

# Homelessness 2020 strategy

A discussion paper

Department of Human Services

October 2009

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## Foreword

Victoria is recognised as leading Australia in response to homelessness. The innovative *Victorian Homelessness Strategy 2002* provided a strong policy framework for improving Victoria's response and we now have well developed, collaborative homelessness services.

Our efforts now need to focus on prevention and early intervention to assist people who at the margins or who are homeless to participate fully in society, both economically and socially. This can be achieved through a whole of government approach in partnership with service providers with the individual at the centre.

Today, new challenges and opportunities exist to reduce homelessness.

Our vision is being shaped by:

- the social inclusion agenda;
- Homelessness being a national priority;
- The Commonwealth and Victorian Government agreeing to unprecedented levels of investment – \$1.5 billion over the next 5 years in housing and homelessness; and
- the Victorian Government endorsing a whole of government approach to a new *Homelessness 2020* strategy.

This *Homelessness 2020* strategy discussion paper aims to promote discussion and debate within government, community, business and the service delivery system. The paper does not provide the answers but poses themes, questions and concepts to assist our discussion and shape the directions of our response.

We need an ambitious far sighted strategy to reduce the number of Victorians: currently over 20,500; who are experiencing homelessness at night.

Your contribution is crucial to developing a new homelessness strategy to 2020. I encourage and welcome your participation.



Gill Callister  
Chair  
Interdepartmental Committee on Homelessness



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## 1. The opportunity

Homelessness is a blight on our community. On 2006 census night alone, some 105,000 people were homeless across Australia. Of these, over 20,500 were in Victoria<sup>1</sup>. This is 20,500 too many.

Over the past ten years, the Victorian Government, through its innovative *Victorian Homelessness Strategy 2002*, has led and shaped the national agenda on homelessness and housing. Through the Council of Australian Governments, the Commonwealth and Victorian Governments have now agreed to unprecedented levels of investment and reform in the housing and homelessness assistance system. It is time to update and recast our Homelessness strategy to respond to today's challenges and to build on our achievements to date.

Today we have a unique, possibly 'once in a generation' opportunity to address this social problem in Australia. With the 2008 release of the Commonwealth Government's White Paper on Homelessness – *The Road Home: A National Approach to Reducing Homelessness* (the White Paper), homelessness was made a national priority. Its goals are to halve homelessness by 2020 and to offer accommodation to all rough sleepers who need it by 2020.

Continuing Victoria's leadership role, the Premier John Brumby announced in July 2009 the development of a new strategy – *Homelessness 2020* strategy. It will require a collective vision and effort to help people experiencing homelessness transition to independence and participate more fully in the social and economic life of Victoria.

The Housing and Community Building Division of the Department of Human Services (DHS) will lead development of Victoria's response to homelessness across government, the service system, business and within the community. It has prepared this discussion paper as the first stage in developing a new homelessness strategy to facilitate a more socially inclusive Victoria.

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<sup>1</sup> Chamberlain, C. & McKenzie, D, *Counting the Homeless 2006 Victoria*, 2009. p. 6.

## 2. The discussion

This discussion paper is just the first step in a journey. While our achievements to date in tackling homelessness in Victoria are substantial, the national goals for 2020 present a whole series of new challenges and opportunities.

A roof over peoples' head is just one part of the response required. The achievement of these goals will require changes in policy and service delivery. The prevention and resolution of homelessness will need a broader response than that afforded by the current specialist homeless service system (HSS). The resources of mainstream service systems will require more effective harnessing and co-ordination, as well as greater collaborative support to prevent and intervene earlier. We need to enhance our strategies, our programs and our collaboration.

There are a number of steps in building a new strategy for Victoria:

1. While not exhaustive, this discussion paper is intended to stimulate debate on the policy and service delivery arrangements that will best meet our vision and national goals.
2. DHS is seeking feedback through forums and written submissions on this discussion paper from a wide range of stakeholders including the specialist and mainstream service systems, clients of their services, philanthropic organisations and the general community.
3. DHS will then release a draft *Homelessness 2020* strategy for consultation in early 2010 informed by the feedback.
4. Further targeted consultation on the draft strategy will be held in early 2010.
5. The *Homelessness 2020* strategy will be released in May 2010, providing a vision, clear strategies, directions and actions for both policy and service delivery in Victoria over the next 10 years.

### 3. Policy context

#### Victoria's response to homelessness

Our response is having some success, Victoria has had the lowest rate of homelessness in Australia at 42 people for every 10,000<sup>2</sup> and half of Australia's crisis and transitional housing stock is located in Victoria. But we need to do better. In Victoria, over 45 per cent of homeless people were under the age of 24 years old and 31 per cent stayed in homeless services<sup>3</sup>. Of those accessing homelessness services in Victoria over 30 per cent were young people aged between 15–24 years, over 65 per cent were women, over 6 per cent were Indigenous<sup>4</sup>. Around 21,400 children accompanied an adult to the homeless service in 2007–08<sup>5</sup> in Victoria.

Addressing disadvantage, reducing inequality and achieving social inclusion have been key imperatives for the Victorian Government. The Government's social policy framework, *A Fairer Victoria* (AFV), seeks to tackle the underlying causes of homelessness and build capacity to promote cohesive and strong communities that optimise social and economic participation for all.

*A Fairer Victoria* has been instrumental in integrating homelessness with the housing system by linking crisis and transition services to long-term housing. In pursuing new approaches to homelessness, Victoria has gained insight into what works well and has been able to close critical gaps in the system that can impede action, and has recognised the value of working in partnership to address individual needs.

*A Fairer Victoria*, *the Victorian Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities* and the considerable focus on homelessness and social housing provision over many years demonstrates the Victorian Government's commitment to supporting vulnerable Victorians.

Since 1999, the Victorian Government has invested over \$1 billion to specifically address homelessness, through programs such as:

- The Supported Accommodation Assistance Program;
- Transitional housing management program;
- Flexible funding assistance to help people in crisis;
- Youth homelessness initiatives; and
- A whole-of-government integrated family violence response.

Over the last four years, the Victorian Government has also provided over \$4 billion for initiatives to strengthen the resilience of Victorian communities including major investments in early childhood, family violence, mental health, disability services and housing.

The *Victorian Homelessness Strategy 2002* (VHS) has provided a strong policy framework for improving the provision of quality services to people who are homeless. The emphasis has been on improving the way Victoria responds to those who are homeless, at risk of homelessness, escaping family violence and requiring long-term housing.

This strategic, innovative investment in homelessness and social housing has seen a trebling to more than 50,000 Victorians assisted in crisis and transitional housing every year. Victoria now has a well-developed, flexible and innovative specialist HSS and substantive, strategic response to family violence. Prevention and early intervention have been central aims through linkages with other programs in mental health and justice, and by integrating services, particularly for children, youth and people with alcohol and drug dependency.

<sup>2</sup> Chamberlain, C. & McKenzie, D, *Counting the Homeless 2006 Victoria*, 2009. p.6.

<sup>3</sup> IBID, p35.

<sup>4</sup> Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, *Homeless People in SAAP: SAAP National Data Collection annual report*, SAAP NDCA report series 12, Canberra 2008.

<sup>5</sup> IBID, p15.

To facilitate social inclusion, the homelessness response is linking into the key reform strategies of:

- Whole of government *Integrated Family Violence Response*;
- The *Victorian Mental Health Reform Strategy 2009–2012*;
- *Directions for out-of-home care* to reform child protection, placement and family services;
- *Blueprint for Education and Early Childhood Development*; and
- *The Victorian State Disability Plan 2002–2012*.

In 2008–09, the Victorian Government committed \$140.2 million to assist 176,000 people with support, flexible funding and accommodation. Victoria is implementing a range of innovative initiatives such as *Opening Doors* project, new Indigenous family violence facilities, assistance for women and children experiencing family violence to remain safely in their homes, implement supportive housing options in Melbourne’s CBD, and provide an additional 68 homes in outer metropolitan areas and regional Victoria for homeless families and individuals under A Place to Call Home.

## National goals and partnerships

At a national level, the Commonwealth has made reducing homelessness a national priority. The Commonwealth’s White Paper on Homelessness: *The Road Home* sets a strategic agenda that includes goals and identifies actions to reduce the impact and incidence of homelessness in Australia by 2020. The key goals are to halve overall homelessness by 2020 and offer supported accommodation to all rough sleepers who need it by 2020.

In November 2008, the Council of Australian Governments agreed to the National Affordable Housing Agreement and National Partnerships on homelessness, social housing and later the Nation Building and Jobs Plan. These Partnerships provide the platform for collaboration on reducing homelessness. The focus is on prevention and early intervention through the greater involvement of mainstream services and by increasing the supply of housing.

Over the next five years, a total of \$1.5 billion has been committed in Victoria through National Partnerships to addressing homelessness and increasing social housing. The key strategies agreed on are:

- More effort to prevent and intervene early to stop homelessness and its impacts;
- Breaking the cycle of homelessness by investing in services and by helping people to find stable accommodation and obtain employment;
- Creating a better connected service system;
- Increasing the supply of new and refurbished social housing; and
- Increasing opportunities for homeless people to gain secure long-term accommodation.

In agreeing to the National Partnership Agreement on homelessness, Victoria and the Commonwealth have committed to achieving nationally agreed targets by 2013, as follows:

- A 7 per cent decrease in the number of Australians who are homeless;
- 25 per cent reduction in the number of Australians sleeping rough;
- 25 per cent reduction in the number of people released from care and custodial settings and exiting social housing and private rental to homelessness; and
- 25 per cent reduction in three repeat periods of homelessness at an emergency service in 12 months.

In addition, the Victorian Government has also made significant commitments to:

- Greater support for women who experience family violence in securing or maintaining safe, sustainable housing;
- Greater support to re-engage at risk or homeless youth with family, school and work;
- Additional support to at risk or homeless children to maintain contact with school;
- Greater linking of families to counselling, financial advice or case management;
- Linking Indigenous women to legal services; and
- Workforce development in the homelessness services sector.

## **Housing response**

Changes to housing affordability and the tight private rental market are adding continual pressure to the housing options for those most at need in our society. Over the next three years to 2012 in Victoria around 5,000 new dwellings and around 5,600 existing social housing refurbishments will occur through the National Partnership Agreements. This boost to social housing will assist in reducing homelessness and help drive a more integrated and outcome focussed response across the service system.

All these initiatives and achievements are having an impact on addressing homelessness. But more needs to occur. The Victorian Government is committed to reforming rooming house regulation and public housing to improve the safety, sustainability and efficiency of housing in Victoria through an integrated housing strategy. Also, a long term Commonwealth investment in improving the supply of housing will go a long way to achieving the national goals by 2020.

We have leadership: we now need innovation and strong focus by all stakeholders to tackle homelessness.

## 4. Homelessness 2020 strategy: our vision for Victoria

The Victorian Government continues to lead in providing comprehensive policies and programs to address homelessness. The challenge is to provide a vision that commits all government agencies, service system providers, business and the community to bringing people at the margins or who are homeless into the mainstream of community life in Victoria. By encouraging social inclusion, *Homelessness 2020* strategy will seek to set the strategic directions for achieving the national goals of halving homelessness by 2020 and offering accommodation to all rough sleepers who want it by 2020.

Committing to a vision and following through with action is challenging. It signals a greater effort by all and a willingness to face homelessness ‘head on’ to find long-term solutions. The Victorian Government, in consultation with all levels of government, service providers, business and community, will lead planning about how best to achieve these goals and what new policies and service delivery practices are required.

Since the adoption of the VHS 2002, new challenges and thinking have emerged from within government and the community, including but not limited to:

- The importance of social inclusion. All policies, programs and services should maximise the individual’s capacity to participate socially and economically and should create more inclusive communities;
- Early intervention and prevention approaches are recognised as the most effective in minimising harm and in addressing homelessness;
- A whole-of-government approach is necessary in order to develop coherent and co-ordinated services that meet multiple needs;
- Reducing homelessness is not the sole responsibility of the homelessness service sector as nearly 70 per cent of Victorian homeless people do not access homeless services;<sup>6</sup>
- The person should always be the focus of our policy and service delivery efforts. Policy and services should respond to the individual; not the individual having to respond to policy and service delivery arrangements; and
- A robust social housing sector that operates within a nationally consistent framework and substantial commitment to growing the stock of social housing over the long term.

Accordingly, feedback is sought on four key themes:

- Placing homelessness within a social inclusion framework;
- Improving prevention and early intervention within the continuum of service delivery;
- Integrating whole-of-government approaches; and
- Focusing policy and service delivery on the individual.

In addressing these themes, we can begin to implement a more consistent and long-term approach to homelessness in Victoria and build a new vision for the future.

As the first step towards that new vision, this discussion paper poses a series of guiding questions at the end of each section. They are not intended to limit discussion, but rather to help focus our consideration of *Homelessness 2020* strategy.

<sup>6</sup> IBID, page35.

## Questions for Consideration

1. What are the critical strategies and actions that should be included in the *Homelessness 2020* strategy for Victoria?
2. What are the challenges and opportunities associated with the goals of halving homelessness and providing accommodation to all rough sleepers by 2020?
3. Where should resources be targeted over the next 10 years in order to meet these goals?
4. What are the mechanisms required at a policy and service delivery level to measure the reduction of homelessness in Victoria?

## a. Homelessness and social inclusion

*Homelessness 2020* strategy will be developed within a framework of social inclusion to ensure that people at the margins or who are homeless are given the opportunity to participate fully in society, both economically and socially. Fundamentally, social inclusion means making homelessness a community issue requiring an integrated community response.

People who experience homelessness are not a homogenous group so our responses cannot be uniform or assume that the provision of accommodation alone is sufficient. Housing is an important vehicle for social inclusion, but so too is appropriate service system support to help people overcome barriers and create sustainable opportunities for participation in society.

According to the 2006 *Counting the Homeless Report*<sup>7</sup>, over 2,200 or 11 percent of people who were homeless in Victoria were rough sleepers. While rough sleepers require an enhanced, targeted response, the vast majority of people experiencing homelessness in Victoria are either moving frequently from one form of temporary shelter to another or living in boarding and rooming houses on a medium-to-long term basis.

Reducing homelessness is therefore intrinsically linked to creating sustainable life solutions for individuals and families. This means building broader, more integrated service delivery systems, and creating education and employment opportunities for all.

To create a socially inclusive homelessness strategy, the Victorian Government is considering the following:

- Further harnessing the significant contributions of the philanthropic community, service delivery sectors, business, researchers and the goodwill of the Victorian community in addressing homelessness;
- Human as well as the economic cost of people being homeless;
- Coordinating and strategic work at all levels of government to shift to an outcome rather than a process or output focused service response;
- Working with the Commonwealth to reform areas such as affordable housing, income support, migration, health and aged care provision and employment;
- Ensuring Victoria's investment in housing helps to reduce homelessness by planning new housing stock located close to employment opportunities, educational facilities, public transport, and community services such as health and child care;
- Focusing on prevention and early intervention through infrastructure and the use of innovative, flexible models to support mainstream and homelessness services;
- Prioritising workforce development in both homelessness and mainstream services that will help effect change; and
- Development of a dedicated research program to evaluate homelessness.

### Questions for Consideration

1. How can social inclusion be achieved for people experiencing homelessness?
2. Are there any further social inclusion considerations that need to inform the *Homelessness 2020 strategy*?

<sup>7</sup> Chamberlain, C. & McKenzie, D, *Counting the Homeless 2006 Victoria*, 2009. p.6.

## b. Prevention and early intervention

Prevention and early intervention are crucial to addressing homelessness and can result in significant reductions in homelessness. While this has been the Victorian Government approach under VHS 2002, we need to further clarify the roles, responsibilities and accountabilities of service delivery systems in assisting people at the margins or experiencing homelessness back into mainstream community life. Building on the major reforms to policy and in the service system, we now propose that responsibility and accountability for:

- Prevention should sit with mainstream service delivery systems;
- Early intervention and service delivery that break the cycle of homelessness should sit with both the specialist HSS and mainstream services, with the specialist HSS taking the lead role, where appropriate; and
- Long-term or chronic homelessness should sit with both the specialist HSS and the mainstream service systems, with mainstream services taking the lead where appropriate.

### Prevention

The Victorian Government's current homelessness policy acknowledges that mainstream services have a key role to play in preventing homelessness. They do so, by 'identifying and diverting potential homeless clients'<sup>8</sup>. Indeed, services such as affordable housing, health, education and income support are critical in both preventing and resolving homelessness. While clients of these services are not yet homeless, they are a group at risk of becoming so.

The Commonwealth White Paper also highlighted the prominence of the mainstream service system in prevention and early intervention<sup>9</sup>.

Currently, the specialist HSS in Victoria work across the continuum of service delivery from prevention and early intervention, through to transitional support to break the cycle and longer-term housing.

Some of the central issues that *Homelessness 2020* strategy will consider are:

- The accountabilities and responsibilities for resolving homelessness in the service system;
- The capacity, resources and areas of focus for the mainstream service system to respond to preventing homelessness;
- Whether the specialist HSS in Victoria should become more targeted to early intervention and transition out of homelessness; and
- The policy and program relationship between mainstream services and the specialist HSS.

### Early intervention

Once people are identified as homeless, early intervention approaches are most effective to resolve issues or ensure the homelessness experience is of short duration. People who experience homelessness are likely to present to specialist HSS services and require referral to mainstream services. Early intervention could mean maintaining existing community connections to family, and/or education or employment, for example, while the immediate housing issue or personal issues are resolved.

<sup>8</sup> Victorian Government, *Submission to the Australian Government's Green Paper on Homelessness*, 2008 p.3

<sup>9</sup> Commonwealth of Australia, *The Road Home: A National Approach to Reducing Homelessness*, 2008, p.ix.

While more needs to be achieved, Victorian Government policy and programs have been moving towards the integration of early intervention services. This has involved the collaboration of the Department of Human Services, Department of Justice, Department of Health, and Department of Education and Early Childhood Development.

An emphasis on early intervention service integration has implications for:

- Clarity around resources, accountability and responsibility;
- Policy implementation and resource allocation;
- Timely and thorough assessments of individual need, focussed on outcomes;
- Case management practice, including the ability for case managers to broker access to other resources, such as material aid, food vouchers and mainstream services;
- Greater alignment of policy and practice within and between service delivery systems; and
- Agreed, shared operational definitions and mechanisms for incorporating early intervention across program practice.

### **Breaking the cycle of homelessness**

For those people who require support and housing to break the cycle, the specialist HSS has had prime responsibility and accountability. However, the service delivery supports required to address individual and family needs may rest with other service delivery systems.

The service delivery system that should take the lead should be determined by the outcome of an individual assessment of that person's needs. Once identified, a clear mandate and resources should be provided to allow that specific housing, education or health service to take the lead in resolving the person's issues. The intensity and length of assistance will also vary, depending on the individual's circumstances and needs.

The implications for both the specialist HSS and mainstream service systems include:

- The extent to which broader community connections need to be established;
- The multiple government departments and service delivery systems involved in directly addressing homelessness and their capacity to do so;
- Mechanisms for ensuring effective involvement, co-ordination and integration of the specialist HSS and mainstream service systems;
- Where a lead role is identified for the specialist HSS, upgrading the status, role and mandate of case managers;
- Where a lead role is identified for mainstream service systems, mechanisms are required to co-ordinate and access resources from the specialist HSS;
- Enhancement of both the case co-ordination and brokering role, as well as an increase in brokerage funds; and
- Workforce development in both mainstream and specialist HSS services.

## Long-term or ongoing homelessness

For a small number of individuals, homelessness is a long-term or chronic experience. Around 15 per cent of people accessing specialist HSS received 3 or more support periods in 2007–08<sup>10</sup>. These people often have multiple and complex issues, and difficulty maintaining stability in their life circumstances and/or housing. While their housing issues may have some resolution through the specialist HSS, (often through access to some form of public housing), their broader support needs may be ongoing. Housing stability remains tenuous, as many are coping with mental health or drug and alcohol addictions. Yet housing stability can be maintained with the right assistance. Often this assistance is available through mainstream service systems such as mental health and disability services.

Once housing is obtained, supporting these people should be the primary responsibility of the mainstream service system rather than the specialist HSS. For example, a community health service may be the lead agency, with the HSS only assisting where housing becomes a more prominent issue.

The implications of the whole of government approaches will require a considerable rethink in policy and program development.

### Questions for Consideration

1. Should responsibility for the prevention of homelessness sit primarily with mainstream services?
2. How can mainstream services and specialist HSS work more effectively together in early intervention?
3. How are mainstream services and specialist HSS responsible for breaking the cycle of homelessness and in which ways?
4. Where should the major focus of specialist HSS be over the next 10 years in Victoria?
5. What are the possible mechanisms for integration of the specialist HSS and mainstream services?  
How should integration be monitored?
6. Are there any further early intervention and prevention considerations that need to inform the *Homelessness 2020* strategy?

<sup>10</sup> Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, Homeless people in SAAP, *SAAP National Data Collection annual report 2007–08, Victoria, 2008* p11.

### c. Whole-of-government approaches

The complex nature of homelessness and the need for individual tailored responses calls for a whole-of-government approach. Creating better alignment across government and service delivery systems has the potential to significantly reduce the human and economic costs of homelessness. The responsibility and accountability for resolving homelessness across Victoria therefore must be more broadly based than the specialist HSS.

In July 2009, the Victorian Government committed to the development of a whole-of-government Victorian Homelessness Strategy to 2020. Victoria has already begun to develop and successfully implement whole-of-government policy and practices, such as the *Integrated Approach to Family Violence* and *Victorian Mental Health Reform Strategy*. The challenge now is to incorporate successful strategies and service delivery into *Homelessness 2020* strategy.

While we have agreed to develop a whole-of-government approach within Victoria, there are key policy areas such as income support, health and aged care, employment services and the funding for affordable housing that sit largely within the Commonwealth. The whole-of-government approach will therefore require Commonwealth input and co-operation. Further discussions and protocols will need to be pursued with the Commonwealth.

Working within a whole-of-government approach should create better outcomes. However, it also poses a number of challenges to both current policy and service delivery arrangements. Given the specific targets within the National Partnerships around education, justice and exiting care, for example, departments and service delivery systems will need to jointly develop consistent responses, protocols and outcome measures, as well as take responsibility for ensuring targets are met and individual outcomes are achieved.

One approach to developing a more co-ordinated response may be to develop a whole-of-government homelessness audit tool. For example, when policy is being developed it would take account of how a particular policy area may affect or impact on homelessness.

Given that different target groups within the homeless population have distinct sets of needs, consideration could be given to specific multi-disciplinary approaches. Rather than mainstream services such as Centrelink operating in outreach capacities at homelessness services, for example, homelessness services could be co-located within Centrelink or mental health services.

The scope of service delivery in mainstream services may need to change to accommodate the needs of people who are homeless. This may require changes to assessment tools, physical settings or appointment schedules. Similarly, specialist HSS providers may need to extend their practice and service base to accommodate co-case management practices where these do not exist.

The implications of increased cross-government work will include consideration of:

- New pooled funding models to facilitate whole-of-government service models, including funding for partnership development;
- Where funding is administered separately through different government departments, alignment of targets and outcomes;
- Updating data collection mechanisms to align with multi-disciplinary service delivery; and
- Developing and sustaining the workforce across government and the service systems. This, in turn, has implications for staffing and infrastructure.

## Questions for Consideration

1. How can whole-of-government approaches to homelessness be achieved?
2. Where should the effort to form whole-of-government approaches be focused? For example, cross-government policy development, service delivery protocols, or a mixture?
3. A whole-of-government approach effectively creates multiple accountabilities for outcomes in the service system. How could these be co-ordinated or managed?
4. To what extent are government agencies and services working with consistent definitions and assessment tools to identify homelessness? How does cross-government policy currently align?
5. What whole-of-government approaches should be trialled or piloted and in which services?

## d. Focus on the individual

Since the VHS 2002, homelessness policy has recognised the complexity and sophistication required to meet the individual needs of people experiencing or at risk of homelessness and to overcome their barriers to social inclusion. To move towards a focus on outcomes for the individual rather than system outputs, *Homelessness 2020* strategy will need to consider the delivery of a more client-driven service system, programs and funding arrangements. This, inevitably, will lead to differentiated case management approaches, changes to the way housing and homelessness programs are administered, as well as changes to mainstream service delivery.

Significant effort and investment have already gone into developing service delivery systems that prioritise the needs of individuals. VHS 2002 recognised more targeted policy approaches<sup>11</sup> create a more sophisticated understanding of people’s needs. More recently, as part of accreditation processes<sup>12</sup>, tools for identifying client needs are required across the specialist HSS. However, providing mainstream services to the individual, such as discharge from hospital, should not lead to a greater risk of homelessness or entry into the specialist HSS.

The importance of attending to the needs of the whole person is clearly evident in broader policy approaches already identified<sup>13</sup> across Victoria. A greater focus on individual needs requires consideration by all stakeholders of a range of issues including the following:

- More effective identification and assessment of individual client needs, including the level of complexity and whether the individual may require intensive, long or short term interventions and from which service delivery systems;
- The duration of support periods and whether housing allocation processes are aligned to individual needs;
- Clarity about what constitutes an ‘outcome’ for an individual client, rather merely than an ‘output’ or ‘process’. One way to think about this may be to identify outcomes and milestones, which can be linked within an overall case management plan. The outcomes may be conceived of as those that sustainably and effectively resolve homelessness. The milestones recognise the achievements along the way that create the pathway to sustainability, for example, accessing transition housing;
- The outcome will differ for particular target groups. For example, an outcome for a young person (18 years old) might be finding long-term accommodation in public housing. Alternatively, this could be a milestone towards an outcome, such as resolving a drug habit, gaining a qualification and employment, or moving out of public housing into private rental and ultimately achieving independence. For another target group, such as families, securing good quality public housing with relevant supports and good proximity to community facilities may be an outcome; and
- Evaluation and data collection must reflect the new approach and therefore have greater capacity to identify and measure outcomes.

<sup>11</sup> For example the *Integrated Family Violence Framework and the YHAP Stages 1 & 2*.

<sup>12</sup> Homelessness Assistance Service Standards

<sup>13</sup> There is clear evidence of this within *The Blueprint for education and Early Childhood Development*, *The Victorian Mental Health Strategy 2009-2013*, *The Disability State Plan* and *The Blueprint for education and Early Childhood Development*.

Currently the case management function within the specialist HSS provides a range of services. This may be a strength of the system, as it allows case managers to work at a variety of levels and to undertake a number of tasks and brokerage functions. Resolving homelessness for the individual may, in some instances, require enhancement of this role.

One way to achieve this could be to provide significant funds to ‘buy in’ services from mainstream services as appropriate<sup>14</sup>. Another approach could be to increase both the mandate and therefore the accountability of case managers to ensure their clients gain the services they require from mainstream services.

This approach has the potential to significantly reduce the incidence of people seeking services from multiple service delivery systems. Victoria could consider creating a hierarchy of differing degrees and levels of case management function and responsibility, within which clients would need to be identified as the responsibility of a particular service delivery system.

Furthermore, the length of a person’s housing tenure is often based on the program within which the housing stock is managed, rather than on the individual circumstances and needs of the client. At the policy level, consideration could be given to a more integrated response, with tenure determined by the individual need and not the particular program. For target groups such as families this would assist in creating stability and community connection, which are key to addressing homelessness and building social inclusion.

Greater alignment of housing policy to an outcome for an individual also has the following implications:

- Reducing the number of property and suburb changes people are required to make;
- Better targeting of housing policies including the Transitional Housing Program, housing establishment funds, the Supported Housing Advocacy and Support Program, and crisis accommodation;
- Identifying options and actions to improve the sustainability of and outcomes for, public housing tenancies including priority to the homeless and those experiencing family violence and reducing the complexity of the segmented waiting list;
- Protecting the well being of vulnerable Victorians residing in accommodation that does not meet community standards with regard to amenity and safety, particularly those living in unregistered rooming houses; and
- Achieving the COAG reform to integrate waiting lists of social and public housing.

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<sup>14</sup> Victorian Government, Submission to the Australian Government’s Green Paper on Homelessness, 2008.

## Questions for Consideration

1. What would an outcome, rather than an output, focus look like for different target groups?
2. What are the critical elements of best practice outcome-focused service delivery models?
3. Should the accountability for an outcome or resolution of a person's situation be identified with a particular service?
4. How can mainstream and specialist HSS services work together to achieve best practice and innovation?
5. To what extent should there be a variety of case management models aligned across services?
6. How can greater alignment of housing stock with reducing homelessness be achieved?
7. What further changes focused on the individual are critical to halving homelessness and assisting rough sleepers by 2020?

## 5. Conclusion

Success in halving homelessness in Victoria by 2020 will ultimately rest upon the degree and willingness of all stakeholders to commit to reform and action.

The Victorian Government cannot achieve this important goal alone. Greater levels of responsibility and accountability by all levels of government, the service delivery sectors and the wider community are critical for the prevention and early intervention of homelessness.

This discussion paper recognises and builds upon existing debate and represents the first stage in developing Victoria's vision for creating an environment whereby people experiencing homelessness or at the margins of society can transition to independence and achieve social inclusion.

The discussion paper seeks feedback from a broad cross section of stakeholders about what is needed and how this goal is to be achieved. By Friday 27 November 2009, submissions must be emailed to **homelessness2020@dhs.vic.gov.au** or sent to:

Homelessness Taskforce  
Housing Sector Development  
Department of Human Services  
L24, 50 Lonsdale St  
Melbourne Vic 3000

A Consultation schedule will be prepared for each Region by early November. Consultation dates and venues will be available on the website at **www.homelessness.vic.gov.au**. Additional hard copies of the discussion paper can be obtained by emailing **shanta.montegrejo@dhs.vic.gov.au**



## Appendix A: Glossary

**affordable housing**–Housing that is affordable for low- to moderate-income households, when housing costs are low enough to enable the household to meet other basic, long term living costs.

**brokerage funds**–Flexible funds that are available to buy and deliver services that are specific to the needs of clients.

**case management**–A process of assessment, facilitation and advocacy on behalf of the client to obtain services to meet the client’s needs and desired outcomes.

**Census**–The Census of Population and Housing carried out by the Australian Bureau of Statistics. It aims to accurately measure the number of people in Australia on Census night, their key characteristics, and the dwellings in which they live. Census 2006 is the most recent Australian Census; however limited data are available at this stage.

**Centrelink**–A Commonwealth Government statutory agency which assists Australians to become self sufficient and supports people in need by delivering a range of services, including income support payments.

**Common Ground**–The Common Ground model was developed in New York. It provides a comprehensive support system designed to help people regain their stability and independence. Housing that is safe, attractive and affordable is provided at affordable rents (approximately 30 per cent of tenants’ income). The housing complexes operate as communities and are provided with libraries, clinics, computer centres. Activities fostering interaction between tenants are provided to foster a sense of community.

**Council of Australian Governments (COAG)**–The peak intergovernmental forum in Australia, comprising the Prime Minister, state premiers, territory chief ministers and the President of the Australian Local Government Association. The Council’s role is to initiate, develop and monitor the implementation of policy reforms that are of national significance and require cooperative action by all levels of government.

**crisis accommodation**–Accommodation for people who are experiencing or are at risk of homelessness, which provides short-term accommodation including refuges, shelters, motels, flats, boarding houses or caravan parks.

**early intervention**–Strategies that aim to reduce risk factors through timely identification and tailored advice and support for those at risk of homelessness.

**emergency accommodation**–Short-term accommodation provided for people who have recently lost their housing (crisis) or are homeless (in, for example, shelters, motels, flats or caravan parks). See also *crisis accommodation*.

**family violence**–Family violence is behaviour by a person towards a family member that is physically or sexually abusive; is emotionally or psychologically abusive; economically abusive; threatening; coercive or in any other way controls or dominates the family member and causes that family member to feel fear for the safety or well-being of that family member or another person; or behaviour by a person that causes a child to hear or witness, or otherwise be exposed to the effects of that behaviour.

**homelessness**–People who are homeless fall into three broad groups, that is, those who are:

- sleeping rough (living on the streets)
- living in temporary accommodation, such as crisis accommodation (*see crisis accommodation*) or staying with friends or relatives
- staying in boarding or rooming houses or caravan parks with no secure lease and no private facilities.

**mainstream services**—Generalist services provided by either government or non-government agencies that are available to the general population, such as Centrelink, mental health and disability services, schools, public and community housing (see *social housing*), aged care and community health centres.

**National Affordable Housing Agreement**—The National Affordable Housing Agreement replaces the Commonwealth State Housing Agreement and the Supported Accommodation Assistance Program V Agreement in 2009. The new agreement will encompass housing and homelessness assistance provided at all levels of government (Commonwealth and state and territory).

**prevention**—Programs and opportunities that enable and encourage individuals to address possible risk factors before they are vulnerable to homelessness.

**sleeping rough**—See *homelessness*.

**social housing**—Rental housing that is provided and/or managed by government or non-government organisations. This housing is mainly targeted at people on low incomes who are in greatest need. This includes those who are homeless, living in inappropriate housing, or who have very high rental costs.

In public housing, the majority of tenants pay less than the market rent (that is, 25 per cent or less of their income). In community housing, rent payments range from less than 25 per cent to more than 30 per cent of income. Tenants also receive a range of support services (such as personal support and employment support) and are encouraged to be involved in managing community dwellings.

social inclusion—To be socially included, all Australians need to be able to play a full role in Australian life, in economic, social, psychological and political terms and be given the opportunity to:

- secure a job
- access services
- connect with others in life through family, friends, work, personal interests and local community
- deal with personal crises such as ill health, bereavement or the loss of a job
- have their voice heard.

**specialist homelessness services**—Services that work to assist people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness.

**support period**—The time during which a person is supported by a specialist homelessness service (HSS). It commences when a client begins to receive support and/or supported accommodation from specialist HSS and ends when the client ends the relationship with the HSS or the HSS ends the relationship with the client.

**sustainable housing**—Housing that is affordable, offers secure tenure, and is appropriate for the client given their needs and history, such as support for sustaining housing.



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