

**Submission
No 48**

**OPTIONS TO IMPROVE ACCESS TO EXISTING AND ALTERNATE
ACCOMMODATION TO ADDRESS THE SOCIAL HOUSING SHORTAGE**

Organisation: Mission Australia

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**Options to improve
access to existing and
alternate accommodation
to address the social
housing shortage 2021**

**MISSION
AUSTRALIA**

Options to improve access to existing and alternative accommodation

Mission Australia is a national, non-denominational Christian charity that has been helping vulnerable people move towards independence for more than 160 years. Our vision is an Australia where all of us have a safe home and can thrive. In the 2019-20 financial year, we supported close to 170,000 individuals through almost 500 programs and services across Australia,¹ including 59,000 individuals and 4,000 families through 250 services in NSW.

Mission Australia delivers a wide range of direct housing and homelessness supports as well as other services to support people in need. These include Specialist Homelessness Services (SHS), tenancy support, residential aged care, and specialist housing support services such as the Housing and Accommodation Support Initiative. These services are complemented by a range of other services such as mental health services, residential alcohol and drug rehabilitation services, domestic and family violence related services and other children and families services.

Mission Australia Housing was established in 2009 by Mission Australia and is a Registered Tier 1 Community Housing Provider (CHP) which aims to deliver more homes in vibrant communities. Mission Australia Housing currently owns or manages over 3,100 social and affordable homes Australia-wide, including 2,257 social housing dwellings and 235 affordable housing dwellings in NSW.

Mission Australia welcomes the opportunity to provide input to the Legislative Assembly Committee on Community Service's Inquiry into options to improve access to existing and alternate accommodation to address the social housing shortage. This submission is based on a combination of research and insights from our service provision across NSW.

Recommendations

- **Publicly owned land is prioritised for social and affordable housing over 'meanwhile use' by the Government and planning authorities.**
- **Homestay-type temporary accommodation for key workers, particularly in regional areas, is incentivised by the Government to encourage innovative partnerships between community, private sector parties and homeowners to address immediate housing needs.**
- **The Fontainebleau transitional pilot program is replicated in other areas of NSW by the Government, following evaluation if required.**
- **Supply targets are adopted by the Government across NSW to drive work and accountability on meeting housing supply needs.**

¹ Mission Australia (2019) 'Annual Report', <https://www.missionaustralia.com.au/publications/annual-reports/annual-report-2019/1320-annual-report-2019/file>

- **Tailored Support Co-ordination services are commissioned by the Government for all public housing tenants who require support to either maintain their tenancies to avoid homelessness or to build capacity to transition to the private market.**
- **Adapted Tailored Support Co-ordination is commissioned by the Government for people in ‘meanwhile use’/temporary accommodation to provide support and help them transition to long-term housing.**

Current context

On Census night in 2016, there were close to 38,000 people experiencing homelessness in NSW, an increase of 37% from 2011.² In 2019-20, 70,040 clients were assisted by SHS in NSW, accounting for about 24% of the national SHS population (290,500 total clients).³ On average, 25 requests for SHS assistance in NSW went unmet each day.⁴ As of 30 June 2020, there were over 51,000 people on the NSW social housing waiting list, with waiting periods between two and 10+ years.⁵

In many regional, rural and remote areas there is a shortage of affordable and adequate housing. Just over 40% of people accessing SHS in NSW were in a regional area, 6% higher than the Australian average.⁶ Regional rental growth continues to significantly outpace capital cities, with an 11.3% annual increase compared to 5%.⁷

Although we don’t yet know the precise impacts of COVID-19 on long-term homelessness trends, we do know that the homelessness service system needs to continue to evolve to prevent people from becoming homeless and rapidly house the decreasing number who do. Short-term accommodation alternatives are an important interim measure for meeting current need, but the evidence is clear that long-term, stable, supportive housing is crucial for positive social and economic outcomes.^{8, 9}

The experience of providing short-term accommodation to people experiencing homelessness in response to COVID-19 provides an opportunity to revise strategic approaches to homelessness in NSW and shift the system more definitively towards one that:

² Australian Bureau of Statistics (2016), 2049.0 – ‘Census of Population and Housing: Estimating homelessness’, <https://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/mf/2049.0> 8

³ Australian Institute of Health and Wellbeing (2020), ‘Specialist homelessness services 2019–20: New South Wales’, <https://www.aihw.gov.au/getmedia/c1ce917d-9812-459d-967d-0d2a027f70c0/aihw-hou-322-nsw-factsheet.pdf.aspx>

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ NSW Department of Community and Justice (n.d.), ‘Applying for Housing Assistance: Expected Waiting Times’,

⁶ Australian Institute of Health and Wellbeing (2020), ‘Specialist homelessness services 2019–20: New South Wales’, <https://www.aihw.gov.au/getmedia/c1ce917d-9812-459d-967d-0d2a027f70c0/aihw-hou-322-nsw-factsheet.pdf.aspx>

⁷ CoreLogic (2021), ‘National rents record highest annual growth in over a decade’, <https://www.corelogic.com.au/news/national-rents-record-highest-annual-growth-over-decade>

⁸ Conroy, E., Bower, M., Flatau, P., Zaretsky, K., Eardley, T., & Burns, L. (2013), ‘The MISHA Project: From Homelessness to Sustained Housing 2010-2013’, <https://www.missionaustralia.com.au/documents/279-from-homelessness-to-sustained-housing-2010-2013-misha-research-report-2014/file>.

⁹ Pleave, N. (2016), Housing First Guide Europe, pp.20-22,

https://housingfirsteurope.eu/assets/files/2017/03/HFG_full_Digital.pdf.

1. Focuses on prevention and early intervention measures and funds services that are specifically and solely devoted to these approaches.
2. Funds supportive housing models based on Housing First principles for those who need it.
3. Ensures that an adequate supply of affordable housing is available for all who need it.

Our recommendations for this system re-orientation were detailed in our submission to the NSW Audit Office's *NSW Responses to Homelessness Audit 2021*, which is included for the Committee's reference at **Attachment A**.

This current submission describes some suggestions for improving the supply and quality of short-term accommodation options under the Committee's Terms of Reference.

ToR A: Options to better support 'meanwhile use' (temporary supportive accommodation), and the current major planning barriers to 'meanwhile use'

We recommend

- **Publicly owned land is prioritised for social and affordable housing over 'meanwhile use' by the Government and planning authorities.**

Mission Australia recognises 'meanwhile use' can be an effective temporary accommodation solution if narrow criteria are met. This includes identifying sites early before essential infrastructure is removed, favourable zoning and 'existing use rights' that facilitate unrestricted stay (e.g., residential aged care facilities, serviced apartments), and receptive landlords (in cases of private land) and local councils. To be a cost and time effective approach for CHPs most of these conditions need to be met.

While the COVID-19 pandemic and cyclical economic downturns may present greater opportunities for 'meanwhile use', this should not divert from efforts to ensure long-term affordable housing solutions in social housing and the private market. To this end, circumstances where publicly owned land is available it should be prioritised for social and affordable housing rather than 'meanwhile use'.

Mission Australia understands the Department of Planning, Industry and Environment is preparing a discussion paper on 'meanwhile use' which we anticipate will provide greater exploration of these issues.

ToR C: Options for crisis, key-worker and other short term accommodation models

Crisis and transitional accommodation services provide support to vulnerable people who are in crisis, dangerous and unsustainable housing situations. These services are also able to support people with addressing their immediate challenges and support them to access other forms of accommodation.

Homestay-type temporary accommodation for key workers

We recommend

- **Homestay-type temporary accommodation for key workers, particularly in regional areas, is incentivised by the Government to encourage innovative partnerships between community, private sector parties and homeowners to address immediate housing needs.**

Background and rationale

Key workers require a separate response to the traditional homelessness system, which is oriented to vulnerable people in crisis and with a broader support focus. In considering short-term accommodation options as a solution to an immediate need for housing, and in light of affordability and supply issues felt in both metropolitan and regional NSW, Mission Australia suggests exploring the applicability of the homestay concept. However, it should be noted that recent research on housing for key workers indicates long-term affordable housing solutions with a view to home ownership better align with the aspirations of this group,¹⁰ whilst this approach may generate opportunities for cyclical or seasonal key-worker patterns. In particular, it may create opportunities for 'surge' workforces in the event of natural disasters, health orders or bushfires.

AHURI research released in 2021 provides key insights to inform policy or program responses to housing for key workers and should inform Action 2.1.6 in the Housing 2041 Action Plan for 2021-22. They include:

- There is no universal definition of a key worker, but they are largely considered to be in employment that is key to the functioning of cities and on low to moderate incomes.
- 20% of key workers¹¹ in Sydney could be classified as being in housing stress.¹²
- 30,000 key workers in Sydney are in overcrowded dwellings.
- A policy focus on affordable housing to rent does not address the strong home ownership aspirations of this group of workers.
- Subgroups of key workers are more likely to need assistance, such as young workers not in the housing market, single income households, workers and their families requiring larger dwellings.
- Overseas experience highlights that planning regulations and programs targeted to key workers tended to overtime be expanded to generalised working households on low to moderate incomes.
- Policy should focus on increasing housing supply across the continuum, particularly on strategies to support home ownership in line with the aspirations of this group.¹³

¹⁰ Gilbert, C., Nasreen, Z., & Gurrán, N. (2021), 'Housing key workers: Scoping challenges, aspirations, and policy responses for Australian cities', In AHURI Final Report (Issue 355), <https://doi.org/10.18408/ahuri7323901>.

¹¹ AHURI selected 21 occupation groups for their analysis, all of which earn incomes in the second and lower-third quintiles.

¹² Defined as households (typically low and moderate-income) spending more than 30% of their gross household income on rent or mortgage payments.

¹³ Gilbert, C. et al. (2021).

Homestay concept and adaption

Homestay programs are traditionally designed for international students to find low-cost accommodation (sometimes with meals provided). It is a well-established practice across many countries and emerged in Australia as a response to the growing number of international students and meeting their accommodation needs.¹⁴

This concept could be adapted for key workers as a temporary accommodation measure to address rental affordability and low vacancy rates that prohibit key workers from living close to their place of employment. This approach is more likely to suit some cohorts of key workers such as young workers not in the housing market and single households. It is not likely to be suitable for key worker families. Proof of concept will need to be undertaken to better understand the potential market of key workers and hosts. Financial incentives would be required to elevate this from a conventional rental arrangement and to encourage hosts who are not yet in the rental market but whose dwelling has capacity for additional tenants.

Alignment with Housing 2041

Housing 2041 defines key worker as *“someone who provides a vital service, especially in the police, health or education sectors”*.

The Housing 2041 Action Plan for 2021-22 will *“undertake a review of key worker housing provision across NSW to ensure access and delivery of secure, quality housing for NSW Government frontline workers. A review of the key worker housing model, with a focus on regional and remote NSW, is required to ensure more effective provision of safe, secure and quality housing for professional staff, in the right locations.”*

Fontainebleau transitional pilot program

We recommend

- **The Fontainebleau transitional pilot program is replicated in other areas of NSW by the Government, following evaluation if required.**

Background and rationale

Since March 2021, Mission Australia’s Early Intervention Tenancy Support Service (EITSS) has been working with the Department of Communities and Justice (DCJ) in Liverpool on a pilot program known as Fontainebleau transitional pilot program. EITSS provides support to individuals and families across South West Sydney who are at risk of homelessness to find appropriate, affordable and sustainable housing.

Fontainebleau is a hotel in South West Sydney which offered 21 rooms to DCJ for a maximum of three months’ crisis accommodation. Under the terms of the agreement, Mission Australia provides short-

¹⁴ Akbar, H., Bael, T. Van, Hassan, Y., & Baguley, G. (2004), ‘Evaluating the QUT Homestay Program : lessons learnt in providing quality services to international students’.

term intensive support to tenants of the accommodation whilst DCJ staff in Liverpool refer suitable clients from temporary accommodation into the program.

This approach differs from the traditional temporary accommodation models that leave vulnerable people isolated and unsupported in hotels and motels, which Mission Australia does not support. The significant government funding currently spent on temporary accommodation should be diverted to innovative and more suitable models of accommodation with on-site support.

The stated purpose of the program is to offer intensive short-term support to achieve positive outcomes. In practice this gives MA's EITSS service an additional three months to find housing for people. It also allows clients of the program, many of whom are exiting institutional care including prison, a bit of time to get back on their feet, obtain ID and prepare for independent living.

Of the 22 clients of the program since March, seven have been assisted into private rental, two into public housing, and four into Together Home properties. The remaining nine are still engaged in the program. Additionally, three have obtained full-time work during their time with the program.

Given these encouraging outcomes, we recommend that the Government evaluate and expand this pilot program into other areas across NSW.

ToR D: Barriers to additional supply across NSW, including for smaller non-CHP housing providers

We recommend

- **Supply targets are adopted by the Government across NSW to drive work and accountability on meeting housing supply needs.**

The absence of detailed housing supply targets, which reflect the different housing needs across NSW, creates a dysfunctional and fragmented approach to meeting supply. The Government limiting the ability of the City of Sydney to raise levies on developers, which is one of the few levers local councils have to increase affordable housing, is an example of this dynamic.¹⁵ Introducing targets would create a much-needed alignment of planning and policy responses between the Government and local councils, given both have a key role in the planning system and shared interest in delivering for their communities.

Once clear targets have been set and accountable stakeholders identified, it will help drive solutions to meet them. These solutions could include the introduction or scaling up of the following:

- Developer levies / mandatory inclusionary zoning.¹⁶

¹⁵ Morris, A. (2018), 'Mission nearly impossible: the City of Sydney's efforts to increase the affordable housing supply', <https://theconversation.com/mission-nearly-impossible-the-city-of-sydneys-efforts-to-increase-the-affordable-housing-supply-93366>.

¹⁶ The Constellation Project. (undated), 'Mandatory inclusionary zoning', https://theconstellationproject.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/MIZ-flyer_WEB-Lisa-updates-Dec-21.pdf

- An audit of all government-owned land to increase potential supply options.¹⁷
- Discounted sales of public and council owned land for social or affordable housing purposes.¹⁸
- Restrictions on short-term letting in constrained rental markets, particularly coastal regions.¹⁹
- Planning and tax changes to incentivise build-to-rent schemes.²⁰

Part of analysing the appropriateness of these options would be their cost/benefit and a careful assessment of the enablers and barriers to their successful implementation.

ToR E: Support for and accountability of registered community housing providers

CHPs in NSW are required to be registered under the NSW registration system (NSW Local Scheme) or the National Regulatory System for Community Housing (NRSCH) to receive housing assistance from DCJ. The NSW Local Scheme was set up to cover providers ineligible to register under the NRSCH, with both aligned to provide consistency in regulatory requirements.

It should be noted that DCJ while a provider of housing is not regulated. The Productivity Commission has recommended that the NRSCH be expanded to cover public housing to provide consistent regulatory requirements regardless of the provider's organisational structure.²¹

Tailored Support Coordination Service for public housing tenants

Although falling outside the formal Terms of Reference for this Inquiry, we would like to make an additional recommendation for the Committee's consideration. This section outlines a model of housing plus support which we recommend be adopted by the government to support NSW public housing tenants to maintain their tenancies and which could also be adapted to support people in 'meanwhile use' and temporary accommodation. Providing support to maintain tenancies should reduce the 'churn' of people exiting public housing to forms of homelessness requiring crisis accommodation and may encourage others to transition into the private rental market. This in turn should reduce the need for publicly-funded short-term accommodation options. For those being supported in 'meanwhile use'

¹⁷ As per Action 1.3.2 *Establish a register of NSW Government land*; See NSW Government. (2021), 'Housing 2041 2021-22 Action Plan', <https://www.planning.nsw.gov.au/-/media/Files/DPE/Reports/Policy-and-legislation/NSW-Housing-2021-22-Action-Plan-mayv2-2021.pdf>

¹⁸ Morris *op. cit.*

¹⁹ Community Housing Industry Association (2020), 'Built to last: A 20-year plan for community housing in NSW', <https://communityhousing.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/CHIA-NSW-Housing-Strategy-Submission.pdf>

²⁰ NSW Department of Planning, Industry Environment. (2021), 'Build-to-rent housing', <https://www.planning.nsw.gov.au/build-to-rent>; NSW Government. (2021), 'Housing 2041: NSW Housing Strategy', <https://www.planning.nsw.gov.au/-/media/Files/DPE/Reports/Policy-and-legislation/NSW-Housing-Strategy-Report-2021-Mayv2.pdf>

²¹ Productivity Commission (2017), 'Productivity Commission Inquiry Report Introducing Competition and Informed User Choice into Human Services: Reforms to Human Services', <http://www.pc.gov.au/inquiries/completed/human-services/reforms/report/human-services-reforms.pdf>

accommodation, the objective would be to support them for the duration of that accommodation and also support their transition to long-term housing.

We recommend

- **Tailored Support Co-ordination services are commissioned by the Government for all public housing tenants who require support to either maintain their tenancies to avoid homelessness or to build capacity to transition to the private market.**
- **Adapted Tailored Support Co-ordination is commissioned by the Government for people in 'meanwhile use'/temporary accommodation to provide support and help them transition to long-term housing.**

Impacts of failed tenancies on the housing and homelessness systems

Research suggests social housing tenants who leave in the following circumstances are more at risk of homelessness:

- people who exit abruptly
- people who establish new tenancies based on debt
- a person who is financially highly dependent on another person
- people with a history of multiple unsuccessful transitions out of social housing.²²

An analysis of NSW public housing and Aboriginal housing tenancies that ended in 2008-9 found 33% of households went on to experience unstable housing. They ended up accessing one or more of the following: private rental assistance, temporary accommodation, and social housing (or applied to the social housing registry).²³

Providing early support to sustain tenancies at risk and improve the social housing experience may divert people from churning through the homelessness services system to only end up back in social housing or entrenched in homelessness. This cycle has been characterised as the 'revolving door syndrome', whereby tenants with high needs are evicted because of accrued debt and/or their high needs, only to be rehoused again with larger debt.²⁴

Additionally, by focussing on prevention and early intervention activities the cost of tenant exits and delivering crisis support and accommodation for the NSW Government could be reduced. If action had been taken to assist the 33% of households that exited in 2008-9 to sustain their tenancies, an

²² Conroy, E., & Williams, M. (2017), 'Evidence check: Homelessness at Transition', Sax Institute.

²³ Bermingham, S., and Park, Y. (2013), 'Tenancy Exit Cost Analysis: A Report on AHO and public housing tenancy ends and subsequent assistance', Department of Families and Community Services.

²⁴ Gale, A. (2003), 'Successful Tenancies: Stopping the revolving door, paper presented at the 3rd National Homelessness Conference 'Beyond the Divide' convened by the Australian Federation of Homelessness Organisations', Brisbane cited in Habibis, D., Atkinson, R., Dunbar, T., Goss, D., Easthope, H., & Maginn, P. (2007), 'A sustaining tenancies approach to managing demanding behaviour in public housing: a good practice guide', AHURI.

estimated saving of \$8.8 million per annum in direct costs²⁵ and \$630,000 in avoided SHS costs could have been realised.²⁶

Background and rationale

Support in public housing has traditionally been limited to landlord activities (e.g., rent arrears, relocations, and responding to tenant breaches), reflecting that historically tenants were mostly low income, working households not requiring additional supportive interventions. As social housing has increasingly become a safety net for the most vulnerable there is a need to provide greater support.²⁷ Over the years the DCJ has responded to this need, particularly in housing estates, but often with a more management than supportive focus.²⁸ In South Moree housing estate, significant reductions in rent arrears and drops in vandalism and incidents of nuisance and annoyance were achieved when the DCJ introduced Intensive Tenancy Management in the early 2000s. The elements of this model were more assertive tenancy management, asset management, community development and social support.²⁹ Most of the housing estates where this model was adopted have since come under community housing tenancy management.³⁰

Supports targeted to public housing tenants more broadly are often rationed and designed for high needs groups. For example, the Housing and Accommodation Support Initiative offers a range of flexible psychosocial supports for people with severe mental illness, however, packages are limited. For the majority of public housing tenants with a range of lower-level needs, there is no state-wide, systematic process to identify them with the purpose of effectively sustaining, or successfully transitioning out of, social housing. In June, the Audit Office of NSW report on the NSW Homelessness Strategy found the only change to business as usual for sustaining tenancies was the development of new practice guidelines.³¹

Many CHPs deliver some level of support outside of regular landlord duties to their tenants, or work in partnership with outside organisations to deliver it. At Mission Australia Housing we have adopted an Integrated Model of Housing and Support for tenants in our social housing properties and their families and communities.

This model is based on an internal partnership between different teams within our organisation: the tenancy managers and community development staff within Mission Australia Housing; and the support

²⁵ Includes product and employment related expenses for temporary accommodation, RentStart, Private Rental Subsidy, delivering rehousing assistance.

²⁶ Bermingham et al. (2013).

²⁷ NSW Family and Community Services (2016), 'Future Directions for Social Housing in NSW'.

²⁸ Shelter NSW (2003), 'Tenancies, communities, and the (re)development of public housing estates – a background paper', <https://shelternsw.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/2003-Tenancies-communities-and-the-redevelopment-of-public-housing-estates-background-paper-Craig-Johnston.pdf>.

²⁹ Ferguson, J. (2006), 'Intensive Tenancy Management in South Moree', *Housing Works*, 4(2), pp.

15-18. cited in Habibis, D., Atkinson, R., Dunbar, T., Goss, D., Easthope, H., & Maginn, P. (2007), 'A sustaining tenancies approach to managing demanding behaviour in public housing : a good practice guide', AHURI. 15-18.

³⁰ Shelter NSW (2003).

³¹ Audit Office of NSW (2021), 'Responses to homelessness'.

workers within Mission Australia’s community services. However, the model can also be applied more broadly to partnerships between separate community housing and community services organisations.

Tailored Support Coordination Service (TSCS)

TSCS has been piloted as the support service component of Mission Australia Housing’s Integrated Model of Housing and Support in Coffs Harbour properties since July 2019. It was designed to support both the “safety net group” and “opportunity group” identified in the Future Directions for Social Housing in NSW policy.

The service provides individual support to tenants to maintain stable tenancies, improve wellbeing, social participation and independence through the coordination of tenant generated, recovery oriented Individualised Support Plans (ISP). ISP create a recovery-oriented service map guided by tenant identified needs, strengths and goals to coordinate supports across the broader service system.

TSCS aims to:

- stabilise tenancies at risk
- develop capacity to live independently
- increase protective factors and reduce tenancy risk in new households
- create pathways out of social housing
- increase wellbeing and social participation
- support families with school age children to break the cycle of intergenerational dependence on income supports.

Key activities include:

- helping participants to identify their goals and map pathways towards achieving them
- identifying and facilitating access to the support services and connections that will help them achieve their goals
- assisting participants to navigate the service system and address barriers to access
- working with participants to ensure their supports are meeting their needs.

Our internal review of the service found that collaboration between housing and support teams was a key strength and had created substantial benefits for tenants. This collaboration enabled effective and early identification of the signs that a tenancy is at risk, or that a tenant is experiencing challenges. It demonstrated the effectiveness of Mission Australia support workers taking a holistic understanding of an individual’s needs through rapport building and leveraging their knowledge of local service system and advocacy skills to ensure tenants accessed supports in a timely manner, that barriers to access can be addressed, and that providers better understood the tenant’s needs.

Alignment with Housing 2041

Housing 2041 identifies “*increased support for those most in need*” as one of the six components to achieving its vision. Underpinning this is “*providing ongoing support and programs to agreed targets to reduce homelessness*”

and support those with complex needs, such as support for mental and physical health, substance use, domestic and family violence, education, employment or financial stress”

Alignment with Future Directions for Social Housing

The strategy identifies two broad groups of social housing tenants, identified as ‘safety net group’ and ‘opportunity group’. The former are people who require support for an extended period of time, while the latter are people who can be helped to become more independent financially and eventually transition out of social housing.

Alignment with NSW Homelessness Strategy 2018–2023

The strategy under Action 1.2 will *“take action to sustain existing tenancies in social housing through local strategies to deliver intensive person-centred support and case management to address a range of complex needs such as mental health and alcohol and other drug issues.”*

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NSW Responses to Homelessness Audit 2021



Audit Office of NSW: Responses to homelessness

Mission Australia is a national, non-denominational Christian charity that has been serving Australia for more than 160 years. Our goal is to end homelessness and ensure people and communities in need can thrive. Mission Australia Housing (MAH) was established in 2009 by Mission Australia and is a Registered Tier 1 Community Housing Provider which aims to deliver more homes in vibrant communities. MAH currently owns or manages over 3000 social and affordable homes. Together, during the 2019-20 financial year, we supported close to 170,000 individuals through almost 500 programs and services across Australia.¹

Mission Australia welcomes the opportunity to provide input into the Audit Office's review into government responses to homelessness. As a provider of Specialist Homelessness Services in NSW with close ties to a Community Housing Provider, we are committed to working with the Government and our sector colleagues to develop responses that prevent and eventually eliminate homelessness.

Summary of recommendations

Prevention and early intervention

- Roll out the Universal Risk Screening tool for homelessness in all NSW schools.
- Develop an action plan and secure funding arrangements to implement the *No Exits from Government Services into Homelessness: A framework for multi-agency action*.
- Extend the age of leaving out-of-home care from 18 to 21 years for any young person who chooses to remain in out-of-home care. Where this is not an appropriate option, intensive exit planning and support should be provided to ensure young people do not exit out-of-home care into homelessness.
- Expand the Sustaining Tenancies program to support social housing as well as private tenancies at risk in all regions across NSW.

Effective supports and responses

Housing First approaches

- Make Together Home a permanent and recurrent part of the homelessness service system in NSW.
- Increase the number of high needs support packages within the Together Home program.

¹ Mission Australia, Annual Report, 2019-20, accessible at: <https://www.missionaustralia.com.au/publications/annual-reports/annual-report-2020>

Ending street sleeping

- Invest in the End Street Sleeping Collaboration.

Supports for high-risk cohorts

- Invest in housing and homelessness supports for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people as a step towards 'closing the gap' in outcomes between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and non-Indigenous people.
- Acknowledge the key role of Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations in the provision of services to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and communities and empower them with investment in the development of infrastructure, governance, systems and processes.
- Invest in Youth Foyer or similar models to address homelessness and promote engagement with education, employment and training for young people.
- Consider the potential of the by-name list established by the End Street Sleeping Collaboration to facilitate linking people sleeping rough with the NDIS.
- Work with the Federal Government to develop and implement a plan to increase access to the NDIS by people experiencing homelessness, especially people sleeping rough.
- Increase investment in social housing options for the ageing population in NSW.
- Establish a state-wide housing information and support service for older people to provide a central point of contact at risk of homelessness based on Victoria's Home at Last Model.
- Expand investment in Staying Home Leaving Violence to implement services across NSW.
- Work with the Federal Government to ensure that temporary visa holders, including women on spousal visas escaping domestic and family violence, have access to income support payments and other necessary supports.
- Invest in additional affordable housing in regional, rural and remote areas of NSW.

An integrated, person-centred service system

- Continue the level of cross agency collaboration implemented to respond to COVID-19 in Sydney, in particular the integrated approach to the assessment, support and housing of street sleepers. The End Street Sleeping Collaboration and DCJ could play a key facilitation role.
- Continue to consult with the sector on appropriate collaborative mechanisms to deliver new strategic goals in a post-COVID environment.

Introduction

Homelessness and a lack of adequate, secure, affordable housing are significant social issues for NSW. On Census night in 2016, there were close to 38,000 people experiencing homelessness in NSW, an increase of 37% from 2011.² In 2019-20 just over 70,000 people were assisted by Specialist Homelessness Services (SHS) in NSW, accounting for about 24% of the national SHS population (290,500 total clients). On average, 25 requests for SHS assistance in NSW went unmet each day.³ As of June 2019, there were 51,000 people in NSW on the social housing waiting list, with waiting periods between two and 10 years.⁴

Mission Australia welcomed the release of the comprehensive, whole-of-government NSW Homelessness Strategy 2018-23 (the Strategy) when it was published in 2018. The priority areas of focus on prevention and early intervention, effective supports and responses with a focus on Housing First, and an integrated, person-centred service system promised to set a positive path for reform and we have been pleased to see many of the Government's commitments under the Strategy realised.

In our view, the Government's significant investments in homelessness services and supports in response to COVID-19 have been positive and have created an opportunity to further refine strategic approaches to eliminating homelessness in NSW. Funding for temporary accommodation, increasing private rental market subsidies, and extending the Community Housing Leasing Program via the Together Home program have been positive short-term investments. The establishment of collaborative working groups involving the Government and the sector has also been a successful approach. Together, these approaches demonstrate that a great deal can be achieved quickly where there is an imperative to do so.

While additional funding for temporary accommodation arrangements led to successes in moving many people into temporary accommodation (including a large number of rough sleepers), which was an adequate response to the crisis circumstances generated by COVID-19, we support a long-term move away from this and towards programs like Together Home which will provide many with long-term supportive housing.

The long-term impacts of COVID-19 and the associated rises in unemployment, mental health issues and domestic and family violence on homelessness are not yet known. Modelling undertaken by Equity Economics suggests that if unemployment rises to 15% in NSW, homelessness will increase by up to 16,000 people.⁵ At present, unemployment rates have not reached their anticipated heights, but we

² Australian Bureau of Statistics (2016) 2049.0 - Census of Population and Housing: Estimating homelessness, accessible at: <https://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/mf/2049.0>

³ Australian Institute of Health and Wellbeing (2020) Specialist homelessness services 2019-20, NSW summary, accessible at: <https://www.aihw.gov.au/getmedia/c1ce917d-9812-459d-967d-0d2a027f70c0/aihw-hou-322-nsw-factsheet.pdf.aspx>

⁴ NSW Department of Community and Justice, Applying for Housing Assistance: Expected Waiting Times, accessible at: <https://www.facs.nsw.gov.au/housing/help/applying-assistance/expected-waiting-times>

⁵ Equity Economics (2020) Supporting economic recovery In NSW: Investment In social and affordable housing is critical to supporting jobs today and families into the future, accessible at: <https://www.ncoss.org.au/policy->

know that there are continuing issues of underemployment and lack of alignment between job vacancies and the skills and employment preferences of those looking for work.⁶ We are also approaching the likely end of the Coronavirus Supplement to various income support payments, the JobKeeper payment, and the evictions moratorium, and the impact of these changes on homelessness remain to be seen.

Although we don't yet know the precise impacts of COVID-19 on long-term homelessness trends, we do know that the homelessness service system needs to continue to evolve to prevent people from becoming homeless and rapidly house the decreasing number who do. An opportunity emerges from the experience of COVID-19 to revise strategic approaches to homelessness in NSW and shift the system more definitively towards one that:

1. Focuses on prevention and early intervention measures and funds services that are specifically and solely devoted to these approaches.
2. Funds supportive housing models based on Housing First principles for those who need it.
3. Increases the supply of social and affordable housing.
4. Encourages collaboration between the Government and sector on responding to homelessness.

These themes are integral to considerations of both the NSW Government's response to homelessness during COVID-19 and the Strategy and are taken up in our submission in three parts which reflect the priority areas of the Strategy:

Part 1: Early intervention and prevention

Part 2: Effective supports and responses

Part 3: An integrated, person-centred service system

Part 1: Prevention and early intervention

Prevention and early intervention are fundamental strategies for addressing and eventually eliminating homelessness, and we welcomed their inclusion as cornerstones of the Strategy. Significant progress has been made under the Strategy in this area, including:

- The rollout of the universal screening tool in select NSW schools.
- The introduction of a pilot program based on the Community of Schools and Services model.
- The development of a framework by the Department of Communities and Justice to strengthen current practice in preventing exits from institutional care into homelessness: *No Exits from Government Services into Homelessness: A framework for multi-agency action.*

[advocacy/policy-research-publications/supporting-economic-recovery-in-nsw-investment-in-social-and-affordable-housing-is-critical-to-supporting-jobs-today-and-families-into-the-future/](#)

⁶ Jericho, G (2021) Australia has huge growth in job vacancies, but that doesn't mean it's easy to find one, in *The Guardian*, <https://www.theguardian.com/business/grogonomics/2021/jan/14/australia-has-huge-growth-in-job-vacancies-but-that-doesnt-mean-its-easy-to-find-one>

- The expansion of the Sustaining Tenancies program.

At the service level we still see significant need for further investment in prevention and early intervention. Some people have already reached crisis point by the time they come to our services and require intensive, long-term intervention.

“(Ideally), people would be supported to maintain their housing long before they are at risk of homelessness and are experiencing a mountain of challenges ... From our experience, some people get in debt that spiral out of control or resort to using alcohol or drugs as a coping mechanism. All these can be avoided if there was proper, targeted early intervention.”

Mission Australia, Area Manager – NSW

The Strategy envisaged building links between first to know agencies (such as real estate agents) and the not for profit sector to enhance early intervention efforts. Unfortunately, these links do not always operate as smoothly and effectively as hoped and are particularly challenging to implement in rural and remote areas.

“The policies are well intentioned but can’t be properly implemented in rural areas. For example, we have one real estate agent for the whole Walgett area. They are not going to have time to focus on our clients when they have other, more lucrative priorities.”

Mission Australia, Area Manager – Central NSW

A new measure introduced under the Strategy established Housing Networks based on geographic areas. Even where early intervention referrals through these Housing Network meetings are made, there are no appropriate properties available in certain areas.

“We’ve had about five referrals for housing in our area and we can’t help them because there are no social and affordable housing units available. For early intervention to actually work, we need a lot more social housing in these (regional, rural and remote) areas.”

Mission Australia, Area Manager – NSW

However, there are also positive examples where early intervention projects based on real estate engagement have been successful, including the Macarthur Real Estate Engagement Project as highlighted below.

Macarthur Real Estate Engagement Project (MREEP), NSW

The Early Intervention and Tenancy Support Service team in South West Sydney currently leads this Project, working with Real Estate Agents and multiple services in health, housing, employment and Centrelink. Supporting tenants who are struggling to maintain their tenancies, MREEP provides early intervention for new and existing tenants of Real Estates to avoid them entering homelessness. Flexible appointments, wraparound supports (financial planning/budget, setting goals, free health checks), and a person-centred approach and support to build positive relationships with Real Estate Agents and

enables tenants to gain confidence to access services, activities and community events. Outcomes so far have included 138 tenants (including their families) have exited social housing and secured private rent, with 170 tenants having avoided eviction.

We recognise that significant effort will be required to transform the homelessness service system from one focussed on crisis responses to one focused on early intervention. It is difficult for service providers to focus on prevention and early intervention when the system is oversubscribed and many people entering into it are already in crisis. The challenge will be to shift to a greater systemic investment and focus on prevention and early intervention while in the meantime continuing to respond to the immediate presenting issues of those seeking assistance.

Measures that have a sole focus on prevention and early intervention, such as a universal screening tool, preventing exits into homelessness from institutional care, and funding for tenancy support programs, will make a contribution to the systemic shift required and we urge the Government to continue to build on their success.

Universal Risk Screening

Preventing or intervening early in homelessness for young people is particularly important. For children and young people, homelessness can be particularly devastating to their development and its effects are often long-lasting. Stable, affordable and suitable housing is essential for a young person's economic, mental, physical and social wellbeing. It is also connected to a positive sense of self, good health, social cohesion and educational completion.⁷ The total costs of health services and the justice system due to young people experiencing homelessness is an average of \$17,868 per person per year, not including the additional lifetime impact of early school leaving and low engagement with employment.⁸

The rollout of the Universal Risk Screening tool is an important advance in building early identification of young people at risk in a universal setting and has been successfully piloted in secondary schools in Albury, Penrith and Mount Druitt since 2019. It should now be extended to all schools in NSW.

Recommendation

- Roll out the Universal Risk Screening tool for homelessness in all NSW schools.

Preventing exits from institutional care into homelessness

In 2019-20, around 1,800 people leaving institutional care settings received assistance from a specialist homelessness services (SHS) agency.⁹ These included health settings, prisons and detention centres as well as young people leaving care. The number of those who exited these settings into homelessness or

⁷ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (2020) Australia's children. Cat. no. CWS 69. Canberra: AIHW. Accessible at <https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/children-youth/australias-children>

⁸ MacKenzie, D, Flatau, P, Steen, A and Thielking, M (2016) The cost of youth homelessness in Australia, accessible at <https://apo.org.au/sites/default/files/resource-files/2016-04/apo-nid63479.pdf>

⁹ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (2020) Specialist Homelessness Services Annual Report 2019-2020, accessible at: <https://www.aihw.gov.au/getmedia/9e4e2ff0-d30c-419d-abe6-1bb648fc43dd/Specialist-homelessness-services-annual-report.pdf.aspx?inline=true>

insecure housing without seeking assistance from an SHS agency is unknown. Effective planning in advance can significantly contribute to preventing homelessness and other associated challenges.

Under the Strategy, the NSW Government has funded programs that aim to prevent people leaving institutional care arrangements becoming homeless, which is a valuable investment in homelessness prevention. This includes the Home and Healthy program, which aims to reduce the prevalence and impacts of homelessness for adults exiting health facilities in Sydney. The program is funded via an Impact Investment as part of the NSW Homelessness Strategy, with funding from the NSW Department of Communities and Justice. Mission Australia is delivering this program and will continue to work with the government to refine the delivery model.

As an overarching framework setting out the Government's approach to preventing homelessness among people leaving institutional care arrangements, the *No Exits from Government Services into Homelessness: A framework for multi-agency action* is a positive step. Now we need to move beyond a framework to develop an action plan and secure funding arrangements that will support its implementation.

Recommendation

- Develop an action plan and secure funding arrangements to implement the *No Exits from Government Services into Homelessness: A framework for multi-agency action*.

Home Stretch

One critical measure to implement in preventing exits from institutional care into homelessness is to extend the age for all young people leaving out-of-home care to 21. Each state and territory in Australia have now done so or are in the process of doing so, other than NSW and Queensland. A 2018 report from Deloitte Access Economics, *Extending care to 21 years in New South Wales*¹⁰ provides compelling evidence of the social and economic benefits that would accrue to NSW if the age of leaving out-of-home care were extended from 18 to 21. This simple reform would achieve the following outcomes for young people in care:

- Homelessness halved from 39% to 19.5%.
- Rate of teen pregnancy reduced from 16.6% to 10.2%.
- Educational engagement increased from 7.0% to 16.3%, for non-parents.
- Hospitalisation rates reduced from 29.2% to 19.2%.
- Rate of mental illness reduced from 54.4% to 30.1%.
- Rate of smoking reduced from 56.8% to 24.9%.
- Interaction with the criminal justice system reduced from 16.3% to 10.4%.
- Alcohol and drug dependence rates reduced from 15.8% to 2.5%.
- Lost wellbeing due to mental illness and substance abuse reduced from 54.4% to 30.1%.

¹⁰ Deloitte Access Economics (2018) Extending care to 21 years in New South Wales, accessible at: <https://www.anglicare.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/Home-stretch-campaign-NSW-Oct-2018-v3.pdf>

Mission Australia recommends that the NSW Government adopt the recommendation of the Home Stretch campaign and extend the age of leaving out-of-home care to 21 years if the young person chooses to stay in out-of-home care. Where this is not an appropriate option, intensive exit planning and support should be provided to ensure young people do not exit out-of-home care into homelessness.

Recommendation

- Extend the age of leaving out-of-home care from 18 to 21 years for any young person who chooses to remain in out-of-home care. Where this is not an appropriate option, intensive exit planning and support should be provided to ensure young people do not exit out-of-home care into homelessness.

Sustaining Tenancies in Social Housing program

The expansion of the Sustaining Tenancies in Social Housing program is welcome and we would like to see its further expansion to support all at-risk tenancies. The program is funded by NSW Department of Communities and Justice (DCJ) and aims to sustain the tenancies of tenants living in social housing and increase their social connections and wellbeing over a 12-month period. It is based on evidence that intervention strategies can work effectively if wrap-around support and brokerage is available early for at-risk tenancies.

Following a successful pilot the program has now been extended to a limited number of regions across NSW, but has the potential to benefit people across all areas of NSW who need support to maintain their tenancy. The program could also be expanded to support private rental tenancies as well as those in social housing.

Recommendation

- Expand the Sustaining Tenancies program to support social housing as well as private tenancies at risk in all regions across NSW.

Part 2: Effective supports and responses

Those who do become homeless need effective responses to help them quickly exit homelessness and, if necessary, access ongoing assistance with health, wellbeing, education, employment and other issues.

Housing First approaches

Housing First approaches have demonstrated excellent housing outcomes and positive impacts on a range of health and wellbeing outcomes both in Australia and internationally. The Housing First model respects the rights of all people to housing, no matter their personal circumstances, and evaluations have repeatedly demonstrated their value in housing retention over the long term (see, for example, the **MISHA** project in the breakout box below). For people with chronic histories of homelessness and more intensive support needs, Housing First is an economically viable and personally valuable approach to addressing homelessness.

The Together Home program has been built on Housing First principles and we welcome its introduction. However, at present it is a time-limited investment for two years. We encourage the Government to make it a permanent and recurrent part of the homelessness service system in NSW.

We also encourage further investment in the high needs support packages available under the Together Home program. Intended to provide additional support to those for whom a less intensive intervention is not suitable, there are at present only 40 such packages available across NSW. In our service delivery experience, many more than this will be required to meet demand.

Michael's Intensive Supported Housing Accord (MISHA Project) NSW¹¹

The MISHA project was a successful Housing First model providing holistic care to men who were chronically homeless. It began in late 2010 with the aims of providing homeless men with support to enter and sustain permanent housing, ensuring access to mental and physical health supports, reducing social isolation and equipping clients to live successfully within the community.

As a result of services provided, 98% of clients were able to support their tenancy over a 12-month period. Research on the project from 2010-2013 demonstrated costs associated with use of health and justice services were more than halved over 2 years – delivering a saving to government of more than \$8,000 per person each year.

Overall financial savings to government attributed to the MISHA Project were estimated at close to a million dollars over two years, through fewer nights spent in hospitals, mental health facilities or drug and alcohol centres, fewer visits from justice officers, less police interaction and less time spent in detention facilities.

There were also savings generated to housing providers due to reduced evictions, estimated at \$1,880 per client, in the first 12 months of the client being housed. The total net saving to housing providers generated by providing tenancy support services to 74 MISHA clients over a one-year period was estimated at \$138,880.

Recommendation

- Make Together Home a permanent and recurrent part of the homelessness service system in NSW.
- Increase the number of high needs support packages within the Together Home program.

¹¹ See further: Mission Australia, *From Homelessness to Sustained Housing, 2010 – 2013, MISHA research report*, accessible at: <https://www.missionaustralia.com.au/documents/279-from-homelessness-to-sustained-housing-2010-2013-misha-research-report-2014/file>

Ending street sleeping

We support the intent of the Premier's Priority to reduce street homelessness in NSW by 50 per cent by 2025. Continued funding and support of the End Street Sleeping Collaboration (ESSC) is a vital part of reaching this target and going further to achieve the ESSC's aim of zero street homelessness in NSW.

As a partner in the ESSC, Mission Australia is committed to work with government and sector agencies to access secure and long-term housing as well as to implement preventative measures to intervene before homelessness occurs.¹²

The by-name list is a particularly valuable output from the ESSC, reducing the need for people to re-tell their stories to multiple agencies. It also has the potential to assist in linking people sleeping rough with funding and supports through the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS), as addressed in the **People with disability** section below.

Recommendation

- Invest in the End Street Sleeping Collaboration.

Crisis and transitional accommodation

As noted earlier, we recognise that significant effort will be required to transform the homelessness service system from one focussed on crisis responses to one focused on early intervention and that continuing support is required for people entering the system while in crisis, while at the same time shifting systemic focus and effort to prevention and early intervention.

While transitioning to a system where service responses are based on Housing First principles, there is a continuing need for transitional short-term accommodation, providing timely and effective services and working with people towards a range of housing, social and economic participation goals. The ultimate goal is long-term stable and secure accommodation for everyone but crisis and transitional accommodation is a necessary part of the current service system due to the shortage of affordable housing supply.

Ebbs House

Ebbs House is a crisis and transitional accommodation property for up to 31 people at risk of or experiencing homelessness. Other services offered include, outreach support, case management, counselling, information, advice and advocacy. The service rapidly re-houses individuals and families in need. It also provides post-crisis and follow up support to ensure people are able to permanently exit the cycle of homelessness.

Ebbs House is located in a central location close to public transport, within walking distance to the Brookvale Community Health Centre as well as employment and community services, hospitals, the Warringah Mall and the local TAFE.

¹² End Street Sleeping Collaboration, accessible at: <https://www.acttoendstreetsleeping.org/about-1>

Case study

Richard* is a 62-year-old man who was linked with Mission Australia's Lower North Shore & Northern Beaches Homelessness Support Service in March 2019. At the time he was referred to the service, he was sleeping rough in a laundry at the bottom of an apartment block for about 6 months. Prior to experiencing homelessness, he worked for the Roads and Traffic Authority for 25 years before being made redundant. This had a significant impact on his mental health.

After providing him with transitional accommodation, the case managers worked with Richard to provide wrap-around supports to address other issues that he was experiencing. He was linked with in essential support services tailored to meet his needs. These services supported Richards's application for social housing.

Richard was linked with the Opportunity Pathways Program which targets support for people who are either in social housing or on the waiting list to obtain employment. With the support of the case managers and the employment service Richard was able to secure work as a delivery driver. Richard said that he found using technology extremely difficult so he relied on a physical street map to help him navigate Sydney streets. Unfortunately, he could not maintain the job as it was impacting on his anxiety. Richard's case manager supported him during this period to ensure that he was not discouraged by that experience and helped Richard focus on the positive milestones he has achieved during a short period of time. They also provided Richard with assistance on using a mobile phone and various apps including google maps.

Richard's case manager continued to advocate on his behalf to obtain housing including reaching out to the local Community Housing Providers. In March this year Richard was offered a Community Housing property. This was the first time in many years where he was able to secure long-term, stable and affordable housing.

The case manager used brokerage funding to source white goods and other materials to help him establish himself in the new house. Richard was very emotional and pleased that he was able to find accommodation during a time where people were expected to spend extended periods of time in the safety of a home due to the pandemic. He continues to be engaged with services and is positive about his future.

*Name has been changed for privacy

Supports for high-risk cohorts

We work with a number of high-risk cohorts whom we are concerned have been disproportionately burdened by the health and economic effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, associated lockdown and flow-on macroeconomic effects.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people

The impacts of inadequate housing on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health and wellbeing are significant.¹³ The major issue of overcrowding for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people is largely a result of needing to share housing due lack of supply, low incomes and high rent.¹⁴ Overcrowding can compound psychosocial stress and ill health due to food insecurity, the sharing of limited resources, exposure to tensions and conflict, the lack of privacy and personal space and the prevalence of infectious and chronic diseases.¹⁵

“Homelessness looks different in our areas. We see less rough sleeping and more overcrowding due to lack of appropriate housing options. Our Aboriginal communities need better targeted support as well as larger houses.”

Mission Australia, Area Manager – Regional NSW.

A significant investment by Government is required in housing and homelessness supports for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to work towards improving a range of outcomes and meeting targets set by the Closing the Gap framework. As noted in the 2020 Closing the Gap report, gains in life expectancy will in part rely on improvements in housing,¹⁶ and safe, secure and affordable housing is also a vital component in promoting educational completion, employment, good physical and mental health and a range of other life outcomes.

Housing and homelessness services designed to benefit Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people should be co-designed and implemented with community members, Elders and Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations to ensure they are culturally adapted and appropriate. More concerted measures, delivered through Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations, are needed to meaningfully address housing issues experienced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

Recommendations

- Invest in housing and homelessness supports for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people as a step towards ‘closing the gap’ in outcomes between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and non-Indigenous people.

¹³ National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation, Aboriginal Housing for Aboriginal Health: NACCHO Policy Position Paper, accessible at: <https://www.naccho.org.au/wp-content/uploads/NACCHO-Housing-Policy-Paper-SH-edits.pdf>

¹⁴ National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation, Aboriginal Housing for Aboriginal Health: NACCHO Policy Position Paper, accessible at: <https://www.naccho.org.au/wp-content/uploads/NACCHO-Housing-Policy-Paper-SH-edits.pdf>

¹⁵ P. Memmott, C. Birdsall-Jones and K. Greenop, Australian Indigenous house crowding, Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute (2012) accessible at: https://www.ahuri.edu.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0013/2029/AHURI_Final_Report_No194_Australian_Indigenous_house_crowding.pdf

¹⁶ Australian Government (2020) Closing the Gap Report 2020, accessible at <https://ctgreport.niaa.gov.au/overview>

- Acknowledge the key role of Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations in the provision of services to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and communities and empower them with investment in the development of infrastructure, governance, systems and processes.

Young people

As noted in the **Part 1: Prevention and early intervention**, young people are at particular risk of poor outcomes from homelessness. We have already noted the need for a Universal Risk Screener above.

Young people account for only 2.9% of principal tenants in social and public housing in Australia¹⁷ and young people are less likely to qualify for priority access. Supported accommodation coupled with intensive case management and coordinated supports including educational supports, may be more appropriate for some young people.

The Youth Foyer model assists young people, usually aged 16-24 years, to engage in education and employment, and gradually to reduce their dependence on social services. Youth Foyers generally have self-contained accommodation, on-site support workers, education programs, variable levels of support where a young person can progress to more independent living, onsite facilities and employment supports. Participation in education, training and employment is a condition of the accommodation. In these ways and because of their focus on independence, Foyers are different from traditional supported accommodation models.¹⁸

An evaluation conducted on the Youth Foyer model found significantly improved outcomes for young people. For example, Foyer enabled participants to pursue the education qualifications necessary to sustain employment. The percentage who had completed at least Year 12 or a Certificate III increased from 42% at entry to 67% at exit and to 75% a year after exit. By exit, about 30% of participants had completed an education qualification higher than at entry, and a year later about 46% had done so.¹⁹ Further funding is required for services such as these that can offer appropriate accommodation to young people as well as supporting education and their wellbeing.

Recommendation

- Invest in Youth Foyer or similar models to address homelessness and promote engagement with education, employment and training for young people.

¹⁷ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (2018) Housing assistance in Australia 2018, cat. no. HOU 296, accessible at: <https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/housing-assistance/housing-assistance-in-australia-2018/contents/housing-in-australia>

¹⁸ O'Shaughnessy, M. (2014) Somewhere to stay: models addressing youth homelessness, accessible at: https://www.churchilltrust.com.au/media/fellows/OShaughnessy_Molly_2014_Somewhere_to_stay.pdf

¹⁹ M. Coddou, et al (2019) Starting a future that means something to you: outcomes from a longitudinal study of Education First Youth Foyers, Brotherhood of St Laurence & Launch Housing, Melbourne, accessible at: http://library.bsl.org.au/jspui/bitstream/1/11369/1/Coddou_et al Starting_a_future_Education_First_Youth_Foyers_outcomes_2019.pdf

People with disability

The Strategy aims to provide choice and the right supports for people, including people with disability, to address the issues putting them at risk of homelessness and to reduce repeat homelessness. People with physical disabilities struggle to find appropriate accessible and affordable housing.

“We have some of the oldest buildings that are in need of significant repairs and are not accessible. We had to give a woman with disability different temporary accommodation because the refuge is not in an accessible building.”

Mission Australia, Area Manager – Regional NSW

Even where a limited number of properties are available, a significant amount of advocacy is needed on the part of the services to assist clients with disability to get approval for those properties.

It is estimated that nationally 6% of National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) participants, or 28,000 individuals need access to Specialist Disability Accommodation (SDA).²⁰ When the Scheme is fully implemented, the SDA is expected to account for NDIS spending of \$700 million a year.²¹ It is also expected that the NDIS will contribute to create a \$5 billion disability housing market over the next five years.²² This investment into disability accommodation is vital considering the acute shortage of affordable and accessible housing in the private rental market.²³

However, as the Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability has noted, people experiencing homelessness often have a range of barriers to accessing the NDIS. Many people experiencing homelessness, especially rough sleepers, are eligible for an NDIS package but need specialist staff to assist them to access this support. We note the potential of the by-name list established by the ESSC (see **Ending street sleeping** section above) to assist in linking people sleeping rough with needed NDIS funding and support.

We urge the NSW Government to work with the Federal Government to develop and implement a plan to increase access to the NDIS by people experiencing homelessness. This could include funding for liaison officers to work with people experiencing homelessness to ensure their equitable access to the NDIS.

²⁰ National Disability Insurance Scheme (2018) Specialist Disability Accommodation Provider and Investor Brief, April 2018, p.5, accessible at: <https://www.ndis.gov.au/providers/essentials-providers-working-ndia/specialist-disability-accommodation>

²¹ Winkler, D., Taleporos, G. and Bo'sher, L., *How the NDIS is using the market to create housing for people with disability*, The Conversation, accessible at: <https://theconversation.com/how-the-ndis-is-using-the-market-to-create-housing-for-people-with-disability-83144>

²² Summer Foundation and PwC (2017) NDIS Specialist Disability Accommodation Pathway to a mature market, , p.5 accessible at: <https://www.summerfoundation.org.au/resources/ndis-specialist-disability-accommodation-pathway-to-a-mature-market/>

²³ Anglicare Australia (2018) Rental Affordability Snapshot, accessible at: <https://www.anglicare.asn.au/docs/default-source/default-document-library/final---rental-affordability-snapshot811d9309d6962baacc1ff0000899bca.pdf?sfvrsn=4>

Recommendations

- Consider the potential of the by-name list established by the End Street Sleeping Collaboration to facilitate linking people sleeping rough with the NDIS.
- Work with the Federal Government to develop and implement a plan to increase access to the NDIS by people experiencing homelessness, especially people sleeping rough.

Older people 55+

From 2011 to 2016, the number of people aged 55 and over experiencing homelessness in NSW increased by 42% (from 4,529 to 6,411).²⁴ There is a growing trend for people to become homeless in later life for the first time, particularly amongst women. The incidence of housing stress and homelessness among older people is expected to increase over time due to an ageing population and declining rates of home ownership.

More affordable housing options with appropriate supports are needed for older people, including tenancy support to older people to find and maintain housing, upgrading or renovating current social and affordable housing stock to meet the accessibility needs of older people, and incorporating universal design standing for age accessibility in appropriate new developments.

Home at Last in Victoria²⁵ is a state-wide housing information and support service for older people and is suitable for adopting and adapting to NSW. Older people in a housing crisis are provided with one-on-one support to access appropriate and affordable housing. Older people are also encouraged to access help earlier and plan for their housing future before reaching crisis point.

Home at Last has been evaluated and shown to be cost-effective in helping clients gain secure housing and diverting demand from Specialist Homelessness Services. The KPMG evaluation found that the service had a cost saving of \$220.81 per client compared to Specialist Homelessness Services.²⁶

Recommendations

- Increase investment in social housing options for the ageing population in NSW.
- Establish a state-wide housing information and support service for older people to provide a central point of contact at risk of homelessness based on Victoria's Home at Last Model.

²⁴ Australian Bureau of Statistics (2016) 2049.0 - Census of Population and Housing: Estimating homelessness, accessible at: <https://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/mf/2049.0>

²⁵ Housing for the Aged Action Group, Home at Last Service, accessible at: https://www.olderrenters.org.au/home_at_last

²⁶ KPMG, (2015) Evaluation of the homelessness IAPs, summative evaluation report, accessible at: <http://www.nwhn.net.au/admin/file/content101/c6/Evaluation-of-homelessness-innovation-action-projects-executive-summary-0115.pdf>

Women escaping domestic and family violence

One of the areas in which there appears to have been a definite increase in the risk of homelessness is the demand for housing related to domestic and family violence. The additional \$21 million in funding to support people experiencing domestic and family violence announced by the NSW and Commonwealth Governments in May 2020²⁷ is welcomed. However, more housing options and safety programs are needed to help domestic and family violence victim/survivors to rebuild their lives. Some of our services are seeing an increase in demand for housing services by people experiencing domestic and family violence. For example, one of our regional homelessness services reported that there were 53 clients indicating DFV between June to December 2020, compared to 23 clients in 2019 for the same period.

“We are certainly seeing an unprecedented increase in demand from people citing domestic violence as the reason for seeking services ... our area was hugely impacted by the bushfires and now by this (COVID-19). Employment options are low and for a tourist town we are not doing well. People are feeling the pressure and it could be one of the reasons why we are seeing an increase in cases.”

Mission Australia, Program Manager – regional NSW

We know that a range of responses are needed for women and children who become homeless due to domestic and family violence, including universal prevention initiatives that address structural issues including gender inequality alongside rapid rehousing, safe at home and other service responses. The Strategy included a commitment to establishing Staying Home Leaving Violence in five new sites, and we encourage the Government to continue to expand this program across NSW as an effective model for allowing women and children to remain in their own homes and connected to their own communities, where it is safe to do so.

Recommendation

- Expand investment in Staying Home Leaving Violence to implement services across NSW.

People on temporary visas

The significant impact of COVID-19 on people on temporary visas has been well-documented.²⁸ Their inability to access income support payments, loss of employment and limited financial security have increased their risk of homelessness. Community services have been able to provide some supports during the pandemic, with certain state and territory governments increasing funding to support

²⁷ Department of Communities and Justice (2020) Media Release: COVID-19: Funding To Boost Domestic Violence Support, 26 May 2020, accessible at: https://www.dcj.nsw.gov.au/data/assets/pdf_file/0011/780626/covid-19-funding-to-boost-domestic-violence-support.pdf

²⁸ P. Whiteford, Open letter to the prime minister: extend coronavirus support to temporary workers, The Conversation, 7 April 2020, accessible at: <https://theconversation.com/open-letter-to-the-prime-minister-extend-coronavirus-support-to-temporary-workers-135691>

temporary migrants. Support from the NSW Government has included \$20 million to fund temporary crisis accommodation for stranded international students²⁹ and providing victims of domestic and family violence who are not eligible for Medicare, including temporary visa holders access to free public hospital care without needing to report an incident to Police.³⁰ However, there needs to be more financial and human resourcing to provide supports to people who are unable to access mainstream services and supports due to government policy limitations.

While this issue has been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, it was a pre-existing problem that has concerned our services for many years. Our services assist many people on temporary visa arrangements, including women on spousal visas who need crisis accommodation to escape from domestic and family violence. Without income support, they can be forced to remain in crisis accommodation for months, and sometimes years. At present, our services do their best to support these women through other Mission Australia services to meet their basic needs, including accommodation and linking with Emergency Relief or food parcels through other support programs.

Updates to the Specialist Homelessness Services Program Guidelines to reflect need among this group are encouraging, with the recent circulation of an updated version specifying that there are no eligibility restrictions due to citizenship or residency due to come into effect in July 2021.

A broader solution to this serious issue is also needed, requiring cooperation between the Federal and NSW governments to ensure that people on temporary visas, including women on spousal visas escaping domestic and family violence, have a source of income and are able to access all appropriate services and supports.

Recommendations

- Work with the Federal Government to ensure that temporary visa holders, including women on spousal visas escaping domestic and family violence, have access to income support payments and other necessary supports.

People living in regional, rural and remote areas

There is a severe lack of available affordable housing in regional, rural and remote areas, in terms of temporary accommodation, supportive housing options, and sufficient social and affordable housing stock.

Support for temporary accommodation as part of the COVID-19 response from the government was welcomed as this ensured many people could access temporary accommodation. However, with the

²⁹ NSW Education, NSW Government supporting international students through COVID-19, accessible at: [NSW Government supporting international students through COVID-19](#)

³⁰ Department of Communities and Justice, Media Release: Easier hospital access for domestic violence victims, 13 August 2020, accessible at: <https://www.dcj.nsw.gov.au/news-and-media/media-releases/easier-hospital-access-for-domestic-violence-victims>

growing demand, in some areas, there were no rooms available to house people experiencing homelessness despite funding being available.

“We have a significant shortage of TA (temporary accommodation), we are lucky if we can get two days per person in the same motel ... it’s traumatic for people to constantly move from one TA to the next without any meaningful long-term housing options.”

Mission Australia – Area Manager Regional NSW

Sometimes there is TA available for some cohorts but not others. In the Goulburn area, for example, Mission Australia services have seen an influx of men of different ages who are unable to find appropriate housing. It becomes even more challenging to find accommodation for these individuals if they are experiencing mental health issues, alcohol and drug dependence or other similar challenges.

“We have had some clients who said they approached the local council and they were given swags and tents and access to the public park because they didn’t have any TA (temporary Accommodation) available for men. Most TAs in our area are for families – ... but we need more housing for men as well.”

Mission Australia, Area Manager – Regional NSW

Demand for supportive housing models also outstrips supply. Together Home packages are a much-needed model with the capacity to provide housing plus wraparound support, particularly for people with AOD or mental health issues. However, there are only an extremely limited number of Together Home places in some non-metro areas. For example, there are only 10 in the Central West region (in Bathurst and Cobar) and none at all in West or Far West. This is particularly disappointing as in many towns in Western NSW it is very difficult to support people into the private rental market, and a social housing response is the most appropriate source of housing for many clients.

There is a serious shortage of affordable, adequate housing in many regional, rural and remote areas. Overcrowding can also present as an environmental stressor for people living in such households, including from issues such as a lack of privacy, which can have an impact on mental health, education achievement and communicable diseases.³¹ This can be a particular challenge in some rural and remote areas.³² Although there has been sporadic investment to build social housing, these are usually smaller units with one to two bedrooms, insufficient for larger families.

³¹ Morgan Loitta, Overcrowding leads to poorer health outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, Royal Australian College of General Practitioners, accessible at:

<https://www1.racgp.org.au/newsgp/racgp/overcrowding-a-key-determinant-of-poor-health-outc>

³² A. Beer, et al., The drivers of supply and demand in Australia’s rural and regional centres, AHURI Final Report No.165, 2011, accessible at:

https://www.ahuri.edu.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0015/2049/AHURI_Final_Report_No165_The_drivers_of_supply_and_demand_in_Australias_rural_and_regional_centres.pdf

“One of the best ways to address homelessness in remote areas is to make houses with more than two bedrooms available. There should be a clear plan to identify areas and increase the stock of larger homes in remote locations.”

Mission Australia, Area Manager – Regional NSW

Coastal areas in NSW have seen an increase in housing costs as tourists or sea changers in search of affordable housing move from Sydney. These have resulted in increasing competition for affordable properties and heightened the risk of homelessness among many locals on low to moderate incomes.³³ Mission Australia had previously observed cases where real estate agents have open to working with not for profit sector organisations when the number of available properties increased in Sydney and other popular tourist areas during COVID-19. However, since the restrictions have been eased in NSW, coastal areas have seen an influx of local tourists coming to the area and some of the real estate agents have indicated that the six-month contracts they offered to Mission Australia clients will be terminated at the end of the lease.

“We have already seen people who are going to be homeless when their contracts come to an end very soon ... we have supported over 200 families in the first quarter of this, which is our entire KPI for the year and it is likely to get worse.”

Mission Australia, Area Manager – Regional NSW

Recommendation

- Invest in additional affordable housing in regional, rural and remote areas of NSW.

Greater investment in social and affordable housing

A systemic approach to the prevention, reduction and eventual elimination of homelessness relies on having an adequate supply of affordable housing in which people can live safely and securely and, if necessary, be supported to maintain their tenancy and address other health and wellbeing issues. Even with the Government’s most recent investment of \$812 million in social housing in the November 2020 Budget, demand for affordable housing far outstrips supply. As of June 2019, there were 51,000 people in NSW on the social housing waiting list, with waiting periods between two and 10 years,³⁴ and many more are homeless or in marginal housing.

³³ Terzon, E. (2020) ‘Rental vacancy rates hit zero in Australian coastal towns as they hit COVID capacity’ in ABC News Online, accessible at https://www.abc.net.au/news/2021-01-08/surf-coast-rentals-at-zero-vacancy/13037172?utm_source=abc_news_web&utm_medium=content_shared&utm_content=twitter&utm_campaign=abc_news_web

³⁴ NSW Department of Community and Justice, Applying for Housing Assistance: Expected Waiting Times, accessible at: <https://www.facs.nsw.gov.au/housing/help/applying-assistance/expected-waiting-times>

Increasing supply

Alongside many in the not for profit sector, Mission Australia has called on the government to invest in additional 5,000 new social housing dwellings every year for the next 10 years to meet demand prior to COVID-19. Our submission on the NSW Housing Strategy discussion paper argued that investment in these social housing dwellings should have clear and measurable outcomes and targets in relation to the number of social and affordable housing built during set time periods.

In terms of maintenance and upgrades, we welcomed the \$60.5 million program in the NSW Government's \$2.3 billion COVID-19 stimulus package for maintenance works and upgrades on public housing properties, including 50% in regional NSW.³⁵ However, considering the long waiting list for social housing and the limited availability of properties, the government should adopt measures to systematically develop a comprehensive ongoing maintenance program across the entire NSW social housing portfolio. This will ensure fit-for-purpose homes that meet accessibility and other standards, and creating jobs and stimulating economic activity in the process.³⁶

Inclusionary zoning has proven to be an effective tool in increasing affordable housing. Considering the urgent need to increase social and affordable housing, there have been calls to ensure mandatory inclusionary zoning on both government owned and private owned lands. Therefore, we recommend a significant expansion of the current mandatory inclusionary zoning policies to meet the emerging housing demand.

Recommendations

- Establish a mechanism to fund social and affordable housing through a permanent and annual funding source which can grow the supply of social housing by 5,000 dwellings per annum, and similar for affordable housing, starting with options to permanently house those in extended temporary arrangements through:
 - The identification and purchase of vacant, or soon-to-be completed, developments for conversion to social or affordable housing, and
 - Identification of government owned properties for conversion to social housing.
- Mandate inclusionary zoning to increase the supply of social and affordable housing.

³⁵ NSW Government, Economic stimulus to boost jobs and social housing, accessible at: <https://www.nsw.gov.au/news/economic-stimulus-to-boost-jobs-and-social-housing>

³⁶ NCOSS, Cost of Living/COVID-19 Supplementary Paper: Recommendations to the NSW Government, 2020, accessible at: https://www.ncoss.org.au/sites/default/files/public/policy/23042020_CoLCOVID19_SupplementaryPaper%20ONLINE_0.pdf

Strategic planning tool for social housing supply

The Constellation Project³⁷ is a joint initiative of the corporate and not for profit sector that aims to end homelessness within a generation. The founding members are Mission Australia, Red Cross, PwC and the Centre for Social Impact.

The Constellation Project has developed a strategic planning tool which can calculate the need for social housing, the cost to deliver this housing and the economic social benefits of supplying this housing. This tool was developed in partnership with the Department of Communities in Tasmania and recently supported their planning around the delivery of new social housing.

The Constellation Project has also been working on other tools to facilitate inclusionary zoning and a funding mechanism which would rely on a Commonwealth-based to incentivise and drive private investment into social and affordable housing.

We would be keen to share this work with you as we have concluded that a long-term housing production strategy which combines Commonwealth funding with Local planning and State land could form a critical part of the solution to ending homelessness in NSW.

Recommendation

- Consider uptake of the strategic planning tool for social housing supply developed by The Constellation Project for the Tasmanian Government.

Part 3: An integrated, person-centred service system

Mission Australia has long advocated for the provision of integrated, person-centred services and we were encouraged by the inclusion in the Strategy. Particularly as a result of COVID-19, we have seen very positive examples of collaboration and coordination between agencies in action.

Collaboration

MA has been intensively involved in collaborative efforts with Governments and housing and homelessness providers to coordinate housing and support activities. We welcomed and have participated in a range of collaboration mechanisms established by the Government, including the Sydney Rough Sleeping COVID-19 Taskforce and Housing Exits Working Group. In Central Sydney MA has worked in collaboration with other agencies to ensure that people in temporary accommodation were able to get fast track access to housing and other supports including the NDIS, and also participated in an End Street Sleeping Escalation Group where senior leaders from the sector came together to unblock system barriers to ensure that rough sleepers could access the support they needed.

In particular, the Sydney Rough Sleeping COVID-19 Taskforce has been a valuable group that has been able to achieve great outcomes for a group that can be difficult to engage with needed services and we recommend its continuation as a standing collaborative arrangement.

³⁷ The Constellation Project, accessible at: <https://www.theconstellationproject.com.au/about-the-project/>

The stronger collaborative relationships built under COVID have carried through to routine arrangements between sector agencies. Our operations staff report that that are meeting and talking more with other agencies, working together to assist repeat clients, sharing brokerage funds, personal protective equipment and other COVID resources (for example, risk management plans) across agencies.

This collaboration has been formally supported through structures established by the Government and enthusiastically taken up by the sector. The challenge will be to continue these strong relationships once the immediate threat of COVID has receded. Mission Australia has a strong commitment to working in collaboration with government and with our sector colleagues to design system improvements that will achieve better outcomes for people experiencing or at risk of homelessness. *Working through collaboration* is a key operating principle under our Strategy 20-25 and we look forward to continuing the strong collaborative approaches with government and sector that we have been part of during COVID-19.

Person-centred service system

There is significant value in taking an integrated, collaborative approach to providing assistance to people sleeping rough. Cross-agency working groups can help to identify the specific complex needs of individuals and provide an integrated suite of wraparound supports to them. The lead agency concept has proven to be a valuable approach to working with people sleeping rough, enabling a single agency to be identified as the key point of contact and ensured that the supporting environment of the homelessness service system can be wrapped around an individual. The Homelessness Outreach Support Team (HOST) has become a key facet of a more integrated service system for people sleeping rough in inner city Sydney and could serve as a model for other integration projects across NSW.

Recommendations

- Continue the level of cross agency collaboration implemented to respond to COVID-19 in Sydney, in particular the integrated approach to the assessment, support and housing of street sleepers. The End Street Sleeping Collaboration and DCJ could play a key facilitation role.
- Continue to consult with the sector on appropriate collaborative mechanisms to deliver new strategic goals in a post-COVID environment.

Conclusion

Mission Australia is committed to working alongside the NSW Government and our sector colleagues to address, reduce and eventually eliminate homelessness in NSW. We know that this will require a huge ongoing effort and systemic shifts to gradually reduce the number of people entering homelessness through prevention measures, assist them to exit homelessness through rapid rehousing that includes Housing First approaches where appropriate, and ensure that the population of NSW has access to an adequate supply of social and affordable housing. We look forward to ongoing collaboration with the Government and sector to make this vision a reality.