City of Sydney
June 2008

Draft submission in response to the Federal Government's Green Paper: *Which Way Home? A New Approach to Homelessness.*

THE CITY OF SYDNEY (CoS)

Through service provision, project, policy and sector development, research and advocacy, the City of Sydney aims to end chronic homelessness within the inner city by 2017 (as stated in the Homelessness Strategy 2007-12 that was endorsed by Council in August 2007).

As the only local council in Australia with a dedicated Homelessness Unit and an annual investment in direct homelessness projects and policy of over $1.5 million dollars, the City is well placed to contribute toward a National Policy on Homelessness.

The City welcomes the Green Paper and applauds the Federal Government for the commitment to addressing homelessness that is clearly evident in the release of the Green Paper. The City particularly welcomes the opportunity to consider any approaches that combine and coordinate the resources and the commitment of all levels of government in partnership with community services, the business and philanthropic sector and the community as a whole. With all of these stakeholders involved and invested, the goal of social inclusiveness for people who are homeless is closer than it ever has been.

RESPONSE TO THE GREEN PAPER

In the development of a Policy Paper, the Federal Government has stated their commitment to accountability in the process of identifying goals and developing strategies that strive to achieve those goals. CoS recommends that the White Paper adopt a **vision of ending homelessness in Australia** supported by the Guiding Principle that, in a country as prosperous as Australia, no person should find themselves homeless and unable to resolve that situation.

The government's Policy Paper on Homelessness must plan to end homelessness instead of 'managing' crisis. This will require a profound change in policy and focus from 'shelter first' to 'housing first'; from crisis responses to a focus on prevention, quick response and solution. In order to achieve the vision of 'ending homelessness' within an integrated service response it is imperative that the Policy response be provided within a framework of a National Plan that is supported by all levels of government, the non-government sector and corporate and philanthropic partners and the community in general. In support of a vision to end homelessness, the City of Sydney recommends the development of a **10 Year Plan** that will pull together the many aspects of dedicated and mainstream approaches to homelessness in one coordinated strategy to eliminate homelessness in this country.

Goals, Targets And Principles

In pursuit of a national policy approach that would achieve the long term vision of ending homelessness, the City recommends the adoption of the following overarching and ancillary goals. It is our belief that if the strategies that emerge within a national policy reflect each of the overarching goals incorporating the specific outcomes identified in the ancillary goals, then achieving the vision to end homelessness within 10 years will indeed be possible.

The following goals embody the basic principles of closing the entry points into homelessness, opening up exit points out of homelessness and focusing on long term, sustainable outcomes. Available research overseas (US, UK, Canada) attests to the fact that, by eliminating repetitive responses that fail to achieve sustainable results, ending homelessness will be less expensive than servicing it.

Question 1. What goal(s) should we set to reduce homelessness?

Overarching Goals (long term outcomes)

1. Preventing new homelessness, including zero tolerance of discharges to homelessness
2. Rapidly re-housing people who fall into homelessness
3. *Ending* chronic homelessness first.

Ancillary Goals (short to medium term outcomes)

- The development of a national 10 Year Plan supported by consensus at all levels of government and incorporating the participation of the non-government sector including corporate and philanthropic involvement.
- Creation of a national integrated system for the collection and management of homelessness data that includes collection from mainstream services.
- The implementation of regular processes for tracking the costs of 'servicing homelessness' to guide the ongoing development of policy and potential reallocation of resources to end homelessness.
- Every mainstream government agency, regardless of their core business, has an identified strategy to respond to the needs of homeless persons embedded within their operational policies that is linked to the national plan and mindful of its goals.
- The identification and elimination of: barriers to mainstream service access; duplication of services; repeat occasions of service due to unresolved need, and an end to the practice of service devolvement and cost shifting.

Question 2. What targets will best help us reach our goal?

a. A decrease in the number of people leaving stable housing and entering a state of homelessness **or** an increase in the number of people supported to resolve crisis and remain in their homes.

b. An increase in the number of people who exit homelessness to stable housing within three months of becoming homeless **or** a reduction in the number of people who have been homeless beyond the initial experience of crisis.

c. A decrease in the number of people discharged from state care, prison and hospitals into homelessness **or** an increase in the number of people who exit institutions straight to stable long term housing with support.

d. A decrease in the number of hospital and prison admissions of people who are homeless with a particular focus on a reduction in *repeat* admissions by chronically homeless people with complex needs **and** reduced admissions will be reflected in reduced expenditure.

e. All people who have been homeless for 12 months or longer are stably housed, with wrap around support to retain that housing, within 5 years of the implementation of a National Policy **or** the elimination of chronic homelessness within 5 years.

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f. A 75-95% housing retention rate, after 2 years of being housed, of people who have been homelessness, to be re-assessed bi-annually. 75% retention rate for chronically homelessness with complex needs and 95% success rate for other homeless.

g. A reduction in the number of shelter beds is replaced with an increase in the number, range and availability of low cost and supported housing.

h. An increase in the availability, flexibility and mobility of support services that are provided to vulnerable people in a *community setting* including support provided to people to remain in their homes **or** a decrease in the number of people who re-experience homeless after having been housed.

i. A reduction in the number of times and number of services to whom a homeless client must relay their story before getting their needs met **or** an increase in client satisfaction, a reduction in frustration and disengagement from systems of support **and** an increase in positive outcomes from single occasions of service.

j. An increase in the number of homeless and formerly homeless people who remain in or re-enter the educational system and who gain employment.

k. An increase in the number of homeless and formerly homeless people who access activities in the mainstream that relate to giving them an experience of social connectivity.

l. All mainstream government agencies have plans to address homelessness that are linked to the national plan and supported by dedicated staff and resources **and** those agencies/staff are working collaboratively across program areas and in partnership with non-government agencies and the homeless including their key supports.

m. An increase in the active involvement of public agencies, business and philanthropists that have never previously been involved or that have had peripheral involvement **or** an increase in the level and range of resources and stakeholders committed to ending homelessness

Question 3. What are the best ways to measure the targets we set?

Ongoing consumer feedback is regularly encouraged, collected and translated into ongoing quality improvements and effective service delivery.

The development and implementation of an integrated system for tracking, measuring and analysing homelessness data across all levels and program areas of government and non-government services. This data system would be interlinked and able to extract data at a national, state and local level as well as having the capacity to track the progress of individuals (with consent) through a service system continuum to monitor enduring outcomes.

Analysis of the costs of providing recurrent services to homeless people compared to the costs of providing long term stable housing with support. This will require being able to measure levels of expenditure across the *entire* service system.

Data collection is designed to answer the question, **"is service provision linked to the stated goals and targets of the National Plan?"** as well as providing valuable demographic and empirical evidence that feeds into ongoing evaluation and policy development.

All strategies are benchmarked and contain key performance indicators (KPIs) in all areas of implementation, monitored regularly and reviewed not less than annually. Ongoing funding is

commensurate with the achievement of KPIs and programs, including pilots, with proven outcomes are NOT de-funded.

The implementation of simultaneous, annual or bi-annual Street Counts, using consistent methodologies, in all major cities and towns across Australia. Counts are already occurring in Sydney, Melbourne, Adelaide and Brisbane.

A focus on tracking long term outcomes instead of limited occasions of service. By shifting the focus of scrutiny away from what doesn't work toward what does.

Question 4. What are the three research priorities for a national homelessness research agenda?

A cost/benefit analysis: to identify the cost of 'servicing homelessness' against the benefits of ending homelessness including an investigation of the potential savings that would occur through the provision of stable, supported housing and opportunities for the reallocation of expenditure that does not result in enduring outcomes. This must be done across all public services and non-government agencies. A cost/benefit analysis will greatly support progress toward profound change in the way that homelessness is addressed in this country by: identifying where money is being spent the most effectively and ineffectively, supporting the case for restructuring in areas; identify additional resources that can be directed to effective programs; place the new National Plan within the context of fiscally responsible policy.

Redefining homelessness: in the context of a national refocusing of homelessness policy, it would be timely to engage in careful analysis and pragmatic reflection upon the relevance and usefulness of the currently endorsed and widely utilised definition of homelessness (Primary, Secondary, Tertiary). The research must investigate whether the definition currently in use is appropriate to the pending change in policy and strategic direction that should be underpinned by a definition that is complementary to a revised way of thinking.

Chamberlain and MacKensie's definition of homelessness is essentially a descriptor of accommodation types[1]. Whilst this definition is complementary to the existing homelessness service system that is dominated by the SAAP response, and relevant in its time, it fails to account for individual and personal experience of alienation and loss and it is, whenever we have asked the question, not a definition that the homeless themselves relate to.[2]

The establishment of a national system for capturing and managing homelessness data: the structure, detail and management of a national system of information collection related to homelessness and the goals of a national plan. This research would include an investigation of how those systems of data collection can be embedded in and linked across all government departments and how it might be used to track the trajectory of service use by individuals (with consent). It is particularly important to get this right in the high cost areas of health, disability and aged care, child protection and corrective services.

Question 5. Have we got the principles right?

The City supports the ten principles proposed by the government to guide the development of a new approach. However, we feel that the principles are repetitive in some areas, vague in others and have missed important elements. Working from the government's identified principles the City proposes the following principles to underpin a national approach to homelessness:

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[1] Chris Chamberlain and David McKenzie, 'Understanding Contemporary Homelessness: Issues of Definition and Meaning' (1992) 27 *Australian Journal of Social Issues* 274
[2] Refer Appendix I, for definitions currently used by the City of Sydney in our Homelessness Strategy.

1. ***A national commitment,*** reflected in dedicated leadership and the active involvement of all levels of government and from the non-profit, business and philanthropic sectors is necessary to end homelessness.

2. ***The integration of service delivery*** across all public service areas will require joined up policy that is longitudinal, evidence based and measures outcomes over the short and long term.

3. ***International principles of human rights*** that ~~focuses~~focus on social inclusion, the right to adequate housing, safety, well-being, dignity and respect for all underpins all identified approaches. All people, regardless of their circumstances have the right to access resources that will help them to end their experience of disadvantage.

4. ***The primacy of individual choice*** **and the right to participate** is paramount in all approaches.

5. ***Every vulnerable person who requires assistance*** to address the issues that are contributing to their ~~homelessness,~~homelessness should be able to access support that specifically addresses those needs.

6. ***Prevention and early intervention*** facilitating rapid exits from homelessness is a main focus and transition points from homelessness and institutional care into long term housing rather than limited term shelter is a priority.

7. ***Ending the experience and reducing the cost of chronic homelessness***, that is housing people who have been homeless for one or more years, is a focus.

8. ***The use of comprehensive and consistent data*** and the use of evidence based approaches will help shape our priorities for action.

9. ***Targets, that are measurable and measured***, are set to end homelessness, attached to longitudinal planning with adequate resources attached.

10. ***The discontinuation of approaches that are proven to be unsuccessful*** in ending the experience of homelessness for service users and the expansion and ongoing resourcing of proven approaches will underlie our planning.

Question 6. How can the business sector best be involved in reducing homelessness?

The creation of a National Plan: fashioned around business principles in terms of planning, accountability and with a focus on returns against investment. Invite entrepreneurs and business representatives to the planning table when developing the National Plan to facilitate their commitment. Businesses understand how to 'run a business' and specialise in planning for returns. They will be more engaged in a plan that they contributed to the development of.

Promotion of participation as investment: that recognises and exploits motivations to involvement that extend beyond altruistic reasons. There are many practical reasons attached to self-interest for business to become involved in ending homelessness. Businesses should be reminded that they are already involved in or impacted upon by homelessness, albeit indirectly for many, through such things as donations and volunteerism, to the employment of security guards to prevent trespass by homeless, or cleaners to address the impacts or reduced pleasure in public amenity and open spaces.

Government commitment is evident: all levels of government need to express and demonstrate a strong commitment before inviting the involvement of business in order to

address any fear that business has that they will be asked to fill the gaps left by government in servicing and resourcing.

The development of formal proposals from government to business that include tax incentives, matching commitments from government (financial or value in kind), opportunities for corporate volunteerism and increasing social capital are some examples.

Government actively promotes and recognises the contribution of the business sector: partnerships are publicly recognised through mechanisms such as annual awards and media releases and businesses are recognised for their role in ending homelessness.

Education: provide business and philanthropists with the information that they need in order to make informed choices about where and how to *invest* their money. Education will aim to attach resources to where they can achieve the greatest benefit. Increasing returns on investment will encourage greater and ongoing investment and will also act to reduce the propagation of ad-hoc contributions that are not linked to longitudinal plans and do not contribute to long term goals.

Start local, target local interest: capital city Mayors to convene a series of summits to promote opportunities to invest in a national plan that is targeted at the full participation of the non-profit, philanthropic and business communities.

Question 7. How can we develop broader community involvement and maximise the contribution of the philanthropic sector?

Involving the broader community and philanthropic sector will follow essentially the same approach as involving the business sector, as the principles of eliciting that involvement cross all areas: education, self interest as well as social capital, opportunity to get involved at level of planning, evidence of outcomes that benefit the broader community as well as the homeless and so on. The main key will be to demonstrate that not only is there a moral imperative to end homelessness, but that ending homelessness is fiscally responsible and far more practical than allowing it to continue. Where people are not always convinced by the moral argument, the fiscal argument to end homelessness, when backed up by research and evidence, is virtually indisputable!

OPTIONS

Option 1 and 2: Transform SAAP / Improve SAAP response

Australia has reacted to homelessness with a predominantly emergency response, the Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP), for more than 20 years. While this emergency response has saved lives, supported many thousands of people, reduced suffering and helped some to exit homelessness it has not provided a permanent solution for the majority of people without housing.

Furthermore, SAAP has done little to decrease the number of individuals entering the front doors of homeless and as a result of this homelessness services and other mainstream public services are in a constant state of overflow with no prospect of an improvement to this situation. The SAAP system alone costs the federal and state governments an estimated $642 million a year. This does not include the many services and programs funded through private and philanthropic contributions or the even more extensive expenditure of public mainstream services. It is a limitation in current policy making that the latter has never been measured across the service sector in Australia.

When assessing known and potential expenditure in the context of sustainable returns against investment, this is ~~insupportable,~~insupportable; in no other area would such fiscally irresponsible investment be tolerated. When considering this in the context of the damaged lives of vulnerable people it is wholly unacceptable.

Australia has constructed a massive, unwieldy, over bureaucratised, un-coordinated and fiscally irresponsible infrastructure that ultimately only serves to combat the *manifestations* of homelessness, rather than ending it. This is not a criticism of the SAAP sector or the many excellent workers within it. SAAP was conceived in 1985 as a last resort, a safety net, for those who fell into homelessness. Despite some excellent innovations and improvements over the years, it has changed little from its core business of 'providing temporary shelter'. SAAP has evolved from its original purpose into the accepted residential response for an entire, diverse, population of vulnerable people.

SAAP services have, for all this time, been forced into a role of trying to be all things to all people as they attempt to negotiate better and effective responses for their clients from the mainstream public services. Despite the proliferation of agreements, protocols, memorandums of understanding etc, they have not been successful in achieving this at any but the most basic levels of individual service.

The state of our current system of service delivery (across all areas) and the lack or outcomes evident after 20 years of implementation reflects the failure of previous governments, federal and state, to develop comprehensive plans, integrated across all areas of public expenditure not limited to SAAP, to address.

People become homeless or risk homelessness for a range of reasons, rarely limited to single factors and these are adequately identified in the governments Green Paper (page 20-25). No single service will be able to respond to all of the issues that need to be addressed to assist a person to resolve risk or exit homelessness and re-integrate into the mainstream of all that community life has to offer. And yet, this is what the current infrastructure demands with the result that homeless individuals and families are forced to access multiple services to meet their various needs. The end result is a profound level of unmet need that compounds disadvantage and perpetuates and even propagates homelessness.

Mainstream public services, even more so than SAAP, have failed to adequately and effectively respond to the needs of homeless people. Cost shifting, service devolment and eligibility criteria that excludes more people than it supports, have resulted in an experience of homelessness for some, that has endured for decades.

For the reasons identified above, the City does not believe that Options One or Two, as provided in the Green Paper, will achieve the goals of eliminating or even reducing homelessness.

Option 3: Improve mainstream services and restrict SAAP to crisis responses

The City supports Option 3 based on our belief that the integration of mainstream services into a national response to homelessness is essential to the success of that response. However, whilst the suggestions made by the government in the detail of Option 3 address many issues that are currently preventing joined up service delivery they also fail to address certain fundamental shortfalls, such as the provision of long term housing, and other systemic and resource problems that are germane to enduring homelessness and require urgent redress. Whilst many of the proposals in Option 3 are credible in their individual right, in failing to

address these other shortfalls, they risk becoming part of an ad-hoc approach that fails to live up to the goals of integrating government and non-government service delivery.

We have addressed those shortfalls in our response and subsequent recommendations following.

Target Groups

We would argue against a national response which focuses on four streams of support, tailored to specific target groups (youth, people experiencing or escaping domestic violence, single people and families in housing stress) as identified in Option One of the Green Paper for the following reasons:

- Individual or family experience of homelessness and subsequent support needs may cross more than one of these streams.
- Aboriginal and Torres Straight Islander people, people from other culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, chronically homeless people with complex needs and other target groups with specific needs are not included.
- A national plan, including a new infrastructure for joined up service delivery, should be flexible and responsive to all needs.
- The goal of reducing the number of services that a person/s must access in order to get their needs met should be paramount.
- The major objectives, such as long term housing, are applicable to all.

Specialisation of support *within* a new infrastructure will need to be a component of the national plan in order to address the particular needs of individual groups. The SAAP system, in a reconstituted role, is well placed to meet the needs of special target groups. However, the overriding goal of an integrated **mainstream** system should be 'service for all' and the elimination of all barriers to service access that are created by the quarantining of resources for particular target groups. Narrow and inflexible eligibility criteria in the mainstream public services must be replaced with flexible criteria that responds to need.

No person should find themselves in a situation where they cannot access an effective response to their needs, as is the case for many people in the current system such as: persons with axis II mental disorders; people with cognitive impairment (emerging evidence indicates a large population within the homeless) who incurred that impairment between the age of 18 and 60; transgender people; people with behavioural disorders not responsive to a medical approach; people in need of long term congregate care and so on. The aforementioned groups are over represented in the criminal justice system and are often frequent presenters in emergency departments and are testimony to the claim that the smallest percentage of the homeless will often use the largest portion of the resources.

No one service fits all and flexibility is an inherent component of best practice, however the basic principles of collaboration, integration and above all **service for all** must be consistent.

How do we develop collective accountability for outcomes in a 'joined-up' system?

Cost/benefit research, as recommended on page 4 of this submission, will lead to planning that incorporates a policy of 'spend less, achieve more' that is planning to collaborate with other agencies, share resources and allocate available resources toward long term sustainable outcomes that reduce repeat service presentation resulting from unresolved needs.

All strategies are benchmarked and contain key performance indicators (KPIs) in all areas of implementation, monitored regularly and reviewed not less than annually. Ongoing funding is commensurate with the achievement of KPIs and programs, including pilots, with proven outcomes are NOT de-funded.

Agencies are accountable to outcomes for clients *after* a service has been provided, for example after discharge from hospital, prison, state care or crisis shelter. This will vary across different agencies but the goal is that all services are provided within a continuum not as an individual occasion of service.

What else is needed to help mainstream services better respond to people who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless?

Low cost and supported housing:

The government's green paper is disappointingly vague on the issue of providing long term, secure housing toward the objective of ending or even reducing homelessness. ***There is no single issue that is more important than the availability of secure, long term housing when planning to end or even reduce homelessness***. Furthermore it is important to policy formulation to differentiate between 'affordable' and 'low-cost housing'. Affordable housing, at approximately 20% below market rate, will remain out of the reach of the poorest members of society. A failure to incorporate low cost housing in Housing Affordability Strategies will continue to place long term housing outside of the reach of most people who are homeless. State, Federal and Local government must incorporate responses to the poorest members of society in Affordable Housing strategies such as those included in the federal ~~governments~~government's national housing initiatives.

Without an adequate supply of housing and preventative measures that enable people to remain in housing, there will be no option but to manage people in their experience of homelessness whilst the newly homeless continue to poor through the front doors[3]. We have included a rang~~e~~ of proposals relating to the provision of low cost and supported housing in the final section 'Bold New Ideas'.

Structural reform:

A National Plan, targeting the support and involvement of all levels of government, must address the structural weaknesses of the mainstream service system as an imperative toward a joined up national policy and plan of action. These weaknesses represent fundamental barriers to effective and coordinated responses to homelessness and place the achievement of the stated goals of the national policy at risk.

Mainstream public agencies are not structured in a way that is currently conducive to joined up approaches and this is a particular problem in states such as NSW that provide services in 'silos' (i.e. health, disability and aged care, community services, education, community services and so on) not to mention the silos within the silos (i.e. health: mental health, drug and alcohol, emergency services and population health).

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[3] The Homelessness Persons Information Centre (HPIC), a NSW state wide service provided by the City of Sydney, recorded an increase of over 150 (above the 2006-07 period) people reporting crisis eviction as the primary reason for homelessness. This figure was taken one month before the end of the 07-08 year.

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Homelessness persons/teams/units in mainstream agencies:

To achieve integration across mainstream public services and with the non-government services, each department will need to incorporate a unit/team/person with dedicated resources (the make up of this will depending on the service and the level of interaction with the homeless population and service system) that are responsible for ensuring:

- Internal plans are linked to the national plan.
- Service is provided in coordination with other mainstream services and the non-government homelessness service providers.
- A policy of zero tolerance of discharge to homelessness is adopted and adhered to.
- Service barriers are addressed and, through a shared approach, everyone receives a service that is coordinated across all areas of individual need.
- No service will turn away a person in need without ensuring that their needs will be addressed elsewhere.
- An end to cost shifting and service devolvement in a framework of shared responsibility and shared resources.

Multidisciplinary Assertive Community Outreach Teams (ACOTs):

ACOTs (known by various names) are multidisciplinary teams that are made up of health and allied health specialists, social and welfare workers, case managers and living skills specialists.

The City strongly recommends the establishment of ACOTs in every location where there is a significant population of people who are homeless and where a cost/benefit analysis demonstrates (as it surely will) excessive expenditure against limited outcomes.

ACOTs have been proven in Australia (e.g. Qld Homeless Health Outreach Teams) and extensively overseas (US, Canada) to be overwhelmingly successful in achieving the following outcomes: reduction in costs to the mainstream public service system across multiple areas; mainstreaming, coordinating and streamlining responses; breaking down silos; reducing barriers to service access; reducing service devolvement and cost shifting (where all necessary services are provided by one team with a shared budget); freeing up acute hospital beds; reducing entry into the criminal justice system; supporting community services; linking people to education, employment and recreational activities; and most importantly of all: achieving long term, sustainable outcomes by successfully housing people and providing wrap around support.

Welfare reform:
The practice of 'breaching' in the administration of social security benefits **must end**. A policy that removes the sole income of a person for any period is not only incongruent with prevention and intervention practices it is an inhumane and punitive practice that has no basis in evidence of outcomes, it punishes disadvantage and is in and of itself a method of cost shifting between federal and state systems, where state funded systems must provide care to people who have no income to care for themselves.

What role should SAAP play in a joined up system?

Prevention and triage
We do not support simply limiting SAAP to a crisis response. In line with the objectives of the National Plan, we recommend that SAAP be reconfigured to provide the front line of prevention and early intervention responses and ongoing support to people once housed where necessary.

SAAP would be resourced to intervene to prevent homelessness or to quickly capture people who fall into homelessness. Some ways in which this can be achieved:

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- Specific SAAP services are linked to stable housing - quick referrals can be made.
- Rather than case management and support provided solely on site, SAAP services provide mobile outreach to support people in housing with some case management on site to refer people into housing and engage support services.
- Different services continue to provide the type of support needed to different target groups and different progressions along the at-risk, newly homeless or long term homeless trajectory.

In terms of its role of linking homeless people to the mainstream sector, SAAP would act to 'triage' people into appropriate support systems within the SAAP or mainstream service sector.

Rapid re-housing and Housing First
Whilst it is our contention that ending homelessness is possible, we recognise that the experience of crisis will always exist and people will sometimes become homeless. The focus is on ending that experience within a short period of it occurring so that people do not develop identities as homeless. This will require rapid return to housing or entry into new housing where a person or families becomes homeless. An available supply of affordable and low cost housing must exist to support this policy so that housing not shelter is the focus and people are no longer required to transition through the crisis system in order to resolve their crisis.

Homeless people are no longer required to cycle through the crisis and transitional accommodation sector. Instead, contingent on an available supply of long term options, people are referred from SAAP immediately into long term housing with no prerequisites for treatment compliance, with support wrapped around them. Research on Housing First models overseas (US) has demonstrated that Housing First has far superior outcomes in terms of sustaining tenancies than traditional models of making people 'housing ready'.

Connecting SAAP to mainstream services
SAAP support teams are connected to homelessness workers/teams within mainstream departments and to the ACOTs to ensure that connection at the prevention or intervention stage is made as soon as the need is identified and community based support is available to whoever needs it.

Taxpayer funds are limited—where, across the range of possibilities for <u>mainstream</u> services, should we direct our effort to give us the biggest impact?

The following recommendations for mainstream services do not address the possible and recommended roles for SAAP under a reconfiguration.

- Low cost, supported housing
- Multidisciplinary Assertive Community Outreach Teams (ACOTS)
- Dedicated homelessness resources within every mainstream service that has significant interaction with the homeless

Other 'bold ideas' or new proposals:

LOW COST and SUPPORTED HOUSING

Housing strategies must address prevention as well as elimination of homelessness. Potential **prevention strategies** are:

- Provision of bond and rent payments in advance to permit individuals/families at risk of homelessness to obtain permanent housing;

- Subsidies to assist with rent and/or utility debts for individuals/families that have received eviction or utility termination notices;
- The establishment and support of mediation programs for landlord-tenant disputes;
- Further legal services to represent tenants in eviction or other related proceedings;
- Assistance to relocate where eviction or the loss of home is inevitable, mediation to allow time for that to occur; and
- Short term loans, linked to financial counselling, to prevent foreclosure on a home.

All of these would be linked to any additional mainstream services, such as employment, health care, child support etc that are appropriate.

Long term housing options:

Different individuals/families will require different forms of housing and levels of support. Some people will be able to enter or remain in housing with minimal support and short term intervention. Other people will require support over the medium term for the length of time that it takes them to resolve the issues that place them at risk. A smaller percentage of people will require long term, intensive support and a very small group will require permanent, congregate care with high levels of full time support in place.

1. Housing and Support Initiatives (HASI)

The City recommends the continued funding and ongoing role out of the successful 'Housing and Support Initiatives' (HASI) that provide a range of programs targeting different levels of need that are currently being implemented in NSW under a partnership between Housing NSW and NSW Health. We would however recommend the following changes to the HASI programs:

- HASI support packages are currently dedicated to people being referred out of acute care hospitals and only those who have mental health case workers. This practice compounds the disadvantage of people already excluded from the health system, is inherently discriminatory and defies the principle of 'access for all'.
- HASI should be continued as an 'all of government' service, with funding provided through much the same federal, state funding agreements as SAAP currently is with accountabilities (as identified in other areas of this submission).
- HASI is rolled out to provide support across all levels of support need: low, medium and high.
- HASI support workers will require ongoing professional development that increases the skill set to be responsive to people with high and complex needs.

2. Disability and Support Initiative (DASI)

NSW currently plans the role out of a similar 'Disability and Support Initiative' (DASI) in 2008 or 2009. This is an excellent idea, however we are informed that, similar to HASI, the criteria for access is restrictive and compounds the disadvantage of those people who have a disability but fall outside of the criteria for access to the service provided by the Department of Ageing, Disability and Home Care (NSW DADHC). Recommendations for HASI also apply here.

3. Common Ground

The City recommends the rollout of Common Ground across Australia. It is already being implemented in Victoria and South Australia. Common Ground contains all of the best models of practice in terms of social integration, partnership with the philanthropic and private sector, supported accommodation and successful outcomes. The City further recommends that the federal government explore with state and local governments opportunities for the sourcing of property/land, partnerships and resourcing to implement this in every state of Australia.

4. An increase in the supply, availability and quality of public housing stock.

The previous federal government stripped $400 million out of the Commonwealth State Housing Agreement over the last 10 years.[4] The Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute has found that NSW has the highest level of dis-investment in public housing of any state in Australia. This practice of dis-investment must end and the housing stock that has been lost must be replaced.

5. Starter housing to permanent housing

Very few homeless people, when asked, request "more services". They request housing. However, many of them will not accept public housing if it means accepting bed sits because they fear that they will get 'stuck there'. Housing NSW has many empty bed sits as a result. We recommend the following approach to better utilise existing stock and encourage homeless people to utilise it.

- Bed sits are offered to people as 'starter housing' with opportunity to progress to better accommodation after not more than a year.

6. Managed Alcohol Administration Programs (MAAPS)

A large percentage of the long term homeless suffer from chronic alcohol dependence. Many of these people have been living on the streets and in the Intoxicated Persons Units (IPUs) for over a decade. Chronic drinkers have higher mortality rates than the general population, they are frequent users of expensive mainstream services, such as health and corrective services, and their substance dependence excludes them from accessing many services. Many of them have been housed in the past and have lost that housing for various reasons attached to their substance abuse. MAAPS provide supported congregate care to people with intractable alcohol addiction and reduce their overall high risk levels of consumption through the managed administration of alcohol whilst also ensuring that their health, nutritional and social needs are met.

HOMELESSNESS ADVISORY COUNCILS

Participation in decision making that impacts upon the self is one of the most important components of social inclusion, yet the homelessness sector has not done this very effectively in this country. Homeless people hold many of the answers to the questions asked about how to resolve homelessness and yet their voices are rarely heard at the level of policy making. The City recommends a national rollout of homeless advisory councils that train and support homeless people to become advocates and ensure their voices are heard within the development of policy at all levels of service provision. Homeless people would be paid to participate and this participation would be recognised in their obligations under the Centrelink system.

LEGAL SERVICES FOR THE HOMELESS

The City recommends that the Homeless Persons Legal Service (HPLS) be provided with funding to incorporate criminal representation in their services. Most legal support provided at this time is for non-criminal matters. HPLS has been profoundly successful in assisting people to negotiate legal matters and an extension of this service to include the criminal justice system would reduce the numbers of vulnerable people entering the criminal justice system, prevent the criminalisation of disadvantage, and could be funded through money saved by not incarcerating people.

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[4] February 21, 2007, media release by Tanya Plibersek, MP Shadow Minister for Human Services, Housing, Women & Youth

EDUCATION, TRAINING AND EMPLOYMENT

Young people must be supported to stay within the education system. Adults who have left the education system and who have been unemployed for a lengthy period must be supported to access vocational training that is directly linked to employment opportunities. A large number of homeless people that the City has consulted with have expressed a desire to re-enter the work force and to find meaningful ways to engage their time. The Job Network, in its current form, has failed to achieve this for many vulnerable people who have then suffered the repercussions of that failure. The City is currently working on a policy to quarantine a certain number of jobs within the contracts given to companies to carry out work for the City. Linked to this ~~is~~are partnerships with TAFE to provide outreach courses to the homeless to give them the training that will enable them to take up the opportunity of employment. Mentors will be identified to support people entering the workforce after a long absence and small grants made available to assist them to purchase the materials needed to commence work.

Volunteerism

Homeless people who engage in consumer advocacy roles or volunteerism should have this recognised under their mutual obligations. Opportunities for volunteerism should be linked to ongoing training, education and employment opportunities along a continuum of engagement, skill building leading to employment.