Catholic Social Services
Australia

Which way home?

A New Approach to Homelessness

Response to the Australian Government's discussion paper

Contact: **Frank Quinlan**
Executive Director

Catholic Social Services Australia
PO Box 326, Curtin ACT 2605
Telephone: 02-6285 1366
Mobile: 0409-655 460

1 Summary

Catholic Social Services Australia and its members commend the Government for its leadership in issuing a Green Paper on Homelessness – "Which way Home? A New Approach to Homelessness" – with the aim of developing a new policy response to meet the needs over 100,000 homeless people in Australia.

Catholic Social Services Australia's vision for a National Homelessness strategy is one that is underpinned by:
- A well-articulated social inclusion strategy, incorporating an anti-poverty strategy with clear targets set, including homelessness objectives;
- A 'whole of government' approach; and,
- Legislatively protected rights to adequate housing.

In responding to the needs of homeless people in Australia, Catholic Social Services Australia envisages a service model which is:
- Client-focused
- Flexible and adaptable
- Case-managed
- Multi-disciplinary
- Adequately resourced

Catholic Social Services Australia envisages a much stronger emphasis on early intervention and prevention strategies in a future National Homelessness Strategy. From experience, there is a systemic failure to tap into existing structures such as health, education, justice and court systems, and existing social service delivery networks to affectively prevent homeless or relapse into homelessness. Further, many of the findings contained within our publication, *Dropping off the Edge: the distribution of disadvantage in Australia* should serve as a useful tool in identifying particular geographical homelessness hotspots, and as a useful framework for ongoing monitoring.

We add our voice to the many expressing concern about the availability, affordability and appropriateness of housing in this country – particularly in relation to homeless people.

A more accurate and timely measure of homelessness should be developed from current research and data collection initiatives. We also suggest the establishment of a Homelessness Innovation Fund to provide continual and ongoing support for research into programs responding to homelessness as well as the establishment of a National Clearinghouse for the purpose of disseminating research in the area and establishing models of best practice.

In terms of the sector's capacity to actively engage in a national response to homelessness, Catholic Social Services Australia is particularly concerned about skill shortages and financial viability issues affecting the social services sector. We also acknowledge that the response to homelessness will cost money and Catholic Social Services Australia requests that the Government commits adequate long term funding for programs it sets out in the White Paper.

2 Introduction

Catholic Social Services Australia, an agency of the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference, is the Catholic Church's peak national body for social services. It represents 64 member organisations which employ over 6,500 people, and supports its members' delivery of a wide range of social service programs. Catholic Social Services Australia also advises the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference on social policy issues and advocates publicly for social policy consistent with Catholic Social Teaching.

In November 2007 the Vatican hosted a special meeting on Homelessness in the World, the "International Meeting for the Pastoral Care of the Homeless". At the end of that meeting a statement was issued which included the following paragraph, highly relevant to the situation confronting Australian society and our potential response to homelessness:

> "The homeless represent a challenge for the whole society, which is called to a co-responsibility in the promotion of an impassioned approach to the problem. It is a matter of understanding the situation rather than finding an explanation, which could degenerate into unsuitable categorization. It is a matter of taking into consideration the person, not as an object for which we intend to intervene in a way that has been previously defined. This requires a project of intervention, that rather than stigmatizing, has a logic of true inclusivity. However, despite this, welcome remains limited, fragile and incapable, so it must be sustained by a deliberate and constant commitment. Spontaneity, fragmentation and indecision weigh against an integral, lasting and sustainable approach."[1]

3 The Green Paper

The heralding of a Green Paper on Homelessness by Prime Minister Kevin Rudd in January this year was welcomed by many people involved in providing services to homeless people in this country. It was a promising sign that one of the future government's election commitments aimed at tackling homelessness and had some clear process for consultation. Catholic Social Services Australia welcomes the opportunity to contribute.

Turning to the Green Paper itself, Catholic Social Services Australia would concur with many of its colleagues who participated in the various public consultation forums that neither Options 1, 2 nor 3 in their own right provide the optimum way forward required to tackle homelessness in Australia.

Before any models can be agreed upon, a national response to tackling homelessness requires the definition of a number of higher order principles:

3.1   A well articulated social inclusion strategy, incorporating an anti-poverty strategy with clear targets set and established for homelessness objectives:

The Paper states that 'preventing homelessness is a key priority for social inclusion'.[2] However, Section 4 does not address these key social inclusion priorities.

> "Homelessness is a state in which people are not only excluded from basic shelter, but also from security, a place to belong, intimate relationships, neighbours and all of the benefits of having a place to call one's own, such as the space and facilities to cook, space for hobbies and recreation etc. Over time, exclusion from one aspect of the normally expected benefits and resources of society leads to exclusion from others, and to a compounding set of reinforcing disadvantages. Homeless

---

[1] http://www.zenit.org/article-21853?l=english

[2] Australian Government, "Which Way Home? A New approach to homelessness", May 2008, p. 13

people represent the group of people who have reached the 'end state' of the process of social exclusion. They are generally the people who suffer the most discrimination, have access to the least resources, and are the most cut off from opportunities for a better life.[3]

Given that poverty and an inability to afford adequate housing are central to the causes of homelessness, Catholic Social Services Australia strongly advocates the setting of targets to reduce homelessness within an overarching anti-poverty strategy forming a cornerstone within this nation's social inclusion strategy.

There are a number of models which are successfully realising homelessness objectives within a socially inclusive framework: the Irish Government's *Homelessness: An Integrated strategy response*[4]; the South Australian Government's *Everyone's Responsibility: Reducing Homelessness in South Australia* strategy[5], and Sacred Heart Mission's *A Journey to Social Inclusion (J2SI)*[6].

3.2 A 'whole of government' approach

People who need help with housing connect with the system at any number of entry points. Access to services is ad hoc and homeless people constantly fall through the cracks with inadequate safety nets in place. There is clearly the need for a better integrated response to homelessness services from Commonwealth, State/Territory and Local Governments. Where multiple agencies are required to respond clear lines of accountability must be developed. In attempting to find 'whole of government' responses to this crisis it will be essential to link A National Homelessness Strategy into all of the following:

- National Housing initiatives: in particular the National Rental Affordability Scheme and the National Housing Supply Council; National Policy Commission on Indigenous Housing

- National Child Protection Framework

- Employment and Vocational Services

- Outcomes of the National Mental Health and Disability Employment Strategy

- National Council on Violence Against Women and Children

- National Mental Health Reform

- Family Law Reform measures including Family Relationship Centres

---

[3] Talbot, C: "Social Exclusion and Homelessness: Everyone's responsibility", 14 October 2003: A UnitingCare Wesley publication, pg. 13

[4] Available at
http://www.environ.ie/en/Publications/DevelopmentandHousing/Housing/FileDownLoad,1797,en.pdf

[5] Available at http://www.socialinclusion.sa.gov.au/files/Homelessness_SIB_july03.pdf

[6] Perusco, Michael: "A journey to social inclusion: ending the cycle of homelessness", published in MICAH, April 2008, pp 4-5.

3.3 Legislatively protected right to adequate housing

International standards for the protection of universal human rights and fundamental freedoms must underpin all responses to homelessness and Catholic Social Services Australia believes this is best achieved within legislative frameworks to ensure people who are homeless or who are at risk of being homeless have their rights legally protected.

The right to adequate housing is set out under article 11(1) of the International Covenant on Economic Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) and defined in the UN Committee on Economic Social and Cultural Rights General Comment No 4 – right to adequate housing (1991).

It is important to note that housing is more than simply a right to shelter. It is a right to an adequate standard of living. Whether housing is adequate depends on a range of factors including:

- legal security of tenure

- availability of services, materials, facilities and infrastructure

- affordability

- accessibility

- habitability

- location

- cultural adequacy[7]

3.3.1 Children – in need of a special mention

Further analysis of information about the homeless population from the 2006 Census will be released in 2008. Of particular concern to this country is the number of children identified as homeless. SAAP data only counts those people who sought assistance from a funded service provider, but it is the trend in the SAAP data - indicating a growth trend in the number of children – which should be cause for concern.

Along with the International Standards outlined above, Children should also be protected under the measures outlined in the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

The Non-Government Report on the Implementation of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child in Australia to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child of May 2005 noted:

> "The Committee's 1997 Concluding Observations expressed concern 'at the spread of homelessness amongst young people in Australia', and feared that 'homeless children were at risk of involvement in prostitution, drug abuse, pornography and other forms of delinquency and economic exploitation' (paragraph 18). Homelessness remains a significant human rights issue for children in Australia, the available figures are disturbingly high. Census night 2001 recorded 36,000 homeless children. Data based on requests for homeless services reveal 64,800

---

[7] ICESCR, General Comment 4: The right to adequate Housing, [8]

children and youth accessed a homelessness service in 2002-2003. Australian children become homeless for many different and complex reasons, including:

- Family violence and abuse

- Substance misuse and health issues (particularly mental health issues)

- Poverty

- A shortage of affordable accommodation (brought about by dramatic cuts in funding for public housing and rising costs of private housing) and

- Aboriginality (Indigenous children are more likely to become homeless).

"Homelessness not only threatens a child's right to a standard of living adequate for his or her physical, mental, spiritual, moral and social development, it is also likely to be associated with violations of other rights in the Convention, having adverse impacts on children's health, education, economic security, and their relationships with family and community. Homelessness has also been shown to place children at risk of substance abuse and sexual exploitation."[8]

Having taken into account reports by both the Government of the day and NGOs, the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child had this to say in its report of 30 September 2005:

57. In light of article 27 of the Convention, the Committee recommends that the State party increase its efforts to provide affordable housing options and take all possible measures to raise the standard of living of indigenous children and children living in rural and remote areas.

58. The Committee further recommends that the State party address and systematically investigate the consequences of economic hardship on children, with a view to developing measures aimed at reducing its negative impact on children's healthy development.

65. While the Committee welcomes that the State party is seriously considering the issue of youth homelessness, including with the National Homelessness Strategy (NHS) and the 'Reconnect' program, it wishes to express concern at the situation of homeless children, which are also more likely to be affected by educational and relational problems and are more exposed to substances abuse and sexual exploitation.

66. The Committee recommends that the State party intensity its efforts in order to address the urgent needs and rights of homeless children, especially as to their housing, health and education. Furthermore, the State party should provide homeless children with adequate recovery and social reintegration services for physical, sexual and substance abuse and to promote reunification with their families when feasible.[9]

---

[8] The Non-Government Report on the Implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child in Australia May 2005 pp. 47-48, http://www.ncylc.org.ay/croc/images/CROC_Report_for_Web.pdf

[9] Accessed at http://www.ncylc.org.au/croc/home.html

Catholic Social Services Australia implores this Government to revisit this report and consider implementing the report's recommendations as part of its response to homelessness in Australia.

4 A way forward

The White Paper should establish a plan within no less than a seven to eight year timeframe. According to Professor Tony Vinson:

> "Disadvantage entrenched over decades cannot be turned around in a few short years. In fact our evidence to date indicates that when this happens you get a 'boomerang' effect – a rebound to previous levels of disadvantage.
>
> What is needed is persistent effort nearer to seven or eight years – as happens to good effect overseas – rather than the Australian norm of two or three. It is possible that an inadequate single 'dose' of community assistance may be more harmful than no help at all."[10].

If addressing homelessness in this country is going to be a priority central to a social inclusion agenda as this Government has already suggested then the timeframe will be a crucial factor in any national policy response.

With the foundations in place as identified in Section 2 above, Catholic Social Services Australia recommends the following key criteria in assisting homeless people out of homelessness as well as assisting those at risk of homelessness.

4.1 Client-focused service delivery

Due to the complex situations from which homeless people or those at risk of homelessness present themselves to our services – it is of utmost importance that a national response to tackling homelessness is one that is flexible and adaptable to the individual's needs (including dependents) and that the capacity of the social services sector to respond to their needs is seamless – not encumbered by bureaucratic and governmental boundaries or regressive administrative burden.

Furthermore, service response must be case-managed and multi-discliplinary – reflecting once again the complex requirements of people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness. To facilitate this approach a much greater emphasis on the value of and need for dedicated brokerage funding arrangements needs to be realised.

A number of federally funded programs currently provide for a flexible and adaptable program framework. They are based on a case management approach with a capacity for implementing a multi-disciplinary methodology. Examples include Reconnect[11] and the Personal Helpers and Mentors Program[12]. One of the greatest challenges to these programs is the incapacity of mainstream services to meet demand, more often than not – due to lack of funding.

If time limits are to be imposed on client support periods then a more realistic assessment of this is required. Many case workers focused on assisting particularly disadvantaged individuals reflect

---

[10] Vinson, T. Speech at the launch of Dropping off the Edge: the distribution of disadvantage in Australia, Parliament House, Canberra, 28 February 2007. Available at: http://www.australiandisadvantage.org.au/pdf/vinson_speech.pdf

[11] For more information see, http://www.fahcsia.gov.au/internet/facsinternet.nsf/youth/programs-reconnect.htm

[12] http://www.facsia.gov.au/internet/facsinternet.nsf/MentalHealth/pham_program.htm

that building a relationship with the individual and/or their family is a crucial factor in gaining positive outcomes and often involves many hours of contact over an extended period of time. In terms of homelessness crisis support, 6-12 months would be a more realistic timeframe to apply.

In terms of response mechanisms to those identified as chronically homeless, there is the "Housing First" model which aims to address homelessness as a priority of first order. The approach is based on a number of key elements:

- People don't have to be assessed as 'house ready'

- Housing is provided as quickly as possible

- People are provided with adequate and appropriate support services in their home

- People with alcohol and other drug addictions can access housing regardless of their substance abuse

- People do not need to be 'compliant' with mental health treatment.

What this model aims to do primarily, is remove what are often some of the major obstacles to obtaining and maintaining housing for consumers who are chronically homeless.[13] If this is to be successfully adopted in Australia then there will need to be a major paradigm shift in the manner in which crisis accommodation is currently provided in Australia. Furthermore, a greater need will exist for publicly funded housing and awareness raising campaigns to combat discrimination – both are discussed in some more detail further on in this submission.

The strong emphasis in the Green Paper on economic/employment objectives for people who are homeless or who have been homeless is welcome. The Federal Government in particular has an important role to play in employment programs and given the importance of suitable employment as a way out of poverty, Catholic Social Services Australia supports such an objective.

However, important as it is, employment remains only one priority in a range of priorities which should be considered. Other objectives should include:

(i)   Achieving housing outcomes for people who are homeless or at risk of homeless within the definition of 'adequate housing' as identified by International Law.

(ii)   Assisting individuals and/or their families achieve success in addressing their underlying causes of homelessness such as violence issues, drug and alcohol addiction and dependence, relationship issues, mental health issues.

(iii)   Accepting that for some people in our society, full or unsupported employment may not be possible. Catholic Social Services Australia would like to see some greater exploration of this notion and some clear direction concerning ways in which individuals can be valuable contributors to society without necessarily being active participants in the workforce. To deem employment as the optimum economic objective of a homelessness strategy fails to acknowledge the value that individuals can add to society within a socially inclusive agenda.

(iv)   A commitment from the Federal Government to continue to financially support all citizens at an acceptable level of subsistence should also form part of a national strategy aimed at addressing homelessness; income support should not be dependent on workforce participation. An adequate income support strategy can play a key role in reducing poverty amongst those at risk of homelessness. This also requires the development of programs to engage all citizens in diverse socially

---

[13] Reynolds, F. (2007 Churchill Fellow) A Report to the Winston Churchill Memorial Trust of Australia: "To Examine programs that assist vulnerable and complex chronically homeless people", 31 January 2008, p. 40

inclusive activities, rather than relying on dead-end 'work experience' programs as currently being proposed in the revised Employment Services Model.

Catholic Social Services Australia is one of the largest providers of the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations' funded program – the Personal Support Program. It is a pre-vocational program aimed at assisting individuals to overcome their personal and social barriers to attain employment. There are a high number of participants who move in and out of stable accommodation but exactly how many is unknown despite best efforts to acquire this information from the Department (inquiries date back to November last year).

Therefore, in analysing Catholic Social Services Australia's total caseload, as opposed to only those who indicate homelessness as a barrier, as at 30 April 2008, the aggregated economic outcome was 39 per cent. That is 39 per cent of all PSP clients of Catholic Social Services Australia had been assisted to gain employment. Of these, 61 per cent achieved 13 week outcomes (had been employed for 13 weeks) and close to 39 per cent had achieved a 26 week outcome (had been employed for 26 weeks). The conversion rate from 13-26 week outcomes currently stands at 63 per cent. What happens to these individuals past this point is unknown.

Such outcomes are a clear demonstration of how intensive support can assist people to overcome even high levels of complex disadvantage.

4.2   Early intervention and prevention

A national Homelessness Strategy should include a broad education and awareness program to help raise awareness about people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness. The Prime Minister's commitment to this issue as a key policy priority for this Government has certainly delivered a higher profile to the issues surrounding homelessness and homeless people. A broad education and awareness program will become particularly important if we are to successfully achieve desired socially inclusive objectives. Affordable and appropriate housing throughout mainstream suburbs is a much preferred model of public and affordable housing than the housing 'ghettos' established under some previous policies. To achieve this social integration an awareness and education program will be crucial to overcoming existing barriers and discrimination.

There are also particular groups which should be targeted.

4.2.1   Indigenous people

Indigenous people are disproportionately affected by homelessness and while they make up 2 per cent of Australia's population, they represent 9 per cent of the total homeless population and 19 per cent of people in improvised housing.[14]

4.2.2   Women

As much as 42 per cent of the homeless population in Australia is female[15], many of these with accompanying children. Women generally seek out crisis accommodation assistance rather than

---

[14] Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), Counting the Homeless 2001, 2003, p5, available at http://www.ausstats.abs.gov.au/ausstats/free.nsf//0/5AD852F13620FFDCCA256DE2007D81FE/$fILE/20500_2001.pdf [21 January 2008].

[15] ABS, Counting the Homeless, 2001, 2003, p4

sleeping rough, hence their strong representation among SAAP service users – 60 per cent in the 2005-06 reporting period.[16]

Domestic and family violence, relationship/family breakdown and financial difficulty are all cited as primary reasons for which women seek assistance – with domestic and family violence the major factor.[17]

4.2.3 Children and young people

Youth under the age of 24 years account for almost half of those people counted as homeless on Census night in 2001.[18] According to SAAP data the vast majority of homeless children accompany their parents with three-quarters of the 54,700 children who accompanied their parents into SAAP services in 2005-06 under 10 years of age.[19]

It is therefore of no surprise that homelessness among children and young people is reflective of some of the reasons women find themselves homeless including relationship/family breakdown and domestic violence. Other factors include physical and emotional abuse, anxiety or depression, unemployment and substance abuse.

4.2.4 Young people transitioning out of State Care

Forty three per cent of young people who became homeless before the age of 18 were former participants in state care arrangements. This is a glaring indictment on the lost opportunity for early intervention and prevention to this group of young people.[20]

4.2.5 People with a mental illness

The availability of data on the incidence of mental illness in the homeless population is quite varied, often based on smaller samples and boutique research projects. The SAAP data indicates that in 2004-05, 11,800 SAAP clients (or around 12 per cent) reported a mental health problem and 19,400 (or around 19 per cent) reported a substance use problem. Some clients in these groups report both a mental health and a substance use problem (co-morbidity) within the same support period (4,800 or around 5 per cent of clients).

4.2.6 People leaving prison and juvenile justice institutions

4.2.6.1 Prison

According to an AHURI research reportd, there are no reliable data on numbers of prisoners released each year but Department of Family and Community Services (DFaCS) estimates suggested that in 2001 more than 43,000 people were released from prison Australia-wide. The researchers estimate that some 44,000 were released in 2003. Prisoners (and therefore ex-prisoners) as a group have high levels of poor education, unemployment, mental and intellectual

---

[16] Australian Institute for Health and Welfare (2007) Homeless People in SAAP, Support Accommodation Assistance Program National Data Collection Agency Annual Report 2005-06, Cat. No HOU 156 available at http://www.aihw.gov.au/publications/index.cfm/title/10419

[17] Ibid.

[18] ABS, Counting the Homeless, 2001, 2003, pp 3-4

[19] Australian Institute for Health and Welfare (2007) Homeless People in SAAP, Support Accommodation Assistance Program National Data Collection Agency Annual Report 2005-06, Cat. No HOU 156

[20] Johnson, Guy and Chamberlain, C, "From Youth to Adult Homelessness", paper presented at the National Housing conference 2008.

disabilities, poverty and alcohol and other drug problems, making them amongst the most disadvantaged people in Australia. A majority eventually is re-incarcerated, indicating that most ex-prisoners are not rehabilitated by their prison term and are unable to integrate into society once released from prison.[21]

The AHURI research also reported that two key factors emerged from their research as the strongest predictors of return to prison. They were: (i) worsening problems with heroin use; and (ii) moving house often (in this context, two or more times in a three-month post-release period).[22]

4.2.6.2 Young people leaving detention

The recent report into Youth Homelessness by the National Youth Commission reported that "young people leaving detention, either juvenile detention centres or adult correction centres, at the completion of their sentence or on parole are often released without adequate support". And that, "leaving detention without any support leads either to re-incarceration or reliance on homelessness services such as SAAP".[23]

4.2.7 People being discharged from hospital

During 2005–06, mental health-related separations (discharges) without specialised psychiatric care were mainly provided by public acute hospitals (88 per cent of 85,453), with the highest percentage of separations being for those aged 65 years and older. The principal diagnosis of Mental and behavioural disorders due to use of alcohol accounted for the largest number of separations (16,361 or 19.1 per cent).[24]

4.3 Using existing structures:

In terms of preventative and early interventionist strategies there is an obvious need to look at existing structures such as health, education, justice and court systems (including Family Relationship Centres), and existing social service delivery networks to ascertain the interconnectedness required to achieve positive outcomes for people identifiable as being at risk of homelessness.

4.4 Dropping off the Edge:

Whilst the circumstances surrounding an individual's life experience on the road to homelessness or risk of homelessness will vary dramatically, there is no disputing that there are certain factors which can feature as an underlying cause of homelessness. These are often inter-related and can include: poverty, domestic violence, relationship breakdown, mental health issues, alcohol and drug dependence, poor educational achievement, poor quality jobs or unemployment, high cost of buying or renting a home, history of institutional living, criminal activity, and ill-health.

---

[21] Baldry, E et al, 2004, The role of housing in preventing re-offending, AHURI Research & Policy Bulletin Issue 36, AHURI, p 2

[22] Baldry, E et al, 2004, The role of housing in preventing re-offending, AHURI Research & Policy Bulletin Issue 36, AHURI, p 3

[23] National Youth Commission. "Australia's Homeless Youth: A Report of the National Youth Commission Inquiry into Homeless Youth", 2008, pp 295-7 available at http://www.nyc.net.au/files/Australias_Homeless_Youth.pdf

[24] Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, "Australia's Health 2008", p 371. Available at http://www.aihw.gov.au/publications/index.cfm/title/10585

Given these factors, there is certainly scope to utilise the findings of "Dropping off the Edge" – the report mapping social disadvantage in Australia commissioned by Catholic Social Services Australia and Jesuit Social Services and written by Professor Tony Vinson – to identify geographically based homelessness hotspots based on the cumulative disadvantage measures attributable to being at risk of homelessness.[25] Much of this data is available on the publication's accompanying website, http://www.australiandisadvantage.org.au.

The categories of indicators used in the report include*[26]:

Social distress	Health	Community safety	Economic	Education
Low family income Rental Stress Home purchase stress Lone person households	Low birth-weight Childhood injuries Deficient immunisation Disability/sickness support Mortality (life expectancy) Psychiatric hospital admissions Psychiatric patients in community care Suicide	Confirmed child maltreatment Criminal convictions Prison admissions Domestic Violence	Unskilled workers Unemployment Long term unemployment Dependency ratio Low mean taxable income Computer use Internet access	Non-attendance at pre-school Incomplete education (17-24 years) Early school leaving of local population Post-schooling qualifications

* nb: This table outlines the 27 indicators used in the research. Not all jurisdictions had available data across all indicators. For example, Victoria only has available data for 24 of the 27 indicators.

This information can be used to look at geographically based early intervention and prevention strategies to address homelessness or the risk of homelessness.

4.5   Housing: Availability, Affordability, Appropriateness

Catholic Social Services Australia can add weight to the range of other service providers recommending that the Government must find ways to increase the supply of public and community housing, as well as improving access to affordable private rental housing. The Government's injection of funding to public housing via the *A Place to Call Home Strategy* is certainly a welcome measure as is the National Rental Affordability Scheme and the Housing Affordability Fund. It remains to be seen whether or not some of these policy measures will be adequate to meet demand for public housing supply within broader housing market pressures.

---

[25] Vinson, T. "Dropping off the Edge: the distribution of disadvantage in Australia" – A Report of Jesuit Social Services and Catholic Social Services Australia, 2007.

[26] Vinson, T. "Dropping off the Edge: the distribution of disadvantage in Australia" – A Report of Jesuit Social Services and Catholic Social Services Australia, 2007, pp. 9-22.

We cannot reduce homelessness if we do not have the necessary housing. One of the leading models in the world for responding to chronic homelessness – the Housing First Model – suggests the most important element in implementing a Housing First program is the adequate supply of affordably housing options. "This makes the implementation of affordable housing strategies in cities that want to implement 'Housing First' absolutely obligatory."[27]

But in Australia, where public/community housing is available, Catholic Social Services Australia can also reflect the experience of those people in our services accessing public and community housing who report that the housing that is currently available frequently does not meet the criteria enshrined within the UN Right to Adequate Housing. In particular, recurrent themes concerning the unsuitability of the location (includes safety aspects); the lack of access to services, facilities, infrastructure and materials; lack of affordability; lack of accessibility; lack of habitability; and, lack of cultural adequacy. The 'Housing First' model also identifies these criteria as essential for assisting people to learn to live independently.

4.6   Research and Data Collection

The absence of data on homelessness in Australia, which reflects not only a complete picture of homelessness in Australia but a timely one provides some challenges to the setting of targets and maintenance and monitoring of homelessness objectives. It is also important to note that these data issues are not unique to Australia and are also the subject of robust discussion in the United States and Europe concerning the measurement of homeless people.[28]

Therefore, it will be crucial for the White Paper on Homelessness to set out a research strategy aiming for a more accurate and timely measure of homelessness in this country. Further, the introduction of a significant longitudinal study into homelessness in Australia will be essential to tracking long term effectiveness. If one of the aims of the Federal Government is to achieve sustainable housing options for people who are homeless and/or at risk of homelessness then a national research study of this design will be crucial.

In addition, what definitions of homelessness are used and how homelessness is measured will be important characteristics of research design. For example the Personal Support Program (PSP), funded by the Department of Employment, Education and Workplace Relations (DEEWR), has a fairly high number of participants who are homeless or at risk of homelessness. However, in terms of the data that DEEWR collects concerning PSP clients there would be some concerns as to how accurate a figure on homelessness among the client group would be.

People in the PSP client group are often in and out of unstable accommodation. These clients may actually be 'in' accommodation at the time of assessment but due to the long waitlists that have characterised the programme, some clients do not get the support they need to maintain their accommodation/secure more stable accommodation and are often homeless before they actually get access to assistance.

Therefore, if DEEWR data is relying on assessed barrier codes for their measure of homelessness then this would only measure those clients who were homeless **at the time** of assessment. To provide a clearer measure of homelessness among PSP clients it would be necessary to incorporate other reports submitted by service providers along the continuum of service delivery which would indicate the state of a person's housing – when it had changed.

---

[27] Reynolds, F. (2007 Churchill Fellow) A Report to the Winston Churchill Memorial Trust of Australia: "To Examine programs that assist vulnerable and complex chronically homeless people", 31 January 2008, p. 40

[28] Reynolds, F. (2007 Churchill Fellow) A Report to the Winston Churchill Memorial Trust of Australia: "To Examine programs that assist vulnerable and complex chronically homeless people", 31 January 2008.

Further to this, it is important to acknowledge that these larger scale projects are often designed to provide a quantitative analysis of homelessness – looking at cause and effect – with measurement a key objective. Whilst important – it is sometimes difficult to capture the qualitative 'human' element or dimension of being homeless or at risk of homelessness.

To this end, it would also be useful to introduce a Homelessness Innovation Fund that provides continual and ongoing opportunity for research into programs responding to homelessness. If the response to homelessness in Australia is to be flexible and adaptable – this will see the emergence of a range of program methodologies which should have Federally funded provision for research and analysis. Should this be realised, Catholic Social Services Australia also recommends the establishment of a national clearinghouse for the purpose of disseminating research in the area of homelessness and establishing models of best practice.

Catholic Social Services Australia also recommends *Dropping off the Edge: the distribution of disadvantage in Australia* as a sound basis for the special analysis and monitoring of disadvantage.

4.7   Skill shortages

Due to the low levels of unemployment in this country the social services industry is also increasingly under strain to meet the human resourcing levels required to deliver services. This is in part due to the huge growth of demand on social services in recent times a trend, which according to the experts is set to continue. According to the Industry Skills' Council's recent Environmental Scan 2008 for the community services and health industries 24 per cent of all new workforce growth will be from community services and health to 2012, growing at a rate of 3 per cent per year or 170,000 jobs. For the last two years the community services and health industries have been identified as requiring the fastest rate of workforce growth in the following five years.[29]

Catholic Social Services Australia's members are already beginning to canvass the international marketplace to attract staff.

As a national network having a strong presence in regional and rural Australia, Catholic Social Services Australia can report that this is having severe servicing ramifications in regional, rural and remote areas of this country.

The White Paper must respond to two issues in particular in relation to staffing and resourcing:

> (v) in developing a plan to address homelessness in this country the current social services workforce and its capacity to deal with any growth in demand for services should be a key consideration;

> (vi) a recruitment and skills development strategy should be implemented to ensure the existence of a workforce equipped to deal with the many and complex needs of the people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness. This must appropriately reflect strategic expectations of service delivery and the objectives laid out in the White Paper.

4.8   Pay parity

Another factor impacting on the recruiting capacity of not-for-profit agencies such as the members of Catholic Social Services Australia is the issue of parity between our agencies and the government and commercial sectors. Therefore, real wage funding should be a major component of Commonwealth, State/Territory funding arrangements for all social services.

---

[29] Industry Skills Council, "Environmental Scan 2008, Community Services and Health, Industry Skills Council", p. 5 available at http://www.cshisc.com.au/docs/upload/Environmental-Scan-Version-2-28-April-2008.pdf

4.9   Adequately resourced program response mechanisms

SAAP's inability to deal with demand is fundamentally a resourcing issue – not a service delivery issue.

If the Government is looking towards mainstream services to support a national response to homelessness it must provide funding for more services. The 2008 ACOSS Community Sector Survey which showed that more than 40 per cent of community services turned away people who were eligible for support.[30] The survey was broader than homelessness services but it clearly illustrates that demand currently outstrips service availability significantly.

To ensure that we do not fail homeless people in Australia, responding to the issue of homelessness in Australia will require a major injection of resources to directly related homelessness services (including SAAP) as well as the mainstream services required to address the underlying causes of homelessness for homeless people or those at risk of homelessness. If the Government is not prepared to invest the finances needed to realistically assist people then it will need to be realistic about the objectives and goals it sets out in the White Paper as well as the expectations it places on the programs and the agencies delivering those services.

---

[30] ACOSS 2008, Australian Community Sector Survey, p2