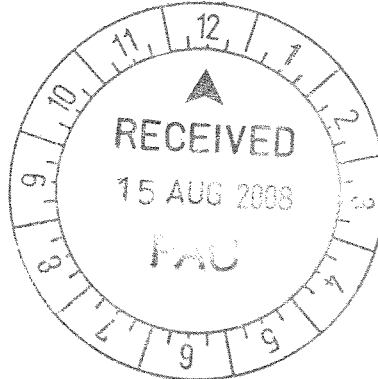


THE AUDIT OFFICE
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Mr Paul McLeay MP
Chair
Public Accounts Committee
Legislative Assembly
Parliament House, Macquarie Street
SYDNEY NSW 2000



11 August 2008

Dear Mr McLeay

**Examination of Auditor-General's Performance Audit Report
Responding to Homelessness**

We have reviewed the submissions provided by agencies on the recommendations in the above performance audit report. NSW Legal Aid and the Department of Premier and Cabinet are the key respondents. Attachment 1 lists the report's recommendations.

Following tabling of the report, we were pleased that the Director-General of the Department of Housing indicated broad acceptance of the twelve recommendations made.

The submissions from the Department of Premier and Cabinet and NSW Legal Aid show the progress being made in implementing the recommendations. We have not substantiated the submissions. Our assessment of whether the responses address the issues raised in the original report, along with an assessment of progress, is provided in attachment 2.

I plan to forward a copy of this correspondence to the heads the Department of Premier and Cabinet and NSW Legal Aid for their information.

I am happy to provide any further assistance the Committee may need in completing its examination.

Yours sincerely

Peter Achterstraat
Auditor-General

attachments

Attachment 1

Recommendations

A wide range of government agencies have a role in responding to homelessness. We are directing a number of our recommendations to the Department of Housing as lead agency on behalf of government.

Defining and reporting performance

We recommend that the Department of Housing, in cooperation with other agencies:

1. develop a statewide framework that outlines the government's response to homelessness and the results it wants to achieve
2. link the framework to relevant sections of the NSW State Plan and factor in community views of homelessness
3. report annually against the state framework including a snapshot of key activities and results, and make this report publicly available
4. examine ways to network with agencies that are not members of PAH
5. set up a means to benchmark the state's performance on homelessness
6. spread best practice on local initiatives

Planning services

We recommend that the Department of Housing, in cooperation with other agencies, encourage government agencies to:

7. use census data on homelessness to help them plan and deliver services
8. adopt similar client identifiers to better track the homeless through their systems

Improving access to services

We recommend that Area Health Services, Legal Aid and Local Courts, as part of service planning:

9. review the extent to which homeless people access their service
10. develop new ways of delivering services to the homeless
11. take homelessness into account when planning new services

We recommend that the Department of Health and Area Health Services:

12. investigate ways to increase hostel caseworkers' knowledge of mental health services, including appropriate responses to mental health issues.

Attachment 2 - Department of Premier and Cabinet

Audit Office observations of DPC response to homelessness actions and progress

Responding to homelessness

Recommendations for Department of Housing (in cooperation with other agencies):

| Recommendation | Does proposed action address issue? | Progress reported by DPC |
|--|--|--|
| 1. State homelessness framework | Proposed action is consistent with intent of recommendation. | Continuing |
| 2. Link framework to State Plan | Proposed action is consistent with intent of recommendation. | Continuing |
| 3. Public reporting against framework | Proposed action is consistent with intent of recommendation. | Delayed until recommendation 1 implemented |
| 4. Network with non-PAH agencies | Proposed action is consistent with intent of recommendation. | Continuing |
| 5. Benchmark the state's performance | Proposed action is consistent with intent of recommendation. | Delayed until recommendation 1 implemented |
| 6. Spread best practice initiatives | Proposed action is consistent with intent of recommendation. | Continuing |
| 7. Use census data to plan services | Proposed action is consistent with intent of recommendation. | Continuing |
| 8. Adopting similar client identifiers | Proposed action is consistent with intent of recommendation. | Continuing |

Recommendations for Area Health Services, Local Courts, and Legal Aid:

(Note that DPC response includes activities of Area Health Services and Local Courts)

| Recommendation | Does proposed action address issue? | Progress reported by DPC |
|---|--|--------------------------|
| 9. Review homeless access to services | Difficult to determine from the Information provided whether action is consistent with intent of recommendation. | Unable to determine |
| 10. New ways of delivery services to homeless | Difficult to determine from the Information provided whether action is consistent with intent of recommendation | Unable to determine |
| 11. Factor homelessness in planning | Difficult to determine from the Information provided whether action is consistent with intent of recommendation | Unable to determine |

Recommendations for Department of Health and Area Health Services:

| Recommendation | Does proposed action address issue? | Progress reported by DPC |
|---|--|--------------------------|
| 12. Hostels' knowledge of mental health | Proposed action is consistent with intent of recommendation. | Continuing |

NSW Legal Aid

Audit Office observations of NSW Legal Aid proposed actions and progress

Responding to homelessness

Recommendations for Area Health Services, Local Courts, and Legal Aid:

| Recommendation | Does proposed action address issue? | Progress reported by Legal Aid |
|---|--|--------------------------------|
| 9. Review homeless access to services | Proposed actions are consistent with intent of recommendation. | Continuing |
| 10. New ways of delivery services to homeless | Proposed actions are consistent with intent of recommendation | Continuing |
| 11. Factor homelessness in planning | Proposed action are consistent with intent of recommendation | Continuing |