

# Shelter Tasmania

A response to the Australian  
Government's Green Paper -  
'Which Way Home - A new approach  
to Homelessness'

June 2008

Shelter Tasmania is an independent community organisation  
committed to the principle of accessible, affordable,  
appropriate and secure housing for every person and  
the elimination of homelessness



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## Introduction

Shelter Tasmania welcomes the opportunity to respond to the issues raised in the Green Paper and to contribute to the development of the Australian Government's White Paper on homelessness. We would like to applaud the Australian Government for prioritising the tackling of homelessness as a major issue in their first term. The Green Paper has offered an opportunity for consultation and discussion with the Non Government sector and others to have their say on how to reduce and ultimately end homelessness. Shelter's submission reflects the issues raised by the membership endorsed by the Shelter Management Committee

Tasmania has its own set of conditions regarding poverty and disadvantage that present real challenges to reduce and eliminate homelessness. Any response to permanently reducing homelessness has to be set within a broader social inclusion strategy. Homelessness has increased in Tasmania despite economic growth; in fact the same economic growth that is seen as the solution to social disadvantage and inclusion can in fact also cause homelessness for those who do not receive its benefits. In recent years the increase in cost for private rental and the decline in affordable housing options - in particular, public housing levels - can be seen as a major cause of increased homelessness.

The 3 Options put forward in the Green Paper did not, however, receive sector-wide support due to what is seen by Shelter's members as a lack of understanding of the current SAAP system and what it has achieved, as well as a failure to address the need for significant increases in the supply of affordable safe, appropriate housing. Therefore, Shelter Tas supports the submission put forward by Homelessness Australia and the Queensland Shelter submission representing the view of National Shelter with some additional Tasmanian information added.

Since 1985 the primary response to homelessness has been the Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP), funded jointly by the Commonwealth and States but delivered almost entirely through the non-government sector. SAAP has gone through many changes since its inception. Shelter Tas acknowledges at the outset that SAAP has been a good program, unique to Australia, which has provided a sound foundation to respond to homelessness. Australia and Tasmania has been well served by SAAP and whilst the green paper recognised that:

- Long term housing, employment and education for SAAP clients are poor
- There has been a lack of integrated and coordination between crisis and mainstream services, and
- Our mainstream services do not routinely support people who experience homelessness or are at risk

We believe the primary cause of these has been the inability of successive and various Commonwealth, State and Territory governments to prioritise homelessness, provide adequate resources and develop, encourage and deliver in an integrated manner to ensure homelessness is kept to a minimum.

It is misguided to criticise SAAP as a program for not delivering outcomes for which it was never designed or resourced to fulfil. SAAP has been a residual program carrying far above its weight and having to deal by necessity with system failures by mainstream agencies, a shrinking budget in real term, increasing client need and complexity and changes to policy thinking over the past 30 years.

## About Shelter

Shelter Tasmania is an independent not-for-profit housing peak organisation funded by the Department of Health and Human Services as a 'Housing Consumer and Provider Peak Body Service'. Shelter Tasmania is the key body that represents the interests of low to moderate income housing consumers and housing providers across Tasmania.

Shelter's membership consists of a wide range of organisations across Tasmania such as: tenants groups, community housing providers, homelessness and crisis accommodation services, local government, research organisations and a range of individuals and services interested in housing and homelessness issues.

Shelter is an affiliated member of **National Shelter** and is part of a network of organisations representing consumer issues in relation to housing and human rights. The Council of Homeless Persons (Tasmania) is a subcommittee of Shelter. Shelter Management Committee is made up of 12 elected members from across Tasmania. The Management Committee members represent a range of agencies and individuals with a broad knowledge and experience of issues facing people experiencing homelessness and low income housing consumers and housing provision.

Shelter aims to provide an effective Tasmanian voice on homelessness and housing related issues by fulfilling the following objectives:

- To promote and maintain the right of every person to access affordable, safe and secure long term housing that they identify as appropriate to their needs.
- To promote and maintain the right of every person to housing of a quality which enhances people's health, well-being, dignity and life opportunities.
- To promote the benefits of public and community housing in the community and across all levels of government.
- To publish, research, collect and disseminate information on matters relating to the provision of housing, particularly for people on low to moderate incomes.
- To create opportunities to support, establish resource and co-ordinate non-government organisations and agencies with similar interests and objectives to the Association.
- To promote opportunities for members of the community to access housing provision free from discrimination due to age, gender, ethnicity, health status or disability.
- To promote and support consumer and community participation in decision making in relation to their housing and to promote access to avenues of appeal across all housing tenures.

**As part of the National Shelter network, Shelter Tas draws strongly from the Queensland Shelter response to the Green Paper. We would like to acknowledge the work of Queensland Shelter and the Government of Queensland for providing the resources to support such important work, particularly in the absence of funding for National Shelter and varying State arrangements.**

## Tasmanian Context

The Green Paper is looking at National approaches to homelessness and no doubt will take into account the need of flexible responses to homelessness around the country. Tasmania has a range of socio-economic conditions that give this State its own unique challenges to promote social inclusion and reduce the number of people experiencing homelessness.

### Tasmania's Profile

- On Census Night 2006 Tasmania's population was 476,481 (ABS 2007).
- Tasmania has a dispersed population, limited affordable transport with the concentration of essential services in the Hobart, Launceston, Devonport and Burnie areas. (TTPB 2007)
- Tasmanian levels of poverty and disadvantage are considerably higher, with Australia's two poorest electorates (Braddon and Lyons).
- Relative to other States and Territories, Tasmania has a higher proportion of low-income households and welfare dependence.
- Tasmanian households have the lowest median household income when compared to other States and Territories (median household income of \$801 per week compared to \$1 027 nationally)
- More than a third of Tasmanians (36.6%) rely on government pensions and allowances, which makes Tasmania the jurisdiction with the highest dependency rate, well above the national average of 27.7%
- Education outcomes, including retention rates, post-school qualifications and literacy and numeracy levels are the worst nationally.
- Levels of unemployment and under-employment were higher and workforce participation was lower.
- Life expectancy is lower.
- Access to health services measured by waiting lists for public dental care and Medicare bulk-billing rates was the worst Nationally (TasCOSS 2007).

### Housing

**It is important to note that housing affordability is getting worse.** The crisis in affordable housing across Tasmania, leading to increasing numbers of Tasmanians living in stress, has been well researched and documented (Shelter Tas 2007).

- In Tasmania 26,000 households, or 10.6% (Harding et al 2004), are in housing "housing stress" (defined as having to pay over 30% of income in housing cost), with some in "extreme housing stress" paying more than 50% of their income in housing cost.
- The majority (52%) of these stressed households are in the private rental market, and another 36% are in the process of purchasing their own home. Both groups are vulnerable to increasing housing costs.
- A survey undertaken by Shelter Tas (Shelter Tas 2007a) found that all tenants except those in public housing were paying over 30% of their income in rent with some as much as 80%.

### Between May 2000 and May 2007

- House prices in Hobart rose 142%, house prices in Launceston rose 167% and house prices in Burnie rose 88%;
- Rents increased across all types of properties in all regions; and
- Across the State the vacancy rate in the private rental market has fallen to under 3% (REIT 2007).

## Homelessness

- The 2001 Census found that 2,415 (Chamberlain 2001) persons were homeless. This figure was up by 400 from the 1996 census. Another way to measure homelessness is expressed as a rate per 10,000 of the population. In 2001 the rate for Tasmania was 52 per 10,000; in 1996 it was 43 per 10,000. Of the 2,415 people homeless in Tasmania on Census Night in 2001, only 314 people (13%) were staying in services funded through the Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP).
- At the time of writing this report the 2006 census data on homelessness was not yet available.
- Between 2001 and 2005, the number of adults seeking support from crisis housing services rose by 28%, and between 2002 and 2005 the number of children accompanying them rose by 39% (AIHW 2007).
- Shelter's members report increasingly high turn away rates from their services. For instance, Hobart City Mission in the past 6 months turned away 48-65 families who were homeless per month. Hobart Women's Shelter, from 1 July 2007 to 1 October 2007, received 174 requests for accommodation (with 189 accompanying children), but could only accommodate 17 women during that time (Shelter Tas 2007b).
- Research shows that some groups of people are at risk of becoming homeless due to problems with housing because they experience a range of complex issues in addition to being on a low income. These groups include: refugees, people with disabilities, people with serious mental illnesses, older people, indigenous people, young people and children. Existing homelessness and housing services are limited in how they can respond to the additional needs of these groups by resource constraints and by the shortage of affordable housing (Tasmanian Community Sector Call for Change 2007).

## Social Housing – Decline in Public Housing

- According to the Tasmanian Bilateral Agreement 2003-8, there are currently 11,500 public housing stocks housing around 30,000 Tasmanians.
- Between 2001-7, the number of public housing fell by 11.4% (SCRGSP 2003- SCRGSP2008)
- The sell off of stock has been driven by the need to compensate for the reduction in funding from both the State and Commonwealth.
- Over the past decade the level of funding for social housing has dropped by 30% in real terms (National Shelter 2007). Between 1996-97 and 2004-5 Commonwealth State Housing Agreement (CSHA) based funding to the State, by the Commonwealth fell by 18.4%. In the same period matching funding from the Tasmanian Government fell by 19.3% (FACSIA 2007).
- Between 2001 and 2006, the number of applicants on the public housing waiting list rose by 62% (SCRGSP 2003, 2007) with approximately 2,600 people on the waiting list in 2007.
- Tasmania also has a small community housing sector of just under 500 properties with 47 different providers. Social housing is close to 6% of the Tasmanian housing stock.

## **Tasmanian Public Housing Debt Issue**

- Housing Tasmania is hampered by the fact that it is required to return approx \$17 million (70% of grant) to the Commonwealth each year to repay a long standing debt.
- To enable a sustainable public housing system in Tasmania this debt must be waived.

The sell off of public housing properties to effectively service a state's housing debt. In the context of significant Commonwealth Budget surpluses we propose that the Commonwealth forgive State Government housing debt. This would be a direct investment back into housing.

## **SAAP System in Tasmania**

In Tasmania twenty two organisations currently provide thirty-five SAAP funded services around the state. Capital funding for accommodation managed by SAAP organisations is provided under the Crisis Accommodation Program (CAP), a funding program provided under the Commonwealth State Housing Agreement.

Under SAAP 1V emergency accommodation services in Tasmania were reconfigured and new services established within an Integrated Continuum of Support (ICOS). The aim of the restructure was to ensure a range of services from assessment, emergency, transitional to independence. Shelter consultation found that ICOS itself is a successful model but due to wider systems failings - in particular, the lack of affordable housing options that is needed for exit points out of SAAP - this system is compromised. SAAP is based on a strong human rights legislative framework and has delivered exceptionally well for thousands of individuals and families in crisis.

## **Great Tassie Initiatives**

In Tasmania the State Government, with the support to the Commonwealth, has recognised the importance of supporting a range of initiatives to prevent homelessness. Shelter recommends that these programs continue to be given recurrent and extended funding:

- The extended Private Rental Support Service (PRSS) to enable extra assistance with up front housing costs, such as bond and rent for low income people to access the private rental market.
- The Private Rental Tenancy Support Service (PRTSS) – designed to prevent homelessness by providing support to low income earners to secure or maintain tenancies in the private rental market.
- Household Organizational Management Expenses (HOME). This Commonwealth initiative has worked particularly well in the Tasmanian context in Launceston,
- Children Homelessness Intervention Learning and Development (CHILD) a Pilot program providing statewide outreach support to children living in families at risk of, or experiencing homelessness.
- The Pilot Transitional Support Prisoner Program (TSPP) to support people with accessing and maintain housing when exiting the prison system.
- Hallam House – operates as a share house for single men as a longer term housing for residents exiting Bethlehem House a crisis service for homelessness men. Supported is provided from a living skills and recreational worker.
- The My Place Program - an early intervention service delivered in the North and North West targeting people who were at risk of homelessness as a result of mental illness and, as a consequence, their stays in acute mental health facilities.
- Specialist Accommodation Support Workers attached to transitional support services who provide intensive support to people with high and complex needs. Caseloads are kept very low and support can be provided long term.
- Immediate Emergency Accommodation (IEA) properties linked with SAAP

services, providing an alternative to Shelter based crisis accommodation. These properties are targeted towards families with outreach support provided by transitional support services.

- Reconnect, though federally funded, has been a great success in early intervention in preventing homelessness for young people in Tasmania. With additional funding it can do more.
- Some SAAP programs have extended their hours of operation to evenings and weekends to engage and support people experiencing homelessness.

## What we did for the Green Paper

This submission is based on the recent work Shelter has undertaken with its members on homelessness and housing issues for people on low incomes in Tasmania. They include:

- The Shelter Tas Budget Submission 2008-9.
- Shelter's Tas Submission to Legislative Council Select Committee on Housing Affordability in Tasmania August 2007.
- Survey to members on how to reduce homelessness, May 2008.
- Green Paper consultations in Hobart and Devonport, June 2008.
- Shelter Tas Management Committee Meeting.
- Working with other Peak Bodies and Community Organisations.

### Shelter Consultations

In June 2008 Shelter Tas ran 2 regional consultations with the support of Housing Tasmania on the Green Paper, *"Which Way Home? A New Approach to Homelessness"*. The first was in Hobart for Southern members, and the second in Devonport for Northern and North West members. The consultations were well attended and full transcripts are available.

A key response to the Green Paper was that it was inaccurate to state SAAP is failing to deliver sustainable long term outcomes for clients in key areas such as housing, employment, training and education. It is important to make the point that SAAP has not been designed or funded to achieve such outcomes and has done well within a wider context of system failure by mainstream agencies and government policy. The Tasmanian SAAP service providers are acutely aware of the woeful lack of government response to address homelessness in any systematic manner. While SAAP has been operating for the past 30 years there has been:

- Deinstitutionalisation of mental health services without having built an alternative system.
- Underfunding of social and affordable housing, the key exit points of SAAP.
- An increasingly competitive, inaccessible and unaffordable private rental market for people on low incomes.
- An over-reliance on markets and market response for government responsibilities.
- Failure of Child and Family services to protect and support young people.
- Inability of the legal system to provide adequate response to domestic violence and other criminal activity.
- Failure of the criminal justice system to address the housing and support needs of people exiting the criminal system.
- Changes to income support measures within Centrelink that can lead directly to homelessness when a people are left without any income.

## We welcome

- The ten key principles for change.
- The common reforms across service sectors.
- The recognition that after 17 years of economic growth the number of people experiencing homelessness is far too high and the Australian Government is determined to reduce the numbers of people experiencing homelessness and respond to issues surrounding the causes of homeless episodes.
- The adoption of the broad definition of homelessness which extends beyond 'rough sleeper' or primary homelessness and includes secondary and tertiary homelessness. It is important that goal and targets on homelessness do not just related specifically to small segments of the homeless population but measure outcomes for the broader homeless population.
- The identification of inadequate responses for two parent and other family types, in the current system, to enable families to remain together through homeless episodes.
- The inadequacy of mainstream responses to homelessness.
- The over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in homeless services
- The particular needs of specific population groups in the green paper i.e. young people.

## We are concerned about

- The use of language in the green paper.

The green paper consistently refers to homeless people as if their only defining characteristic is their current housing status. It would be preferable to use 'people currently experiencing homelessness' as a descriptor. Language is important and often underpins our thought processes and responses. Shelter Tas acknowledges homelessness as episodic – although sometimes chronic, often for too long – and never as a defining characteristic of individual people.

- The notion of three distinct options rather than a reform process.
- The idea that government may extract the "right" information through posing a series of specific questions.

Respondents should be encouraged to think about how Australia can eliminate homelessness rather than as if option three will address the scale of the problem.

## Sector Feedback

Participants' key comment was that any reform on addressing homelessness nationally must acknowledge the strengths and successes of SAAP and that SAAP is not just a passive provision of a bed. Over time it has developed into a program with good practice in case management and the support of homeless people. Innovative models have been explored and developed. **In Tasmania SAAP proved a continuum of support. What is needed now is that the continuum be extended outside the SAAP system to an integrated model with mainstream services.**

## Comments from the sector on what is working well to reduce Homelessness in Tasmania

- The current SAAP system is working, just needs more funding to respond to high and complex needs and lack of exit points.
- Transitional support and housing model.
- Working with case management approach and streamline into transitional housing.
- SAAP support workers network and work well together.

- Intense support models – with lower case loads.
- The SAAP workers have the commitment and skills to work with homeless people.
- SAAP meets the support needs of clients within limited resources.
- MOU between services are established and working.
- Feeding into transitional housing from emergency services.
- Relationships between services – Forums important such as: Youth and SAAP forums.
- Working with peak bodies like Shelter Tas.
- SAAP achieves high outcomes for low inputs.
- SAAP Immediate Emergency Accommodation (IEA) properties.

### **Comments from the sector on what is not working well to reduce Homelessness in Tasmania**

- SAAP and other NGOs pick up clients that are too hard for mainstream services/or/that other service areas refuse to work with e.g. long time support for mental illness.
- The current system (such as Mental Health, Child Youth Family Services) offloads this responsibility onto the NGO sector, which is often under-resourced and under-valued by government agencies.
- Public transport needs to be improved especially in remote areas in the NW.
- Lack of access to bulk billing from doctor and dental services impact on low to moderate income families increasing the pressure on being able to maintain reasonable standards of living.
- Additionally, a greater emphasis should be placed on developing preventative strategies to reduce the risk of people experiencing trauma, as a significant proportion of homeless people have experienced sexual/physical abuse, incarceration, illicit drug use, hepatitis/HIV infections, and mental health issues.
- There is a gap in available independent or suitable housing for 15 to 17 year olds.
- The rental/housing costs are too high and the lower end of the rental market consists of poor standard houses.
- Building expertise in the sector; have not put in place adequate professional development for NGOs supporting the development of a healthy workforce. This has never been implemented.
- The seamless, whole of government approach (outside of SAAP) is not working, if other services outside SAAP do not pick up or work with clients. The impact on the SAAP service and the client is that the SAAP service has to work harder with the client as they often end up back in SAAP.
- SAAP cannot affect wider structural issues; the lack of exit points i.e. the lack of public and private rental accommodation.
- Short term stay and short term support does not work. The impact of mandated time-frames to work limits positive outcomes.
- Impact on timeframes is that it stops achieving real long term outcomes with people.
- Protocols with government service stay at executive level and not promoted to staff in the field.
- There is a developing acceptance of intergeneration poverty.
- No planned exit and support from organisations outside of SAAP – e.g. Hospitals. Prisons, Mental Health, Child and Family Services.

The sector identified a number of barriers to the achievement of long term outcomes for clients: significantly, resource limitations; lack of places available; money; staffing levels; staff skills; staff incomes; lack of complimentary services in rural areas (including public transport); lack of access to child protection, and mental health services; and the lack of exit points to progress people on to independence.

In addition, the sector advocated the need to provide support for people beyond homelessness for as long as is required was an important step in addressing Australia's homelessness problem. Other responses need to be added to fully address homelessness. Because of the high numbers of people with complex needs being referred to organisations there has to be sufficient support options to enable them to better manage their lives and sustain tenancies.

### **Comments from the sector on how to establish strong connections between homeless and mainstream services**

- Specific teams and different departments should work together in teams.
- Early intervention work and preventative strategies need to be a collective shared responsibility between a number of NGO and Government agencies.
- Ensure one person is responsible for each client. For example:
  - Need case co-ordinators, specifically to co-ordinate the people who need to work on the complex needs of clients.
  - Need strong local regional partnerships with committed workers.
- Lots of changes in departmental staff; little in way of hand over; continual loss of corporate knowledge, and this has a flow down effect to clients.
- Take mainstream services into the community; work with doctors, nurses, mental health, and link into where homeless people are.
- Housing response teams: Department and community sector to follow client through the system.
- Need strong government leadership at a senior government level – working with sector responses.
- Mainstream need to acknowledge homelessness: formally, practically, with performance indicators, benchmarks, targets.
- Shared training & professional opportunities between government and the community sector. Staff secondments back and forth.

### **Sector Feedback - If you could redesign SAAP to improve and reform the system, what would it look like?**

- Homelessness would become a whole of community responsibility.
- Increase the supply of housing & stock for people with low-incomes.
- Commonwealth Rent Assistance should be expanded to enable low income people to buy homes.
- Have greater case management – an increased range of housing types for people to access.
- Bring services in to help people on site, so client need is captured immediately.
- Increase public and community housing: we need more exit points.
- Increase funding for better wages and conditions for staff.
- No time limits on working with clients.
- Take time limit out of equation to suit the client – be able to follow the client with appropriate support for their needs.
- Individual case plans tailored for individual client need.
- Long term funding for services: current funding stops and starts and is too short. Increase wages for community sector workers.
- Have a collaborative framework across all services.
- More resources for SAAP services and housing.
- Increase support.
- United service agreements across programs so funding can be shifted to where it is needed.
- Increased consumer protection for all tenants, minimal standards for housing.
- Housing Tasmania debt is wiped off so we have a sustainable and growing public housing system.

## Comments on the 3 Options

Shelter Tas found that none of the three options has gained sector wide support. Members felt the three models proposed in the Green Paper will not achieve a substantial fall in the number of people experiencing homelessness over the next 10 years. All 3 options were seen as inadequate for the following reasons.

### Option 1 - Transform SAAP to build a national homelessness response focused on distinct streams.

Option 1 departmentalised homelessness. Shelter members saw many more risks than benefits in Option 1 and this option showed a lack of understanding by the Government on what SAAP does. In fact, the sector saw that for many people experiencing homelessness this would create a more complex system for people to have to navigate through. It did not address the reality of the diverse and multiple needs of individual or families. Other comments include:

- SAAP clients and practitioners saw SAAP as playing a 'neutral role' where a high level of trust is established outside the mainstream service system.
- Silo issues, creating more client run around, buck passing and closed doors to important services.
- This risks excluding people more.
- This model would take the community response away.
- It would lose the core established response for people experiencing homelessness.
- Loss of the existing SAAP expertise and skilled workforce.

It is doubtful this approach would necessarily link people experiencing homelessness with the range of services they need. For example, if youth SAAP is transferred to education, young people who are homeless are still likely to need access to health, housing and family relationship services. SAAP providers funded under an education portfolio would still need to develop links with other types of services.

It is also difficult to see how this approach would work in an administratively simple manner under the new National Affordable Housing Agreement. If responsibility for SAAP services is given to multiple Departments, each portfolio may need to be a signatory to the new Agreement creating unnecessary bureaucratic complexity.

### Option 2 – Improve the current system.

Sector participants acknowledged the benefit that option 2 sets out building on the current system and a much needed increase in funding to improve the SAAP response. This would enable the strength in the current system to be built on an integrated service system and take away the risk identified in dismantling the current system and replacing it with a new model. Comments included:

- Builds on the existing system which has components that work well - recognised internationally.
- Increased resources, increased support periods, increased successful outcomes.
- Keep what works well, such as strong networks between local SAAP services and across the State.
- Removes the time limit on working with clients, essential for achieving long term outcomes.
- The current time limit at present limits many SAAP services to short term crisis responses.

Yet Option 2 also has a range of limitations as it does not address the wider systemic causes of homelessness. It does not address the barriers to accessing mainstream programs. Comments included:

- Places greater expectations on SAAP services that they can't meet.
- SAAP cannot fix homelessness alone
- Does not address the chronic need for more affordable housing, especially more public and community housing.
- There is a need for a wider community response to end homelessness.
- Its does not address the waiting lists, travel expenses (lack of available public transport), lack of available services, administrative restrictions and out of pocket expenses. Often by the time a person enters SAAP it's the result of systemic failure. Risks noted:

So overall, Option 2 does not address the broader context in which the national response to homelessness sits. It does not discuss barriers to accessing mainstream programs. A recent survey of our member agencies identified a range of barriers to accessing mainstream programs. These include waiting lists, travel expenses, lack of available services, administrative restrictions and out of pocket expenses. Option 2 also fails to canvass prevention and early intervention programs, including how we need to use other areas of Government policy to respond to homelessness.

### **Option 3 – Improve the mainstream service response to homelessness and restrict SAAP to responding to crisis intervention**

Sector participants noted this option restricts the current SAAP response to homelessness in Tasmania. Members outlined that the SAAP Continuum Support Model is working well due to the transitional housing part. Option 3 would take this away. It would require significant improvements to the ability of mainstream programs to support people who are homeless.

Option 3 does not identify who will link the person experiencing homelessness to mainstream services. As the Green Paper notes, support services for people experiencing homelessness tends to be tied to their crisis accommodation. If SAAP's capacity to work with clients is not enhanced, it is difficult to see who will be able to link the person experiencing homelessness with mainstream services.

## **The need for an Option 4**

Due to the limitations of the three proposed models outlined, Shelter Tas calls for a more inclusive option as set out in Option 4, which addresses up front the need for a significant increase in the supply of affordable, safe, appropriate housing.

Shelter Tas supports the Option 4 put forward by Homeless Australia while also supporting and drawing strongly from the Queensland Shelter response to the Green Paper. We would like to **acknowledge the work done by Queensland Shelter** in the **absence of funding for National Shelter**.

These frameworks have been utilised for Shelter Tas' submission with some Tasmanian- specific points. This model has ten key elements that:

- Draw together the funding arrangements necessary to address homelessness within an expanded National Affordable Housing Agreement;
- Provide a framework for policy coordination across various portfolios at different levels of Government;

- Set out a robust accountability framework that includes targets, a co-ordinating authority, a research agenda on homelessness, and enhanced sector representation through stronger national and State/Territory peak bodies, and
- Set out a partnership approach for working with the community sector into the future.

## The ten elements of this model are:

### Funding mechanisms

#### 1. Set out a ten year increase in funding for housing

*A recent survey with Shelter members on how would they reduce homelessness in their region found - There is a critical need to invest in more affordable housing, including public and community housing (Shelter Tas May 2008)*

To achieve a substantial fall in the number of people who are homeless over the next 10 years, there will need to be a significant increase in housing for people who have been homeless. This issue is acknowledged in the Green Paper but no proposals are made about how to achieve this within the three options that have been presented.

There has been a fall in real terms over time in funding for public and community housing over the last 10 years. There is also a shortage of affordable private rental accommodation at present.

The Government needs to:

- increase funding for social housing over the next 10 years, and
- identify how it will increase access to low-cost private rental housing for people who have experienced homelessness.

To achieve this, significant new funding needs to be invested in the new National Affordable Housing Agreement: The immediate aim should be to increase the supply of social housing to at least 6% of total housing stock by 2010. By 2020 the total stock of social housing needs to be increased to 10% of national housing stock. This supported by the recent Senate Committee looking at affordable housing across Australia recommended the need to increase social housing to at least 10% of housing stock by 2020 (SCHAA 2008).

In Tasmanian the government selling off of public housing properties to effectively service a state's housing debt (see p5). In the context of significant Commonwealth Budget surpluses we propose that the Commonwealth forgive State Government housing debt. This would be a direct investment back into housing.

#### 2. Enhance the Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP)

The homelessness sector through the foundational program SAAP is the most experienced, responsive, knowledgeable and creative provider of services to people experiencing homelessness and must therefore remain the centre of an improved national homelessness response. There are two enhancements that need to be made to the program: improvements to the current SAAP response, and a new stream of funding to enable the program to provide long term support. These enhancements need to be supported by additional capital funding under the Crisis Accommodation Program (CAP).

Reposition SAAP to enable the program to provide longer term support to clients.  
**Maintain and strengthen the Continuum of Support Model in Tasmania, which includes the Transitional Support Services.**

As part of this process, the existing crisis response within SAAP needs to be improved. The following issues need to be addressed:

- ongoing unmet demand,
- sufficient resources to support client needs, especially if this support will now be provided longer term,
- additional Capital funding,
- funding children as clients of SAAP in their own right, and
- workforce capacity and development.

A new stream of funding should be made available within SAAP for longer term support to clients. This would include additional resources to enable agencies to broker relationships with mainstream services.

### **3. Expand early intervention and prevention programs**

- In Tasmania extend the successful programs listed under the Tasmanian context. (see Great Tassie Initiatives p5)
- Substantially increase funding for reconnect.
- Increase the Household Organisational Management Expenses (HOME)

### **4. Expand the scope of the National Affordable Housing Agreement to become a “National Affordable Housing and Homelessness Agreement”. With built in links to the National Reform Agenda.**

Include all Federal funded homelessness programs under the Agreement. Develop a national plan to co-ordinate the role of these programs at a local level.

Retain SAAP as a distinctive program. Retain the human rights framework currently provided for in the SAAP Act.

Emphasise greater linkages between SAAP and housing exit points. As part of this, adopt targets on access to social housing, including

- the number of people who leave SAAP and go into social housing, and
- the number of people who are able to maintain tenancies in the long term.

Provide additional capital funding for homeless services under CAP to address unmet demand for SAAP services.

In addition need to think about homelessness in the context of broader government reforms, specifically the National Affordable Housing Agreement and the National Reform Agenda.

**The Council of Australian Governments (COAG)** has identified seven key areas requiring reform. To drive reforms, COAG agreed that it would meet four times in 2008. At its March meeting next year, each of the working groups will provide COAG with its Commonwealth-State implementation plans for the major Commonwealth election commitments.<sup>1</sup>

Along with delivering on this agenda through the course of 2008, COAG agreed that decisions on directions for major policy initiatives for the longer term reform agenda will be taken during 2008.

- health and ageing;
- the productivity agenda – including education, skills, training and early childhood;
- climate change and water;
- infrastructure;
- business regulation and competition;
- housing; and
- Indigenous reform.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.alp.org.au/media/1207/mspm200.php>  
*Shelter Tas Green Paper Submission June 2008*

In reducing the number of Specific Purpose Payments and moving towards outcome measures there is an opportunity to use the **National Reform Agenda (NRA)** to include outcomes or measures and targets in a range of new agreements to avoid loading just one new agreement The National Affordable Housing Agreement with measures that would be best attached through other agreements under negotiation (Queensland Shelter 2008).

At least five of the above agreements could contain measures to reduce homelessness and provide an improved service response to homelessness:

- health and ageing;
- the productivity agenda – including education, skills, training and early childhood;
- infrastructure;
- housing; and
- Indigenous reform.

The Prime Minister has identified reducing homelessness as a key plank of his government; we would recommend that the government think across the whole NRA to fulfil this goal.

Some measures like ensuring that housing service responses play their part may be addressed by providing increased resourcing to the social housing system. The new government identified and criticised cuts to public housing funding by the previous government of \$3.5b over 11 years. This has had the effect of limiting exit options for people experiencing homelessness by reducing social housing at a time when an increased level of social housing was required.

This is a key issue that must be addressed in the development of a new National Affordable Housing Agreement.

## Other agreements

Similarly the number of people exiting prisons with little or no support, who cannot be discharged from hospitals, or who are discharged without adequate support should be supported by measures in specific national agreements. This could be through outcome measures or targets and indicators in the respective agreements to reduce homelessness as a consequence of release, discharge or exit processes.

If we are serious about tackling homelessness across government rather than just addressing a program response then a reference to homelessness should be provided to the drafting processes for all agreements to reduce their respective contributions to homelessness.

## Policy framework

### 5. Develop a Commonwealth whole of government homelessness strategy

Identify areas of Commonwealth responsibility that can be used to respond to homelessness. These include:

- developing strategies to prevent and respond to homelessness amongst women and children escaping domestic violence under the new National Action Plan
- reforming employment services to provide more intensive support for people who have experienced homelessness who are ready to look for work
  - retain JPET as a distinct program
  - provide more flexible notions of 'participation' within employment services
  - exempt women escaping domestic violence from activity requirements

- for up to 12 months, in line with other exemptions for different cohorts
- enhancing Centrelink's homelessness strategy.
  - improve systems to identify people experiencing homelessness
  - ensure the compliance system does not make people homeless. Make financial case management available to everyone who receives an 8 week 'non-payment period'
  - enhance Centrelink's prison servicing strategy
- addressing indigenous homelessness through Federal programs such as funding for indigenous housing
- responding to the needs of the aged and homeless through aged care funding arrangements.

## 6. Build on existing State/Territory homeless strategies

Use the new Specific Purpose Payments (SPPs) to leverage financial resources from States/Territories for funding within mainstream programs to address homelessness. This would be across the new SPPs for healthcare, schools, vocational education and training, and disability services.

Tasmania does not have a Homelessness Strategy. Shelter Tas in successive budget submission has called on the Tasmanian Government to develop a Homelessness Strategy to co-ordinate a response to reduce Tasmanian homelessness (Shelter 2007b). The strategy would need to address the extent to which State/Territory programs contribute to homelessness; for example, in relation to: people leaving mental health facilities, strategies for people released from prison, and support for children and young people exiting State care.

## Accountability framework

### 7. Set Targets and Develop a strong research agenda

Set a national benchmark for reducing homelessness.

Identify performance measures that reflect the successful implementation of the funding and policy framework.

Establish a National Homelessness Research Association. Fund a series of research projects including:

- a longitudinal study of people leaving homelessness, and
- a cost-benefit analysis of homeless services.

### 8. Fund Strong, well resourced national and State/Territory homelessness peak bodies, including funding for National Shelter.

Shelter Tas would like to draw the attention of the Commonwealth Government to the importance of funding for peak bodies, and the first priority is to **fund National Shelter as the peak body advocating for low income housing consumers.**

Homelessness Australia requires funding to undertake a series of projects to support the implementation of the White Paper. These would include:

- an annual Roundtable to review implementation,
- smaller National Conferences on particular issues: e.g. indigenous homelessness, rural/remote homelessness, and
- a sector-wide biennial National Homelessness Conference

Ensure an adequately funded peak for homeless services in each State/Territory.

## 9. Identify a central authority to co-ordinate the homeless response

Establish a strong national authority is required to co-ordinate and oversee the national response to homelessness. To undertake this task, Homelessness Australia proposes the establishment of a new structure, an Australian Council on Homelessness. This authority should co-ordinate the response of multiple agencies in the Federal and State/Territory local government, and will also engage with local governments possibly through the Australian Local Government Association. This authority would need strong non government peak representative bodies.

## 10. A commitment to improved relationships between Governments and the social and community sector

A significant segment of services delivered in the new national response to homelessness will involve the work of the social and community Sector. In April, Parliamentary Secretary for Social Inclusion Senator Ursula Stephens said that "a strong, vibrant and innovative not-for-profit sector is essential to the social inclusion agenda and to a healthy Australian democracy" (Stephens 2008).

The community and social services sector must be able to move forward together with the government in the national response to homelessness. The government has already taken the first steps, with the removal of gag clauses, restoring the right of agencies to advocate and ensuring frank and fearless advice from those working on the front lines and with specific expertise in social services.

However there are more steps that can be taken in order to cement strong working relationships and an efficient and skilled community and social services sector.

Simplified administration and contractual arrangements.

Appropriate salaries and conditions for a specialised, professional workforce and support for the long term viability of the industry

**This was a key issue for the community sector in Tasmania.** A national response to homelessness needs a professional well funded community sector workforce, with salaries that can attract younger workers, and a workforce development strategy that ensures the long term viability of a national response to homelessness.

Average pay rates for workers in the community sector are currently lower than the average pay for the population as a whole. The 2007 ASU members' survey found that almost half of all community sector workers surveyed expressed dissatisfaction with pay (ASU 2007).

The sector also faces a workforce ageing at a faster rate than the general population. It is estimated that 10 to 40 per cent of the workforce in the community sector will retire within the next 5 years<sup>2</sup>. Younger workers in the community sector expressed greater dissatisfaction with wages and conditions. They are more likely to be dissatisfied with wages and conditions and career opportunities.<sup>3</sup>

There are also particular challenges in attracting workers in rural and remote areas. Housing will be required for workers to live in as housing shortages have made rents unaffordable in many parts of rural Australia. Often services also need to be able to offer regular transport back to cities for workers to maintain

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<sup>2</sup> ASU 2007, p.44

<sup>3</sup> ASU 2007, p.46

contact with families. Professional development, training and IT is difficult to access in rural and remote communities, due to the distances involved to access resources. Staff need to be away from services for many days to attend metropolitan training which can leave clients without services.

### **Indexation**

Funding for specialist programs and other payments in the national response to homelessness needs to be properly funded based on an appropriate indexation that reflects increases in the cost of service delivery. Funding per client in SAAP has fallen in real terms over the last 10 years, from \$3,180 in 1996-97 to \$3,130 in 2005-06.<sup>4</sup> By contrast, the Australian Bureau of Statistics has reported an annual inflation rate of 4.2% through the year to March quarter 2008<sup>5</sup>.

## **Recommendations**

### **Goals and Targets**

A target is needed to reduce the numbers of people experiencing homelessness (across all 3 tiers) as measured in the annual census count. For example, from 105,000 in 2008 to 50,000 by 2020 with corresponding targets for reduction in numbers of specific population groups:

- Children
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people
- Young people
- Women escaping domestic violence
- Single and dual parent families with children

Another target would be to increase the supply of social housing to at least 6% of total housing stock in each State and Territory to by 2010 and 10% by 2020.

### **Feedback from the Sector**

In addition to the 10 point framework outlined in Option 4 Shelter would like to add these additional recommendations.

### **Shelter Tas recommends the following:**

- Future Special Purpose payments agreements negotiated between Federal and State governments to include specific reference to domestic violence, youth and other homelessness outcomes referred to in the Green Paper. This approach would also reduce the need for options 1 and 3 in the discussion paper, as mainstream government departments may have clearly defined roles and targets to meet in responding to homelessness.
- The Commonwealth and State governments increase funding to SAAP service by 40% (and indexed to CPI thereafter) to address unmet need.
- Set affordable housing targets for all new housing developments, particularly for the provision of social housing. Some figures referred to in these discussions included a 15% affordable housing target, 5% of which should be for social housing.
- The Commonwealth forgo State Government public housing debt (currently in Tasmania 70% of Commonwealth funding is returned to pay debt). This would be a direct investment back into housing.

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<sup>4</sup> AIHW 2007, p. 88

<sup>5</sup> ABS 6401.0

- The Commonwealth consider what alternative legislation would need to be developed as part of a NAHA to ensure a legislative basis was retained for homelessness responses by respective governments.
- State and Federal Departments develop inter-departmental linkages to aid services and people experiencing homelessness to access services in one streamlined process. This sharing of information will assist in the identification of people at risk of homelessness.
- The Commonwealth government should expand the range of housing options available to homeless people. Housing solutions need to reflect the social/cultural diversity of Australia's homeless populations. Future housing solutions should develop supportive housing models which reflect the needs/aspirations of people requiring this type of housing, such as transitional social and public housing options.
- The Federal government with the support of State governments should establish a National Best Practice Unit in relation to the SAAP/homelessness service delivery. In Tasmania, SAAP services are undertaking a quality assurance process.
- Data collection methods should consolidate both NGO and government data in relation to homelessness and identify potential gaps in current data collection methodology which need to be included in future data collection initiatives.
- The Federal/State governments, as a matter of priority, should develop single service agreements with SAAP and other homelessness services they currently fund.
- Targets for the proportion of Indigenous employees of all Government Departments dealing with homelessness (Housing, Communities, Health, Employment etc) should be established.
- Federal/State governments need to do more work with Magistrates throughout Australia so as to ensure that victims of domestic violence are not forced out of their family home.
- Early intervention work to prevent homelessness should form the core basis of all Federal, State and Local government departments' work. The current system dumps this on the NGO sector, which is often under-resourced and under-valued by government agencies. Early intervention work and preventative strategies need to be a collective and shared responsibility between a number of agencies within the NGO and government sectors.
- The Federal/State governments should give consideration to the development of a Homelessness Act similar to the UK government response. A Homelessness Act would need to be developed in consultation with the NGO sector.
- Structured systems around housing and support should be developed by government agencies whose portfolios have housing and support responsibilities contained within them. For example, the Queensland government departments of housing, health and communities all signed MOUs with one another when the Queensland government implemented an institutional reform package to assist former residents of institutions back into the community. A similar expanded model could be developed around homelessness.
- Funding is provided to mainstream service to allow access to interpreter services for refugee, asylum seekers and refugees.
- Funding is provided for SAAP services to access bi-cultural staff from the main refugee communities.

- Initiatives such as the Residential Tenancies Authority's dispute resolution procedures should be factored in as preventative measures to reduce the risk of homelessness.
- The Federal government should work with State governments to develop:
  - Uniform safeguards for people residing in boarding house accommodation.
  - Minimal standards for all rental properties.
    - ✕ Each State and Territory develops a housing standards code in consultation with building industry, local government and non-government organisation, and that these standards be incorporated into legislation.
    - ✕ The standard code covers heating, fixtures, power, water, fire regulations, plumbing, security, and other concerns essential to habitat living standards
- Shelter Tas recommends that Community Workers are recognised as key workers and there is a requirement to recruit and retain workers with more attractive salary packages and increased access to professional development.

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\* Further Referencing can be supplied on request.