

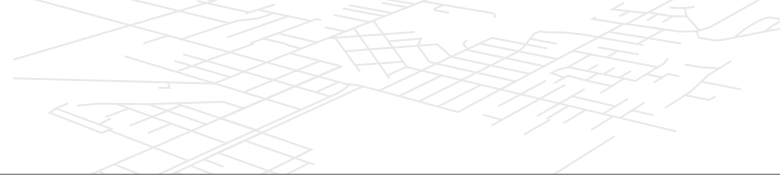


**Australian Government**

# Which Way Home? Summary

A black and white photograph showing the silhouettes of a family—a man, a woman, and a child—cast against a light-colored brick wall. The shadows are long and dark, suggesting a low sun position. The wall has a grid-like pattern of bricks. The image is partially overlaid by a blue banner at the bottom.

A New Approach to Homelessness



## Introduction

After 17 years of economic growth, homelessness in Australia remains unacceptably high. Every night 100,000 Australians are homeless. Half are under 24 years old and 10,000 are children.<sup>1</sup>

There are some effective programs targeting people who are homeless, or at risk of homelessness, operating around Australia. They are not sufficient in number to have enough impact.

A new approach is required – one that brings people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness from the margins in to the mainstream and provides them with opportunities the rest of us take for granted – a good education, decent health care and a secure place to call home.

The new approach needs to be truly national. The best results require all levels of government and service providers to commit to a joint effort. We also need to harness the contributions and efforts of the business community.

## Reducing homelessness is everyone's responsibility.

To reduce homelessness over the long term we need a better functioning, more affordable housing market, increased social and economic participation by homeless people and more responsive and effective services.

Crisis services and mainstream health, education, justice and employment services need to work better together. We need to work harder to prevent homelessness, and stop its cycle.

We look forward to your active participation. We owe it to 100,000 Australians – as well as to our future generations – to get this right.

## A Green Paper and a White Paper

The Prime Minister's Steering Group guided the development of this Green Paper. The Green Paper seeks to promote public discussion about homelessness and suggest ways we can reduce homelessness by 2020. This document is a very short summary of the Green Paper. You can access the full Green Paper over the internet by visiting [www.fahcsia.gov.au](http://www.fahcsia.gov.au) and clicking on "housing and homelessness".

A White Paper will be released in September 2008. The White Paper will set out a national plan of action to 2020.

## Our current response to homelessness

The current response is not working. Mainstream services like schools, health services, and employment programs often fail to help people who are homeless or who are at risk of homelessness. Services don't always work together and people are forced to go from one service to another to try and get help.

Most support for homeless people is provided through the Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP). The aim of SAAP is to resolve crisis, help people re-establish family links and re-establish people's capacity to live independently of the program.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Counting the Homeless 2001 ABS Cat 2050.0

<sup>2</sup> The Supported Accommodation Assistance Act (1994)

Despite the goals of SAAP and attempts over the last fifteen years to focus the program more on early intervention and prevention, it remains largely a crisis response to homelessness. Evaluations of SAAP have pointed to the program's inability to deliver sustainable long term outcomes for clients in critical areas of housing, employment, training and education.<sup>3</sup>

Given the limits of the SAAP service system and the high level of unmet demand it is more likely that people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness will interact with the mainstream service system. Coordination and integration between mainstream services and specific homelessness services must be a priority in a new approach. All government social policies and programs need to work together to reduce homelessness.

## Future Directions

### **Goals and Targets**

For Australia to do better on homelessness we need clear goals that are ambitious and achievable.

There is good evidence that a strong simple goal will focus the efforts of government and the community and reduce homelessness over the long term.

Possible targets for reducing homelessness in Australia could include:

- » a decrease in the number of people moving from public housing and private rental to crisis accommodation services
- » an increase in the number of women and children remaining in their own home following domestic and family violence
- » a decrease in the number of people seeking crisis accommodation who first experienced homelessness as children
- » an increase in the percentage of school-age children who remain in school, education or training after being in crisis accommodation.

### **Principles of a new approach**

We are proposing 10 principles to guide the development of our new approach:

1. A national commitment and strong leadership from all levels of government and from the not-for-profit and business sectors.
2. Preventing the causes of homelessness is a main focus.
3. Social inclusion drives our efforts.
4. Everyone is treated with dignity and respect.
5. Safety and wellbeing are a prime concern for all clients.
6. Rights and responsibilities of individuals and families are paramount.
7. Joined-up service delivery needs joined up-policy.
8. Transition points are a priority.
9. Evidence-based policy helps to shape our priorities for action.
10. Targets are set to reduce homelessness and hold ourselves accountable.

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<sup>3</sup> Erebus Consulting 2004 National Evaluation of SAAP IV – Final Report, 191.

1. What goal(s) should we set to reduce homelessness?
2. What targets will best help us reach our goal?
3. What are the best ways to measure the targets we set?
4. What are the three research priorities for a national homelessness research agenda?
5. Have we got the principles right?
6. How can the business sector best be involved in reducing homelessness?
7. How can we develop broader community involvement and maximise the contribution of the philanthropic sector?

### ***A reformed homelessness service model***

Our aim is that contact with crisis services, offers a swift and secure **gateway** into safe, appropriate accommodation; and a **pathway** to the longer-term goals of personal security, self-development, and social and economic participation

To achieve this we need to radically improve and reform our existing homeless response—primarily SAAP—and to establish strong, direct connections with mainstream services.

In reforming our current response to homelessness there are fundamental tensions between:

- » improving the existing service framework or radically redesigning its basic elements to build stronger links with the housing, education, health and employment systems
- » driving change through the SAAP service model or through the mainstream service system
- » delivering an immediate crisis-only response and longer-term support packages focussing on prevention
- » providing innovative and flexible solutions to homelessness and a nationally consistent service framework.<sup>4</sup>

The Green Paper proposes three reform options:

1. transform SAAP to build a national homelessness response focused on distinct streams
2. improve the current SAAP response
3. improve the mainstream service response to homelessness and restrict SAAP to responding to crisis interventions

### **Option One—Transform SAAP to build a national homelessness response focused on distinct streams**

This option would provide a new national homelessness response which focuses on four streams of support, tailored to particular life events and circumstances: youth, people experiencing or escaping domestic violence, single people, and families in housing stress.

Current crisis services, including SAAP, would be aligned to the critical areas of employment, health, justice and housing. Support from these broader systems could encourage a greater focus on prevention and early intervention and produce more stable and long-lasting outcomes.

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4 Erebus Consulting 2004 National Evaluation of SAAP IV – Future Directions for SAAP, 48-49.

We could disaggregate current homelessness programs and relocate specific elements of SAAP to areas where the strongest links need to be formed, for example:

- » assistance for young people could sit with education, training and employment services—providing greater focus on homeless people building skills and establishing themselves within the community
- » support for people experiencing and escaping domestic violence could sit with the justice system—giving greater emphasis to supporting victims and their children
- » single homeless people could be assisted through the health and ageing systems—focusing on individual needs and support
- » families in housing stress may be better assisted through the housing system with a combination of family support, help to secure and maintain employment, and practical housing assistance.

Such a comprehensive reform process has risks. The approach could be trialled in selected regions to test its feasibility and provide learnings for a broader implementation. In this way SAAP funding and services could be more gradually moved towards mainstream services.

8. What are the barriers to radical change in homelessness services and how could they be overcome?
9. How do we develop collective accountability for outcomes in a 'joined-up' system?
10. Taxpayer funds are limited—where, across the range of possibilities under option one, should we direct our effort to give us the biggest impact?

## Option Two—Improve the current SAAP response

Option Two would provide extra investment to reform crisis services to give a greater focus to long term outcomes. This could include:

- » removing time limits on interventions—so that people get support for as long as they need it
- » increasing the availability of crisis accommodation targeted to different population groups to meet unmet demand
- » implementing sector-wide reform to standardise good practice approaches, including case management methods aimed at independent living and greater economic and social participation
- » establishing protocols at the local level between SAAP services and other service providers so that clients receive a joined-up approach and services are accountable.
- » implementing national service standards for SAAP agencies
- » developing data collection systems and agreed indicators to measure long-term outcomes and track progress
- » providing services with flexible funding and reducing red tape
- » ensuring employment packages for SAAP staff are comparable to those of workers performing similar roles in government, offer staff professional development and training, and update information technology in SAAP services.

11. How would the reforms proposed in this option improve outcomes for SAAP clients and reduce homelessness?
12. What else might be needed to ensure collaboration between SAAP services and the mainstream service system?
13. What incentives are needed to forge strong, ongoing links between homelessness response services and mainstream services?
14. What would be needed to drive innovative forms of support within SAAP and accelerate their take-up across Australia? Who should be the drivers of this process?
15. Taxpayer funds are limited—where, across the range of possible improvements to SAAP, should we direct our effort to give us the biggest impact?

### **Option Three—Improve the mainstream service response to homelessness and restrict SAAP to responding to crisis interventions**

This option would boost the capacity of mainstream services to respond to homelessness with a particular focus on early intervention and prevention.

The mainstream service system would share responsibility for reducing homelessness. As in the first two options, assistance would be tailored to meet each person's specific needs. Support would still be available through a homeless-specific service sector, but this would be restricted to short-term and crisis-based interventions.

Structures and supports would need to be developed to ensure mainstream services were better equipped to respond to people who are homeless and able to identify people at risk early. This could mean:

- » an incentive system with additional funding linked to the achievement of outcomes for people who are homeless through mainstream service systems—such as schools, TAFE and universities, employment services, hospitals and health clinics, housing, and the justice system
- » extra subsidies for child care centres and aged care facilities to take children/older people who are homeless
- » including specific goals and targets to reduce homelessness in funding agreements with the states and territories and measuring performance each year against these goals
- » improving the quality of assessment and transition planning in existing services to ensure clients are provided with the assistance they need, when they need it
- » strengthening the capacities of staff in service delivery agencies to take on this new specialist role by funding professional development
- » developing specific strategies to assist people at risk.
- » specific investment in new service delivery models that integrate mainstream services with homeless specific services.
- » shared strategic plans for each city or region that spell out longer-term goals and mandate targets. This plan would establish the responsibilities of different agencies and hold them accountable.

This option would enable the gradual winding back of SAAP, as mainstream services increasingly took responsibility for preventing and addressing homelessness.

16. Will this option bring change at a pace and scale to reduce homelessness over the long term?
17. What else is needed to help mainstream services better respond to people who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless?
18. Taxpayer funds are limited—where, across the range of possibilities for mainstream services, should we direct our effort to give us the biggest impact?

## Consultation Process

Over the next few months the Government will develop its national plan to reduce homelessness over the long term. This is your opportunity to express your views.

We have included consultation questions to focus your response. We would also like you to put forward the 'big ideas' you believe can reduce homelessness.

### **Attend a public meeting**

Public meetings will be held in all capital cities and some regional centres over the next 5 weeks:

Perth, WA	28 May	Melbourne, VIC	12 June
Karratha, WA	29 May	Canberra, ACT	13 June
Townsville, Qld	4 June	Lismore, NSW	16 June
Darwin, NT	6 June	Hobart, Tas	17 June
Brisbane, Qld	10 June	Adelaide, SA	19 June
Sydney, NSW	11 June	Albury-Wodonga (NSW/Vic)	20 June

If you would like to attend, please call 1800 774 055 or visit [www.fahcsia.gov.au](http://www.fahcsia.gov.au)

### **Write a submission**

You can also write to us online by visiting [www.fahcsia.gov.au](http://www.fahcsia.gov.au) and clicking on "housing and homelessness". You can also post your submission to:

Homelessness Green Paper Submissions  
PO Box 7442  
CANBERRA BC ACT 2610

For further information or for copies of the full report of *Which Way Home?* please contact the Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs on 1800 774 055 or visit [www.fahcsia.gov.au](http://www.fahcsia.gov.au)



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