Foundations for change – Homelessness in NSW

Discussion paper

Sep 2016

NSW GOVERNMENT

Minister's Foreword

Having a safe place to call home is something many of us take for granted. Every night many people in NSW are faced with the sad reality of being homeless – sleeping in shelters, in overcrowded temporary housing, sleeping rough and couch surfing.

Sadly, there are many paths to homelessness including domestic and family violence, severe and chronic mental health issues, unemployment and relationship breakdowns, and drug and alcohol abuse. Leaving out of home care, hospital, prison and juvenile justice facilities also all too often leads to homelessness. Experiencing homelessness is traumatic and deserves a compassionate response.

Specialist homelessness services are increasingly being contacted when other systems fail to address one or more of the causes of homelessness. So increasingly our services have to deal with crisis, rather than prevention. This needs to change.

The NSW Government's focus on community-wide early intervention and prevention is clear in our priorities for youth and domestic and family violence. There is new budget funding of $57 million for initiatives to expand assistance in the private rental market (including for women escaping domestic violence, homeless young people and homeless veterans).

In inner-city Sydney, we are focusing our efforts on housing more people who are sleeping rough and linking them to supports and medical services that will change their lives. We're achieving this through better collaboration between street-based outreach services (like Mission Australia and Neami), NSW Department of Family and Community Services, NSW Police, NSW Health and the City of Sydney.

Other new initiatives are also making a difference. Our 'pop up' housing offices are linking people to services, temporary accommodation and housing assistance, while our free mobile laundries and shower services are helping restore dignity to people who are sleeping rough.

Despite all we have done – there is still much to do. Opportunities across government to collaborate to prevent homelessness by getting to root causes earlier or stopping them altogether is a priority.

We also need your ideas on how we can collaborate to get better outcomes. Breaking the cycle of disadvantage and tackling homelessness is and should be a critical focus for all of our community.

Brad Hazzard
Minister for Family and Community Services
Minister for Social Housing

Contents

1 Introduction

A new strategy on homelessness

Foundations for Change – Homelessness in NSW aims to engage a wide range of organisations and individuals to strengthen collective action and develop a new strategy for reducing homelessness. This strategy aims to broaden the conversation about what homelessness means and how we can prevent it.

Going forward, the system – government, the private and community sectors – must collaborate far more comprehensively and proactively to address homelessness. This new strategy will bring a much stronger focus to the prevention of homelessness, not just the managing of it. Importantly, the strategy will create a framework for collective action across all levels of government, non-government sectors and the community to ensure:

● fewer people experience homelessness

● people in NSW find adequate and secure places to live, and individual needs are assessed to ensure socially and culturally appropriate outcomes

● people are empowered to tackle the underlying issues that put them at risk of homelessness.

This new focus is supported by demonstrated projects under the NSW Homelessness Action Plan 2009–2014, which showed the potential of early intervention and prevention approaches. The evaluation evidence highlights the need to strengthen the focus on identifying people and families at risk of homelessness, particularly in mainstream services.[1] [2]

Specialist homelessness services, despite increased demand, are making a difference by moving from a predominantly crisis-driven response to an integrated service system with services working together effectively to provide support.

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1 AHURI Research Synthesis Service (May 2013) *Homelessness Action Plan – summary of evaluation findings*
2 www.housing.nsw.gov.au/help-with-housing/homelessness/homelessness-action-plan-and-national-partnership-agreement-evaluation-reports

To strengthen the efficiency and effectiveness of services across the homelessness spectrum (including prevention, early intervention and crisis response) we need to:

- create fit for purpose pathways into housing
- harness community and corporate engagement to prevent and reduce homelessness
- ensure better exit planning from government services and facilities
- empower people through education, training and employment
- embed early intervention and prevention approaches
- put people at the centre of responding to homelessness
- strengthen collaboration particularly between government agencies, and also with all stakeholders in the community
- build effective referral pathways and processes
- use data to improve services.

Alongside this, *Future Directions for Social Housing in NSW* has delivered a strategy for increasing social housing supply, improving opportunities for social housing clients and providing a better social housing experience for clients.

The NSW Government recognises the importance of a national approach to homelessness. With the National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness due to expire in June 2017, NSW is working with the Australian Government and other states and territories to establish future policy and funding arrangements for homelessness. This strategy will help inform NSW's position.

As you read further, you will learn more about what the NSW Government is doing and planning to tackle homelessness. You are encouraged to consider and respond to these ideas, as well as provide your own feedback, with a view to building on the good work already underway to prevent and respond to homelessness.

Submissions should be sent to: homelessness.strategy@facs.nsw.gov.au by 5pm on Friday 28 October 2016.

n.b. The closing date for feedback was extended from 14 October on 29 September 2016.

2 Homelessness factors

Homelessness is, to me, something that people experience when they don't have anywhere to call a home, as simple as that (Emily, 24 years old)[3]

Anybody can experience homelessness. It is often a symptom of other social problems like poverty, unemployment and shortages of affordable housing. People are at a higher risk of homelessness when several issues intersect, such as domestic and family violence, trauma, mental illness, drug and alcohol problems and financial stresses.

Broader macro-economic factors also influence homelessness – particularly housing affordability and unemployment. NSW has some of Australia's most competitive housing markets. In NSW in 2013-14, around 50% of lower income households with a mortgage were experiencing mortgage stress, while around 75% of lower income households that were renting were experiencing rental stress.[4]

High housing costs and the resultant **mortgage and rental stress for low income households** are key drivers of homelessness.

IN NSW IN 2013-14:

AROUND

50%

of lower income households with a mortgage were experiencing mortgage stress

Source: Survey of Income and Housing, 2013-14, ABS

AROUND

75%

of lower income renter households were experiencing rental stress

IN 2014-15 OVER

25%

of specialist homelessness services clients said housing stress was a factor in them needing support

Source: 2014-15 NSW specialist homelessness services data, AIHW

An increasingly unaffordable private rental market and fewer social housing vacancies have also contributed to growth in the social housing waiting list, **which has now reached 60,000 households**

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3 Wolfshoenrdl, M (2016) '*They spit at you with their eyes' – Experiences of homelessness in NSW*, Public Interest Advocacy Centre

4 *ABS Survey of Income and Housing 2013-14*

In 2014-15, over a quarter of specialist homelessness services' clients said housing stress was a factor in them needing support. The high cost of the private rental market and fewer social housing vacancies also contributed to growth in the waitlist for social housing, which has now reached 60,000 households.[5]

The shortage of affordable housing also contributes to bottlenecks in the homelessness system. When people struggle to find sustainable affordable housing, they need to stay in crisis accommodation for prolonged periods.

Income levels and labour market conditions can also influence homelessness. For example, a 1% increase in the unemployment rate raises the likelihood of homelessness entry by 1%.[6]

5 *Future Directions for Social Housing in NSW*

6 Johnson, G., Scutella, R., Tseng, Y. P. and Wood, G. (2015b) *Examining the relationship between structural factors, individual characteristics, and homelessness*, AHURI Positioning Paper No. 161, Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute, Melbourne

3 Homelessness in NSW

- On Census night in 2011, there were 28,192 people who were homeless in NSW – around one in every 250 people.
- Of these, 2,205 people (or 7.8%) were of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander descent.
- Young people are also overrepresented in this data:
  - 37.5% of people experiencing homelessness are aged between 0 and 24 years old.
  - One quarter of the people experiencing homelessness are aged between 12 and 24 but only 16.7% of the population is in this age range in the NSW population.

- Homelessness in NSW increased by 20% between the 2006 and 2011 Census counts.
- During 2014-15 specialist homelessness services supported 48,262 people:
  - 27,889 were female (58%)
  - 20,362 were male (42%)
  - 24,617 were under 25 (51%), including 10,730 under 15 year olds (22%) and 13,887 young people aged 15-24 years (29%)
  - 11,925 were Aboriginal (25%)

- Of people accessing specialist homelessness services in 2014-15:
  - 21,635 were homeless on presentation (45%)
  - 20,881 were at risk of homeless on presentation (43%)
  - 5,746 homelessness status was unknown on presentation (12%)

- The primary reasons given by people for seeking help from specialist homelessness services were:
  - housing crises (22%)
  - domestic and family violence (20%)
  - financial difficulties (11%)
  - inadequate or inappropriate dwelling conditions (8%)
  - relationship/family breakdown (7%)
  - previous accommodation ended (6%)
  - housing affordability stress (5%)
  - other reasons (21%)

4 Future opportunities

In 2016-17, the NSW Government will spend $188 million on specialist homelessness services that will respond to around 58,000 people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness.

Effective action on homelessness relies on service systems working together across prevention, early intervention, crisis and transitional responses.

Targeted action by mainstream service systems can impact homelessness – especially by identifying risks and addressing the underlying causes of homelessness.

Taking a whole of government approach to homelessness is recognised as the way forward in other jurisdictions. The evaluation of Canada's Homelessness Partnering Strategy emphasised the importance of agencies at all levels of government working together and building local partnerships with community organisations.[7]

The UK Government is also working towards integrating its service system to prevent homelessness and drive local responses to people at risk of homelessness.[8]

A homelessness strategy with a common vision will guide a more integrated service system and better outcomes. Guiding principles for further reform and investment in tackling homelessness in NSW include:

- prevention starts with mainstream services building protective factors to decrease risk
- early intervention can prevent homelessness
- collective effort to ensure integrated systems and coordinated approaches to reduce homelessness
- we will build on social housing, mental health, and domestic and family violence reforms
- non-government sectors and the community will play an important role.

Discussion questions

- How can government and non government agencies build on previous NSW homelessness initiatives and plans to create a robust strategy to prevent and reduce homelessness in NSW?

- What are the key outcomes the homelessness system should deliver and what outcomes can it influence?

- What role can the corporate sector, philanthropists and other people in the community play to help reduce homelessness?

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7 Employment and Social Development Canada (2014) *Summative Evaluation of the Homelessness Partnering Strategy,* Canada Government

8 Department for Communities and Local Government (2012) *Making every contact count, A joint approach to preventing homelessness*, UK Government

People in NSW find adequate and secure places to live, and individual needs are assessed to ensure socially and culturally appropriate outcomes

Creating pathways into housing

Access to affordable housing can prevent homelessness and can provide a pathway out of homelessness.

The NSW Government is taking action to create pathways into housing, including:

- delivering *Future Directions for Social Housing in NSW* which will increase the supply of social and affordable housing in NSW and increase investment in private rental products

- delivering the Social and Affordable Housing Fund which will deliver access to 3,000 additional social and affordable homes over four years. People living in these homes will receive support to become more independent and, where feasible, move out of social housing

- increasing the number of households successfully transitioning out of social housing - a State Priority

- reducing youth homelessness by increasing the proportion of young people moving from specialist homelessness services to long term accommodation - a Premier's Priority

- increasing housing supply by delivering 50,000 new housing approvals each year - a State Priority

- investing $25 million over the next four years in the Staying Home Leaving Violence program to ensure women and children experiencing domestic or family violence can stay safely in their family home or a home of their choice

- investing $22 million in Start Safely to provide short to medium-term financial help for people escaping domestic and family violence.

Potential opportunities to create better pathways into housing include:

- investigating planning opportunities to increase the supply of affordable housing

- investing in new social and affordable housing through Future Directions (Social and Affordable Housing Fund and Communities Plus)

- boosting private rental products to support households to access and sustain private rental tenancies

- increasing access to housing for people who are sleeping rough

- 'housing first' response to tackle chronic homelessness

- increasing housing options to support women and children experiencing domestic and family violence to transition out of crisis.

Discussion questions

- Are there circumstances where it is more difficult to link people to a suitable housing option? What are the barriers?
- In addition to increasing housing supply, what actions are needed to improve access to housing for people experiencing homelessness and how can the access system for social housing be more responsive to their needs?
- What different supports or tenancy management approaches could help keep people at risk of homelessness in their homes?
- How can different housing options be better linked to other supports?

Harnessing community and corporate engagement to prevent and reduce homelessness

Homelessness is a social problem and our communities can make a difference. Many community members are already actively tackling homelessness and there are opportunities to build on these initiatives.

The NSW Government's social impact investment policy is a framework for bringing together non-government sector innovation and capital to deliver better results for vulnerable people.

Non-government sectors – including financiers, community housing providers and developers – are also leading some of this thinking, including working together to investigate potential investment models for new social and affordable housing.

The NSW Federation of Community Housing Providers has recently proposed an industry-led Affordable Housing Intermediary to help the sector access more efficient sources of funding for affordable housing. The Affordable Housing Working Group, established by the Council on Federal Financial Relations (comprising the Commonwealth and State/Territory Treasurers), is also considering an intermediary as an option and is due to report to the Council of Australian Governments by the end of this year.

Discussion questions

- What needs to change to get greater private sector involvement in delivering social and affordable homes?
- How can the strategy help engage the corporate sector and philanthropists with the issue of homelessness and better link their expertise and funds to help reduce it?
- How can the strategy help services, the corporate sector and philanthropists work together to make a difference?

Better exit planning

Leaving statutory care, juvenile justice, correctional centres or being discharged from mental health or medical facilities can place people at risk of homelessness. Strengthening exit planning for people leaving institutions can minimise the risk of homelessness.

The NSW Government is improving exit planning for people leaving institutions, including:

● committing $40 million over four years to youth homelessness initiatives that adopt an investment approach and prioritise young people leaving statutory care who are at high risk of homelessness

● establishing the Funded Partnership Initiative to fund non-government services to provide accommodation and transitional supports for people leaving prison to assist re-entry into the community.

Potential opportunities to prevent exits into homelessness include:

● starting exit planning as early as possible and engaging other services in the plan

● establishing exit plans that reflect the client's goals

● embedding a culture of homelessness prevention in how exit plans are developed

● linking people exiting institutions to housing pathways through exit planning

● engaging other services in exit planning to make sure clients get the support they need to move to independence.

Discussion questions

● How can exit planning and pathways into housing be better connected?

● How can people at risk of homelessness be better engaged in their exit plans?

People are empowered to tackle the underlying issues that put them at risk of homelessness

Empowering people through education, training and employment to prevent homelessness

Education, training and employment can reduce the risk of homelessness. We are preventing homelessness by working with young people to ensure that they complete year 12 and have pathways into employment, and by supporting unemployed people back into work.

NSW Government initiatives include:

- Premier's Priority to improve education results
- State Priority to improve Aboriginal education outcomes
- fee-free scholarships for young people (aged 15-17) in out-of-home care and young people (aged 18-30) who have previously been in care
- support payments to foster, relative and kinship carers to help young people in out-of-home care complete the HSC or equivalent after they turn 18
- expansion of scholarships for students living in social housing
- implementation of the Wellbeing Framework for Schools across all public schools to improve student engagement and wellbeing
- Supported Students, Successful Students initiative, which provides additional school counselling services and flexible wellbeing resources to support students and their families
- Premier's Priority to create 150,000 new jobs by 2019
- increased employment support, particularly for young people through the Smart, Skilled and Hired program
- identification of youth unemployment as a priority for social impact investment.

Potential further opportunities to empower people include:

- maintaining connections to schools for young people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness
- linking people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness with education, training and employment support
- improving available supports for building skills in retaining employment, and providing supports to address challenges for new employees in the workplace.

Discussion questions

- How can employment initiatives be linked with other initiatives to support housing and homelessness outcomes?
- Where are there opportunities to improve how employment, training and education services help prevent homelessness?

Putting people at the centre of responding to homelessness

People experiencing homelessness highlight the difference it makes in their lives when someone takes the time to understand the problem and is willing to help them. This doesn't need to be in a homeless service. However, a negative experience can set them back and prevent them from asking for help in the future.

Potential opportunities to put people at the centre of responding to homelessness could include:

- changing perceptions of homelessness across the service system
- building trust between clients and services
- increasing skills in the mainstream workforce, especially around trauma-informed practice
- shifting responses from programmatic to person-centred with the person fully engaged in decisions about their needs
- ensuring that the needs of other family members are understood and addressed
- making every contact count and encouraging accountability and ownership of solutions across the mainstream system.

Discussion questions

- How can the strategy encourage and support people working in the mainstream system to find solutions for people at risk of homelessness?
- What are the barriers limiting services from working with people to get them the support they say they need?

Embedding early intervention and prevention

The NSW Homelessness Action Plan evaluation demonstrates the effectiveness of early intervention and prevention approaches to homelessness. There is also a growing Australian and international evidence base which shows how service systems can make savings by intervening earlier to divert people from homelessness or stopping people becoming entrenched in homelessness. People experiencing homelessness and people at risk of homelessness are more likely than the general population to use other mainstream service systems. These services are well placed to identify risk factors and to intervene early or prevent homelessness.

Figure 1: Framing the homelessness system
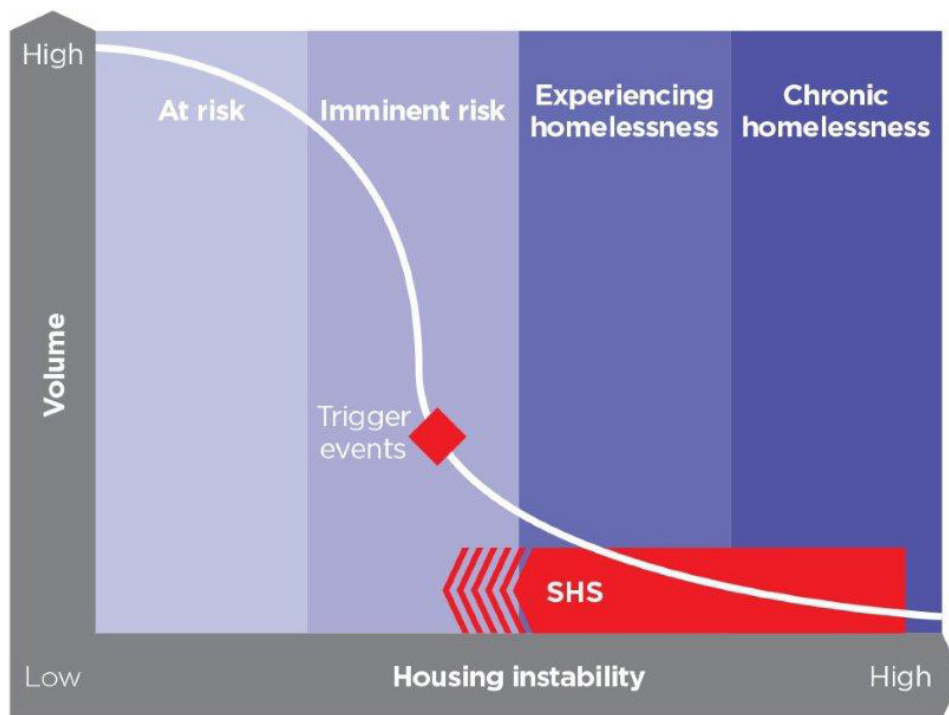
Source: Developed by AHURI based on Culhane, Park et al. 2011

The NSW Government is embedding early intervention and prevention approaches, including:

- investing $190 million over four years to help a range of organisations deliver intensive therapeutic programs to prevent out-of-home care entries, increase exits and improve placement stability for children in care
- redesigning the service system through the Targeted Early Intervention Reform program to ensure that families get the support they need and do not reach crisis point
- implementing mental health reform to strengthen prevention and early intervention services for people at risk of developing, or who are experiencing, mental illness
- trialing projects in secondary schools to identify and address issues and risks for young people, such as disengagement from school, homelessness, mental health, and drug and alcohol use.

Potential opportunities to strengthen early intervention and prevention in mainstream services include:

- focusing on the client's housing situation in case management practice, to address any housing needs early on
- early warning indicators of homelessness in mainstream services' risk assessment tools
- defining the roles and responsibilities of mainstream services in responding to homelessness risk factors
- establishing clear referral processes for mainstream services with clients at risk of homelessness
- developing coordinated case planning approaches with dedicated resources in mainstream services for vulnerable groups
- considering the potential impact of new policies and programs on homelessness to minimise unintended consequences
- providing tailored, wrap around support to people at risk of homelessness
- ensuring mainstream service models are culturally appropriate and locally tailored to respond to diverse client need.

Discussion questions

- Recognising that there are many factors which can increase the risk of homelessness, how can services get better at identifying these people earlier and helping them to get support in place?
- Where are there program opportunities to improve the prevention of homelessness?
- What system-wide changes are required to focus on the prevention of homelessness?

Strengthening collaboration

Homelessness is often the result of a range of interrelated issues. Effective responses to complex problems rely on collaboration between services. Collaboration can be challenging, especially when the responsibilities of different service systems are unclear.

The NSW Government is taking action to strengthen collaboration, including through the:

- **NSW Domestic and Family Violence Blueprint:** creates more accessible, flexible, person-centred service responses that are better coordinated across mainstream and specialist services to make the best use of government investment
- **Domestic and Family Violence Innovation Fund:** for prevention, early intervention and crisis responses that support the efforts of specialist domestic and family violence services and refuges
- **Mental health reform plan:** builds on the existing capacity of different parts of the mental health service system to work in an integrated way and supports partnerships to strengthen responses for people with mental illness. The plan also includes initiatives bringing together accommodation and psychosocial supports to help people receiving long-term hospital care live in the community and sustain their tenancies.

Potential opportunities to strengthen collaboration include:

- strengthening local leadership of multi-agency approaches to increase collaboration
- removing barriers that prevent services from working collaboratively and flexibly
- agreeing on principles to guide collaboration at a local level
- improving case coordination to leverage resources from mainstream services
- strengthening cross-agency information sharing arrangements
- improving the process for gaining consent from vulnerable people to share information.

Discussion questions

- Where are local services and stakeholders implementing a collaborative approach to prevention and early intervention that is making a difference?
- Would a system wide definition of homelessness, prevention, early intervention and crisis responses help drive more collaborative approaches?
- What are the barriers to collaboration between sectors and how can they be addressed?
- Where has coordinated effort been used to prevent homelessness? What worked and what didn't?
- How can the NSW Government and mainstream agencies make their services available to people experiencing homelessness in ways that are accessible, dignified for the individual, and provided in a way that it is not re-traumatising to the person?

Building effective referral pathways and processes

Effective referral pathways ensure people get the right support at the right time.

The NSW Government is taking action to build more effective referral pathways and processes, including Link2Home.

Link2Home is the statewide homelessness information and referral telephone service. It provides:

- information about local services
- an assessment to determine what kind of help is needed
- referral to appropriate specialist homelessness services, support services, temporary accommodation and/or other services.

Potential opportunities to strengthen referral pathways and processes include:

- developing local and statewide referral systems that build on established good practice
- establishing agreed referral practices and pathways into mainstream services and homelessness services at a local level
- improving understanding of local service systems
- embedding a culture of warm referrals in mainstream services to make sure clients are supported by other services.

Discussion questions

- What examples are there of effective local referral processes which engage a broad range of sectors and mainstream services?
- How can referrals between other sectors and systems, such as primary health networks, be improved?

Using data to improve services

Better data on homelessness would help mainstream service systems to plan services based on demand. Data can also help mainstream services identify opportunities for prevention and early intervention.

We are improving the management of specialist homelessness services client data through a Client Information Management System. This system supports consistent practice for assessment, referrals and information sharing, and will prevent clients from having to retell their story each time they access a service.

Improved data collection will improve understanding of how people access specialist homelessness supports and the broader social housing system. Better and more timely data collection will also facilitate improved performance reporting at both program and provider level.

The NSW Government is also using data to improve services across the whole of government by developing a NSW Human Services Outcomes Framework. The Framework will provide opportunities to understand how all services can work together to enable the systematic tracking and monitoring of client outcomes across services and sectors.

Potential opportunities to improve the use of data include:

- changing data collected by mainstream services to include data on risk factors, and pathways into and out of homelessness
- sharing of data by mainstream services to improve the understanding of homelessness
- better use of the evidence base on the impact of homelessness on mainstream services to inform service planning and resource allocation.

Discussion questions

- What data being collected by agencies could be shared to improve responses to homelessness?
- Is there any scope for reconfiguring services based on this data?

5 Groups at higher risk of experiencing homelessness

Some groups are at particular risk of homelessness. These groups are not exclusive and individuals may experience a range of risk factors.

Children and young people

The major drivers of homelessness for children and young people are:

- domestic and family violence
- low incomes and difficulty accessing affordable housing
- having been in or recently left out-of-home-care

Young people who do not have strong support networks are particularly vulnerable when in housing crisis.

Intergenerational trauma, violence at home, disengagement from school and other complex issues can also lead to mental health and/or drug and alcohol problems for some young people, further adding to their vulnerability.

Support services from health, education, child protection and criminal justice systems can prevent homelessness. However, services are not available in some parts of NSW and some do not have capacity, due to high demand. Services can also miss prevention opportunities if unaware of homelessness risks.

Australian research indicates that on average, young people aged 15-24 who access specialist homelessness services cost the Commonwealth and State health systems combined $8,505 per person each year, and $9,363 across the criminal justice system.[9]

9 MacKenzie, D., Flatau, P., Steen, A. and Thielking, M. (2016) *The cost of youth homelessness in Australia*, Research Briefing, Swinburne University, University of Western Australia, Charles Sturt University, The Salvation Army, Mission Australia, Anglicare Canberra and Goulburn, Melbourne

Discussion questions

- Where are the opportunities to better identify and respond to the warning signs that young people are at risk of homelessness?

- How can the strategy strengthen services to ensure young people are engaged in the services they access and that services are tailored to the needs of children and young people?

- How can services better work together and engage young people at risk of homelessness to keep them in education, training or employment?

- How can services engage with young people to help them into appropriate housing?

In 2014-15:

24,617

WERE UNDER 25

10,730

WERE UNDER 15 YEARS,
including 1,165 children who said they were living alone when they came to the service

13,887

WERE 15-24 YEARS,
including 10,700 who said they were living alone when they came to the service

Source: 2014-15 NSW specialist homelessness services data, AIHW

Society's view of homelessness is a person on the street... They don't see it as a woman living in a refuge (or) the person who's been sleeping on someone's couch for three months (Samantha, 33 years old) [10]

Family violence and homelessness

In 2014-15:

17,350

people accessing specialist homelessness services were
EXPERIENCING DOMESTIC AND FAMILY VIOLENCE

9,955
WERE FEMALES OVER 15

5,478
WERE CHILDREN UNDER 15,
either presenting with a parent or alone

Almost 50% of the 17,350 people were seeking crisis accommodation and 65% needed domestic and family violence counselling and support.

Source: 2014-15 NSW specialist homelessness services data, AIHW

Domestic and family violence is a significant trigger for homelessness. It is the main reason women and children leave their homes in Australia.

Systematic and prolonged abuse can leave survivors and their children isolated from support, such as social networks and financial resources.

People may also stay in abusive relationships longer when they do not have access to housing services to assist them to leave or to remove the perpetrator. This may be because services are not geographically convenient or require engagement that doesn't suit their needs.

The NSW Government is helping women and children at risk of homelessness. The Staying Home Leaving Violence program prevents homelessness by removing perpetrators from the home, while the Start Safely subsidy provides short to medium-term financial help to secure private rental accommodation.

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10 Wolfshoenrdl, M (2016) *'They spit at you with their eyes' – Experiences of homelessness in NSW*, Public Interest Advocacy Centre

Evidence suggests that programs supporting people escaping domestic violence are highly cost effective.[11] Australian research into women's services shows they can achieve reductions in costs of approximately $9,295 per client shared across Commonwealth and State health systems. This research also found services contributed to savings in the justice system.[12]

Discussion questions

- How can we build on Staying Home Leaving Violence and Start Safely, to address the risk of homelessness for people experiencing domestic and family violence, including supporting women and children to remain in their home?

- How can the Safer Pathways rollout be used to ensure early intervention for people at risk of homelessness?

11 Zaretzky, K. and Flatau, P. (2013) *The cost of homelessness and the net benefit of homelessness programs: a national study*, AHURI Final Report No. 218, Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute, Melbourne

12 Zaretzky, K. and Flatau, P. (2013) *The cost of homelessness and the net benefit of homelessness programs: a national study*, AHURI Final Report No. 218, Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute, Melbourne

Aboriginal people and homelessness

IN 2014-15, OF THE 48,262 NSW SPECIALIST HOMELESSNESS SERVICES CLIENTS:

11,925 (25%)

Identified as **Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander descent**

OF THE 1,680 CLIENTS EXPERIENCING REPEAT HOMELESSNESS:

461 (27%)

identified as **Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander descent**

OF THE 17,350 CLIENTS EXPERIENCING DOMESTIC AND FAMILY VIOLENCE:

4,636 (27%)

identified as **Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander descent**

Source: 2014-15 NSW specialist homelessness services data, AIHW

Aboriginal people are more likely to experience homelessness due to systemic and generational disadvantage.

Homelessness is closely linked to Aboriginal disadvantage and further affects the social and economic challenges faced by Aboriginal people. Aboriginal people are disproportionately represented in the risk factors for homelessness:

- unemployment rates among Aboriginal people are around three times that of non-Aboriginal Australians
- Aboriginal young people are more likely to be unemployed than their non-Aboriginal peers
- the average income of Aboriginal people is 60% of the national average
- home ownership is significantly lower among Aboriginal people
- Aboriginal women are more likely to experience domestic and family violence
- Aboriginal young people represent around a third of children and young people in out-of-home care
- Aboriginal people are more likely to be imprisoned
- Aboriginal young people are detained at a notably higher rate than non-Aboriginal young people.
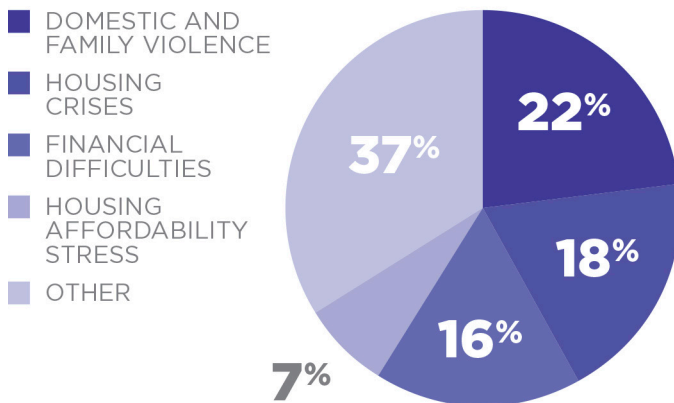
The strength of family and cultural connections is a resilience factor for Aboriginal people at risk of homelessness. However, this can lead to overcrowding, 'couch-surfing' and other, more hidden forms of homelessness. Aboriginal people accessing services in metropolitan and regional areas (such as health, legal or employment), may become homeless because of the lack of affordable or suitable short to medium term accommodation. The lack of access to culturally appropriate, affordable housing is also a significant risk factor for Aboriginal people. Housing that allows Aboriginal people to participate in communal living and cultural activities is not available in some locations. Homelessness services for Aboriginal people must be culturally competent and, where possible, delivered by specialist Aboriginal services.

Discussion questions

- How can existing services better identify and support Aboriginal people at risk of homelessness?

- How can service systems improve how they engage with Aboriginal people to deliver culturally competent, holistic responses when they are at risk or experiencing homelessness?

Older women and homelessness

In 2014-15, 1,429 women aged 55 and over accessed specialist homelessness services. The most common reasons for seeking help were:

- ■ DOMESTIC AND FAMILY VIOLENCE
- ■ HOUSING CRISES
- ■ FINANCIAL DIFFICULTIES
- ■ HOUSING AFFORDABILITY STRESS
- ■ OTHER

37% 22% 18% 16% 7%

Source: 2014-15 NSW specialist homelessness services data, AIHW

Research shows women are increasingly experiencing homelessness for the first time in later life because of the breakup of a marriage, death of a spouse, retirement-related financial stress and/or mental illness.[13]

Many women are unaware of available support or find it difficult to access support.

With our ageing population, this issue could become more significant over time with significant costs. Older people who fall out of home ownership are also more likely to require ongoing housing assistance.[14]

Discussion questions

- Where are the opportunities to identify and support older women earlier who may be vulnerable and at risk of homelessness?
- How can the aged care system help to divert people from homelessness?

13 Petersen M., Parsell, C., Phillips, R. and White, G. (2014) *Preventing first time homelessness amongst older Australians*, AHURI Final Report No.222, Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute, Melbourne

14 Wood, G., Batterham, D., Cigdem, M. and Mallett, S. (2015) *The structural drivers of homelessness in Australia 2001–11,* AHURI Final Report No. 238, Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute, Melbourne

People have preconceived ideas that homelessness comes out of doing something wrong, or that something is not right with you (Allan, 55 years old) [15]

Rough sleeping and chronic homelessness

Sleeping rough usually begins as a temporary response to being homeless. As homelessness becomes longer term,[16] people are more likely to sleep rough.[17]

People who are sleeping rough face a range of issues that can undermine their mental and physical health and entrench their homelessness, including discrimination, stigma, substance abuse, mental illness (including Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder), and abuse (physical, psychological, sexual or other). These complex problems challenge the service system as a whole, particularly for people entrenched in homelessness who require active, long-term responses. Many also distrust authorities or services following institutional or custodial experiences.[18]

486 rough sleepers were counted in the inner city of Sydney in February 2016, the highest since 2008 and up 121 from the same time the previous year.

Source: City of Sydney Council

A 2015 survey on rough sleepers in Inner Sydney found that:

72%
reported substance abuse

49%
had been the victims of physical, psychological, sexual or other abuse

53%
reported a mental health issue

Source: City of Sydney Council

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15 Wolfshoenrdl, M (2016) *'They spit at you with their eyes' – Experiences of homelessness in NSW*, Public Interest Advocacy Centre

16 Chamberlain, C, Johnson, G and Theobald, J, (2007) *Homelessness in Melbourne: Confronting the Challenge*, RMIT Publishing, Melbourne

17 Homelessness NSW (2016) *Inner City Sydney Registry Week 2015 Report*, February, www.homelessnessnsw.org.au/images/stories/documents/Registry_Week_2015_report.pdf

18 Memmott, P., S. Long, and C. Chambers (2003), *Categories of Indigenous 'homeless' people and good practice responses to their needs*, AHURI Positioning Paper No. 53. , Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute, Melbourne

Chronic homelessness imposes a significant cost, particularly to the health system, and taking action can deliver savings.

Australian research found that men who were provided with temporary accommodation or outreach support, in addition to specialist support services, decreased their use of the Commonwealth and State health systems at an estimated annual saving of $8,222 per person.[19]

Housing First approaches have delivered significantly better housing retention rates than models that require people experiencing chronic homelessness to engage with other support services before being housed.[20]

Discussion questions

- What are the barriers to housing and support providers working together to support a Housing First approach for people sleeping rough?

- What scope is there for new investment models to fund housing and support models for people who are sleeping rough?

- Where are there opportunities to identify people who are sleeping rough and intervene earlier to stop the problem becoming chronic?

19 Mission Australia (2012) *The Michael Project, 2007–2010: new perspectives and possibilities for homeless men*, Mission Australia, Sydney
20 Johnson, Parkinson and Parsell (2012) *Policy shift or program drift? Implementing housing first in Australia*, AHURI

" Homelessness is just in your head but that despair slowly dictates standards of achievement for life (Robert, 60 years old) [21] *"*

Mental illness and homelessness

People experiencing mental illness who are at risk of homelessness tend to be socially isolated and highly stigmatised. People with mental illness experience a range of challenges to keeping their home, including discrimination, low incomes, disrupted income or employment, and unaffordable housing.[22]

People with mental illness cannot always access the support to meet their needs and which could help prevent them from becoming homeless. This is particularly true for young people and people in regional and rural locations.

The effects of mental illness and experience with uncoordinated service systems can prevent people from accessing available supports. Gaps in how services work together to help people transition from hospital back into the community can also contribute to homelessness.

Research shows that people with very complex issues become homeless because the root causes of their issues are not addressed.[23] This is despite many contacts with mainstream services.

IN 2014-15:

15,675

SPECIALIST HOMELESSNESS SERVICES CLIENTS
said they were experiencing **MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES**

46%

said they **NEEDED MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORT**

Source: 2014-15 NSW specialist homelessness services data, AIHW

21 Wolfshoenrdl, M (2016) *'They spit at you with their eyes' – Experiences of homelessness in NSW*, Public Interest Advocacy Centre

22 Beer, A., P. Delfabbro, et al. (2005) *Developing models of good practice in meeting the needs of homeless young people in rural areas,* Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute, Southern Research Centre Melbourne

23 Baldry, E., Dowse, L., McCausland, R. and Clarence, M. (2012) *Lifecourse institutional costs of homelessness for vulnerable groups*, FaHCSIA, Canberra.

Stable housing can promote recovery and the development of informal supports, social inclusion and community belonging.[24]

Research undertaken in NSW into people with mental health disorders and cognitive disabilities estimated life course institutional costs to NSW government agencies ranging from $840,000 to $5.3 million based on 11 case studies.[25] Better ways of working could reduce these costs.

Discussion questions

- What needs to change to stop people living with mental illness from becoming homeless because of the episodic nature of their illness?

- How can the mental health system better keep people at risk of homelessness engaged with their support?

24 Duff, C., S. Loo, and S. Murray (2012) *The role of informal community resources in supporting independent housing for young people recovering from mental illness: key issues for houing policy-makers and practitioners*, AHURI Final Report No. 199. 2012, Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute, Melbourne

25 Baldry, E., Dowse, L., McCausland, R. and Clarence, M. (2012) *Lifecourse institutional costs of homelessness for vulnerable groups*, FaHCSIA, Canberra.

People with disability and homelessness

People with disability have a greater risk of homelessness. However, people with disability are not a uniform group and different disabilities result in different risks.[26] Disability type and severity, combined with mental health issues and their location also affect homelessness pathways.

People with disability and their carers are at a greater risk of homelessness because of low incomes, limited labour market engagement and tight private rental sector capacity.[27]

People with disability can find it difficult to find affordable and appropriate accommodation, and to access support, medication and treatments.[28] The National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) provides an unprecedented opportunity for people with disability to live more independently in housing of their choice. Supporting people to maintain housing is a responsibility shared by the NDIS, mainstream housing and homelessness services, and formal and informal disability support sectors.

Barriers to appropriate, affordable housing include:

- the lack of affordable, accessible, well located and culturally appropriate housing (in social and general housing)
- discrimination
- lack of rental history and references for the private rental system.

The 2011 Census recorded:

1,468

homeless people in NSW needing
ASSISTANCE WITH CORE ACTIVITIES*

UP

8% FROM 2006

*Core activity areas include self-care, mobility and communication.

Source: 2011 Census, ABS

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26 Beer, A., et al. (2012) *Addressing homelessness amongst persons with a disability: identifying and enacting best practice*, The University of Adelaide, Hanover Welfare Services, Melbourne City Mission, The University of Melbourne, Adelaide

27 Beer, A. and D. Faulkner (2008) *The housing careers of people with a disability and carers of people with a disability*, in Research Paper, Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute, Melbourne

28 O'Brien, A., S. Inglis, et al (2002) *Linkages between housing and support – what is important from the perspective of people living with a mental illness*, AHURI Positioning Paper No. 33, Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute, Melbourne

While people with disability are strongly represented in social housing, current policies prioritising applicants in most need can mean that people with disability do not achieve priority status to access suitable accommodation.[29]

Discussion questions

- How can housing, health and disability support services work together to ensure that the risk of homelessness for people with disability is minimised by identifying problems and intervening early?

- How can mainstream housing providers and the NDIS work together to ensure that housing providers have access to services, information and support that will promote the maintenance of successful tenancies in both the public and private housing sectors?

29 Wiesel, I., et al (2015), *Moving to my home: housing aspirations, transitions and outcomes of people with disability*, AHURI Final Report No. 246, Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute, Melbourne

I really need housing. If I don't get housing I will have to stay at my mum's place. Her house is overcrowded, we will start arguing, then I'll take off and get back on drugs and then re-offend ...(Anonymous)[30]

Leaving prison and homelessness

IN 2014-15:

1,385

of specialist homelessness services clients **identified themselves as people exiting from a custodial setting**

33%
were aged between 15 and 24 years old

60%
were aged between 25 and 54 years old

Source: 2014-15 NSW specialist homelessness services data, AIHW

Leaving prison can trigger homelessness. People can lose their homes while in prison or may not be able to return home when released. People leaving prison are also likely to be unemployed making it hard for them to secure housing. People on remand can also be released with little time to arrange alternative housing.

The risk of homelessness after leaving prison is greater for older people, people with a mental illness and people who have become institutionalised. This problem may be more pronounced in the future given the ageing prison population.

People in prison often present with very complex needs, particularly co-existing mental health conditions and drug, alcohol or other substance problems. This group is at high risk of homelessness.

Some prisoners may have limited access to programs and welfare staff to help them plan their release and develop skills for life afterwards. People leaving prison and offenders on community based orders may find it difficult to access affordable housing in the metropolitan areas and regional centres where other support services are available for them. Some prisoners receive temporary assistance to find accommodation when released, but may experience ongoing barriers, including a lack of affordable housing, discrimination, and difficulty accessing employment and mental health services.

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30 Legal Aid NSW, *Aboriginal Women Leaving Custody – Report into Barriers to Housing*

People in prison also sometimes have applications for social housing closed when they cannot respond to correspondence that did not reach them.

Aboriginal women leaving prison are especially vulnerable. They are more likely to have prior experiences of homelessness, mental illness, domestic violence, and drug and alcohol addiction, and are more likely to have fines, debt and face discrimination in the private rental market.

Supporting Aboriginal people back into the community can be challenging. In some cases an Aboriginal community may have concerns about an offender returning, making it difficult to identify an alternative location with accommodation and support. This issue is more pronounced in regional and remote areas of NSW.

The relationship between homelessness and reoffending is not direct or causal but stable housing does appear to have a role to play in reducing re-offending.[31]

Discussion question

● What exit planning strategies and support partners need to be involved to stop people leaving prisons into homelessness?

Culturally and linguistically diverse communities and homelessness

People from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds can be at higher risk of homelessness. Homelessness risk factors such as domestic and family violence, low incomes, exploitative tenancy arrangements, linguistic isolation, elder abuse and overcrowding are particularly impactful in some culturally and linguistically diverse communities. People in these communities may experience challenges in accessing housing.

In some circumstances people may be reluctant to access services, including homelessness services, believing that asking for help will put their immigration status or that of their family at risk. This is particularly an issue where people may be recent arrivals to Australia, are dependent on a spouse or family member for visa sponsorship, or where the provision of accommodation is a condition of visa sponsorship. Similar issues may arise when a person's legal residence in Australia is dependent on employment-based sponsorship or where accommodation is employment based. These situations can keep people in unsafe situations or force them into marginal housing.

Discussion question

● Are there linguistic or cultural barriers to accessing services which could help prevent homelessness?

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31 O'Leary (2013) The role of stable accommodation in reducing recidivism: what does the evidence tell us, Safer Communities

Veterans and homelessness

Research shows homelessness is becoming more common among former Australian Defence Force (ADF) members. In 2009, an estimated 3000 Veterans nationally may have been experiencing homelessness.

Mental illness, especially Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), is one of the main precursors to homelessness for ex-military personnel. Trauma, drug and alcohol abuse, and family breakdowns are also significant drivers.

Symptoms of PTSD can take years to surface. Episodes of homelessness may occur long after post-discharge support is available. The shared responsibilities between state and federal governments and disconnection between some services further complicates addressing this issue.

Discussion questions

- What systemic changes would prevent Veterans and their families from becoming homeless, particularly during the transition from military to civilian life?

- Where are the opportunities to identify and intervene earlier with veterans at risk of homelessness?

IN 2009 APPROXIMATELY

3,000 VETERANS
nationally were
EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS

Source: Department of Veteran's Affairs

A 2015 SURVEY FOUND

8% OF 516 HOMELESS PEOPLE
surveyed in Inner Sydney
IDENTIFIED THEMSELVES AS VETERANS

Source: City of Sydney Council

6 Have your say

The NSW Government looks forward to a collaborative consultation process with stakeholders over the following months. We are seeking comments, feedback and ideas relevant to the issues outlined in this Discussion Paper.

We are particularly interested in hearing about innovation, collaborative approaches and models that have been effective in preventing and reducing homelessness in NSW or in other jurisdictions.

We welcome your submissions and comments, which can be made using one of the following options:

- **on-line**   www.facs.nsw.gov.au/homelessnessstrategy

- **email**   homelessness.strategy@facs.nsw.gov.au

- **post**   Homelessness Strategy Team
Strategic Reform & Policy
Department of Family and Community Services
Locked Bag 10
Strawberry Hills NSW 2012

Submissions close by 5pm on Friday 28 October 2016.

n.b. The closing date for feedback was extended from 14 October on 29 September 2016.