Reducing Homelessness*,⁶ it was stated that 'the Australian Government will enact new legislation to ensure that people who are homeless receive quality services and adequate support' and that the 'best features of the *Supported Accommodation Assistance Act 1994* and the *Disability Services Act 1986* would be incorporated into the new legislation on homelessness'.

A parliamentary committee reaffirmed the need to frame legislation on homelessness after a consultation with key stakeholders. However, there is no legislative successor to the *Supported Accommodation and Assistance Act*.

There was concern in the homelessness sector that without legislation, government commitment was weaker and the rights of homeless clients less secure. However, the new funding arrangement for homeless services as a part of a National Affordable Housing Agreement (NAHA) did not require special program legislation as before. Nor did the development of the homeless service sector in various jurisdictions require Commonwealth legislation. A discussion paper, *A National Quality Framework to support quality services for people experiencing homeless*,⁷ was distributed during discussions around Australia in 2011. This effort, terminated following the 2013 election, was based on considerable prior development in the various jurisdictions.

During the 1990s, a lot of effort was put in to improve SAAP service

standards. The New South Wales (NSW) *SAAP Standards* (1998)⁸ are a good example. More recently, in 2005, Victoria rolled out Homelessness Assistance Service Standards — HASS⁹ and services were required to accredit against these standards. In 2012, these standards were replaced by a more generic Department of Human Services Standards.¹⁰

In 2006, the Victorian Government had produced a new *Consumer Charter and Guidelines: Your rights and responsibilities explained*, which was subsequently superseded by a newer Client Services Charter.¹¹ The Charter set out the rights and responsibilities for clients of homelessness and social housing services funded by the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) — rights to crisis assistance, consideration for accommodation and housing based on fair policies, help finding and staying in long-term suitable housing, freedom from discrimination, to be respected, participation in decision-making, the right to make a complaint and help applying for income support, employment and health services, educational opportunities and other support services, but a responsibility in turn to be respectful of others.

In 2008, the ACT Government launched an *ACT Homelessness Charter*.¹² In the preamble, the status of the Charter was explained as 'a statement of rights is intended to improve the circumstances of homeless people by raising community awareness and promoting a rights-based approach to homelessness service delivery. The charter is not a law, and the rights it sets out cannot be directly enforced in a court of law. It is a statement of values subject to the laws of the ACT'. The charter covers similar ground as the Victorian charter, perhaps somewhat more strongly stated.

As part of the *Tasmanian Homelessness Plan 2010–13: Coming in from the cold*,¹³ Tasmania also developed a Homelessness Charter. The Tasmanian Charter advanced seven key themes that cross-referenced to practice principles for quality 'user-focused' and 'needs-based' service provision.¹⁴

These were:

- Dignity and respect;
- Health, safety and well-being;
- Privacy and confidentiality;
- Equity and fairness;
- Non-discrimination;
- Choice and self-determination.

Many homelessness agencies undertake quality assurance cycles. Three states developed charters, two have human rights legislation. There are various jurisdictional service standards which share much in common. Despite a lack of a National Quality Framework and consistency in the various jurisdictions, there is no endemic problem in the practical work with homeless clients in Specialist Homelessness Services (SHS) on the ground. But, what would move practice to a new level of effectiveness is a 'deliverology'¹⁵ approach where homelessness-related data is used in real-time to improve outcomes.

In the UK, Michael Barber headed up the Delivery Unit under the Blair Government, which in 2001 was tasked with ensuring that reforms were achieved and outcomes delivered. Deliverology was originally a pejorative term but it has since been embraced to describe the outcomes improvement methodology — clear objectives, targeted resources, close data-driven attention to practice and a focus on improving outcomes. By contrast, the homelessness client data that is collected is primarily about accountability and system management. The NSW Government's commitment to 12 key Premier's Priorities¹⁶ — which include 'making housing more affordable', 'reducing youth homelessness' and 'reducing domestic violence' — is an Australian exemplar of 'deliverology' in action for other jurisdictions to follow.

The Strategic Goal of 'Ending Homelessness'

A major issue of a policy area such as homelessness is setting appropriate long-term goals and then having the means and the bipartisan political commitment to see them through. At one level, homelessness is not a hotly contested issue, but many of the best initiatives get shelved when governments change.

When Australia began responding to the increasing problem of homelessness in the early 1980s, community advocates and various state and territory reports argued for homelessness services to meet the expressed need for supported accommodation. This was a landmark achievement and it produced one of the best homelessness service systems in the world. The preamble to the *Supported Accommodation Assistance Act (1994)* spoke to 'the need to redress social inequalities', about the 'reduction of poverty' and 'the amelioration of the consequences of poverty for individuals' (aka homeless persons). The policy approach at this time was about 'amelioration of the consequences of poverty' or the homelessness of clients of SAAP, not ending homelessness.

In the United States (US), where homelessness is more prevalent and street sleeping more evident, the National Alliance to End Homelessness,¹⁷ called for an end to homelessness in the US in ten years. The clock started ticking from about 2002. This was a bold aspirational goal. Hundreds of cities and towns adopted this objective and started to craft plans to achieve the end of homelessness. Looking back on the US experience what lessons can we draw? Clearly, the end of homelessness has not been achieved although small decreases in the point in time counts of homeless persons possibly suggest a positive impact. On the other hand, it must be remembered that in the US context residency in rooming houses or trailer parks is not counted as homelessness but is accepted as an affordable housing option. Maybe some people have moved across into this kind of accommodation. Not rough sleeping but in terms of an Australian definition of homelessness still a situation of homelessness. Does that mean the goal of ending homelessness in ten years was over-reach? Yes, but with the caveat that the homelessness response was terribly under-resourced, and in the US, it was not possible to roll out a national strategic plan.

In 2010, before the results of the effort could be publicly assessed, the US federal government did a 'tactical reboot' on the plan to end

homelessness by redefining the objective as the goal of putting an 'end to chronic and veteran homelessness'. What has been achieved is a substantial growth in the provision of supportive housing. But, virtually nothing has been done to implement prevention and early intervention strategies. In terms of major national policy change, significant structural reform is very difficult in a country where a culture of possessive individualism is so pervasive; where the very idea of universal health care is a controversial issue and where real wages corrected for inflation have been falling or flat-lined for more than 40 years.

In 2008, the National Youth Commission Inquiry on Youth Homelessness called for 'ending youth homelessness by 2030', and a National Framework and National Homelessness Action Plan with 'specific targets over the short, medium and long-term' and 'strategies that set out realistically how targets will be achieved'.¹⁸ Over the past decade, many of Australia's leading charities and organisations in the homelessness sector have added their voice to the call to end homelessness.

While, the 2008 White Paper did not explicitly talk of ending homelessness, it did for the first time set a target of halving homelessness by 2020 with the implication that over the long term the implicit goal was eliminating homelessness. The White Paper framework of 'turning off the tap', 'improving and expanding services' and 'breaking the cycle' if implemented systematically and systemically would conceivably progress towards to that stated strategic goal. However, the election of the Abbott Government ended the relatively higher policy priority homelessness had under the previous Labor Government. Yet, even before that, after a good start, no national strategy plan was developed and no new investment went into 'turning off the tap' or early intervention and prevention. Both sides of politics must bear some of the responsibility for the failure to make a measurable difference in reducing homelessness. Our collective national response to homelessness needs to be rebooted and rebuilt.



In Summary

So, what needs to be done?

- Serious new investment in early intervention and prevention. Without this, reducing homelessness cannot be achieved. For different sub-cohorts within the homelessness population such as youth or families and women escaping domestic violence, this will involve some quite different approaches and models.
- A 'whole of government' strategic approach to homelessness that brings mainstream agencies, whether administrated by the Commonwealth or the states and territories, into the national effort — new models that go beyond just what SHS agencies are funded to do — and a shift to place-based collective impact models.
- A COAG supported nationally cooperative effort drawing on some of the best work being done in various jurisdictions thus more effectively expending the public funds available for responding to homelessness.
- An adoption and adaptation of the Michael Barber's 'deliverology' approach to improving client outcomes across a range of service delivery areas relevant to homelessness, including, housing, community services, education, health and justice.
- The development of a youth-specific and youth-appropriate social housing sector as both a preventative measure, but also as

a way of delivering rapid rehousing for young people who have become homeless. All youth housing and homelessness hubs should be foyer-like and supportive of education, training and employment pathways.

- A rethink social housing and a move away from social housing as 'welfare' housing — and major social housing investment and policies such as taxation reform and mandated social housing as part of all private housing developments.
- A *National Strategy Plan for Ending Homelessness*, supported by both sides of politics and designed as a long-term effort to end homelessness.

To paraphrase what a number of historical personalities have said: 'The measure of a civilization or society is how well it treats its most vulnerable citizens'. We all might usefully reflect on how this profound thought could be operationalised to end homelessness in Australia?

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Breaking Public Housing?: Tightening the Noose and Kicking Away the Chair

Travis Gilbert, Chief Executive Officer, ACT Shelter

With states and territories negotiating a new National Housing and Homelessness Agreement (NHHA), I thought I should take *Parity* readers back in time a little...

Amidst the heady days of 'wall-to-wall' Labor Governments, with the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) now a closed shop, a triumphant Prime Minister boldly declared the old era of stage managed, nation-bickering was over — replaced by the nation-building era Rudd coined 'co-operative federalism'; the year was 2007.¹

The Council on Federal Financial Relations was tasked with consolidating more than 90 separate agreements/dedicated program bilaterals into six *Specific Purpose Payments* (SPPs) — supported by time-limited National Partnership Agreements to fund big ticket items like affordable housing.

State and territory leaders had agreed with Kevin 07. There would be no need for old-school thinking like tied grants or requirements to match funding.

Taking Stock: one subsidy, per dwelling, per year, perhaps

In a significant win for the three most populous states, funding for the Affordable Housing SPP was allocated on a *per capita* basis.

Bonus! Thought at least a couple of leaders — no need to demonstrate how many state owned and managed mainstream and Indigenous homes we have carriage of — no arduous accountability requirement to retain/restore our housing stock.

At the time I was a naïve civil servant at Housing SA when the National Affordable Housing Agreement (NAHA) was broadened, narrowed,

tweaked — then diminished somewhat... South Australia fared very badly out of the *per capita* deal.

A year later, I moved to Canberra to work at Homelessness Australia. I soon learned Housing ACT, was and is, also duded by the population based funding model. Likewise, the Northern Territory found itself at least \$7 million worse off and Tasmania took a hit as well.²

I guess it was more politically expedient to reward under-investment by states where 14 million voters live at the expense of states with only 1.7 million federal voters.

For universal public systems like Medicare, a *per capita* funding seems like the most sensible model. However, unlike Medicare benefits, social housing is not a universal access system. Over the past three decades, Commonwealth and State/Territory Governments determined we must 'triage to highest need'. As a result deliberate and planned decisions were taken to residualise public housing, move moderate income working people out and 'free up' finite properties for people the housing market will never 'price-in'.

A *per capita* funding model for a system serving five to ten per cent of our population is both gerrymandered and inefficient. Not only does it reward states who historically underinvested. It incentivises them to continue to under-invest. Why build or retain stock, if you can transfer your 'legacy' stock and its maintenance costs and keep your share of Commonwealth funding?

To its credit the ACT Government has the en-masse sell-off or transfer of public housing, (save for a tranche of transfers tied to a loan facility it

established to provide access to some \$70 million,) to support the growth of one provider and head leasing arrangements with not for profits for about 640 properties.³ Under the *per capita* NAHA model, this means the ACT Government continues to fare much worse than more populous states who have flogged off large tranches of public housing but retained the same Commonwealth contribution as they would have, had they sold none.

What's In It For Us? Pitching a Per Dwelling Subsidy

Governments should be able to document how many homes their Housing/Tenancy Officers manage plus or minus a hundred.

An asset management strategy should also provide generic information about the condition of state owned and managed properties. The remainder of asset life; depreciation since time of build; how many are in good amenity; how many are beyond repair and properties per 10,000 people, etc. All state/territory Housing Authorities would have these asset management strategies.

If they will not open their books to the Feds, the obvious question without notice is, why not? It is a concern Federal Treasurer Morrison has been at pains to point out.

So here is my pitch to state and territory housing authorities.

Having done such an audit, jurisdictions can declare via their Ministers they are accountable for public spending. They contract out management of the maintaining of their assets, they assume responsibility for the thankless, thorny, time consuming and tough roles. They demonstrate that did the due diligence and it illustrates the gap between the cost to provide this vital

social infrastructure. The cost of homes for nearly 900,000 of Sco' Mo's 'fellow Australians' is thus X million dollars.

It could open...

Meeting International Obligations

We understand human rights are an open wound at the minute for the Australian Government.

That said, the Australian Government is the tier of government responsible for reporting to the United Nations (UN) on our efforts to meet housing obligations stipulated in the International Covenant of Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and Australia's submissions on the UN Sustainable Development goals.⁴

For this reason I propose increasing the Commonwealth allocation under a new National Housing and Homelessness Agreement (NHHA), having regard for rising maintenance costs and depreciated capital value on older dwellings.

To save time, I will concede this will not be an attractive offer for some state Treasuries. I am from the ACT, so let's move on.

The \$6 billion Question...

Over the past decade successive Commonwealth Government Ministers have lauded the \$6 billion-ish a year they allocate to housing assistance.⁵ Usually this is done to emphasise their generosity to the social housing and homelessness sectors.

So... The \$6 billion question is what does it fund?

About \$4 billion is spent on Commonwealth Rent Assistance Payments (CRAP) to support 1.34 million private and 70,000 community housing tenants.⁵

It allocates about \$1 billion to the operational subsidy for public housing and Community Housing Investment Program (CHIP) component of the NAHA.⁶ 845,500 people in homes maintained (in part) by funding for this subsidy, including some 9,900 households in State Owned and Managed Indigenous Housing (SOMIH).⁷

It should be noted state and territory governments commit more than \$3 billion to operational costs of public housing per annum.⁸

The Commonwealth reports about \$260 million from the NAHA as its allocation to some 1,500 homelessness services supporting over 200,000 people each year at risk of, or experiencing homelessness. \$116.3 million will be allocated to the Commonwealth this year for the National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness that supports just over 80,000 people.⁹

The remaining \$550 to \$600 million was allocated by the Commonwealth to homelessness responses in 'first to know' agencies, partial funds for two family violence packages,¹⁰ the HOME Advice and Reconnect Programs, Assistance with Care and Housing for the Aged (ACHA), homelessness data collection, reporting and research and pilot programs.¹¹

From Pride to Prejudice: Demonising Tenants, Shattering Public Confidence

A deliberate and planned strategy characterised by progressively tightening the eligibility criteria for public housing (lowest income, highest need) has strangled rental income for state and territory housing authorities. This has reduced rental income, bankrupting public housing. By residualisation to highest need, media focus has been on the two per cent of tenants whose behaviour makes for easy tabloid and Current Affairs fodder. This has shattered public confidence in the system.

At the same time, the Commonwealth began reducing funding for the operational subsidy for public housing and increasing the direct cash payment, Commonwealth Rent Assistance (CRA) for private and community housing tenants on income support.

In 1989, expenditure on CRA was roughly equal to expenditure on social housing through the Commonwealth-State Housing Agreement.

Next year the Commonwealth will hand out five times as much CRA to tenants than it will allocate to public housing. In the ACT, 84 per cent of private tenants receiving CRA require the maximum rate of CRA to keep their heads above water.¹² However, the Productivity Commission rhetoric is that it is social housing rather than private rental that is broken.

Yet not only does social housing offer affordable and secure tenure, it also has a performance indicator framework (see Figure 1).

Community Housing Organisations also need to meet the requirements of the parallel National Regulatory System for Community Housing.¹³ In private rental, there are no such national performance indicators or regulatory standards.

For Profits... Have We Got a Value Proposition for You!

This is our value proposition in a nutshell.

Through competitive tendering and contestable procurement you bid for the following:

- 350,000 + public housing properties housing just over 700,000 tenants on income based rents.
- Tenants contributing between \$3,500 to \$6,000 rent per year. As a bonus, we will open up Commonwealth coffers so you can (tenant willing) factor in 70 bucks a week of Rent Assistance taking your rent from \$7,000 to \$9,000 a year (potentially).¹⁴
- Wait, there's more... The average age of your 'investment property' should you accept this amazing offer ... 47 YEARS.¹⁵

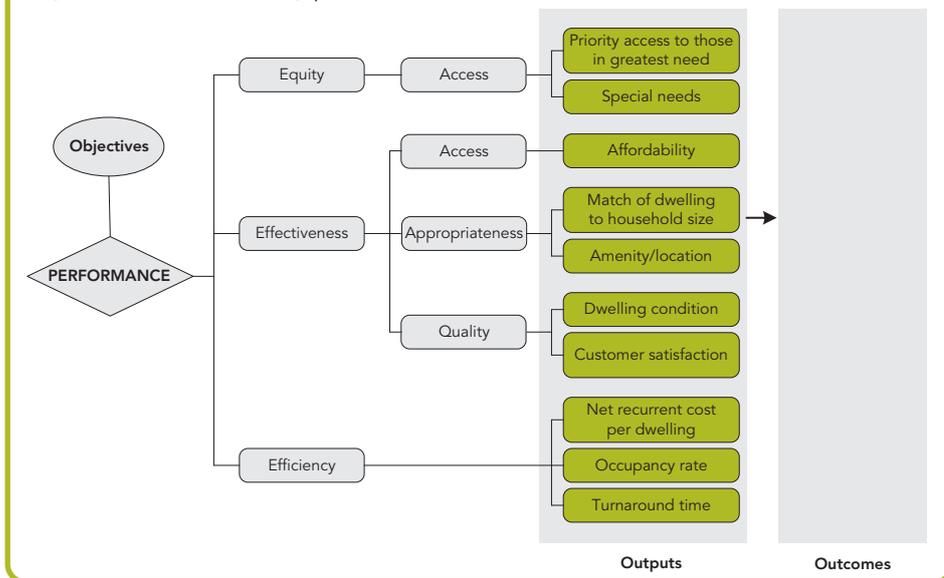
Maintenance costs expected per your nice little earner... \$9000 a year.¹⁶

Your tenant will not pay for water consumption, you cannot factor in rates to your asking rent, and annual rent increases above a few dollars will mean you will be at the tribunal soon enough serving a notice to remedy for arrears...

Did we not mention, our allocations policy is in effect an extraordinary act of self-sabotage.

Over 90 per cent of our tenants earn less than the median asking rent in the middle ring of the three Eastern Seaboard capitals. This was deliberate and planned. We rationed and residualised our product through written allocations policy to people with very high needs and very low incomes — the Commonwealth deliberately diverted funding away from new supply of state owned housing so... private enterprise, step right up.

Figure 1: Social housing performance indicator framework



About 80 per cent of your customer base have very high needs and very low incomes.

High needs — low Incomes — old stock — high maintenance — low rental yield.

Based on the above, my Request for Proposal to Mum and Dad investors, private property managers and 'for profits', is this:

How will you make public housing a profitable enterprise if you were afforded the opportunity to bid to deliver it through open, contestable procurement?

How will you grow the supply of housing for people on low incomes and where will you leverage the capital for this?

Please direct your responses to the Productivity Commission.

Post-Script

The Commonwealth contributes roughly \$1 billion to the housing part of the NAHA every year, this is not budgeted to increase when the National Housing and Homelessness Agreement (NHHA) replaces the NAHA in 2018–19.¹⁷

Without growth funding, public housing will wither on the proverbial vine and die.

Community housing organisations have delivered significant growth over the past two decades, much of this through leveraging off the back of

stock transfer. The private rental market has consistently failed to deliver homes at price points our punters can afford.

To impose *market principles* on social housing — a system which exists *because of market failure*, makes no sense to me — yet here we are.

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Artificial Intelligence and Homelessness Policy: A Brave New Solution?

Chris Black, Social Policy Analyst

Looking into the future can be very scary and unscientific. Particularly in an area such as homelessness where the future of housing affordability, the reduction in low skilled or even professional job opportunities, and the rising cost of living point to a fairly uncertain few decades to come.

But maybe we are about to turn the corner, with a new tool at our disposal in policy-making and program design? Could artificial intelligence (AI) be the answer? Could it possibly deliver worse outcomes than we currently have?

In a recent research project for Google, Australian researchers at AlphaBeta did a mass review of all occupations and their core tasks to see how 'automated' they may be in the future, and therefore prepare us for the potential impact of AI on our future economy and society.

Luckily for social and welfare professionals, it was estimated that only 14 per cent of their job could be automated, and the same for public policy managers. This indicates that these jobs will have healthy prospects in the future. (Politicians, or 'Members of Parliament', were also pretty safe with only 15 per cent of their job likely to be automated. For some a positive, for others a BIG negative). Other jobs like bus and taxi drivers will be 41 per cent automated.

[Check out www.abc.net.au/theairace if you want to know about other professions.]

But what if we were to hand the job of developing homelessness policy over to a machine — one that is either 'Artificially Intelligent' or offering 'Augmented Intelligence'?

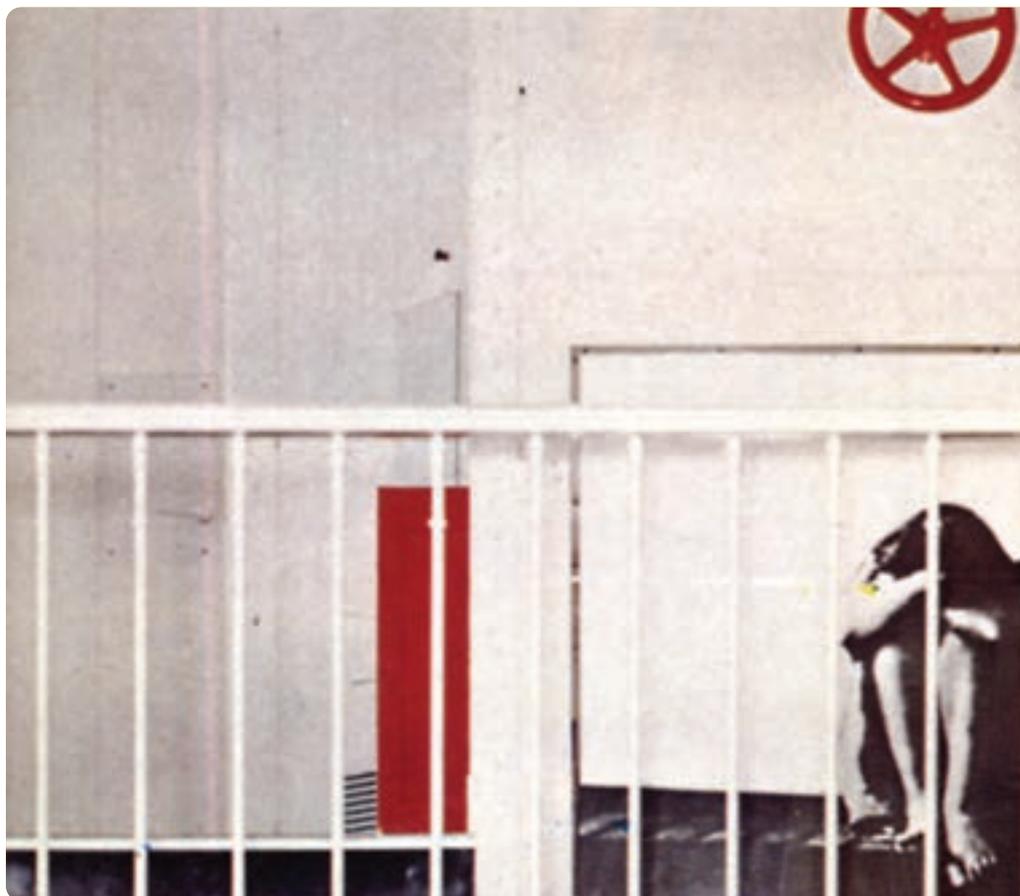
As someone who worked on the 2000 National Homelessness Strategy consultation paper and was involved in the research and writing behind the 2008 *Road Home* strategy, I am quite attracted to the idea of an objective, data-based, evidence-driven policy process — one without the whims and prejudices of various government officials, politicians, private interests and other 'stakeholders' calling the shots. One that can nail the most appropriate solution, not the most politically feasible and revenue neutral one while ignoring the real costs involved.

People with an actual lived experience of homelessness could help feed the 'machine' with a real-life evidence base (of the causal factors, lived

experience, short and long term impacts of homelessness), our mountainous database of research on the topic could be entered, and the relatively recent bank of information about the economic costs of homelessness and housing instability could also be plugged in.

A machine programmed to evaluate and analyse data and then provide a range of solutions could then churn over the information and present us with a number of options, the cost of each option and the cost (both social and economic) of either pursuing or failing to pursue each one.

In my (not unintelligent, but undoubtedly less rigorously analytical) opinion, the results would



likely come out with something similar to the following:

- Develop a comprehensive national strategy (involve everyone, including people with a lived experience of homelessness, and every government department at a national and state/territory level with even an iota of responsibility for causing or responding to homelessness) that spells out the root causes and lifetime costs of homelessness for individuals and the broader society.
- Identify the resources and infrastructure needed to put in place to:
 - Prevent homelessness occurring wherever possible;
 - Respond to the crisis of homelessness immediately when it occurs;
 - Provide a 'Housing First' solution to those affected;
 - Allow for adequate post-crisis support and follow-up to maintain secure housing and support services as required;
 - Ensure adequate social housing is delivered by every State and Territory to respond to growth in population, immigration rates and other

known variables that impact on housing demand/supply.

- Introduce a 'social housing levy' onto every new residential development nationwide requiring either a percentage of units allocated to social housing or a corresponding monetary contribution toward a national social housing fund.
- Develop a 10 year, 20 year and 30 year prediction of the costs of responding, and the concomitant costs of failing to act (including the cost of failing to adequately prevent homelessness for known high-risk groups such as ATSI communities, young people leaving care, people leaving prisons and other institutional settings, people with under-served mental health needs, women who have reported even one episode of family violence to the police or welfare authorities). Require that the costs of failing to act are assigned to and deducted from the responsible department's annual budgets until they step up to the plate.
- Test the results with people who have experienced homelessness to see what they think of the proposed solutions [Hint: if they say it's a bunch of rubbish, pay

attention to them and revise the proposed actions].

- Publish the proposed plan of attack on a public platform, the resources dedicated to the solutions, the names of the people and organisations and government departments responsible for each action item, so there can be some public visibility and accountability for the progress and outcomes of the plan.
- Mandate that an annual progress report be delivered to the Prime Minister and tabled in Federal Parliament, with similar processes required for each State and Territory (until the day that the population wakes up and insists that three levels of government is way too unwieldy, expensive and inefficient and abolishes state/territory governments).

The 'machine' might come up with some other completely unexpected and innovative solutions. But the bottom line is that decades of human intelligence, and existing policy-making processes, have failed us in delivering real and lasting answers to homelessness here in 'the lucky country'. If it comes down to a vote, I'll be hoping that the AI's have it!



Reconnecting with Young People

Leah Cave, Research and Evaluation Officer and

Jo Fildes Head of Research and Evaluation Sector Engagement, Mission Australia

Mission Australia's Research and Evaluation team conducted an outcomes evaluation across their seven Reconnect sites from March–October 2016. The evaluation collected both quantitative and qualitative data designed to determine whether client's improved across outcomes identified in consultation with Reconnect staff. Quantitative results were collected through an evaluation questionnaire developed by the Research and Evaluation team and piloted with Reconnect clients and staff. Qualitative information was gained through a series of semi-structured interviews conducted with stakeholders identified by staff across all seven sites. All current clients were asked to complete a questionnaire over two data collection periods and data from 57 clients was analysed for this evaluation.

Reconnect aims to prevent at-risk young people moving into homelessness through community based early intervention with young people, their families and the wider service system. The target group of Reconnect is young people aged 12 to 18 years who are experiencing homelessness or are at-risk of homelessness and their families. There are currently over 100 Reconnect services operating in metropolitan, regional, rural and remote locations around Australia, including a number of specialist Reconnect services.

Using administrative data, the 'support start date' for all clients in the full dataset was identified to determine the service duration between intake into the Reconnect service and the date of each survey's completion. Surveys were then grouped according to service support length at the time of completion.

Surveys completed from between eight to four weeks formed an 'intake' cohort, while surveys completed after a service support length of 8 to 16 weeks formed a 'follow-up' cohort.

A summary of findings has been provided below:

- Clients' personal wellbeing improved considerably throughout the time clients were supported by Reconnect, rising from 'challenged' (61.7 on the Personal Wellbeing Index scale) to 'normal' wellbeing (71.2).
- Client's housing permanency improved throughout the time they were receiving service support with Reconnect. At intake, the most recent time clients had a permanent place to live increased from a standardised score of 68.5 at intake to 86.2 at follow-up.
- The proportion of clients indicating that they did not have support in a time of crisis reduced by almost half, decreasing from 15.8 per cent at intake to 8.7 per cent at follow-up.
- Levels of family cohesion improved considerably over service length. The proportion of those indicating their family's ability to get along as 'poor' decreased dramatically from 42.1 per cent at intake to 4.2 per cent at follow-up, while those indicating this was 'very good' increased from 10.5 per cent at intake to 29.2 per cent at follow-up.
- Reported levels of financial resources in the family appear to have stabilised over time. A much greater proportion of cases reported that their family had 'mostly' enough money to meet their needs after 8 to 16 weeks, with 41.7 per cent giving this

response at follow-up compared to 15.8 per cent on intake.

- The proportion of clients rating characteristics of their housing as 'adequate or better' appears to have either remained steady or increased between intake and follow-up. The greatest increase was seen for 'your housing needs in general', rising from 64.6 per cent at intake to 80.0 per cent at follow-up.

Stakeholder interviews were transcribed and organised thematically. A summary of findings from these interviews is provided below:

- Most stakeholders reported positive views about the outcomes and supports provided to the young people they referred into Reconnect.
- Positive outcomes for young people engaged with Reconnect included: improved school attendance; improved coping skills; improved stress management; increased socialisation; improved conflict resolution skills; and improved communication skills.
- Stakeholders reported that the age range for referral should be expanded to include younger children. Schools in particular recognised that intervening earlier in the life cycle is critical in addressing homelessness risk factors and that it would be beneficial for children under 12 years old to be identified as 'at-risk'.
- The unique family intervention provided by Reconnect could potentially be expanded by supporting and training other local community services to effectively approach and assist families and young people identified as at-risk.

- Reconnect fills an important service gap and if the service operations of Reconnect were limited or removed this would have a dramatically negative impact on the community. The specialised service model for Reconnect was seen to be effective in providing early intervention for young people at risk of homelessness.
- The greatest changes were seen in clients during the initial phase of engagement with Reconnect services. This indicates that intervening early with intensive case management can result in considerably improved client outcomes across a range of

indicators, preventing more expensive interventions in the future by addressing the risk factors for homelessness early.

Mission Australia calls on the Commonwealth Government to guarantee the continuation of the Reconnect program for another five years, and give consideration to the following:

- Extending resources for additional staff in existing Reconnect services, particularly in communities with high levels of homelessness risk, socioeconomic disadvantage and child protection involvement;

- Expanding the program to additional locations of high child and youth homelessness;
- Expanding the Reconnect service model and capacity of this program to support an extended age range of 10 to 18 years. This could be subject to review after a period of time to assess whether this meets the needs of the local community; and
- Enabling the program to adopt more place-based, community-led approaches which work collaboratively with local schools, government agencies and youth support services into the future.



Community Garden at Clarendon Vale and Rokeby in Tasmania

Photo by Natalie Mendham

Consumer Voices

— Federal Policy and Homelessness

Consumer Voices is a regular feature in *Parity*. Articles are written by and with consumers to ensure they have a say about the issues that directly affect them.

The Peer Education and Support Program (PESP) is the consumer participation program at the Council to Homeless Persons (CHP) in Victoria. PESP is a diverse group of people who have experienced homelessness and are trained and supported to undertake a range of activities to improve the response to homelessness, educate and raise awareness about homelessness and promote consumer input into homelessness policy and service design and delivery.

Introduction

Over the years members of the PESP have contributed to the development of government homelessness policy at all levels. PESP members used their lived experience of homelessness as a resource to inform the 2008 *The Road Home: a national approach to reducing homelessness* White Paper and the Green Paper consultations upon which it was based. In Victoria PESP members and other consumers were involved in a range of government policy consultations and co-design processes. PESP members have also worked with a number of local governments on homelessness strategies and initiatives.

Since the PESP input into the Green and White papers in 2008 the opportunity to contribute to federal government homelessness policy has been absent. However, a number of significant decisions have been made, that will impact on people experiencing homelessness.

Members of our PESP were asked what the role of consumers should be in the development of federal government homelessness policy.

Should consumers play a role in federal homelessness policy and why/why not?

Christine

Yes, definitely because it is good practice to utilise consumers to inform policy decisions and provide a better service to the community as a whole.

Jason

Yes they should because it is good to know your consumers and provide them with an opportunity to play a role in decision making that affects them.

Jody

Yes. Consumers provide valuable advice to the government on aspects of homelessness that can only come from a lived experience. Individual PESP members have expertise in particular areas and represent a perspective that is crucial to the success of all government policies. All government changes and improvements should maintain a consumer focused approach and be targeted towards meeting the needs of specific cohorts.

Consumer input isn't just about highlighting the negatives. PESP members' participation is informed by their lived experience; consultations with government, service providers and consumers and their expert knowledge of community based services. The aim of consumers' participation is to achieve positive solutions.

Trevor

Yes because by listening to the people who have a lived experience it enables you to formulate policies and procedures that will be streamlined, efficient and effective.

How should consumers contribute to or participate in the development of federal government policy?

Christine

There should be a federal body made up of people with a lived experience which reflects the diversity of consumers of social services.

Jason

Consumers should actively participate in co-design processes which inform future government policy. PESP have been recruited to co-design processes at state level, which has been successful and greatly appreciated by stakeholders.

Jody

There are a number of strategies which could be employed for consumers to effectively participate in the development of government policy. Firstly, consumers should have opportunity to provide expertise at the service delivery level, which includes advising services what works, what doesn't and identifies any gaps.

Second, peer to peer data collection processes would be a more effective way to collect information on experiences of homelessness to inform decision making and government policy.

Federal government homelessness policy should involve decisions on prevention, housing options and support. Consumers should be recruited to these decision making processes from beginning to end and policy should direct best practice approaches to recruitment, engagement, support and training for consumers.

Trevor

Consumers should be involved at all the key levels where decisions are

being made when they impact on people experiencing homelessness.

What should be the key elements of a national government homelessness policy?

Christine

One key is that consumer participation should be an essential part of the development of homelessness policy.

There should be the continuous and ongoing development of public and social housing with flexible wrap around support.

There should also be incentives for landlords to provide people on a low income with affordable homes with rent capped at 25 per cent of their income.

As well service co-ordination strategies and an integrated data

system for all community services are needed.

Jason

There needs to be a greater development of affordable housing.

Jody

Providing affordable housing, particularly in areas where numbers of people experiencing homelessness are high is important.

We need to build the capacity for communities to deliver targeted, collaborative service systems across community, health and homelessness sectors.

A national training and workforce development strategy which incorporates a training package targeted to people employed in the homelessness sector would really make a difference.

Trevor

A good policy should encompass all areas that affect homelessness and have benchmarks that services and government departments have to meet, similar to what they did with the road toll.

Conclusion

The purpose of government homelessness policy should be to prevent homelessness and improve responses to homelessness. Who better to inform these decisions than people with a lived experience of homelessness? Federal government homelessness policy should be a consultative, partnership approach that seeks input from all relevant stakeholders: government, services and consumers. It is time for a new approach and consumers want to participate in a decision making body which informs a new national government homelessness policy.

Homelessness in Australia: An Introduction

Homelessness in Australia: An Introduction provides thought-provoking, up-to-date information about the characteristics of the homeless population and contemporary policy debates.

Leading researchers and advocates from across Australia have come together to contribute their expertise and experience to produce a foundational resource that will set the benchmark for the future analysis of homelessness. Editors, Chris Chamberlain, Guy Johnson and Catherine Robinson are all recognised experts in the field.

Homelessness in Australia: An Introduction is published by New South Press in association with the Victorian Council to Homeless Persons, one of Australia's leading peak homelessness advocacy bodies.

Homelessness in Australia: An Introduction contains 14 chapters.

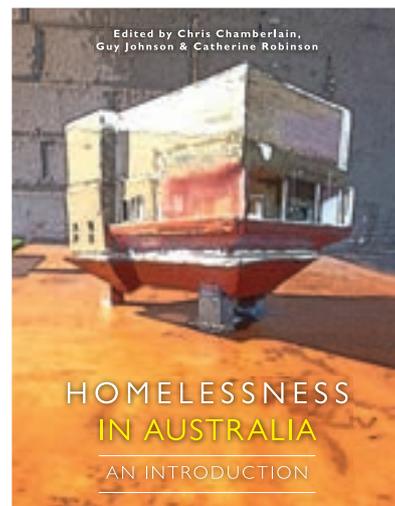
Part 1 includes: an essay on homelessness policy from the start of the nineteenth century to recent times; a chapter measuring mobility in and out of the homeless population and a piece on the causes of homelessness.

Part 2 is about contemporary policy issues and discussions. It has chapters on: the debate about definition and counting; gender and homelessness; young people; older people; Indigenous homelessness; domestic and family violence; people with complex needs and the justice system; trauma as both a cause and consequence of homelessness; and people who are long-term or 'chronically' homeless.

Part 3 includes a piece on the 'failure of the housing system' and a chapter on 'reforming the service system'.

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Dr Alice Clark

Executive Director, Shelter SA



The National Housing and Homelessness Agreement: A Policy Vacuum?

Specialist homelessness service providers in South Australia have been working over and above their capacity for many years. With a continuing decline in the number of private rental properties that are affordable and appropriate for people living on low incomes, and the large decrease in the number of public housing properties, there are real concerns that we are fast approaching the biggest homelessness crisis ever seen in South Australia.

I welcome the Federal Government's announcement about maintaining the funding of critical homelessness services for the next three years. Past uncertainty about the future of the National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness has resulted in considerable disruption in the provision of services to some of our most vulnerable citizens. Workers in the specialist homelessness services sector need as much job security as we can offer so that we can retain the experience and knowledge they have

gained, to benefit their clients, and service providers must be able to plan, innovate and have continuity in their organisations.

There is too little detail about the National Housing and Homelessness Agreement (NHHA) at the time of writing to critique the outcomes that may be a part of the new bilateral agreements with the states and territories. What is blatantly missing from public commentary from our Federal Government is a long-term vision for our housing system to underpin the agreement and a definition of what, if any, evidence-base will be used to inform the accompanying policy. Likewise, there is no indication of the form and processes of consultation with the wider homelessness and social housing sectors, or the wider community, that would (or should) inform the development of a long-term vision or plan to respond effectively to homelessness and the need for affordable housing.

It is my view that the Federal Government must lead the way in policy setting in the area of homelessness. This leadership is necessary to provide the authority and direction to the states and territories in implementing local policies to reach the targets that would have a positive impact on reducing the numbers of people experiencing homelessness. Moreover if we are to see any real decrease in people accessing homelessness services, the states and territories must receive adequate funding, which they should match, to meet the social housing targets that should be part of the agreement. Initiatives that seek private investment in affordable housing are welcome, but we cannot lose sight of the need for Commonwealth and

State Government funding for social housing. The provision of a Commonwealth growth fund is a crucial within the new NHHA and I hope that state governments, peak bodies and service providers will insist it is included in the bilateral agreements.

In South Australia, our specialist homelessness service providers are increasingly concerned that a homelessness tsunami is rapidly approaching. For the past six years, while I have worked at Shelter SA, the constant message from the sector is that there is no suitable or affordable accommodation to exit clients into. An inadequate supply of social housing to meet demand is no surprise, with the demise of our public housing system over the last twenty years, and another 660 public housing properties to be sold this financial year, but we are now reaching a tipping point in South Australia.

There are other issues at play that are causing residual types of accommodation, shelter of the last resort, to be even more difficult to access. The Supported Residential Facilities (SRFs) sector, which is governed by legislation, accompanying standards and licensing, is in crisis. Providing accommodation to approximately 1,000 vulnerable South Australians and low-needs personal care services, SRF proprietors are considering their future in light of the roll-out of the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) which may mean that they lose the State Government subsidy they currently receive. One SRF has already closed because of concerns about their financial viability without the subsidy and the SRF Association has advised Shelter SA that there are now no vacancies across South Australia.

Shelter SA's recent work on rooming houses highlights the lack of regulation in the sector and the absence of any support to residents, thus providing accommodation that is entirely unsuitable for vulnerable citizens. Unfortunately, the exact number of rooming house residents is not known due to a lack of data and we look forward to working with South Australian Government to improve this situation. Anecdotally, eleven boarding houses recently closed in Northern Adelaide, and even though some are not ideal places to live, their closures mean there are even fewer forms of shelter for people exiting prisons, hospitals and mental health treatment facilities. Even though it is South Australian Government policy not to exit people from institutions into homelessness, rooming houses are used extensively as there are no other alternatives exits and they have become a form of pseudo institutional care without the required supports.

In addition, rooming houses and SRFs are not affordable for people living on low incomes, with SRFs charging 80 per cent of resident income and boarding houses charging \$320 per fortnight, plus a utilities charge. For a person receiving a Newstart payment of \$500 per fortnight, both accommodation types exceed the 30 per cent of income level deemed to cause housing stress, and so condemn residents to a life of poverty and in many cases the deprivation of their legal and human rights.

Recent South Australian 'Code Blue' activations during cold and wet winter weather, saw the opening of temporary night shelters for rough sleepers in Adelaide and increased responses to people who contact the Homelessness Gateway (service system access point) across South Australia. There is a growing recognition that when there is a Code Blue, there are people who come to the shelters who are not known to service providers and who would refuse to access the types of emergency accommodation

responses that are usually offered (if they are not full). Code Blue has highlighted that there are few if any suitable options for everyone sleeping rough who has had a negative experience in congregate, temporary housing, like rooming houses, and who will therefore not return to that type of housing. Alternative, better quality shelter and housing options are needed and must be included in the NHHA.



The prevention of homelessness is absolutely critical in reducing reliance on homelessness services. However, without safe, secure and affordable accommodation to exit clients from homelessness services, the system is clogged and people can cycle in and out of services, despite the best efforts of service providers. As well as people who require high levels of support to get back on their feet, there are also people experiencing homelessness who simply need an affordable place to live and have lost their private rental through a relationship break-up, losing their job, having an accident or some other series of events that has meant they could not pay their rent.

The cost of living is now out of reach of thousands of South Australians. Private renters are a growing demographic across the country and the high costs of housing and utilities combined with high unemployment rates mean that people are living hand to mouth, and it does not take much to interrupt their rental payments.

I recently spoke with one person whose situation illustrates how easily people can fall into housing stress and poverty. A woman in her fifties, told me an horrific story which began with losing her job, through no fault of her own, and moving into share housing with other unrelated adults. She was sexually assaulted by a housemate and the share arrangement became untenable. She lost many of her possessions at the time, was left with all of the utility bills for the house and spent time living in her car. She has now secured a private rental but has been unable to have the electricity connected due to her past debts, and each fortnight, the debt is growing rather than reducing. She is now working part-time but is still not managing to get ahead. We must continue to challenge stereotypes about people experiencing homelessness as more and more, people may have a roof over their heads, but are still living in poverty.

Housing policy and associated funding should be treated as a mainstream portfolio and public policy issue similar to health and education, rather than relegated to welfare and social services, so it receives the political attention it deserves as a priority.

There are some positive initiatives happening in South Australia and the specialist homelessness services workers achieve outstanding outcomes with their clients in a very stretched environment. However, policy, programs and funding must be put in place to prevent people becoming homeless and provide social housing for people seeking to exit homelessness.

National agreements, policy and funding must be wider than the welfare sector if positive outcomes are to be achieved including increasing the supply of social housing through public investment. I look forward to working together with my state and national colleagues, including National Shelter, to influence the development of future bilateral agreements.

Felicity Reynolds

Chief Executive Officer, Mercy Foundation



Stuck in the Past: Australian Homelessness Policy

Grass Roots Responses to Women in Need in the 1970s

The early 1970s in Australia saw some great community led responses to some difficult problems. Feminists came together to start women's refuges. Temporary places where women and children fleeing domestic violence could stay — safe and hidden from their perpetrators. This was the perfect response for the time. A time when Domestic Violence Orders or Apprehended Violence Orders did not exist, when some families routinely told their daughters to return to violent husbands and a time when women raising children in the home had little access to their own funds. It was also a time (and I remember this) when police would dismiss some call-outs as 'just a domestic' and not worth their time responding to.

The Policy, Legal and Service System Catches Up

Fortunately, things have changed. Police now take domestic and family violence very seriously and they have

increased powers to press charges. Apprehended violence orders now exist along with programs such as 'Staying Home Leaving Violence'. Such programs work well for many (not all) women subjected to violence from their partners. Women and children stay in the family home and the perpetrator is asked to leave and is subject to a relevant court order to stay away. I am not suggesting we have got everything right yet, I am just suggesting that in relation to the legal, social and program environment of responding to women subjected to family violence that things have changed significantly over the past 50 years. Sadly, the thing that hasn't changed is that far too many women are still being assaulted in their homes. It will be even better when that changes.

Other New Responses to Homelessness 50 Years Ago

During the same time period, there were new initiatives for young people and for adults experiencing homelessness. There was a clear need for short term crisis accommodation to ensure that people did not need to literally sleep on the streets. These were appropriate and compassionate responses for people who found themselves in untenable family and housing situations or people who had lost work and as a result lost their housing and became homeless. Much of what happened was initiated by the community and charitable sectors in response to the needs they were seeing. Now — hold that thought, while I discuss housing policy during the same period.

Housing Policy in Australia Post World War Two

The other thing happening before and during this time was that all State governments in Australia remained committed to public housing and the

notion that all Australians needed a safe and affordable home. Even Australians who were in and out of work, in seasonal work, in low paid work, unemployed or who were supported on disability (then termed, the Invalid) pension.

To our great pride, Australia had fully embraced the civil notion of housing for all after the Second World War. Massive building programs by housing commissions in all States saw small fibro or sometimes brick three bedroom homes built for families to live in at affordable rents, tied to their incomes. Inner cities saw slums cleared and brand new publicly funded high rise apartments built to take their place. Of course, we did not yet understand that those initiatives would create their own problems in the years and decades to come. At the time this was done — those places were far better than the dirt floored, crumbling stone, one outhouse per six homes in our inner city slums.

What Were They Thinking?

As we now look back at the problems created by housing huge numbers of people in high rise apartments and then later, in whole new suburbs devoted only to public housing we might wonder 'what were the housing policy makers of that time thinking?' Couldn't they see what a bad idea that was? But we now have the benefit of hindsight. At the times these developments were built the intent was to ensure everyone in our society had access to decent affordable housing. The intent was good, but the long-term results were not so good. That said, there were still some great long term results — many people raised their families in small but decent affordable homes. They also had long term security of tenure.

Times Have Changed

Housing policy in most states is now radically different. The current thinking is to 'salt and pepper' public housing in amongst all other types of housing — private, affordable and completely unaffordable. Perhaps the researchers and policy makers will find fault with that in 50 years, but at this point it does appear to be a better idea.

Unfortunately the other housing policy change in the past couple of decades has been the significant disinvestment by state governments in public housing. This type of housing is no longer classified as stable, affordable long-term housing for all Australians on low incomes. It has now almost become impossible to access if your only issue is a low income. It has become housing mostly for people who are on long-term Centrelink benefits (for a range of reasons).

Public Housing is in a Death Spiral

Whilst ensuring those with the highest need get publicly funded housing is important, this targeting approach has had some unintended consequences. Without a range of people living in public housing on a range of low incomes, not just Commonwealth benefits, the rental income to state governments (tied to 25 per cent of renter's incomes and no Commonwealth Rent Assistance) has shrunk significantly. Public housing in most states is now in a death spiral of reducing rental income followed by reduced investment in public housing, followed by yet tighter targeting, followed by reduced rental income, followed by reduced investment in public housing. You get my point. Whilst public housing estates used to be filled with people on low incomes (employed and unemployed), at the current rate they will soon be filled exclusively with those on Commonwealth benefits.

Now — Back to Homelessness Policy Responses

And this is the point at which we will now turn our minds back to homelessness policy. Remember those great community initiatives in the 1970s and 1980s that provided crisis accommodation for people in a crisis? Well, in 1986 the

Commonwealth and State Government did a wonderful thing. They signed the very first Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP) Agreement. This meant that those services became funded and became a systemic response right across Australia for all people experiencing homelessness — be they women leaving a violent partner, young people who were homeless for the first time or adults who had lost housing for any number of reasons. Congratulations to Australia. That was a good funding and policy agreement at the right time.

But it is now 2017 and times have changed. As just noted, there is now far less social housing. We have also seen private rents in cities grow significantly (regardless of negative gearing) and house prices have become out of reach even for middle class young adults in the major cities. Australia has some very real housing problems.

It's not crisis accommodation if it's the only place to go and you're no longer in crisis

These problems not only contribute to making some people homeless — they contribute to keeping them homeless. Crisis accommodation services are full and the expectation that people can move from a crisis service to an affordable long term housing option is less realistic. Our housing environment has changed, but our homelessness policy response (on the whole — there are notable program exceptions) has stayed the same.

We Need Significant Housing and Homelessness Policy Change

It is time for the Commonwealth and the States to show the same courage they found in 1986 and bring about major structural and systemic change to the way in which we fund and respond to homelessness in Australia. It is time that housing and homelessness policy be linked together. Housing ends homelessness. For people with significant ongoing support needs (a small percentage of all people experiencing homelessness) a Housing First response followed by permanent supportive housing (scatter site or high density) is evidence based and effective.

For people without any additional needs, permanent affordable housing using a rapid re-housing approach works.

Transitional housing is nonsense and keeps people anxious about their future housing. If people require support to transition back into housing, it is the support that needs to be transitional not the housing. For people who are able to be employed but who are currently unemployed — having a house to live in, shower in, feed yourself in and in which to do your own laundry — is also the best place from which you can seek out and then sustain employment.

What Does 'Ending Homelessness' Really Look Like?

When I think about what 'ending homelessness' looks like, this is what I see. An Australia that has the right Commonwealth and State policy and program settings that mean no one experiences long term street homelessness. Systems are in place to ensure people who are assessed as having high and permanent support needs can access permanent supportive housing within an appropriate time frame.

I also envisage a smaller crisis accommodation services system that provides exactly what it says on the box: crisis accommodation. People are assisted as quickly as possible back into housing and employment. If they have some support needs, that support is provided short or medium-term within that person's home, not within a crisis accommodation service for months or a transitional housing program for a year. Our approach to homelessness policy in the future will in fact be housing policy. State governments will need to re-invest in social housing and the Commonwealth will need to support them to do this.

That is what an end to homelessness looks like. There will be no more 'homelessness weeks' and no more feeding human beings like pigeons in a park, no more street showers or street laundries. In fact, our new housing policy and funding settings will ensure we all look back at those initiatives and wonder 'what were they thinking?'

Catherine Yeomans

Chief Executive Officer, Mission Australia



Beyond Supply

The new National Housing and Homelessness Agreement (NHHA) provides an opportunity to change the trajectory of homelessness in Australia. With the right settings we could see the number of people experiencing homelessness drastically fall in the future rather than continue to rise as is the current prediction.

At the moment the voices of those with lived experience of homelessness and rental stress, and of the organisations who seek to serve them, are missing from these vital negotiations. We have

hard-earned knowledge, not only about the real and dire problems, but also of the lasting solutions that could be embedded in these agreements and our views must be brought to the table.

Supply of social and affordable housing, or the lack thereof, is a major barrier to reducing homelessness in Australia. We have proffered a way to overcome this barrier in an earlier article in this edition. But like all economic problems, there is both a supply and a demand side to the housing and homelessness equation.



There are many factors influencing people's ability to find, pay for and maintain housing that are impacted by both social and economic circumstances. At Mission Australia we work hard to prevent homelessness before it occurs. This includes through supporting journeys to recovery for people experiencing mental illness; providing rehabilitation and supports for those facing addiction; and working towards family reconciliation for young people where possible.

State governments could also do much more to reduce demand for homelessness services by committing to zero exits into homelessness from hospitals, mental health institutions, out of home care and criminal detention.

Preventing homelessness and ensuring sustainable exits from homelessness is also about ensuring that people have the capacity to pay their rent. While affordable housing supply is crucial, if we ever expect people to compete in the rental market, or even to be able to pay their bills while living in subsidised housing, we urgently need to reform social security.

The inadequacy of social security payments has been well critiqued, particularly the very low payment

levels for Youth Allowance and Newstart at just \$436 and \$535.60 per fortnight respectively. We have a highly targeted social security system and yet the payment rates for people needing support fall well below the poverty line.

Market-based rents are completely out of step with people's capacity to pay when they are surviving on income support. With median rent now at \$415 per fortnight, while the maximum Commonwealth Rent Assistance (CRA) payment for a single person is \$132.20, out-of-pocket housing expenses swallow most of the income received by people being supported by social security payments.

Although CRA is indexed to the Consumer Price Index (CPI), rental costs have been increasing faster than CPI, which means that payments are losing real value for individuals over time. Nationally, in June 2015, 68.5 per cent of CRA recipients would have paid more than 30 per cent of their gross income on rent if CRA were not provided. However, even with CRA, 41.2 per cent of recipients still spent more than 30 per cent of their income on rent.¹

We have been calling for a review of income support payments including Newstart, Youth Allowance and Commonwealth Rent Assistance for

years, to ensure that those receiving support have an adequate income to keep a roof over their head. Instead we have seen proposals — including the suite of changes to the welfare system currently being debated — that attempt to reduce payments and cut support.

Not only are people facing challenges paying their rent, but the rising cost of living including the cost of energy, transport and food means people on low incomes are often forced to make unacceptable choices — between having the heater on and eating fresh vegetables — or are simply left unable to pay their rent and at a high risk of homelessness.

Yes we need to increase the supply of social and affordable housing, but we also need to lift our income support payments above the poverty line to ensure that people can afford the rent. We need to think beyond bricks and mortar and across government silos. Policy positions must address both sides of the equation if they are to have a meaningful impact in reducing the unacceptable number of people in our community pushed into homelessness.

Endnote

1. *Review of Government Services 2016*, Productivity Commission, Australian Government, Canberra.

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