



# Brotherhood of St Laurence

Working for an Australia free of poverty

## MEDIA RELEASE

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### **Homeless White Paper: a bold coherent strategy**

The Rudd Government's White Paper on homelessness, was welcomed today by Tony Nicholson, Executive Director of the Brotherhood of St Laurence, as a bold, coherent strategy.

"In an era when Australians have become accustomed to glib political promises attached to a grab bag of initiatives this stands in contrast as a serious, well-thought-out and well-resourced strategy," Mr Nicholson said.

"This \$1.2 billion commitment is by far the most substantial commitment ever made to tackling homelessness in this nation.

"However, the strategic elements of the Paper are as important as the level of funds committed. It is a strategy that:

- Is based on a realistic assessment of the causes of homelessness, now and over the next decade.
- Sets long term goals, targets and milestones by which progress will be measured year on year, and importantly allocates resources accordingly. All parties involved, governments and service providers will be able to be held accountable.
- Is practical and grounded in the reality of what we know works and commits to a research agenda that will drive innovation and effectiveness.
- Devolves decision making about the detailed design of program initiatives to the local level, to best meet local circumstances, and give people at the local level a say in the way resources are applied.

"In setting targets to halve homelessness and effectively eliminate rough sleeping, it is a far more ambitious and visionary strategy to tackle homelessness than anything seen in comparable countries.

"Strategies of this kind in other countries only set out to reduce rough sleeping. This goes much further. It recognises that living situations offering temporary shelter, but little else, leave a person or family effectively homeless, stranded with no chance of participating in mainstream community life; of receiving proper health care, of going to school, of undertaking training or getting a job,

"The focus on prevention is most welcome and long overdue. Half of this massive increase in resources goes to prevention, and that's where we will see the greatest impact on overall homeless numbers. Not only will this mean that tens of thousands of Australian individuals and families will avoid the trauma of homelessness but there will be a big saving to the public purse.

"For too long, too much of our assistance to people experiencing homelessness has effectively denied them their aspirations for a mainstream lifestyle.

“So it is pleasing to see that this strategy gives priority to building people’s capacities for economic and social participation and the opportunity to enjoy the common dignity derived from being able to work, and to enjoy cultural and sporting pursuits.

“I am particularly delighted that the strategy will tackle the homelessness of the 65,000 children who accompany their parents into homeless crisis centres each year – the vast majority of whom are under 12 years of age. All the research demonstrates that it is an experience that scars their life chances at a very early age. At long last their plight has been recognised. Under this strategy their experience of homelessness should no longer be a life sentence.

“Of course there are now some large and immediate challenges presented by this strategy.

“Much work needs to be done between the two levels of government to finalise the implementation detail of the strategy. It must be done expeditiously. This is not the time for shilly-shallying.

“Mainstream health, education, and employment services and specialist service providers to the homeless are challenged to grasp this reform agenda and do things differently.

“But the challenges are much broader than just for governments and service providers.

“This strategy is a clarion call for all Australians to join the task of tackling homelessness. New partnerships will be required. The business sector, in particular, has much to bring to the task – particularly in bringing previously homeless people into the world of work.

“I’m confident that, in time, this strategy will be seen as a significant turning point in the evolution of social policy in this nation. It will be seen as one of the first coherent examples of where the principles of social inclusion guided the development of a new approach to social policy that was relevant to the modern Australian society and economy.”

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