



Melbourne Citymission
Building Inclusive Communities

A New Approach to Homeless Policy

A Submission from Melbourne Citymission

To

Which Way Home?

A new approach to homelessness (2008)

Commonwealth of Australia

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Melbourne Citymission's Response to
"Which way Home? A new approach to homelessness" (2008)

Introduction

In Australia on any given night over 100,000 people are homeless¹. For a country that has experienced a significant period of economic prosperity this figure is unacceptable. Yet in contrast to some other western democracies, most notably the United States of America, this figure is relatively low². Arguably, one reason the rates of homelessness are relatively low in Australia, especially 'rough sleeping'³, is the existence of the Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP), a dedicated homelessness policy and service delivery platform⁴.

The most recent Homelessness figures, derived from SAAP data, indicate that in the decade between 1996 and 2005 the number of homeless clients has been increasing each year by an average of 2.6 percent⁵. In the current economic context when housing affordability is at an all time low, it is clear that, without significant investment at the policy and service delivery level, many more people will become homeless in the future.

We therefore welcome the Rudd Federal Government's Homelessness Green Paper, *Which way home. A new approach to homelessness (2008)*. The Green Paper provides the Australian community with a rare opportunity to re-consider the meaning and causes of homelessness, and the scope and goals of homelessness service delivery. It invites us to develop new social policies and service models to not only 'reduce' homelessness across Australia but also to 'maximize' the opportunities of people experiencing homelessness to 'participate in the work and life of the ... community'.

We recognise the Federal government's focus on Homelessness as a key component of its broader social inclusion agenda- an agenda for action that is heavily indebted to the social policy vision, frameworks and platform for action of the former Blair British Labour Government and the European Union⁶

Fundamental to this vision is the recognition that, for any given individual or population (e.g. homeless), social exclusion is a consequence of multiple intersecting factors including poverty, labour market exclusion, impoverished social connections, networks and supports, poor health and locational or place based disadvantage. Importantly, social inclusion approaches are also typically founded on a fundamental

¹ Chamberlain, C & Mackenzie, D (2001) Counting the Homeless 2001 (ABS, Canberra); AIHW, (2007) Homeless people in SAAP: SAAP National Data Collection Annual Report 2005-06, Australia (AIHW, Canberra) p89

² Burt, Martha et al., (2001) Helping America's Homeless (The Urban Institute Press)

³ Chamberlain, C & Mackenzie, D (2001). Op Cit.

⁴ See Fitzpatrick, S & Stephens, M (2007) An International Review of Homelessness and Social Housing Policy (DCLG, London)

⁵ AIHW, (2007) Homeless people in SAAP: SAAP National Data Collection Annual Report 2005-06, Australia (AIHW, Canberra) p89

⁶ Social Exclusion Unit (2004) Breaking the Cycle: Taking Stock of Progress and Priorities for the Future, available at <http://www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/social_exclusion_task_force/~media/assets/

belief in human capabilities⁷ and a rejection of so called ‘welfarist’ approaches to disadvantage, which are assumed to encourage dependency.

It follows then that efforts to promote and effect social inclusion, and thereby establish a more just and equitable society, must address the key social, economic and personal drivers of exclusion and disadvantage for given populations. In the British context efforts to address social exclusion translated into placed based or local responses, whole of government responses to disadvantage and ‘joined up’ policy and service delivery to address ‘joined up problems’. Emphasis was also placed on developing frameworks, processes and mechanisms to enhance participatory democracy and promote human capabilities.

Currently, the concept and scope of the social inclusion agenda remains formative in the Australian government context however, it is clear from speeches to date by the Deputy Prime Minister, Julia Gillard, that economic⁸, as much as, social and moral imperatives are driving this initiative. Within this new social inclusion paradigm key marginalised and excluded populations have been identified and targeted for intervention, including people who experience homelessness, those with a disability, people with mental health issues and jobless families. Among these, the homeless are identified as an iconic example of an excluded and marginalised population and targeted for immediate Federal Government policy and service response.

Running parallel to this agenda around social inclusion and homelessness are significant policy reviews of income support arrangements and employment services⁹. Clearly these initiatives are highly relevant to the development of the Rudd Government’s new approach to homelessness. At this point however, the intersection between these policy reviews, and the policy platforms and service responses that will subsequently be rolled out is far from clear, if not poorly conceived.

In this submission Melbourne Citymission responds to the Government’s Green Paper on Homelessness. We begin with a brief discussion of homelessness policy as it relates to SAAP. We present this critical historical overview of homelessness policy to provide a context for discussion of a new approach to homelessness in the future. Next we discuss the notion of home, positioning it as central to an understanding of homelessness and the development of homelessness policy. A critical analysis of the options presented in the Green Paper follows, to provide a basis for our identification and discussion of the key elements of a ‘fourth option’ or alternative approach for future homelessness policy and service delivery across Australia.

Background: An Overview of SAAP Homelessness Policy

In 1985, after extended lobbying from welfare organisations and service providers, the Hawke Federal Government established the Supported Accommodation and Assistance Program (SAAP), a national program to respond to homelessness. This

⁷ Sen. A, (1985) Commodities and Capabilities, Elsevier Science Pub, USA & Canada

⁸ The COAG Rational Reform Agenda (2006) which highlights the need to increase productivity is highly relevant to this agenda

⁹ For example see Australian Government, Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (2008) The Future of Employment Services in Australia: A Discussion Paper.

bold and radical move was long overdue. In developing this national program Federal, State and Territory governments signalled a profound shift in understanding of homelessness, the homeless and homeless service provision. For the first time Australian governments recognised that homelessness was not confined to single male adults, but was experienced by other groups in the population, including young people and women, particularly those escaping family violence. The government acknowledged that people from these groups could also find themselves “permanently” homeless, destitute, without shelter, care or support.

In recognising the profoundly negative impact of homelessness on people’s lives, the Hawke labour Government confirmed that it was the responsibility of the Federal and State governments to mobilise service responses around this issue; to provide a policy response for specific homelessness populations within the community. In this way, for the first time, homelessness became an organising principle for service delivery to people whose welfare had previously been the responsibility of other disparate service sectors.

In the early years of SAAP the focus of this service safety net was crisis accommodation- temporary shelter and limited support as a means of assisting people in crisis and/or resolving homelessness. At this time homelessness in the SAAP program was simplistically conceived of as ‘episodic’ - a personal state of crisis resulting in ‘rooflessness’. As such, provision of shelter, a bed and a decent meal were seen as critical. Between 1990 and 2005 four iterations of SAAP (SAAP II, III IV and V) followed. Each reflected and refined the Federal Government’s understanding of the causes of homelessness, the nature of homeless experiences and the scope and goals of homeless service delivery. Arguably each iteration was conceived in a political context in which homelessness and social exclusion were not considered key social policy issues. Each was constrained by funding shortfalls.

During the 1990s and up until 2008 homeless service provision remained focused around key populations, women escaping violence (with or without accompanying children), young people, single adults and families. Causes of homelessness were identified as violence, substance abuse, trauma, family conflict and family breakdown and to a lesser degree, poverty. Helping homeless people achieve the maximum possible degree of self-reliance and independence was established and consolidated as the key goals of SAAP. While time limited crisis responses remained a central plank of homeless service delivery over this period, the need for transitional accommodation pathways with generalised personal support was acknowledged in SAAP guidelines, if not funded nation-wide. This recognition reflected an emerging view of homelessness and the homeless experience as a *process*, effecting multiple dimensions of a person’s life, rather than an event or episode of rooflessness¹⁰

With this more complex understanding of the homeless experience there was also a growing recognition of the need for flexible accommodation and support models to address homeless people’s multiple needs, not just their need for ‘a bed and a hot meal’. However, in the early 1990’s and arguably throughout that decade into the early 2000’s, SAAP funded service models and practices did not routinely encompass

¹⁰ For an example of this position see Johnson, G (2007) Homelessness in Melbourne: Confronting the Challenge, RMIT University, Melbourne.

support for homeless people to maintain or re-establish their connections to family, friends and their community of origin. Even in SAAP V this is largely overlooked or de-emphasised by policy frameworks and services that aim to assist people to become independent and self-reliant.

Social connections were not the only domains that have *not* been routinely addressed and funded through Federal SAAP Act and ensuing policy. Mental health, primary health, drug and alcohol and employment education and training services have remained largely beyond the scope of SAAP policy, if not service provision. In the SAAP V agreement there are no increased resources to encourage cross-sector work nor to facilitate integrated service responses to meet the multiple issues confronting homeless people. Innovation funds that were made available were very limited in impact. Indeed, the outcomes of many are not known or available.

Meanwhile, across the country throughout the 1990's and 2000's, universal and targeted mainstream services such as hospitals, schools, mental health services, juvenile justice and corrections services, child protection, and drugs treatment services have failed to provide adequate service responses to homeless people. In these service domains people experiencing homelessness were and are often seen as the responsibility of some other jurisdiction.

During the 1990's the target of SAAP funded policy and service provision was also limited, with priority given to those experiencing homelessness rather than those at risk of homelessness. The need for early intervention services for those at risk of homelessness was first underlined with the publication of the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission's report on youth homelessness, commonly known as the Burdekin report (1989)¹¹. This report identified the need for early intervention services for homeless young people and resulted in the development of a national program of Parent –Adolescent Mediation Services aimed at preventing youth homelessness. These services, and the national Reconnect program which followed, were not funded or administered by the SAAP program. As such, by effect if not design, early intervention approaches for homeless young people lay beyond the scope of SAAP homelessness policy.

Over the last decade, the success of the Reconnect program highlighted the need for the development of early intervention approaches to homelessness, a point underlined in SAAP V. However, early intervention services targeted at different homeless populations (e.g. Victorian family violence services) have only emerged relatively recently and these are by no means uniform across and within States and Territories.

We speak then of SAAP as a single national program with five iterations, however in reality there have been and continue to be multiple 'SAAP's' across the country. As a jointly funded Commonwealth/State program, SAAP has been rolled out differently across and within the various State and Territory jurisdictions. Arguably Victoria has led the way in developing innovative service models, based on partnerships and connections with relevant specialist and mainstream service delivery systems. These service models have enabled a more comprehensive response to homeless people's

¹¹ Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission (1989) Our Homeless Children.. Report of the National Inquiry into Homeless Children by the Human Rights and Equal opportunity Commission, Sydney: HREOC.

identified needs¹². This has occurred predominantly through the Victorian Homelessness Strategy, initiated in the first term of the Brack's Labor government. This strategy and the key service initiatives contained within it¹³ recognised that, if we are to reduce homelessness and achieve long-term positive outcomes for homeless people we need joined up service delivery models that address the housing and support needs of homeless people over time.

It is now recognised that if we are to reduce homelessness and improve the long-term outcomes for those already experiencing homelessness across Australia, we require a new national approach. Melbourne Citymission asserts that this new approach must, amongst other things, encompass a more sophisticated understanding in the following areas:

- a clear understanding of the meaning and nature of homelessness,
- the distinction between reasons, triggers, causes and effects of homelessness;
- the distinction between and scope of homelessness prevention, early; intervention and tertiary responses and;
- the place and significance of 'transition' within homelessness policy.

Home

It is the position of Melbourne Citymission that the notion of 'home' itself is critical to any understanding of homelessness. The title of the Green Paper "Which Way Home?" reinforces this idea and implies that homelessness requires more than a housing response.

Over the last 20 years the importance of the idea of home has been recognised by researchers¹⁴ and practitioners¹⁵ alike. Fundamental to this has been the understanding that home encapsulates not just physical comfort and safety, but provides the physical, emotional and social space for personal development without which, successful transitions to independence are less likely to be achieved.

While this insight has often been linked to discussions of early intervention around children and homeless young people¹⁶, its application is relevant across the whole life course. Home grounds our relationship to places, friends and family, schools, employment, and neighbourhoods. A good home provides stability; a safe haven; continuity between the past and present; a safety net in times of financial and

¹² Department of Human Services (2000) Victorian Homeless Strategy.

¹³ For example, HSS development projects; homelessness assistance standards & Charter of Human Rights. YHAP...

¹⁴ See Mallett, S "Understanding home: a critical review of the literature" in The Sociological Review, Vol 52, No.1 Feb 2004.

¹⁵ Melbourne Citymission has developed the family focussed Family Reconciliation & Mediation Program (FRMP) which underscores the importance of 'home' in the development and maturation processes associated with adolescents.

¹⁶ See Mallett, S., Rosenthal, D., Keys, D. & Myers, P. (2006) Moving Out, Moving on: Young People's pathways in and through homelessness in Melbourne, Key Centre For Womens Health in Society, University of Melbourne and Center for Community Health, University of California Los Angeles, Unpublished Manuscript. See also Mackenzie, D. & Chamberlain, C. (1992) 'How many Homeless Youth?' Youth Studies Australia, 11(4), 14-22.

emotional crisis. Without home and the stability it provides, transitions to independence will remain elusive for many people.

Home is not always an ideal place. For some, it can be a place of material deprivation of violence, abuse and neglect. It can also be a place where necessities such as secure tenure, a living wage are absent. When located in disadvantaged neighbourhoods without infrastructure and resources, home can be a place where people are unable to fulfil their capabilities and capacities¹⁷. When things go wrong in these homes, there are few if any safety nets. This becomes one pathway into homelessness - an experience of instability, rupture and displacement.

Home then cannot simply be reduced to a roof or house. It provides a foundation for building and maintaining relationships and connections, security and personal stability, as well as economic and emotional support. It therefore follows that these key elements also need to form the core of any response, which attempts to alleviate or reduce homelessness and achieve long-term positive outcomes for homeless people.

As such a programmatic and service response to homelessness must recognise, understand and address both the causes and effects of this multi dimensional instability. Most importantly it must have the capacity to provide coordinated responses to the diverse forms of instability experienced when people are ‘home’ less. This understanding demands integrated policy between homelessness as well as other policy domains. This includes well-integrated, multidisciplinary service delivery - ‘joined up solutions to joined up problems’.

When the absence of home is understood as the foundation of a homelessness platform, then it is essential to take account of how long people have been homeless. This has implications for both the resources and scope of interventions and the length of time required to facilitate a transition to the mainstream or to permanent forms of support and care. Indeed the open question remains as to the role of such a homelessness platform where people have been homeless for extended periods and it appears a transition to independence is unlikely.

It is the absence of this understanding of ‘home’, which informs Melbourne Citymission’s critique of the options presented as well as our view that a any alternative option requires this dimension to be centre stage.

Green Paper –General Comments

The Stated primary goal of the government’s new approach to homelessness is the reduction (rather than end) of homelessness. The reduction in homelessness is to be achieved not by simply targeting and relocating the most visibly homeless - ‘rough sleepers’ - from the streets. Rather the Green Paper notes that homelessness will be reduced through the coordinated provision of support by governments, business,

¹⁷ State Government of Victoria (2005), A Fairer Victoria. Creating Opportunities and addressing disadvantage

philanthropy and the community sector to enable homeless people to transition from 'the margin into the 'mainstream',¹⁸

By positioning homelessness within its broader social inclusion agenda, and initiating this policy review, the Federal Government acknowledges that homelessness is a national problem requiring a coordinated national solution and approach.

Consistent with international and national debates about social inclusion¹⁹ the paper acknowledges that the causes and consequences of social exclusion, particularly homelessness - the iconic example of exclusion - are multiple and intersecting. They include personal as well as structural factors such as housing affordability, access to work, education and training, and entrenched disadvantage. As such, solutions to homelessness necessitate multi-dimensional cross-sectoral policy and program approaches. Responses to homelessness that merely provide shelter and food are patently inadequate in effecting positive long-term outcomes for people who experience homelessness. In Victoria this has long been recognised²⁰.

Absent from the Green Paper however is a clear, consistent and coherent vision for a 'new' approach to homelessness into the future.

Melbourne Citymission contends that this stems from a lack of conceptual clarity on a number of issues including:

1. the **nature and meaning of homelessness** –i.e. What is homelessness? What are the dimensions of the homeless experience?
2. the **difference between reason, triggers, causes and effects of homelessness** and their implications for a 'new approach'
3. the **diversity of the homeless population** -i.e. How do we best characterise the sub-populations of homeless people (e.g. by age? ,life stage? household type?) and develop service responses accordingly?
4. the **differences between prevention, early intervention, and tertiary** responses to homelessness as a whole and for particular sub-populations- i.e. Where do prevention, early intervention and tertiary responses belong in a new approach to homelessness? What should be encompassed in each of these approaches?
5. the **intersection between homelessness and housing** policy response. How will the housing reform agenda meet the needs of particular homeless populations?
6. the **nature and evolution of SAAP over time and across Federal, State and local jurisdictions**, each with differing capacities to deliver long term outcomes for homeless people.
7. the relationship between a **social inclusion agenda and a new approach to homelessness**
8. the **transition process or pathway** from homelessness to home, work and integration into the community
9. the **scope and role of a national homelessness policy**.
10. the **forms of governance** required to effect positive long term outcomes

¹⁸ Commonwealth of Australia (2008) Which Way Home? A New Approach to Homelessness.

¹⁹ Social Exclusion Unit (2004) Breaking the Cycle: Taking Stock of Progress and Priorities for the Future. Op Cit.

²⁰ Department of Human Services (2000) Victorian Homeless Strategy. Op Cit

11. the **relation between universal, mainstream targeted and homelessness specific services**

Given the time frame for responses to the Green paper it is beyond the scope of this paper to articulate all these issues. There are however three, which Melbourne Citymission will concentrate on as they form the basis for our proposed fourth option discussed below:

- the **difference between reason, triggers, causes and effects of homelessness**
- the **differences between prevention, early intervention, and tertiary responses**
- the **transition process or pathway**

The difference between reason, triggers, and causes of homelessness and their and their implications for a ‘new approach’
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In the Green Paper, as in the homelessness research and policy field more generally, there is a lack of clarity about the difference between reason, triggers, causes and effects of homelessness. For example, the terms reason, trigger and causes are often used interchangeably, thereby preventing a robust discussion of the policy and service responses that might address the causes of homelessness for the diverse homeless population in Australia.

Both reasons and triggers focus on the individual level experiences that lead to homelessness. These may be singular or multiple.

Triggers refer to the particular event(s) that immediately precede episodes of homelessness for an individual. Some common triggers include: exit from statutory care (including child protection, juvenile justice and prison), debt, eviction, deteriorating mental health or a traumatic event. For a given individual or population (those leaving care) triggers may or may not be the same as ‘reasons’ for homelessness²¹.

Reasons for homelessness or for leaving home are typically nominated by individuals (and sometimes service providers) to explain their understanding of why they became homeless. They focus on individual level factors (personal mental illness) or personalise and individualise what could be understood as social or structural level factors (eviction, family violence).

An understanding of reasons and triggers is important for working with individuals and/or in identifying common issues that may need to be explored in a given program or service. However, as many researchers note²², reasons for homelessness do not, in and of themselves explain the causes of homelessness. As such they are of limited value for framing social policy and programs that address prevention, early intervention and tertiary responses to homelessness.

²¹ For examples see National Youth Commission, (2008), Australia’s Homeless Youth: A Report of the National Youth Commission Inquiry into Youth Homelessness,

²² For example see Mallett, S., Rosenthal, D., Keys, D. & Myers, P. (2006) Moving Out, Moving on: Young People’s pathways in and through homelessness in Melbourne. Op Cit.

Causes of homelessness are typically differentiated into structural and individual level causes. Structural or social contextual causes include: housing affordability, poverty, safety net income support, the changing labour market, changing nature of the family and household type, entrenched place based disadvantage, education policy and funding (e.g. compulsory and post-compulsory education and training policy and provision), mental health policy, funding and service models and culturally and socially constructed gender relations.

Individual level causes of homelessness focus on personal or familial characteristics, what some have termed situational factors that are common among people in the homeless population. These include: personal or familial mental illness, substance abuse, alcoholism, learning difficulties and educational failure, family stress, conflict and breakdown, personal or familial violence, intergenerational poverty and unemployment and/or neglect and abuse.

While debate exists about the weight that should be attributed to structural versus individual causes of homelessness a reasonable consensus exists among researchers in Australia and in Europe²³ that, if long term reduction in homelessness is to be achieved, a policy, service and community response to homelessness must address both structural and individual level factors. Arguably long term and/or recurrent homelessness for a given individual or among specific homeless populations reflects a failure of social policy and the related service system to address both individual and structural causes of homelessness.

One way of conceptualising the dimensions of a structural and individual level response to homelessness is provided by Williams and Popay²⁴. They suggest that if we are to understand and respond to social disadvantage, including homelessness, we must consider and address

- people's capacities including their sense of self and capacity to act;
- the broader social and physical environment including available infrastructure, resources, risks and opportunities in a given place (neighbourhood municipality, region state);
- institutional and policy formulations (e.g. health, justice, income support, housing) and;
- the broader social and economic policy environment.

As such, an approach to homelessness that does not encompass all these domains is destined to have little or no effect on reducing the numbers of homeless and recurrent homeless.

To date in Australia individual causal factors have been the focus of the homelessness policy and service response. The balance between individual and structural causal factors will need to be addressed in order to effect long term sustainable change for people experiencing homelessness.

²³ Wright-Howie, D (2008) Australia's Strengths and Challenges in Responding to Homelessness: An International Comparison, A Discussion Paper for the National Homelessness Conference, Adelaide.

²⁴ Williams, F & Popay, J (1999) 'Balancing Polarities: Developing a New Framework for Welfare Research' in F. Williams, J. Popay and a. Oakley, *Welfare Research: A Critical Review*. London: UCL.

The differences between prevention, early intervention, and tertiary responses to homelessness as a whole and for particular sub-populations- i.e. Where do prevention, early intervention and tertiary responses belong in a new approach to homelessness? What should be encompassed in each of these approaches?

Prevention is underlined as a key component and principle for change in a new approach to homelessness yet nowhere is a definition of homelessness prevention and early intervention articulated in the Green Paper. In several places throughout the document prevention is conflated with ensuring stable housing²⁵. While jobs, health, financial management and family safety are also mentioned alongside prevention and early intervention, specific policy and programmatic responses in these areas effecting different homeless populations is not discussed.

Melbourne Citymission contends that a preventative approach to homelessness sits within a broader social inclusion agenda which seeks to address disadvantage and social exclusion across the community. The sites for implementation of a preventative agenda include: universal services (e.g. Health, Education, Centrelink), some mainstream targeted services (e.g. State and Territory Mental Health, Drug and Alcohol, Child Protection departments) as well as business.

The scope and parameters of social inclusion policy and program agenda should, take account of the main structural level causes of homelessness, notably:

- housing instability (housing affordability, access to and affordability of the private rental market, public housing stock,
- poverty and income support (Centrelink breaching rules, adequate rent assistance, allowances that match a living wage)
- family breakdown and conflict (family support)
- improved access to and availability of Universal and targeted health services especially drug and alcohol and mental health services
- gender relations and violence
- enhanced support around employment, education and training for homeless populations.
- planning, resources and infrastructure in disadvantaged areas

In contrast to preventative policy and services, homelessness early intervention responses should target identified populations of people at risk of, or experiencing, homelessness. These policies and programs should be highly responsive to the triggers for and individual level causes of homelessness. While there are good examples of innovative and/or successful homelessness early intervention services across the country (notably Reconnect and Home Advice) there has been no systematic roll out of early intervention approaches for all homeless populations in the key domains of health, education, employment, training, family and community connectedness, income support and housing/accommodation²⁶.

²⁵ See for example p.7, 10, 37 of the Green paper. Op Cit.

²⁶

Importantly within the ‘Green paper’ there has been no discussion of what types of early intervention services should be developed and prioritised and for which populations of homeless people. There has also been no agreement about whether early intervention services should only target those at risk of homelessness and the newly homeless rather than medium and longer-term homeless people. What for example could be the focus of early intervention in the case of a family experiencing homelessness where violence is starting to emerge. Who provides the early intervention response? A homelessness agency or a family support service?

The whole area of prevention, early intervention and tertiary responses requires a much greater level of conceptual precision. This has an implication for service delivery policy as well as our ability to effect long term sustainable change.

The transitional process or pathway

Consistent with the notion of transition, homelessness must be understood as a *process*. For this reason, it is critical that the full continuum of early intervention through to tertiary responses should remain part of the one platform.

The Green paper does not clearly identify which clients should be part of the homelessness platform response as opposed to the responsibility of other service delivery systems. The discussion of the role of mainstream service delivery is meant to create a ‘bridge’ between them. It does not succeed in this.

Currently there are at least three inter related ways of examining homelessness and homelessness transitions²⁷. They include:

- Housing careers
- Homelessness careers
- Pathways

All three approaches have a shared focus on the process or journey that people take into stable housing or longer-term homelessness; however, they all differ around the scope of enquiry and analysis. Most importantly they assume different processes, which require different service responses to achieve long-term stability and sustainability for homeless people

This lack of conceptual clarity regarding transition is reflected in such debates as the ‘housing first’ vs. the ‘support’ debate. There is a need to clarify, at least for policy purposes, which frameworks will inform our understandings of ‘transition’ and therefore what is meant by such policy imperatives such as ‘independence’.

This has a critical function in determining the role of mainstream and universal services and their direct or indirect role with homeless populations.

²⁷ Anderson, I., and Tullock, D., (2000) Pathways Through Homelessness: A Review of the Research Evidence. Edinburgh; Scottish Homes, pp49-50

Green Paper – The Options

Option 1.

This option proposes the disaggregation of existing SAAP only arrangements into a ‘life course’ or life stage approach (e.g. youth, single adults, families). The focus of the policy and service approach is the population ‘target group’ rather than homelessness as the central issue in its own right.

The strength of this approach is probably best understood in terms of early intervention. By emphasising the population group rather than homelessness itself, arguably a broader understanding of the target group is possible. However the alignment of target groups to single policy domains (e.g. employment), assumes that the target group have less rather than more complex issues and service needs. How this option would produce more stable and long lasting outcomes for homeless people remains unexplained. At best this claim is an aspirational statement, rather than one of fact.

While there are some positive features of this option, it is problematic for a number of reasons:

- An assumption is made that SAAP, in its current form, is only a crisis service. Clearly, from a Victorian perspective at least, this is inaccurate.
- The alignment of target groups to different service delivery systems is perplexing. The examples documented in the Green Paper fail to capture the complex and multiple service needs of many within the homeless service system. For example, aligning young people to employment, education and training (EET) makes some sense for this life stage. However, importantly it fails to articulate how such a response would work with young people who have multiple and complex issues such as drug and alcohol or mental health problems. Many of these young people are, at least in the short term, unable to participate in an EET programs, yet certainly require a series of supports.
- The alignment of target groups to differing policy domains also fails to understand that, over time, people can move into or between target groups. For example, a ‘young person’ may turn into a ‘single adult’. Whether the aligned policy domain for singles adults is appropriate for the particular clients remains far from clear.
- The proposed changes to governance, at the level of State and Federal government would be highly challenging. To be effective, this option, would require a major engineering of government departments, both State and Federal, and the related business arrangements. Consider the area of young people. There are no coherent or agreed upon age ranges for what constitutes a ‘young person’²⁸. How would such agreements be organised, particularly

²⁸ Melbourne Citymission, *Ten Point Plan*, 2007

where there are statutory jurisdictions such as Child Protection and Juvenile Justice?

- In terms of outcomes of changed governance arrangements it remains an open question whether significant positive long-term outcomes have been achieved for homeless and /or disadvantaged populations. Outcomes of initiatives undertaken in England²⁹ and Victoria³⁰, suggest that the effects of such initiatives are far from clear³¹.
- At the level of direct service model development, it remains unclear how such models would reduce homelessness, as it would require a massive injection of funding into both the existing homelessness service system as well as the policy areas identified for each target group.

Option 2

As indicated in the Green Paper this option essentially seeks an upgrade of existing service delivery arrangements within SAAP. The strength of this response is that it aspires to further develop a program that has an identified track record in both developing very successful approaches to the transition³² as well as maintaining a focus on 'homelessness' itself as the organising principle.

Melbourne Citymission agrees with many of the points identified including, removing time limits from interventions, encouraging 'one stop shops', accreditation processes and enhanced data collection systems. Some of this work is already underway in states such as Victoria. Learning's from such processes should inform further National approaches.

Yet this option as articulated in the Green Paper also has significant difficulties including:

- Once again, an assumption is made that SAAP has and is only a crisis service delivery platform. Clearly this is inaccurate and not the experience of Victoria and elsewhere. To this extent what is required is greater precision in the discussion and greater depth of understanding as there are many different models of SAAP across the country.
- Melbourne Citymission would agree that there should be a dedicated homelessness response/platform. Yet such a response should also include early intervention and tertiary programs from other service delivery systems which are currently absent including: JPET; Reconnect; PSP; housing; a

²⁹ Griggs, J, Whitworth,A, Walker,R, McLennan, D, Noble,M (2008) Person or Place Based Policies to Tackle Disadvantage? Not Knowing What Works, Joseph Rowntree Foundation.

³⁰ Victorian Government, *Fairer Victoria*

³¹ Griggs et al Op Cit

³²For examples see Project I, National Youth Commission. See also Eardsley, T., Thompson,D., Cass,B., Dadich,A., Neale, M (2008) Measuring the Impact of SAAP Funded Homelessness Services on Client Self Reliance, Social . Social Policy Research Centre, Uni of NSW.

national Family Reconciliation and Mediation Program; targeted health responses, Maternal and Child Health services.

- The direct relationship between housing and support is unclear. What is clear however is that a response that does not include both housing and support will not achieve a reduction in homelessness. Without housing and support as the basis for stability, it remains unclear how employment outcomes and therefore independence are possible. Current housing models articulated in Housing Reform strategy will not meet the needs of many in the homeless population.
- The conceptual differentiation between early intervention and tertiary responses within this option are ill defined.
- The role of mainstream service delivery policy and systems is unclear. How will mainstream and universal services be brokered and what is their exact role in the continuum of service provision between early intervention and exiting from homelessness?

Option 3

Of the three options presented, this is perhaps the most ambitious for it places responsibility for homelessness with universal and mainstream targeted services. To date these service systems have largely failed homeless people, often because their needs are considered too difficult or problematic to address in current service models.

This option proceeds from the premise that there is nothing unique or distinctive about the experience of homelessness. Lost in this approach is a view of home as central to an understanding of homelessness and homelessness policy and service provision. Homelessness is conceived then as one expression of social exclusion, requiring a generic policy and service approach. Homelessness specific responses would literally become a ‘safety net’ only response and be construed as working on an episodic and crisis basis with clients whose broader needs are addressed in other service sectors.

There are some good practice examples where mainstream and homeless service delivery systems work together³³. While there is certainly immense scope to improve these relationships, it is Melbourne Citymission’s experience that there are many service delivery partnerships within Victoria at least, which successfully combine a targeted homeless response with a mainstream approach³⁴.

The very ambition of this option is also the basis for its weakness if reducing homelessness remains the ultimate aim. The following points require further clarification before such an approach could be further explored:

³³ Melbourne Citymission Frontyard Service delivery model is one such example. This model will be highlighted specifically in a separate response.

³⁴ Melbourne Citymission also operates services for women exiting prison., which are effective in working with both Corrections Victoria and Office of Housing.

- The notion of mainstream services is ill defined. Are targeted services such as mental health considered mainstream services or is the definition restricted to universal services such as schools and hospitals?
- It is not clear how mainstream services will enhance early intervention and prevention responses. We have argued that prevention approaches are squarely the responsibility of the 'mainstream' while 'early intervention' approaches the responsibility of both service delivery streams. The conflation of prevention and early intervention does not assist the discussion.
- It is Melbourne Citymission's view that an incentive system as proposed for mainstream services will simply not work. The Job Network is a good example of a mainstream service that has overwhelmingly failed homeless people.³⁵ Incentives are likely to see mainstream services work at the early intervention rather than tertiary end of the continuum.
- The interface between the homelessness service system and mainstream remains unclear. Who/What will broker these arrangements? Centrelink is identified as one possible broker; however evidence from the YP4 Trial³⁶ would indicate this to be an ineffective route. There is an obvious conflict of interest as Centrelink has the power to suspend/breach clients.
- Mainstream and universal services have a culture of 'one size fits all'. This is to be expected as, by definition, they service the general population. If mainstream services were to assume responsibility for ongoing post-crisis responses to homeless people, they will require a major cultural change, in for example, hours of operation, including opening hours well beyond normal business hours.
- It would also require a massive injection of funding across the entire service delivery system. One reason why mainstream services do not work with homeless people to the degree they should is purely a resource issue. They are already struggling to fulfil current expectations.

Melbourne Citymission contends that there are strengths and weaknesses in all three options presented in the Green Paper. There is confusion in all options around policy, programs, service models and processes. This is symptomatic of a lack of coherence and consistency across the Green paper as a whole.

For example while the multi dimensional cause and effects of homelessness are acknowledged in the paper, policy and service responses that address this are not seriously developed in any of the options, particularly those of 1 and 3. Also, intriguingly the innovative service models and practices presented in the Green paper do not articulate with the Options.

The models presented, mostly share common elements. These include: case management, integrated service responses with an articulated intersection with mainstream or universal service systems. These are the elements that any new option should build upon.

³⁵ For example see Australian Government, Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (2008) The Future of Employment Services in Australia: A Discussion Paper. Op Cit

³⁶ When YP4 used Centrelink as the gateway for recruitment of clients it was unable to fulfil the initial target numbers for the trial as clients were reluctant to disclose information.

MCM's position – Option 4

- A specific homelessness platform is required to achieve long-term outcomes. The absence of home creates levels of material, emotional and social instability, which requires an integrated and co-ordinated multi dimensional approach.
- Any new framework to address homelessness requires flexibility. A 'one size fits all' will simply not work.
- It requires an acknowledgement that there is a direct relationship between housing and support. Privileging either one of these approaches *in an overall policy framework* will not reduce homelessness.
- Any new approach will need to be clear about the *emphasis* placed on the principle of transition. For some the transition will be short, for others varying degrees of time will be required. For others a transition to 'independence' will simply not be possible.
- While the idea of homelessness should be central to any new initiative/platform, there is also a requirement for both universal and specialised approaches *within* this platform for particular target groups.

A Practice example for such an approach

Step Ahead

Step Ahead is the first model of its type in Victoria, and is one of only a few programs in Australia to adapt the groundbreaking European 'foyer' model.

Some of the characteristics that distinguish Step Ahead from traditional homeless programs and services include the following:

- ***Step Ahead clients are housed for up to three years.*** *In comparison, refuges can only offer six weeks accommodation, while traditional models of transitional housing usually provide shelter for up to 18 months.*

Knowing that they have three years of supported accommodation gives vulnerable young people 'breathing space' to resolve issues beyond their immediate housing crisis.

- ***Step Ahead provides more than just shelter*** – *it provides intensive casework support, including a personal development course that equips young people with the skills to successfully sustain independent housing and be able to address difficulties associated with family breakdown and shared living. Importantly, each Step Ahead client has a caseworker that coordinates all the various supports the person requires.*

- ***Step Ahead acts to break the cycle of dependence, by supporting young people in education, employment and training.*** Step Ahead recognises that education, employment and training are critical pathways out of poverty. All of the young people who enter the Step Ahead program are involved in education, training and/or employment.

In addition to providing secure housing, Step Ahead offers IT resources (including computers & internet access) and homework support (a free tutoring program supported by Melbourne University students and the City of Melbourne Library).

- ***Step Ahead is focused on exiting people from the homeless system in a sustainable way.*** The casework model has been specifically designed to move young people through a transition from dependence to independence. As a 'back stop', once a young person has moved from Step Ahead and is settled in other housing (for example, private rental, back with family, or in community housing) they are offered up to six months of 'after care'.
- ***The intensive support offered by Step Ahead minimises the risk of young people getting lost in the 'system'.***

In traditional transitional housing models, a young person receives – on average – one visit per fortnight from a support worker. The low level of support means that it is easy for a young person to 'slip through the cracks'. In particular, it makes it difficult to do any real work with the young person around employment, education and training. It is also difficult to gauge the living skills of the young person. This means that very young people who haven't had the life experience of having to budget can find themselves evicted from transitional housing for non-payment of rent.

Indicators of Step Ahead's success

- To date, 174 young people have gone through the Step Ahead program.
- Of these 174 clients:
 - 117 have participated in the living skills course that Step Ahead runs several times a year.
 - 57 have been accommodated in Step Ahead properties. ***All 57 have been linked into employment, education and training as a result of the intensive case management practices of the program;***

No clients have required the full three years of support – all clients have made the transition to independence earlier than anticipated

On the basis of the discussion already articulated Melbourne Citymission makes the following statements about any new approach to homelessness:

- Any approach requires a National effort and approach, which is both flexible and coherent.
- Homelessness requires both a housing and support approach
- Underpinning such a National policy approach is the idea of the creation of a 'home' as the organising principle for a new approach to homelessness.
- Structural and individual causes v of homelessness must be addressed if long term outcomes are to be achieved
- Preventative approaches to homelessness should be articulated through a 'social inclusion' platform rather than homeless response.
- Early intervention, transitional and tertiary level Responses to homelessness should be integrated as part of any overall response.
- The idea of 'transition' *at the policy level* itself requires further articulation. This should be should be informed by both further research and identified successful service models.
- Any new approach must recognise the particular issues associated with homelessness. Therefore any response which includes employment, health or education should work be part of the overall homelessness response and approach.

Recommendations.

1. Development of a National Housing and Homelessness Policy:

This policy should include the following elements:

- Enhanced data collection systems
- Targets for the reduction of homelessness in all categories of homelessness
- Significant levels of investment in public/social housing development, including public/private partnerships.
- Significant investment in support services, both short and long term.
- A re-engineering of government jurisdictions and business rules that ensures coherent regional boundaries, age ranges for service delivery and consistent definitions of homelessness. COAG should have a significant role within this.
- Specialist programs such as JPET, PSP, Reconnect, and Home Advice should be within this policy response.
- Mainstream service delivery policy such as Care and protection, Justice and disability clearly articulate with housing and homeless policy, to ensure proper accountabilities for service delivery.
- Universal services such as Education are required under any approach to maintain educational service to homeless client groups irrespective of income levels.
- A program of multi disciplinary research is required to further inform best practice outcomes and knowledge and understanding of 'transitions' for this population.

2. **Prevention of homelessness should be the primary responsibility of the broader social inclusion agenda.**
 - That a dedicated research program be developed and executed around better defining 'prevention from homelessness', over the next 3-5 years.
 - That targeted 'pilot' programs be funded in each state which seek to increase the identification and responsibility for mainstream services to prevent homelessness.

3. **Development of pilots in each state and territory that bring together homeless service delivery and mainstream services to achieve long term outcomes. This should include:**
 - 'Pooled' funding models be trialled
 - Co located models of service delivery be encouraged
 - Mainstream services responses are embedded within homeless responses.
 - Homelessness services receive significant brokerage to purchase mainstream services.
 - Longitudinal studies to be funded to evaluate the long term benefits for clients of such arrangements.

4. **Further program definition be undertaken to determine whether mainstream or homelessness services should be responsible for clients unable to make a transition to the mainstream. This should include:**
 - Consider prioritisation of homelessness specific funding to those who are able to make a transition.
 - Dedicated funding within mainstream targeted services (ie mental health) to provide ongoing accommodation and support services.
 - Development of an evidence base to identify:
 - the characteristics of such clients groups
 - the extent to which the current homelessness service system is working with such groups and
 - identification of the support and accommodation requirements for such groups.

5. **Further analysis of the current target group breakdowns be undertaken to ensure coherence with changing demographic profiles (i.e. household types). This should include:**
 - An audit of the current target groups identified within the homelessness service system to identify them with current demographic projections i.e. rising rates of single households

6. **That the current reviews of Employment services and Income Support payments articulate with the homelessness policy review.**

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Melbourne Citymission

The following provides an overview of some of the services Melbourne Citymission operate to assist with homelessness service delivery.

Youth & Homelessness services

- [Frontyard Youth Services](#)
- [Community Integration & Accommodation Options](#)
- [Melbourne Early Intervention Service](#)
- [Gateway Reconnect](#)
- [Stopover Youth Refuge](#)
- [Stopover Youth Housing Outreach Program](#)
- [Western Region Accommodation Program](#)
- [Step Ahead Program](#)
- [Family Crisis Accommodation Service](#)
- [Family Reconciliation & Mediation Program](#)
- [Pastoral Care: Youth CBD Region](#)
- [Western Reconnect](#)
- [Melbourne Youth Support Service](#)

Adult & Family services

- [Adult & Family Service](#)
- [Family Crisis Accommodation Service](#)
- [Childcare](#)
- [Early Childhood Intervention Program](#)
- [Family and Children's Community Support Service](#)
- [Gateway Reconnect](#)
- [Western Reconnect](#)
- [Young And Pregnant Parenting](#)
- [Finding Solutions](#)
- [Parent Support Group](#)
- [Family & Community Links at Hartnett House](#)
- [Correctional Services Employment Pilot Program](#)
- [Support for Women Exiting Prison](#)

Disability Services

- ABI Community Access Program
- ABI Neighbour-ring Accommodation & Support Project
- Bridges
- Case Management Action Group
- Children's Accommodation Transition Service
- Community Living Support Service - Outreach
- Community Living Support Service - Residential
- Disability Case Management Service
- Family & Children's Community Support Service
- Melbourne Case Management Service
- Northern Region Disability Services
- Outreach Service
- Respite Program
- Shared Supported Accommodation
- State-wide ABI Paediatric Coordinators
- State-wide Acquired Brain Injury Case Management Service

Employment, Education and Training Services

- Horn of Africa Young People's Pathway Project
- Job Placement & Employment Training
- Personal Support Program
- School Focused Youth Program
- Slingshot Community Enterprise and Employment Centre
- Tutoring Program
- Western Young People's Independent Network
- Youth Employment, Education & Training Initiative