Responding to HOMELESSNESS

Sisters Inside Inc. (SIS)

An organisation which provides services to women & girls with lived prison experience and their children.

Most are homeless, or at risk of homelessness, and have complex and inter-related needs.

Submission in Response to the FaHCSIA Green Paper

Contents

This Submission ... At a Glance

Over 1,000 women are released from prisons in Australia each year; the majority are homeless upon release; a significant proportion are Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander women.

Most fit the classic homelessness profile - with a history of domestic violence, unemployment, substance abuse and/or mental health issues.

The majority are mothers of dependent children, and most were the primary carers for their children prior to imprisonment.

The complex and inter-related needs of these families highlights the importance of *wrap around* services when addressing homelessness.

Given the inter-relationship between homelessness and criminalisation, targeting these families would be an efficient way to make a significant long term impact on homelessness in Australia.

SIS has developed a model of service which has proven highly effective in addressing homelessness amongst women with lived prison experience.

This model is remarkably congruent with the 10 Principles for Change and could be readily applied to work with other homeless populations.

10 years of funding neglect has led to a National Homelessness Emergency in Australia; a concerted effort is required to address this shortfall in resources and the significant long term harm done to many Australians.

We must create new ways to *fast track* homeless people through crisis accommodation to long term, appropriate, stable, affordable housing.

It is only when securely housed and supported, that people can fully address the causes of their homelessness and move toward genuine social inclusion.

About Sisters Inside (SIS)

Sisters Inside, Queensland[1]

Sisters Inside specialises in working with women with high and complex needs. SIS provides a variety of *wrap-around* services for women prior to and following release from prison. SIS focuses on social inclusion and functions from a *whole of family* perspective, with children recognised as clients. SIS may work with an individual woman or family over many months or years. The intensity of SIS involvement at any given time will vary according to the woman's needs. Often, SIS simply functions as a *safety net* for women already in housing - preventing escalation of minor issues into loss of housing or a return to prison.

SIS provides many pre and post-release programs and services including:

- Intensive support for women and children in rebuilding their lives after the trauma of prison (eg. individual *Planned Support*, programs/camps, parenting support).
- Support for women in prison (eg. sexual assault counselling, Indigenous support workers, skills workshops).
- Early intervention with mothers in prison and their children, to address housing issues and aid positive family reunification post-release.
- Age-specific services to young women prisoners in youth and adult prisons.
- Reunification of women and their children, including reunification of families from the stolen generations.
- Support for children whose mothers are in prison, including facilitating contact between mothers and children.
- Support for homeless or at risk young people with mothers in prison, focused on improving their social and educational connectedness.
- Increasing women's participation in mainstream society (eg. arranging training opportunities and work pathways).
- Community building programs (eg. Indigenous Circus Project).
- Development of stand-alone, user-friendly resources for Indigenous and non-Indigenous women, children and workers.

In 2006-7, SIS undertook a National Homeless Strategy Demonstration Project, "A Place to Call Home", which worked with 229 women and 306 related children over an 18 month period. The project was highly successful in addressing needs the needs of homeless women with complex, inter-related needs and their families. It generated substantial new evidence on effective strategies for working with homeless people.

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[1] Further details available from: http://www.sistersinside.com.au

SIS Contribution to Homeless Strategy Development

Sisters Inside Inc. (SIS) is uniquely placed to respond to the FaHCSIA Green Paper. We daily see the impact of homelessness on women and their children, and girls, in the criminal justice system. We increasingly see women being criminalised, due to their homelessness and the complex, inter-related issues they face. Women's experience as victims of crime frequently contributes both to their homelessness and their criminalisation. Imprisonment, far from addressing these problems, adds another layer of complexity to the issues faced by these women and their children. **Imprisonment often sets whole families on a downward spiral toward chronic primary or secondary homelessness.**

Many women with lived prison experience have a long history of homelessness. As acknowledged by Hon. Tanya Plibersek in her video message: *The causes of homelessness are complex - things like family breakdown, drug addiction, mental illness, domestic violence and unemployment.* Most women with lived prison experience face most, or all, of these issues. *Criminalisation* **of women is a further significant contributor to homelessness.** If women were not homeless prior to imprisonment, then most are homeless following release from prison. Further, the complexities of the inter-related issues they face have been exacerbated.

Most women prisoners are mothers of dependent children. At least 25% of women in prison are unsentenced and the majority are first time offenders. Most sentenced women have been convicted for minor non-violent offences, and are serving short sentences. (In Queensland the average is 2 months, and many women serve shorter sentences than this.) **Even a short period of imprisonment can lead to homelessness, and therefore impact on whole families.** If women are amongst the few with a home and job, these are likely to be lost due to their imprisonment. Often, children are emotionally damaged as a result of being placed in care whilst their mother is in prison. Following criminalisation, women and their children lose even more *opportunities to be part of the economy, part of their families and part of the community*.

SIS can particularly contribute to the development of service delivery strategies to address homelessness. The SIS *Planned Support* model was refined and articulated as part of a Demonstration Project, funded through the National Homelessness Strategy in 2006-7. It proved a highly successful *wrap around* approach to homelessness. Planned Support shares some characteristics with conventional Case Management, but is driven by a fundamentally different approach to working with homeless women and their children. This new, evidence-based approach is particularly compatible with the 10 Principles for Change outlined in the Green Paper. Planned Support could be successfully transferred to work with other groups of homeless people.

Importance of 'Wrap Around 'Services

Most women with lived prison experience fit the classic homelessness profile. Numerous studies[2] have found that:

- The vast majority of women have a history of physical and/or sexual abuse.
- The majority are survivors of incest.
- The majority have a history of domestic violence.
- The majority have diagnosed mental health issues.
- The majority have a history of poor educational and employment outcomes.
- The majority have a history of drug and/or alcohol abuse.
- Many have an intellectual or learning disability.
- Many have a childhood experience of incarceration and/or institutionalisation.
- Many have complex physical health needs, including preventable health problems.
- Many are at risk of suicide or self harm, particularly within days or weeks of release from prison.

Most women have more than one of these characteristics, and many have all of them. Many SIS participants have **all** 31 causal factors of homelessness, listed in Table 2 of the Green Paper (p20).

The SIS National Homeless Strategy Demonstration Project further found that:

- 50% of women leaving prison also had a Centrelink or (Queensland) Department of Housing debt, and therefore *started from behind*, financially. (Often these debts were accrued as a result of their sudden, unexpected imprisonment.)
- Many women leaving prison had lost all or most of their belongings, and therefore needed essentials such as personal care items and clothing immediately.
- Many women leaving prison had little or no identification (essential for access to crisis payments, ongoing income support and housing).
- At least 6.5% of women with lived prison experience were on the TICA Register[3], which effectively precluded them from private sector rental housing.

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[2] SIS would be happy to provide more detailed statistical information to support each of these claims. Our knowledge of women in prison in Australia is limited since official statistics are often not publicly available, and very little research has been undertaken focused on women prisoners[2]. Yet, the limited data available presents a highly consistent profile of women released from prison - homeless with high, complex needs.

[3] A total of 15 of the 229 women involved with the project. It is likely that many more women were on the TICA List. It costs $35 per search to establish whether a woman is on the List, therefore a search was only undertaken when indicated.

The complex situation of women with lived prison experience is further exacerbated because:

1. The majority are also mothers of dependent children. Services must address the complex and inter-related needs of whole families, not just the women themselves.
2. A highly disproportionate number are Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander women. It is critical that services are culturally appropriate.

There is limited value in addressing a single problem such as homelessness, in isolation from other issues:

Short Term Example: Despite a long history of mental health issues, Mary is released from prison without medication or mental health referral. She is provided with emergency shelter. Other residents at the shelter find Mary's behaviour difficult. This behaviour may be due to a number of factors, including withdrawal from prescribed pharmaceutical drugs, lack of necessary medication and the trauma of release. Mary is excluded from the shelter, and returns to the streets.

Long Term Example: After years of homelessness and 4 weeks in prison, Lynda is finally allocated public housing. She hasn't stayed in a house alone for many years … it's so quiet that Lynda can't sleep. It reminds her of a foster home she stayed in as a child … she keeps thinking that a man is lurking in the corners of the room. Despite having been 'clean' for several months, Lynda goes to the local bottle shop and has a 'few drinks' to get through the night. She knows that that having secure housing is essential to regaining custody of her 3 children who were taken into care when she was sent to prison. But she's just too scared to stay in the house. Luckily, Lynda doesn't end up in trouble with the police during the night. In the morning, she abandons the house and returns to her sister's.

It is essential that any strategy to address homelessness recognises the complex causes of homelessness, and the inter-related issues that they often generate.

If we genuinely want homeless people to take their rightful place in society, we must begin by giving them the same autonomy and right to make decisions about their lives as other community members. Wrap around services must *keep them warm* during their transition. Services must not be *wrapped so tight that they can't move!* Services must work alongside homeless people, in order to build their self-management skills, and enable them to take responsibility for their own lives. **Effective wrap around services provide *support*, rather than *smothering*, for homeless people.**

An Effective, Transferable, Model of Service

Like other homeless people, most women in prison have always been on the margins of mainstream society. After release from prison, they continue to face the same issues that existed prior to imprisonment (sometimes the very issues that contributed to their offence). Often these issues have compounded whilst in prison, making them even more difficult to address than before.

Upon release from prison, women are expected to make a fast transition from being fully controlled by others (*a good prisoner)* to taking full control of their own life (*a good citizen*). Similarly, as detailed in the Green Paper, many other homeless people have a history of institutionalisation and are under pressure to move from *being controlled* to *taking control*.

Over the past 10 years, SIS has consistently observed that once *free*, women respond negatively to some service providers. Many women would prefer to manage without essential services, rather than face workers who remind them of prison officers, or other authority figures in their past lives. On occasion, this may put them at risk of re-imprisonment (eg. when they are unwilling to deal with income support agencies). Using Action Research, the National Demonstration Project identified a series of industry practices which women found *unhelpful*, and focused on developing alternatives to these. Some of these unhelpful practices are implicit in conventional Case Management.

SIS has developed a model of service, *Planned Support*, which has proven highly effective in addressing homelessness amongst women with lived prison experience. For example, the first intake of women in the National Demonstration Project (SE Queensland) had consistent support from SIS services for 9 - 12 months. 70% of this group was in a relatively stable housing situation by the end of the project. **The *Planned Support* model seeks to retain the strengths of case management, whilst empowering women to take control of their life decisions - including decisions about whether or not to plan, and planning priorities.**

Planned Support is based on a flexible, women-driven approach to planning. It focuses on supporting women to identify their own needs. It aims to address these directly wherever possible. It provides supported referral and/or advocacy when women need assistance from other organisations.

Each woman has a *Lead Worker* who is her key reference point. The woman has significant input into allocation of her Lead Worker. The Lead Worker is responsible for tracking the woman's progress and needs, for the duration of her involvement.

There is a remarkable level of congruence between this model, and the 10 Principles for Change outlined in the Green Paper (pp57-8). Planned Support focuses on:

- Aiming for early intervention and prevention.
- Working toward social inclusion of participants.
- Addressing the causes of homelessness.
- Prioritising finding secure affordable housing.
- Treating participants with dignity and respect.
- Ensuring the safety and wellbeing of families.
- Treating children as clients in their own right.
- Providing services suited to participants' age, capacity and aspirations.
- Using a multi-disciplinary approach.
- Targeting participants at their most vulnerable transition points.
- Being driven by evidence and client needs at a policy and practice level.
- Being highly accountable for worker actions - in the first instance, to participants themselves.

How Services are Provided

Like the South Australian example cited in the Green Paper, SIS found that it was important to provide *assertive, flexible and personalised responses that do not give up on people* (p43).

The attitude of workers was found to be a critical determinant of successfully working with this group of women. The project found that working from each woman's own strengths, goals and priorities was the single most important determinant of ultimate success. Workers in the project supported and resourced women's perception of their needs. They worked from the assumption that women should be free to test their own strategies and, if necessary, learn from their mistakes. They treated women as the experts in their own lives, and valued their ability and right to make their own decisions.

Many women required very high levels of support during their transition from prison and homelessness toward independence. The project found that it was important to know when support was, and was not, needed. Achieving improved autonomy depended on achieving a balance between fast, intense provision of services when needed, and moving into a background support role (being a *safety net*) when women were managing on their own. Some assessment tools were developed to assist workers in making this judgment.

Organisational Systems and Structures

Some of the organisational factors which were found to contribute to the success of the Demonstration Project were:

- **Critical Organisational Mass:** This project was co-located with a number of other programs at SIS. This proved very useful in responding to the often specialist and/or urgent needs of women. Many women had as much interaction with other SIS workers, as their Lead Worker or other Demonstration Project staff. However, the successful outcome of co-location must be viewed in the context of a high level of integration of between SIS services, and the congruence of worker attitudes and values throughout the organisation.
- **Peer-based staff:** The staff team in the Demonstration Project included women with lived prison experience and Indigenous staff. This was found to improve both the efficiency and effectiveness of services. It short-cut the process of trust-building, and improved the level of understanding of women's needs amongst all workers in the project.
- **Sophisticated staff support systems:** There is clear evidence that incidents of suicide or self-harm are common amongst women in the days and weeks after release from prison. These can particularly impact on peer-based staff. SIS already had critical incident systems in place, and these proved essential to sustained service provision when incidents occurred during the project.
- **Workload systems:** The project developed clearly articulated frameworks for identifying different levels of need/resourcing amongst women. These included criteria based on stages of post-prison transition, and categorisation of women into *Active* and *Inactive* clients. It also provided for sudden changes in status (eg. after a critical incident or crisis for a woman).
- **Developmental reflection:** Quarterly reflection days helped re-energise Project staff and helped the project develop new frameworks and practices (which, in turn, improved project efficiency). Action research was a particularly useful tool aiding this process of reflection and service improvement.
- **Continuity of service:** A commitment to continuity of service beyond addressing immediate issues of homelessness was critical to successful long term outcomes for women. Even when in stable housing, some women faced crisis situations which potentially threatened their housing. Providing an ongoing *safety net* for a period of time played a demonstratively important preventative role, and enabled women to move forward and address further issues in their lives.
- **Worker development time:** Given the maze of services, and the constantly changing service provision climate, it was found that allocating time for each worker to develop and update their knowledge of services, assistance criteria and application processes ultimately improved efficiency.

Direct Service Provision

Many women have limited literacy. It quickly became clear that women were averse to developing written plans. During the transition from homelessness, women's circumstances and priorities changed constantly. Staff found the CMS system a useful means of maintaining immediate, accessible, up-to-date information about women's changing plans.

Concurrently addressing women's housing, support service and practical needs was critical in the early stages of their transition. Practical needs (eg. transport to an appointment or storing women's belongings) and support needs (eg. substance abuse services or counselling) were found to be at least as important as housing. This required critical analysis and reframing of the concept of *dependency*.

The ability to respond to needs quickly was central to the project's success. This was particularly important during critical times when women were under emotional and practical pressure (eg. immediately post-release, or during Family Court procedures, or whilst addressing substance abuse issues).

Fast access to flexible brokerage funds was invaluable. Most emergency relief funds do not make allowances for critical needs such as purchasing a birth certificate or overnight motel accommodation when there are no shelter places available.

Lead Workers played a key role in maintaining the *big picture* for women. Homeless women are typically preoccupied with short term emotional and practical survival. Many are removed from public housing waiting lists whilst in prison or not living at a stable address. Project Lead Workers regularly monitored each woman's place on the list. As a result, several women were reinstated on the list and ultimately placed in secure housing.

Coordination and Collaboration

The Green Paper comments on lack of coordination across service providers a number of times. The Demonstration Project was in a privileged position. Because of its research focus, considerable time was allocated to collaborative undertakings with other agencies. Considerable effort was dedicated to participating in coordination mechanisms, building relationships with government agencies and community based services, seeking to establish service-provision partnerships and providing education to other agencies about the needs of women with lived prison experience. The project found that developing **personalised networks** with individual service providers and agencies was more effective than more formal approaches. This personalised approach to partnership had a greater impact on outcomes for homeless

women than mechanisms such as developing MOU's, participation in coordinating groups or providing structured worker education/training.

Ultimately, however, seamless **coordination cannot make up for a lack of essential services.** Nor can it change the attitudes and guidelines which preclude those most in need - people with complex needs. If other organisations are unable or unwilling to provide essential services, women's long term housing prognosis is poor.

Whilst lack of coordination is sometimes a problem, more often the problems lie in the policies and practices of service providers. Just a few of the problems experienced during the project were:

- Difficulty accessing women in prison to undertake early intervention and planning for their transition post-release.
- Difficulty accessing mental health and substance abuse services for women, particularly when they faced both mental health and substance abuse issues.
- Difficulties finding crisis accommodation for women with mental health and/or substance abuse issues.
- Difficulties overcoming existing barriers to long term housing for women (eg. removal from DoH Waiting list whilst in prison, housing debt accrued as a result of imprisonment, or inclusion on the TICA List).

These systemic barriers were matters of policy and practice, rather than coordination. A more systematic whole-of-government approach (p34) would health with pathways out of homelessness. But, only if this was coupled with an overarching policy framework (Principal 7) which required all service providers to develop policies and practices consistent with the 10 Principles. It is these policies and practices which may increase the risk of homelessness, or actually cause homelessness.

A different type of collaboration occurred between the project and its funding body (FaCSIA). During the life of the project the Commonwealth agreed to several project changes in response to new evidence and changed circumstances. This willingness to negotiate was invaluable in maximising service provision. **This type of flexibility should be a feature of any program designed to address homelessness.**

At a very practical level, during the life of the project, another agency maintained a register of housing vacancies which was updated on a daily basis. This significantly increased project efficiency and freed up worker time to address women's needs. Including **Vacancy Registers** in the mix of services designed to address homelessness would be a very positive contribution.

Future Directions - Targeting Women with Lived Prison Experience

As at 30 June 2006, there were 1827 women in prison in Australia[4].   Given the short sentences served by most women, this suggests that well over 1,000 women are released from prisons in Australia each year. This may seem like a small proportion of homeless people. However, it is important to assess the importance of targeting this group in a wider context.

As recognised in the Green Paper, there is a *complex relationship between homelessness and offending behaviour, with each contributing to increases in the other* (p24). Further, the significance of this group is highlighted by 2005-6 findings that 11% of SAAP clients had a history of repeated incarceration (p24). Like other SAAP clients, many women with lived prison experience have a history of state care. And, their children are at increased risk of future homelessness, since there is good evidence that youth homelessness is the beginning of long term homelessness (p25). It is reasonable to expect that targeting these 1000+ women, and their children, would have a (positively) disproportionate impact on addressing wider homelessness in Australia.

Targeting women with lived prison experience has two key advantages:

1. Unlike many groups of homeless people, these women can be easily accessed. Both pre and post release (on probation), women are a *captive market*.
2. This could have a significant preventative and multiplier effect. Women who were not homeless prior to imprisonment can be prevented from falling into the downward spiral of homelessness. Targeting mothers could help prevent further harm to their children in the short and long term. This includes reducing the risk that these children will become homeless adults.

This is also a rapidly growing population group. Rates of imprisonment of women have more than doubled over the past few years[5], and Indigenous women and their children are particularly vulnerable[6]. Plans to build new women's prison facilities in several jurisdictions suggest that this will be a growing population at risk of homelessness into the future.

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[4] ABS, Prisoners in Australia 2006, summary at: http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/mf/4500.0/
[5] Over the past few years, there has been a 110% increase in the total incarceration rate for women - ABS Statistics cited in Goulding 2004:14.
Download from: http://www.cscr.murdoch.edu.au/impact_of_prison.pdf
[6] According to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner (2004) there was a 343% increase in imprisonment of Indigenous women between 1993 and 2003.
Download from: http://www.hreoc.gov.au/social_justice/sjreport04

SIS has developed a range of practical tools and substantial training materials, and is therefore well placed to resource other service providers seeking to implement a Planned Support approach to working with homeless populations.

Intervention Goals for Women with Lived Prison Experience and Their Families

All the interventions proposed in the next section equally apply to women with lived prison experience and their children. In addition:

- Brokerage workers should be appointed for all women in prison, at least 2 months prior to their release. These workers should be provided with guaranteed access to women in prison to ensure that intensive transition planning occurs prior to release, and practical needs such as ID, clothing, crisis payment and housing can be in place ready for their release. The Demonstration Project clearly found that this form of early intervention played a significant role in preventing homelessness.
- Most women serve short sentences. Yet, during this time they often accrue a housing debt and lose their housing. Allowing this to occur is a false economy.   Retention of housing for women serving short sentences, particularly women with dependent children, would be a valuable investment in preventing homelessness.
- Similarly, help with small debts which are a barrier to accessing housing (eg. rental debts incurred as a result of sudden, unexpected imprisonment) would play a useful preventative role. It would allow women to *get on their feet* more quickly after imprisonment, and aid in the addressing the family problems so often experienced after children are placed in care. Centrelink or state housing department debts could be suspended for women being released from prison.
- It is important that women have access to adequate suitable crisis accommodation upon release. This includes the need for *shelters of last resort* which guarantee to accommodate women and their children. This is particularly critical for women with complex needs which lead to behaviours that existing services find difficult to manage. In order for these shelters to function successfully, they would require workers with high levels of competence in responding to a range of behaviours, and attitudes consistent with the 10 Principles for Change.
- Many women in prison are survivors of domestic violence. A commitment to removing the perpetrator, rather than the victim, from family violence settings would go a long way toward addressing homelessness (and sometimes, subsequent criminal offences) amongst women with lived prison experience and their children.

Future Directions - Addressing the Wider Questions

SIS applauds the Australian Government's commitment to addressing homelessness - in both the short and long term. Australia certainly needs a new approach which focuses more strongly on early intervention and prevention. In particular, **SIS strongly supports the 10 Principles For Change outlined in the Green Paper.**

Australia is a signatory to a number of International Human Rights instruments. Despite our national wealth, inadequate crisis, short term and longer term accommodation is available. Improving the appropriateness and availability of crisis and emergency accommodation is an essential pre-requisite to addressing homelessness in the short term. In the long term, making finding stable, safe and affordable housing easier is a pre-requisite to achieving the positive, developmental goals outlined in the Green Paper.

As a result of 10 years of funding neglect, homeless people often spend much of their day on basic survival - competing for accommodation for the following night, accessing food and other necessities and keeping track of their meager possessions. Often, support workers have little choice but to address these day-to-day issues at the expense of a focus on prevention or longer term social inclusion strategies. Whilst workers continue to *shift deck chairs on the Titanic*, many homeless people are inevitably stuck in the homelessness cycle.

As acknowledged by the Minister, stopping the cycle of homelessness requires much more than accommodation alone. The years of neglect mean that homelessness is now a deeply entrenched problem - a lifestyle, for many people. Some see themselves as part of a *community* of homeless people, rather than part of the wider society.

It is important to recognise that social inclusion is the last step in an extended process, for long term homeless people. Breaking the cycle of homelessness must move through at least 3 main phases:

1. Accessing and maintaining appropriate long term housing.
2. Addressing personal needs such as health, emotional, parenting, income support.
3. Addressing social inclusion needs such as education, employment and wider community engagement.

These phases are not mutually exclusive. For example, some progress can be made toward education or training whilst someone is homeless. However, the success of these endeavours will be severely limited by their unstable housing situation and the likely intervention of emotional or health issues. People who

have been in the margins for a long time will only move into the mainstream, when they have all the same opportunities and rights as other community members.

Initially, it is critical that we address the health, welfare and social needs of homeless people. Services to address needs such as mental health issues and substance abuse are grossly inadequate. This problem is further exacerbated for homeless people with complex, inter-related needs. For example:

- Many mental health services are unwilling or unable to work with people who also have substance abuse issues;
- Many substance abuse services are unwilling or unable to work with people who also have mental health issues;
- Many homeless people fail to qualify for access to mental health and/or substance abuse service, due to geographical constraints.

Britain's 78% reduction in the number of people *sleeping rough* over the past 10 years (Green Paper, p9) is a great achievement. However, the question remains: *Who were the 22% who missed out?* **When addressing homelessness in Australia, it is important that those with the most complex, inter-related needs are not *the 22%* who fall through the system.**

Unless adequate funds are allocated to meet people's most basic human rights, services will continue to implement the *silo approach* noted in the Green Paper (p39), as a means of working within their resource limitations and *comfort zone.* **Unless services commit to working within the 10 Principles of Change, they will continue to implement the demonstrably unsuccessful service provision models of the past**, which have failed to address homelessness. We must move toward enabling homeless people to assess their own needs, rather than relying on assessment by service providers.

In the long term, formerly homeless people will only truly be socially included with improved education and employment opportunities and outcomes.

Taxpayer funds are limited. But they are not limited to working within current lines of expenditure. Homelessness is a National Emergency. It places Australian values and our social stability at long term risk. It is essential that funds are reallocated from other budget lines to address the human rights of our population. This is an investment in the future of our nation. It is essential that substantial new resources are allocated, in the short term, to redress the shortfall created by years of neglect once and for all.

The key barriers to radical change are funding and competencies. Many of the factors which keep people in the homelessness cycle result from lack of housing and other services. Service and individual worker competencies (knowledge, skills and attitudes/values) must be further enhanced to generate policies and practices which are compatible with the new directions being

sought in the Green Paper. Only then can they respond to effectively to the needs of homeless people

Given their relative organisational flexibility and history of success in providing responsive services, non-government organisations are best placed to drive innovative forms of support and accelerate their take-up across Australia. The successful services cited in the Green Paper are most often community-based and population-targeted - *delivered by specialist family, youth and local community organisations* (p35). Most notably, the Reconnect program has been highly successful in addressing issues related to homelessness. It is important that non-government organisations are resourced to play a key role in implementing *A New Approach to Homelessness,* particularly in relation to crisis accommodation, brokerage, support and wrap-around services. Non-government organisations are best equipped to provide flexible support packages, which are tailored to individual participants, multi-disciplinary and are not time limited. A *lead agency* could be allocated to each homeless person to broker services to meet their needs. Their location at the hub of brokering 'joined-up' systems for homeless people would place them in a position to generate collective accountability for outcomes and identify any failure to meet agreed outcomes by process partners.

Ultimately, community services rely heavily on governments to provide the material means to address homelessness - particularly housing stock, income support, education and health services. Removing the resourcing, policy and practical barriers to accessing these is essential to a successful long term strategy to address homelessness. As part of tailored support packages for homeless individuals and families, governments must guarantee access to services to meet their basic rights - particularly (mental) health and substance abuse services.

The private sector, too, can play a valuable role. In the first instance, the real estate and housing sectors can contribute to addressing the barriers to affordable private rental for many homeless people. In the long term, partnerships between employers and other service providers will be critical in creating employment pathways for homeless people.

In order to successfully address this National Emergency, we must build on the existing expertise of all sectors. It is essential that government, non government and private sector organisations work together. We need a new way forward that builds on the strengths of existing service providers and the evidence about models of practice which are effective in working with homeless people. We must develop and implement new evidence-based approaches toward achieving *A New Approach to Homelessness.*

Intervention Goals for All Homeless People

Within this term of government, the Australian Government should aim to:

- Ensure that sufficient appropriate crisis and emergency accommodation is available to stop the often daily *survival run-around*, and allow homeless people time to begin to address the causes of their homelessness.
- Achieve a significant increase in the availability of stable long term housing appropriate to the needs of homeless people. Increases in public housing stock remains the most viable means of providing safe, secure, affordable housing.
- Ensure that every homeless person has access to flexible, supportive, wrap-around services until they are socially included.
- Resource organisations with demonstrated effectiveness in addressing complex and inter-related needs to undertake substantial action research, to further articulate the models of practice that are most effective in working with homeless people with high needs.
- Work together with state/territory government, non-government and private sectors to address resourcing, policy and practice barriers to providing appropriate early intervention and prevention services to homeless people.
- Substantially increase the number of appropriate flanking services to address the causes of homelessness (eg. health issues, criminalisation, a history of abuse).

Within the next term of government, the need for crisis accommodation services will have been largely superceded, due to the significant increase in access to appropriate long term housing. By the end of the next term, the Australian Government should aim to:

- Ensure that homeless families are provided with stable, affordable housing within 2 weeks of becoming homeless.
- Ensure that homeless singles are provided with stable, affordable housing within 4 weeks of becoming homeless.
- Ensure that every homeless person has access to the flanking services required to address their wider needs, including income support, mental health, substance abuse, parental support, education/training and employment services.