The Road Home

A National Approach to Reducing Homelessness

December 2008

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Foreword

In a country as prosperous as Australia, no one should be homeless.

Homelessness is not just the result of too few houses – its causes are many and varied. Domestic violence, a shortage of affordable housing, unemployment, mental illness, family breakdown and drug and alcohol abuse all contribute to the level of homelessness in Australia.

This White Paper sets an ambitious target to halve homelessness by 2020 and offer supported accommodation to all rough sleepers who need it. To make sure the Government remains on track to meet these important goals, this White Paper sets out interim targets for 2013.

Reducing homelessness is everyone's responsibility. Australia's efforts to reduce homelessness have to be urgent, as well as sustained.

This White Paper delivers a 55 per cent increase on the current investment in homelessness services. This represents an additional $800 million over four years and is a down payment on the 12 year reform agenda. It also includes a commitment to additional social housing for homeless people of $400 million over the next two financial years.

This White Paper addresses the causes of homelessness and provides a framework for preventing homelessness from occurring in the first place. Among other strategies it increases support for victims of domestic violence to stay safely in their own home; increases public and community housing for people at risk of homelessness; improves tenancy advice and support services; and introduces a policy of no exits 'into homelessness' from hospitals, mental health and drug and alcohol services and statutory care. These measures will help prevent more Australians from becoming homeless each year.

When – despite our best efforts – people become homeless, this White Paper sets out ways to strengthen the provision of services for these Australians. It will help services to provide people who become homeless with the full range of support that they need – rather than leaving individuals to try and navigate a complex system looking for help. Assertive outreach services will work with homeless people bringing people off the streets into the housing they need to end their homelessness permanently.

The National Affordable Housing Agreement will deliver more longer term housing for Australians who are homeless, more public and community housing and build and renew run down and overcrowded housing for Indigenous Australians living in remote areas.

This White Paper is a once in a generation opportunity to drastically reduce homelessness in Australia. By taking action now, the Government is confident that we can reduce homelessness by 2020.

The Hon Kevin Rudd MP   The Hon Tanya Plibersek MP
Prime Minister   Minister for Housing

Background

Reducing homelessness is a priority for the Australian Government.

In January 2008 the Prime Minister, the Hon Kevin Rudd MP, and the Minister for Housing, the Hon Tanya Plibersek MP, announced the development of a comprehensive, long term plan to tackle homelessness.

The Prime Minister appointed a steering group to oversee this process:

- Tony Nicholson, Executive Director of the Brotherhood of St Laurence (Chair)
- Anna Buduls, company director and philanthropist
- Heather Nancarrow, Director of the Queensland Centre for Domestic and Family Violence Research, Central Queensland University (CQU), MacKay.

In May 2008 the Government released a Green Paper on homelessness, *Which Way Home? A New Approach to Homelessness,* which sought to promote public discussion, highlight the challenges faced by people who are homeless and suggest ways to reduce homelessness in the long term.

Public consultations were held in all states during May and June 2008.

More than 1,200 people attended 13 consultations and almost 600 written submissions were received. More than 300 people experiencing homelessness gave their views.

There was strong agreement at consultations and in submissions that Australia's response to homelessness needed to be improved.

Submissions urged the Government to develop a new, whole-of-government approach that would:

- demonstrate national leadership
- focus strongly on prevention and early intervention
- provide support for homeless Australians that leads to increased economic and social participation
- encourage closer collaboration between services used by people vulnerable to homelessness
- increase access to safe, affordable housing linked to appropriate support services
- recognise the complexity of homelessness and address the needs of different groups within the homeless population, including families with children, young people, Indigenous people, older adults and women and children leaving domestic or family violence.

This White Paper, *The Road Home*, sets out a national approach to reducing homelessness.

Contents

List of tables

Executive Summary

Homelessness can affect anyone. In Australia, around 105,000 people are homeless on any given night. While the overall rate of homelessness has been relatively stable over the last 12 years, increasing numbers of children, families and older people are experiencing homelessness. Since 2001, there has been a drop in the numbers of young people who are homeless. Indigenous people are over-represented in the homeless population.

Homelessness includes people who are sleeping rough, as well as people staying in temporary, unstable or substandard accommodation. Many people who are homeless cycle between homelessness and marginal housing. People are staying in crisis accommodation for longer because they have nowhere else to go.

Homelessness is not just a housing problem. Homelessness has many drivers and causes, including the shortage of affordable housing, long term unemployment, mental health issues, substance abuse and family and relationship breakdown. Among women, domestic and family violence is the main reason for seeking help from specialist homelessness services.

Just maintaining the current effort on homelessness will see an increase in the number of Australians who are homeless due to the growth in populations at risk of homelessness, such as older people in housing stress and children in care and protection.

Investing in services to prevent and reduce homelessness delivers benefits not only to those vulnerable to homelessness but also to the entire community.

The White Paper Vision

Homelessness is everyone's responsibility. Ending homelessness requires sustained long-term effort from all levels of government, business, the not-for-profit sector and the community.

The Australian Government, with the agreement of state and territory governments, has set two headline goals to guide our long term response to homelessness

- *Halve overall homelessness by 2020*
- *Offer accommodation to all rough sleepers who need it by 2020.*

Interim targets will measure progress towards these goals.

The White Paper tailors the national response to the needs of particular groups within the homeless population, including children, older people, young people and Indigenous Australians. Clear principles will guide the response to homelessness to ensure it is client-centred, respectful and effective.

The new National Affordable Housing Agreement (NAHA), to commence in January 2009, gives a full picture of the Commonwealth and state and territory effort on housing and homelessness.

This Agreement provides $6.1 billion over the five years from 2008–09 on measures including social housing, assistance to people in the private rental market, support and accommodation for people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness and assistance with home purchasing.

Under the NAHA, the Council of Australian Governments has approved additional funding of $1.2 billion over the next four years as a down payment on the 12 year reform agenda outlined in this White Paper.

$800 million of this funding will be spent on services to prevent and reduce homelessness - delivered through the National Partnership on Homelessness. A further $400 million will increase the supply of affordable and supported housing for people who would otherwise be homeless - delivered through the National Partnership on Social Housing.

Detailed Implementation Plans for each National Partnership will be agreed between the Australian Government and each state and territory in the first half of 2009.

Wherever possible, homelessness should be prevented. People who experience homelessness should move quickly through the crisis system to long-term housing and at the same time should get help to reconnect them with education, employment and the community. Both the specialist homelessness system and the mainstream system have roles to play to help people participate socially and economically in their communities and to maintain long-term housing.

The response to homelessness will be implemented through three strategies:

1. *Turning off the tap*: services will intervene early to prevent homelessness
2. *Improving and expanding services*: services will be more connected and responsive to achieve sustainable housing, improve economic and social participation and end homelessness for their clients
3. *Breaking the cycle*: people who become homeless will move quickly through the crisis system to stable housing with the support they need so that homelessness does not recur.

Turning off the tap

Homelessness can be prevented by tackling the structural drivers of homelessness such as entrenched disadvantage, unemployment and the shortage of affordable housing; and targeting groups who are at risk of homelessness such as older people in housing stress, women and children leaving violence, Indigenous Australians and people leaving state care.

The response involves many portfolios in all levels of government. Significant major reforms are already under way such as the Closing the Gap Package for Indigenous

Australians, the National Mental Health and Disability Employment Strategy and the proposed National Child Protection Framework.

Prevention strategies should focus on key transition points and life events. There are some excellent local homelessness prevention initiatives. Over the next 12 years, effort will be focused on delivering evidence based prevention programs more widely across the country.

Initiatives under this strategy include:

- Increasing support for people in public and private rental housing to maintain their tenancies
- Assisting up to 9,000 additional young people between 12 and 18 years of age, to remain connected with their families
- Assisting up to 2,250 additional families at risk of homelessness to stay housed
- 'No exits into homelessness' from statutory, custodial care, health, mental health and drug and alcohol services
- Helping women and children who experience domestic violence to stay safely in the family home
- Delivering community based mental health services under the Personal Helpers and Mentors Program (PHaMs) to 1,000 difficult to reach Australians, including people who are homeless
- Establishing a network of 90 Community Engagement Officers to improve access to Centrelink services for people at risk of homelessness.

Improving and expanding services

All people who are vulnerable to homelessness will need help from mainstream services such as Centrelink and health and employment services. Those who become homeless may also seek help from the specialist homelessness sector. At present, they have to approach each service they need separately, often repeating their story over and over again.

Mainstream services must identify people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness so they can receive all the support they need. Services must also review their policies and practices to ensure they do not make the lives of their homeless clients even more difficult. There should be 'no wrong doors' for people who are homeless when they seek help.

Specialist homelessness services are needed to provide a crisis response to people who have no accommodation, to assist them with their transition to stable housing and to provide a source of expertise on homelessness. But specialist homelessness services cannot be expected to deliver the entire homelessness response.

People will get much better help if mainstream and specialist homelessness services work better together. Improving information technology systems across services will also help. Developing advanced practitioner positions in specialist homelessness services will drive this integration and provide enhanced career opportunities for skilled staff.

Legislation will underpin the national response to homelessness, setting standards to deliver the best quality services possible.

Initiatives under this strategy include:

- A workforce development strategy for specialist homelessness services
- Testing new funding models that reflect the complexity of client's needs
- Improving information technology systems for services
- Developing quality standards for specialist homelessness services.

Breaking the cycle

For some people, homelessness is an isolated event – it happens once and for a short time. For others, a small minority, homelessness is part of a chaotic and uncertain life of poverty and disadvantage. These people tend to cycle in and out of homelessness and when they do find housing, it tends to be short term.

An increase in the supply of affordable housing and specialist housing models that link accommodation and support is critical to reducing homelessness.

People who are chronically homeless need wrap-around support that addresses all their needs. People who participate in work and their community are more likely to leave homelessness permanently.

Services targeting people sleeping rough in Australia are underdeveloped. Assertive outreach programs are needed to get them into stable housing, to address their health issues and to assist them to stabilise their lives.

Children who experience homelessness are more likely to become homeless when they reach adulthood. Many children who are accommodated in the specialist homelessness service system have witnessed or been victims of domestic violence. They need specialist assistance to help them deal with the traumas of homelessness and violence and get them back to school and participating in recreation activities.

Initiatives under this strategy include:

- Building up to 2,700 additional public and community housing dwellings for low income households
- Allocating aged care places and capital funds for at least one new specialist facility for older people who are homeless in each of the next four years
- Building up to 4,200 new houses and upgrading up to 4,800 existing houses in remote Indigenous communities
- Providing assertive outreach programs for rough sleepers
- Improving services for older people experiencing homelessness.

Research

The Australian Government will develop a national homelessness research strategy to support the White Paper. Homelessness research priorities will include population-based research, cost-benefit analysis, analysis of the effectiveness of interventions and longitudinal studies. Improved information technology systems will assist integration between homelessness services and mainstream services and facilitate reporting against COAG's performance indicators.

Implementation and Governance

To drive the agenda on homelessness the Prime Minister will appoint a Council on Homelessness. The Council will monitor the achievement of the goals and targets set out in the White Paper by 2013 and 2020.

It will report annually to the Prime Minister. Principles established by the Social Inclusion Board will guide the Council's work.

The Australian Government will also establish the Bea Miles Foundation to work in partnership with the business and corporate sectors to harness their efforts in reducing homelessness.

The COAG Reform Council will monitor progress against the outcomes and performance indicators in the NAHA.

The response to homelessness will be underpinned by legislation that guarantees that people who are homeless are treated with dignity and respect and receive quality services.

Chapter One: Scoping the problem

Key points

- The problem of homelessness includes rough sleeping as well as people staying in temporary, unstable or substandard accommodation.

- Homelessness can affect anyone.

- Over the last five years we have seen changes in the homeless population – rising numbers of children, families and older people are experiencing homelessness, while homelessness among teenagers has dropped.

- Indigenous people are over-represented in the homeless population. Overcrowding in Indigenous housing is an additional cause of homelessness.

- Many people who are homeless move in and out of homelessness and many people spend too long in specialist homelessness services because they have nowhere else to go.

- There are many causes of homelessness – violence and family breakdown, mental health and substance abuse, lack of affordable housing, leaving care and protection or other institutional care.

- Violence is far more likely to be the cause of homelessness among women.

- Homelessness has a big impact on individuals and families; there is also an economic cost to homelessness for the whole community.

- Investing in services to prevent and reduce homelessness delivers benefits for those vulnerable to homelessness and the entire community.

- Children in homeless families are more at risk of experiencing disadvantage and homelessness over their lifetime.

- While there has been a fall in the numbers of young people experiencing homelessness, there are increasing numbers of young people in the care and protection system, which is a cause for concern.

- Just maintaining our current effort will see an increase in the number of Australians who are homeless.

Homelessness in Australia

Every night around 105,000 people are homeless.

Not all of these people are sleeping rough in public places. Many are living in temporary or makeshift accommodation, with family or friends, in specialist homelessness services or in substandard boarding houses.

The most widely accepted definition of homelessness in Australia describes three kinds of homelessness:

- Primary homelessness, such as sleeping rough or living in an improvised dwelling
- Secondary homelessness including staying with friends or relatives and with no other usual address, people in specialist homelessness services
- Tertiary homelessness including people living in boarding houses, or caravan parks with no secure lease, and no private facilities, both short and long-term.[1]

Homelessness does not simply mean that people are without shelter. A stable home provides safety and security as well as connections to friends, family and a community. Homelessness makes it very difficult to hold down a job or lead a healthy and stable life.

Who is homeless?

Homelessness can affect anyone. People who are homeless come from all age groups and include women and men and people from all cultural backgrounds.

There are two major sources of information about people who are homeless.

Every five years the Australia Bureau of Statistics (ABS) provides a snapshot of the number of people who are experiencing homelessness. The ABS makes particular effort to count rough sleepers and people in specialist homelessness services. Using the Census it is possible to estimate the number of people staying in temporary accommodation who have no permanent address of their own.

Most specialist homelessness services are funded under the Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP). Services are required to collect data on service use. In addition to demographic data, the SAAP data records the reasons that people seek help, the services provided and where people go when they stop receiving a service.

While there is a need to improve the information we have on homelessness, the Census and SAAP data provide a picture of homelessness in Australia.

On Census night 2006, there were 16,375 people sleeping rough (see Table 1). This represents 16 per cent of all people who are homeless.

Most rough sleepers live outside our major cities. While about two-thirds of Australia's population live in capital cities, only 26 per cent of rough sleepers were in capital cities.

Table 1: Rough sleepers by state and region

	Capital cities	Regional centres	Rural and remote	Total	Capital cities	Regional centres	Rural and remote	Total	Rate per 10,000
	no	no	no	no	%	%	%	%	no
NSW	1,182	547	1,986	3,715	32	15	53	100	6
VIC	845	245	1,114	2,204	38	11	51	100	4
QLD	591	792	3,782	5,165	12	15	73	100	13
WA	767	207	1,418	2,392	32	9	59	100	12
SA	251	16*	581	848	30	2*	68	100	5
TAS	125	34	226	385	32	9	59	100	7
NT	488	144**	956	1,588	31	9**	60	100	75
ACT	78	0	0	78	100	0	0	100	3
Aust.	4,327	1,985	10,063	16,375	26	12	62	100	8

* Includes Whyalla and Pt Pirie. ** Includes Palmerston and Alice Springs.
Source: Department of Families, Housing, Community and Indigenous Affairs, unpublished table from ABS Census 2006 data.

The number of rough sleepers is highest in Queensland (5,165) and New South Wales (3,715). The rates of rough sleepers per 10,000 people are highest in the Northern Territory (75 per 10,000), Queensland (13 per 10,000) and Western Australia (12 per 10,000).[2]

On Census night there were 58,619 men who were homeless (56 %) and 46,057 women (44 %). This difference increases for people over the age of 35 experiencing homelessness, among whom over 60 per cent are men. More men sleep rough and live in boarding houses than women.

This situation is reversed for young people between the ages of 12 and 18, where young women make up 54 per cent of the homeless population. Women who were homeless were slightly more likely to stay in specialist homelessness services on Census night, often in women's refuges or safe houses.

Homelessness occurs among people of all ages. Young people aged 12 to18 are the largest group of people experiencing homelessness and the highest users of specialist homelessness services. Between 2001 and 2006, there was a fall in the number of young people aged 12 to 18 who were experiencing homelessness. Some commentators say that this is due to the impact of early intervention and prevention programs for this age group.[3]

Table 2: Change in homeless population by age, 2001–06

Age group	2001	2006	Change from 2001 (%)
Under 12	9,941	12,133	22
12–18 years	26,060	21,940	-16
19–24 years	10,113	10,504	4
25–34 years	16,567	15,804	-5
35–44 years	12,992	13,981	8
45–54 years	10,349	12,206	18
55–64 years	7,883	10,708	36
65 or older	5,995	7,400	23
Total	**99,900**	**104,676**	**5**

Source: Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs, unpublished table from ABS Census 2001 and 2006 data.

Over the last five years the number of children who are homeless under the age of 12 has increased by 22 per cent. The vast majority of children who are homeless are with their parents.[4] Many of these family groups are escaping violence, while a smaller group are homeless because of financial stress. Homelessness has a severe impact on children and may be the first step on the path to lifelong disadvantage.

The 2006 Census showed large increases in the number of older people who were homeless. Over 18,000 people aged 55 or over were homeless on Census night in 2006, 4,000 more than in 2001.

Single people make up three-quarters of the homeless population. Families with children who are homeless have increased by 11 per cent since 2001. Many of these families are sleeping rough.[5]

The SAAP data confirms that family homelessness has increased. The number of families with children who seek assistance from specialist homelessness services has increased by 33 per cent over the last five years.[6] Families seeking accommodation are more likely to be turned away from SAAP than single people and are more likely to stay in crisis accommodation for longer than six months.[7]

Of all SAAP support periods, 22 per cent were provided to single-parent families headed by a woman and 1 per cent to single-parent families headed by a man. Domestic violence is the main reason women with children seek assistance from SAAP (55 %).[8]

The rate of homelessness for Indigenous Australians is significantly higher than for non-Indigenous Australians. Indigenous Australians make up 9 per cent of the homeless population and 18 per cent of SAAP clients across Australia.[9] More than a quarter of accompanying children in SAAP were of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander origin.[10]

Homelessness is an issue for Indigenous people living in both urban and remote areas. In 2003, Indigenous people comprised 10 per cent of clients in specialist homelessness services in urban areas, 21 per cent in regional areas, and 71 per cent in remote areas. Both urban and remote Indigenous people cited domestic and family violence as the most common reason for seeking SAAP assistance. Indigenous clients

were less likely to name accommodation difficulties as their reason for seeking support, but were twice as likely to cite overcrowding as a reason for seeking help.[11] Eviction was a more common reason for accessing a specialist homelessness service for Indigenous people in urban and rural areas than for Indigenous people in remote areas.[12]

Some people experience homelessness only once. Over time this group of people are able to get back on their feet, find a house and return to a more stable life.

A smaller group of people experience repeated episodes of homelessness or stay homeless long-term. This group of people are more likely to spend time sleeping rough and may move between services and different kinds of accommodation for many years. Approximately 12 per cent of SAAP clients have three or more periods of support every year. This means that they receive assistance, but present again after a few months because they are still homeless. This group of people is likely to also cycle through mental health services, boarding houses and other facilities.

Many people who use specialist homelessness services have difficulty finding alternative accommodation to move to after they have received support. Over the last five years the average length of time spent in specialist homelessness services has increased from 33 days to 50 days. The problem of finding secure affordable housing and, in some cases, supported accommodation to move out of a specialist homelessness service, is directly connected to the number of people who are turned away from specialist homelessness services because no beds are available.

Causes of homelessness

There are many causes of homelessness.

Many people who become homeless have struggled with considerable personal disadvantage throughout their lives. This may include poverty or long-term unemployment, poor education, violence, mental health problems, disability and substance abuse. For these people, the path into homelessness can start many years earlier.

A specific event can trigger homelessness. This may be losing a job, domestic violence, being evicted from stable housing or a period of high financial stress. Major changes and transitions, such as young people leaving home early, can place people at greater risk.

Stable and affordable housing

Housing affordability, particularly the cost of rent, has become worse in recent years. The greatest impact of the housing affordability problem is on low and moderate income earners in the rental market.

The National Centre for Social and Economic Modelling (NATSEM) estimated that in 2007, 1.1 million households (10 % of all households) were in financial stress including 685,197 private renter households (23 % of private renter households), 52,744 public renter households (13 % of public renter households), 283,471 owners

with mortgages (10 %) and 50,144 owners without mortgages (1.6 %). There has also been a 30 per cent increase in the numbers of older Australians in housing stress between 2003 and 2007.[13]

The increase in family homelessness can be explained, in part, by declining housing affordability and financial stress. Couples with or without children seeking accommodation due to homelessness most commonly cited eviction or being asked to leave their housing as the main reason for doing so.[14] Being unable to pay the rent is a primary cause of eviction.

Some people have access to affordable housing but are still not able to maintain their tenancy. In 2006–07, 4,000 SAAP support periods were provided to clients who needed housing assistance and who came from public or community housing.[15] Most of these people cited violence and personal issues as the reasons they were homeless.

In 2006–07, 1,933 people were evicted from social housing.[16] These people had access to stable affordable housing but were not able to keep up with rent payments or maintain other aspects of their tenancy. Acute mental health episodes may mean that people forget to pay the rent, or unresolved family conflict may make someone's housing untenable.

Domestic violence

Domestic and family violence continues to be the major driver of homelessness. Escaping violence is the most common reason provided by people who seek help from specialist homelessness services. Twenty-two per cent of people seeking help from specialist homelessness services do so because they are escaping violence.[17]

Domestic and family violence is the principal cause of homelessness among women. Fifty-five per cent of women with children and 37 per cent of young single women who seek assistance from specialist homelessness services do so to escape violence.[18]

Many victims of violence will not seek assistance from specialist homelessness services but will stay with friends or family members in temporary arrangements.

Many service providers report that homelessness driven by domestic violence is different from other forms of homelessness. Many women who escape abusive, violent relationships return to the perpetrator numerous times and cycle in and out of homelessness. This may be because they have no money, family support or stable housing or their partner promises to stop the violence.[19]

Safety is often an ongoing problem for people who are escaping violence. Many women and children continue to experience violence after they have left the family home. In the best cases, victims of violence are supported both to find a safe home and to make contact with police to bring the violence to an end.

Long-term unemployment

People who are disconnected from the workforce for long periods of time are vulnerable to homelessness. While the long-term unemployment rate has been at historic lows for more than a decade, Australia still has the fifth highest proportion of people of workforce age in jobless households among Organisation of Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) countries.[20] People who find themselves locked out of the labour market, especially over a long period of time, can find it difficult to secure affordable housing.

Currently only 11per cent of people who leave specialist homelessness services have a job to go to.[21] Most working age people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness would like to earn an income, but face the obvious barriers of holding down a job without a home of their own. This may come on top of poor education and a lack of previous work experience.

Maintaining a connection with employment will help people who are homeless return to stable housing. For people who are homeless, getting work or learning new skills will improve their economic position as well as providing the social benefits of participation.

Family breakdown

Family or relationship breakdown is the second most common reason people seek assistance from specialist homelessness services. Ten per cent of SAAP clients cite relationship or family breakdown as the primary reason for seeking assistance. It is the main reason why males with children seek assistance from SAAP (19 %).[22]

Family breakdown is a large factor in youth homelessness. Young people and families in contact with youth homelessness services often cite family violence as reasons for needing assistance. Young people can be the victims of violence or may be violent toward other family members.

Mental health and substance abuse

In 2004–05, 12 per cent of SAAP clients reported a mental health problem, 19 per cent reported a substance use problem and another 5 per cent reported both a mental health and a substance use problem. The majority of these clients were men aged between 25 and 44 years.[23] About one third of SAAP clients required intensive and/or ongoing assistance with mental health issues.[24]

Rough sleepers and people who are chronically homeless are more likely to have complex needs such as mental health issues, substance abuse and disabilities. They are also more likely to experience chronic health issues and have a mortality rate three to four times higher than that of the general population.[25]

Mental health and substance use disorders can be key contributing factors leading to homelessness. Homelessness can be caused by mental illness, and unstable housing arrangements can also contribute to the deterioration of mental wellbeing. People with severe mental illness who are without family, community and clinical supports are particularly vulnerable to homelessness.

A third of people who are homeless in inner city areas are estimated as having a severe mental illness.[26] This estimate will be compounded by the high rates of homelessness and high prevalence of mental illness amongst young people aged 16 to 24 years.[27]

The evidence suggests that the longer clients with mental health problems are supported by specialist homelessness services, the more likely they are to move into public, community or rental housing rather than return to rough sleeping.[28] Access to a range of longer-term supports and community-based services will increase the early intervention and recovery support options for people who are homeless with a mental illness and substance abuse disorders.

People leaving health care services, child protection and correctional facilities

Service providers report that many people come to specialist homelessness services soon after discharge from hospital. This occurs more frequently for people being discharged from mental health services. Some people in this group did not have stable accommodation before they were admitted to hospital. Others were discharged to stay with family or friends but did not have a long-term housing option. In the worst situations, people are discharged directly to specialist homelessness services.

Young people leaving care of child protection systems also report high levels of homelessness.[29] Nearly half (45.2 %) of all people seeking the support of specialist homelessness services are young people under 18 years of age.[30] Child protection systems have not been able to provide secure, stable accommodation. Service providers report that many young adults who are experiencing homelessness have recently left child protection systems and do not have the income or life skills to manage a home of their own.

A significant number of people who are chronically homeless were under the care of child protection systems in the past.[31] The number of children on care and protection orders and in out-of-home care has increased by 33.5 per cent from 2002-2006.[32] This is a rapidly increasing population that is vulnerable to homelessness.

People leaving prison are also at risk of homelessness. In 2006–07, 1.3 per cent of homelessness service clients reported that they had spent time in the criminal justice system immediately before entering SAAP.[33] People leaving gaol may not have any housing to go to or may return to live with family and friends in situations that are not sustainable.

Seven per cent of prisoners reported that they were homeless at the time of their arrest.[34] An Australian Institute of Criminology study of housing and homelessness outcomes for ex-prisoners found that stable accommodation was likely to contribute to a decrease in reoffending and drug use.[35]

With the numbers of people in the criminal justice system increasing over the last two decades, this is also a growing group of people at risk of homelessness.[36]

Impact of homelessness

Homelessness removes stability and connection in people's lives. People who move away from their home and local community often leave behind important supportive relationships and networks. This makes it harder to participate in employment, maintain children's education and retain contact with family and friends.

In addition to higher rates of mental illness, people who are homeless experience poor dental health, eye problems, podiatry issues, infectious diseases, sexually transmitted disease, pneumonia, lack of preventive and routine health care and inappropriate use of medication.[37]

Children are particularly vulnerable to the traumatic effects of homelessness. It disrupts schooling and other important opportunities to build resilience that come, for example, from participation in sporting and cultural activities. Poor education is a risk factor in future episodes of homelessness. Children who have been homeless are more likely to experience emotional and behavioural problems such as distress, depression, anger and aggression.[38]

Homelessness often takes the form of living for long periods in marginal accommodation, rather than a single period of sleeping rough or staying in a specialist homelessness service. People may move home several times before they get long-term, stable housing. For children this may mean several new schools at a time when their education is already disrupted.

Homelessness can become part of a cycle of intergenerational disadvantage, in which younger generations in some families miss out on the opportunity to participate in the economy and the community. In some communities across Australia, families and individuals are caught in a cycle of low school attainment, high unemployment, poor health, high imprisonment rates and child abuse.[39] Recent research into homelessness found that most of the homeless participants surveyed who had been homeless for the medium to longer-term, first experienced homelessness during their childhood.[40] Australia cannot let this cycle of disadvantage continue.

There are major ongoing costs to government services as a result of homelessness. People who are homeless use hospital emergency services at higher rates than the general population to treat conditions and fix injuries that are made worse by being homeless.[41] It is estimated that the long-term economic cost to the community of not assisting the 50,000 children who pass through specialist homelessness services each year is close to $1 billion per annum.[42]

Homelessness prevention services and services which work with clients to end their homelessness are good investments of public money. Recent research confirms that homelessness programs produce positive outcomes for their clients at relatively low cost and deliver whole-of-government savings in avoidable health, justice and police outlays.[43] Addressing homelessness will boost rates of participation in the economy

and community. People who were homeless will be able to join the workforce and share in the prosperity of the nation.

Homelessness in the next decade

It is extremely difficult to predict patterns of homelessness. Rates of unemployment and domestic violence, the cost of housing and the effectiveness of specialist homelessness services will all impact on the numbers of people who are homeless in the future.

If no additional action is taken, it is likely that homelessness will rise. It will take time for the benefits of the Government's major reform agenda in the areas of housing, education, mental health and Indigenous policy to impact on the structural drivers of homelessness.

At the same time, particular subgroups vulnerable to homelessness are growing rapidly, such as children in care and protection,[44] prisoners,[45] and older people living in housing stress.[46]

Existing specialist homelessness services are at capacity and unable to improve outcomes without greater involvement of mainstream services and greater access to exit points such as permanent housing.

Currently, many people experiencing homelessness do not seek assistance from specialist homelessness services because beds are scarce. As service delivery improves and people move more quickly through these services into long-term housing, this latent demand may be released. This will mean that, in the short term, there may be increasing demand for specialist homelessness services.

Homelessness among families and children is already rising and likely to continue to be an important priority for specialist homelessness services. The potential impact of homelessness on young children is extremely serious and can only be addressed by a specific focus on their needs.

Young people leaving the child protection system are clearly at increased risk of homelessness. The increase in the number of young people in the child protection system may lead to a rise in homelessness among this group over the next decade.

While domestic violence rates in Australia have decreased slightly in the decade to 2005, the number of intimate partner homicides has remained stable.[47] Violence will continue to be a major cause of homelessness unless rates of domestic violence fall *significantly* or new strategies are found to keep victims of violence, mainly women, safer in their homes.[48]

Over the last five years, the rate of homelessness has been relatively stable among adults. This includes the majority of people who are chronically homeless. Improvements in addressing homelessness among young people may result in a fall in the number of adults aged between 25 and 35 years. The average age of people who are chronically homeless may rise, suggesting a greater need for specialist services that focus on older people who are homeless.

Chapter Two: The White Paper vision

Key points

- Homelessness is everyone's responsibility. To end homelessness we need sustained long-term effort from all levels of government, business, the not-for-profit sector and the community.

- The Council of Australian Governments (COAG) has adopted headline goals of halving overall homelessness and offering accommodation to all rough sleepers who need it by 2020. Interim targets will measure progress towards these goals.

- The homelessness response needs tailored measures for different groups such as children, older people, young people and Indigenous people.

- Homelessness can often be prevented. Governments should invest in evidence-based prevention.

- When homelessness does occur, mainstream services have a bigger role to play.

- The time people spend in specialist homelessness services should be minimised.

- The process of supporting people to obtain long-term housing and social and economic participation in the community should start as early as possible.

- Increasing the supply of affordable housing and supported accommodation will mean people can quickly move out of crisis into stable housing.

- Future government effort and investment should occur in three areas:
  - *Turning off the tap*: services will intervene early to prevent homelessness.
  - *Improving and expanding services*: services will be more connected and responsive to achieve sustainable housing, improve economic and social participation and end homelessness for their clients.
  - *Breaking the cycle*: people who become homeless will move quickly through the specialist homelessness service system to stable housing with the support they need so that homelessness does not recur.

Homelessness can happen to anyone. Despite the efforts of all governments over many years, the rates of homelessness remain unacceptably high.

The Australian Government's vision is for a dramatic national reduction in the number of people who become homeless. When – despite best efforts – people do become homeless, specialist and mainstream services must be more responsive and help people who are homeless to find permanent accommodation and the support they need to stabilise their lives.

Homelessness is a problem for all Australians and reducing it is everyone's responsibility. This issue cannot be tackled by governments alone. It will take a sustained and long-term effort to reduce homelessness. There must be additional forms of government assistance, services – mainstream and specialist – must aim to

end homelessness for each of their clients, and businesses need to lend their expertise and resources. Working together, with national leadership and towards a common goal, homelessness can be prevented.

This White Paper sets out a national homelessness strategy that provides tailored measures for different people such as children, older people, young people and Indigenous people.

The national homelessness response outlined in this White Paper is built around three key strategies as a focus for government effort and investment over the next 12 years to 2020:

Turning off the tap

Half of the Australian Government's new funding commitments over the next four years will be directed to the prevention of homelessness. Local initiatives have demonstrated that homelessness can be prevented. Significant effort should be focused on delivering evidence-based services across the country to stop people – especially children, families and young people – becoming homeless in the first place.

Improving and expanding services

While specialist homelessness services are an effective way to deliver crisis and ongoing support, they cannot deliver the entire response. Mainstream services need to improve their response to people who are homeless. When homelessness does occur, the time spent in specialist homelessness services should be minimised and transitions should be made to long-term stable housing, with ongoing support if necessary. Learning or earning, as well as participating in community activities, are crucial. Services that work with people who are homeless should focus on ending homelessness for their clients.

Breaking the cycle

Over the next four years, governments will break the cycle of homelessness by boosting specialist models of supported accommodation to keep people housed. An increase in the supply of affordable housing is crucial in order to permanently reduce homelessness. Some Australians who are homeless will get back on their feet quickly with targeted support. Others – particularly older people or those with mental health issues – will need long-term support. Boosting specialist models of supported accommodation will create exit points so that people can move out of crisis into stable housing quickly. So that they *stay* housed, some people who are homeless with complex needs will require wrap-around support involving a number of services.

A National Partnership approach

Efforts to tackle homelessness have always been shared by the Australian and state and territory governments. Since 1985 the primary response to homelessness has been through the jointly funded Supported Accommodation Assistance Program and the Crisis Accommodation Program. As table 3 below shows, $2 billion over five years is invested by both levels of government in 1500 specialist community based

homelessness services that manage 8,000 units of accommodation for people who are homeless.

Table 3: Funding under the Crisis Accommodation Program (2003-04 to 2007-08) and Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (2005-06 to 2009-10)

	2003-04 $m	2004-05 $m	2005-06 $m	2006-07 $m	2007-08 $m	2008-09 $m	2009-10 $m	Total $m
CAP*	39.655	40.122	40.674	41.155	41.184			202.790
SAAP**			323.948	357.987	372.935	380.836	388.902	1824.608
								2027.398

* Funding under Commonwealth State Housing Agreement 2003-2008
** Funding under the Supported Accommodation Assistance V Agreement 2005-2010

The Council of Australian Governments (COAG) has agreed to a major reform of this approach, with the creation of new National Partnerships on Social Housing, Remote Indigenous Housing and Homelessness within a new National Affordable Housing Agreement (NAHA).

The COAG reforms make it clear that the states and territories are responsible for the day-to-day delivery of services. This includes responsibility for specialist homelessness services as well as mainstream services such as hospitals and schools.

A person's experience of homelessness is diverse: it will be different in inner city Melbourne, far north Queensland and central NSW. State and territory governments are more able to adapt programs to these local conditions.

The new approach under COAG has a number of critical features:

- It institutes a new national approach to homelessness with *tighter* controls placed on the achievement of improved outcomes for homeless Australians and *looser* controls on inputs, allowing state and territory governments and community organisations who are closer to clients to specify the design of services that work.
- The achievement of outcomes will not be narrowly confined, with a focus on improving delivery of services across government to prevent and respond to homelessness.
- Through the National Affordable Housing Agreement there will be a greater focus on the achievement of long-term housing outcomes.

To support these reforms, COAG has committed to a 55 per cent increase on the current investment in homelessness services as a down payment on the 12 year reform agenda. This represents an additional $800 million over four years from 1 July 2009 under the National Partnership on Homelessness.

The new National Affordable Housing Agreement gives a full picture of the efforts of the Australian and state and territory governments on housing and homelessness.

The Agreement provides $6.1 billion over five years from 2008-09 for measures including social housing, assistance to people in the private rental market, support and accommodation for people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness, and for home purchase.

Under the Agreement, Australian and state and territory governments are investing:

- an additional $632 million under the National Rental Affordability Scheme to provide incentives to organisations to build 50,000 new rental properties for rent to low income tenants at 20 per cent below market rent
- an additional $300 million under *A Place to Call Home* to provide an ongoing pool of at least 600 homes over a five year period for individuals and families who are homeless
- an additional $400 million to deliver more public and community housing for low income Australians, as well as specialist models of housing for people who are homeless under the National Partnership on Social Housing
- an additional $1.9 billion over 10 years to boost the quality and supply of housing in remote Indigenous communities and address significant overcrowding, poor housing conditions and severe housing shortages under the National Partnership on Remote Indigenous Housing.

Detailed Implementation Plans for the National Partnerships on Social Housing, Homelessness and Remote Indigenous Housing must be developed between the Australian Government and each state and territory by 1 April 2009. The Australian Government intends for these Plans to be public documents and will seek COAG agreement to this approach.

Goals

The Australian Government, with the agreement of state and territory governments, has set *two headline goals to guide our long term response to homelessness:*

- *halve overall homelessness by 2020*
- *offer accommodation to all rough sleepers who need it by 2020.*

These goals are ambitious.

As an indication of the scale of effort required, reducing rough sleeping to 8,200 per night will involve an estimated reduction in rough sleeping of between 750 and 1,000 people each year for each of the five years to 2013.

These goals are achievable. In 1998, the UK Government set a goal of reducing the number of rough sleepers by two-thirds by 2002 and achieved it ahead of the target date.[49] In recent years Victoria[50] and South Australia[51] have developed detailed strategies to reduce homelessness, and are demonstrating that coordinated whole-of-government effort can dramatically impact on homelessness. Although the South Australian strategy was only launched in 2004, it has already seen a 6.4 per cent reduction in rough sleeping in a period when rough sleeping grew nationally by 16 per cent.[52]

The lessons from overseas and within Australia are clear: the achievement of these goals requires committed and sustained effort from all levels of government, business, the philanthropic and not-for-profit sectors and the Australian community.

The Australian Government understands that it must show national leadership and set the direction, identify measurable goals and commit substantial new funding. The Government must set a governance structure to drive its goals in cooperation with all its stakeholders. It must be accountable for its achievement.

Targets

The Australian and state and territory governments must be able to track progress towards the headline goals that have been agreed by setting short-term targets.

The Australian Government will set interim targets to 2013. These targets acknowledge that there may be modest increases in the rates of homelessness in the short-term before they begin to reduce. By 2013, the rate of homeless persons will need to be around 40 homeless persons per 10,000 population or better if we are to achieve our 2020 goal.

To achieve this, the key interim targets for 2013 are:

- Overall homelessness is reduced by 20 per cent.
- Primary homelessness is reduced by 25 per cent.
- The proportion of people seeking specialist homelessness services more than three times in 12 months is reduced by 25 per cent.

To track progress, the following interim targets for 2013 will be developed with the states and territories:

- The number of people engaged in employment and/or education/training after presenting at specialist homelessness services is increased by 50 per cent.
- The number of people exiting care and custodial settings into homelessness is reduced by 25 per cent.
- The number of families who maintain or secure safe and sustainable housing following domestic or family violence is increased by 20 per cent.
- The number of people exiting from social housing and private rental to homelessness is reduced by 25 per cent.
- The number of young people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness with improved housing stability and engaged with family, school and work is increased by 25 per cent.
- The number of children who are homeless or at risk of homelessness provided with additional support and engaged in education is increased by 50 per cent.
- The number of families who are homeless or at risk of homelessness who receive financial advice, counselling and/or case management is increased by 25 per cent.
- The number of people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness who receive legal services is increased by 25 per cent.

The vision and goals of the White Paper span more than a decade. Changes to the drivers of homelessness and shifts in thinking about how best to respond are likely to occur over this time. To focus appropriate effort and track progress against the Australian Government's 2020 goals, revised interim targets will need to be set over the course of the strategy. Interim targets may be reviewed over the course of the strategy.

Principles to guide our approach

The Australian Government is committed to using the framework of social inclusion to tackle disadvantage.

Social inclusion means building a fairer Australia by targeting the problems that keep people in disadvantage and tackling the barriers that prevent them from participating fully in Australian life.

In 2008-09, the Australian Government's social inclusion priorities are:

- Closing the Gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians
- tackling homelessness
- increasing employment for people with disabilities and mental health conditions
- assisting children at greatest risk of disadvantage
- supporting jobless families.

The Australian Social Inclusion Board, chaired by Patricia Faulkner AO, provides advice on these priorities.

While our approach to homelessness needs to be flexible and responsive, there are specific principles that will guide the Australian Government's homelessness response over the life of this strategy.

The strategy will also be underpinned by a strong legislative framework to ensure effort is maintained.

In implementing the White Paper vision, the Australian Government's guiding principles are:

1. **A national commitment, strong leadership and cooperation from all levels of government and from non-government and business sectors is needed.** Homelessness must be seen as a shared responsibility.

2. **Preventing homelessness is important.** We need to understand the causes of homelessness and use this knowledge to stop people becoming homeless.

3. **Social inclusion drives our efforts**. Tackling homelessness is about more than shelter and support. The focus must be on building the capacity of people and communities to maximise everyone's potential to participate economically and socially.

4. **Clients need to be placed at the centre of service delivery and design**. People who are homeless or at risk of homelessness need to be included in decision-making processes.

5. **The safety and wellbeing of all clients is essential**. Responses to homelessness need to focus on keeping people safe – including protecting women and their children who are escaping domestic and family violence and people experiencing other forms of abuse. Special attention must be given to the unique needs of children at risk.

6. **The rights and responsibilities of individuals and families need to be protected**. Assistance should be balanced to reflect the social and economic objectives appropriate to age, capacity and aspirations.

7. **Joined-up service delivery needs joined-up policy**. An overarching policy framework is needed to guide all government approaches to addressing homelessness. Program funding and accountability boundaries must be changed to allow governments and funded organisations to take a multidisciplinary approach to addressing people's needs.

8. **Transition points are a priority.** People are more vulnerable at times of change: becoming a parent, adolescence, school-to-work, retirement, family breakdown, leaving statutory care and leaving prison. These changes can be more difficult if compounded by poor health, mental health issues, caring responsibilities, bereavement, limited education and geographic or social isolation. Support at these points can prevent problems later on.

9. **Evidence-based policy helps to shape our priorities for action**. Strong evidence on outcomes should drive policy and program design. Achievements will be measured to assess the economic and social returns on investment. Action research is important as it helps improve policy and ensures that best practice and experience can be shared.

10. **Targets are set to reduce homelessness and hold ourselves accountable**. Rigorous and regular reporting against targets will ensure the Australian, state and territory and local governments and service providers are accountable.

Corporate and private sector partnerships

It will not be possible to meet the headline goals under this strategy without harnessing the efforts of the broader corporate and private sector.

Many charities complement government funding with donations from the corporate sector and philanthropic foundations. The private sector also contributes resources to reduce homelessness by donating buildings, running employment programs for people at risk of homelessness, volunteering and pro bono work, and via non-monetary contributions such as household goods and food for kitchens providing meals for people who are homeless. Local businesses contribute to the local and regional effort to reduce homelessness too.

The Australian Government acknowledges the generous efforts of the business and corporate sector to reduce homelessness. Some of Australia's largest companies and

institutions – like Westpac, Vodaphone, ANZ, Toll Holdings and Grocon – directly fund a variety of initiatives aimed specifically at reducing homelessness. These range from early intervention initiatives for children and families at risk of homelessness to building new specialist models of social housing for rough sleepers at cost, foregoing substantial profit.

A proposal to establish a foundation for building partnerships between government and the business sector to tackle homelessness was recommended at the 2020 Summit in April 2008.

To support the White Paper, the Australian Government will establish the Bea Miles Foundation to channel funding, in-kind support and sponsor innovation and research to support the work of governments and the not-for-profit sector in combating homelessness.

What will success look like?

To the Australian Government, success will mean fewer people become homeless. There will be a falling demand for specialist homelessness services, but those who do access them will be moved quickly to permanent accommodation with appropriate supports if necessary. Assertive outreach will draw in those who are sleeping rough to ensure they are housed and that they stay housed.

Through a wide range of measures over the life of this strategy, the underlying causes of homelessness will be dealt with. There will be less domestic violence, fewer children under care and protection orders and more children from disadvantaged families completing their education. Housing will be more affordable. Rates of homelessness for Indigenous Australians will fall to at least the levels in the general population and housing standards in remote communities will be closer to those of other Australians.

Throughout the human services system, homelessness prevention will be considered a priority for all clients. Mainstream agencies will prioritise people who are homeless and work closely with specialist homelessness services to end homelessness for their clients. A full range of services providing practical help to people who are homeless will be provided alongside innovative supported housing models targeted to those who need it.

The Government's strategies will be evidence based, responsive to local conditions and needs, and adjusted as required to reflect changing social and economic conditions.

Homelessness will be considered unacceptable in Australia.

Chapter Three: Turning off the tap

Key points

- Homelessness can often be prevented.
- Prevention and early intervention are the most effective and efficient ways to reduce homelessness.
- Prevention strategies need to be given a greater focus in the future homelessness response.
- Prevention strategies should be focused on key transition points and life events.
- There are many examples of successful prevention at the local level.
- Over the next 10 years, effort should be focused on delivering evidence-based prevention at scale across the country.
- Specific responses are required for different cohorts.

There is no single cause of homelessness. People at risk of homelessness typically face multiple difficulties. Underlying issues might include domestic and family violence, mental health problems, poverty or drug and alcohol addiction. Often, a single further pressure or event – job loss, eviction, poor health or relationship breakdown – can tip a person who is already vulnerable into homelessness.

People without support networks, skills or personal resilience, or who have limited capacity due to their age or disability, can quickly become homeless. Those with the least resources are likely to remain homeless longer. When a person becomes homeless, even briefly, the impact can be long-lasting.

There are four main pathways into homelessness:[53]

- Housing stress, often driven by poverty and accumulating debt
- Family breakdown, particularly driven by domestic violence
- Poor life transitions, particularly transitions out of the child protection system, prison or statutory care
- Untreated mental health and substance use disorders that lead to the loss of housing, education, employment, family and other relationships.

Homelessness can be prevented. Examining pathways into homelessness is important for identifying opportunities to prevent homelessness or intervene before it becomes an entrenched way of life.

It is important that efforts are directed both at *preventing homelessness* – by identifying people at risk and ensuring that they have access to the right support before reaching crisis point – and *preventing the causes of homelessness*.

Preventing homelessness involves both tackling the structural drivers of homelessness (such as entrenched disadvantage and the shortage of affordable housing) and targeting groups who are at particular risk of homelessness (such as people exiting statutory care and people in housing stress).

The role of state and territory governments in preventing homelessness is critical. People at risk of homelessness will often interact with multiple agencies and organisations – all of which must be involved in the national prevention and early intervention effort. These include child protection agencies, state housing authorities, criminal justice and corrective service agencies, mental health services, education, training and employment services, hospitals and Centrelink.

Community service organisations, charities and the private sector – such as banks and real estate agencies – also have an important role to play in preventing homelessness.

There are successful prevention programs in all states and territories. Many of these programs work well with a targeted population at a local level.

Enhanced tenancy support for individuals and families across all tenures

Tenancies fail for many reasons. Financial difficulties leading to rent arrears and eviction may arise from job loss, lack of budgeting skills, credit card debts and other pressures. Steep rent increases, especially for those on low fixed incomes, can trigger homelessness, as can reduction of household income as a result of relationship breakdown.

Social housing and boarding houses currently offer a 'last resort' housing service and as a result, people who are evicted from these tenures are very likely to become homeless and cycle though the human service and justice systems. Each year several thousand tenants leave social housing and seek crisis accommodation.[54] This is disruptive and traumatic for tenants and their children and inefficient for government.

Successful tenancy support programs have been implemented for social housing tenants in some states to prevent evictions that lead to homelessness.[55] These programs identify people who are in the early stages of rental arrears or about whom complaints have been made in regard to antisocial behaviour. At-risk tenants are contacted face to face by a specialist worker, who can help to develop a plan of action and refer tenants to other services, such as financial counsellors, mental health services, education and parenting programs. In some states, these programs are embedded within community renewal programs, which also aim to build cohesion and improve individual opportunities.

There are fewer programs targeting private rental tenancies, although some states and territories provide targeted assistance to establish or maintain private rental tenancies. This takes the form of means tested financial assistance with payment of bond, rental and removal costs and non-financial assistance including referrals to

appropriate support services. Some states and non-government organisations have also undertaken head-leasing arrangements to support clients with high and complex needs whose tenancies are at significant risk.[56]

Under the National Partnership on Homelessness as agreed by COAG, state and territory governments will be encouraged to prevent evictions from all types of tenures through expanded tenancy support models to help people sustain their tenancies. Tenants in the private rental market who are at risk of homelessness will also be supported with tailored assistance including financial assistance such as bond, rental and removal payments and non-financial assistance including guidance, support and referrals to appropriate support services.

How this will work on the ground: John and Gwen

John and Gwen live in Leumeah. John is on unpaid sick leave after a work injury and they are falling behind in their rent. After discussing payment of their overdue rent the local real estate agent contacts the new tenancy support service funded by the state housing department. John and Gwen come to the office to discuss their housing situation with the housing worker. Using tenancy service brokerage funds the housing worker clears the rent arrears and negotiates a $20 a week reduction in rent with the real estate agent for four weeks until John is able to return to work. After one month John returns to work and John and Gwen are able to retain their rental home.

Compulsory rent payments for Centrelink customers in public and community housing

While Centrelink records show that up to 70 per cent or more of public housing tenants use voluntary mechanisms such as the Rent Deduction Scheme to pay their fortnightly rent, each year around 2,000 tenants in public housing are evicted.[57] Once evicted, many end up sleeping rough, accessing specialist homelessness services, or staying with family and friends. This is disruptive and costly for individuals and governments and may lead to longer-term homelessness. It is also easily preventable.

The Australian Government will work with states and territories to introduce compulsory rent payments from Centrelink payments for tenants in public housing at risk of eviction due to non payment of rent.

Regulate residential tenancy databases and improve tenancy laws

Some private tenancy management practices contribute to homelessness.

While residential tenancy databases are a legitimate tool for reducing the risk of rent loss and damage to a rental property, they can create barriers that prevent people from accessing the private rental market. Databases are privately owned and store data about an individual's tenancy history. They are primarily used by real estate agents to check prospective tenants on behalf of property owners.[58]

Many people have found themselves listed on a residential tenancy database based on information that is inaccurate or outdated. Being listed on a database can exclude a person from the private rental market and make them homeless. This is especially the case in regional Australia where the number of homes for rent are limited and there may be little or no competition between real estate agents.

At the Commonwealth level, the *Privacy Act* contains high-level principles that regulate the activities of tenancy databases. While the Australian Government made regulations to ensure that residential tenancy databases are covered by the National Privacy Principles in 2007, there is a need for stronger, nationally consistent state and territory regulation of residential tenancy databases if homelessness is to be prevented.[59]

Nationally consistent regulation of tenancy databases will remove barriers for tenants in the private rental market who may otherwise be at risk of homelessness. It will also provide certainty and clarity to tenants – especially those who have lived in more than one jurisdiction or who plan to relocate to another – as well as to landlords, agents and property managers.

The Australian Government will finalise the development of nationally consistent regulation of residential tenancy databases by June 2010 through the Ministerial Council on Consumer Affairs for implementation by state and territory governments.

Most state and territory tenancy legislation permits 'without-grounds termination' of a tenancy agreement by a landlord. As a result, a tenant may be legally given notice and forced to leave their rented home through no fault of their own. In such a circumstance, people become homeless if they are unable to find other housing that is suitable or affordable. Tasmania is the only jurisdiction where tenancy legislation does not include provisions for a landlord to evict, without grounds or fault, a tenant who is party to a periodic or continuing agreement.

The Australian Government will review the impact of 'without-grounds termination' clauses on homelessness in state and territory tenancy legislation, and the lack of legislative protection for boarders and lodgers in some jurisdictions. As part of this review it will consider the impact of any proposed changes on landlords and future investment in rental housing.

A policy of 'no exits into homelessness' from statutory, custodial care and hospital, mental health and drug and alcohol services

State and territory authorities and services have information about people at high risk of homelessness. This information can be used to ensure that appropriate accommodation and support plans are put in place before the person is discharged and becomes homeless. Examples include young people leaving statutory care or juvenile justice, patients being discharged from medical and psychiatric settings, and prisoners being released from correctional facilities. These groups are relatively small

in number, but vulnerable and often become repeat users of specialist homelessness services.[60]

In these situations, homelessness could be prevented by a 'no discharge into homelessness' policy. This is not a 'housing-only' response: it will mean strengthening current post-release services so a person is connected to long-term (supported) housing, to education, training and employment assistance and, where required, family counselling.

Under the National Partnership on Homelessness, state and territory governments will implement a policy of 'no exits into homelessness' from statutory, custodial care and hospital, mental health and drug and alcohol services for those at risk of homelessness.

Under this strategy the following vulnerable groups of people will be prioritised:

- young people leaving child protection and juvenile justice systems
- people leaving hospital and other health care facilities, particularly mental health facilities and drug and alcohol services
- people leaving prison after serving sentences of 12 months or more.

In collaboration with state and territory governments, the Australian Government will map current pathways out of these services to identify existing locally based initiatives that are successfully preventing homelessness and gaps where these prevention services are needed.

How this will work on the ground: Casey

Casey is 18 and has been living with her foster parents for the past four years. She now wants to move out of home but has no family support and hasn't been at school for the last few years. Casey sits down with Sue – an 'exit planner' who works for the care and protection service. Over the next month Sue encourages Casey to make clear decisions about where she will live and how she will participate in education or employment. Casey eventually moves into Foyer-style accommodation, sharing a home with 12 other young people who are at risk of homelessness. There is live-in support and in return for the accommodation she must be engaged in training or employment.

Additional services for up to 2,250 families at risk of homelessness

Families at high risk of homelessness need early intervention services to stabilise their housing and address the underlying issues that are putting them at risk of homelessness.

The Household Organisation Management Expenses (HOME) Advice Program, which has been funded since 2002, is one successful model which reduces the risk of homelessness.

HOME Advice is provided in partnership between Centrelink and non-government agencies. Centrelink social workers help to resolve tenants' debt issues with Centrelink and external agencies, while workers in non-government partner organisations address the other needs of the family. This may include ensuring children are in school, organising family counselling or encouraging parents to find work or enrol in training.

The HOME Advice Program has demonstrated success in reducing the risk of homelessness: it has significantly improved housing and financial outcomes for families who use the service. [61] By 2007 the program had assisted 2,190 families, including 3,177 adults and 4,584 children. While 70 per cent of families had moved at least once in the two years before getting help from the program, 62 per cent had not moved in the 12 months since working with the HOME Advice Program.

The evaluation showed that the model works well for children in these families: school attendance had increased for all children, including Indigenous children: while 14 per cent of Indigenous children were not attending school regularly before support, this had dropped to 9 per cent after support.[62]

The Western Australian Government also provides tenancy support programs designed to prevent homelessness. The Supported Housing Assistance Program provides support and advocacy to assist public housing tenants, including families, to maintain stable housing. [63] Support is sensitive to the particular needs of each client and culturally appropriate support is provided to Indigenous clients.

In South Australia and Queensland, a 'one-stop shop' approach has been adopted to link clients, including families with a diverse range of housing options and homelessness information. South Australia's 'Housing One Stop Shop' and Queensland's 'Responding to Homelessness' initiative aim to provide easily accessible entry points into the service system, supply relevant information, help clients obtain appropriate assistance and make referrals.[64]

Under the National Partnership on Homelessness, up to 2,250 families at risk of homelessness will receive additional assistance to keep their housing stable.

Early intervention and prevention programs delivered by states and territories will include the following features:

- program delivery by a non-government agency that works closely with families to achieve improved housing and financial outcomes – this includes not only finding housing or resolving debt, but also improving school attendance for children, linking parents with education and employment, expanding social networks and reducing risk of family violence
- intensive case management of the family
- strong linkages to Centrelink, school welfare programs, local employment service providers, financial counsellors and other key services.

How this will work on the ground: Jessie and Rex

Jessie was living in a caravan with her children, aged two and four. Jessie was 19 and had been in statutory care. Her partner Rex, in his late twenties, was in gaol and had a history of being violent to Jessie.

Jessie was finding it difficult to makes ends meet. She contacted Centrelink to see if she was eligible for some additional financial assistance. She met with a Customer Support Officer to discuss her situation. The Support Officer reviewed her financial situation and assisted Jessie to claim the additional income support payments to which she was entitled.

The Centrelink Support Officer also referred Jessie and her family to the local early intervention service for families at risk of homelessness.

The service initially worked with Jessie, and then with both Jessie and Rex once Rex returned home from gaol. With the help of the service Jessie and Rex moved into a small rented house with a rental brokerage package provided by the state housing department. Over time a number of changes occurred. To address his violence, Rex was referred to a voluntary behaviour change program, which he successfully completed with support and encouragement from service providers.

The service linked Jessie into a local TAFE course, from which she did an office services course and eventually got a part-time job. The service paid for driving lessons so that Jessie and the children could be mobile.

At a year follow-up after ceasing contact with the early intervention service, Rex and Jessie were still together and both were employed. They had successfully maintained housing and there had been no ongoing relationship violence. The children were attending school and child care.

Additional services for up to 9,000 young people aged 12 to 18 years at risk of homelessness to remain connected with families, education, training and employment

Specific services to target young people at risk of homelessness need to be provided under this strategy. The focus of these services will be on assisting young people to reconcile with their families, where it is safe and appropriate, and become re-engaged in education, training, work and their local community. These services must link young people with support provided through Centrelink and employment service providers.

The Reconnect program is an effective early intervention model. Young people are referred to Reconnect by 'first to know' agencies such as schools, health services, youth services and Centrelink.

Reconnect aims to address the underlying reasons for a young person leaving home: family conflict, family separation, school related conflict, violence, poverty, drug use and mental health issues. The service providers work closely with other agencies to support both the young person and the family, and provide counselling and practical support.

A recent review of Reconnect showed that 79 per cent of young people reported an improvement in their overall situation as a result of Reconnect and 69 per cent reported improvements in their family relationships. [65]

The review also showed that 90 per cent of young people were living in stable accommodation when they finished using the service and that 50 per cent of young people had an improved connection with employment, education, training and the community.

Under the National Partnership on Homelessness up to 9,000 young people aged between 12 and 18 years will be assisted by early intervention and prevention programs delivered by state and territory governments in partnership with not-for-profit providers.

These services will have the following features:

- focus on working with the young person and their family with a view to reconciliation where it is safe and possible
- maintain a young person's connection with school, training or employment
- provide life skills training to assist the young person to make a transition to independence.

How this will work on the ground: Ben and his family

Ben lived with his mother and stepfather. When Ben was 14, after many years of family conflict, the relationship with his family broke down. He began missing school and was staying at a friend's house. His friend's mother contacted a service that specialised in providing early intervention support to young people at risk of homelessness.

A worker from the service approached Ben through his school and offered to meet him at a nearby coffee shop. Other meetings followed, and Ben gradually revealed why he had skipped school and left home. He spoke about his feelings of anger, the family dynamics and his difficulties at school. The worker contacted the friend's family to check on Ben's safety and to see if they could continue to provide 'time-out' accommodation for Ben.

Another worker met with Ben's mother and stepfather, working with them to identify the source of conflict and to explore their approaches to parenting. As a result of joint counselling sessions, Ben and his parents reached an agreement about how conflict would be dealt with in future, and Ben moved back home.

Support for people with mental health or substance abuse issues to maintain their housing in the community

People with severe mental health issues who are homeless or at risk of homelessness require continuing case management and support.[66]

There is strong evidence that better outcomes are achieved for this group by coordinated approaches which cross traditional service system boundaries and bring together clinical and community care.[67]

The Housing and Accommodation Support Initiative (HASI) in New South Wales successfully delivers services to people with mental health issues through a partnership between NSW Health, Housing NSW and the non-government sector. Clients are provided with accommodation and tenancy support, clinical care and rehabilitation and personal support. Culturally appropriate services are provided for Indigenous people.[68]

The failure to provide more of these integrated services for people with mental illness significantly impedes their ability to achieve better social and economic outcomes.

New or expanded services need to be delivered to provide community support for people with a mental illness to enable them to continue to live in the community. Particular effort is required to develop new approaches in working with Indigenous people so that the service system is better able to meet their needs. The services must link specialist homelessness and housing services with the mental health system.

The Personal Helpers and Mentors (PHaMs) program, established by the Australian Government under the COAG National Action Plan on Mental Health 2006–2011, is an example of an effective service model for this group.

This program provides intensive community support for people who have difficulties in everyday functioning due to severe mental illness. People are referred to PHaMs by hospitals, general practitioners and community mental health services, as well as other community service agencies. Carers, friends and neighbours also refer people with mental illness to PHaMs. PHaMs services play a critical role in linking specialist mental health services, mainstream agencies and specialist homelessness services.

PHaMs helps people with mental illness build social networks, gain employment, learn how to better manage their illness and live independently. PHaMs teams work to stabilise people's housing, particularly where people might be at risk of losing housing due to debt, lack of living skills or difficult behaviour. The teams also work with people who are homeless, securing them accommodation. While the program has had some success in reaching Indigenous people, it is estimated that there is a greater need in this population group than is currently being met.

The Australian Government, working with state and territory governments, will provide around $20 million under the fourth round of the Personal Helpers and Mentors Program in early 2009 to deliver additional community based mental health services to difficult to reach groups of Australians such as people who are homeless who would benefit from mental health services. Up to 1,000 disadvantaged Australians will benefit from these additional community based mental health services.

In addition, under the National Partnership on Homelessness new or expanded services will be delivered by state and territory governments in partnership with not-for-profit providers to assist people with mental health issues to maintain their housing and participate in the community.

These programs will have the following features:

- combine accommodation, tenancy support and clinical care to support people in their homes
- provide support that will enhance social and economic participation
- link specialist mental health services with mainstream agencies and specialist homelessness services.

How this will work on the ground: James

James was referred to the local mental health service by a concerned neighbour. After James was stabilised on medication he was referred to an intensive community support program. The worker had a lot of contact with James in the first few weeks – establishing that James had had a previous episode of mental illness, wanted to get well again and stay in his unit. He was also interested in getting another job having lost his job six months before.

The worker helped James develop a plan to stay in his unit, including ways of managing his rent, the upkeep and relationships with neighbours. The worker assisted James to renegotiate his tenancy with the property manager. James agreed to keep seeing the mental health team and attended a support group. James retained his housing and his capacity to manage his illness improved. The worker helped him get a job through a specialist employment service provider.

Reducing violence against women and children and making it safe for victims of domestic and family violence to return to their home

The Australian Government is strongly committed to reducing domestic and family violence. The National Council to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children is developing a National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children (National Plan), which will be presented to the Government for consideration in early 2009.

The National Plan will set out a strategic framework for reducing the incidence and impact of domestic and family violence and sexual assault against women and

children. The Australian Government will spend approximately $15 million in 2008-09 under the Women's Safety Agenda to take a lead role in eliminating domestic violence and sexual assault in the Australian community.

The National Plan will, over time, reduce the incidence of domestic violence which will have a long-term impact on homelessness amongst women and children.

Until now there has not been sufficient effort made to support women to stay safely in their own home. In the shorter term, homelessness for women and children can be reduced by improving support for women and children to stay in their own home where it is safe and practical. To keep these women and children safe, the perpetrator of the violence should be removed. Supporting women and children to stay in their homes safely means there is less disruption to their lives. Victims of family violence should, where possible, stay in their own community accessing their support and social networks. Children can attend the same schools and maintain their after school activities, social connections and friendships.

Under the National Partnership on Homelessness expanded models of integrated support to enable women and children experiencing domestic and family violence to remain at home safely will be delivered by state and territory governments in partnership with not-for-profit providers.

Some states and territories have already introduced 'safe at home' models that take this approach. The strategy over the next decade is to build on existing programs as well as develop new ones where they are needed.

Based on evidence of best practice approaches, the service models will have the following features:

- specialist workers to carefully assess the safety and support needs for women and children to stay in their own homes
- brokerage funds that could be used to stabilise housing or increase home security for women and children, for example by installing deadlocks, screen doors, security lighting and home alarms, or by providing short-term rental subsidies or mortgage top ups
- integrated criminal justice, health and community service policies and protocols to support women and their children.

It is again important to note that these measures are only appropriate for women and children where a thorough, professional risk assessment indicates this is a safe option. Women and children considered at medium to high risk of further violence from their partner, even with a current court order, will not be able to remain safely in the family home. Crisis accommodation remains an integral part of the national homelessness response. People unable to stay in their own homes need to make a speedy transition from crisis accommodation to safe, secure long-term housing.

How this will work on the ground: Millie and her children

The domestic violence outreach service works closely with police when a domestic violence incident is reported. Millie called police following an assault on her by her husband Mick. Mick had left the house and was staying with his mum. Police took action to protect Millie and her children with an interim protection order. They also referred Millie to a 'safe at home' outreach service.

The service immediately followed up on Millie's legal and housing needs through a home visit. They assisted Millie to make an application to Legal Aid for a lawyer who would assist her to sort out family law matters relating to Mick's contact with the children and child support. They liaised with the police prosecutor about obtaining long-term protection from further violence through the court system.

The outreach worker also discussed Millie's housing situation in detail. Millie and her children had lived in their rented home for six years and the children had an extensive social network in their local neighbourhood. Mick had family he could stay with. Millie felt that with legal protection and some changes to her home she would feel safe to stay there. The service organised for the lease to be changed to her name and for a locksmith to change the locks and secure the windows and sliding door. Millie and the service worker also worked on a safety plan with the domestic violence liaison officer at the local police station.

Enhancing Centrelink's role in homelessness prevention

Centrelink has a critical role to play in preventing homelessness. Centrelink provides income support payments to 6.5 million people, many of whom are disadvantaged, vulnerable and socially excluded. Centrelink is a key 'first to know' agency and is well placed to identify people who are at risk of homelessness and to refer them to appropriate support services.

Centrelink data shows that around 90,000 of its clients change their address three or more times a year, and that 10,000 families are spending more than 50 per cent of their income on rent. Centrelink has introduced a 'flag' to identify clients who are homeless or at risk of homelessness to improve and tailor the service it provides to this group.

The use and expansion of the vulnerability indicator flag on Centrelink's system will ensure participation failures are not applied inappropriately to vulnerable individuals, including jobseekers at risk of homelessness. The flag will inform Centrelink staff that the client needs active follow up, generally from a Centrelink social worker, to ensure that they are receiving the support they need and are able to meet any obligations arising from their income support payment. It will also enable Centrelink's business practices to change to better meet the needs of vulnerable clients.

There will be an increased focus on the needs of young people and their families by Centrelink's social workers. Social workers will work directly with children and young people under 18 who have applied for Youth Allowance Unreasonable to Live At Home. These workers will work together with state and territory youth homelessness prevention services and focus on family reconciliation where possible.

The Australian Government, through Centrelink, will make weekly payments available to its most vulnerable customers including people who are homeless.

Some Centrelink customers have difficulty budgeting their fortnightly income support payments to last over a two week period. Whilst the amount paid is the same through weekly payments, more regular payment reduces the need for urgent payments and can help customers budget to meet their expenses more readily.

Where we will start

- Provide additional support for private and public tenants, including advocacy, financial counselling and referral services to help people sustain their tenancies.

- Work with states and territories to introduce compulsory rent payments from Centrelink benefits for tenants in public housing to eliminate the risk of eviction due to non payment of rent.

- Regulate tenancy databases by June 2010 to prevent exclusion and work with states and territories to review the impact of tenancy laws on rates of homelessness.

- Implement a policy of 'no exits into homelessness' from statutory, custodial care or hospital settings.

- Deliver additional prevention and early intervention services for up to 2,250 families at risk of homelessness.

- Deliver additional services for up to 9,000 12-18 year olds at risk of homelessness to remain connected with their families, where it is safe and appropriate, as well as access to education, training and employment.

- Implement a funding round for the Personal Helpers and Mentors (PHaMs) Program.

- Deliver additional services – including brokerage funds and long-term support – to assist people with mental health issues and/or substance abuse issues who have been homeless to maintain their housing and participate in the community.

- Provide additional support to make it safe for victims of domestic violence to stay safely in the family home.

- Develop a National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children with evidence-based strategies to reduce domestic violence.

- Complete a National Child Protection Framework to improve the safety and wellbeing of children including improved information sharing across state and territory boundaries.

- Introduce a 'flag' within Centrelink records to identify clients who may be homeless or at risk of homelessness to improve services for this group.

- Increase the capacity of Centrelink social workers to work directly with young people under 18 who have applied for Youth Allowance Unreasonable to Live At Home and their families.

- Make weekly payments available for Centrelink's most vulnerable customers including people who are homeless.

Chapter Four: Improving and expanding services

Key points

- People who are homeless have contact with mainstream services that have a responsibility to identify homelessness and actively respond.

- Specialist homelessness services are an effective way to deliver crisis and ongoing support, and provide expertise on homelessness.

- Specialist homelessness services cannot deliver the entire homelessness response. The best outcomes for people who are homeless will be achieved if specialist and mainstream services work together closely.

- Services should operate so that there are 'no wrong doors' for people who are homeless and seeking help.

- All services that work with people who are homeless should focus on getting people into stable long-term housing, employment and training, or other community participation.

- A workforce development strategy is needed so that there are sufficient people with the right skills to work actively with clients to end their homelessness.

- A strong legislative base must remain in place to underpin the national homelessness response, set standards and deliver the best quality services possible for people who are homeless.

People who are vulnerable to homelessness are faced with many difficulties and they typically interact with multiple service systems at any one time and over time.

People who are homeless often experience considerable frustration with the broader social service system, describing it as 'having their time wasted because of misinformation' and 'getting the run around'.[69]

A family experiencing homelessness may need crisis accommodation, immediate help from Centrelink and family counselling. They may also be grappling with legal issues arising from domestic violence, financial problems or mental health issues. School children may need extra help to deal with disruption to education or settle into a new school, or counselling to deal with the impact of witnessing domestic violence.

People are generally expected to find their own way to the right services - through a complex and disconnected service system. They often need to tell their stories over and over again.

Improving the response of mainstream services

A repeated theme of submissions to the Green Paper was the need to improve the response of mainstream services to people who are homeless. This will in many cases prevent people becoming homeless – by catching them early. It will also reduce demand for specialist homelessness services helping those services work more effectively with people – who despite the best efforts – do become homeless and require assistance from specialist homelessness services.[70]

Mainstream services – as critical 'first to know' agencies - include:

- state and territory housing authorities
- Centrelink
- universal employment services
- schools and other education and training services
- health services, including hospitals, mental health and drug and alcohol services
- legal, policing, correctional and juvenile justice systems
- family and children's services, including child protection services and immigration programs
- aged care services

To substantially reduce homelessness and achieve the high level outcomes agreed to by all governments under the National Affordable Housing Agreement these services must all work better together.

Mainstream services must also significantly improve their connections with specialist homelessness services to prevent people falling into homelessness.

The Australian Government will lead this effort by improving collaboration in areas where it funds or operates mainstream services. The Government will review the way that Centrelink and employment service providers define and share information about people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness.

The Australian Government will work with state and territory governments to develop state and regional homelessness action plans to improve collaboration between mainstream services and homelessness services. These plans will include mechanisms for cross-agency case assessments, case management and case planning as well as service protocols which will improve the way services are delivered to the client. It will stop people who are homeless falling through the gaps.

Service protocols have operated successfully in some states and territories between specialist homelessness services and other services such as mental health services or hospitals.

Ten-year action plans have been implemented overseas, most notably in the United States, to integrate the efforts of government, business, the not-for-profit sector and the community to reduce homelessness at a regional level. The Interagency Council

on Homelessness in the United States has worked to develop homelessness action plans in 300 cities as a way to integrate homelessness strategies.[71]

Some states and territories have implemented homelessness action plans at state and/or regional levels. These will serve as good practice examples for their implementation across Australia.

Successful system reform is often achieved incrementally and is driven by people on the ground doing the work but supported by high-level administrative reforms and new investment.[72] Flexible funding could be provided at the regional level to bring critical homelessness sector stakeholders together to deliver integrated service responses.

On the ground, improved collaboration between services will mean that there will be 'no wrong door' into the service system for a person who is homeless. There will be multiple entry points to services: any entry point will be the right entry point for people who are homeless to be assessed and receive appropriate assistance.

Features of a 'no wrong door' system will include:

- mainstream services assessing the housing needs of clients
- specialist homelessness services assessing other needs beyond housing like education and employment needs of clients
- strong service networks and agreements between all human service providers at a local level
- joint assessment, planning, coordination and case management
- sharing information about clients.

Improving specialist homelessness services

Specialist homelessness services are an effective way both to deliver crisis and ongoing support.

The Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP) funded jointly by the Australian and state and territory governments comprises a network of 1,500 specialist homelessness services. Funding for specialist homelessness services will continue under the National Affordable Housing Agreement which replaces the Supported Accommodation Assistance Program V Agreement and commences on 1 January 2009.

The primary focus for specialist homelessness services is to provide supported accommodation for the chronically homeless or those who were temporarily homeless as a result of crisis.[73]

New approaches have evolved over the time the program has been in existence and there are many examples of innovative and good practice. Many specialist homelessness services deliver prevention and early intervention programs: some deliver outreach support to clients in transitional housing; others deliver longer-term outreach to clients who have been stabilised in permanent housing.

There will always be a need for a crisis response to homelessness – particularly for people whose safety is at risk.

At the same time, it is unrealistic to expect specialist homelessness services to deliver the whole response to homelessness.

Specialist homelessness services cannot meet the demand for their services. A survey conducted by the Public Interest Law Clearing House (PILCH) Homeless Persons Legal Clinic reported that 74 per cent of those surveyed had at some time been refused crisis or transitional accommodation by a service provider; in 58 per cent of cases this was due to lack of beds.[74]

Finding sustainable long-term housing for clients of specialist homelessness services has proved difficult. Services have often found it hard to broker the wide range of services that many people who are homeless need to support them to become stable.

Despite the many challenges specialist homelessness services have continued doing more with less: between 2005-06 and 2006-07 the number of people assisted each day by SAAP services rose by 20.4 per cent to 32,400, yet real funding increased by only 9 per cent.[75]

SAAP data suggests that to achieve long-term reductions in homelessness, the response to homelessness must go beyond that delivered by specialist homelessness services.

It is clear that the best outcomes for people who are homeless will be achieved if specialist and mainstream services are highly integrated.

Specialist homelessness services must build strong working partnerships with each other and with mainstream services. They must connect clients to mainstream programs such as housing, health services and employment services that can deliver ongoing support, improve outcomes for clients and reduce the likelihood of homelessness happening again.

The approach agreed to by COAG under the National Affordable Housing Agreement is designed to provide greater flexibility in the way services are delivered. This means that specialist homelessness services will be able to transition some clients more quickly out of crisis services into permanent housing and be able to work for longer periods with those clients who need more intensive, longer-term support.

The Australian Government will work with the states and territories to establish a 'case-mix' pilot trial to better quantify the actual costs of supporting high-needs clients and test whether additional outcome-based performance payments can improve both employment and housing outcomes for people who are homeless.

The trial will identify those people who have a higher level of complexity requiring longer-term and more intensive coordinated support. The trial will identify a best practice approach (including the skills needed) to providing this support.

Improving coordination and installing information technology systems that allow for real-time data exchange across specialist homelessness services will also improve utilisation of existing capacity *within* the specialist homelessness services system and enable better deployment of services to meet demand. For example, it would mean people were less likely to be turned away with nowhere to go while there is a vacancy in another service.

Improving information technology support across the specialist homelessness service sector would reduce the amount of time services spend on collecting and holding data and reporting to government. It would also facilitate inter-agency referrals, provide a platform for enhanced case management and provide services with much better information about client outcomes.

This is discussed further in Chapter Six.

Addressing homelessness in rural and remote areas

Despite common perceptions, rates of homelessness are higher in regional and rural areas: 56 per cent of rough sleepers in the 2006 Census count were located in regional areas.[76]

Policies and programs on homelessness must be designed to respond to the distinct challenges faced in rural and remote communities.[77] There is under investment in services in rural and regional Australia.

The Australian Government will work with the states and territories to review the current distribution of specialist homelessness services against the geographic distribution of people who are homeless, particularly those sleeping rough.

The review will take into account the extent to which the existing service network is able to meet the changing profile of people who are homeless in Australia, particularly the increasing numbers of children who are homeless and the rising numbers of older people who are homeless.

While rural and regional communities often have the strongest history of joined-up and coordinated service approaches, many submissions to the Green Paper identified the need for improved service integration in these communities.

Local governments, in rural and regional areas, are becoming increasingly involved in providing services to people who are homeless. Some local governments have shown strong leadership capability, partnering directly with state and territory governments and business to deliver affordable housing opportunities and homelessness

prevention services.[78] It is clear that local governments will play an increasing role in responding to homelessness.

Developing a workforce strategy

To increase the capacity and diversity of the service response, creative ways of developing a high-quality workforce, retaining and attracting staff, and improving and enhancing career paths in the current employment market must be identified.

Primary responsibility for pay and conditions of homelessness service workers rests with state and territory governments, with most employed under state-based Social and Community Services awards.

Critical issues that need to be addressed include low wages, lack of career progression, high staff turnover, low skilled staff, an ageing workforce, casualisation of the workforce and significant workload stress. Difficulties in attracting young people to the human services field and in retaining staff affect the ability of services to deliver quality outcomes for clients.[79,80] In order to reduce homelessness, the workforce must be adequately trained and well resourced.[81] The SAAP IV Evaluation Report found that in all SAAP reviews, increasing staff salaries had clear benefits for the quality of services provided.[82]

A key priority is to address the need for increased skills and competency in specialist homelessness services to achieve sustainable outcomes for people with high and complex needs.

The Australian Government, with state and territory governments, will consider the development of 'advanced practitioners' within the awards covering employees in specialist homelessness services.

Provision of specialist workers and resources to meet the needs of children experiencing homelessness is discussed in Chapter Five.

The challenges affecting the homelessness sector workforce are shared with the broader community sector.

The Australian Government, as part of its social inclusion agenda, is developing a new and stronger relationship with the not-for-profit sector, based on partnership and respect. A consultation process is currently under way with a view to developing a National Compact with the sector on working together to improve and strengthen working relationships.

The Australian Government commissioned the Australian Council of Social Services to consult and canvass the views of its members and other organisations.

Developing agreed national accreditation and service standards and service charters for people who are homeless

National service charters for mainstream services and accreditation for funded specialist homelessness services will lead to a service system that maintains high-quality service delivery and has appropriately skilled and qualified staff.[83] It will also help develop partnerships that encourage consistency and best practice service delivery across the sector.[84]

A national service standards and accreditation system that focuses on quality improvement will contribute to:

- placing consumers at the centre of the response in both the mainstream and homelessness service settings[85]
- a greater ability to attract and retain a highly trained, multi-skilled and well-educated workforce[86]
- career paths for the workforce, with skills and expertise that are easily transferable within the sector[87]
- continuous service improvement to ensure that clients receive a service offer focussing on achieving sustainable housing and employment outcomes
- stronger connections between government, business and non-government services.

State and territory governments implement service standards with varying degrees of success. Service standards in Victoria focus on improving service integration. In Victoria, service standards encourage specialist homelessness services to work collaboratively with agencies and across programs.[88] As a result, strong partnerships have been formed with mental health and community care divisions, housing, the Department of Justice and the Office of the Correctional Services Commissioner.[89]

In Victoria, all services must undergo a pre-accreditation process in which service delivery is assessed against the Homelessness Assistance Service Standards, providing evidence that high-quality service performance has been achieved. Formal accreditation is then obtained through an external body, which conducts on-site accreditation reviews every three years.

This model is similar to aged care and childcare accreditation models. In each case, an external agency visits service providers and conducts reviews to determine whether services comply with sector-specific standards and actively implement service improvements.

The Australian Government and state and territory governments will work with homelessness services and people who are homeless to develop national homelessness service standards and a system for accrediting services focused on improving quality.

In considering how a national system could be developed and encouraged, approaches such as adoption of service charters in legislation and making accreditation a prerequisite for funding may be useful options. Incentives could be made available to accredited services that actively engage in staff training and education.

New legislation to cover service provision to people who are homeless

The Australian Government will enact new legislation to ensure that people who are homeless receive quality services and adequate support. In addition, service standards encouraging best practice and achievement of outcomes would be set out in the legislation, ensuring national consistency and quality of the services offered to people experiencing homelessness. The best features of the *Supported Accommodation Assistance Act 1994* and the *Disability Services Act 1986* would be incorporated into new legislation on homelessness.

This legislation is discussed further in Chapter Seven.

Where we will start

- Improve collaboration between mainstream and specialist homelessness services.
- Develop a shared definition of homelessness.
- Build a national service system where there are 'no wrong doors'.
- Improve service integration through improved IT systems.
- Test new funding models for specialist homelessness services that reflect the costs of delivering services to clients with complex needs.
- Encourage the use of local and regional action plans, with particular focus on service connections.
- Address homelessness in rural and remote areas.
- Work towards developing advance practitioner positions in specialist homelessness services.
- Develop agreed national accreditation, service standards and service charters for people who are homeless.
- Enact new legislation to ensure people who are homeless receive quality services.

Chapter Five: Breaking the cycle

Key points

- Some people move in and out of homelessness for many years.

- An increase in the supply of affordable housing is needed to reduce homelessness.

- To break the cycle some people who are homeless will require long-term support. Specialist models of supported accommodation are needed for people who are long-term homeless.

- People who participate in work and their community are more likely to leave homelessness permanently.

- Particular focus is required on children who are homeless to prevent a life time of disadvantage that may include long-term homelessness as an adult.

To reduce homelessness, particularly the numbers of people sleeping rough, it is critical that services work to end homelessness for their clients *permanently*.

As well as providing a crisis response to people who are homeless – somewhere to sleep, something to eat, health care, legal protection, counselling – there must be a stronger focus on achieving durable outcomes.

For some people, homelessness is an isolated event – it happens once and for a short time. For others, homelessness is part of a chaotic and uncertain life of poverty and disadvantage. These people tend to move in and out of homelessness and when they do find housing it is not sustained.

An increase in the supply of affordable housing generally and specialist housing models that link accommodation and support should underpin our long-term response to homelessness.

At present, specialist homelessness services struggle to find longer-term accommodation for people they are supporting.

This means that people have to stay in specialist homelessness services for lengthy periods of time. In 2006-07 around 2,000 families with children were living in specialist homelessness services for more than six months.[90] Ideally these families should be in a safe and secure place that they can call their own.

The inability of specialist homelessness services to move people into secure affordable housing also contributes to the high turn away rates from specialist homelessness services. On any given night, more than half of all people requesting new accommodation from specialist homelessness services are turned away.[91] Many of these are young people and families.[92]

Lack of affordable housing also means that some people move from one specialist homelessness service to another or from a homelessness service back to the streets. Around one in six people enter specialist homelessness services from another homelessness service and one in seven exits into another homelessness service. Another 5 per cent of people leave specialist homelessness services to return to the streets.[93]

An increased supply of affordable housing and specialist housing models will enable specialist homelessness services to move people into secure, long-term accommodation. In turn, this will enable specialist homelessness services to assist larger numbers of people. A greater supply of affordable housing will also provide people who are vulnerable to homelessness with more housing choices, and contribute to reducing the numbers of people who become homeless.

Specialist housing is required to meet the needs of individual groups within the homeless population.

Foyer models provide young people who are homeless with stable accommodation and other supports on the basis that they continue to participate in education, training or employment.

Foyer models were developed in France to provide for young people moving from rural areas to the city to find work. As they developed, the focus was widened from purely employment to providing support on a range of issues faced by young people living away from home. The model has now spread through Europe and has also been established in the United States of America. These newer models are targeted primarily to young people experiencing homelessness.

Several Foyer models are operating across Australia. The Foyer Foundation has been established in South Australia to promote the model.

These models support young people who require ongoing support, guidance and mentoring as they may not have the life skills to live on their own. They provide young people with longer-term accommodation that is tied to education, training and employment.

For rough sleepers, assertive outreach models have been successfully trialled in the United Kingdom and the United States of America. These models involve working intensively with people sleeping rough, connecting them to sustainable long-term housing and health services.

Specialist homelessness services provide a vital safety net for people in crisis who have no other options. They also have a key role to play in ending homelessness by identifying people whose long-term prospects are poor without intensive assistance.

Specialist homelessness services need to be able to *wrap services* around their clients. This involves using their expertise to assess all of the clients' needs, identifying the services required, brokering these services and coordinating their delivery.

Services should be able to provide differentiated levels of support to people who are homeless depending on their needs. Some clients will be able to move through specialist homelessness services into longer-term stable accommodation quickly and with limited support. Others will need longer, more intensive support to assist them to maintain their housing and participate in work and community activities. This means that services should be funded to work with clients for as long as they need active support to maintain housing, rather than be subject to time limits on the support they provide.

It is critical that people who are homeless receive support to maximise their opportunities to participate in the economy and the community. For many clients this will mean assisting them to get a job or begin training. Stable housing and increased participation is the best way of ensuring that people remain on their feet and move out of homelessness permanently. Specialist homelessness services and employment services need to work closely together to improve employment outcomes for their clients.

Children who are homeless have particular needs that have to be addressed. The evidence suggests that negative early experiences increase the likelihood of mental health and behavioural problems later in life.[94] Children who are homeless are particularly vulnerable to becoming homeless teenagers and then homeless adults. Attention needs to be paid to reducing the impact of early homelessness and preventing a lifelong cycle of homelessness and social exclusion. This is best done by minimising disruption in their lives, stabilising their housing quickly and keeping them in school.

Under the National Affordable Housing Agreement, due to commence in 2009, the Australian Government will work with states and territories to increase the supply of affordable housing and deliver specialist accommodation for people who are homeless. These initiatives will help to move people from specialist homelessness services into long-term housing that meets their needs, ensuring they stay permanently housed.

Build 50,000 affordable rental homes for low and moderate income earners

Under the National Rental Affordability Scheme, the Australian Government is investing $623 million to increase the supply of affordable rental dwellings by up to 50,000 by 2012, with a further 50,000 houses to be made available after July 2012, if demand remains strong.

The Australian Government will provide tax credits or grants of $6,000 on 50,000 new rental properties each year for ten years. State and territory governments have agreed to contribute a further $2,000 per property, either as cash or in kind each year for ten years.

Rent for these properties will be charged at 20 per cent below the market rate for eligible tenants on low to moderate incomes. Tenants will still be eligible for Rent Assistance – making the properties even more affordable.

Build up to 2,700 additional homes for people who have been homeless or at risk of homelessness

Under A Place to Call Home the Australian Government is investing $150 million over five years to provide a pool of 600 additional houses for homeless individuals and families across Australia.

This initiative is being delivered in partnership with the states and territories who have agreed to provide support services to each household accommodated under the scheme to ensure the cycle of homelessness is stopped. Support services include tenancy support, financial counselling and debt management, drug and alcohol services, health, legal and child welfare services.

In Victoria, Tasmania and South Australia plans are under way to build new facilities for people who are chronically homeless as well as new homes for homeless families. South Australia is also developing a Foyer model facility to provide housing and support to young people who are homeless in Adelaide. Under *A Place to Call Home*, New South Wales, the Australian Capital Territory and Queensland are delivering new homes for individuals and families who have been homeless.

The Australian Government has allocated $400 million over two years commencing 2008-09 to increase the supply of social housing. Between 1,600 and 2,100 additional dwellings will be built by the states and territories by the end of 2009-10 with this funding. This initiative will be implemented through the National Partnership on Social Housing.

Implementation plans for this new housing will be finalised by 1 April 2009. Governments have also agreed to consider further social housing reforms, supply shortfalls and possible payment of Commonwealth funding assistance through a per dwelling subsidy, such as Commonwealth Rent Assistance.

Specialist models of accommodation

Increasing the supply of affordable housing will assist in reducing homelessness. Some people who are homeless will benefit from specialist long-term accommodation models that easily allow for the integration of support and accommodation.

Specialist supported housing facilities in diverse communities should target:

- families who are homeless
- people who are ageing and chronically homeless
- young people who are homeless.

Families should be provided with housing and support to either prevent the family from moving into specialist homelessness services or to leave specialist homelessness services for more sustainable housing. A range of support services will be provided as required to assist them to break the cycle of homelessness and get back on their feet. These could include education, training and employment, legal advice, financial counselling and management, mental health and substance abuse support, family/relationship counselling and social activities.

Older people experiencing homelessness have a different profile to that of other older Australians. They are more likely to have experienced mental illness or cognitive impairment, often as a result of alcohol and substance abuse. Many have been homeless for many years. They may have more complex health and support needs and often do not have family support. To end their homelessness, they may need lifelong support.

Additional aged care accommodation specifically for older people who are homeless is required. Housing models such as that established by Wintringham in Victoria, have proven successful for older people. Wintringham is a not-for-profit welfare organisation working with older men and women who are homeless. Wintringham supplies its residents with long-term supported housing, with particular emphasis on the rights and dignity of residents.

To promote this successful model of housing for older people who are homeless, the Australian Government will amend the Aged Care Act 1997 to recognise older people who are homeless as a 'special needs' group. This will better allow the needs of older people who are homeless to be specifically taken into account during the annual allocation of new residential places and community care packages. It will also allow aged care providers who care for older people who are homeless easier access to targeted capital assistance grants.

The Australian Government will also allocate aged care places and capital for at least one new specialist facility for ageing people who are homeless in an area of need in each of the next four years. Proposals must be of sufficient quality and meet the requirements under the annual Aged Care Approvals Round.

The Australian Government will continue to fund the successful Assistance for Care and Housing for the Aged (ACHA), which helps to link older people who are homeless and those in insecure housing to care and accommodation. *The Australian Government will provide funding of $18.4 million over the next four years to enable existing providers to help more people obtain housing and community care services and for new providers to expand ACHA into new regions.*

More supportive housing models, such as Foyer models, also need to be established to target young people who are homeless. These models provide supported accommodation that is connected to education, training and employment. Young people have access to accommodation while they develop longer-term skills to become independent.

Build up to 4,200 new houses and upgrade up to 4,800 existing houses in remote Indigenous communities

The Australian Government will provide an additional $1.9 billion over ten years to build 4,200 new houses and upgrade up to 4,800 existing houses in remote Indigenous communities under the National Partnership on Remote Indigenous Housing. This will address significant overcrowding, homelessness,

poor housing conditions and the severe housing shortage in remote Indigenous communities.

Indigenous people are over-represented in the homeless population and are more likely to cite overcrowding as a reason for seeking assistance from specialist homelessness services.

Improving housing conditions for remote Indigenous communities will provide a foundation for improvements in health, education and employment and will contribute towards closing the gap on Indigenous disadvantage.

Provide additional assertive outreach programs to rough sleepers

Services targeting people sleeping rough in Australia are underdeveloped. People sleeping on the streets have complex needs. For many, homelessness has become an entrenched way of life. Highly targeted and specialised interventions, that are assertive, intensive and integrated, are needed for this group. Wrap-around or whole-of-person support improves long-term outcomes for these groups. Evidence clearly shows that the longer a client is supported, the better the outcome.[95]

New models successfully trialled in the United Kingdom and United States of America recognise that people sleeping rough are unlikely to actively seek help. These models have a strong focus on outreach – taking the support to the person. Service models that are most effective involve support workers directly approaching people who are homeless and connecting them to housing, health and other services.

This model has been successful overseas and has been trialled in South Australia. At any point in time the South Australian Street to Home program is working with more than 80 people. Data from the past two years show that more than 200 people sleeping rough in the Adelaide inner city have been housed long-term. One-fifth of these people had been sleeping rough for between five and 15 years. The level of support required to sustain housing decreases after six to 12 months of continuous housing. More than 95 per cent of these tenancies have been successful.[96]

Under the National Partnership on Homelessness agreed between the Australian Government and states and territories, there will be an additional focus on reducing rough sleeping. This will require the introduction of assertive outreach programs to find rough sleepers and connect them to sustainable long-term housing and health services.

The incidence of rough sleeping appears to be increasing in rural and remote areas, with around 62 per cent of rough sleepers located in those areas. Service distribution will need to be looked at in the longer term to ensure that isolated rough sleepers are also reached by these types of programs.

How this will work on the ground: Fred

Fred is in his late 40s and has a long-term alcohol and heroin dependency. He has been sleeping rough for four years. The outreach team has been getting to know Fred by visiting him in the park where he sleeps. Eventually, members of the outreach team were able to talk to him about moving off the streets. He agreed to attend a methadone program, and they linked him with a specialist methadone unit while beginning to search for accommodation. He had previously been approved for social housing but the approval had been suspended when the Housing Department could not contact him. At the same time as trying to find him housing, the team worked with him to assess his other needs.

The outreach service worked to find him accommodation, initially using a boarding house before the agency head-leased a property using brokerage funds to cover the bond and other associated costs. Direct rent deductions through Centrelink were organised to assist with budgeting. The outreach team transferred his ongoing assistance to the support team, who continued to work with him for nine months after he obtained housing. By then, Fred was still in the methadone program, had re-enrolled in TAFE and had phone contact with his daughter, who he had not spoken to for years. He had also been linked to a tennis group that included current and former rough sleepers. He is now working with the outreach team to support another rough sleeper to make the transition to sustainable housing.

Additional specialist support for homeless children

There is substantial and growing evidence of the impact of homelessness on children. The instability and chaotic nature of homelessness can have profound effects on a child's physical health, psychological development and academic achievement.[97] A critical impact on children is disrupted schooling, which in turn can increase the risk of homelessness in adulthood. Children who are homeless and those living with domestic and family violence are at greater risk of behavioural problems and poor developmental outcomes.[98]

Specialist homelessness services were not originally resourced with children in mind. Now there is an increasing awareness that children have needs, distinct from those of their parents. The links between specialist homelessness services and schools and child care services in Australia is poor.[99] This is in contrast to the United States of America, where legislation requires schools to identify and address the needs of children who are homeless.

Homelessness services are often not able to provide specialist support for children.[100] Not enough homelessness services employ specialist children's workers. Support for the 50,000 primary aged children in contact with specialist homelessness services each year needs to improve.   This means increasing specialist support for children who are homeless in order to break the cycle of inter-generational homelessness.

Under the National Partnership on Homelessness states and territories will provide additional specialist support to children who are homeless or at risk of homelessness. This specialist support for children could include:

- Regional child development workers to work with specialist homelessness services to provide training and secondary consultation; develop and coordinate formal relationships between specialist homelessness services and early childhood services, child counselling services and schools; and coordinate programs to support children at different developmental stages and needs.
- Brokerage funding for homelessness services to meet the specific needs of children. The funding could be used to purchase school supplies and uniforms, counselling and health services, education, tutoring and mentoring services and sporting and recreational equipment. This will ensure children experiencing homelessness can have access to the basic support and supplies they need to stay at, or return to, school and to settle in to new homes.
- Closer links between homelessness and child protection services to ensure that the most vulnerable children do not exit specialist homelessness services to unsafe living conditions. This work will build on the National Child Protection Framework currently being developed for implementation in 2009.

How this will work on the ground: Stella and her daughter

Stella is an Indigenous woman who comes to a specialist homelessness service after leaving her violent partner. She has a daughter who is four years old. After addressing her immediate legal needs and beginning work to find stable accommodation the service talks to Stella about sending her daughter to preschool.

The service has a strong emphasis on the needs of children and works hard to link children with local child care centres and schools. The service has developed a partnership with an early intervention service, the local schools and several local preschools. The centre also runs a supported playgroup for local Indigenous mothers as well as in-house school readiness programs. It strongly encourages its clients to attend the supported playgroup. A speech pathologist also makes regular outreach visits to the service.

A worker talks to Stella about her options and the importance of getting her daughter 'school ready'. She helps Stella to find a suitable preschool that is right for her daughter. Workers from the service take Stella to drop her daughter off at the preschool each day.

Two weeks later Stella moves into stable housing in the local area. Stella's daughter is able to continue attending the local pre-school.

A national network of 90 Community Engagement Officers to provide outreach services to people who are homeless

Centrelink systems can work against people who are homeless. Proof of identity requirements, debt management and non-payment periods can make it difficult for people experiencing homelessness to get or maintain income support. Without the security of regular income, finding and maintaining housing is impossible. People who are homeless are difficult to contact and can fail to meet obligations if they do not have a stable address. Many people experiencing homelessness find going into a Centrelink office difficult, particularly if they are young, Indigenous, sleeping rough, have a mental illness or poor literacy skills.

The Australian Government, through Centrelink will put in place a national network of 90 Community Engagement Officers from July 2009 to ensure that disadvantaged and homeless clients have enhanced access to Centrelink services and address barriers to participation.

This expands and replaces the existing Community Contact Officer network, providing a national program to strengthen Centrelink's engagement with clients who are homeless or at risk of homelessness. This program will include out-servicing arrangements through community agencies that support disadvantaged, homeless and at risk customers such as rehabilitation centres, psychiatric hospitals, hostels, boarding houses, refuges, drop-in centres and organised meeting places.

Conduct pilots to co-locate state and territory housing services in Centrelink Customer Service Centres

In September 2008, Centrelink began trialling the co-location of an outposted staff member from Housing ACT in Centrelink's Concept Office in Tuggeranong in the Australian Capital Territory. A key benefit of the co-location is that clients in crisis are better able to access a range of supports in the one place. For example, when a client experiencing a crisis as a result of domestic violence comes to see a Centrelink Customer Service Advisor, the advisor can refer the client immediately to the Housing Officer. Co-location means the client can get help with finding crisis accommodation as well as longer-term housing. A Centrelink social worker is also available to assist if required.

The service has been well received by clients who are no longer required to travel to access services provided by Housing ACT.

The Australian Government, through Centrelink, will trial the co-location of state and territory housing services in other Centrelink Customer Service Centres to improve services to people who are homeless.

Boosting participation in the economy and community

For people who are homeless, or at risk of homelessness, finding a job or other opportunities to participate in the community is critical. For many, the first step to

employment will be to re-engage with structured activities which are enjoyable and meaningful.

To assist people who are homeless to participate in these kinds of activities, the Australian Government has provided $2.3 million to RecLink to deliver their sporting and cultural programs like the Choir of Hard Knocks across Australia. The funding will link up more than 200 community agencies to work with people who are homeless to enhance their participation.

New employment services, to commence on 1 July 2009, will provide the right mix of training, work experience and other interventions to help jobseekers, particularly disadvantaged jobseekers and people who are homeless, obtain suitable employment.

The new system actively encourages Employment Service Providers to forge close links and establish collaborative arrangements with organisations delivering homelessness services to provide a more integrated service to homeless jobseekers. The Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations will assist peak bodies in the homelessness and employment service sectors to develop a template agreement which can help providers to formalise their collaborative arrangements.

As part of the Government's new employment service system, the Australian Government has committed $41 million to an Innovation Fund designed to address the needs of the most disadvantaged jobseekers, including people who are homeless. Funding will be provided to projects which foster innovative solutions to overcome barriers to employment. Organisations will be selected to be part of the Innovation Fund Panel and invited to propose their ideas for new projects.

Improved legal services for people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness

Legal issues and lack of access to legal advice can contribute to or increase homelessness. Many people experiencing homelessness have previously had some interaction with the legal system, either as a defendant or victim of violence in a criminal matter.[101] There is often a direct causal link between a person's homelessness and their legal problems.[102] Common legal issues for people who are homeless include family law, Centrelink disputes, tenancy, credit and debts and employment.

A survey of the community sector found that one in five people seeking legal advice or help were being turned away.[103] Current service provision data indicates that this means approximately 25,000 people each year are left unassisted and struggling with issues that are known triggers of homelessness.

There is a clear need to increase access to legal services to individuals and families at risk of homelessness – particularly legal services in the areas of family law, domestic and family violence, credit and debt and tenancy.

Under the National Partnership on Homelessness, extra Australian and state and territory government funding will allow the states and territories to expand legal services to clients at risk of homelessness with a focus on family law, domestic and family violence, credit and debt and tenancy.

Increasing voting and civic participation among people who are homeless

People who are homeless are often excluded from voting by logistical barriers and by a lack of understanding of Australia's democratic process. Participating in elections and exercising voting rights is central to social inclusion.

The Australian Government is committed to reforming the Commonwealth *Electoral Act 1918* and bringing Australia's electoral system up to world's best practice. As part of this process, the Government is preparing two Green Papers on electoral reform.

The Australian Government will examine enrolment issues for people who are homeless in its second Green Paper on electoral reform to be released in 2009.

The Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters, through its Inquiry into the 2007 Federal Election, has received submissions and heard evidence about the barriers for voters who are homeless and itinerant and will consider this issue in its report.

Where we will start

- Build 50,000 affordable rental homes for low and moderate-income earners.
- Build up to 2,700 homes for people who have been homeless or at risk of homelessness.
- Allocate aged care places and capital for at least one new specialist facility for ageing homeless people in an area of need in each of the next four years.
- Amend the *Aged Care Act 1997* to recognise older people who are homeless as a 'special needs' group.
- Build up to 4,200 new houses and upgrade 4,800 existing houses in remote Indigenous communities over the next decade.
- Provide additional assertive outreach programs to locate rough sleepers and connect them to long term housing and health services.
- Provide additional specialist support to children including brokerage funds to assist them to return to home and school.
- Establish a network of 90 Community Engagement Officers in Centrelink to provide outreach services to people who are homeless and work with local service providers to prevent homelessness.
- Pilot the co-location of state and territory housing services in Centrelink Customer Service Centres.

- Reform employment services to provide greater incentives to employment service providers to assist homeless jobseekers.

- Improve legal services for people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness.

- Examine enrolment issues for people who are homeless as part of electoral reforms to be progressed in 2009.

Chapter Six: Research

Key Points

- A long-term research agenda is required to improve the evidence on which our response to homelessness is based.

- Investment in improving data on homelessness is required to enable progress against the goals and targets under this strategy to be measured.

There is an urgent need to improve the evidence base to inform the delivery of high-quality services to people vulnerable to homelessness. Since the pool of money is limited, it is important that funded programs are cost-effective and work to protect and enhance the life chances of people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness. People who are homeless, or are at risk of homelessness are among the most vulnerable in our community - it is vital that interventions actually work and that they do no further harm.

Rigorous, accurate and reliable national data across the service systems and program areas working with people who are homeless or at risk is needed to reliably measure progress in addressing homelessness. Better information is needed on the many different pathways people take through the service system to measure longer term social and economic participation outcomes and to improve the service offer to people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness.

Strategies to reduce homelessness should be informed by research, critical evaluation, practitioner expertise and the needs of individual clients of specialist homelessness services.

Progress made towards the goals and targets set in the White Paper will need to be measured to ensure accountability of all levels of government.

Existing data on homelessness

Census data: Counting the Homeless

The Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) has developed its Homelessness Enumeration Strategy since the 1996 Census to undertake a rigorous count of the homeless population. This strategy was refined for the 2001 Census, with data collectors working with state and territory governments and homelessness providers to ensure an accurate count. Detailed analysis of this data set was then undertaken and a report on the homeless population, with an estimate of the number of people who are homeless, was made.

Using Census data to measure progress against strategies to reduce homelessness presents a number of difficulties. These include the challenge of counting

populations such as rough sleepers, the inability to capture longitudinal data on individual pathways in and out of homelessness and the frequency of the collection. A further difficulty is the lag time between data collection and availability of the data analysis—that is, data from the 2006 Census was not publicly available until 2008.

While the Census data provides a snapshot of the homeless population on the particular day that the Census is taken, it does not capture the duration of homelessness or the reasons for homelessness. Nor does it provide information about who is at risk of homelessness.

In an attempt to gain more frequent and comprehensive data about people who are homeless, some cities have undertaken their own surveys of rough sleepers, with varying degrees of success.[104]

Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP) data

The National Data Collection Agency at the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) collects data on all specialist homelessness services funded by the Australian Government and states and territories. The data contains detailed information about clients, including their reasons for requesting assistance, their circumstances immediately before and after support and the length and level of support they receive. The agency releases the data in annual reports, as well as making an annual 'Demand for SAAP Accommodation Assistance by Homeless People' report and releasing regular thematic reports.

While the data captured under this collection is richer and more complex than the Census data, these services come into contact with only 19 per cent of people who are homeless on any given day. It misses the many thousands who did not approach a SAAP service, those who use mainstream services, or people who receive a service from a homelessness service not funded under SAAP. Also, the data collection does not provide detailed information about the medium and long-term outcomes for those who receive assistance through specialist homelessness services.

Measuring unmet demand for crisis accommodation is particularly problematic. This information is captured by asking services to record the number of people turned away during two two-week periods each year. While this is useful for understanding demand, it does not provide information about the circumstances of those who are turned away.

Although there is some capacity to analyse AIHW data longitudinally, problems arise from incomplete coverage of agencies, client consent not being provided and confidentiality requirements set out in AIHW legislation which restrict access to this data.

Some agencies are reluctant to collect additional data on their clients out of concern that this will breach their privacy or because it represents an additional administrative task that prevents workers spending time with their clients. These legitimate concerns need to be balanced against the service improvements that might flow from access to richer data on clients' pathways.

Other homelessness program data collections

Other homelessness programs administered by the Australian Government (such as Reconnect and the HOME Advice Program) or state and territory government initiatives (such as the Housing and Support Initiative and the Transitional Housing Management Program) have their own data collections. The HOME Advice Program, for instance, provides data that includes clients' views of their situation and goals at commencement and completion of support. In addition, data is collected on their housing, income, employment and education circumstances before and at the end of support, on their goals and on progress made during the intervention to achieving these goals.

Information on the use of the various homelessness services or 'pathways' through the homelessness service system is critical to understanding how people use the service system, what interventions are successful and where improvements can be made.

Data collections in mainstream services

Mainstream agencies which are in contact with people who are homeless may not always be aware of people's accommodation needs. Capturing this information could inform mainstream service strategies and measure outcomes for these people. Encouraging mainstream agencies and specialist homelessness services to adopt the same definitional approach to measuring homelessness, and to be diligent about capturing the outcomes for homeless or at risk clients, will help governments and service providers get a clear view about the true extent of homelessness in Australia.

Data linkage across large data collections with appropriate protocols for undertaking analysis of the data would assist in understanding the complex pathways in and out of homelessness and could lead to improved responses for people experiencing homelessness.

A national homelessness research strategy

Research into homelessness is complex due to the nature of the problems and individual circumstances affecting people who are homeless. People who may have experienced multiple disadvantages or are grappling with complex problems (such as drug and alcohol, mental health, domestic violence and poverty) may be unwilling or unable to participate in research. Ethical dilemmas may arise for researchers about disclosing suspected child abuse or neglect or law-breaking. The high mobility of some people who are homeless acts as a barrier to recruiting and maintaining contact with them as participants in research studies.[105]

The complexity of people's circumstances and the multiple pathways in and out of homelessness can also make it difficult to examine causal relationships – randomised controlled trials or lengthy self-report questionnaires are rarely used. Alternative methodologies such as action research or outlier studies[106] to examine factors associated with resilience need to be considered.

A further challenge in homelessness research is the state and territory differences in funding, management and service delivery models. There is a need for multi-site or cross-jurisdictional studies, longitudinal research and comparative evaluations of practice models to determine what works best.

Homelessness research needs to engage with culturally and linguistically diverse communities, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and families living in rural and remote areas. Identified population groups for research include individuals and families with substance abuse or mental health problems, people with a disability, families in which there is domestic violence and families with complex problems such as cumulative harm, dual diagnosis, multiple problems or social exclusion.

Longitudinal studies are needed to analyse the impact of homelessness on young children, those in middle childhood and adolescence in vulnerable families.

There are significant research gaps. There is little research looking at long-term outcomes of clients assisted by specialist homelessness services. Better information is also needed on longer-term outcomes for people experiencing homelessness who use mainstream services, such as health, housing or employment services.

There is a particular need to fund research into the service system and practice issues to ensure that the services provided to people experiencing homelessness are the best they can be. Useful areas of exploration include needs assessment and planning at the local, state and national levels, development of standardised assessment methodologies and tools, exploration of service system capacity including provider audits, unmet demand estimation and analysis of responsiveness of mainstream service systems.

Cost benefit and cost effectiveness analyses would provide better evidence on the nature and timing of service interventions and would allow more realistic allocation of funding. Examination of different models of multi-agency, integrated or co-ordinated service delivery to identify best practice, most efficient use of resources and outcomes is critical to service improvement. Better quantification of the level of resources required to prevent and respond to people with complex needs who are homeless, for example, people with mental health issues or complex disability, would improve the design and delivery of services.

The Australian Government will develop a national homelessness research strategy to support the White Paper. It will build on existing research and data collection efforts. It will strengthen the current evidence base to inform policy and practice and guide research priorities for researchers and funding bodies.

Identifying the limitations of the existing data collections and taking steps to improve these collections will allow for more accurate measurement of the complexity of the experiences and outcomes of people who are homeless.

As a starting point, the Australian Government will work with states and territories to pilot data linking projects in order to gain a clearer picture of the pathways through service systems for people who are homeless. Initial projects will focus on clients most at risk, particularly children, and will explore data linkages

across child protection, housing, homelessness and criminal justice systems as well as Centrelink.

Issues relating to accessibility and confidentiality of existing data also need to be addressed as part of the national homelessness research strategy so that data is more able to be used and analysed by researchers.

State and territory governments, who have direct funding relationships with specialist homelessness services, are best placed to work directly with services to enhance data collection efforts.

As part of the national homelessness research strategy, the Australian Government will work with state and territory governments and specialist homelessness services to reform the National Data Collection process.

Priorities for reform will be:

- improving analysis of turn away data
- improving analysis of outcomes for people following periods of support from homelessness services
- improving the period of time between collection of data and reporting
- enhancing access to AIHW data for other research purposes.

Access to 'real time' data from specialist homelessness services should also be considered under the national homelessness research strategy. The availability of 'real time' data would avoid the need for clients to contact many agencies searching for accommodation and repeat their stories. Access to information about bed availability in specialist homelessness services would be improved. It would also improve the match between supply and demand in specialist homelessness services. Moving services to 'real time' data collection would require considerable service reform and investment in service infrastructure, particularly information technology.

The national homelessness research strategy will also focus on these additional research priorities:

- population-based research: classifying, diagnosing and measuring the prevalence and incidence of homelessness across various population groups
- identifying risk and protective factors, causal mechanisms and the housing, health and employment outcomes of homelessness
- the effectiveness of interventions designed to prevent and respond to homelessness
- inter-sectoral research on how people (especially children) cope with homelessness and the importance of resilience
- the lifelong consequences of homelessness, with a particular focus on becoming homeless and moving on from homelessness.

The national homelessness research strategy will require collaboration from many parties, recognising that the process of reflection and engagement extends beyond the government sector.

Completed research should be publicly disseminated to inform both policy and service practice. The Homelessness Clearinghouse recently launched by the Australian Government will be an important vehicle for this purpose; peak homelessness organisations also have an important role to play in sharing research findings.

An integrated information technology system

Connected administrative data collected from both specialist homelessness and mainstream services over time is needed. This will improve the quality and timeliness of the data collected, reduce the administrative burden on specialist homelessness services in collecting and reporting data, reduce the burden on clients in repeatedly providing the same information to different agencies and will improve both service planning and the service offer to individuals who are homeless or at risk of homelessness. *The Australian Government will undertake a scoping study to explore information technology options to better integrate homelessness specialist with each other and with mainstream services.*

Under the National Partnership on Homelessness the COAG Reform Council will report annually on the progress each jurisdiction has made against the partnership's high-level performance indicators. Monitoring of progress on homelessness will be undertaken by the Housing Ministers' Conference and Community and Disability Services Ministers' Conference.

Where we will start

- Develop a national homelessness research strategy, which builds on existing data and research, to measure progress against goals and targets and ensure that our homelessness intervention is evidence based.

- Pilot a data linkage study to gain a clearer picture of the homeless pathways through service systems.

- Reform the National Data Collection process.

- Undertake a scoping study on ways information technology could be used to better connect homelessness specialist with each other and with mainstream services.

Chapter Seven: Implementation and governance

Key points

- The Prime Minister's Council on Homelessness will drive the reform agenda to reduce homelessness by 2020.
- The COAG Reform Council will monitor state and territory government performance against agreed high level performance indicators and report progress annually.
- To meet the goals and targets a long-term and sustained effort from all levels of government and from the business and community sectors is needed.
- The Social Inclusion Board, the Housing Ministers' Conference and the Community and Disability Services Ministers' Conference each have a role to play.

Communities across Australia are working hard every day to end homelessness for many people. These efforts are delivered and reported through different governance and accountability arrangements currently in place in each jurisdiction. While these arrangements may be useful for tracking performance at the state and territory level, they are too inconsistent to determine the progress being achieved nationally.

An effective framework of governance and accountability is critical for monitoring the implementation of the White Paper strategies and tracking performance at the national level. These new arrangements will bring together existing governance and accountability structures in different jurisdictions consistent with a national framework. Roles and responsibilities will be extended to join up the response.

Driving the reform agenda

The Prime Minister will appoint a Council on Homelessness to drive national reforms and guide the implementation of the White Paper. The Council, comprised of appropriately qualified people, will also regularly monitor implementation of the White Paper and progress towards the goals and targets over 12 years to 2020.

The Council will help drive the reforms set out in the White Paper and monitor the achievement of the targets by 2013 and 2020.

It will report annually to the Prime Minister on progress of the reforms set out in this White Paper.

The targets will be achieved by the long-term structural reform being undertaken through COAG and specific measures to be implemented by governments, such as

those funded under the National Partnerships on Homelessness, Social Housing and Remote Indigenous Housing.

Achievement of these targets will also require cultural change – every Australian must see combating homelessness as their responsibility. As well as driving implementation of targeted measures, the Council must keep a national focus on reducing homelessness.

This White Paper sits within the Australian Government's social inclusion agenda. The Australian Social Inclusion Board has endorsed principles to guide a socially inclusive approach, which will assist the Council to drive the reforms in the White Paper and monitor the achievements.

Government-business partnership to reduce homelessness

It will not be possible to meet the goals to reduce homelessness without harnessing the efforts of the corporate and private sector. Charities working with people who are homeless receive much support from business and philanthropic foundations. *The Australian Government will establish the Bea Miles Foundation to work in partnership with the business and corporate sectors to harness their efforts in reducing homelessness.*

Council of Australian Governments Reform Council

The COAG Reform Council will monitor, analyse and report on outcomes under the new agreements, including those that impact on the implementation of the strategies in this White Paper. This role includes monitoring progress against the performance indicators agreed in the National Affordable Housing Agreement and, the extent that they support the objectives of the national agreement and the Partnerships on Homelessness, Social Housing and Remote Indigenous Housing.

The Australian Government will agree implementation plans with the states and territories for the National Affordable Housing Agreement and the National Partnerships on Homelessness, Social Housing and Remote Indigenous Housing.

Implementation plans will set out how the objectives of the National Partnerships will be achieved. These plans will include timelines for achieving the performance benchmarks set out in the agreement and will be reviewed and updated as necessary. These plans will be in place in the first half of 2009. Reports on progress will be provided to the COAG Reform Council.

Community and Disability Services Ministers' Conference and Housing Ministers' Conference

The Community and Disability Services Ministers' Conference and the Housing Ministers' Conference will be responsible for the implementation of particular measures for reducing homelessness.

The Community and Disability Services Ministers' Advisory Committee and the Housing Ministers' Advisory Committee will support ministers across jurisdictions by developing a strategic framework aligned to the White Paper strategies. These committees will integrate their homelessness policy responses.

The current Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP) Coordination and Development Committee, which reports to the Community and Disability Services Ministers' Advisory Committee, was established to strategically manage SAAP. Membership consists of representatives from the Australian and state and territory governments. The role of the SAAP Coordination and Development Committee will change when the new COAG arrangements are put in place in 2009.

The new committee will drive and monitor the service system changes being developed to better connect and integrate the homelessness service system. Membership will broaden to include representatives from the homelessness, housing, health, employment, disability and income support sectors. Mainstream service responses to homelessness must be captured and endorsed as part of the integrated homelessness service system.

Monitoring progress within individual jurisdictions

In most jurisdictions, ministerial or cross-government coordinating committee structures are in place already. Aligning the focus of these committees with national goals and their targets, performance indicators, benchmarks and baseline data and monitoring progress will ensure that national goals are met.

State and territory homelessness plans can be used to drive homelessness service integration reforms at the local level. States and territories may also endorse a number of regional homelessness action plans to better target and deliver homeless service reforms at this level. The success of local and regional initiatives will be critical in achieving the national targets to reduce homelessness.

Implement new legislation to ensure people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness receive quality services.

The *Supported Accommodation Assistance Act 1994* sets out important principles and has guided the response to homelessness in Australia since first legislated in 1985. A number of submissions to the Green Paper made suggestions for strengthening the legislation or bringing it up to date.

The establishment of the National Affordable Housing Agreement provides an opportunity to reconsider the legislative framework for providing services to people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness. As mentioned in Chapter Four the Australian Government will work with specialist homelessness services and state and territory governments to amend the Supported Accommodation Assistance legislation and will ensure people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness receive quality services and adequate support. These quality standards could be based on those in the current *Disability Services Act 1986*, which guide services to be innovative and focused on achieving positive outcomes for people with disabilities.

Where we will start

- Appoint the Prime Minister's Council on Homelessness to drive the reforms set out in the White Paper and monitor its implementation and progress over 12 years to 2020.

- Establish the Bea Miles Foundation to channel funding, in kind support and sponsor innovation and research to support the work of governments and the not-for-profit sector in combating homelessness.

- Finalise implementation plans for the National Affordable Housing Agreement and the National Partnerships on Homelessness, Social Housing and Remote Indigenous Housing, and report on progress to the COAG Reform Council in the first half of 2009.

- Implement new legislation to ensure people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness receive quality services and adequate support to meet their needs.

Glossary

affordable housing—Housing that is affordable for low- to moderate-income households, when housing costs are low enough to enable the household to meet other basic, long term living costs. For example, housing costs should be less than 30 per cent of household income for occupants in the bottom 40 per cent of household incomes.[107]

brokerage funds—Flexible funds that are available to buy and deliver services that are specific to the needs of their clients.

case management—A process of assessment, facilitation and advocacy on behalf of the client to obtain services to meet the client's needs and desired outcomes.

Census—The Census of Population and Housing carried out by the Australian Bureau of Statistics. It aims to accurately measure the number of people in Australia on Census night, their key characteristics, and the dwellings in which they live. Census 2006 is the most recent Australian Census; however limited data are available at this stage.

Centrelink—A Commonwealth Government statutory agency, which assists Australians to become self sufficient and supports people in need by delivering a range of services, including income support payments.

Common Ground—The Common Ground model was developed in New York. It provides a comprehensive support system designed to help people regain their stability and independence. Housing that is safe, attractive and affordable is provided at affordable rents (approximately 30 per cent of tenants' income). The housing complexes operate as communities and are provided with libraries, clinics, computer centres. Activities fostering interaction between tenants are provided to foster a sense of community. The first Australian Common Ground model is now operating in Adelaide.

Council of Australian Governments (COAG)—The peak intergovernmental forum in Australia, comprising the Prime Minister, state premiers, territory chief ministers and the President of the Australian Local Government Association. The Council's role is to initiate, develop and monitor the implementation of policy reforms that are of national significance and require cooperative action by all levels of government.

crisis accommodation—Accommodation for people who are experiencing or are at risk of homelessness, which provides short-term accommodation including refuges, shelters, motels, flats, boarding houses or caravan parks.

domestic and family violence— Domestic violence occurs when one partner in an intimate relationship attempts by physical or psychological means to dominate and control the other. It is generally understood as 'gendered violence', and is an abuse

of power within a relationship or after separation. In most cases the offender is male and the victim female.

'Family violence' is the term preferred by many Indigenous communities. 'Family' covers a diverse range of ties of mutual obligation and support, and perpetrators and victims of family violence can include, for example, aunts, uncles, cousins and children of previous relationships.

A wide range of behaviours may be involved in domestic or family violence, including physical, sexual, spiritual, verbal, emotional, social and economic abuse.[108]

early intervention—Strategies that aim to reduce risk factors through timely identification and tailored advice and support for those at risk of homelessness.

emergency accommodation—Short-term accommodation provided for people who have recently lost their housing (crisis) or are homeless (in, for example, shelters, motels, flats or caravan parks). See also *crisis accommodation*.

family violence—See *domestic violence*.

Foyer models—Foyer models provide housing for young people who are homeless. The housing is conditional on their participating in education, training or employment. Several Foyer models currently operate in Australia.

Housing and Accommodation Support Initiative (HASI) —An innovative program that links stable housing to a range of specialist supports for people with mental illness, to enable full participation in the community and improved quality of life. The program is funded by the NSW Government.

homelessness—People who are homeless fall into three broad groups, that is, those who are:
- sleeping rough (living on the streets)
- living in temporary accommodation, such as crisis accommodation (see *crisis accommodation*) or staying with friends or relatives
- staying in boarding houses or caravan parks with no secure lease and no private facilities.

mainstream services—Generalist services provided by either government or non-government agencies that are available to the general population, such as Centrelink, public and community housing (see *social housing*), aged care and community health centres.

National Affordable Housing Agreement—The National Affordable Housing Agreement will replace the Commonwealth State Housing Agreement and the Supported Accommodation Assistance Program V Agreement in 2009. The new agreement will encompass housing and homelessness assistance provided at all levels of government (Commonwealth, state and territory and local government).

not-for-profit sector—Non-government organisations providing a broad range of social services, including in relation to homelessness, education, health, conservation, and recreation. The sector is an integral part of Australia's economic, social and political systems.

prevention—Programs and opportunities that enable and encourage individuals to address possible risk factors before they are vulnerable to homelessness.

sleeping rough—See *homelessness*.

social housing—Rental housing that is provided and/or managed by government or non-government organisations. This housing is mainly targeted at people on low incomes who are in greatest need. This includes those who are homeless, living in inappropriate housing, or who have very high rental costs.

In public housing, the majority of tenants pay less than the market rent (that is, 25 per cent or less of their income). In community housing, rent payments range from less than 25 per cent to more than 30 per cent of income. Tenants also receive a range of support services (such as personal support and employment support) and are encouraged to be involved in managing community dwellings.[109]

social inclusion—To be socially included, all Australians need to be able to play a full role in Australian life, in economic, social, psychological and political terms and be given the opportunity to:
- secure a job
- access services
- connect with others in life through family, friends, work, personal interests and local community
- deal with personal crises such as ill health, bereavement or the loss of a job
- have their voice heard.[110]

specialist homelessness services—services that work to assist people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness. (See also *Supported Accommodation Assistance Program*.)

specialist support services—Services that address specific needs, such as domestic violence services or mental health services.

support period—the time during which a person is supported by a SAAP agency. It commences when a SAAP client begins to receive support and/or supported accommodation from a SAAP agency and ends when the client ends the relationship with the agency or the agency ends the relationship with the client.

Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP)—A joint Commonwealth and state and territory government funded support program, which assists people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness through a range of support and supported accommodation services.

NOTE: This document refers to SAAP when discussing the program as it exists up to 31 December 2008. Due to the changes that will be implemented as of 1 January 2009 under the National Affordable Housing Agreement (NAHA), the term 'specialist homelessness services' is used to describe SAAP services and other services that assist people who are homeless.

sustainable housing—Housing that is affordable, offers secure tenure, and is appropriate for the client given their needs and history, such as support for sustaining housing.

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