



## Response

### **Which way home? A new approach to homelessness**

Anglicare Australia welcomes the Rudd government's commitment to reducing homelessness and the opportunity to respond to the green paper, 'Which way home?'

#### ***Leadership***

Reducing the incidence of homelessness by 2020 will take commitment and a serious investment of resources and goodwill by governments, the community and the private and not for profit sectors.

The federal government needs to demonstrate leadership over the long term. The current commitment of the Prime Minister and the Minister for Housing is welcome, however, reducing homelessness requires a long-term vision and the federal government needs to maintain a strong leadership role over the life of the strategy. The government needs to be prepared to be held accountable for national progress in reducing homelessness in the years up to 2020 and beyond.

The government's newly established Social Inclusion Board needs to take a central role in developing, monitoring and reporting publicly on achievement of Australia's plan to tackle homelessness.

The federal government cannot achieve its goals alone. It needs to work in partnership with state, territory and local governments, the broader community, including business and the community sector. Working cooperatively and creatively with organisations that have long worked with disadvantaged Australians and, in particular, those that work with the most marginalised of those – people who are homeless – is fundamental to the government achieving its aim. The specialist skills and commitment the organisations offer will be critical to successful outcomes.

#### ***Tackling an entrenched problem needs a 'cool head'***

Anglicare Australia is concerned at the haste with which the federal government is consulting and moving towards a plan to tackle homelessness which the government hopes to finalise by September 2008. Noting the federal government's strong leadership and commitment to act on this important issue, it is important that we do not waste this once in a generation opportunity to get it right and to develop a national plan that reduces and prevents homelessness.

We need to step back, to give time to bring key players on board (particularly those sectors that may not have seen themselves as having an interest in homelessness or a key role in its reduction and prevention). We also need to take a strategic focus that does not hone in too closely on homelessness alone, but examines the broader policy and program settings that leave too many disadvantaged people sidelined from access to mainstream systems and support, increasing their risk of falling further behind and potentially becoming homeless.

The danger of moving too quickly is that quick fixes, or easy solutions that address only the symptoms not the causes of homelessness, will be identified or that single, visible and easily quantifiable issues (such as rough sleeping) will form the nucleus of any plan.

Anglicare Australia recommends that a National Homelessness Plan, setting out the government's agenda for preventing and reducing homelessness be produced by September. This should be followed up with a twelve to eighteen month consultation period with all interested stakeholders to confirm the goals and targets, and to set out detailed strategies for, and gain commitment to, achieving the government's broad agenda.

However, there are some urgent challenges that require immediate responses. These are preventing families in severe housing stress becoming homeless; responding to the needs of children who are homeless (whether as part of a family group or alone); and breaking the link between the care and protection or juvenile justice systems and homelessness for young people.

### ***Roles and responsibilities for governments and NGOs***

Responsibilities and accountabilities need to be clearly articulated across and between governments:

- the Commonwealth needs to take a leadership role that would include executive support; national direction and policy setting; data; research; pilots; and evaluation of the plan to tackle homelessness. The federal government needs also to review its policy and administrative settings for Commonwealth-only assistance (e.g. through income support and aged and community care) to ensure that these do not inadvertently increase the risk of homelessness or create barriers for people who are homeless
- State and territory roles would encompass working with the federal government on setting and evaluating the national agenda; planning and implementation of mainstream and homelessness programs; working with non-government organisations on putting services on the ground; measuring the impact of local and statewide service systems
- Local government would have roles and responsibilities in local level planning; decision-making, facilitating strategic partnerships and in some cases, providing services
- Non-government service organisations in the mainstream and homelessness sectors would have responsibility for working with people who are at risk of homelessness, or who are homeless; for forming strategic partnerships at the regional and local level; for decision-making

All tiers of government are members of the Council of Australian Governments (COAG). COAG should be held publicly accountable for progress in reducing homelessness. As with the federal Social Inclusion Board, COAG should take responsibility for overseeing the development, delivery of, and reporting publicly against, the National Homelessness Plan.

## ***Homelessness responses are part of a broader system***

Anglicare Australia is concerned at the attention given to perceived deficits with the Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP). 'Which way home?' does not fully recognise some of the innovative and excellent work SAAP does within the constraints of an under-resourced program and in an environment in which mainstream systems have not adequately supported disadvantaged Australians. Anglicare Australia is also disturbed that the green paper downplays the professionalism, expertise and experience SAAP managers and workers bring to their work with people who are among the most marginalised in Australian society.

The blame for lack of exit points into safe, secure and affordable housing or jobs are laid at SAAP's door. However, the question arises: are mainstream market failures in housing and in employment services for disadvantaged job seekers two primary feeders into homelessness and two primary barriers to SAAP services' capacity to move people into housing and jobs?

Reducing and responding to homelessness requires more than homelessness specific services. Some important systemic issues underlie the incidence of homelessness in Australia. While we have experienced 17 years of growth, there are many Australians who have been left behind. To support every Australian's right to take part in social and economic opportunities, there needs to be:

- an adequate supply of appropriate, safe, secure and affordable housing to meet Australians' accommodation needs, including an expanded and normalised social housing component (whether this be public or community housing)
- an adequate income support system that enables every Australian to meet their basic food, shelter, health and social and economic participation needs
- widely available and well resourced universal access and specialist services in areas such as education and training, health (including mental health), parenting and child wellbeing
- an employment market that provides opportunity for all, with investment in appropriate and flexible provision of support for disadvantaged job seekers and fair pay and working conditions
- effective and early intervention strategies with adolescents in care that breaks the cycle of dependence on a child welfare system to graduation to an adult welfare system.

## ***Goals and targets***

Anglicare Australia supports setting challenging and achievable goals and targets for reducing homelessness. We agree that a single goal such as reducing homelessness by 50% is not sufficiently defined. It does not hold the government and community accountable for making a real difference.

Goals and targets should be set for agreed sub-groups within the homelessness population. Such groups could include those who are particularly vulnerable, such as children who are homeless (whether as part of a family group or alone); young people, particularly those who have had involvement with child protection or juvenile justice; people escaping domestic or family violence; people with multiple and complex needs; older, at risk or homeless single people; and indigenous Australians.

Goals and targets by sub-group should be set in light of the resources that the federal and state governments will contribute to dealing with homelessness across mainstream and homelessness sectors. Factors such as whether programs or services are universal access or targeted and who will be eligible will influence the capacity of the system to respond, identification of groups accessing services and their outcomes, and therefore the targets that should be set.

The benchmarks to be used should be clear, consistent and regularly measured. In the absence of more robust collection methods, the 2006 ABS population census and the national SAAP data collection report for that year should be used to set the baseline for the number of people identified as being homeless (primary, secondary, tertiary) and the number of people assisted. The first five-year comparison with the census would be for 2011, two years into a reforming system, with the next report to follow the 2016 census. SAAP data can be used to provide year to year snapshots of service usage in between.

Anglicare Australia agrees that the census and SAAP data collections need to be augmented by more robust reporting and longitudinal studies to capture the experiences of homelessness and outcomes across the mainstream and homelessness service system. This would enable better identification of points of intervention and their impacts across the system.

Research priorities could include:

- examination of homelessness careers (duration of both periods of homelessness and of being housed, triggers for becoming homeless, complexity, transitions, longer-term impact of interventions) across a range of sub-populations of people who are homeless;
- links between childhood homelessness, interface with the child protection and/or juvenile justice system and adult homelessness (what are the triggers? which children or young people are at most risk? where can interventions work? what interventions? at what points?)

Piloting new approaches or interventions should be accompanied by intensive, iterative evaluations that allow reflections on what is working and what is not and changes of direction where necessary. This approach lends itself to communities of practice (such as were formed around the Communities for Children initiative) sharing experiences and comparing outcomes.

### ***Principles for change***

Anglicare Australia agrees with the principles for change that are outlined in the green paper. However, we consider that those principles need to be augmented with a principle around partnerships – across and between levels of government; involving government, the community and people who are homeless, and the private and community services sector.

Additionally, we should seek to build on what works, rather than reinvent wheels. As the green paper identifies, SAAP has delivered successes in the face of constraints – both in terms of internal resource and capacity issues (funding has declined in real terms over the past decade, while demand has risen) and lack of access to mainstream goods and services for SAAP clients.

A further principle is adequate government resourcing for general services (housing, income support, job search assistance, education, health, etc) and support services for people who are at risk or homeless.

There also needs to be community 'ownership' of homelessness. This would involve community generated solutions that respond to individual community capacities and needs; community engagement in identifying solutions and making decisions, input into program design, development and implementation and in measuring the progress.

There also needs to be a holistic and flexible approach, which brings together a range of services/programs, to deal with an individual's or family's complexity of issues.

### ***Preventing homelessness***

#### **Focusing on children and young people**

Childhood homelessness, being in state care and/or juvenile justice systems are strong predictors of adult homelessness. Each of these potential entry points to homelessness presents an opportunity for intervening and preventing a young person being homeless later in life.

By focusing on the needs of children as individuals, as well as members of families who are homeless, interventions can be put in place to build their resilience and to keep them connected to their existing routines, networks and communities. Specific therapeutic interventions could be required to assist them deal with traumatic experiences. Support and supervision may be needed to equip them to stay at school, such as providing financial assistance, helping them catch up on schoolwork and monitoring school attendance.

By working with children and young people in out of home care or involved in the juvenile justice system, strategies aimed at building resilience and capacity to cope with independent living and to prevent future homelessness could include:

- teaching them living and financial literacy skills to enable them to maintain tenancies
- keeping them involved in education and training
- connecting them to employment opportunities (including apprenticeships and traineeships)
- providing counselling and/or emotional support to deal with issues such as domestic or family violence
- connecting them to specialist services (such as mental health or drug and alcohol services or specific counselling or other interventions to address the underlying causes of offending)
- helping them stay connected with wider family and other networks
- developing plans for leaving care or detention that involve accommodation and support
- connecting young people with mentors who stay with them through the transition from care or detention to independent living

- states/territories actively providing care leavers with the opportunity to access ongoing financial, emotional or other support up until 25 years of age.

Given the acknowledged link between the care and protection and juvenile justice systems and homelessness, preventive and early intervention strategies should be piloted in these arenas.

### Continuum of universal and crisis services

Asking for help can be hard – it means admitting to ‘failure’. Australia needs a stronger culture of asking for help, using tools and resources to address issues early before problems escalate, rather than ‘battling on’ hoping to deal with issues alone or that they will go away.

The systems of advice, help and support need to be appropriately resourced, actively promoted through outreach and/or marketing, and access needs to be universal and non-stigmatising.

Common issues that have ‘soft’ ends where universal services such as information and education, early intervention and support can make a big difference and ‘hard’ ends which demand crisis responses are:

- parenting, where services range from parenting education and early childhood services through to involvement in the child protection system
- housing, where the system encompasses access to safe, secure, affordable housing, financial or other assistance to maintain tenancies or achieve ownership through to crisis accommodation
- finances, where financial management information and literacy programs (such as that provided through education institutions, websites, banks or other financial institutions) can prevent people falling into crisis, through to crisis responses such as financial counselling and debt management services, and emergency financial and material relief to meet very basic needs
- relationships, where relationship education and counselling on the formation of new families may be circuit breakers, to crisis responses when relationships fall apart and violence or other abuse are involved
- health and substance abuse issues, where primary health services, preventive measures and early interventions can prevent ongoing harm, through to management of chronic diseases or addictions.

### ***Holistic approach to reducing homelessness***

Anglicare Australia believes that, by 2020, it is achievable to reduce homelessness significantly. It will take leadership and collaboration across governments, the community and the service system.

### Joined up policy and delivery

Anglicare Australia does not believe that preventing and reducing homelessness is an ‘either/or’ choice between mainstream and homelessness specific responses. We therefore do not support any individual option presented in the green paper, but rather a hybrid model that takes key concepts from each of the options.

Both mainstream and homelessness sectors have important roles to play, both at the preventive, early intervention end and at the crisis end, when some one is homeless. A 'joined-up' continuum of policy and programs, services and supports provides a more flexible system, able to draw on the experience and expertise of multidisciplinary teams, and a better safety net than throwing responsibility and effort into either mainstream or homelessness services.

Policy, programs and interdepartmental cooperation across and between governments at the national and state/territory levels need to drive this 'joined-up' approach. At the local level, it needs to be delivered through one portal. This does not mean a one size fits all approach, but one that is owned and driven by local communities, tailored to local strengths and circumstances.

The outcomes this approach would deliver are:

- safe, secure and affordable housing
- increased resilience and 'inoculation' against future homelessness
- access to and participation in education and/or training
- adequate income, whether through wages or income support and family assistance payments
- safe, healthy, respectful relationships with family, friends and neighbours
- health and wellbeing (including management of chronic health conditions and/or substance abuse issues)
- connections to networks, being in and of the community and civic engagement.

#### Principles underpinning a 'joined up' model

People who need/are seeking help need a single, easily identified entry point into the system. It is unreasonable to expect people who are in a crisis situation to navigate their way through the maze of services to find the help they need. There should be no turnaways for basic needs (information, food, shelter and/or financial assistance).

People seeking assistance should experience one assessment process and be expected to tell their story once only (this may occur over a period of days or weeks).

A case management approach that is client centred, collaborative and outcomes focussed should be adopted.

It is critical that a continuum of integrated responses across prevention, early intervention and crisis intervention be available.

Multiple and complex issues require multidisciplinary responses, drawing expertise from a range of sectors.

#### Community services hubs

Anglicare Australia envisages a continuum of mainstream and homelessness specific services being provided through a single, local level community services hub, which could be based on a regional centre, an LGA, etc. This single gateway could be augmented by a national web-based portal and Freecall phone line, linking people to services at their local level.

The composition of each hub would be determined by the local community, based on an assessment of its strengths and needs. That said, the homelessness system needs to be geared to prevention and early intervention, as well as crisis responses. A continuum of mainstream, crisis and homelessness services need to be available, accessed through one portal.

### Specialist homelessness streams in community services hubs

While there would be one access point for people who are in crisis or at risk of homelessness, or homeless, there is a need to retain specialisation so that an individual's or family's needs are responded to in the best possible way. Specialisations would form around identified client issues (e.g. children (whether accompanying parents or alone); young people; domestic and family violence; mental health; substance abuse; housing stress). Cross-disciplinary teams should enable the service system to respond flexibly to the range of people presenting for assistance.

### Benefits of mainstream and homeless services in common hubs

Common hubs provide capacity to respond holistically and flexibly to people's needs. They provide an environment in which:

- a continuum of responses from prevention through crisis through to resolution are possible
- early identification of, and responding to, people at risk is possible, with effective and efficient referral mechanisms are in place
- resources and capacities, knowledge of roles and limits, and service availability can be shared
- cross-sectoral information sharing and training can occur, and more flexible career paths are open
- identified key worker/case manager can be drawn from a mainstream or homelessness team, in response to the presenting or priority needs of the individual or family
- cross-sectoral teams work, bringing together holistic approaches (one worker or sector does not need all the answers)
- there is capacity to quickly respond to changing support needs, moving flexibly between mainstream and crisis as support needs increase and as they decrease, from crisis response to maintenance mode.

### Outreach and relationship building

As well as working with mainstream services involved in the community services hub, homelessness services need to create strong partnerships with broader community actors and agencies, including schools and early childhood/childcare centres, TAFEs, health services (including local GPs), police, business organisations, local councils, etc. This has the benefits of developing community ownership for solving the problem of homelessness; creating a more informed and resilient community, capable of identifying and responding appropriately to issues of disadvantage and homelessness; and expanding the commitment and resources available to respond to dealing with homelessness.

## ***Transforming responses to homelessness***

### Phased transition

Anglicare Australia considers that there is a need to retain a homelessness specific sector and that the current base should be built on, rather than starting afresh with a new base. The SAAP sector brings a long history of experience and expertise to dealing with issues of homelessness and the needs of those who are homeless.

There needs to be a phased transition to community services hubs providing a holistic suite of services as outlined above that focuses on strengthening homelessness responses (primarily SAAP) and increasing the capacity of mainstream services and systems and other specialist services to better identify and respond to the needs of people who are homeless. This is achievable, and can build on existing hubs set up to respond to homelessness, that involve a range of organisations servicing the needs of diverse client groups (Brisbane and Cairns homelessness centres, Victorian Local Area Service Networks, etc.).

These approaches can be expanded to other centres and states, and their effectiveness tested across a range of environments. Each hub should be driven by local communities and responsive to local strengths and needs – a generic list of services applied nationally will not work.

### Separate support and housing

Support periods should be aligned to client need, not time limited or tied to crisis or transitional accommodation. Where appropriate and possible, people should be placed (or remain) in long-term housing, with supports tailored to their needs.

For some people, this could mean a short period of intensive support and material assistance, for others it could mean intermittent, low level outreach support for a longer time, and for others, it could mean linking into other forms of ongoing support, such as mental health support teams.

Anglicare Australia is aware that there is already separation of the provision of support and the management of housing in some areas. We consider that this approach should be more widely trialled to identify whether it is more suited to particular localities or client groups. Separation of support and housing has the advantage of allowing support agencies to focus on just that, while housing providers would have responsibility for property and tenancy management. It also has the potential to provide for the flexible use of available housing stock (both that formerly 'tied' to SAAP services and social housing stock) to meet client needs and achieve more mixed tenancies.

### Expand and integrate successful models

Over the past two decades, there have been a number of innovative pilots introduced (such as JPET and Reconnect) that have become continuing programs. While this is positive, there was little or no expansion of these programs beyond their original size, nor were the approaches integrated into more general practice. It would appear that HOME Advice (which has likewise proven to be successful) will remain in its current shape and size.

There is a strong argument for expanding and integrating these programs into a homelessness system at the policy level, rather than leaving them as small, stand alone federal government programs sitting on the side of the main homelessness response (SAAP). This creates extra administrative burdens on services that operate across programs at the expense of meeting people's needs.

### Piloting new approaches

Immediate action is needed to respond to the needs of children who are homeless and to prevent homelessness for young people involved in the care and protection or juvenile justice systems. Pilots could be used to test and compare the efficacy of intervening at points and also the kinds of interventions that deliver the most benefit and can be more broadly replicated.

### Adopting and adapting overseas experience

New models that are based on their success overseas such as Foyer and Common Ground should be established in such a manner as to ensure that their development in Australia replicates the highest standard of these models, and is true to the core principles and accreditation processes that are integral to their success. There is a danger in grabbing hold of a great idea, but not taking the time to ensure it is replicated properly and in full consideration of the best practice overseas.

Foyers provide accommodation with opportunity to young people who are unable to remain at home until they complete their transition to adult independence. By providing a complete package of accommodation, personal support, a community to belong to and access to employment and training opportunities, foyers aim to maximise the young person's chances of escaping from the 'no home – no job – no home' cycle.

### ***Strengthening the workforce***

Mainstream and homelessness specific services need to be able to attract and retain professional workers. This is partly a resources issue and partly a perception issue. Crisis and homelessness services, in particular, have difficulty in attracting and keeping people.

A skilled community services sector is the government achieving its goal of reducing homelessness. The government therefore needs to invest in a community services workforce strategy that:

- ensures workers have the relevant skills and competencies
- addresses recruitment and retention issues
- provides training and development opportunities
- provides for career pathways within and across sectors
- remunerates workers adequately for their skills and competencies.