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Joint Submission from:

Youth Network of Tasmania,

Shelter Tasmania,

and

Tasmania Council of Social Service.

to the:

National Youth Commission

Inquiry into Youth Homelessness

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Introduction

The Youth Network of Tasmania, Shelter Tasmania and Tasmanian Council of Social Service welcome the opportunity to participate in the National Youth Commission Inquiry into Youth Homelessness.

This submission is based on consultation with our extensive networks across all levels of service delivery in Tasmania. Despite evidence from Housing Tasmania showing an increase in young people's access to public housing, these networks report high levels of increased demand for their services. In particular they report that:

- The age of young people accessing their services is trending down;
- The young people's needs are becoming more complex;
- They require increasingly high levels of support;
- Barriers to their access to public and private rental, including greater competition for all forms of housing, are increasing;
- The housing service system in Tasmania is unable to adequately address these issues;
- Other areas of service provision such as drug and alcohol and mental health services for young people, are also inadequate, exacerbating their accommodation problems.

The non-government youth sector has a ten year history of constructive and collaborative engagement with the state government around these issues but these arrangements have collapsed in recent years, leaving few avenues for constructive dialogue in relation to youth housing concerns.

Our submission offers a collaborative response from three key Tasmanian policy and advocacy groups to the NYC Terms of Reference for the National Youth Commission into Youth Homelessness.

About the Youth Network of Tasmania

The Youth Network of Tasmania is the peak body for the non-government youth sector in Tasmania. YNOT aims to involve young people and service providers in the identification of youth issues and the development of appropriate strategies and policies to address these issues. YNOT also facilitates the development of coordinating mechanisms across the youth sector and provides advice to government and other agencies on youth issues.

YNOT's contribution to this submission is based on consultation with members of the Statewide Youth Housing Group, a sub-committee of YNOT that brings youth housing service providers together from all regions to explore and progress youth housing issues.

About Shelter Tasmania

Shelter Tasmania is an independent not-for-profit housing peak organisation. Shelter represents the interest of housing consumers on low incomes and housing providers across Tasmania. Shelter was established in 1975 and has played a leading role in the development of the social housing sector and ensuring that both government and community hear and respond to the housing needs and experiences of low income and disadvantaged Tasmanians. While the work of Shelter has adapted to changing times, its fundamental purpose to promote a fair, just and equitable housing system for all, has not.

Shelter's membership consists of a wide range of housing and supported accommodation services, tenant groups, local government, community organisations and individuals interested in housing. The Council of Homeless Persons Tasmania is a subcommittee of Shelter.

About the Tasmania Council of Social Service.

The Tasmanian Council of Social Service is the peak industry body for the non-government community services sector in Tasmania. TasCOSS is the principal voice for low income and disadvantaged Tasmanians on social and economic policy issues. For over 40 years TasCOSS has worked toward eliminating poverty and creating a more equitable society by addressing the causes of disadvantage, not just the symptoms.

It's membership comprises organisations and individuals active in the provision of community services to low income, vulnerable and disadvantaged Tasmanians. TasCOSS represents the interests of its members and their clients to the sector, governments and the general community.

NYC Terms of Reference:

- 1) To document the history of policy, programs and initiatives by Federal, State and Territory governments to assist homeless youth.**

The Tasmanian Context

- According to the 2001 Census young people aged 12 to 25 years made up 18% of the Tasmanian Population. There were 2,415 homeless people in Tasmania on census night 7th August 2001¹.
- In a separate study it was estimated that there were 1,008 homeless young people 12-18 years². This implies that 42% of the homeless population in Tasmania were young people aged 12-18.
- It was also estimated that at the time only 13% of the homeless people (approx 315) were accommodated in SAAP³.
- In the most recently published SAAP data for the 2005-06 year; of the 4,450 clients supported by SAAP during the year, approximately 1 700 (or 39%) were under 25 years of age. This included 70 (or 1.6 %) young people under the age of 15.⁴

The following are a number of strategies and programs instigated by the Tasmanian State Government to assist people on low incomes in Tasmania. Some are specifically targeted to young people, others are wider strategies to address the chronic shortage of affordable housing across Tasmania. It is worth noting that most of these initiatives are no longer operating and have not been replaced.

It is acknowledged by the authors that homelessness is much more than a lack of housing, but an affordable and appropriate housing system is a key response to homelessness, and due to the chronic shortage of suitable housing in Tasmania for young people, housing is given emphasis in this submission.

Initiatives – State Government

Youth Housing Strategic Framework 1999-2003

- The Youth Network of Tasmania (YNOT) had advocated for the development of a state youth housing policy since its inception in 1995;
- The State government agreed to participate in a joint process to develop a “Youth Housing Strategy” in 1999;
- The “Youth Housing Strategy Forum” was convened to oversee the development of the plan. It consisted of regional representatives from the

¹ Counting the Homeless 2001, Chamberlain & MacKenzie, Australian Bureau of Statistics 2050.0, 2003. Table 6.2.

² Youth Homelessness 2001, Chamberlain & MacKenzie, RMIT University, 2002. Table 4.3.

³ Counting the Homeless 2001, Chamberlain & MacKenzie, Australian Bureau of Statistics 2050.0, 2003. Table 6.3.

⁴ Homeless people in SAAP – SAAP NDC Annual Report 2005-06 – Tasmanian Supplement, Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2007. Tables 3.1 and 4.1.

NGO sector, and senior management from Housing Tasmania and Child Youth and Family Support;

- The Statewide Youth Housing Group (SWYHG), a sub-committee of YNOT was consulted at all key stages of development.
- The purpose of the plan was to “reflect agreements, based on collaborative process, between the Department of Health and Human Services and the youth housing sector, on a way forward to improve housing outcomes for young people”;
- A set of principles, agreed outcomes and focus areas were developed, with clear objectives within each focus area;
- A work-plan was developed, specifying activities, actions and timelines relating to each activity;
- A reporting cycle was agreed with annual reports to the Minister and the community sector via the Statewide Youth Housing Group;
- The initial Framework was reviewed in 2002. Progress to date against the plan’s objectives was recorded in the revised workplan for 2002-2003;
- Modest progress was made in relation to a number of objectives (see work-plan);
- Informal outcomes were a far higher level of communication and collaboration between DHHS and the sector than had ever existed prior to the process, or since;
- The “Youth Housing Strategic Framework” and the “Youth Housing Strategy Forum” were subsumed by the Affordable Housing Strategy (see below).

Housing Roundtable

- The HT Roundtable was formed as part of a comprehensive approach to improved collaboration between DHHS funded services and the community sector in the nineties.
- A whole of agency forum, divisional forums (such as the Housing Tasmania Roundtable) and a number of working parties (such as the youth sector Joint Action Group) were established;
- Housing Tasmania chose to establish a “Roundtable” that met twice yearly with an emphasis on information sharing, rather than a more frequent, issues based collaborative process. The Housing Tasmania Roundtable was a poor substitute for genuinely collaborative consultative arrangements such as the Youth Housing Strategy Forum.

Restructure of SAAP services (2000-5)

- Prior to the restructure of SAAP services in 2000 Tasmania had a wide variety of SAAP funded housing services for young people. Many of these services offered crisis and medium term accommodation, and outreach services with specific youth housing expertise;
- These services were active participants in lobbying and advocacy in relation to youth housing issues, and worked in close collaboration with Housing Tasmania on new housing strategies for young people;
- The primary effect of the SAAP restructure on many of these services has been to “generalize” their target group, and limit their service delivery

flexibility. In many instances, the outreach component has been separated from the housing service, and their capacity to provide medium term accommodation has been reduced or curtailed;

- The SAAP Industry Reference Group, formed to provide community sector input into the restructure process, has not been an effective vehicle for consultation and in recent years has met very rarely.

The Affordable Housing Strategy (AHS) 2004-8

- The AHS was launched on the 15th December 2003.
- The Strategy was a four year, 2 phase strategy, providing an injection of an additional \$45 million dollars over the first phase, from stamp duty windfalls, to provide a capital program of almost \$90 million dollars, and a range of other initiatives aimed at assisting more Tasmanians into private rental and home ownership.
- A new set of consultative arrangement superseded existing processes and mechanisms such as the Youth Housing Strategy Forum, the Housing Tasmania Roundtable and, to a significant extent, the Industry Advisory Group for the SAAP Program;
- The new consultative arrangements included an Affordable Housing Reference Group made up of industry bodies, large providers, and peak bodies including Shelter and TasCOSS. Consultative arrangements for youth were included in high needs with aged, disabilities, migrants and refugees;
- YNOT objected to the exclusion of a direct youth sector voice on the reference group , but was not successful in obtaining access to constructive, ongoing dialogue with Housing Tasmania, during, or since the AHS;
- A growing disparity has emerged between the information YNOT has received about young people's access to housing through the AHS initiative, and Housing Tasmania's perception of young people's access;
- Data supplied by Housing Tasmania suggest that young people's access has improved;
- Anecdotal evidence from youth housing service providers suggest that levels of housing need have risen faster than can be accommodated by the AHS, and that young people are relatively worse off than prior to the AHS;
- YNOT has again approached Housing Tasmania asking for a specific consultative interface between HT and the SWYHG around youth issues, but have been rebuffed.
- Stage 2 of the AHS was not implemented by the government. From a youth sector perspective the additional expenditure of the AHS needs to be weighed against the loss of effective consultative arrangements under stage 1, and the failure to deliver stage 2.
- The effects of the review and restructure of SAAP services also needs to be factored in to this equation;
- The AHS unfolded against the backdrop of a real estate market boom which saw rising property costs, including construction and purchasing. These were coupled with a dramatic rises in private rental costs.
- This context meant that the strategies contained within the policy were not able to have the impact originally thought to be possible. In spite of this the

Strategy was not unsuccessful. Without Phase 1 of the AHS, our housing affordably crisis would be much worse.

Affordable Housing Crisis Coalition 2005-2006.

- In late 2005 The Affordable Housing Crisis Coalition was formed out of concern for the ongoing crisis in affordable housing in Tasmania and the lack of commitment by the State Government to fund stage 2 of the Affordable Housing Strategy. The Coalition was made up of a range of non-government organisations, trade unions and industry bodies.
- The Coalition Strategies to help ease the housing crisis include:
 - 1200 new public houses over 4 years to maintain just the current level of stock.
 - Eradicate the Housing Tasmania \$250 million debt to the Commonwealth.
 - Expanded Strategies to help low income earners to rent and buy properties.
 - Supporting the proposed Affordable Housing Organization.
- The State Government did not commit to Phase 2 of the Strategy, replacing it with the Affordable Housing Organisation.
- None of the strategies put forward by the Affordable Housing Crisis Coalition and promoted by Shelter and TasCOSS in state budget submission have been taken up by the State Government.

Now in 2007

- Since the Affordable Housing Reference Group was disbanded there has been, despite requests by the community sector, no housing advisory body established.
- The Affordable Housing Organisation announced in December 2005 is the only major housing initiative now supported by the State Government, contributing \$24 million for the first 4 years. The plan is to build up to 700 homes. There has been slow progress with only 6 houses made available.
- The AHO has no specific strategies in place to house young people; access will be via the public housing waiting list with preference given to families.
- The Statewide SAAP Industry Reference Group exists but has not met since March 2005.
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Current Data from Housing Tasmanian⁵

Public Housing Applications

There were 2681 public housing applications on hand at 3 May 2007. Of the applications on hand:

- 773 (28.9 per cent) were for people aged 24 years or younger.

Public Housing Allocations

Over the 12 months ending 3 May 2007, there were 1 161 allocations of a public housing home. Of these:

- 322 (27.7 per cent) were for people aged 24 years or younger at the time of allocation.

⁵ Data source Tasmanian Housing Information System- 3 May 2007

Direct Tenancy Program⁶

At 3 May 2007, there were 105 Direct Tenancies. Of these, 63 (60 per cent) were held by tenants aged 24 years or younger.

Community Housing

Data submitted by community housing providers as part of the Commonwealth State Housing Agreement administrative data survey for 2005-06 indicates that, of the 467 households residing at 30 June 2006:

- 75 (16 per cent) community housing tenancies were households where the principal tenant was aged 24 years or less.

Public Housing Applicants

Principal Applicant aged 24 years or less

	Female	Male	Total
North	117	58	175
North West	108	38	146
South	310	142	452
Total	535	238	773

2) To identify the issues that prevent homeless youth from connecting with their local community and participating in the broader society as active citizens.

Services reported that the biggest issues preventing homeless young people from connecting with their local community were:

- The lack of suitable, sustainable housing options (both private and public) for young people.
- Disengagement from schools.
- Lack of education leading to poor literacy, numeracy and social skills.
- Lack of motivation.
- Lack of available employment.
- Mental health issues.
- Substance issues including cigarettes, drug and alcohol.
- Lack of support services to complement the SAAP service system to meet the need of homeless young people such as:
 - Detox and rehab centres.
 - Rehabilitation programs for young people in the justice system, or preventative programs.
 - Child, Youth and Family Services not adequately resourced to work with homeless or at risk of homelessness youth.
 - Specialised residential services for youth who have mental health issues and/or drug and alcohol issues.

⁶ Data source Tasmanian Housing Information System- 3 May 2007.

3) To draw attention to positive and negative changes affecting homeless young people since the last national independent inquiry into youth homelessness by the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission in 1987.

In consulting with service providers across the state on the issues facing homeless young people in Tasmania and any negative or positive changes, the following were given:

- Over recent years there has been an increase in young people presenting to services with high and complex needs and the age group is getting younger.
- Lack of capacity for the SAAP system to support young people with high needs.
- Shelter's report that they are increasingly accessed by a younger cohort of people with complex and challenging needs, and for whom there are no viable housing options in the public or private rental market, as they are unable to access or sustain tenancies.
- 13 – 15yr olds need a totally different kind of supported accommodation.
- Lack of secure accommodation for clients with challenging behaviors who deliberately put themselves at risk.
- A lack of exit options for all young people, through public or private rental, particularly for the younger age group (under 18) who are unable to legally contract with housing providers.
- A lack of adequate support and accommodation options for young people in, or leaving, the care system.
- Services noted the lack of ability to access Children Youth and Family Services (CYFS) unless the young person already had an allocated worker.
- CYFS not dealing with case loads, young people become the victims of a system that's not coping.
- Lack of timely response by CYFS so that young people at risk move on and slip through the holes in the system.
- The private rental system has become more competitive and expensive with continual low vacancy rates, making it increasingly difficult to house young people in it at all.
- Rate of department referrals of clients under 16yrs and on guardianship orders to refuges is not acceptable. **Department accommodation urgently needs to be increased.**
- Loco parentii issues. Who is responsible to make decisions for under 16's when they are staying in supported accommodation with no parental contact? Who is liable if an issue does arise?

Case Study

Annie Kenney Young Women's Refuge

A 15 year old young woman came into Annie Kenney Young Women's Refuge due to family breakdown. The young woman constantly put her self at risk with 'at risk' behaviour. The young woman was not attending school. CYFS were notified but did not allocate a worker for this young woman; therefore there was no support for this young person. The young woman eventually became a client of PASS and eventually went into a placement. The placement broke down and the young woman returned to Annie Kenney Young Women's Refuge. Once again CYFS were contacted and no response was given for this young person. Consequently Annie Kenney were severely restricted in the assistance that they could provide this young woman as she was only 15 and unable to sign a lease and she had used all available resources regarding other services. This young woman had been offered a chance for an all expense paid trip to Sydney if she wanted to go as there was plenty of 'work' available to her when she got to Sydney. Workers at Annie Kenney were able to persuade the young woman not to go to Sydney. The young woman had no alternative accommodation to go to and constant phone calls to the department were getting workers nowhere. The young woman made a lot of attempts to secure housing in the Share House Market but because of her age and rental bidding was unable to secure any accommodation until she moved into a Boarding House in Hobart. In less than a week the young woman was back at Annie Kenney Young Women's Refuge because she had been raped whilst staying at the Boarding House by another resident.

4) To report on the adequacy of existing services and programs, as well as identifying innovative initiatives for responding to the needs of homeless young people.

For the adequacy of existing service and program see 1 , 2 and 3.

Below is a case study of an innovative program that pulled together a number of programs to produce safe and secure housing and support and a pathway out of homelessness.

Case Study-

Youth and Family Focus Devonport

An innovative initiative for responding to the needs of homeless, young pregnant single mothers and/or homeless young single mothers with a child has been our Chettle Street Project. Housing Tasmania had 3 units, located in Chettle Street, which had been unsatisfactory for housing for many years. Those units were offered to Yaff. As the units were very tired, Yaff negotiated with Housing for a Work for the Dole crew to be given the materials from Housing to do them up. (This project has been nominated for the National Work for the Dole Achievement Awards – we are in the final 4 in Australia!). The units were then occupied by homeless, young single mothers who receive two forms of funded support – one is via Yaff's FOTO service funded by SAAP, the second is the integration of the mothers

into networks where they can learn additional skills via Local Answers Stronger Families and Communities Strategy – Local Answers Program. In the 6 months that this program has been running we have evidence of single mothers moving towards being re-connected with the community.

5. To recommend actions that should be taken by various stakeholders and government authorities to resolve and ameliorate the problem of youth homelessness within a broad policy framework from prevention to post-supported accommodation.

There are a range of actions that should be taken by various stakeholders and government authorities to resolve and ameliorate the problem of youth homelessness within a broad policy framework. Affordable, secure, appropriate and safe housing across all tenures is a basic and essential human right. A serious commitment to this right needs to be demonstrated within Australian social policy and practice. This means there needs to be a coordinated response to youth homelessness from early intervention programs through to assisting young people secure and maintain long-term accommodation.

SAAP and Housing

There are currently 35 SAAP agencies operating in Tasmania; 10 of these are targeted at young people, while 21 of these agencies are generalist services. During the 2005-6 period 27.6% of SAAP clients were aged between 15-25, with the number of young men assessing the service only marginally higher. In 2004/5 35% of SAAP clients were aged between 15-25 and over two thirds were young women. While over half of SAAP services in Tasmania are located in the southern region, the recent YCOPE Project found that crisis intervention, accommodation and housing do not meet the needs of young people living in the Clarence area of Hobart. This is only one example of a gap in the service provision.

The QYHC (Queensland Youth Housing Coalition) argue that funding for the last two SAAP agreements has not acknowledged the need for significant increases in funding for youth accommodation at either the bed number level or for the ongoing viability of services (2006: 4). Youth services funded out of SAAP program are often the only 'homes' for young people who access them. According to the QYHC (2006: 10), there needs to be an increase in funding in order for these services to be able to provide:

- adequate staffing
- adequate grocery bills to deal with growing bodies
- adequate operational income to provide educational tools such as computers and software
- accommodation that is well resourced – painted, good furniture and other goods and chattels.

In addition to increasing funding for SAAP youth services, appropriate, safe housing needs to be available to homeless young people, which requires an increase in funding for housing services from Commonwealth, State/Territory and Local governments. Young people need to be able to access a range of affordable accommodation and housing models to prevent homelessness and to meet their short and long term housing needs. Homelessness and housing systems need to be better aligned to provide sustainable pathways out of homelessness for people accessing the homelessness support system.

Early intervention programs

Early intervention programs are an essential part of any long-term strategy to address youth homelessness. There is overwhelming national and international research that demonstrates that appropriate early-intervention services for children aged 0-5 has a significant positive affect. Moreover, the Tasmanian State Government's own reports into child protection and family support services, released late last year, documents the critical need for such services in Tasmania.

A system wide approach to supporting Tasmanian families is required, which incorporates the following three tiers of services:

1. Universal and primary services for all children;
2. Secondary services for children at risk and who are vulnerable;
3. Tertiary services for children in need of care and protection.

Elements of this should ideally be coordinated with a national early-years strategy. Within this system-wide approach, the State Government should consider investing to establish the following programs and services.

The child protection system in Tasmania is clearly under-resourced and there is need for additional investment to address pressure in a range of acute children's services. However, by increasing investment in universal, 'tier-1' program areas, we can considerably reduce the long-term costs of tier 3 protective end of the spectrum and contribute to preventing to youth homelessness.

Income Support and Youth Unemployment

Youth Allowance is the most common financial support provided to young people in Australia. In November 2006 there were 11,650 young people receiving Youth Allowance in Tasmania. The current level of Youth Allowance does not meet basic living expenses and is benchmarked at an inadequate level for young people who are living independently in our community. According to some definitions of the poverty line in Australia those on Youth Allowance as a sole source of income are living just below the poverty line.

There needs to be an increase in income payments to meet all reasonable costs of living. Young people are often required to work part-time or casually to supplement Youth Allowance in order to cover the basic cost of living. This can have a detrimental impact on study, educational outcomes and future prospects for our

youth. Mission Australia calls for the introduction of an integrated single income support payment which provides adequate assistance for young people, incentives for greater participation and needs-based 'add on' payments according to individual circumstances, such as homelessness or disability.

Concerted action is needed to engage thousands of marginalised young people and reduce youth unemployment which, according to Mission Australia, is four times (14.3% for 15-19 year olds) and two times higher (6.7% for 20-24 year olds) than unemployment among those aged 25 and above (3.6%). While Tasmanian youth rated getting a job as a higher priority than young people on the mainland (31.5% compared to 20.3), in November 2006, Tasmania had the second highest youth unemployment rate in Australia (25.4% of persons aged 15-19 years looking for full-time work, well above the national rate of 17.4%).

One important response to youth unemployment is the Job Placement Employment and Training (JPET) program which is a Commonwealth funded program aimed at assisting students and unemployed young people aged 15-21 years (with priority to be given to those aged 15 to 19), who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless. This is a program of vital importance to young people and needs continued funding, support and expansion. For example, young people in detention are excluded from participating in the JPET program. Exclusionary practices such as these need to be reviewed and modified to assist those most at risk of unemployment and homelessness.

Youth Justice

Young people exiting correctional facilities are at risk of homelessness and need additional support into short and long term accommodation. Tasmania has the second highest rate of youth in custody in Australia and measures must be taken to ensure they are sufficiently supported with affordable, low-cost housing upon leaving detention. Furthermore, there needs to be increased funding for community education programs aimed at youth at risk of offending.

Lack of sufficient numbers of support workers within Ashley Detention Centre, combined with the fact that JPET services are unable to work with offenders until they have been released from Ashley, means that young people leave the youth justice system often unprepared and lacking the skills to re-enter the housing and employment system. According to Custodial Youth Justice Manager Bill Smith, detainees aged between 10-20 in Tasmania's Ashley Detention Centre often have drug and alcohol issues, mental health problems, poor social skills and low literacy and numeracy skills (*The Mercury*, May 14 2007. pp2).

These co-existing issues combined with low levels of employment, social stigma and the risk of re-offending (40-45% "graduate" to adult prison and homeless youth have higher rates of criminal behaviour than the general population) put young people exiting correctional facilities at high risk of short and long term housing instability and homelessness. To address this there needs to be not only an increase in housing

support but an increase in funding for community education programs, schooling, training and rehabilitation for young people while in detention.

Furthermore, young people in care and protection orders have a far greater risk of experiencing homelessness than their peers. State and Territory welfare authorities must be sufficiently resourced to meet the needs of young people under 16 in State care and protection to ensure these people do not become homeless.

Drug and alcohol services and mental health services

Many young people who are homeless also have mental health issues and/or drug and alcohol dependency issues. Specialised residential services for youth who have mental illness, drug and alcohol substance abuse are required. Service providers have noted that personality disorders are often not diagnosed and there is a lack of services such as 'detox' centres for young people. There needs to be increases in funding for these services and they must be delivered with flexibility to best suit the needs of young homeless people. They must be designed to take into account people's transient living arrangements, low literacy and numeracy levels.

It is important to acknowledge that many homeless youth develop mental health and substance abuse issues *after* they become homeless. Therefore, the psychological, emotional, social and physical strains of becoming homeless needs to be addressed before a substance abuse or mental health issue presents. This can be done through consistent and supportive and youth appropriate alcohol / drug and mental health counselling and education.

Sexual Assault, Domestic Violence Services and Family Relationship Counselling

Family breakdown and domestic violence are two of the main reasons young women seek support from homeless assistance services, while family breakdown is one of the key reasons young men seek support from services. Many young men and women who enter the homeless assistance system are escaping sexual, physical and emotional abuse. Suitable accommodation models to match the young person's immediate needs to ensure safety and abuse issues are addressed. An increase in funding for sexual assault and domestic violence services is required as well as early education programs surrounding protective behaviours and sexual abuse. Awareness surrounding male sexual abuse and assault and domestic violence needs to be increased in order to remove stigma surrounding young men displaying help-seeking behaviours.

Enhanced support and education for young parents and parents with children and/or adolescents surrounding coping mechanisms, anger management, drug and alcohol abuse and ways to improve communication is required and may help to alleviate some of the tensions experienced by young people at home through an early intervention approach.

Youth Health Services

Continued and increased funding to youth health services and centres across all levels of government will help to ameliorate and prevent youth homelessness. Youth

health centres and services such as Pulse (in Glenorchy), The Link (in Hobart city) and The Corner (in Launceston) give homeless youth access to youth workers, social workers, youth health nurses, GPs and access to facilities such as showers, washing machines and dryers which can alleviate some of the material and physical pressures of homelessness while also keeping young people connected to workers within their community.

There is however a serious lack of youth services of this type in the Clarence area of Hobart. Furthermore, an increase in funding of youth health outreach services as well as a renewed focus on addressing the health needs of young people in rural areas would help to address some of the health issues that present with youth homelessness. According to Mission Australia, greater use of mobile outreach and information technology based information delivery should be encouraged to reduce the level of social exclusion, particularly for young people in disadvantaged communities and rural and remote areas.

Research

There is a continuing need to fund and undertake research on homelessness in relation to specific youth groups most at risk of homelessness including indigenous youth, migrant and / or refugee youth, young parents, children and young people exiting correctional facilities. Further research needs to be undertaken on sector-wide practices in relation to access, exclusion and early exit of homelessness services. This research should be used to influence policy and program decisions at all levels of government.

Schools

Between two thirds and three quarters of homeless students do not complete the school year (Mission Australia: 2006). Schools need to continue to be involved in providing preventative measures against youth homelessness by working with young people considered 'at risk' of disengaging from their studies and school communities. Youth most at risk of disengagement need continued support and assistance into post year 10 training or vocational education.

The State Government should continue to fund positions within the Department of Education, such as Youth Learning Officers (YLOs), who can assist young people at risk of disengaging to remain supported and connected to education options and their community. Funding should continue for Commonwealth initiatives such as Youth Pathway Advisors employed to work with young people aged 13-19 at risk of not making a successful transition through school, and from school to further education, training and employment.

Understanding of Adolescent Development

Stakeholders and government authorities should work to increase understanding of the social and developmental (physical, psychological and emotional) issues that are unique to adolescence, impacting on young peoples' ability and willingness to access youth-targeted services and programs. Social policy has overlooked the developmental issues facing young independent people required to negotiate a range

of complex living situations (M Leebeek: 2006) and this needs to be addressed and reflected within a broad policy framework and the local level of workplace practices.

Adolescence is a time of great cognitive, social and emotional change and development. It is a time in which young people test boundaries, explore their identity and sexuality, their values and view of life. The desire for independence plays a large role in the actions and behaviour of adolescents, as does the need for approval from peers. Young people should be allowed to make mistakes and youth workers need to be tolerant and supporting of the fact that young people are developing values and these values may conflict with the values of the service (Leebeek 2006).

The changing role of the youth worker in relation to young people has meant a change in the skill set, training and professional development in the field. This needs to be acknowledged through providing up-to-date education and skill development to people working with youth from the moment of induction, with an emphasis on continued workforce development.

6. To explore the basis for a renewed national accord between the Commonwealth and the states and territories and between government and the community on the issue of youth homelessness.

The cornerstone of a renewed national accord between the Commonwealth and States and Territories, and between government and community must be a rejuvenated SAAP system, a new CSHA or National Affordable Housing Agreement (as proposed by National Shelter), and the establishment of a new Commonwealth-State and Territory early-years strategy, the basis of which could be the COAG 'human capital reform' work.

SAAP

The SAAP service system is fully stretched and young clients can experience long waiting lists and exclusion from services. Some young people have difficulty gaining access to SAAP services including young males from CALD backgrounds, young people with high support needs who are unable to live independently, single parents, people with disabilities, suicidal young people and young couples. There needs to be an increase in resources and Capital Funding to SAAP to enable it to grow and change so that it can provide appropriate services to those who need it most, particularly young people with high, diverse and complex needs.

Housing

National Shelter, the peak body advocating for low income housing consumers, has recently released a National Policy Platform: Australian Housing – A Fair Share? The platform calls for a mix of actions with the Commonwealth and State and Territory governments working together.

The platform includes calls for:

- a National Housing Strategy,
- a review of the impact of the taxation system on housing affordability,
- the development of financing and investment strategies to attract institutional investors into affordable rental housing, and
- implementation of a National Indigenous Housing Strategy.

For a complete list of recommendations view www.shelter.org.au

Early-Years

The Council of Australian Governments (COAG) Human Capital Reform Report states that the life chances of children, especially for those born into disadvantaged families, is strongly shaped before they begin school. Confronting early disadvantage is often far more effective than seeking to remedy disadvantage later in life (2006: 3). A major and cultural attitudinal shift is required to build a continuous approach to learning throughout life. This shift will require leadership and policy reform to ensure that:

- all children have a good start to life through high quality early childhood development opportunities;
- all students develop strong literacy and numeracy skills – the foundations for life and learning skills;
- all young people are supported in the transition from school to further study or work; and
- all adults are encouraged to update their skills continuously.

Finally, there needs to be a government and community commitment to Australian children and youth. This means we need to commit as a society to deliver the support systems that children and young people need. It means we need to commit to prioritising the health and well-being of our children and young people over inaction. The basis for our decision making should be the health and well-being of our children and young people. Without the development of a coordinated, national affordable housing strategy, responses to youth homelessness will continue to suffer at the level of structure, delivery and outcome, and it is the health, wellbeing and future of Australia's youth who will suffer the most.