

## **CHILD PROTECTION AND SOCIAL SERVICES SYSTEM**

**Organisation:** Homelessness NSW

**Date Received:** 16 December 2020



## **Committee on Children and Young People**

**December 2020**

### **Inquiry into child protection and social services system**

Homelessness NSW is a peak not for profit organisation that works with its members to prevent and reduce homelessness across NSW. Our members include small, locally based community organisations, multiservice agencies with a regional reach and large State-wide service providers.

We thank the Committee for the opportunity to provide a submission. Levels of homelessness of young people in NSW remain unacceptably high. Youth homelessness remains a significant social issue in Australia. When young people are forced to leave home early, they find it very difficult to gain sufficient income to live independently. According to the latest AIHW on homelessness 26% of all presenting clients were unaccompanied young people aged 15-24, just under 17,900 young people.

Homeless young people suffer significant social disadvantage themselves as well as costing the wider community.

The costs to the Australia economy of health services associated with young people experiencing homelessness is an average of \$8,505 per person per year or \$355 million across all young people aged 15-24 accessing Specialist Homelessness Services. Homeless young people are much more likely to have contact with the criminal justice system than the general population or other disadvantaged young people, who are long-term unemployed but not homeless. The cost to the Australian economy is an average of \$9,363 per person per year or \$391 million across all young people aged 15-24 accessing the Specialist Homelessness Service system.

It is clearly in no one's interest for this to continue.

Homelessness NSW is most interested in commenting on the Homeless Youth assistance Program (HYAP).

In June 2018 the NSW Ombudsman released a report [More than Shelter](#). This report addressed the legal and policy gaps for homeless children that reviewed service provision to children experiencing homelessness in New South Wales, particularly via the Homeless Youth Assistance Program (HYAP).

HYAP supports unaccompanied children experiencing or at risk of homelessness aged 12 -15 and comprises funding of \$54 million over 6 years. The report identified that in 2016-2017, just over 5,000 young people aged 12 to 18 presented on their own to a Specialist Homelessness Service (SHS) seeking support. 700 of these were aged under 16 and seeking accommodation. The report identified a number of issues with the provision of care and support to children experiencing homelessness including:

- a lack of legal clarity for services around decision making responsibility for the children
- that the HYAP is the only form of professional care provided to vulnerable children and young people in NSW where there are no regulatory standards in place that govern the quality of care provided.
- that key information regarding children experiencing homelessness is not known because basic data is either not being captured or is unreliable.

Unaccompanied children presenting at SHSs should have the highest level of care and protection possible.

The pathway between child/youth homelessness and adult homelessness is well known, documented and understood.

Working to break this must be a priority of government and the NGO sector. These children have fallen through the child protection system and the SHS service system is the safety net supporting them. Consequently, these children should be prioritised and the system needs to be adequately resourced to ensure their safety and care to give them the best opportunities in life.

There are major physiological, psychological and experiential differences between a 12-15 year-old and a 18-24 year-old; this should be recognised by SHSs and service provision must be provided in a way that ensures the safety and care of unaccompanied children experiencing homelessness.

Due to their existing policies, practices, procedures and accreditation Out of Home Care (OOHC) providers are best placed to provide adequate care for young people at risk and specifically children aged 12 – 15 years. Any other providers of accommodation and support to unaccompanied 12 - 15 year olds must adhere to the same requirements.

Regards



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CEO