

**INQUIRY INTO HOMELESSNESS AND LOW-COST
RENTAL ACCOMMODATION**

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The Hon Ian West MLC
Committee Chair
Standing Committee on Social Issues
Parliament House
Macquarie Street
SYDNEY NSW 2000

Dear Sir

**RE: INQUIRY INTO HOMELESSNESS AND
LOW-COST RENTAL ACCOMMODATION**

I refer to your letter of 6 February 2009 inviting Council to make a submission to the abovementioned Inquiry.

You may be interested to know that Murray Shire Council undertook a study into homelessness in 2005. A copy of the final report is enclosed for your information. It is considered that the contents may assist you with your Inquiry.

Should you require further information, please contact the undersigned on 03 5884 3302.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Greg Murdoch".

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Encl.

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HOMELESSNESS

IN THE MURRAY SHIRE & SURROUNDING DISTRICTS



HOMELESSNESS IN THE MURRAY SHIRE & SURROUNDING DISTRICTS

FINAL REPORT

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Kathy Desmond



ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This project was commissioned by the Murray Shire Council and funded by the NSW Department of Housing. The project was managed by a Project Committee consisting of stakeholder representatives from, Murray Shire, the Shire of Deniliquin and the Victorian Shire of Campaspe as well as the NSW Department of Community Services. The committee's guidance, expertise and support throughout the duration of this project are gratefully acknowledged.

Project Committee

- Greg Murdoch (Murray Shire Council)
- Peter Williams (Campaspe Shire Council)
- Yvette Jaczina (St. Luke's)
- Patricia McLeod (NSW Department of Community Services)
- Jean Andrews (Campaspe Shire Council)
- Pat Fogarty (St. Vincent de Paul)
- Paul Thorpe (St. Luke's)
- Kay Langfield (NSW Department of Community Services)

A comprehensive consultation process was undertaken with all homelessness services as well as other services who work with homeless people in the Murray Shire and surrounding areas. We would like to extend our appreciation to all those agencies and individuals who participated in the project hearings, providing critical input to the project.

We would also like to thank those workers and individuals who helped facilitate contact and made the consultations possible, in particular Jean Andrews from Campaspe Shire Council and Pat Fogarty from St. Vincent de Paul in Deniliquin for providing the venue for the consultations in Echuca and Deniliquin. We also extend a special thanks to the staff at St. Luke's in Echuca who facilitated contact with homeless people living in a local caravan park.

In addition, we would like to acknowledge and thank the following people: Greg Murdoch (CEO Murray Shire Council) for his valued input, local knowledge and feedback on the draft and final reports; Kay Langfield and Patricia McLeod (NSW DoCS) for their guidance and comment on the final report; Joe Day and Karleen Dwyer (Njernda Aboriginal Corporation) for their insight and expertise on Indigenous issues; Jenny Rolf (DoH Deniliquin Office) for her input on housing issues in Deniliquin; Pat Fogarty (St. Vincent de Paul) for her on-going comment, support and valued feedback; and Lillian Harris and Graeme Rosenow (St. Luke's) for providing some key data on homelessness clients.

David MacKenzie and Kathy Desmond

December 2005

ABBREVIATIONS

ABS	Australian Bureau of Statistics	ICC	Indigenous Coordination Centre
AHBV	Aboriginal Housing Board of Victoria	LGA	Local Government Area
AIHW	Australian Institute of Health & Welfare	LLEN	Local Learning & Employment Network (Vic)
AOD	Alcohol & Other Drugs	MH	Mental Health
ASP	Aboriginal Services Plan	NHS	National Homelessness Strategy
ATSI	Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander	OoH	Office of Housing (Vic)
ATSIC	Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Commission	PAH	Partnership Against Homelessness (NSW)
ATSIS	Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Services	PCP	Primary Care Partnerships (Vic)
CAMHS	Community Adolescent Mental Health Service	PHAP	Public Housing Advocacy Program (Vic)
CAP	Crisis Accommodation Program	SAAP	Supported Accommodation Assistance Program
CMHP	Community Managed Housing Program	SEWB	Social & Emotional Well Being
CPG	Community Programs Group (Vic)	SFYS	School Focused Youth Service (Vic)
DHS	Victorian Department of Human Services	SHIP	Social Housing Innovations Project
DoCS	NSW Department of Community Services	SU	Swinburne University
DoH	NSW Department of Housing	THM	Transitional Housing Management Program (Vic)
FDV	Family & Domestic Violence	VHS	Victorian Homelessness Strategy
FDVCPF	Family & Domestic Violence Crisis Protection Framework (Vic)	VIHS	Victorian Indigenous Homelessness Study
HEF	Housing Establishment Fund	YHAP	Youth Homelessness Action Plan (Vic)
HIR	Housing Information & Referral		
HSS	Homelessness Service System		
HSSDP	Homelessness Service System Development Project		

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	7
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	8
1. PROJECT OVERVIEW	18
BACKGROUND TO THE PROJECT	18
PURPOSE OF THE PROJECT	18
PROJECT METHODOLOGY	19
2. POLICY & FUNDING CONTEXT	22
SAAP V AGREEMENT	22
NSW PARTNERSHIP AGAINST HOMELESSNESS (PAH)	22
VICTORIAN HOMELESSNESS STRATEGY (VHS)	23
HOMELESSNESS WITHIN INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES	24
3. THE MURRAY SHIRE & ADJOINING DISTRICTS	28
POPULATION.....	29
YOUNG PEOPLE	31
INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES	32
HOUSING AFFORDABILITY.....	34
UNEMPLOYMENT.....	38
SUMMARY	39
4. RURAL HOMELESSNESS IN MURRAY	40
OVERVIEW.....	40
HOMELESSNESS IN THE MURRAY AND GOULBURN.....	40
SLEEPING ROUGH, CAMPING OR IMPROVISED DWELLINGS	43
CARAVAN PARKS OR BOARDING HOUSES	46
INDIGENOUS HOMELESSNESS.....	49
REASONS FOR HOMELESSNESS.....	50
SUMMARY	52
5. HOMELESSNESS ASSISTANCE IN MURRAY AND SURROUNDING DISTRICTS	53
SUPPORTED ACCOMMODATION ASSISTANCE PROGRAM (SAAP)	53
MURRAY SERVICE MAPPING	55
DEDICATED HOMELESSNESS SERVICES	59
MEDIUM-TERM/TRANSITIONAL HOUSING	61
PUBLIC HOUSING.....	62
OTHER LONG-TERM HOUSING OPTIONS	66
SUMMARY	67
6. ANALYSIS OF ISSUES	69
FUNDING FOR SAAP SERVICES	69
CARAVAN PARKS AS CRISIS ACCOMMODATION	73
IMPROVISED DWELLINGS/ INFORMAL SETTLEMENTS.....	75
CROSS-BORDER ISSUES.....	78
EARLY INTERVENTION.....	80
AFFORDABLE HOUSING.....	85
FAMILY/DOMESTIC VIOLENCE	87
7. LIST OF RECOMMENDATIONS	91
8. BIBLIOGRAPHY	94

LIST OF TABLES & FIGURES

Table 1: Population in Murray/Campaspe by urban centre & age 2001*	29
Table 2: Population in selected urban centres, NSW & Vic 2001	30
Table 3: Total population & percent of youth (12-25 years) in Murray/Campaspe 2001*	31
Table 4: Indigenous population in Murray & Campaspe Shires, 2001*	32
Table 5: Indigenous population in selected urban centres, 2001*	33
Table 6: Median weekly rents, Campaspe Shire, September 2002 & June 2004	35
Table 7: Median weekly rents, Central Murray SSD June 2002 & June 2005	35
Table 8: LGA rental affordability in Campaspe Shire, September 2002 & June 2004	36
Table 9: Rental affordability in Loddon Shire September 2002 & June 2004	37
Table 10: Rental affordability by percent & LGA (2004) with 2002 totals	37
Table 11: Unemployment rates, Campaspe & Murray Shires, 2001*	38
Table 12: Indigenous unemployment rates, Campaspe & Murray Shires, 2001	39
Table 13: Homeless people in different sectors of the population by State/Territory 2001	41
Table 14: Murray Statistical Division – number and rate of homelessness (NSW) 2001	41
Table 15: Goulburn Sub-division – segments of the homeless population (Vic) 2001	42
Table 16: Proportion of homeless population, Nth Goulburn, Metro Melbourne & Vic. 2001	43
Table 17: Proportion of homeless population, Central Murray, Metro Sydney & NSW	44
Table 18: Distribution of boarding house & marginal residents of caravan parks, Aust. 2001	47
Table 19: No. homeless people & marginal residents of caravan parks, Vic. 2001	48
Table 20: No. homeless people & marginal residents of caravan parks, NSW 2001	48
Table 21: Distribution of Indigenous & non-Indigenous homeless people, Vic. 2001	49
Table 22: Distribution of Indigenous & non-Indigenous homeless people, NSW 2001	49
Table 23: Recurrent funding allocations by percent & target group, NSW & Vic 2003-04	53
Table 24: No. SAAP agencies & recurrent allocation by target group NSW & Vic 2003-04	54
Table 25: Distribution of SAAP agencies & recurrent funding in rural NSW regions 2003-04	54
Table 26: Distribution of SAAP agencies & recurrent funding in rural Victorian regions 2003-04	55
Table 27: List of services, LGA's of Murray, Deniliquin & Campaspe 2005	57
Table 27: List of services, LGA's of Murray, Deniliquin & Campaspe 2005 (continued)	58
Table 28: Annual & 'point in time' client data, St. Vincent de Paul & St. Luke's services, 2005	60
Table 29: Transitional Housing Properties, Campaspe & Bendigo 2002.	61
Table 30: Proportion of public housing, NSW, Sydney & Central Murray, 2001	64
Table 31: Proportion of public housing, Central Murray & surrounding SSDs, 2001	64
Table 32: Proportion of public housing, Murray SSD's & Deniliquin, 2001	64
Table 33: Proportion of public housing by selected SSD Victoria, 2001	65
Table 34: Aboriginal Housing Board stock, Campaspe Shire & Bendigo, 2002	66
Table 35: Long-term housing programs & stock, Campaspe Shire & Bendigo, 2002	67
Table 36: Victorian Office of Housing regional budget allocations, 2003-2004	69
Table 37: Victorian Office of Housing predicted regional budget allocations, 2003-2004	70
Table 38: New South Wales SAAP regional budget allocations, 2003-2004	70
Table 39: Predicted NSW SAAP regional budget allocations, 2003-2004	71
Table 40: Predicted Victorian Office of Housing regional budget allocations, 2003-2004	71
Table 41: NSW SAAP predicted budget allocations including marginal residents of caravan parks 2003-04	72
Table 42: No. & rate per 100,000 of apprehended violence orders within NSW, 1997	88
Figure 1: Murray homelessness services map	56

INTRODUCTION

Homelessness remains a major issue for Australian social policy. The Burdekin Human Rights and equal Opportunity Commission inquiry in 1989 focused national attention on 'youth homelessness' and in 1995 there was a House of Representatives inquiry into Aspects of Youth Homelessness followed by a Prime Ministerial Taskforce on Youth Homelessness in 1996. Since 1985, the Supported Accommodation and Assistance program [SAAP] has provided a range of supported accommodation to homeless people, developing a wider range of practice models over the years. More broadly, under SAAP IV a number of the states and indeed all states and territories to some extent have adopted a more strategic approach to the issue of homelessness looking into the future with the notion of a 'whole of government' framework. About 100,000 Australians were found to be homeless in the ABS Homeless Census in 2001. About one third of the 20,000 homeless Victorians enumerated, are to be found outside Melbourne and some 40 percent of the 26,676 homeless in New South Wales are outside of Sydney. However, homelessness is still commonly thought of as a problem associated the inner-city where there is a concentration of large homeless agencies. Press attention in its representations of the homeless, still tends to focus on homeless people sleeping out in the city.

Less attention has been paid to homelessness in a rural context such as Murray Shire. Murray Shire has perhaps been seen for a long time as an adjunct to the regional Victorian city of Echuca. Moama is directly across the river from Echuca and people move back and forth in their everyday life and business activities. While Moama and Murray Shire are inextricably linked to Echuca and Campaspe Shire, jurisdictional limitations slice through Echuca-Moama on many issues. This project was designed to examine the homelessness service system in Murray Shire and surrounding areas, which include Deniliquin and the surrounding rural areas in New South Wales, as well as Echuca and parts of Campaspe Shire in Victoria as well as the broader Loddon-Mallee region. Thinking in terms of a cross-border paradigm is central to the arguments in this report.

A major dilemma for policy makers and program administrations as well as service providers is that even where the rate of homelessness may be higher in a rural area, the total number of homeless people and the overall population in the area is relatively small and will be provided with a level of resources based broadly on a weighted function of the population in need which is a small number compared to Sydney or Melbourne. The rural homeless population is often dispersed across large areas and service provision costs or time on task will be much greater than in a capital city. There are no easy answers to this dilemma but building community's capacity to deal with homelessness or other troubling issues is necessary condition for successful advocacy and service development.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

While people experiencing chronic homelessness are more visible when sleeping rough and through their recurrent use of SAAP services, there are many homeless people who are less easily identified. Of the 99,900 people who were identified as homeless in the 2001 Census, only 14,200 were 'sleeping rough' at the time of the Census. Families and individuals staying with friends and relatives, in caravan parks, in substandard accommodation, pickers huts, boarding houses and backpacker hostels are among those referred as the 'hidden homeless', and such people make up a significant proportion of the homeless population in rural and regional areas (VHS Consultation Paper, 2002).

Homelessness can be conceptualised as a career process that has a beginning and a succession of stages to the point where the person becomes chronically homeless. People are becoming homeless and leaving homelessness, while at the same time many people who are homeless are highly transient, frequently moving from place to place.

Indigenous people are also a major group of the 'hidden homeless' population and current data indicates they are over represented in SAAP services, compared with the total Indigenous population counts. For example, while only two percent of the Australian population identified as Indigenous at the 2001 Census a total of nine percent of all homeless people were Indigenous. In addition, some 19 percent of those classified as chronically homeless (i.e. 'sleeping rough') were also Indigenous (VIHS, 2001). In Victoria, the VIHS (2001) stated that approximately 1,100 Indigenous people access SAAP services in any one year. This is compared to a total Victorian client base of about 25,000 people and accounts for almost twice the national average rate.

THE MURRAY SHIRE AND ADJOINING DISTRICTS

Murray Shire sits on the NSW side of the NSW/Victorian border, approximately 800 kilometres from Sydney and 250 kilometres from Melbourne. The Shire is bounded by the municipality of Deniliquin on its northern side and by the rural town of Echuca in the Victorian Shire of Campaspe. The smaller town of Mathoura is also experiencing growth with increased housing, a steady rise in property values, a growth in tourist and retirement accommodation and new business development targeting the Mathoura Visitor Information and Business Centre.

The Shire of Campaspe is the Murray Shire's Victorian LGA neighbour across the border, and approximately 180 kilometres north of Melbourne. Services and support within the Campaspe Shire are frequently accessed by residents from Murray Shire as well as other neighbouring rural and regional centres in NSW. Community and welfare services in Echuca are therefore a key aspect of the Murray Shire's homelessness service system.

Many Indigenous communities live along both sides of the Murray River and have significant cultural links within adjacent areas in NSW and Victoria. Key Indigenous communities in and around the Murray Shire include Cummeragunja and the settlement at Moonahcullah near Deniliquin. There

is also the Moama Local Aboriginal Land Council and in Campaspe, there is the Njernda Aboriginal Corporation in Echuca.

HOUSING AFFORDABILITY

While the cost of private rental has increased, the availability of private rental stock is also a major issue in country areas. For example, vacancy rates on private rental properties in NSW have recently fallen from 3.6 percent over the last five years to 2.5 percent in early 2005 (REI NSW, 2005). This rate now falls below the accepted 'balanced' benchmark of between three to four percent and is expected to fall further in 2006.

The overall vacancy rate for private rental properties in rural and regional Victoria has been in decline since 2003, falling to 1.7 percent in the December 2004 quarter (REIV, 2005). This decline reflects a strong demand for rental properties in country regions as well as a decrease in the level of new rental stock entering the market, primarily due to a weaker demand by investors.

HOMELESSNESS IN THE MURRAY AND GOULBURN

The rate of homelessness in Victoria, NSW and the ACT are all similar – between 40 -50 homeless people per 10,000 of the population. In Victoria there were 20,305 homeless people in 2001 and a rate of 44 per 10,000, while in NSW there were 26,676 homeless with a rate of 42 per 10,000. The Statistical Sub-Division of Central Murray had 113 homeless people out of the 367 in the Murray statistical division. But, Central Murray had the highest number of marginal residents of caravan parks (83) in the Murray statistical division. The overall rate of homelessness for Central Murray was 65 per 10,000, higher than Sydney (39 per 10,000) and higher than Albury (42 per 10,000), the main population centre in the statistical division of Murray.

Even though a homeless figure of 113 in Murray relates to an area greater than Murray Shire, it can reasonably be assumed for the purpose of this project that the number of homeless in Murray Shire and Deniliquin is about 100 (i.e. most of the homeless are probably in this slightly smaller geographical area or would seek services there in the first instance). On the Victorian side, there were 354 homeless in North Goulburn excluding Shepparton City. Campaspe contains only 35,149 of the 73888 people in North Goulburn or approximately half. A reasonable assumption is that at least half of the homeless or 177 homeless people would be in Campaspe Shire and look to Echuca for services and support. Many of the homeless in North Goulburn will go to Shepparton for services. An estimate of the homeless population for Murray Shire and surrounding districts is about 300 – 28 percent sleeping rough or living in improvised dwellings, 48 percent living with friends and relatives, 19 percent in boarding houses and five percent in SAAP accommodation.

In terms of the Murray Shire and surrounding districts it is clear that the homeless population within the scope of this project is between two to three times higher on the Victorian side. The reality for homeless people who are highly mobile is that they can move about to seek various services. This is why any examination of the service response to homelessness in Murray Shire needs to take account of the wider regional context to pay attention to the everyday reality of this mobility. The distribution of

resources and funding allocations in regional and rural areas is one indicator determining the capacity of the service system to function effectively and meet the needs of homeless people.

INDIGENOUS HOMELESSNESS

While only two percent of the Australian population was identified as Indigenous in the 2001 Census, Indigenous people made up a total of nine percent of all homeless people across Australia and about 18 percent of SAAP clients over a year.. In Victoria, Indigenous people are only 0.56 percent of the Victorian population; however they are 2.8 percent of the homeless population and 4.5 percent of SAAP clients.

Overall, the rate of non-Indigenous homelessness in Victoria is 42 per 10,000, but 564 homeless Indigenous people in the Victorian Indigenous population of 25,949 translates into a rate of 217 per 10,000. Similarly, the rate of homelessness for non-Indigenous people in New South Wales is 41 per 10,000, or about the same as Victoria. The rate of homelessness for indigenous people is 110 per 10,000 in New South Wales. The inference is that Indigenous Victorians are five times more likely to experience homelessness in Victoria than non-Indigenous people and for Indigenous people in New South Wales it is 2.5 times more likely. Calculated rates provide an indicator on the risk of homelessness for different groups but the distribution of services relies on information about the number of people in need. The 2001 Census identified only six homeless Indigenous people in Murray, which equates to about 1.6 percent of the total homeless population in the Shire.

HOMELESSNESS ASSISTANCE

For Murray and the Riverina there are a total of eighteen SAAP agencies which make up 4.6 percent of all SAAP agencies in NSW. Near the Murray Shire there are two SAAP workers employed through Vinnies Reconnect in Deniliquin. Although the region received the highest recurrent allocation (\$4,290,000) in the 03/04 financial year, this represents only four percent of the total recurrent allocations for the State.

In Victoria, the Campaspe Shire is located within Loddon-Mallee and is one of ten Local Government Areas in the region. Loddon-Mallee receives the highest SAAP allocation (6.1%) and has eighteen SAAP agencies that deliver a total of twenty-nine SAAP services. Among these 29 services, four (or 13% of the regions SAAP services) are within the Campaspe Shire, primarily located in the central township of Echuca.

DEDICATED HOMELESSNESS SERVICES

A total of 25 services that work in some way with homeless people in Murray, Campaspe and Deniliquin have been listed in the service map. Of these, there are a total of six dedicated homelessness services in Murray and Campaspe Shires, including: St Luke's youth case management and accommodation support (2); Njernda's family violence service (1); Uniting Church STEPS (1); Campaspe-Murray Community Care (1); and Loddon Mallee Housing outreach service located at the Kyabram Community and Learning Centre. In neighbouring Deniliquin, there are four

dedicated homelessness services, all of which are managed and operated by the St. Vincent de Paul Society. Of all the dedicated homelessness services three are specialist family violence services – one in Deniliquin, one in Echuca (Indigenous) and one based in Bendigo which provides outreach to Campaspe.

There is no crisis and emergency accommodation in either Campaspe or Murray Shires. St. Luke's accommodation & support service in Echuca and Loddon Mallee Housing's SAAP worker in Kyabram provide homelessness support and access to HEF dollars in order to purchase crisis accommodation in the private housing/tourist accommodation market. This is mainly local caravan parks such as the Willow Caravan Park in Echuca or Murray Perch in Barmah, hotels, backpackers and youth hostels.

MEDIUM-TERM/TRANSITIONAL HOUSING

Within Victoria's Loddon Mallee region there are a total of 152 transitional houses. This figure includes 13 Crisis Initiative Properties (CIPs). Of the total THM stock in the Loddon Mallee region, Campaspe has nine properties (or 5.9% of the total), of which all but one are two to three bedroom properties. In Bendigo, the number of THMs total 68 or 44.7 percent of the total for the region. Again, most are two to three bedroom properties.

As at 30 June 2004, public housing lease subsidies in NSW totalled \$18.09 million. Approximately 55 community housing providers receive lease subsidies from the NSW government. In 2004, 323 head-leased properties were provided on a long-term basis extending for up to 10 years. For households experiencing a short-term housing crisis and who are not eligible for public housing, DoH may provide emergency temporary accommodation in the form of short-term public housing or a head-lease property for up to three months.

PUBLIC HOUSING

One of the difficulties comparing public housing between New South Wales and Victoria is that although all states operate under the Commonwealth-States Housing Agreement [CSHA] the administration of public housing is undertaken in somewhat different ways, wait lists are managed differently and what statistics are publicly available is different. Public housing is one form of affordable housing. However, figures for public rental housing can be extracted from the 2001 ABS Census of Population and Housing. Aboriginal housing is counted in a different category as is housing established by service organisations, social accommodation and aged-care accommodation. The ABS count of public rental housing involves some undercount because whether a dwelling is counted as 'public rental' depends on the occupant filling in the form correctly. However, the error of measurement does not undermine the ABS data for the purpose of state, regional and area comparison and it is the best data available.

In Sydney the proportion of rental housing that is public is 17.5 percent and for New South Wales it is 17.7 percent, which means that on average, public housing in rural New South Wales is distributed the same as for Sydney. However, it will be higher in some rural areas and lower in others. The

arguments about a particular area such as Murray Shire depend on comparisons with similar areas and in particular the surrounding areas.

An emerging issue is that the three areas along the Murray River and adjacent to the Murray Shire have significantly lower provisions of public rental housing. Secondly, when Deniliquin is disaggregated from Central Murray, it can be seen that Deniliquin has a provision of public housing close to the state average – a total of 140 dwellings according to the ABS figures for 2001. On the other hand the rest of Central Murray has only 3.6 percent of public housing rental. According to the ABS there were only nine public housing rental dwellings in Murray Shire. Other local information counted for six public housing dwellings in Moama, so these two figures are broadly congruent.

Because Murray Shire is so closely linked to Echuca economically in terms of the everyday way that people use services, the last comparison is between public housing in Central Murray with Melbourne, Victoria and North Goulburn SSD which includes Campaspe Shire and Echuca. Despite a lower level of public housing in the rental market in Victoria, Central Murray by comparison is lower than the Victorian average but more importantly, much lower than Echuca [31.6%] and the SSD of North Goulburn [23.9%] that includes both Campaspe Shire and Shepparton. Also by comparison, Campaspe Shire has 23.9% public rental housing.

The reasons for Murray Shire's low level of public housing cannot be explained in any simple way, but it may have been determined in past years when the population was smaller and before the rapid expansion of housing and population in the Shire.

PUBLIC RENTAL HOUSING FOR INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES

It is well recognised in the literature (AHBV, 2004: VIHS, 2001) that there is a need for Aboriginal housing organisations to be able to provide larger-sized properties (i.e. at least 4-5 bedroom stock) in order to appropriately cater for Indigenous families and extended families that live together. In the Murray Shire there are a total of 45 public housing properties dedicated to Indigenous households. These are: Njernda Aboriginal Co-op - Moama (3); Moama Local Aboriginal Council - Moama (4); Cummeragunja Local Aboriginal Land Council - Cummeragunja (22); and Cummeragunja Pty Ltd - Cummeragunja (16).

In 2002, the Aboriginal Housing Board of Victoria owned 215 properties in the Loddon Mallee region, most of which were three-bedroom houses. Loddon Mallee has a total of 23 four-bedroom houses and only one five-bedroom house in the region. The Shire of Campaspe has the second highest number of AHBV properties (after Swan Hill) in the region.

ANALYSIS OF ISSUES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

FUNDING FOR SAAP SERVICES

The discussion on homelessness in Murray Shire and its surrounding areas raises issues of resource allocation based on statistics of actual homelessness by region. Although exact statistics cannot be produced for most Local Government Area, reasonable estimates are possible. The three points of

comparison are the existing regional allocations for SAAP service provision in the Hume and Loddon-Mallee in Victoria and Murrumbidgee-Murray in New South Wales, the predicted allocation if ABS homelessness data were used and lastly, the predicted allocation if the marginal residents of caravan parks are included in the homelessness population. Using homelessness data as a measure of need to make these calculations of resource distribution are indicative and a basic calculation that would be enhanced by more complex formulae. State-wide services are not considered. But, the weakness of the current distribution is highlighted. The specific disadvantage of Hume and Loddon-Mallee regions are quantified. Including the marginal residents of caravan parks as a part of the population in need of services would suggest a level of funding disadvantage across rural Victoria.

Funding adjustments could be factored into successive funding cycles with some additional funds for homelessness services in both states, avoiding any radical reduction of funding for services. Any new funding could be directed to areas disadvantaged under existing and past arrangements as a priority consideration – Hume and Loddon-Mallee regions in Victoria and Campaspe Shire and Riverina-Murray in New South Wales. This approach would be more acceptable and any adjustment will be a difficult process of change. Overlaying all of these points are political considerations at several levels.

RECOMMENDATION 1

THAT THE SHIRES OF MURRAY AND CAMPASPE, TOGETHER WITH HOMELESS SERVICES IN THE SURROUNDING AREAS OF NSW AND VICTORIA, ADVOCATE FOR A REVIEW OF HOMELESSNESS FUNDING. IN VICTORIA THIS SHOULD BE ADDRESSED TO THE DHS FUNDING MODEL REVIEW IN ORDER TO REDRESS FUNDING IMBALANCES BETWEEN REGIONS ON THE BASIS OF A MORE DETAILED ANALYSIS BY DHS POLICY AND PLANNING EXPERTS, WHILE IN NSW THIS SAME ISSUE SHOULD BE RE-EXAMINED AS PART OF THE DECISION-MAKING PROCESS ABOUT FUNDING UNDER SAAP V.

CARAVAN PARKS AS CRISIS ACCOMMODATION

One of the features of rural homeless is the use of caravan parks for emergency accommodation as well as longer-term accommodation at the lowest end of the housing market. As tourism has developed, the extent of permanent residency in caravan parks has declined. Various respondents told of the problems getting homeless people into caravan parks. Even when access can be arranged, the caravan parks are not a low cost form of accommodation. Associated with this is the dearth of SAAP emergency accommodation in rural settings.

RECOMMENDATION 2

THAT MURRAY AND CAMPASPE SHIRE COUNCILS FACILITATE DISCUSSIONS BETWEEN ST. VINCENT DE PAUL SOCIETY (DENILQUIN), ST. LUKE'S (ECHUCA), THE VICTORIAN DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES (LODDON-MALLEE REGION) AND THE NSW DEPARTMENT OF COMMUNITY SERVICES (WEST REGION) ABOUT THE FEASIBILITY OF A PROGRAM WHEREBY SITES WITHIN EXISTING CARAVAN PARKS COULD BE LEASED FOR CABINS OR CARAVANS TO PROVIDE EMERGENCY ACCOMMODATION FOR HOMELESS PEOPLE SUPPORTED BY SAAP WORKERS.

RECOMMENDATION 3

THAT THE DEBATE AND DEVELOPMENT OF THE SOCIAL ENTERPRISE CARAVAN PARK MODEL BE MONITORED BY ST. VINCENT DE PAUL (DENILQUIN) AND ST. LUKE'S (ECHUCA) AND THE REGIONAL DEPARTMENTAL STAKEHOLDERS AS A POTENTIALLY APPLICABLE RURAL MODEL OF CRISIS AND EMERGENCY ACCOMMODATION FOR MURRAY SHIRE AND ITS SURROUNDING AREAS IN BOTH NSW AND VICTORIA.

IMPROVISED DWELLINGS/ INFORMAL SETTLEMENTS

People living in improvised dwellings are another characteristic feature of rural homelessness. In Murray and its surrounding areas in Victoria and New South Wales between 24-30 percent of the homeless are living in improvised dwellings or camping out somewhere. There is no clear picture where all of these places are but most are probably scattered across the rural properties in the area. In most cases there may be one or two such dwellings per property and generally they are out of sight.

RECOMMENDATION 4

THAT ST LUKE'S AND ST. VINCENT DE PAUL JOINTLY DEVELOP A POLICY FOR IMPROVED OUTREACH SERVICES FOR HOMELESS PEOPLE LIVING IN IMPROVISED DWELLINGS AND SMALL INFORMAL SETTLEMENTS, AND MAINTAIN AN ON-GOING LIAISON TO IMPROVE THE COORDINATION OF OUTREACH SUPPORT TO THIS GROUP.

RECOMMENDATION 5

THAT THE WINTRINGHAM MODEL FOR OLDER HOMELESS PEOPLE BE INVESTIGATED AS A POSSIBLE RESPONSE FOR A LONG TERM GROUP OF OLDER HOMELESS MEN (AND WOMEN) IN MURRAY AND SURROUNDING AREAS.

CROSS-BORDER ISSUES

The need to work smarter across the NSW-Vic border is not a new issue. In the past Moama and Campaspe Shires have cooperated in planning and on projects in order to facilitate a more seamless approach to service delivery. Many people from NSW travel into Echuca for various services. Echuca is effectively the 'big city' for a rural area in both Victoria and NSW. We were told of some people who maintained postal addresses in Victoria or use relative's addresses to get access to Victorian services while actually living in NSW. Indigenous informants mentioned a series of anomalies from their point of view where the state border becomes a barrier to efficient and effective service delivery. The two key issues highlighted by respondents were mental health and housing. The differences between NSW and Victoria on mental health seem more formidable than in housing but there are evidently issues across all the service areas.

RECOMMENDATION 6

THAT MURRAY AND CAMPASPE SHIRES CONTINUE THE JOINT APPROACH TO WORKING ACROSS THE NSW/VICTORIAN BORDER. THE COUNCILS SHOULD SEEK TO BRING THE VICTORIAN DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES AND THE NSW DEPARTMENT OF COMMUNITY SERVICES TOGETHER TO DEVELOP A MORE COOPERATIVE CROSS BORDER APPROACH TO FUNDING HOUSING AND HOMELESSNESS SERVICES IN THE AREA.

RECOMMENDATION 7

THAT ST LUKE'S AND ST. VINCENT DE PAUL JOINTLY DEVELOP A CROSS-BORDER PROTOCOL WITH FORMAL SERVICE PROCEDURES AND REGULAR FORMAL COORDINATION MEETINGS. THIS PROTOCOL WOULD ALSO INCLUDE THE SHARING OF DATA, A JOINT APPROACH TO DHS AND DOCS FOR RECOGNITION AND SUPPORT, AND JOINT SUBMISSIONS FOR ADDITIONAL RESOURCES. AS PART OF THIS PROCESS A THOROUGH EXAMINATION OF THE DISTRIBUTION OF CURRENT RESOURCES AND SERVICES OUGHT TO TAKE PLACE.

EARLY INTERVENTION

In the past decade, early intervention has become a major policy orientation for the issue of homelessness, particularly for young people. The notion of 'early intervention' can be applied to a range of issues, but in the context of homelessness it does not imply early in life but as early as possible in a person's actual experience of homelessness. The positive response to early intervention has opened up policy thinking to a broader conception about deploying public policy responses to homelessness. Early intervention policy and programs are most developed for young people although there is some pilot work underway to implement early intervention for families and public housing tenants.

RECOMMENDATION 8

THAT A PILOT PROJECT BE DEVELOPED TO INVESTIGATE THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE COUCH SURFING PLACEMENT OPTION FOR YOUNG PEOPLE.

There is a need to expand Reconnect nationally (Chamberlain and Mackenzie, 2004) which in the context of this project and the Murray and Campaspe Shires means a Reconnect service in Echuca. Fieldwork evidence suggests that Vinnies Reconnect in Deniliquin is a good example of an effective Reconnect service in a program that has been found to be broadly effective. The national evaluation of Reconnect found a significant improvement in the capacity of young people and their families to deal with intra-family conflict, improved communication and more positive attitudes to school. About 70 percent of Reconnect clients achieve positive outcomes, either reconciliation if they were detached, or a more stable family situation for the larger group referred because they are deemed at risk.

RECOMMENDATION 9

THAT JOINT REPRESENTATION IS MADE BY ST LUKE'S, VICTORIA AND ST. VINCENT DE PAUL IN DENILIQUN TO THE COMMONWEALTH GOVERNMENT FOR FUNDS FOR A RECONNECT SERVICE IN ECHUCA.

The issue of cross-border coordination needs to be taken up at a service provision level in a number of areas. The SAAP youth service providers, St Luke's in Victoria and Vinnies in Deniliquin should more formally coordinate their support for homeless young people, not only in terms of submissions and advocacy for a Reconnect service in Echuca, but also for the suggested 'couch-surfing placement pilot. Coordination and cooperation need some kind of formal process and structure to be implemented as an on-going feature of the homeless service system across Murray and Campaspe Shires.

RECOMMENDATION 10

THAT ST LUKE'S, VICTORIA AND ST. VINCENT DE PAUL IN DENILIQUN FORM A COORDINATING COMMITTEE TOGETHER WITH THE SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN MURRAY SHIRE, DENILIQUN AND CAMPASPE SHIRE AND OTHER SALIENT STAKEHOLDERS IN ORDER TO IMPROVE THE COORDINATION OF SUPPORT TO HOMELESS YOUNG PEOPLE.

AFFORDABLE HOUSING

There are currently a number of initiatives underway in both NSW and Victoria to address the issue of a net lack affordable housing. Local government is seen as the most appropriate level of government to respond to this issue in concrete practical terms and both state governments proclaim the need for strategic alliances and partnerships with local councils in order to effectively respond to the decline in affordable housing. There is a policy argument that local government is better informed about local needs and responsive to local issues than state governments, although the Commonwealth and the states have major responsibilities to ensure that adequate funds are available. There are also some good examples of local government authorities 'playing an increasingly pro-active role in shaping local housing outcomes, such as the provision of affordable housing'. While this is by no means the norm yet it is a growing trend with 'many expressing commitment to extending this role'.

RECOMMENDATION 11

THAT MURRAY AND CAMPASPE SHIRES DEVELOP A COMMON POSITION ON AFFORDABLE HOUSING AND A JOINT STRATEGY APPROACH SO THAT AFFORDABLE HOUSING FITS AS A COMPONENT PART OF THEIR RESPECTIVE SOCIAL AND COMMUNITY AND/OR ENVIRONMENT PLANS.

RECOMMENDATION 12

THAT MURRAY AND CAMPASPE SHIRE COUNCILS PURSUE A JOINT SUBMISSION TO NSW DOH AND VICTORIA'S DHS (OFFICE OF HOUSING) FOR A PARTNERSHIP INITIATIVE TO FURTHER EXPLORE APPROPRIATE OPTIONS FOR INCREASING AFFORDABLE HOUSING WITHIN BOTH SHIRES.

There is a clear and strong case for more public housing in Murray Shire. Deniliquin has 16.6 percent public rental housing which is close to the NSW average of 17.7 percent. The adjacent Shire of Campaspe has 23.9 percent public housing which is above the Victorian average of 14.3 percent. The Victorian rural city of Echuca has 31.6 percent public housing. Whatever the historical reasons for the Murray anomaly, the population and housing growth in Murray Shire clearly indicates there is a case for priority provision.

In Deniliquin, which is where much of the public housing in the area has been historically placed, there is a rental market of 844 dwellings while in Murray there are 445 rental dwellings or about half. Yet in Deniliquin, there are 140 public housing rental properties while on ABS figures in Murray there are nine. To bring Murray shire up to the level of the Central Murray SSD that includes Deniliquin [i.e. 8%] would require about an additional 35 dwellings. To bring Murray to 15 percent public housing rental in the municipality would require about 70 public housing rental dwellings. These calculated figures highlight the gap. There is a strong case for priority allocation to this area.

The case requires an increasing population and a developing local economy. Both these conditions are satisfied in Murray Shire.

RECOMMENDATION 13

THAT MURRAY AND CAMPASPE SHIRES TOGETHER WITH HOUSING SECTOR STAKEHOLDERS ADVOCATE FOR PRIORITY PROVISION OF PUBLIC HOUSING PROPERTIES IN MURRAY SHIRE TO THE NSW DEPARTMENT OF HOUSING AND ALSO TO THE OFFICE OF HOUSING IN VICTORIA.

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

Family and domestic violence is a major cause of homelessness among women and children in metropolitan areas, but it is perhaps even more hidden in rural areas (Adkins et al 2003; Chung D et al, 200; Edwards 2004). The figures for Apprehended Violence Orders in 1997 for New South Wales published by the NSW Bureau of Crime and Statistics Research suggest that domestic violence is somewhat higher in rural and regional areas than in Sydney.

Current research on domestic violence supports an approach where women and children remain safely in the family home (WESNET 2000; DHS 2002; Parkinson 2003). This is not a model that suits all family violence situations and the need to prioritise the safety of a woman and her children should never be compromised. However, an approach which holds a perpetrator accountable for his actions and which supports the family to remain in their local community has considerable potential to alleviate a key cause of homelessness and reduce the upheaval and dislocation associated with having to move into an unfamiliar area. Positive work is underway in Albury-Wodonga on this model and some discussion should be initiated with the key people involved to draw from their experience and to enlist their help for a Murray-Campaspe proposal.

RECOMMENDATION 14

THAT MURRAY AND CAMPASPE SHIRES FACILITATE A MEETING OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE SERVICE PROVIDERS IN THE SURROUNDING AREAS TO SEEK FUNDING FROM PARTNERSHIPS AGAINST DOMESTIC VIOLENCE (PADV), TO CONDUCT A PILOT INITIATIVE IN AN APPROPRIATE SITE (SUCH AS ECHUCA) TO TRIAL NEW APPROACHES TO RESPONDING TO DOMESTIC VIOLENCE WHICH SUPPORT THE REMOVAL OF A PERPETRATOR INTO A SECURE LOCATION FOR TREATMENT AND INTERVENTION.

RECOMMENDATION 15

THAT CAMPASPE AND MURRAY SHIRES SUPPORT THE CAMPASPE MURRAY FAMILY VIOLENCE NETWORK TO SEEK FUNDING FOR AN ADDITIONAL DOMESTIC VIOLENCE OUTREACH WORKER TO WORK ACROSS THE TWO SHIRES AND SURROUNDING AREAS.

1. PROJECT OVERVIEW

BACKGROUND TO THE PROJECT

Homelessness in Murray Shire first became as a major issue in 2001 with a focus on the lack of public housing and SAAP services for particular homeless target groups. It was also acknowledged that there was a lack of statistical evidence about these issues of concern and moreover, a lack of information on which to plan future strategies. In 2003, the Shire developed its second Social and Community Plan that sought to identify the needs of the local community and formulate access and equity activities that the local council, along with other community agencies, could implement to address these needs. The 2003 Murray Shire Community Plan was an important initiative involving a collaborative partnership between the neighbouring Shires of Campaspe in Victoria and Murray in NSW. The intention of this cross-border partnership was to improve the integration of regional planning around common issues, especially in respect to cross-border anomalies. As a result a range of common issues and concerns were identified across the two shires, including:

- A lack of emergency accommodation options for victims of family/domestic violence and homeless men;
- A lack of generalist counselling services along with financial counselling and alcohol and other drugs counselling and support services;
- A need to improve cross-border cooperation and coordination;
- A lack of appropriate and practical transport options for remote communities and for people needing to access services outside of the Shire (i.e. in Deniliquin/Echuca);
- A need for further research to examine the extent of homelessness and issues regarding the provision of crisis and public housing.

(Murray Shire Social & Community Plan 2003-2008, 2003)

PURPOSE OF THE PROJECT

Project Aims and Objectives

The aim of this research project was to examine homelessness in the Murray Shire and adjoining districts and to recommend options for crisis and public housing and support for a range of key homeless target groups such as young people, single women/men and women with/without children escaping domestic violence. Project objectives were:

- To undertake research to determine the extent of homelessness and the reasons for the level of homelessness, in the Murray Shire and surrounding districts.
- To examine the range of issues in relation to homelessness in the Murray Shire and surrounding districts including periods of homelessness, local populations (i.e. permanent residents/transient or seasonal populations), issues of domestic and family violence; mental health issues (including co-morbidity) and intellectual disability.
- To recommend crisis and public housing options for a range of key homeless target groups such as young people, single women/men and women with/without children escaping domestic violence.

- To identify and describe possible models of service delivery to address the homelessness situation taking into account the rural nature of the target area. This encompassed a mapping exercise that examined existing services, how they are accessed and identification of emerging referral patterns.

Scope

The scope of the project included homelessness services, the clients of these services, Indigenous communities and Indigenous community controlled organisations as well as services and programs in related sectors, such as alcohol and other drugs and mental health. Base-line data on homelessness was drawn from the 'Counting the Homeless' NSW and Victorian State reports with a focus on the relevant statistical data divisions (i.e. NSW's Upper and Central Murray and Murray-Darling and Victoria's North, South and South-West Goulburn districts).

The homelessness figures cover a broader geographical area than required for this project due to the way in which statistical data divisions are segmented in each State and Territory. Analysis of the ABS data down to the level of municipalities and Shires in precise terms is not available because the homeless figures are not a simple output from the ABS Census of Population and Housing. However, the available data provides a sufficiently useful statistical profile of the Campaspe-Murray area, and a quantitative foundation for the information gleaned from the hearings/consultations conducted as part of the research methodology.

Geographically, the project primarily focused on key town centres within the NSW Murray Shire and Victorian Shire of Campaspe as well as two Indigenous communities. These included: Echuca, Kyabram and Rochester (Victoria); Deniliquin, Moama, Mathoura, Womboota and Bunnaloo (NSW); and Indigenous communities at Cummeragunja and Moonahcullah (NSW).

PROJECT METHODOLOGY

The project methodology comprised of several key components:

- The collection of data from a variety of sources including: the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS); existing research reports on homelessness; Local Government Community Plan/s; and other relevant sources;
- A service mapping exercise of existing SAAP agencies and other relevant agencies located in the Murray Shire and agencies outside of the Murray Shire that deliver services in the Murray Shire, including: the type of services delivered; the location the service is delivered; and the level of service delivered;
- Consultation with key stakeholders in the target area that utilized a participatory approach and which focused on evidence-based rather than anecdotal information;
- Documentation of cross border issues identified as a result of research undertaken;
- Identification of existing coordination mechanisms (e.g. networks; referral protocols, memorandum of understanding or service agreements) as well as identification of gaps in the SAAP service system for homeless people in the Murray Shire.

Core areas for investigation involved: examining the extent of homelessness; identifying relevant issues such as local homeless populations & trends; conducting a service mapping exercise which also looked at cross-border anomalies as well as the range of service responses to different homeless

populations; identifying crisis and public housing options; and examining rural models of service delivery and best practice. Key sources of information for each of these areas included the following:

Extent of Homelessness

- 'Counting the Homeless' Reports;
- ABS/other data;
- Project Hearings.

Rural Models of Service Delivery

- Service mapping;
- Dialogue with stakeholders;
- Relevant literature.

Service Mapping and Response

- Service directories;
- Hearings;
- Literature;
- Dialogue with stakeholders.

Homelessness Issues

- Hearings;
- Dialogue with stakeholders;
- Relevant literature.

Crisis and Public Housing Options

- Service mapping;
- Dialogue with stakeholders (OoH, DoCS).

The methodology involved five steps: a literature review; development of a research framework to guide the collection of information and data; implementation of a comprehensive consultation strategy; a final report outlining all key issues and the development of recommendations based on the research.

Literature Review

The literature review's main focus was on understanding how rural and regional homelessness differed from the established knowledge base on homelessness in the major metropolitan centres. Relatively little attention has been paid to this. In the past, homelessness services and strategic responses in rural and regional areas have been modelled largely on metropolitan approaches making the assumption that there are only minor differences. Although country areas and homelessness services have been consulted during several recent initiatives (such as the development of the VHS), the response to rural homelessness on a policy and strategic level remains under-developed. There are obviously many similarities between rural/regional homelessness and metropolitan homelessness however there has been little applied research on how the differences impact on service design and approaches and ultimately, outcomes for service users. What we do know from experience is that not all metropolitan models that have achieved positive outcomes in major cities seem to have managed the same level of success in rural and regional areas.

Research Framework & Service Map

A framework for the research was developed in conjunction with the Project Committee. The consultation strategy was to conduct 'hearings' over a number of days, in selected key locations. The 'hearings' were organised in collaboration with the Project Committee and provided appointment based time segments for submissions (written or verbal) by service providers, relevant organisations/agencies as well as other key stakeholders. Submissions were presented to the

researchers in a range of formats and by various groups of stakeholders, from representatives of organisations, from individuals and/or groups. The research consultants contracted the services of a professional transcribe who documented the entire process and each interview. This approach achieved two primary objectives: first, it maximised the ability of the research team to consult with significantly more stakeholders than would otherwise be possible in the same time frame using a standard 'visiting' method; and second, it captured more detailed qualitative data since all consultations were recorded verbatim.

Consultations

The Murray Hearings were conducted in late November and early December 2004 over a one-week period. Hearings were held in Echuca and Deniliquin along with site visits to various caravan parks and agencies. A significant cross-section of informants were interviewed from agencies and services who were, in one way or another, involved or working with homeless people, as well as some homeless people who use services in the Murray Shire and surrounding districts. The consultation interviews were organised around two key questions:

- What are the issues from your perspective?
- What are the ways that programs and services could be developed, expanded or changed to improve the outcomes for homeless people?

There was also a good deal of telephone contact on a one to one basis following up points raised during the hearings and taking information from people who had not been able to attend. A discussion paper was released that presented the findings from the consultation hearings. The themes in the working document reflected those issues expressed to the researchers during the consultations by workers and some homeless people.

Final Report

The development of the final report involved bringing together all documented findings as well as information and feedback gleaned from discussions and presentations with the Project Management Group and other key stakeholders. The design and development of this final report has been based on the original project brief, the aims and objectives of the research as well as the required outcomes.

2. POLICY & FUNDING CONTEXT

The major policy frameworks that impact on homeless policy and programs in Murray and surrounding districts are the NSW Partnership Against Homelessness (PAH), the Victorian Homelessness Strategy (VHS) and the SAAP V agreement. The latter was still under negotiation when this report was tabled so although some of the general directions likely under SAAP V are clear enough, there is as yet no detail on the new program cycle. The PAH and VHS, on the other hand, are well established and planned approaches of each state government to developing appropriate responses to homelessness.

SAAP V AGREEMENT

The Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP) is a joint Commonwealth and State funded program designed to respond, through the provision of support, to the needs of people who are homeless, escaping family violence, or at risk of homelessness. SAAP workers throughout Australia work at the frontline of client service for the homeless, where most clients are likely to exhibit significant and complex needs, such as dependence on alcohol and other drugs, mental health and other physical or intellectual disabilities, problem gambling, family violence, low income and lack of affordable housing.

The aim of SAAP is to assist homeless people or people at risk of becoming homeless to achieve self-reliance and independence, by providing support and/or accommodation in order to:

- resolve crisis;
- re-establish family links where appropriate; and
- re-establish a capacity to live independently of SAAP.

In June 2005 Senator Kay Patterson, Minister for Family and Community Services, extended the time frame for States and Territories to sign off on the new SAAP V Multilateral Agreement, from June 1st to September 30th, 2005. The purpose of this extension was to provide extra time for negotiations between the Commonwealth and States and Territories around the new SAAP V agreement (Patterson, 2005).

In general, the new directions of SAAP V are based on the findings from the SAAP IV evaluation, conducted in late 2004 and early 2005.

NSW PARTNERSHIP AGAINST HOMELESSNESS (PAH)

'Partnership Against Homelessness' (PAH) is the NSW policy framework for improving services to homeless people. The PAH was established in 1999 and is an interdepartmental committee of twelve government agencies, including ten lead partnership agencies along with the NSW Department of Housing and the Office of Community Housing. The Partnership oversees the roll-out of reforms to existing services as well as establishing a range of new projects with the expressed aim of increasing homeless people's access to crisis, temporary and long-term accommodation and housing options (PAH DoH Fact Sheet, 2003). The key objectives of the PAH are:

- Helping homeless men and women access services;
- Coordinating support services;
- Improving access to temporary or crisis accommodation; and
- Facilitating the move to long-term housing.

Priority areas for PAH initiatives were developed in response to an evaluation of the strategy conducted in 2001. The priority framework encompassed eight priority areas which recognised a range of client groups as well as service segments for future directions. These included: people sleeping rough in public places; indigenous homelessness; ex-offenders; older homeless people; AOD clients; broadening the range of accommodation models; transitional support for those moving out of crisis accommodation; and homelessness prevention (NSW DoH, Homelessness Unit, 2003). Major PAH initiatives include:

- The Inner City Homelessness Action Plan;
- Hunter Homelessness Pilot Project 'The Sign Post';
- After Hours Temporary Accommodation Line;
- Protocol for Homeless People in Public Places;
- Broadening the range of accommodation models;
- Local Coordinated Support Strategies; and
- Inner city Aboriginal Homelessness Research.

VICTORIAN HOMELESSNESS STRATEGY (VHS)

The Victorian Homelessness Strategy (VHS) sets out the policy framework for how the Victorian Homelessness Service System will address and respond to the complex issue of homelessness in the next two to three years. The VHS began in 2000, with the broad aim to deliver a comprehensive and coordinated response to meeting the needs of people experiencing homelessness by developing a preventative and early intervention response to tackling homelessness as well as improving current responses. In 2002 the VHS Final Report 'Directions for Change' was released and consisted of an action plan and strategic framework. Recommendations for future directions included:

- All services should be underpinned by a common and consistent set of principles, owned by all elements of the homelessness service sector.
- All services' operations should be informed by common standards.
- All services should demonstrate a shared commitment to client-focused practices and systems, and should respect clients' rights, dignity and privacy.

In addition, there were five strategic objectives that emerged from the findings:

- Improving client focus and client outcomes.
- Developing integrated and sustainable service responses.
- Working across government and with the community to prevent homelessness.
- Increasing access to and supply of, affordable housing.
- Supporting and driving change.

Since the Victorian Government commissioned the VHS in 2000, a range of initiatives have been implemented to improve the capacity of the homelessness services system. These include increases

in funding for SAAP services; additional crisis accommodation places; increased numbers of properties managed by THM services; and two new crisis supported accommodation facilities (Newman, 2004).

In this period of intensive activity, the SAAP budget has increased by more than \$20 million, the THM program budget by more than \$10 million and the Housing Establishment Fund budget by more than \$2 million. In addition, more than \$2 million in mental health funding, \$0.5 from Juvenile Justice and well over \$1 million in funding from the Department of Justice has been provided to address homelessness for high-risk groups (Newman, 2004).

Key strategies that have been implemented by the VHS include the following:

- The Family and Domestic Violence Crisis Protection Framework;
- Youth Homelessness Action Plan;
- Charter of Rights and Homelessness Assistance Service Standards;
- Common Assessment and Referral Approach;
- Pilot of workers in mainstream and Indigenous public housing estates to support at risk tenancies; and
- Homelessness Service System Development Projects (HSSDP) in four key areas of Victoria.
- Under SAAP IV, several states developed a strategic planned approach to the issue of homelessness, setting long range objectives and a whole of government approach.

HOMELESSNESS WITHIN INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES

On a national level, services to Indigenous Australians have been provided through two executive agencies of the Commonwealth Government – Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Services (ATSIS) and the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC). ATSIS was established in mid-2003 to provide services to ATSIC and administer programs that were previously the responsibility of ATSIC. Generally speaking, ATSIS and ATSIC have operated as one agency (ATSIS, 2004).

On April 15th, 2004 the Commonwealth government announced its intention to abolish both ATSIC and ATSIS and as of July 1st, 2004, re-distribute their programs, services and other areas of responsibility to Commonwealth Government mainstream departments and agencies. The status of both ATSIS and ATSIC are currently awaiting the outcome of a Senate Select Committee investigation into legislative issues surrounding the ATSIC Amendment Bill (ATSIC, 2004).

In a press release, Senator Amanda Vanstone (Minister for Indigenous Affairs) stated that the new proposed structure for managing and administering Indigenous affairs would involve the creation of 'Indigenous Coordination Centres' (ICC) throughout rural and remote areas of Australia to coordinate Indigenous programs and manage services to local people. The ICC's purpose would be to take over responsibility for services that were previously funded by ATSIS. The role of the thirty-five Indigenous Regional Councils throughout Australia also remains relatively undecided. The Regional councils each consist of twelve members and provide representation and advocacy for their local communities; devise regional plans; undertake funding decisions on ATSIC/ATSIS programs within their respective regions; and lobby governments to meet local ATSI needs.

Policy Directions for Indigenous Communities in NSW

While Indigenous people within NSW account for approximately two percent of the total NSW population they are significantly over-represented in SAAP services and make up approximately ten percent of SAAP clients in NSW. Indigenous people in NSW also account for about three percent of the boarding house population; four percent of those staying with friends/relatives; and eight percent of people living in improvised dwellings or sleeping rough (Counting the Homeless, 2004).

In 1995, DoCS produced a draft report on the issues facing the Department in its service provision to NSW Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. 'A New Generation of Services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People: Our Future' reported on a range of issues affecting access to services for Indigenous people, and formed the basis of future Indigenous policy direction in NSW. Key themes that were identified as needing attention were:

- Indigenous communities mistrust of the Department and welfare institutions due to past policies and procedures;
- historical exclusion of Indigenous people from mainstream services and programs;
- culturally insensitive services and programs; and
- isolation of Indigenous communities, particularly in rural and remote areas.

The NSW government's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander policy paper outlines four key result areas, along with matching actions, strategies and phased timelines for implementation, that guide the efforts of the Department in achieving its policy goals. These key result areas are:

- Strong partnerships between Aboriginal communities and DoCS;
- Positive awareness in Aboriginal communities of DoCS;
- Aboriginal people's needs are met by the DoCS' service system; and
- Service use by Aboriginal people is reflected in DoCS' funding.

The Victorian Indigenous Policy Framework

The VHS final report acknowledged that issues of homelessness for Indigenous communities required a separate policy response that was cognisant of the nature of Indigenous homelessness, its impact on families and communities, including the cultural and historic determinants. In 2001 the AHBV released its report 'Victorian Indigenous Homelessness Study' which formed the basis for the Victorian government's policy response to Indigenous homelessness

In 2003, the Office of Housing commissioned a study to investigate how homelessness services, both mainstream and Indigenous, might better meet the needs of Indigenous people, who are homeless or at-risk of becoming homeless. The first stage of the project was completed in February 2004. The OoH, in its December 2004 update on VHS initiatives noted:

Additional data analysis – including the findings of the Australian Bureau of Statistics Counting the Homeless report – is currently being undertaken by the OoH to inform the development of an enhanced response to Indigenous homelessness. The project Steering Committee will consider the initial report, the additional data analysis and proposed responses by early 2005.

Victorian Indigenous Homelessness Study

The Victorian Indigenous Homelessness Study (2001) is an important report of the VHS, providing a framework for the Government's response to Indigenous homelessness. Funded through Aboriginal Housing Board of Victoria, the study's broad aim was to investigate the nature and implications of homelessness within the Victorian Indigenous culture and community and inform the development of the VHS response to Indigenous homelessness.

The study highlighted that in order to understand Indigenous homelessness, consideration needed to be given to the "impact and construction of culture in respect to the diversity of the Indigenous community, and particularly to the notion of homelessness" (VIHS, 2001).

Cultural factors strongly condition how Indigenous people relate to housing. The importance of the extended family, in particular, is critical to meeting their housing needs. This is poorly understood by non-Indigenous agencies and service providers, underscoring the importance of Indigenous housing workers in mediating between Indigenous residents and the broader community (VIHS, 2001)

Seven key themes and policy implications emerged from the consultations with Victorian Indigenous communities conducted as part of the study. These themes highlighted the difference between mainstream definitional issues and policy responses to homelessness and that which currently exists for Indigenous communities, and provided pathways forward for future policy and planning:

- The *cultural context of homelessness* within Indigenous communities was noted as having important implications for creating successful policy and appropriately targeted services. The notion and conflicting definitions of 'home' between Indigenous culture and non-Indigenous mainstream services are a prime example. Meaningful consultation and advice seeking with Indigenous peak bodies and communities by policy makers was noted as critical to informing successful future responses.
- An understanding of the role of the *extended family network* within Indigenous culture, and how this impacts on the provision of housing and use of Indigenous family income, was highlighted as an issue that needs to be reflected in housing policy and provision. In particular, it was recommended that consideration be given to designing larger houses with multiple living areas and increased number of bedrooms which are appropriately located close to kinship groups, significant land marks, support services and employment opportunities. Appropriate responses to 'overcrowding' issues was also noted as an issue that needs to be considered carefully so that policy structures do not create further poverty and disadvantage.
- *Racism and discriminatory practices* in the private rental and finance market were found to be key factors that exacerbate Indigenous homelessness, through increasing the incidence of

overcrowding and provision of substandard accommodation. Improved communication, awareness campaigns and legal responses to discrimination was cited for future action.

- *Fragmentation and the complexity of the current service system* were perceived as confusing, rigid and lacking in culturally sensitive responses. A whole of government response that focused on Indigenous communities having some control over designing and implementing support policy was noted as a strategy that would increase the likelihood that services were appropriately targeted and truly responsive to the needs of Indigenous people and communities.
- Young people, single men, ex-prisoners and victims of domestic/family violence were identified as *groups at high risk of homelessness*. Causes and impacts of homelessness in regard to these groups of Indigenous people was noted as 'poorly understood', and therefore the need for further research to identify underlying forces and triggers to homelessness would be needed to inform future effective responses.
- *Expansion of current housing stock* for Indigenous families and communities was cited as a critical factor in any future response to the issue of Indigenous homelessness.
- *Prevention of homelessness* within the Indigenous community was noted as a policy area in need of attention. Such a response would need to rely on meaningful participation and consultation with key Indigenous housing and support organisations.

Victorian and Regional Aboriginal Services Plan (ASP) 2003 - 2006

In 2004, the Department of Human Services, released the State Aboriginal Services Plan which aimed to address the inequalities in health outcomes for Indigenous communities as well as the over-representation of Indigenous people in the departments statutory services. The key objective of the plan is to reduce the gap in health and well-being between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and the general Victorian population. The ASP identifies three priority areas for action: children and families; youth; and lengthening life. Within these key priority areas, the ASP highlights a range of strategic goals that encompass consultative and integrated processes, planning, the development of partnerships and the role of capacity building. Each DHS Health Region has been mandated to develop their own ASP and establish an Indigenous reference committee to provide guidance and advice on the production of the plan.

3. THE MURRAY SHIRE & ADJOINING DISTRICTS

The NSW Murray Shire sits on the NSW/Victorian border, approximately 800 kilometres from Sydney and 250 kilometres from Melbourne. The Shire is bounded by the municipality of Deniliquin on its northern side and by the rural town of Echuca in the Victorian Shire of Campaspe. Murray has a population of about 6,000 residents with the main centres at Moama and Mathoura accounting for some 4,700 residents. The remaining 1,300 residents live in rural and remote locations throughout the Shire including two small villages at Womboota and Bunnaloo as well as the Aboriginal settlement of Cummeragunja.



Murray Shire is the fastest growing Shire Council in rural NSW and in partnership with Campaspe Shire is host to a thriving tourist industry promoted through 'Echuca–Moama Tourism'. A key facet of Murray's tourist strategy is the promotion of Moama as an inland sea-change destination for families and retirement option for older people. The smaller town of Mathoura is also experiencing growth with increased housing, a steady rise in property values, a growth in tourist and retirement accommodation and new business development targeting the Mathoura Visitor Information and Business Centre.

Much of the population increase has been attributed to Council's highly successful 'Inland Sea-change' promotion. However, industrial promotion has also played an important role. Council's efforts in attracting the \$3.5 million Byford's development to Moama have not only contributed to the increase already, but will continue to do so in the future (www.murray.nsw.gov.au).

The NSW urban centre of Deniliquin is on the Edward River near the edge of the Riverina plain and on the northern border of Murray Shire. Deniliquin is about 34 kilometres north of Mathoura and 74 kilometres from Moama-Echuca and has traditionally been the centre from which government and community services to the Murray Shire have been provided. The Riverina region in southern New South Wales encompasses the middle and lower reaches of the Murrumbidgee River Valley. Major towns include Griffith, Junee, Narrandera, Cootamundra, Young, Hay, Lockhart, Gundagai, Tumut and Wagga Wagga. The estimated combined population of Murray Shire and the LGA of Deniliquin in 2005 is most likely around 15,000 with an urban population of about 11,200. This is due to Murray's consistently high growth rate of between two to three percent (Murray Shire Socio-Economic Profile).

The Shire of Campaspe is the Murray Shire's Victorian LGA neighbour across the border, and approximately 180 kilometres north of Melbourne. Campaspe includes the major urban centres of Echuca (Moama's twin border town), Kyabram and Rochester. About two thirds of Campaspe's 35,000 residents live in these three urban centres, while the remaining one third reside in more rural and smaller townships such as Tongala and Rushworth. The Shire also has a number of very small

rural communities with a population of less than 100 including: Corop (33); Nanneella (50); Toolleen (30); and Torrumbarry (21).

Services and support within the Campaspe Shire are frequently accessed by residents from Murray Shire as well as other neighbouring urban centres and locations in NSW. Community and welfare services in Echuca in reality therefore are a key aspect of the Murray Shire's homelessness service system. Campaspe also has a well established industry and business sector and is home to a number of major food processing company's including Nestle, Heinz Watties, Simplot Australia and Cedenco Australia, among others. Main industries in Campaspe Shire are agriculture, forestry/fishing, manufacturing and retail trade.

POPULATION

In 2001 Murray Shire and the LGA of Deniliquin recorded a total population of just over 11,000 residents, of which 21 percent are children and young people aged less than 15 years and 18 percent are aged 65 years or more. Table 1 details the population in Murray & Campaspe by urban centre and age.

Table 1: Population in Murray/Campaspe by urban centre & age 2001*

URBAN CENTRE	TOTAL POPULATION	AGED <15		AGED >65	
		(N)	(%)	(N)	(%)
MURRAY SHIRE & DENILIQIN (NSW)					
DENILIQIN	7,786	1,765	22.6	1,277	16.4
MOAMA	2,823	537	19	578	20.4
MATHOURA	645	118	18.3	130	20.1
WOMBOOTA	20	-	-	-	-
BUNALOO	20	-	-	-	-
TOTAL	11,294*	2,420	21.4	1,985	17.5
CAMPASPE SHIRE (VIC)					
ECHUCA	10,955	2,353	21.4	1,874	17.1
KYABRAM	5,534	1,262	22.8	1,013	18.3
ROCHESTER	2,624	601	23	522	20
TONGALA	1,179	281	24	231	19.6
RUSHWORTH	1,001	201	20	246	24.5
GUNBOWER	283	47	16.6	51	18
LOCKINGTON	400	100	25	87	21.7
STANHOPE	514	116	22.5	93	18
TOTAL	22,490	4,961	22	4,117	18.3

*Table does not include population numbers in smaller rural settlements within Murray Shire
(Source: ABS Expanded Community Profiles, 2002)

While Moama has the largest population in the Murray Shire, Echuca (on the Victorian side of the border) is the largest urban centre in the area surrounding Murray with almost 11,000 residents. The small town of Lockington in Campaspe has the highest proportion of children and young people aged

less than 15 years (25%) followed closely by Tongala (24%) and Rochester (23%). In Rushworth, with a total population of 1,000 residents, almost a quarter (24.5%) of the population are 65 years and over.

Population in Surrounding Districts

In the areas surrounding the Murray Shire, Bendigo, Shepparton, Griffith and Echuca are the largest population centres. Griffith is the largest urban centre on the NSW side of the border with just over 16,000 residents. In Victoria, Bendigo is the nearest major urban centre to the Murray Shire (excluding Echuca) with a total population of 68,715. There are a number of key community service system links from Bendigo to Echuca-Moama. Table 2 (below) provides an overview of selected urban centres that surround the Murray Shire and their population distribution.

Table 2: Population in selected urban centres, NSW & Vic 2001

URBAN CENTRE	TOTAL POPULATION	AGED <15		AGED >65	
		(N)	(%)	(N)	(%)
NEW SOUTH WALES					
GRIFFITH	16,003	3,799	23.7	2080	13
HAY	2,703	663	24.5	430	15.9
MULWALA	1,677	238	14.2	429	25.6
BALRANALD	1,282	294	23	196	15.3
BARHAM	1,186	203	17.1	372	31.4
BERRIGAN	929	175	18.8	218	23.5
VICTORIA					
BENDIGO	68,715	14,554	21.1	9,960	14.5
SHEPPARTON	35,828	8,406	23.4	4,525	12.6
MARYBOROUGH	7,481	1,442	19.3	1,604	21.4
COBRAM	4,554	991	21.7	884	19.4
YARRAWONGA	4,025	755	18.7	1,132	28.1
NUMURKAH	3,382	702	20.7	773	23
HEATHCOTE	1,555	293	18.8	427	27.4
CHARLTON	1,026	166	16.1	263	25.6

(Source: ABS Expanded Community Profiles, 2002)

The rural townships of Yarrawonga, Heathcote and Charlton have the highest proportion of people aged 65 years and over (28.1%, 27.4% and 25.6% respectively). Although Bendigo is the largest population centre in the area surrounding the Murray Shire, the proportion of older people over 65 years of age living in Bendigo is comparatively lower (14.5%) than with other urban centres in both NSW and Victoria, with the exception of Griffith which records 13 percent of the population aged 65 years and over. Shepparton also has a low proportion of older people however children and young adolescents under 15 years, make up almost one quarter (23.4%) of the population – one of the highest youth population rates in North East Victoria.

YOUNG PEOPLE

Young people aged 12-25 who are homeless make up about one third of the homeless population in Victoria (CTH, 2001). Generally, areas with high populations of young people will also experience higher rates of youth homelessness. Table 3 below, shows the number and proportion, of young people aged 12 -25 years in the key urban centres that make up Murray and Campaspe Shires.

Table 3: Total population & percent of youth (12-25 years) in Murray/Campaspe 2001*

REGIONAL TOWN	TOTAL POPULATION	AGED 12-25		REGIONAL TOWN	TOTAL POPULATION	AGED 12-25	
		(N)	%			(N)	%
MURRAY SHIRE & DENILIQVIN				CAMPASPE SHIRE			
DENILIQVIN	7,786	1,263	16.2	ECHUCA	10,955	1,815	16.5
MOAMA	2,823	457	16.1	KYABRAM	5,534	967	17.4
MATHOURA	645	83	12.8	ROCHESTER	2,624	394	15
WOMBOOTA	20	-	-	TONGALA	1,179	211	17.9
BUNALOO	20	-	-	RUSHWORTH	1,001	156	15.6
				GUNBOWER	283	34	12
				LOCKINGTON	400	49	12.2
				STANHOPE	514	64	12.4
	11,294	1,803	16		22,490	3,690	16.4

*Table does not include population numbers in smaller rural settlements within Murray Shire
(Source: ABS Basic Community Profiles, 2002)

Murray Shire (Moama) and the LGA of Deniliquin have similar proportions of young people aged 12 – 25 years within their populations (16.1% and 16.2% respectively). The smaller township of Mathoura records only 12.8 percent of young people in this age bracket, and just over 20 percent of the population in Mathoura is aged 65 years and over. This appears to reflect the notion of Mathoura as a 'retirement' or sea-change destination for older people. While Moama also recorded a 20 percent proportion of older people in the population, the town is located close to Echuca and therefore recorded a higher proportion of young people in the community.

In Campaspe, Kyabram and Tongala have a slightly higher proportion of young people for their population however this only reflects a small number of young people in comparison with Moama's 16.1 percent. Again, the townships more isolated from larger urban centres tend to have lower numbers of young people. Such is the case for Gunbower, Lockington and Stanhope which all average between 12 percent and 12.4 percent of young people 12 – 25 years. Young people in outlying country towns are particularly vulnerable when they experience homelessness due to the lack of services and supports in the immediate community.

INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES

Population data on the Indigenous settlements at Cumeragunja and Moonahcullah are not available and therefore the 2001 Census figures for the Murray Shire significantly under-count the number of Indigenous people within the Shire. With this caveat in mind, the 2001 Census shows that the Shire of Campaspe has a higher official recorded proportion of Indigenous people (1.95%) compared with the Murray Shire (0.02%). However, Moama and Deniliquin both have an above average proportion of Indigenous people in their population (3.6% and 2.6% respectively). Table 4 (below) provides ABS Census data on Indigenous populations in Murray and Campaspe Shires from the 2001 Census.

Table 4: Indigenous population in Murray & Campaspe Shires, 2001*

URBAN CENTRE	TOTAL POPULATION	INDIGENOUS	
		(N)	(%)
MURRAY SHIRE & DENILIQIN (NSW)			
DENILIQIN	7,786	205	2.6
MOAMA	2,823	102	3.6
MATHOURA	645	7	1.1
WOMBOOTA	20	-	-
BUNALOO	20	-	-
TOTAL	11,294	307	0.02
CAMPASPE SHIRE (VIC)			
ECHUCA	10,955	314	2.9
KYABRAM	5,534	80	1.4
ROCHESTER	2,624	15	0.5
TONGALA	1,179	3	0.2
RUSHWORTH	1,001	9	0.9
GUNBOWER	283	3	1
LOCKINGTON	400	12	3
STANHOPE	514	3	0.6
TOTAL	22,490	439	1.95

*There are no available population figures for the Indigenous settlements of Cumeragunja or Moonahcullah and there are no available population figures for Womboota or Bunaloo including Indigenous population data (Source: ABS Expanded Community Profiles, 2002)

The average proportion of Indigenous people within urban centres is about one to two percent. It is estimated that the proportion of the Indigenous population in the Murray Shire is most likely around two to three percent if Cumeragunja and Moonahcullah are included.

The twin border towns of Echuca and Moama have an above average Indigenous population (2.9% and 3.6% respectively) which is at least partly due to the Indigenous settlement of Cumeragunja situated on the Victorian/NSW border, just west of Moama. Cumeragunja is an important land mark in the history of the Murray region and forms part of the traditional lands of the Yorta Yorta people. It was first established in 1881 by Indigenous people as a thriving farmland and was later taken over by

the NSW Aborigines Protection Board as part of Australia's Assimilation policy. It is also the site of the 1939 'Cummeragunja Walk-off' – the first-ever mass protest of Aboriginal people in Australia (ABC Mission Voices, 2005). In 1983 the NSW Government granted 1,200 acres of the former Cummeragunja Reserve to the Yorta Yorta Land Council. Many Indigenous communities live along both sides of the Murray River and have significant cultural links within adjacent areas in NSW and Victoria. As can be seen by table 5 (below), a large proportion of the Indigenous population are found in NSW rural centres.

Table 5: Indigenous population in selected urban centres, 2001*

URBAN CENTRE	TOTAL POPULATION	INDIGENOUS	
		(N)	(%)
NEW SOUTH WALES			
GRIFFITH	16,003	712	4.5
HAY	2,703	116	4.3
MULWALA	1,677	13	0.8
BALRANALD	1,282	114	8.9
BARHAM	1,186	13	1.1
BERRIGAN	929	13	1.4
VICTORIA			
BENDIGO	68,715	690	1
SHEPPARTON	35,828	1,298	3.6
MARYBOROUGH	7,481	64	0.8
COBRAM	4,554	22	0.4
YARRAWONGA	4,025	18	0.4
NUMURKAH	3,382	36	1
HEATHCOTE	1,555	27	1.7
CHARLTON	1,026	0	0

*There are no available population figures for the Indigenous settlements of Cummeragunja or Moonahcullah (Source: ABS Expanded Community Profiles, 2002)

In NSW, Balranald, Griffith and Hay have the highest proportion of Indigenous people in and around the Murray Shire (8.9%, 4.5% and 4.3% respectively). In Victoria, Shepparton and Echuca have the largest proportion of Indigenous people (3.6% and 2.9% respectively). Interestingly, these five urban centres are among those that also have the highest proportion of children and young people as well as the lowest percentile proportion of people aged 65 years and over. It is possible that these profiles are in part due to the number of Indigenous people in these urban centres. Indigenous communities are generally characterised by a high proportion of young people and low proportion of older persons in their populations. Older Indigenous people generally have poorer health and therefore lower life expectancy than their Anglo-Australian counterparts due to poverty, lack of basic infrastructure services such as electricity and water, lack of access and equity to health services as well as higher rates of homelessness, substance use and other forms of disadvantage.

HOUSING AFFORDABILITY

The housing boom that has dominated the private sector housing market over the past 4 – 6 years has had an impact on the private rental market in regional and rural areas across Australia. For example, property prices in regional and rural Victoria have outpaced property prices in Melbourne since 2001 (REIV 2004). In 2004, house prices in the larger, regional cities of Victoria continued to rise at faster rates than that of Melbourne. Similarly, in some NSW regional and rural communities, the percentage increase in median house price over the year to the June quarter (2004) was more than twice the increase in Sydney's median house price (Kelly R 2004).

One in five Australians or almost 4 million people now lives on the coast outside of a capital city. This figure is growing at a rate of 60,000 per year. The ABS figures show a larger than average proportion of people in these areas is aged over 65 years (Kelly R, REI NSW, 2004).

In turn, this has affected the level and percentage of affordable housing in the private rental market which is available to low income earners or those on statutory incomes (Centrelink). Consistently workers in Murray and Campaspe informed the hearings about problems of access to the private rental market for their homeless clients due to cost and history:

There are some people who are moving out into other more remote areas, because housing is cheaper, but they've got no transport to get in to actually access the services that they need. I grew up here in a really small town when it was about 6,000 people...but in the last ten years, it's changed. Obviously with the increasing rent, it's one of the least affordable areas. It's sort of up there with the southern end.

Another informant noted that country communities often have long memories:

But, the other thing up here in the country, of course, is that you're in a town of 10,000 people so Billy Smith, who fifteen years ago went and rented a place through an estate agent in Echuca, became a terrible tenant and trashed the joint and did something awful, and fifteen years later, he comes back to town, and he wants to rent a place, and there's the same estate agent doing the same job and he says, "I remember you, don't I?" Once people burn bridges in small rural areas, it's very difficult for them to gain the trust back.

Private Rental

Single bedroom flats or bed-sitter apartments are in demand by single people but this is the tenure where there is generally the lowest supply. Young people in particular, seem to have difficulty gaining access to the private rental market. The cost of rental in the private market is evidently a major problem when considering the issue of affordable housing. Table 6 and 7 (below) charts the median weekly rental cost for private rental flats and houses in the LGA of Campaspe and SSD of Central Murray.

Table 6: Median weekly rents, Campaspe Shire, September 2002 & June 2004

YEAR	1 B/R FLAT		2 B/R FLAT		2 B/R HOUSE		3 B/R HOUSE	
	No	\$	No	\$	No	\$	No	\$
2002	17	90	71	150	19	150	93	175
2004	16	90	48	150	-	-	64	185

(Source: Office of Housing Rental Report Compendium: September Quarter 2002–June Quarter 2004)

As can be seen, the median cost of rent in Campaspe has only marginally increased over the two years from 2002 to 2004. However the number of stock in each category has decreased. In the case of two bedroom houses, the June 2004 quarter recorded no available properties.

In the Statistical Sub-Division of Central Murray, private rental costs average between \$25 and \$35 less than that in Victoria's Campaspe Shire. However, annual increases in median rents within NSW rural areas were reported as significant:

Amongst Rural Statistical Sub-Divisions (SSD), most SSDs recorded annual increases in median rent for two bedroom dwellings ranged from two percent to 31 percent. For three bedroom dwellings annual increases were generally in the range two percent to 15 percent (NSW DoH, Rental Report 2004).

The 2001 ABS Census counted a total of 367 private rental properties (private landlord or real estate agent) in the LGA of Murray Shire. Of these 13 percent (48) were priced below \$100 per week; 70 percent (258) were between \$100 and \$200; 11 percent (40) were between \$200 and \$300 and 2.5 percent (9) were \$400 or more. Table 7 (below) shows the weekly median rents for private rental properties in the SSD of Central Murray for the June 2002 and June 2005 quarter.

Table 7: Median weekly rents, Central Murray SSD June 2002 & June 2005

YEAR	FLAT/APARTMENT		HOUSE			ALL DWELLINGS	
	1BR	2BR	2BR	3BR	4BR +	2BR	3BR
2002	\$80	\$108	\$115	\$140	\$150	\$115	\$140
2005	\$95	\$115	\$120	\$160	\$160	\$120	\$160

(Source: NSW Department of Housing, Rental Report 2002 & 2005)

Rent prices for one bedroom flats/apartments in Central Murray rose by about \$15 per week and for 2 bedroom flats, by \$7 per week in the three years from 2002 to 2003. The greatest increase in rent over this period was for 3 bedroom properties and 4 or more bedroom houses which rose by \$10 to \$20 per week.

Affordable Housing

While the cost of private rental has increased, the availability of private rental stock is also a major issue in country areas. For example, vacancy rates on private rental properties in NSW have recently fallen from 3.6 percent over the last five years to 2.5 percent in early 2005 (REI NSW, 2005). This rate

now falls below the accepted 'balanced' benchmark of between three to four percent and is expected to fall further in 2006.

The private residential rental market provides housing for more than half a million NSW residents...Speculative investors left the market two years ago and few long-term investors have bought since the introduction of new State Government taxes designed to deter investment in property. Fewer investors mean fewer properties for rent and therefore lower vacancy rates and higher rents (Kelly, REI NSW, 2004)

The overall vacancy rate for private rental properties in rural and regional Victoria has been in decline since 2003, falling to 1.7 percent in the December 2004 quarter (REIV, 2005). This decline reflects a strong demand for rental properties in country regions as well as a decrease in the level of new rental stock entering the market, primarily due to a weaker demand by investors.

The level of affordable housing supply in the private rental market is generally assessed as the number of properties where rent falls within 30 percent of income levels (including rent assistance) for low income households and which will not be deemed to be overcrowded. Rental thresholds are therefore taken from the income of the number of occupants for that bedroom type (OoH, 2005). For example, one-bedroom properties are deemed to be affordable if the weekly rental falls under 30 percent of a single person on Newstart allowance. For two bedroom properties the income threshold is based on a single parent pensioner with one child, three bedroom properties – a couple on Newstart with two children and four bedroom properties are based on a couple on Newstart with three children. Table 8 (below) details the percentage of affordable housing in the Campaspe LGA from one bedroom dwellings through to four or more bedroom houses for 2002 and 2004.

Table 8: LGA rental affordability in Campaspe Shire, September 2002 & June 2004

YEAR	1 B/R		2 B/R		3 B/R		4 + B/R		TOTAL	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
2002	15	83%	53	58%	76	78%	5	42%	149	68%
2004	5	15%	33	31%	45	20%	5	10%	88	21%

(Source: Office of Housing (2004) 'Rental Report Compendium: September Quarter 2002–June Quarter 2004')

In 2002 the total of all affordable housing in Campaspe was 68 percent. Less than two years later, this figure had fallen to 21 percent. In other words only 21 percent of all properties in the private rental market in Campaspe were deemed to be affordable for low income earners. For comparison, the same trend is also evident in most of Campaspe's neighbouring LGAs - Shepparton, Bendigo, Moira, Strathbogje and Loddon. For example, in Loddon Shire affordable housing in 2002 was 100 percent, while in 2004 it had dropped to 39 percent.

Table 9: Rental affordability in Loddon Shire September 2002 & June 2004

YEAR	1 B/R		2 B/R		3 B/R		4 + B/R		TOTAL	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
2002	3	100%	1	100%	3	100%	3	100%	10	100%
2004	17	59%	100	35%	105	43%	12	32%	234	39%

(Source: Office of Housing (2004) 'Rental Report Compendium: September Quarter 2002–June Quarter 2004')

A drop in affordable housing does not necessarily mean that there has been a reduction in the number of dwellings available for rent. In fact, the opposite is more often true. Loddon Shire is a case in point. Table 9 (above) shows the number of rental properties in Loddon increased in all categories (i.e. 1, 2, 3 and 4 + bedrooms) between 2002 and 2004. However, because the number of properties that were deemed affordable had significantly decreased this indicates that most of the housing development in Loddon during 2002 and 2004 was at the higher end of the market.

Table 10: Rental affordability by percent & LGA (2004) with 2002 totals

LGA	1 B/R (%)	2 B/R (%)	3 B/R (%)	4 + B/R (%)	TOTAL (2004)	(2002)
SHEPPARTON	11	40	27	39	32%	69%
MOIRA	2	1	5	22	3%	94%
STRATHBOGIE	0	0	2	0	1%	29%
GANNAWARRA	100	98	97	89	97%	98%
BENDIGO	13	19	23	25	21%	74%

N.B. '%' indicates percent of affordable stock for that bedroom type in private rental market.

(Source: Office of Housing (2004) 'Rental Report Compendium: September Quarter 2002–June Quarter 2004')

For comparison rates, table 10 (above) draws on Victoria's affordable housing data for Campaspe's neighbouring LGAs. The LGA of Gannawarra Shire located on the Murray River toward Mildura is the only exception to the downward trend experienced by the other LGAs, with vacancy rates falling only one percent in the two years 2002-2004.

However, housing affordability in rural and regional areas remains higher than in metropolitan areas despite the difficulties already mentioned. In rural and regional Victoria housing affordability was 72 percent in 2004, while Metropolitan Melbourne recorded 23 percent of housing as affordable. In NSW, the same is also true with Sydney's vacancy rates falling to below benchmark levels for the first time in five years. This is one factor that explains the migration patterns of city dwellers (particularly young families and retiree's) to in land regional and rural locations and is sometimes referred to as the 'average Australian's tree-change'.

UNEMPLOYMENT

The ongoing "casualisation" of the labour force, complicated by the large numbers of hidden long-term unemployed, underemployed and "de-motivated" jobseekers, has left the labour market at a critical juncture. As Australia's full-time employees spend longer hours at work, the ranks of Australia's part-time "working" nation continue to grow...Rural Victoria is one of the areas that has been hardest hit by this trend. Despite Victoria's surpluses and private sector prosperity, there are fewer jobs in Victoria's towns and rural areas now than in 1990. (Martyn, 2005)

Housing demand is also affected by income and employment levels and these in turn affect the level of demand for housing in different tenures. Income and employment affect housing demand by influencing the affordability of housing in the community. Low incomes and high levels of unemployment can make housing costs high for some households, who may then have difficulty maintaining private rental and/or home ownership.

In March 2005 Australia's unemployment rate was steady at just on five percent. According to ABS data, while full time employment has generally increased and part-time employment has decreased over the 2004-05 period, the number of persons seeking part-time work has steadily increased. In short, more people are looking for fewer part-time jobs and more people in part-time employment are seeking further work.

The effect of the explosion in part-time employment is that a huge number of Australians are now under-employed...The number of underemployed persons has increased more than threefold during the past two decades, with a corresponding increase in the official underemployment rate from 2.6 percent in 1979 to 6.2 percent in 2003. Meanwhile, full-time employees are working longer hours than ever before (Martyn, 2005).

Similar to Australia overall, the unemployment rate for Victoria and NSW has continued to decrease during 2002-03 following higher levels for most of the 1990s. After reaching a peak of around 13 percent in 1994 unemployment has declined during 2003-04 to just below six percent. However, regional unemployment rates for youth and Indigenous people remain higher than that of the major cities.

Table 11: Unemployment rates, Campaspe & Murray Shires, 2001*

LGA	TOTAL LABOUR FORCE (N)	TOTAL U/EMPLOYED (N)	UNEMPLOYMENT RATE (%)	YOUTH UNEMPLOYMENT RATE* (%)
CAMPASPE SHIRE	15,823	851	5.3	11.3
MURRAY SHIRE	2,721	147	5.4	9.5

*Youth unemployed rate = total youth labour force (2,409 Camp; 399 Murray) by # unemployed youth (272 Camp; 38 Murray)
(Source: ABS Basic Community Profiles 2002)

In 2001, both Campaspe and Murray Shires had similar rates of unemployment – between five and six percent of the total labour force. For young people aged less than 25 years, the unemployment rate increases to 11.3 percent and 9.5 percent respectively.

Indigenous unemployment remains a critical issue for many rural and regional communities. Table 12 (below) provides figures from the 2001 Census on Indigenous unemployment and Indigenous youth unemployment in both Campaspe and Murray Shires.

Table 12: Indigenous unemployment rates, Campaspe & Murray Shires, 2001

LGA	TOTAL INDIGENOUS LABOUR FORCE (N)	TOTAL INDIGENOUS U/EMPLOYED (N)	INDIGENOUS UNEMPLOYMENT RATE (%)	INDIGENOUS YOUTH UNEMPLOYMENT RATE* (%)
CAMPASPE SHIRE	164	40	24.4	45
MURRAY SHIRE	50	9	18	16.6

(Source: ABS Indigenous Profiles 2002)

SUMMARY

Murray Shire is the fastest growing Shire Council in rural NSW. Homelessness services as well as other support services within Murray's Victorian border Neighbour of Campaspe Shire are frequently accessed by residents from Murray Shire as well as other neighbouring rural centres and locations in NSW.

Deniliquin is another important neighbour to the Murray Shire and is located about 34 kilometres north of Mathoura and 74 kilometres from Moama-Echuca. Deniliquin has traditionally been the centre from which government and community services to the Murray Shire have been provided.

The housing boom that has dominated the private sector housing market over the past 4 – 6 years has had an important impact on the private rental market in regional and rural areas across Australia. For example, in 2004 house prices in the larger, regional centres of Victoria continued to rise at faster rates than that of Melbourne. Similarly, in some NSW regional and rural communities the percentage increase in median house price over the year to the June quarter (2004) was more than twice the increase in Sydney's median house price (Kelly R 2004).

These trends also affect the median price of rent as well as the vacancy rates in the private rental market. It was noted in this chapter that vacancy rates not only reflect a higher cost of rent, but also the decrease in the number of affordable housing properties for rent in the private market. The lack of affordable houses in an area along with vacancy rates that fall below the three to four percent mark tend to indicate a strong demand for rental properties in country regions as well as a decrease in the level of new rental stock entering the market, primarily due to a weaker demand by investors.

4. RURAL HOMELESSNESS IN MURRAY

OVERVIEW

...the provision of homeless services across rural and regional Victoria is often constrained by the limited capacity of agencies, which are required to service extensive geographic areas with limited community infrastructure, limited resources and lack of specialized responses. The provision of effective and responsive homeless services to localized communities is a particular challenge for the VHS (VHS Working Report, 2001).

While people experiencing chronic homelessness are often most visible when sleeping rough and through their recurrent use of SAAP services, there are many people of the homeless population who are less easily identified. Of the 99,900 people identified as homeless in the 2001 Census, only 14,200 were 'sleeping rough' at the time of the Census. Families and individuals staying with friends and relatives, in caravan parks, in substandard accommodation, pickers huts, boarding houses and backpacker hostels are among some of those defined as the 'hidden homeless', and who also make up a significant proportion of homeless people in rural and regional areas (VHS Consultation Paper, 2002).

Also, homelessness can be conceptualised as a career process that has a beginning and a succession of stages to the point where the person becomes chronically homeless. People are becoming homeless and leaving homelessness, while at the same time many people who are homeless are highly transient, frequently moving from place to place.

Indigenous people are an important group of the 'hidden homeless' population and current data clearly indicates they are over-represented in SAAP services, compared with the total Indigenous population counts (FaCS, 2001). For example, while only two percent of the Australian population identified as Indigenous at the 2001 Census, a total of nine percent of all homeless people were Indigenous. In addition, some 19 percent of those classified as chronically homeless (i.e. 'sleeping rough') were also Indigenous (VIHS, 2001). In Victoria, the VIHS (2001) stated that approximately 1,100 Indigenous people access SAAP services each year. This is compared to a total Victorian client base of about 25,000 people and accounts for almost twice the national average rate.

HOMELESSNESS IN THE MURRAY AND GOULBURN

The Shires of Murray (NSW) and Campaspe (Vic) sit within a regional context of country Australia. The 'Counting the Homeless 2001' Victorian and NSW state reports (Chamberlain & MacKenzie, 2004) provide the most accurate homelessness population figures. The following figures have been taken from these reports however, for a more detailed explanation please see www.countingthehomeless.com.au for downloadable versions of all state reports.

The rates of homelessness in Victoria, NSW and the ACT are all similar – between 40-50 homeless people per 10,000 of the population. In Victoria, there were 20,305 homeless people in 2001 and a rate of 44 per 10,000, while in NSW there were 26,676 homeless with a rate of 42 per 10,000.

Table 13: Homeless people in different sectors of the population by State/Territory 2001

POPULATION SECTOR	NSW (N=26,676)	Vic (N=20,305)	SA (N=7,586)	Tas (N=2,415)	ACT (N=1,229)
	%	%	%	%	%
BOARDING HOUSE	29	26	19	11	5
SAAP SERVICE	15	25	15	13	24
FRIENDS	45	40	54	66	65
IMPROVISED DWELLING	11	9	12	10	6
TOTAL	100	100	100	100	100

(Source: Counting the Homeless 2001, Australia 2004)

Homeless people need other services besides SAAP, but SAAP remains a centre-piece in the Australian response to homelessness. While homeless people are typically transient, travelling to reach services on a day by day basis is a costly exercise for people on such low incomes.

In NSW, there are six statistical divisions covering inland regional and rural NSW. Of these, the Murray statistical division includes Upper and Central Murray as well as the Murray-Darling. In Victoria, there are four statistical divisions which segment the Northern country region of the state. Of particular relevance to this project are the Goulburn and North Goulburn divisions which encompass Shepparton as the major urban centre as well as Echuca, Kyabram and Rochester. Tables 14 and 15 provide current statistics from the Counting the Homeless 2001 (2004) state reports for NSW and Victoria, for Murray and Goulburn statistical division.

Table 14: Murray Statistical Division – number and rate of homelessness (NSW) 2001

	MURRAY STATISTICAL DIVISION		
	UPPER	CENTRAL	MURRAY-DARLING
NUMBER	42	113	86
RATE PER 10,000	21	38	90
CARAVAN	30	83	52
TOTAL	72	196	138
RATE PER 10,000	37	65	145

(Source: Counting the Homeless 2001 NSW State Report, 2004)

Central Murray with a total population of 30,157 includes the Murray Shire (5,920) and Deniliquin (8,037) or about half the total. There are a total of thirteen sub-divisions in inland regional NSW with populations from approximately 30,000 to 65,000 people. Upper Murray and Murray-Darling recorded between 21 - 90 homeless people per 10,000 in the 2001 Census, the rate of homelessness in Central Murray was 38 per 10,000 or 65 per 10,000 if the marginal residents of the caravan parks are

included. Central Murray had the highest number of marginal residents of caravan parks (83) in the Murray statistical division.

Table 15: Goulburn Sub-division – segments of the homeless population (Vic) 2001

	GOULBURN RURAL SUB-DIVISION		
	NORTH	SOUTH	SOUTH-WEST
BOARDING HOUSE	76	52	25
THM/ SAAP	19	11	42
FRIENDS	157	71	66
IMPROVISED DWELLING	102	63	103
TOTAL	354	197	236

(Source: *Counting the Homeless 2001 Vic. State Report, 2004*)

In Northern Victoria there are nine rural subdivisions, of which North Goulburn recording the highest number of homeless people (354) with a homeless rate of 48 per 10,000 of the population. One factor worth noting is the total number of marginal residents of caravan parks in Victoria (3,400) - one-third are located in Northern Victoria. Of the five rural sub-divisions, Goulburn North recorded the third highest rate of marginal caravan park residents (159), following Shepparton (187) and Mildura (240). In addition, there were 141 Indigenous people who were marginal residents of caravan parks, including 74 in Northern Victoria. North Goulburn includes Campaspe Shire and the border city of Echuca. The population of Campaspe is 35,149 or approximately half of the total population of North Goulburn (73,888).

Even though the figure of 113 homeless in Murray relates to an area greater than Murray Shire, it can reasonably be assumed for the purpose of this project that the number of homeless in Murray Shire and Deniliquin is about 100 (i.e. most of the homeless are probably in this slightly smaller geographical area or would seek services there in the first instance). On the Victorian side, there were 354 homeless in North Goulburn excluding Shepparton City. Campaspe contains only 35,149 of the 73888 people in North Goulburn or approximately half. A reasonable assumption is that at least half of the homeless or 177 homeless people would be in Campaspe Shire and look to Echuca for services and support. Many of the homeless in North Goulburn will go to Shepparton for services. An estimate of the homeless population for Murray Shire and surrounding districts defined as above is about 300 – 28 percent sleeping rough or living in improvised dwellings, 48 percent living with friends and relatives, 19 percent in boarding houses and five percent in SAAP accommodation.

In terms of the Murray Shire and surrounding districts, it is clear that the homeless population within the scope of this project is between two to three times higher on the Victorian side. The reality for homeless people who are highly mobile is that they can move about to seek various services. This is why any examination of the service response to homelessness in Murray Shire needs to take account of the wider regional context to pay attention to the reality of mobility. The distribution of resources and funding allocations in regional and rural areas is one key indicator in determining the capacity of the service system to function effectively in meeting the needs of homeless people.

SLEEPING ROUGH, CAMPING OR IMPROVISED DWELLINGS

Rural and regional areas experience significantly higher rates of homeless people sleeping 'by the river', 'under the bridge', in cars or in improvised dwellings. The ABS count of homelessness in 2001 cannot disaggregate between someone sleeping rough or camping out with no other usual address and someone living permanently or semi-permanently in an improvised dwelling. From the point of view of doing a Census count of homeless people this is not a major issue but from a practice standpoint the difference between someone moving around without conventional shelter and someone living in improvised shelter may be important and requires somewhat different responses. The extent of primary homelessness is a feature of homelessness in country areas. Local services have been known to purchase tents, blankets, sleeping bags etc., in addition to advising homeless people where 'the best spots along the river are'. Because the affordability of housing has decreased and there are few crisis beds available in most country areas, homeless people are increasingly less likely to be able to find somewhere to stay, outside of their social network of extended family and friends (Council to Homeless Persons 2002).

The claim about a higher extent of homeless people sleeping out can be examined using the available statistical data for North Goulburn (Victoria), the SSD surrounding Echuca and Central Murray (NSW), and the SSD which includes both Moama and Deniliquin (NSW).

Table 16: Proportion of homeless population, Nth Goulburn, Metro Melbourne & Vic. 2001

ACCOMMODATION SITUATION	METROPOLITAN MELBOURNE (N=14072)	NORTH GOULBURN (N=354)	VICTORIA (N=20305)
	%	%	%
BOARDING HOUSE	30	21	26
SAAP/THM	27	5	15
STAYING WITH FRIENDS OR RELATIVES	38	44	45
SLEEPING ROUGH OR IN IMPROVISED DWELLING.	5	30	11
TOTAL	100	100	100

(Source: *Counting the Homeless 2001 Vic. State Report, 2004*)

In Victoria, some 30 percent of the homeless in North Goulburn were identified as experiencing primary homelessness at the time of the 2001 ABS Census (Table 16, above). In NSW the same pattern is evident with nearly one quarter of homeless people in Central Murray in the situation of 'primary homelessness' – sleeping rough, camping out with no other usual address or living in an improvised dwelling (Table 17, below). In the cities, homeless people in these circumstances are mostly likely sleeping rough or squatting in an empty building, not camping out or in an improvised dwelling but in rural areas it is generally the other way around.

Table 17: Proportion of homeless population, Central Murray, Metro Sydney & NSW

ACCOMMODATION SITUATION	METROPOLITAN SYDNEY (N=15,456)	CENTRAL MURRAY (N=113)	NEW SOUTH WALES (N= 26,676)
	%	%	%
BOARDING HOUSE	39	12	29
SAAP ACCOMMODATION	15	15	15
STAYING WITH FRIENDS OR RELATIVES	40	59	45
SLEEPING ROUGH OR IN IMPROVISED DWELLING.	6	24	11
TOTAL	100	100	100

(Source: Counting the Homeless 2001 NSW State Report, 2004)

The research team visited one group of improvised dwellings/caravans close to Echuca/Moama and spoke with the residents. The dwellings have been on private land for many years and there is a semi-stable population of men living there, but with some slow turnover over the years. Although sometimes referred to as a caravan park, the settlement much more closely resembles an informal settlement of improvised dwellings. However, the dwellings are old caravans with a 'lean-to' attached. The owner refers to residents as 'my friends' and she does not charge them – 'we work it out between ourselves'.

The residents have all the characteristics of older homeless men, a group which in the past might have been somewhat derisively referred to as on 'skid row'. One man related how his physical disabilities had happened:

I'll give you a classic example. I ended up wrecking my kneecaps, splitting it in two back in 1970, right, and Jeff Kennett came with some Work cover and created so much trouble, right, with Work cover. I received a lump payment sum of \$20,000. They put me out to pasture so to speak. Right now as it stands, if I go - like, I'm used to working with my hands, hands-on positions. As it stands, I'd have to go for a medical before I'd go for another job, right, and no employer would see fit to employ me the way my right hand is, so therefore the government is creating that, no one else.

He demonstrated how the damage had left him with an impaired hand. His index finger cannot bend and his hand shows the scars of a major laceration. The laughter amongst the whole group during this exchange was because of the deformity appeared to be a defiant and extremely rude gesture. In order to work this man would be required to take a physical and at his own expense. Probably every man in this riverbank settlement had suffered some kind of disability. One man had suffered a mental breakdown. Another was separated from his former wife and children, down and out and probably suffering depression. At one stage, we were told that maybe two of the ten could work but then that was amended to accept that the two most able were probably not fit to last two weeks in a normal job. Apart from the men living in the settlement, there was another man living down on the

river somewhere – ‘He can’t stand people near him ... He’s down there. I never see him, never see him’.

Another anecdote referred to a long-time resident who had passed away:

But he was an old local from here, and there’s a young child who was actually with the family. But the drink got ‘im and he just went downhill and he had his own places over the years, but just through being poorly treated, eventually ended up with nothing, and even though he owned a house he got so beaten about, he just couldn’t be put into it, and no one would care for him.

This case illustrates a number of points about what is happening here and what kinds of men join such a settlement. This man was not an itinerant from somewhere else, but a local man probably suffering from acute alcoholism, whose family relationships had deteriorated and who needed care. An urban single men’s service would in all likelihood provide accommodation for similar individuals.

A settlement such as this acts as a magnet for others simply because it is there and will accept men in similar circumstances to the residents or perhaps because of problems of access to appropriate services:

In the middle of winter, I had to bring an old chap who was injured across, and we had to slide them into Mrs. T’s back-shed there, put a mattress on the floor because he was meant to be heading off to a spot in Melbourne from Deniliquin and he got to Echuca but his mind went sort of fuzzy and he got off the bus here, instead of getting off the bus in Melbourne, and he was so bad, he couldn’t stand up, and it wasn’t alcohol. He had been an alcoholic, but he was just so ill and we had nowhere for him to go until we could get him on the bus the next day and I rang Mrs. T up and said have you got somewhere? It was in the middle of winter, stormy, cold.

But this chap, because he’d been living here for a while and caused such problems, and no one else would have him and he was just really so terribly far gone so we stacked him up here in the shed of a night and come and picked him up the next morning and back on the bus and off to the hospital in Melbourne. But, I’ve got photos of him lying unconscious under the sand shelter here. The Shire of Campaspe have said well, we’ve got this problem, what can we do about it? ... and this poor old dear ... I haven’t seen him for a long time.

This man’s health was very poor and the support systems in Campaspe apparently could not provide for him. He moved on after a short stay but he had been a resident on a number of occasions previously.

One resident had been there for seven years, another for three years, while a third person was a resident of two years standing. The most recent had been there for only nine months – ‘he’s not been here long – I’ve got to educate him’. Over the years there has been a turnover of residents although it was not clear the extent of this turnover.

A number of claims have circulated in the community about deaths on this site. There has been a suggestion that at least one murder has happened. These claims probably circulate a kind of urban myth in the local gossip. Many have heard about these rumours but no-one knows the source. Some people may be inclined to believe such claims despite the lack of credible evidence. We could find no evidence of deaths that might have involved foul play but there was a farm accident on the property some years ago. There was mention of another death of one of the residents but this was due to his ill-health and many of the men passing through this settlement have health issues. They continue to consume alcohol by choice and in large quantities that clearly contributes to their ill-health.

On this particular site, the residents have formed a small self-support community – *'freedom reigns ... you basically can do anything you like and all of us, we sit around a camp-fire and get on to it and it'll go all night'*. They pool their funds to pay the various charges for electricity and other rates and charges that the owner has to pay. The owner of the site lives with the other residents.

Improvised dwellings could be tin sheds or old ruined dwellings no longer meeting council standards for habitation or more commonly old caravans with tarpaulins or shelters attached. No survey was attempted of improvised dwellings throughout the shire, but according to the ABS statistics there were 28 individuals in Central Hume and 102 in North Goulburn under primary homelessness. The site visited during the consultations would have accounted for 9-10 of the 28 individuals in Central Murray. The site may have been unusually large and it is likely that there are improvised dwellings scattered on rural properties through the region that are not close to a main centre and no-where near as visible as the site visited.

In metropolitan Melbourne or Sydney, 'sleeping rough' is highly visible, but only five to six percent of the homeless will be in this situation at any one time. By comparison, in the rural areas around Murray Shire between 24-30 percent of the homeless will be sleeping out, camping or in some form of improvised dwelling. Local workers routinely report instances of people in these circumstances and the ABS homelessness statistics corroborate these reports.

CARAVAN PARKS OR BOARDING HOUSES

Since the 1960s and 1970s, living in a single room in boarding houses without tenure and self-contained facilities has been defined as a situation of homelessness according to the research of the time and the cultural definition used in Australia today. Boarding houses may be large establishments but more and more they seem to be converted houses. During the 2001 Census, ABS collectors found it difficult sometimes to identify a boarding house as distinct from a private dwelling. Caravan parks with permanent residents are common in rural areas but not in metropolitan centres. Marginal residents in caravan parks are defined as individuals or family groups where no-one is employed and the assumption is that such people are not there by choice but because of necessity. Table 18 compares boarding house residents with the marginal residents of caravan parks.

Table 18: Distribution of boarding house & marginal residents of caravan parks, Aust. 2001

AREA	BOARDING HOUSE (N=22,877)	CARAVAN (N=22868)
CAPITAL CITY	67%	22%
REGIONAL/REMOTE LOCATION	33%	78%
TOTAL	100%	100%

(Source: Counting the Homeless 2001 Australia 2004)

In general terms, caravan parks are used more by homeless people in the country than in the capital cities where boarding houses and cheap hotels are more common. In an important sense, the marginal residents of caravan parks are the boarding house residents of rural Australia. Across Australia in 2001, there were some 22,868 marginal residents of caravan parks defined as unemployed persons or family groups where no-one in the family was employed, and who stated that the caravan park was their usual address. Some caravan parks mainly cater for tourists and do not take permanent residents, while others accept permanent residents as well as travellers/tourists. Some low-end parks take only permanent or semi-permanent residents. The use of caravan parks in regional towns and rural locations is one aspect that defines the nature of rural homelessness. Also, caravan parks are commonly used for emergency accommodation in rural areas and this point is discussed in more detail later under the theme of crisis accommodation. However, under the strict ABS definition used with the 2001 Census data, caravan park residents as opposed to people living in makeshift caravans are not counted as homeless.

Of specific relevance to this project is the ad-hoc provision of emergency accommodation for homeless people, particularly within caravan parks and other locations within the Shire, that may not be appropriate or suitable, particularly for some target group populations (i.e. women escaping domestic violence, women/men with accompanying children). The issue of caravan parks as pseudo crisis accommodation was highlighted in the report of 'Counting the Homeless 2001' (Chamberlain & MacKenzie, 2003). The homelessness census report identified 22,868 marginal residents of caravan parks in 14,770 dwellings across Australia in 2001. In NSW, the census counted 6,900 marginal caravan park residents, the second highest in the country following Queensland which had approximately 8,000 residents within this target group. The authors noted:

Some people were in caravan parks that are used for emergency accommodation in regional centres and country towns. SAAP workers sometimes send homeless people to caravan parks if there is no SAAP accommodation available...there is a sense in which caravans are used as an alternative to boarding houses outside of the capital cities (Chamberlain & MacKenzie, 2003)

Table 19 shows the number of homeless and the number of marginal residents of caravan parks in metropolitan Melbourne, Northern Victoria and the North Goulburn statistical sub-division.

Table 19: No. homeless people & marginal residents of caravan parks, Vic. 2001

	MELBOURNE	NORTHERN VIC	NORTH GOULBURN	VICTORIA
# OF HOMELESS	14,072	2,945	354	20,305
RATE PER 10,000	42	56	48	44
CARAVAN PARKS	1,377	1,167	159	3,408
TOTAL	15,449	4,112	513	23,713
ADJUSTED RATE PER 10,000	46	78	69	51

(Source: *Counting the Homeless 2001 Vic. State Report, 2004*)

An adjusted rate of homelessness that includes marginal residents of caravan parks makes little difference in Melbourne but significantly increases the rate of homelessness in rural areas, particularly in Northern Victoria. The marginal residents of caravan parks make up nine percent of the homeless population in Melbourne, but 28 percent in Northern Victoria and 31 percent in North Goulburn. The impact of this group in Northern Victoria contributes to an overall rate of homelessness of 78 per 10,000, significantly higher than other regional areas in Victoria. In North Goulburn, the inclusion of caravan park residents reveals a homeless rate of 69 per 10,000 compared to 48 per 10,000 of the population.

Table 20: No. homeless people & marginal residents of caravan parks, NSW 2001

	SYDNEY	MURRAY INCL ALBURY	CENTRAL MURRAY	NEW SOUTH WALES
# OF HOMELESS	15,456	367	241	26,676
RATE PER 10,000	39	34	41	42
CARAVAN	1,541	246	135	6881
TOTAL	16,997	613	376	33557
Adjusted Rate per 10,000	43	56	63	53

(Source: *Counting the Homeless 2001 NSW State Report, 2004*)

A similar pattern is evident in the data for New South Wales. Including caravan park residents makes little difference to the overall rate of homelessness in Sydney but is an important factor where 36 percent of the homeless population in Central Murray are marginal residents of caravan parks.

As with most rural areas, caravan parks and local pubs are frequently used as crisis accommodation. In Victoria funding for such crisis accommodation comes from the governments Housing Establishment Fund which is distributed to selected agencies within each region. The notion that caravan parks are an inexpensive option for quick accommodation is generally not true.

Although not all caravan parks are substandard, a vast majority of those used by homelessness services are less than appropriate. In some cases, agencies and workers have negotiated and collaborated with local park owners and managers to improve access to the park for their clients. However, as noted earlier, access to caravan parks during certain seasonal periods, local festivals and other community celebrations becomes difficult and more expensive.

Services are often forced to refer clients to these parks even when it is clearly inappropriate and unsafe to do so (i.e. as a discharge destination for people exiting psychiatric services). HEF allocations and other agency emergency relief budgets cannot meet the demand, and services must either turn away homeless clients and prioritise particular client groups (such as those with dependant children) in order to stretch their budget dollars over the allocated period.

The permanent and semi-permanent residents of caravan parks have been displaced increasingly in areas where tourism has developed.

INDIGENOUS HOMELESSNESS

A third issue is homelessness in the Indigenous community. While only two percent of the Australian population identified as Indigenous in the 2001 Census, Indigenous people made up a total of nine percent of all homeless people across Australia and about 17.7 percent of SAAP clients over a year.. In Victoria, Indigenous people are only 0.56 percent of the Victorian population; however they are 2.8 percent of the homeless population and 4.5 percent of SAAP clients.

Table 21: Distribution of Indigenous & non-Indigenous homeless people, Vic. 2001

	NON-INDIGENOUS HOMELESS		INDIGENOUS HOMELESS	
	N	%	N	%
MELBOURNE	13,757	70	315	56
NORTHERN VICTORIA	2,793	14	152	27
REST OF VICTORIA	3084	16	97	17
TOTAL VICTORIAN HOMELESS POPULATION	19,634	100	564	100

(Source: *Counting the Homeless 2001 Vic. State Report, 2004*)

Table 21 compares the geographical distribution of non-Indigenous and Indigenous people in Victoria using the 2001 Census data. A higher proportion of homeless Indigenous Victorians [44%] live in rural Victoria than non-Indigenous Victorians [30%]. This broadly reflects the distribution of the general population. But nearly one third of homeless Indigenous Victorians [27%] are in Northern Victoria – Hume and Loddon-Mallee. Table 22 makes the same comparison for New South Wales.

Table 22: Distribution of Indigenous & non-Indigenous homeless people, NSW 2001

	NON-INDIGENOUS HOMELESS		INDIGENOUS HOMELESS	
	N	%	N	%
SYDNEY	14879	59	577	42
MURRAY & MURRUMBIDGEE	361	2	42	3
REST OF NSW	9817	39	757	55
TOTAL NSW HOMELESS POPULATION	25057	100	1376	100

(Source: *Counting the Homeless 2001 NSW State Report, 2004*)

A higher proportion of homeless Indigenous people in New South Wales [58%] live in rural New South Wales than non-Indigenous people [41%]. Unlike the northern region of Victoria, the proportion of homeless in Murray and Murrumbidgee statistical divisions is low – three percent for indigenous homeless and two percent for non-Indigenous homeless.

Overall, the rate of non-Indigenous homelessness in Victoria is about 42 per 10,000, but 564 homeless Indigenous people in the Victorian Indigenous population of 25,949 translates into a rate of 217 per 10,000. Similarly, the rate of homelessness for non-Indigenous people in New South Wales is 41 per 10,000, or about the same as Victoria. The rate of homelessness for indigenous people is 110 per 10,000 in New South Wales. The inference is that Indigenous Victorians are five times more likely to experience homelessness in Victoria than non-Indigenous people and for Indigenous people in New South Wales it is 2.5 times more likely. Calculated rates provide an indicator on the risk of homelessness for different groups but the distribution of services relies on information about the number of people in need. The 2001 Census identified only six homeless Indigenous people in Murray which equates to about 1.6% of the total homeless population in the Shire.

REASONS FOR HOMELESSNESS

The reasons why people become homeless in rural settings are similar to why people become homeless in small to large towns or in the capital cities of Australia. For young people, it is predominately a breakdown in family relationships although the specific factors may vary:

Sometimes it's abuse. Sometimes it's over crowding, and sometimes the family is just not functioning very well...

When young people are forced to leave home early or feel they need to leave, before they are established in the workforce or before they are in a position to be able to live independently, they become homeless (Davies et al 2002; Düsseldorf 2003). About one third of the homeless population are young people between the age of twelve and twenty four years and in addition there are children younger than twelve accompanying a parent or parents.

We've got nothing for them and we're hoping to maybe get a program up where these young people would live in somebody's home and that person would be a carer for them. This sort of program is running in Bendigo.

Family breakdown is also a major factor in adult homelessness and when this happens between adult partners it is often accompanied by conflict and violence:

The domestic violence is huge, huge. Most of the kids claim conflict in the family. That's not the main reason they give for seeking our services. But then when we start to unpack that, it's domestic violence. And it's not recognised. A lot of the families don't recognise domestic violence - the verbal, especially emotional abuse, is not recognised. They have normalized it; this is how everyone acts – even when it comes to physical violence.

Domestic violence involves not only the consequences of the separation between partners where the women and children if there are children normally end up without accommodation. There are protective issues due to the violence.

Young people may experience violent abuse. In one example, a young girl was referred to the service. Her parents had separated and she was having difficulty getting on with her step-father. There was serious conflict:

He was physically abusive to her, and she went to live with her natural father and his partner, and she had children. There was lots of conflict in their family. Basically, no one wanted her. She probably spent a year couch surfing. We actually had a notification to her with DoCS. She said she was okay there, and the parents supported her and she was back and about a year later we found out she was couch surfing for a year, so we basically did what we could do and then we came back and she was very honest where things were at, and we worked really well with her. She went into emergency accommodation. She was fifteen and in exceptional circumstances. You have to be sixteen before you receive an amount where DoCS are involved, but given there had been a long family history with DoCS, DoCS supported her. She had never been given any support at school.

There was apparent reconciliation but later the agency found that 'she was couch-surfing for a year'. Her age was a problem because she was only fifteen putting her into the age where statutory responsibility by DOCS comes in. There were ample opportunities for early intervention support from the school welfare staff but nothing was done and consequently she left school. The worker notes:

... she was out of school. She was doing basically nothing ... She was doing a bit of part-time work at Macas ... but then basically it all got too much for her. It was all in the too hard basket. ... there were lots of agencies involved ...(and then) basically, she attempted suicide at one stage. Mental Health was involved, but she went into emergency accommodation but did a great job ... and now she's actually in Homes Out West. For different reasons, she is coming back into our service, for entirely different reasons. She's had that tenancy now for three years ... She's been to TAFE and she's actually started a traineeship. That fell down but I actually don't believe that she's responsible for the reason that that traineeship fell down. She was doing exceptionally well in that traineeship. Yeah. She's coming back in and is doing really well.

This example encapsulates the complexity of many cases. Domestic violence was involved and this young woman required a lot of support over an extended period of time. Despite the adversity she had faced with breakdown at home and homelessness, she was making a considerable effort to support herself although there was a lot of support around her.

On the other side, the lack of affordable housing options in many rural areas or the lack of emergency accommodation presents a whole suite of problems for workers attempting to support people who have become homeless.

SUMMARY

With the exception of the Indigenous context, the dimensions of homelessness within mainstream society are now reasonably well recognised and defined. However, the features of homelessness in rural settings as well as rural strategies, models and approaches that are effective are far less understood. While there have been many consultations in rural areas, there is only a modest body of knowledge about how regional, rural and remote communities can provide an efficient and effective service system response. Problems and issues are generally easy to identify, but the best solutions are harder to construct.

While there are clearly many commonalities between rural and city homelessness, there are also some unique factors of rural and regional homelessness. For example, while the causes of homelessness tend to be the same for city areas as well as country areas, (i.e. family breakdown, domestic violence, unemployment, poverty etc) the incidence and therefore impact of these causal factors is frequently more severe in regional settings. In this light, homelessness in rural areas is more difficult to address because the causes are often more pronounced and impact heavily on local communities and also because local economies cannot necessarily support the expense of a 'big city' designed support system. As a result, services are generally located in large clusters within the more substantive regional centres while smaller townships (under 10,000 people) frequently have little or no services. Moreover, there is obviously less government funds allocated to country regions because of lower population numbers (along with old assumptions about a lack of need), and so the capacity of the service system to be innovative and responsive is somewhat hampered. On the other hand, country regions are also known for their increased ability to attain high levels of community involvement and ownership in local issues as well as community capacity building.

It is considered that links between the smaller numbers of agencies across rural regions are strong from necessity, and that networking between agencies has clear benefits for clients. Co-operation between agencies is facilitated by a higher incidence of SAAP/THM co-location, and collocation of homelessness services with other human services. Consequently, reports from some rural regions questioned whether clients are 'bounced' between services to the same degree as is suggested in reports from metropolitan regions (VHS Assessment & Referral in Homelessness Services, Final Report, 2001)

This however, is not without some difficulties as community attitudes in rural and regional areas may be more conservative than their metropolitan counterparts. This in turn, can affect the potential success of new or innovative service models entering the system.

5. HOMELESSNESS ASSISTANCE IN MURRAY AND SURROUNDING DISTRICTS

In NSW, homelessness assistance is primarily provided through the Department of Housing and the Department of Community Services. Programs include: rent assistance; provision of temporary accommodation; public housing; the Crisis Accommodation Program (CAP); and SAAP (DoCS, 2003). SAAP is administered by the Department of Community Services (DoCS) and chiefly delivered through the non-government sector, with some local government involvement.

In Victoria, the provision of services and housing to homeless people primarily occurs through three programs: the Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP); the Transitional Housing Management Program (THM); and the Housing Establishment Fund (HEF). These programs are referred to as Homelessness Assistance programs and along with the long-term Community Managed Housing Programs (CMHP), are administered by the Community Programs Group (CPG) located in the Office of Housing (OoH), Victorian Department of Human Services (DHS).

SUPPORTED ACCOMMODATION ASSISTANCE PROGRAM (SAAP)

There are some 394 SAAP services in NSW and approximately 375 SAAP services in Victoria. The majority of SAAP services in both states are target group specific and include: young people; single women/women and their children escaping family violence; families; single men; single women; and cross target/general services. Table 23 (below) shows the percent of recurrent allocations to specific SAAP target groups for both NSW and Victoria.

Table 23: Recurrent funding allocations by percent & target group, NSW & Vic 2003-04

	YOUNG PEOPLE	FAMILY VIOLENCE	SINGLE MEN	SINGLE WOMEN	CROSS TARGET	FAMILIES	TOTAL
NSW	38.2	27.8	13.3	3.9	12	4.8	100
VIC	28.6	21.5	8.1	5.7	28	8.1	100

(Source: SAAP NDCA, Vic & NSW 03-04)

In NSW, the major SAAP target groups that attract the largest proportion of recurrent funds are: young people; women escaping domestic/family violence; and services for single men. In Victoria, SAAP funds are primarily dedicated to: young people; cross target services; and services for women escaping domestic/family violence. These target groups account for almost 80 percent of the total SAAP allocations in both NSW and Victoria. Table 24 (below) details the spread of SAAP agencies across target groups and the proportion of recurrent funding for both Victoria and NSW.

Table 24: No. SAAP agencies & recurrent allocation by target group NSW & Vic 2003-04

PRIMARY TARGET GROUP	AGENCIES (N)		RECURRENT ALLOCATION (\$)		MEAN FUNDING PER AGENCY (\$)	
	NSW	Vic	NSW	Vic	NSW	Vic
YOUNG PEOPLE	168	136	40,413,000	20,575,000	240,600	151,300
WOMEN ESCAPING FV	92	60	29,354,000	15,403,000	319,100	256,700
SINGLE MEN ONLY	38	16	14,035,000	5,850,000	369,300	365,600
CROSS TARGET	52	106	12,719,000	20,097,000	244,600	189,600
FAMILIES	24	39	5,101,000	5,846,000	212,500	149,900
SINGLE WOMEN ONLY	20	18	4,088,000	4,077,000	204,400	226,500
TOTAL	394	375	105,710,000	71,847,000	268,300	191,600

(Source: SAAP NDCA, NSW 03-04)

Regional Divide of SAAP Services and Allocations

SAAP services in NSW are spread across a total of seventeen regions which consist of inner regions, regions across the middle band and four inland rural/remote regions. NSW inland rural regions include: Orana/Far West; Riverina/Murray; New England; and Central West, accounting for almost 20 percent of all SAAP agencies within NSW. However, recurrent funding allocations to these rural regions represent only 14 percent of the total SAAP budget for the State. Table 25 (below) provides details on the number of SAAP agencies and percent of recurrent allocations to the four rural regions of NSW.

Table 25: Distribution of SAAP agencies & recurrent funding in rural NSW regions 2003-04

REGION	AGENCIES		RECURRENT ALLOCATION	
	N	%	\$	%
ORANA/FAR WEST	23	5.8	4,022,000	3.8
RIVERINA/MURRAY	18	4.6	4,290,000	4.1
NEW ENGLAND	20	5.1	4,253,000	4.0
CENTRAL WEST	16	4.1	2,882,000	2.7
TOTAL	77	19.6	15,447,000	14.6

(Source: Homeless People in SAAP 2003-04, NSW Supplementary Tables, 2005)

For Murray and the Riverina there are a total of 18 SAAP agencies which make up 4.6 percent of all SAAP agencies in NSW. Near the Murray Shire there are two SAAP workers employed through Vinnies Reconnect in Deniliquin. Although the region received the highest recurrent allocation (\$4,290,000) in the 2003-04 financial year this represents only about four percent of the total recurrent allocations for the State.

In Victoria, SAAP services are deployed within eight DHS regions which consist of three inner urban regions (North-West, Southern and Eastern) and five rural regions (Barwon, Gippsland, Grampians, Hume and Loddon-Mallee). Table 26 (below) details the distribution of SAAP agencies and funding allocations for the five rural regions in Victoria.

Table 26: Distribution of SAAP agencies & recurrent funding in rural Victorian regions 2003-04

REGION	AGENCIES		RECURRENT ALLOCATION	
	N	%	\$	%
BARWON SOUTH WESTERN	27	7.2	4,168,000	5.8
GIPPSLAND	27	7.2	3,973,000	5.5
GRAMPIANS	35	9.3	3,245,000	4.5
HUME	26	6.9	3,729,000	5.2
LODDON MALLEE	29	7.7	4,416,000	6.1
TOTAL	144	38.3	19,531,000	27.1

(Source: Homeless People in SAAP 2003-04, Victorian Supplementary Tables, 2005)

The Campaspe Shire is located within Loddon-Mallee Region and is one of ten Local Government Areas in the region. Loddon-Mallee receives the highest SAAP allocation (6.1%) of the Victorian rural region and has 18 SAAP agencies that deliver a total of 29 SAAP services. Among these 29 services, four (or 13% of the regions SAAP services) are within the Campaspe Shire, primarily located in the central township of Echuca:

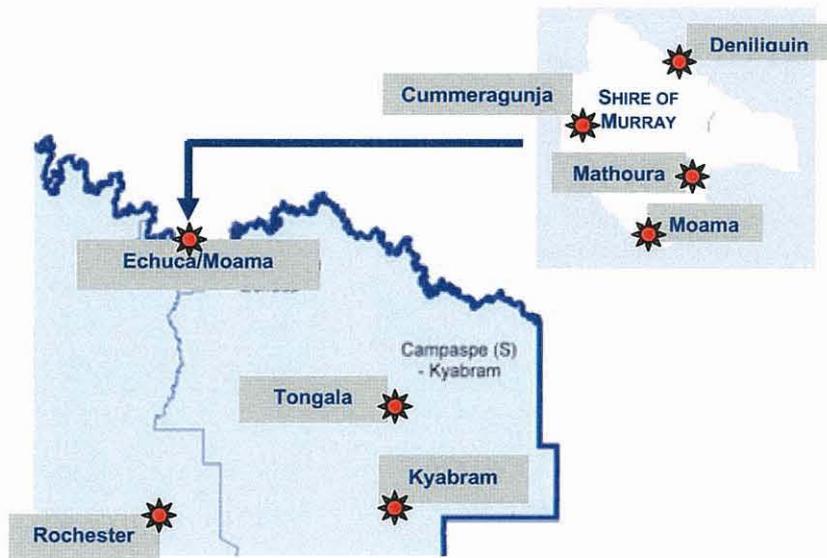
- St Luke's: 2 EFT SAAP Workers (Echuca);
- Njernda Aboriginal Corp.: 1 EFT SAAP Worker (Echuca);
- Loddon-Mallee Housing: 1 EFT SAAP Worker (Kyabram).

MURRAY SERVICE MAPPING

For the purposes of this mapping exercise, services have been categorised under the target group headings of: Crisis/Emergency Accommodation; Youth; Indigenous; Family/Domestic Violence; Cross Target; and Mental Health services.

Table 27 follows the service map in figure 1 and provides details on all agencies, organisations and programs that appear in the service map. Not all agencies noted here are in receipt of SAAP funding and thus are not naturally classified as a 'homelessness' service. However, the criterion used for the purpose of the service map is that they all have some level of service contact with homeless people. On the ground, the range of programs and services that assist homeless people frequently extends outside of the SAAP funded network. This may be particularly the case in rural areas where SAAP agencies/services are more limited. Community Health and Learning Centres as well as certain private caravan parks, hotels and hostels that are frequently used to provide crisis and emergency accommodation are listed separately.

Figure 1: Murray homelessness services map



<u>DENILIQUN</u>	
E/C Accom.	X 2
Youth	X 1
F/DV	X 1
Mental Health	X 1
Cross Target	X 1

<u>CUMMERAGUNJA</u>	
Indigenous	X 1

<u>ECHUCA</u>	
Youth	X 3
Indigenous	X 1
F/DV	X 1
X Target	X 8
Mental Health	X 1

<u>KYABRAM</u>	
X Target	X 1

<u>BENDIGO</u>	
(SERVICING CAMPASPE)	
F/DV	X 2
X Target	X 1
Mental Health	X 1

Table 27: List of services, LGA's of Murray, Deniliquin & Campaspe 2005

SERVICE	DESCRIPTOR	LOCATION & CATCHMENT
EMERGENCY/CRISIS ACCOMMODATION		
St Vincent de Paul Crisis Accommodation Service	Crisis & short-term supported accommodation & outreach service	Based in Deniliquin, catchment: Deniliquin, Murray Shire, Berrigan, Hay
NSW Department of Housing	Temporary Accommodation Line	State-wide
YOUTH		
St Vincent de Paul Reconnect	Early intervention youth homelessness program	Based in Deniliquin, catchment: Deniliquin, Murray Shire, Berrigan, Hay
Campaspe Cohuna LLEN	Local Learning & Employment Network	Echuca
Njernda Aboriginal Corporation	Juvenile Justice Program for Indigenous youth	Echuca
St Luke's Youth Services	Intensive case management & support	Echuca/Moama
INDIGENOUS		
Viney Morgan AMS	Indigenous Medical Service – primary health care, social & emotional wellbeing, family support; AOD, women's health & referral.	Cummeragunja - covers Barmah, Moonahcullah, Deniliquin & Moama
Njernda Aboriginal Corporation	Aboriginal community health facility offering: Health clinic; AOD; family violence; women's issues; men's business; social & emotional wellbeing; juvenile justice & capacity building	Echuca
FAMILY/DOMESTIC VIOLENCE & SEXUAL ASSAULT		
EASE Loddon Campaspe DVO	Domestic Violence Outreach service	Based in Bendigo, outreach to Campaspe Shire
Loddon Campaspe CASA	Centre Against Sexual Assault provides counselling & support	Based in Bendigo, outreach to Echuca & surrounding areas
Njernda Aboriginal Corporation	Family Violence & Support Program for Indigenous women & children	Echuca
St Vincent de Paul Family Violence Service	Support & crisis accommodation for women & children escaping family & domestic violence	Based in Deniliquin, catchment: Deniliquin, Murray Shire, Berrigan, Hay
MENTAL HEALTH		
Echuca Community Mental Health	Triage (Psychiatric Crisis)	Based in Bendigo, outreach to Echuca, Kyabram & Rochester
Community MH Riverside Centre	Community Mental Health Service	Deniliquin
St Luke's Recovery MH Service	Individual & group support, activities & socialising, & housing related rehabilitation & support for adults with mental health issues	Echuca

(Blue Highlight denotes dedicated homeless services)

Table 27: List of services, LGA's of Murray, Deniliquin & Campaspe 2005 (continued)

SERVICE	DESCRIPTOR	LOCATION & CATCHMENT
CROSS TARGET		
St Luke's		Echuca/Moama
-Children & Family Services	Family & individual counselling & support, foster care placements for 0-14 year old children & advocacy	
-Consumer & Tenancy Advice	A service to assist traders, consumers, tenants & landlords to understand legal rights & aim to resolve disputes.	
-Financial Counselling	Provides free & confidential information & support	
-Echuca & District Accommodation Support	A service assisting people aged over 15 who are homeless or at risk of homelessness.	
-Njernda Social Work Mentoring Project	12-month project in partnership with Njernda Aboriginal Corporation in Echuca.	
Echuca Regional Health Service	Provides general counselling, AOD counselling & support as well as a social worker	Echuca
Advocacy & Rights Centre	Provides advice & advocacy to public housing tenants	Based in Bendigo, outreach to Echuca every Friday
Uniting Church STEPS Program	Volunteer program providing lunch service for local homeless & disadvantaged people	Echuca
Campaspe-Murray Community Care	Provides emergency relief for disadvantaged & homeless people in Campaspe & Murray Shire	Echuca/Moama
Loddon-Mallee Housing	SAAP worker	Kyabram
St Vincent de Paul Transitional Housing	Medium-term (6-12 months) transitional accommodation	Based in Deniliquin, catchment includes Deniliquin, Murray Shire, Berrigan, Hay
Homes Out West	Community Housing Provider	Based in Deniliquin

(Blue Highlight denotes dedicated homeless services)

PRIVATE CARAVAN PARKS		
SERVICE	DESCRIPTOR	LOCATION & CATCHMENT
Willow Caravan Park	Private business providing permanent & long term accommodation for single men	Echuca
American Hotel, Nomads Backpackers, YHA Hostel	Private businesses used as crisis/emergency accommodation option by SAAP services	Echuca
Murray Perch Caravan Park	Private business used as emergency & longer term accommodation option for families by SAAP services.	Barmah

COMMUNITY HEALTH & LEARNING CENTRES		
SERVICE	DESCRIPTOR	LOCATION & CATCHMENT
Echuca Regional Health Service	Health Service	Echuca
Kyabram Community & Learning Centre	Health Service & Community Learning Centre	Kyabram
Rochester District Health Service	Health Service	Rochester
Moama CHS	Community Health Service	Moama
Mathoura CHS	Community Health Service	Mathoura
Deniliquin CHS	Community Health Service	Deniliquin

DEDICATED HOMELESSNESS SERVICES

A total of 27 services that work in some way with homeless people in Murray, Campaspe and Deniliquin have been listed in the service map. Of these, there are a total of 12 dedicated homelessness services including three family/domestic violence services. In Murray and Campaspe Shires, there are only six dedicated homeless services: St Luke's youth case management program and their accommodation support service; Njernda's Indigenous family violence service; the Uniting Church STEPS (lunch program); Campaspe-Murray Community Care (emergency relief); and Loddon Mallee Housing outreach service located at the Kyabram Community and Learning Centre. In neighbouring Deniliquin there are four dedicated homelessness services, all of which are managed and operated by the St. Vincent de Paul Society. Homes Out West is the community housing provider in Deniliquin and co-locates with the St. Vincent de Paul services. Of all the dedicated homelessness services three are specialist family violence services – one in Deniliquin, one in Echuca (Indigenous) and one based in Bendigo which provides outreach to Campaspe Shire.

In addition to the above services NSW DoH provides a temporary accommodation line which is a crisis housing phone service. This after-hours telephone service assists homeless people to access temporary accommodation in caravan parks, motels/hotels or backpackers for one night only, as well as appropriate support services, and is operated by the Department's Contact Centre. During the 2003-04 year, some 5,600 calls were recorded on this service, resulting in 1,320 cases receiving assistance of temporary accommodation.

There is no dedicated crisis/emergency accommodation in either Campaspe or Murray Shires. St. Luke's accommodation & support service in Echuca and Loddon Mallee Housing's SAAP worker in Kyabram provide homelessness support and access to HEF dollars in order to purchase crisis accommodation in the private housing/tourist accommodation market. This mainly is in local caravan parks such as the Willow Caravan Park in Echuca or Murray Perch in Barmah, hotels, backpackers and youth hostels. St. Vincent de Paul in Deniliquin is the only provider of crisis accommodation in the immediate vicinity of Murray Shire. On the Victorian side, the nearest direct provider of crisis/emergency accommodation is in either Bendigo or Shepparton.

Information on the number of clients supported by both St. Vincent de Paul in Deniliquin and St. Luke's in Echuca over the year and point in time was collected as part of this research. Table 28 below show the number of clients assisted over the 2004/2005 financial year as well as a 'point in time' figure for the week of October 17–21, 2005.

Table 28: Annual & 'point in time' client data, St. Vincent de Paul & St. Luke's services, 2005

AGENCY	ANNUAL NO. OF CLIENTS	SUPPORT PROVIDED (POINT IN TIME)	ACCOMMODATION PROVIDED (POINT IN TIME)
ST. VINCENT DE PAUL (NSW)	223	9	14
ST. LUKE'S (VIC)	161	12	3

'Point in time' figures can vary from week to week but one noticeable difference is the capacity of each agency to provide crisis accommodation. Most clients supported by St. Vincent de Paul were accommodated in properties managed by the agency, whereas most of St Luke's clients were supported wherever they are staying in the community. Of the three clients actually accommodated at St. Luke's, one stayed in a caravan park, another stayed in a hotel while the third stayed with her sister and the agency helped her obtain a Centrelink crisis payment.

During the week that this information was collated, St. Vincent de Paul turned away two people, because there was no available accommodation in caravan parks or hotel/motels due to the staging of a local festival in Deniliquin. One was a family on the road and some petrol money was provided as well as one night accommodation in Kerang. St Luke's turned away six individuals in the same week: a family from another town seeking emergency accommodation; a single parent who wanted to leave where she was living with her mentally ill father; a single woman wanting to leave her uncle's house; and a man inquiring about accommodation in Echuca. The four transitional units in Echuca were occupied.

There is some liaison between the two agencies, but according to workers from both, this contact is not regular and systematic; it is based on an informal rather than formal arrangement.

The City of Greater Bendigo is the nearest regional centre (outside of Echuca) to the Campaspe and Murray district. Echuca Community Mental Health Service, EASE, Loddon Campaspe CASA, and the Advocacy and Rights Centre are all services that are based in Bendigo but provide a dedicated service to the Campaspe Shire, although these do not necessarily include the residents of Moama or Mathoura in the Murray Shire.

The significant lack of SAAP services in rural and regional areas, particularly SAAP crisis accommodation, has had an impact on the way the homelessness service system operates. For example, in some Victorian regions, the transitional housing program and segmented one public housing applications (priority housing) have, to some degree, become an entry point for homeless people attempting to find housing. Subsequently, the transitional housing programs now have long waiting lists because they are also entry points for crisis accommodation, albeit by default. In addition to this, exit points from transitional housing have tended to bottleneck over recent years because

public housing waiting lists have increased while affordable housing within the private market has decreased.

A major destination for homeless people in the country tends to be the local caravan parks, which are frequently expensive, difficult for some target groups to access and sometimes substandard in the provision of their caravans and cabins. Homeless residents in local caravan parks may be moved on to make way for tourists paying a higher short-term stay rate. Also, some homeless people, such as young people and women, may refuse to go to a park for accommodation, preferring to 'sleep rough' for safety and security reasons.

MEDIUM-TERM/TRANSITIONAL HOUSING

Victoria's Transitional Housing Management Program (THMP)

The Transitional Housing Management (THM) Program is a Victorian Government initiative that aims to provide a range of housing assistance to homeless people or those at risk of impending homelessness. The program also assists those in crisis to establish and/or maintain appropriate, secure and sustainable housing through the provision of transitional housing (i.e. short – medium term accommodation). The THM Program is primarily funded through the Commonwealth State Housing Agreement and was implemented in June 1997, with 15 community-based agencies appointed to implement the program. The key target groups for the THM program are:

- families and individuals who are homeless or at risk of homelessness;
- women and their children who are escaping family violence; and
- young people who are homeless or escaping family violence.

Within Victoria's Loddon Mallee region there area total of 152 transitional houses. This includes 13 Crisis Initiative Properties (CIPs). The THM Crisis Initiative was borne from the VHS which sought to increase crisis accommodation stock by allocating five percent of THM properties to this purpose. There are some issues that remain unresolved about this initiative, particularly in the major city of Melbourne where its success appears to be dubious at best. On the ground, THM crisis properties are seen by the sector as transitional accommodation – that is, a short to medium term stay for clients – rather than crisis accommodation where clients need to access longer term housing. The result is many clients in these THMs are unable to get priority on longer term waiting lists as they are perceived as already adequately housed. The VHS Working Report (2001) noted that this new allocation would be "able to respond only to clients with less complex needs" and that "there is a view that this model may work best in rural areas".

Table 29: Transitional Housing Properties, Campaspe & Bendigo 2002.

AREA	1 B/R	2 B/R	3 B/R	4 B/R	5 B/R	TOTAL
CAMPASPE	1	4	4	-	-	9
BENDIGO	2	40	22	4	-	68
TOTAL REGIONAL STOCK	8	74	58	10	2	152

(Source: Loddon-Mallee SAAP Network, 2002)

Of the total THM stock in the Loddon Mallee region, Campaspe has 9 properties (or 5.9% of the total), of which all but one are 2-3 bedroom properties. In Bendigo, the number of THMs is 68 or 45 percent of the total for the region. Again, most are 2-3 bedroom properties.

NSW CAP and Head-lease Initiative

The Crisis Accommodation Program (CAP) is administered by the Office of Community Housing and provides housing for people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness and/or in crisis. Properties are purchased, leased, renovated, or upgraded and provided to non-government organisations to provide transitional accommodation to assist clients to move to independent living. The CAP program is closely linked to SAAP and many SAAP services are delivered from CAP projects. In 2004 a total of 1,355 CAP properties were managed under the program. This includes 189 leased properties. At the time of tabling this report there were no CAP properties in the Murray Shire and two 2 bedroom medium term units managed by St. Vincent de Paul in Deniliquin.

Head-lease properties are private rental market housing which is leased by the Department and then sub-leased to DoH clients whose needs cannot be immediately met through public housing. There are three types of Head-leasing programs implemented by DoH:

- Short term - in which the Department leases a property from the owner for 6 months to 3 years;
- Long term - in which the Department leases a property from the owner for 10 to 15 years; and
- Spot leasing which is medium term head-leasing undertaken as part of a local allocations policy.

As at 30 June 2004, public housing lease subsidies totalled \$18.09 million. Approximately 55 community housing providers receive leasing subsidies from the Department. In 2004, 323 head-leased properties were provided throughout NSW on a long-term basis extending for up to 10 years.

For households experiencing a short-term housing crisis and who are not eligible for public housing DoH may provide Emergency Temporary Accommodation in the form of short-term public housing or a head-lease property for up to three months. The provision of emergency accommodation for households that are not eligible for public housing is only available to those who meet the following criteria:

- In urgent need of short-term temporary accommodation;
- Are not eligible for public housing;
- Cannot resolve the need themselves;
- Cannot be accommodated by family or friends; and
- Are not eligible for other forms of assistance from other agencies because of income or temporary residency status.

PUBLIC HOUSING

Allocation for priority housing in NSW is for those who are assessed as in the greatest need. Generally, priority is given to those who are homeless, households at risk of becoming homeless, the elderly, people living with disabilities and/or HIV/AIDS, and people with drug or alcohol dependencies. In 2003-04, priority housing was allocated to 3,331 tenants, which equates to 31.7 percent of the 10,499 new tenants housed during the year.

The NSW Public Housing Register is a schedule of eligible applicants for either priority or general public housing allocation. In 2004, there were a total of 73,289 applicants on the public housing register – a decline from 80,188 recorded at the same time in the 2003 year.

Public housing is a major destination for homeless people leaving THM properties in Victoria. The amount of stock and the management of the stock is determined by the Office of Housing (DHS) and funding comes under the Commonwealth State Housing Agreement.

The Office of Housing waiting list is segmented – Early Housing includes Segment 1 for homeless applicants, Segment 2 for people who need support such as people suffering a disability or mental illness and Segment 3 covers urgent need such as a mother with a very young baby. Wait turn is basically Segment 4 for low income applicants, which are the majority of applicants.

Public Rental Housing in NSW & Victoria

One of the difficulties comparing public housing between New South Wales and Victoria is that although all states operate under the Commonwealth-States Housing Agreement [CSHA] the administration of public housing is undertaken in somewhat differently, wait lists are managed differently and the publicly available statistics are different. Public housing is one form of affordable housing. However, figures for public rental housing can be extracted from the 2001 ABS Census of Population and Housing. Aboriginal housing is counted in a different category as will be housing established by service organisations, social accommodation and aged care accommodation. A further point is that the ABS count of public rental housing involves some undercount because whether a dwelling is counted as 'public rental' depends on the occupant filling in the form correctly. However, the error of measurement does not undermine the ABS data for the purpose of state, regional and area comparison and it is the best data available.

For the purposes of this data ABS statistical subdivisions will be used. Central Murray includes Murray Shire and Deniliquin as well as districts to the north – Jerrilderi, Conargo and Windouran – Berrigan to the east and Wakool to the west. An examination of public housing stock in Central Murray is presented along with data on Sydney, New South Wales and the surrounding statistical subdivisions of Murray-Darling, Lower Murrumbidgee, and Central Murrumbidgee including Wagga Wagga, Lachlan, Albury, and Upper Murray. Although private rental housing is often quoted as a proportion of all households in the community, perhaps a better indicator is the proportion of all rented housing which is public rental. For the tenants affordability is a major issue.

Table 30 compares New South Wales, Sydney and Central Murray. The question is whether Central Murray is above or below average for the state or about average. It is going to be the case that some rural and regional areas may be well below average for a range of reasons including a declining regional economy and decreases in population along with the accumulation of priority decisions about where public housing ought to go.

Table 30: Proportion of public housing, NSW, Sydney & Central Murray, 2001

POPULATION SECTOR	NSW	SYDNEY	CENTRAL MURRAY
PUBLIC HOUSING RENTAL	114,137	72721	197
TOTAL RENTAL PROPERTIES	645,287	416414	2449
PROPORTION OF PUBLIC HOUSING RENTAL	17.7	17.5	8

(Source: ABS Census 2001)

In Sydney, the proportion of public rental housing is 17.5 percent and for New South Wales it is 17.7 percent, which means that overall and on average public housing in rural New South Wales is distributed the same as for Sydney. However, it will be higher in some rural areas and lower in others. The arguments about a particular area such as Murray Shire depend on comparisons with similar areas and in particular the surrounding areas.

Table 31: Proportion of public housing, Central Murray & surrounding SSDs, 2001

POPULATION SECTOR	CENTRAL MURRAY	CENTRAL MURRUMBIDGEE	LOWER MURRUMBIDGEE	LACHLAN	ALBURY
PUBLIC HOUSING RENTAL	197	2054	611	986	978
TOTAL RENTAL PROPERTIES	2449	9868	4611	5206	5613
PROPORTION OF PUBLIC HOUSING RENTAL	8%	20.8%	13.3%	18.9%	17.4%

(Source: ABS Census 2001)

In Table 31 the other statistical sub-divisions to the north [Lower Murrumbidgee], to the east [Albury] and to the north-east [Lachlan and Central Murrumbidgee] all have higher proportions of public rental housing, and in some cases, higher than the state average. Table 32 compares Central Murray with Murray-Darling to the west and Upper Murray to the east; all three areas lie along the border between New South Wales and Victoria. Deniliquin has been disaggregated from Central Murray.

Table 32: Proportion of public housing, Murray SSD's & Deniliquin, 2001

POPULATION SECTOR	CENTRAL MURRAY	MURRAY-DARLING	UPPER MURRAY	DENILIQUN	CENTRAL MURRAY W/O DENILIQUN
PUBLIC HOUSING RENTAL	197	57	123	140	57
TOTAL RENTAL PROPERTIES	2449	830	2037	844	1605
PROPORTION OF PUBLIC HOUSING RENTAL	8%	6.9%	6.0%	16.6%	3.6%

(Source: ABS Census 2001)

Firstly, the pattern is that the three areas along the Murray all have significantly lower provision of public rental housing. Secondly, when Deniliquin is disaggregated from Central Murray it can be seen that Deniliquin has a provision of public housing close to the state average – a total of 140 dwellings according to the ABS figures for 2001. On the other hand the rest of Central Murray has only 3.6 percent of public housing rental. According to the ABS there were only nine public housing rental dwellings in Murray Shire. Other local figures counted six public housing dwellings in Moama, so these figures are broadly congruent.

Because Murray Shire is so closely tied to Echuca economically and in terms of the everyday use of services, the last comparison is between public housing in Central Murray with Melbourne, Victoria and North Goulburn SSD, which includes Campaspe Shire and Echuca.

Table 33: Proportion of public housing by selected SSD Victoria, 2001

POPULATION SECTOR	CENTRAL MURRAY W/O DENILIQUN	MELBOURNE	ECHUCA	NORTH GOULBURN	VICTORIA
PUBLIC HOUSING RENTAL	57	35,951	404	2,053	54,779
TOTAL RENTAL PROPERTIES	1,605	283,077	1,280	9,858	382,863
PROPORTION OF PUBLIC HOUSING RENTAL	3.6%	12%	31.6%	23.9%	14.3%

(Source: ABS Census 2001)

Again, despite a lower level of public housing in the rental market in Victoria, Central Murray by comparison is lower than the Victorian average, but more importantly, much lower than Echuca [31.6%] and the SSD of North Goulburn [23.9%] which includes both Campaspe Shire and Shepparton. Also by comparison Campaspe Shire has 23.9 percent public rental housing.

The reasons for Murray Shire's low level of public housing cannot be simply explained but may have been determined in past years when the population was smaller and before the rapid expansion of housing and population in the shire. The issue of public housing for Murray Shire is taken up in Chapter 6: Analysis of Issues.

Public Rental Housing for Indigenous Communities

It is well recognised in the literature (AHBV 2000; Berry et al 2001; Memmott et al 2003; Trewin & Madden 2003; DHS 2004; Young et al 1998) that there is a need for Aboriginal housing organisations to be able to provide larger-sized properties (i.e. at least 4-5 bedroom stock) in order to appropriately cater for Indigenous families and extended families that frequently live together.

Housing for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in NSW is provided through public and community housing, as well as the Aboriginal Housing Office (AHO). While the AHO is an independent organisation, its 4,148 properties are managed by the Department under a service agreement. A further 8,700 Indigenous households are housed under the DoH general public housing program. In

the Murray Shire there are a total of 53 public housing properties dedicated to Indigenous households. These are:

- Njernda Aboriginal Co-op - Moama (3)
- NSW Aboriginal Housing Office – Moama (8)
- Moama Local Aboriginal Council - Moama (4)
- Cummeragunja Local Aboriginal Land Council - Cummeragunja (22)
- Cummeragunja Pty Ltd - Cummeragunja (16)

For Indigenous people in Victoria, the Aboriginal Housing Board of Victoria (AHBV) is the key body responsible for the development and management of housing assistance to the Aboriginal community. In 2002 the Aboriginal Housing Board of Victoria owned 215 properties in the Loddon Mallee region, most of which were three-bedroom houses. Loddon Mallee had a total of 23 four-bedroom houses and only one five-bedroom house in the region. The Shire of Campaspe has the second highest number of AHBV properties (after Swan Hill) in the region. Table 34 outlines the number of AHBV owned properties in Campaspe and Greater Bendigo by number of bedrooms.

Table 34: Aboriginal Housing Board stock, Campaspe Shire & Bendigo, 2002

AREA	1 B/R	2 B/R	3 B/R	4 B/R	5 B/R	TOTAL
CAMPASPE	-	8	46	6	-	60
BENDIGO	-	4	20	1	-	25
TOTAL REGIONAL STOCK	2	25	164	23	1	215

(Source: Loddon-Mallee SAAP Network, 2002)

OTHER LONG-TERM HOUSING OPTIONS

In Victoria, 'Long-Term Housing' (LTH) refers to a range of housing programs that provide affordable accommodation to particular target groups of low income and disadvantaged households. Key programs that form part of LTH options within the Loddon-Mallee region are: Long-term Community Housing Program and Local Government and Community Housing Program or 'LGCHP' (targeting: single adults; young people; people with a disability; older people; frail aged people and families); Rooming House Program (which assists low income single adults without children); Group Housing Program (which provides shared accommodation for people with a physical, intellectual and/or psychiatric disability as well as for frail aged clients); Interim Long Term Program or ILTFM (for family and single adults, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders, HIV clients and those exiting THMs). Table 35 provides details on the number of long-term housing programs within Campaspe and Greater Bendigo.

Table 35: Long-term housing programs & stock, Campaspe Shire & Bendigo, 2002

	CAMPASPE	BENDIGO	TOTAL
GROUP HOUSING	2	15	17
COMMUNITY HOUSING PROGRAM (CHP)	5	-	5
LOCAL GOVERNMENT CHP	24	19	43
INTERIM LONG TERM (ILT)	2 (ABI)	5 (ABI/Youth)	7
ROOMING HOUSE PROGRAM	-	2	2

(Source: Loddon-Mallee SAAP Network, 2002)

In NSW, longer-term housing options include:

- *Community Housing*, which constitutes around nine percent of social housing in NSW and is provided through 200 not-for-profit organisations. At the end of the 2004 financial year 13,038 dwellings were managed by community organisations such as housing associations, co-operatives, charities, churches and other community groups. The role of the department in Community Housing is to oversee and partially fund this sector through the Office of Community Housing (DoH).
- *Supported Housing* which primarily aims to assist households to sustain their longer-term tenancies. A major proportion of allocations under the Supported Housing scheme are to people and families with special needs and who require access to a range of community and government support services. This program seeks to create and maintain partnerships with a range of community and government organisations that are resourced to provide necessary support services.

SUMMARY

Homelessness assistance is supported accommodation in some form and then assistance for homeless people to access longer term housing such as public housing. In NSW there are 394 SAAP services, 18 in the Riverina-Murray area which in practical terms translates into two SAAP workers from Vinnies Reconnect who could be available to Murray Shire people. In Victoria, there are 375 SAAP services and 29 agencies in Loddon-Mallee region, four of which are in Campaspe Shire. The main Victorian SAAP provider for Murray Shire clients is St Luke's which has two EFT workers in Echuca, but there is a Loddon-Mallee housing worker in Kyabram and one SAAP worker working out of the Njernda Aboriginal Cooperative. The service mapping exercise identified 27 agencies that work in some way with homeless people in Murray, Campaspe and Deniliquin Shires. There are 12 dedicated homelessness services including three specialising in domestic/family violence, however there is no dedicated crisis/emergency accommodation in either Campaspe or Murray Shires. St Luke's can provide some HEF funds to buy emergency accommodation, mainly in a local caravan park, while access to Vinnies emergency accommodation will depend on vacancies at the time of need. Victoria has medium/long-term supported accommodation in its THM program – 9 properties in Campaspe Shire and 68 in Bendigo. Public housing on the NSW side of the border in Murray Shire is

significantly below the NSW state average provision. Deniliquin, which is close to the state average, has 140 properties while Murray Shire has nine. In Echuca, some 32 percent of rental housing is public [404 properties] and again Murray Shire is lower than the Victorian state average. This may reflect past decisions prior to the high population growth that has taken place. However, it is a significant anomaly with implications for assisting the homeless in Murray and its surrounding districts.

6. ANALYSIS OF ISSUES

FUNDING FOR SAAP SERVICES

The discussion on homelessness in Murray Shire and its surrounding areas raises issues of resource allocation based on statistics of actual homelessness by region. Although exact statistics cannot be produced for most Local Government Areas, reasonable estimates are possible. The main source of data is the Australian Bureau of Statistics paper *Counting the Homeless 2001: Australia* developed under the Australian Census Analytic Program. Reports for all states and territories provide more detail data on homelessness by statistical division and statistical sub-division. The three points of comparison are the existing regional allocations for SAAP service provision in the Hume and Loddon-Mallee in Victoria and Murrumbidgee-Murray in New South Wales, the predicted allocation if ABS homelessness data were used and lastly, the predicted allocation if the marginal residents of caravan parks are included in the homelessness figure used in the calculation. While the established ABS definition and counting rules include primary, secondary and tertiary homelessness categories, for the first time in 2001 new information was available on the marginal residents of caravan parks. This category was defined as individuals or family groups where no-one is employed. From this group come many of the clients of SAAP support services in regional centres and rural areas. So including this category of people in the homeless population for the purpose of the calculations of resource distribution is realistic and reasonable.

This argument has to be developed in two steps. Firstly, an examination is done for Victoria then New South Wales. Table 36 uses 2003-2004 figures provided in the Victorian DHS Office of Housing Policy and Funding Plan 2003-2004 to 2005-2006.

Table 36: Victorian Office of Housing regional budget allocations, 2003-2004

REGION	SAAP	THM	HEF	TOTAL ALLOCATION	%
METROPOLITAN MELBOURNE	\$44,479,120	\$16,133,420	\$4,957,280	\$65,569,820	71.0
HUME REGION	\$3,524,950	\$1,464,480	\$263,370	\$5,252,800	5.7
LODDON-MALLEE REGION	\$ 4,346,950	\$ 1,476,040	\$ 310,500	\$6,133,930	6.6
OTHER RURAL REGIONS	\$10,529,040	\$4,103,540	\$739,610	\$15,372,190	16.7
TOTAL REGIONS	\$62,880,050	\$23,177,490	\$6,270,760	\$92,328,300	100.0

These figures exclude \$8,935,100 designated for central not regional allocation

According to 'Counting the Homeless 2001: Victoria' the proportion of Victoria's homeless in Hume Region is 7.3 percent, Loddon Mallee region is 7.2 percent, with 69.3 percent in Metropolitan Melbourne and the balance of 23.4 percent in the other rural regions. Table 37 shows what the funding pattern would look like if this profile the homeless population was used strictly to determine funding.

Table 37: Victorian Office of Housing predicted regional budget allocations, 2003-2004

REGION	PERCENT	PREDICTED ALLOCATION	CHANGE
METROPOLITAN MELBOURNE	69.7	\$64,352,825	- \$1,216,995
HUME REGION	7.3	\$6,739,659	+ \$1,486,859
LODDON-MALLEE REGION	7.2	\$6,647,638	+ \$513,708
OTHER RURAL REGIONS	16.2	\$14,957,184	- \$415,006
TOTAL REGIONS	100.0	\$92,328,300	

These figures exclude \$8,935,100 designated for central not regional allocation and 107 cases for which no regional information was available. Differences in the change column are due to round off.

The effect would be a reduction in the metropolitan allocation by about \$1.2m, but the northern regions of Hume and Loddon-Mallee gain \$1,486,859 and \$513,708 respectively. However, the other rural regions would be adjusted downward by about \$415,006. There is a case using actual homelessness figures that Hume and Loddon-Mallee regions are under funded, particularly Hume. Campaspe Shire is a major part of the North Goulburn SSD within Murray Region.

For NSW, the funding is reported in seventeen regional categories that are sub-sets of the larger NSW Department of Community Services regions.

Table 38: New South Wales SAAP regional budget allocations, 2003-2004

REGION	SAAP ALLOCATION	%
METROPOLITAN SYDNEY	\$55,902,000	53.0
RIVERINA-MURRAY REGION	\$4,290,000	4.1
OTHER WEST REGIONS [ORANA/FAR WEST & CENTRAL WEST]	\$6,904,000	6.5
OTHER RURAL REGIONS	\$38,615,000	36.4
TOTAL REGIONS	\$105,110,000	100.0

These figures exclude \$5,163,000 designated for central not regional allocation

However, according to 'Counting the Homeless 2001: New South Wales' the proportion of New South Wales's homeless in the Riverina-Murray SAAP Region is four percent, and the other west regions [Orana/Far West and Central West] is just under six percent, with 58.5 percent in Metropolitan Sydney and the balance of 32.6 percent in the other rural regions. Table 39 shows what the funding pattern would look like if this profile the homeless population was used strictly to determine funding.

Table 39: Predicted NSW SAAP regional budget allocations, 2003-2004

REGION	PERCENT	PREDICTED ALLOCATION	CHANGE
METROPOLITAN SYDNEY	58.5	\$61,489,350	+ \$5,587,735
RIVERINA MURRAY REGION	4.0	\$4,204,400	- \$85,600
OTHER WEST REGIONS [ORANA/FAR WEST & CENTRAL WEST]	5.9	\$6,201,490	- \$ 702,510
OTHER RURAL REGIONS	32.6	\$34,265,860	- \$4,349,140
TOTAL REGIONS	100.0	\$105,110,000	0

*These figures exclude \$5,163,000 designated for central not regional allocation.
Also excluded are 241 cases where there was missing data.*

On this basis, it is evident that using actual homelessness data for the NSW region that includes Murray Shire does not reveal a funding short-fall and suggests that there is already some loading for remote location factored into the New South Wales SAAP funding. The higher proportion of the homeless population is in metropolitan Sydney, probably reflects the movement of homeless people to the capital and particularly the inner city. If these determinations were used Murray Shire would benefit but only through a greater allocation to Campaspe Shire from the Victorian side.

However, a second calculation can be done using a different assumption about the homeless population by including the marginal residents of caravan parks as part of the homeless population on the basis that many require support from the homelessness service system. It can be argued that this population figure is a better indicator of real need than the figure using the strict definition and that the marginal caravan park residents are the 'boarding house' occupants of rural Victoria. As pointed out before, there is ample evidence from service providers that many unemployed individuals and families in caravan parks also use SAAP services for support. They will be SAAP clients and the expended population may be a better indicator of real need for this reason, definitional purity put to one aside.

Table 40: Predicted Victorian Office of Housing regional budget allocations, 2003-2004

REGION	PERCENT	PREDICTED ALLOCATION	CHANGE
METROPOLITAN MELBOURNE	65.5	\$60,475,036	- \$5,094,772
HUME REGION	8.6	\$7,940,234	+ \$2,687,433
LODDON MALLEE REGION	8.3	\$7,663,249	+ \$1,529,319
OTHER RURAL REGIONS	17.6	\$16,249,780	+ \$877,590
TOTAL REGIONS	100.0	\$92,328,300	

These figures exclude \$8,935,100 designated for central not regional allocation and 107 cases of homelessness for which no geographical information was available.

Using homelessness data as a measure of need to make these calculations of resource distribution are indicative and a basic calculation that would be enhanced by more complex formulae. State-wide services are not considered. But, the weakness of the current distribution is highlighted. The specific

disadvantage of Hume and Loddon-Mallee regions are quantified. Including the marginal residents of caravan parks as a part of the population in need of services would suggest a level of funding disadvantage across rural Victoria.

The Shire of Campaspe is part of the Statistical Sub-Division of North Goulburn. The estimated adjustment in funding would be some \$800,000 more than the current allocation based on these assumptions.

On the New South Wales side of the border the same examination gives the following results. Table 41 shows the funding distribution in New South Wales using ABS homelessness data.

Table 41: NSW SAAP predicted budget allocations including marginal residents of caravan parks 2003-04

REGION	PERCENT	PREDICTED ALLOCATION	CHANGE
METROPOLITAN SYDNEY	50.7	\$53,238,215	- \$2,663,785
RIVERINA MURRAY REGION	4.2	\$4,414,620	+ \$124,620
OTHER WEST REGIONS [ORANA/FAR WEST & CENTRAL WEST]	5.9	\$6,201,149	- \$702,851
OTHER RURAL REGIONS	39.2	\$2,391,303	+ \$2,943,080
TOTAL REGIONS	100.0	\$105,110,000	

*These figures exclude \$5,163,000 designated for central not regional allocation.
Also excluded are 241 cases where there was missing data.*

On these assumptions, there would be a small positive transfer of funds to Riverina-Murray but a loss of funding in the Far West, while regional areas up the north coast from Sydney and down the south coast would be major beneficiaries due the larger populations of marginal caravan park dwellers.

Taking together an adjustment in both New South Wales and Victoria, services in the areas accessible from Murray Shire might benefit by some \$800,000, which is still a significant sum as a proportion of the existing expenditure on homelessness services for the same area.

However, the other argument with funding implications is the remoteness of certain areas of a state from the capital city. New South Wales is the larger and more populous state compared to Victoria. From Melbourne to Wodonga is about 300 kms. By comparison, Albury is 560 kms from Sydney, and Western towns such as Bourke 775kms, Broken Hill 1160kms or northern towns such as Tamworth 390kms and Tweed Heads 855kms. Remote population centres experience higher costs in many respects and higher costs of functioning within a state-wide service system. With lower populations they receive proportionately small shares of the overall pool of funds, yet options are usually more limited in rural and remote settings. From Echuca to Melbourne is 207kms or approximately 2 hrs 40 mins driving time while from Moama to Sydney is 794 kms or about 10 hours driving. This factor may already comprise a small loading on the distribution of funding across New South Wales regions, however, across the different states and territories, there is no widely agreed way of doing this adjustment. The Commonwealth Grants Commission does apply some established procedures to

Commonwealth grants funding for states to compensate for service delivery across large distances and remote areas. Within states, it is more ad hoc. This is an issue that might usefully be re-examined for homeless service delivery in Murray Shire.

Finally, any conceivable process of making adjustments is fraught with political difficulties at all levels – reducing funding to the capital cities of Melbourne and Sydney would produce an outcry that existing resources do not meet demand and a lot of negative publicity. Any consultation process could potentially be divisive if the premise for changing funding profiles was that there would be major winners and losers and static resource base into the future. Alternatively, funding adjustments could be factored into successive funding cycles with some additional funds for homelessness services in both states, avoiding any radical reduction of funding for services. Any new funding could be directed to areas disadvantaged under existing and past arrangements as a priority consideration – Hume and Loddon-Mallee regions in Victoria and Campaspe Shire and Riverina-Murray in New South Wales. This approach would be more acceptable but any adjustment would still be a process of change. Overlaying all of these points are political considerations at several levels.

RECOMMENDATION 1

THAT THE SHIRES OF MURRAY AND CAMPASPE, TOGETHER WITH HOMELESS SERVICES IN THE SURROUNDING AREAS OF NSW AND VICTORIA, ADVOCATE FOR A REVIEW OF HOMELESSNESS FUNDING. IN VICTORIA THIS SHOULD BE ADDRESSED TO THE DHS FUNDING MODEL REVIEW IN ORDER TO REDRESS FUNDING IMBALANCES BETWEEN REGIONS ON THE BASIS OF A MORE DETAILED ANALYSIS BY DHS POLICY AND PLANNING EXPERTS, WHILE IN NSW THIS SAME ISSUE SHOULD BE RE-EXAMINED AS PART OF THE DECISION-MAKING PROCESS ABOUT FUNDING UNDER SAAP IV.

CARAVAN PARKS AS CRISIS ACCOMMODATION

One of the features of rural homeless is the use of caravan parks for emergency accommodation as well as longer-term accommodation at the lowest end of the housing market (Eddy 2003; Homeground 2004). As tourism has developed, the extent of permanent residency in caravan parks has declined. Various respondents told of the problems getting homeless people into caravan parks. Even when access can be arranged, the caravan parks are not a low cost form of accommodation. Associated with this is the dearth of SAAP emergency accommodation in rural settings. Our suggestion is that consideration be given to the development of a social enterprise caravan park managed by a community agency. In the past, Council caravan parks have either been run by Council employees or leased out. Such parks were mainly designed to cater for tourists and campers although they sometimes provided semi-permanent or permanent accommodation. The management of the Council Park had no skills to deal with homeless people or residents with high and complex needs. Our proposal for a social enterprise caravan park has the following objectives:

- To expand the availability of emergency accommodation in caravans and cabins;
- To provide permanent and semi-permanent accommodation for various poor and disadvantaged individuals and families;
- To also offer accommodation for travellers, particularly back-packers.

A crucial element of the proposal is who should manage the social enterprise. In our view the staff should generally be the same workers who currently work with homeless people and other disadvantaged groups. There are important issues of how to effectively manage such a facility so that it does not simply become a 'ghetto' area with a concentration of people with problems. An over-riding principle is to create as normal an environment as possible with a good environmental ambience. Capital investment would be required to purchase or lease land and caravans/ cabins. Staffing needs to be supplied under SAAP or some other appropriate source of funds. However if this concept were developed throughout rural Australia it could make a huge difference to the availability of crisis and emergency accommodation. It builds a service model out of a wide spread set of practices in the use of caravan parks in rural contexts.

A more easily achieved small-scale version of the same idea is to purchase caravans or relocatable cabins and lease sites in existing caravan parks with an agreement with the proprietor about providing support from a SAAP agency. This concept removes the competitive factor from the equation and relieves the park owner/proprietor from much of the responsibility of dealing with homeless residents, while at the same time providing a stream of income. This approach is small scale and uses existing infrastructure but it would not work for some homeless clients. A letter addressed to the Shire of Campaspe by the Campaspe Murray family Violence network based in Echuca [12 July 2005] advocates *'that the Shire consider providing some emergency accommodation for victims of family violence in the caravan park owned by the Shire'*.

The potential problems with this proposal would be that badly managed, a social enterprise caravan park could become a 'ghetto park'. However, that is by no means inevitable and around Australia some parks, which mainly cater for permanents, are well run and presentable establishments. Of course there are some which are very run down and poorly managed. Good management is vital and a philosophy of providing a normalized environment. On the other hand, an important innovation is the potential to generate additional income for reinvestment in further services.

This proposal takes something that is characteristic of rural areas and considers how this could be re-developed into a more effective model of supported accommodation. In Victoria, medium and long-term accommodation has been re-organised under the Transitional Housing Management (THM) program whereas in NSW there are still transitional properties within SAAP and properties head leased by the Department of Housing for people on the public housing wait list in NSW. There does not seem to be a realistic prospect under SAAP V that transitional accommodation will be substantially expanded. Thus the existing position will largely remain unless something like the social enterprise model or the mini version is taken up.

RECOMMENDATION 2

THAT MURRAY AND CAMPASPE SHIRE COUNCILS FACILITATE DISCUSSIONS BETWEEN ST. VINCENT DE PAUL SOCIETY (DENILQUIN), ST. LUKE'S (ECHUCA), THE VICTORIAN DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES (LODDON-MALLEE REGION) AND THE NSW DEPARTMENT OF COMMUNITY SERVICES (WEST REGION) ABOUT THE FEASIBILITY OF A PROGRAM WHEREBY SITES WITHIN EXISTING CARAVAN PARKS COULD BE LEASED FOR CABINS OR CARAVANS TO PROVIDE EMERGENCY ACCOMMODATION FOR HOMELESS PEOPLE SUPPORTED BY SAAP WORKERS.

RECOMMENDATION 3

THAT THE DEBATE AND DEVELOPMENT OF THE SOCIAL ENTERPRISE CARAVAN PARK MODEL BE MONITORED BY ST. VINCENT DE PAUL (DENILQUIN) AND ST. LUKE'S (ECHUCA) AND THE REGIONAL DEPARTMENTAL STAKEHOLDERS AS A POTENTIALLY APPLICABLE RURAL MODEL OF CRISIS AND EMERGENCY ACCOMMODATION FOR MURRAY SHIRE AND ITS SURROUNDING AREAS IN BOTH NSW AND VICTORIA.

Either of the above proposals raises issues of who might be responsible for initiation and so on. While Local Government is not going to be the major source of funds, Councils could open Council parks to Recommendation 2. Council(s) could approach a major faith based NGO to draw that organisation into the entrepreneurial process for developing a social enterprise caravan park. One run down Caravan Park in Melbourne was purchased by a group of Christian business men, who have developed a business plan on a largely not-for-profit basis, which includes workers from The Salvation Army being on site to provide continuing support to the residents. This appears to be at least an approximation to the proposed model. The capital funds have come from private sources. However, these private interests have come to the project with social goals. If a significant capital fund was raised from private sources, then an approach could be made to the Office of Housing, Victoria and the Department of Housing in NSW for a capital contribution. The key to working out what might work in Murray and Campaspe Shires probably depends on attracting the right NGO partner. Some seed funds could be found from money put aside by licensed clubs in NSW under the law for charitable purposes or the Community Support Fund in Victoria. The drive for this must come from the community sector with encouragement from the Councils.

IMPROVISED DWELLINGS/ INFORMAL SETTLEMENTS

People living in improvised dwellings are another characteristic feature of rural homelessness. In Murray and its surrounding areas in Victoria and New South Wales up to 24-30 percent of the homeless is probably living in improvised dwellings or camping out somewhere. There is no clear picture where all of these places are but most are probably scattered across the rural properties in the area. In most cases there may be one or two such dwellings per property and generally they are out of sight. Even people with good local knowledge probably won't know where most are.

One settlement of improvised dwellings in the area has attracted some attention, mainly because of the number of caravan-dwellings in one place and the proximity to Echuca and Moama. Good policy needs to apply across a lot of situations and not be overly focused on one problem site. There has been some anxiety in Council circles about possible legal liability and Council has also had to field concerns expressed by some people in the community about the informal settlement residents. On the one hand positive comments came from workers attached to agencies in the area. While they had some concerns, they were more concerned about the welfare of the residents and the consequences of closing the settlement down. Finally there are the residents themselves and what they say about how they want to live. We heard that there had been at least two dubious deaths on the property, one of which has been loosely characterised as probably a murder and there are some people who think that Council should act more forthrightly to close it down.

If a farmer in Moama set up two caravans near to his main farm house and which operated off the farm electricity supply as well as sharing other household facilities, such an adjunct settlement would attract little attention - particularly if the farm was some distance from Moama city centre. If the residents were family members or friends staying with the family, there would be no issue. The informal settlement near Moama has attracted attention because it has some nine caravans/ makeshift shelters sited near to the owner's dwelling on private land that just happens to be close to the Echuca wharf and tourist precinct. Also, this arrangement has been in place for a long time, is close to Moama and therefore has a higher degree of visibility.

Meeting the residents and hearing their stories is particularly useful because it showed that they were isolated individuals generally estranged from family support networks; they have been employed and often travelled throughout Australia but nearly every resident was a man who suffered some kind of physical or mental disability. No-one could take up full-time work. The other shared characteristic was that they all consumed alcohol daily and in copious quantities. Their resources were at a very low level. In every respect the men living in this settlement resembled single homeless men in the capital cities who in the sixties and early seventies would have been called the 'skid row' group. This lifestyle may not be the healthiest possible but there are some positive features. Living in the Moama setting provides a sense of belonging and real friendships amongst men who would otherwise be more isolated and lonely. Self-determination is another important quality of life for the residents. As one resident explained:

There's a certain freedom here - I really hate to be told what to do. I'd hate to be told when to have a shower and hate to be told if I can have a drink or if I couldn't have a drink or smoke - no thank you. That's OK for maybe a teenager or a younger person but definitely not for us.

This group acts as a self-support community and there is some support flowing to the residents from local businesses and local agencies. Some agencies bring older homeless men to the settlement as a last resort when there is no where else for them to go.

To a great extent the residents are self-regulating. A worker who has brought homeless men to the settlement told us:

From time to time I bring people across here who are duds. The men here are the good people who are living a life here, who are happy and who fit in here.

From time to time new residents arrive who do not fit in - 'they might be junkies or people who just have got other problems and who just do not fit in'. The signs are 'blankets over the windows - they're druggies - they start undermining the place, and they go'. This is clearly a community of friends made up of homeless men who have become friends with each other. On the few occasions where a new person has been disruptive or 'using', they have been rejected by the residents. As one resident said:

We've had a few rough ones, but we've had more good ones than the rough ones. Please don't judge us by the few rough ones. There are a couple of few rough ones, but we can handle it.

From a policy standpoint, we would argue that informal settlements and improvised dwellings in a rural context should not be regarded as a problem per se, but, recognised as instances of people helping themselves, albeit in situations of rural poverty. Council, the Department of Community Services and local agencies should consider what services are needed by the people living in such situations but if they can be largely self-supporting with networks of social support that it preferable to institutional care. The homeless men we spoke to in the consultations indicated they preferred to be able to live outside care facilities. On the other hand, the cases of older disabled and unemployed men living in improvised dwellings suggest a lack of accommodation options for these men.

The informal settlement on private property close to Moama is unlikely to continue following the owner's passing. A precipitous closure of this site would create a demand on services and a host of other problems that the local system is not ready for. The preferred position for this and other situations like it would be to recognise that social self support is at work where people are helping themselves and each other. The challenge is how to provide some services to the people in these situations in an appropriate and legally defensible manner. Dialogue and negotiations should take place through an agency that already has a relationship with the residents to ensure that they receive some basic support. Suggestions for turning the settlement into a more permanent facility are problematic because the land is largely categorised as in the flood zone and there are restrictions on what can be done with it or on the sale of land parcels. However, it is a valuable area of land opposite the Echuca tourist precinct. Also for legal reasons, Council would not proceed with any permanent facilities on the site as suggested by some because the site is private land and public facilities on private land raise all kinds of legal complications. However, the welfare of the homeless residents remains a concern and Council should facilitate non-government agencies assisting the residents when needed and even providing temporary re-locatable facilities. The existence of the settlement reflects a real need in the area and some initiatives should be taken to create more support options for homeless older men and women, but especially men in the Murray-Campaspe Shire areas. In the long-term a de-facto agency/informal settlement is not a model that should be replicated but aspects of the informal settlement do provide clues to useful service and support initiatives.

The present arrangements will not continue in the longer-term and in the mean-time, there needs to be some development of clustered long-term accommodation for homeless men like the residents in the Moama-Campaspe Shires. In fact as the resident's age and given their ill-health, there will come a time when they will require medical and other support. We have suggested that the feasibility of the Wintringham model be assessed for Murray Shire. More broadly, access to low cost cabins or re-locatable housing or caravans needs to be expanded in the district and throughout rural Australia. Our advice is to put in a developmental strategy that will ultimately improve the capacity of the homeless service system in response the older people living in improvised dwellings or clustering in informal settlements. The two main agencies are the organisations which would develop such a strategy and again, this becomes another level of cross-border cooperation. It would help if there was a common secure database of where improvised dwellings are located, perhaps accessible online. Decisions about who does what need to made. Joint approaches for any additional resources should also become established practice.

RECOMMENDATION 4

THAT ST LUKE'S AND ST. VINCENT DE PAUL JOINTLY DEVELOP A POLICY FOR IMPROVED OUTREACH SERVICES FOR HOMELESS PEOPLE LIVING IN IMPROVISED DWELLINGS AND SMALL INFORMAL SETTLEMENTS, AND MAINTAIN AN ON-GOING LIAISON TO IMPROVE THE COORDINATION OF OUTREACH SUPPORT TO THIS GROUP.

A model for accommodating older homeless people uses a social entrepreneurship approach with major funding from the aged care sector rather than SAAP funds. The Wintringham hostels provide high quality accommodation and are a long-term arrangement for people accepted into a hostel. Wintringham was formed in 1987 as a public not-for-profit company in Melbourne in order to develop an alternative to the shelter based models in place at the time. It also recognised that the older homeless had considerable difficulty gaining access to the aged care system of hostels and nursing homes. A Wintringham hostel operates with aged care package money for residents, most of who have been homeless or close to it. Hostels typically are clustered self-contained cottages or units with verandas, self-contained kitchens and en-suites and are staffed 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Each unit has a part-time carer who is responsible for providing the care required under the personal care plan, which usually includes meal preparation. The operation of the Wintringham model is now well established, but capital development is always the major challenge. The organisation has grown from one hostel to a \$15 million operation with programs that support more than 600 older, formerly homeless people in a range of programs, residential settings or through outreach. There have been some recent discussions between Loddon-Mallee Housing Association and Wintringham about cooperation in Victoria. Local government assistance is a success factor and there are various ways that capital funds can be assembled, but since 1997, the Commonwealth has made only limited capital funds available. Local funds could be used to leverage Commonwealth funding or some kind of public-private enterprise could be considered. The major expenditures are land lease or purchase and the capital funds to build units. There is no simple approach for achieving this. Councils should begin with the Loddon-Mallee Housing Association and Wintringham itself. Council's role is primarily a facilitating one but explicit support by Council in any bids for funds will be important.

RECOMMENDATION 5

THAT THE WINTRINGHAM MODEL FOR OLDER HOMELESS PEOPLE BE INVESTIGATED AS A POSSIBLE RESPONSE FOR A LONG TERM GROUP OF OLDER HOMELESS MEN (AND WOMEN) IN MURRAY AND SURROUNDING AREAS.

CROSS-BORDER ISSUES

The need to work smarter across the NSW-Vic border is not a new issue. In the past, Moama and Campaspe Shires have cooperated in planning and on projects in order to facilitate a more seamless approach to service delivery. Echuca is effectively the 'big city' for this rural area and many people from NSW travel into Echuca for various services. We were told of some people who maintained postal addresses in Victoria or used relative's addresses to get access to Victorian services while actually living in NSW. Indigenous informants mentioned a series of anomalies within mental health and housing services, where the state border becomes a barrier to efficient and effective service delivery. The differences between NSW and Victoria on mental health seem more formidable than in housing but there are evidently issues across all the service areas.

This report fully supports the cooperative approach by the Campaspe and Murray Shires to identify the various reforms and the joint arrangements that would substantially improve service delivery. In some cases reform is not likely to be quickly achieved, such as where legislative changes are required, but in most cases the reforms are administrative and procedural. There is already a prior history of cooperation between these two local governments and the principles involved in cross-border cooperation have already been established. There is also the established mental health protocol agreement between departments in New South Wales and Victoria although several informants have said that the protocol is not well established in practice on the ground and pointed out that it has limitations. What is needed is a long-term process to implement reforms and new arrangements in the various service delivery areas. The driver for this process must be Local Government and the proposals for what needs to be done can only be constructed through consultation with local stakeholders and by considering the issues as experienced in the local area. Ideally this would have some dedicated resources such as a project worker to work on behalf of the Councils to ensure that tasks are done and actions are developed and followed through. At this stage it is most likely that Council officers will undertake this cooperative work. That being the case, the progress made on cross-border cooperation ought to be regularly reported to the Councils.

The level of cooperation between Murray and Campaspe Shires is quite well developed but a larger challenge is engaging the various state departments to recognise the need for a cooperative approach to service provision and to develop a practical way to enable this to happen. While departments under different state jurisdictions are not likely in the near future to engage in collaborative planning, it should be possible to consult jointly and conduct discussions about planning as part of the regional planning on both sides of the border. Also, approaches from the joint Councils and services across the border would pressure the state departments to take the 'other' into account as a cross-border paradigm is slowly established. This is not likely to just evolve and it will require some dedicated effort.

If the operation of SAAP is considered in a cross-border framework then the catchment area covers Campaspe Shire (with 35,000 people), Murray Shire (5,907), Deniliquin (7,786) and perhaps some of the areas surrounding Deniliquin which would take in about 9000 people (ABS Census 2001). Echuca is the major city centre of this cross-border area and the population on the Victorian side is twice the population of Murray Shire and Deniliquin combined (about 16,000). However, if the population of rural areas such as Wakool, Windouran, Jerrilderie and Berrigan are included on the NSW side, the difference is much less. Also it should be noted that the population of Moama has increased as the town has grown rapidly since the 2001 ABS Census. A strong service presence in Echuca would make sense because in effect, Moama is largely serviced from Echuca and Victoria. The two major issues that arise are the level of coordination between the two key SAAP funded agencies (i.e. St. Vincent de Paul and St. Luke's) and secondly, how might cross border services be recognised in decision-making by DHS in Victoria and DOCS in NSW, and how this would impact in terms of organised resources on the ground.

RECOMMENDATION 6

THAT MURRAY AND CAMPASPE SHIRES CONTINUE THE JOINT APPROACH TO WORKING ACROSS THE NSW/VICTORIAN BORDER. THE COUNCILS SHOULD SEEK TO BRING THE VICTORIAN DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES AND THE NSW DEPARTMENT OF COMMUNITY SERVICES TOGETHER TO DEVELOP A MORE COOPERATIVE CROSS BORDER APPROACH TO FUNDING HOUSING AND HOMELESSNESS SERVICES IN THE AREA.

RECOMMENDATION 7

THAT ST LUKE'S AND ST. VINCENT DE PAUL JOINTLY DEVELOP A CROSS-BORDER PROTOCOL WITH FORMAL SERVICE PROCEDURES AND REGULAR FORMAL COORDINATION MEETINGS. THIS PROTOCOL WOULD ALSO INCLUDE THE SHARING OF DATA, A JOINT APPROACH TO DHS AND DOCS FOR RECOGNITION AND SUPPORT, AND JOINT SUBMISSIONS FOR ADDITIONAL RESOURCES. AS PART OF THIS PROCESS A THOROUGH EXAMINATION OF THE DISTRIBUTION OF CURRENT RESOURCES AND SERVICES OUGHT TO TAKE PLACE.

EARLY INTERVENTION

In the past decade, early intervention has become a major policy orientation with the homelessness area, particularly for young people. Early intervention was first officially canvassed in the House of Representatives Report on Aspects of Youth Homelessness (1995), and then taken up as the core theme of the Prime Minister's Youth Homelessness Taskforce. This Taskforce fielded 26 pilot early intervention projects from 1997-99. Following this, the Commonwealth Government launched the Reconnect program with \$20m of recurrent funds, deploying early intervention workers in communities across Australia. There is an effective Reconnect program in Deniliquin that is well connected to a range of other youth services and which works with the secondary schools in its intake area.

The notion of 'early intervention' can be applied to a range of issues, but in the context of homelessness it does not imply early in life but as early as possible in a person's actual experience of homelessness. The positive response to early intervention has opened up policy thinking to a broader conception about deploying public policy responses to homelessness. Early intervention policy and programs are most developed for young people although there is some pilot work underway to implement early intervention for families and public housing tenants.

Early intervention is reaching young people who are at imminent risk of becoming homeless, or as soon as possible after they become homeless. The term often used is 'recently homeless' and it usually refers to within one month, but this is not a strict duration. Early intervention is grounded in the concept of homelessness as a process or a 'career' with changes in the life of the homeless person over time. This concept is the basis for the new thinking about homelessness as a 'career process', or a series of biographical transitions from one stage to another (MacKenzie and Chamberlain, 2003; Chamberlain and MacKenzie 1998, Ch.5; National Evaluation of the Supported Accommodation Assistance Program 1999, Ch.7; Thomson Goodall and Associates 1999, Ch.2).

Early intervention seeks to explore the possibilities for family reconciliation, or to enable a homeless young person to stay with more distant family or friend's families, or placements in family settings. As far as possible, this form of intervention attempts to prevent young people entering SAAP

and mixing with other young people with more difficult problems, who may be well and truly part of the street subculture.

Young people usually become homeless because of a breakdown in family relations. This broad view covers sexual and physical abuse, inappropriate or incompetent parenting, tensions between children and step-parents, escalating arguments between young people and parents and many other specific issues that lead to a deterioration in relations. The issues that were raised during the hearings in Murray and Echuca were similar to other parts of Australia. As family conflict becomes apparent, workers or teachers may identify young people as increasingly 'at risk'. The term 'at risk' is widely used to refer to a range of different problems but the concept is used in somewhat different ways and for different purposes depending on the problem (Dryfoos 1990; Carter 1993; Department of Employment, Education and Training 1994; Batten and Russell 1995; Withers and Batten 1995). The concept of 'at risk of homelessness' was developed to accord with how experienced youth workers and welfare teachers generally decide that young people might be 'at risk'.

When workers decide that a young person is 'at risk' of homelessness, they usually focus on several key factors: a young person's family situation – are they living with both parents, or in a blended family, or with a single parent; information about the state of the relationship between the young person and family members - do they get on well with their mother, but not with their stepfather; the reasons why the young person came to see them at that time; and in addition, clues provided by a young person's body language, behaviour or expressions.

The reason schools are so important in the scheme of early intervention is that welfare staff will have information about how a young person is 'travelling' at school - whether their school work has started to deteriorate, or if they have had a lot of conflict with other students, or become 'withdrawn'; but also they may be the first to know what is happening at home.

There are five phases and four transitions to the youth career model. The development of the career model makes explicit the phase where young people become homeless but remain at school. The phase of 'homeless student' is particularly important because the possibilities of early intervention are contained in what can be achieved at this stage.

The second phase on the youth career involves the initial process of detachment from the family situation. The first tangible indicator of 'homelessness' is when a young person leaves home for at least one night without their parent's permission. This is a 'tentative break' and it may be a once only experience. But in cases, where underlying family problems remain unresolved, some teenagers begin to move in and out of home. Running away from home is usually for relatively short periods.

Some students move through the 'in and out' stage quickly, whereas for others it happens over a much longer period of time. This is a critical time to engage in early intervention where it is possible to facilitate family reconciliation. The 'in and out' pattern identifies a pattern of episodic leaving home by young people for relatively short periods of time, from a few days to a week. Usually, these young people stay with friends in their community of origin.

The permanent break signifies the emergence of an identity independent of familial relations of dependence. In the past young people would often leave home at 16 or 17 years of age and move into

the labour market as an apprentice or into unskilled or semi-skilled work. However, these days, young people tend to stay home for longer and after moving out often return several times as they attempt to achieve a fully independent lifestyle.

Young people may literally be forced from their family home, or else they may feel compelled to leave due to extreme and unacceptable circumstances. If sexual or physical assault is involved, most will readily agree that the young person was forced to leave, but where conflict is at a lower level and involves disagreements about what is acceptable in the life of the family, community opinion and valuations are more unclear and uncertain. In the high drama of a crisis, it is difficult to know whether relationships can be repaired or not, but early intervention work is about exploring the possibilities for reconciliation and achieving family reconciliation where this is possible.

Generally, teenagers leave home first and then later leave school. Chamberlain and MacKenzie (1998, Ch.5) have pointed out that teenagers usually have their first experience of homelessness while they are still at school (O'Connor 1989, p.14; Crane and Brannock 1996, p.40; MacKenzie and Chamberlain 1995). What happens for a young person at this stage is critical. Here is the opportunity for early intervention with a range of possible positive outcomes. Homeless students may reconcile with parents and return home, or they may be supported at school as independent students living apart from the family home. Students living independently are more common these days than a decade ago. Some will go into an alternative education and training program, while they are being assisted into independent accommodation. Generally, it is not considered appropriate for young teenagers to live independently, because most do not have the maturity or living skills, but from 16 years and older, independent living with some support is the real and desirable option.

Early intervention is concerned with the appropriate support for young people who are recently homeless, where reconciliation with family is a real possibility even though it may not always be achieved. Early intervention work is also working with young people who are homeless but still attending school and still attached to their community. If attachments to school and community can be maintained then a young person may be homeless but they are less likely to drift into transience and move down the homeless career path.

Chronic homelessness in one sense is the end of the homeless career at least in terms of the theoretical model. However, homeless young people may continue this way for very long periods of time, particularly if they have high and complex needs, such as mental health and/or substance use problems that the service system struggles to meet (Szirom, King and Desmond, 2004). In some cases, homelessness for young people may be episodic, where they move in and out of homelessness many times, and where homelessness is interrupted by relatively short periods of stability. In other cases, they become itinerant, remaining homeless for many years.

Some agencies have clearly done early intervention work with clients. The range of practices are from a crisis service that has a clear sense of attempting family reconciliation for recently homeless young people as an urgent priority, to a crisis service that works on the basis that 'they should be allowed to settle in before we try do anything like family reconciliation'. These contrasting examples come from outside Murray but they represent the dichotomy of practices throughout the sector.

It helps to think out the options for these young people. Some will still be staying in the family home, perhaps having runaway previously, but they present with the strong impulse to leave the family home. Whichever service has contact with a recently homeless young person should try to delay them from leaving while at the same time moving to work with both the young person and their family. Alternatively, they might be provided with accommodation as a respite from the family situation. Family reconciliation is pursued as a realistic possibility, but it cannot be achieved in all cases.

Typically young people who have runaway from home will stay with friends – ‘couch surfing’. This is very common. Some can avail themselves of this option only for a short time but others may be able to spend longer periods with friend’s families. On an ad hoc basis, workers will sometimes negotiate for a young person to remain there while other longer-term options are investigated. If this could be developed into a programmatic response ‘couch surfers’ staying with families they know and who know them, could be stabilized in a safe environment, while other aspects of early intervention are followed up.

In some states, there is an Adolescent Community Placement (ACP) program available to young people, particularly younger teenagers, where they can stay with families or individuals. The adults recruited to such programs, are properly screened and receive some training and continuing support from workers. The costs of keeping an additional person in the household are defrayed. Victoria, South Australia and Tasmania have ACP programs.

In Murray and Campaspe, family placements developed with the families where couch surfers are staying, would tap into a reservoir of social capital and the social support networks that homeless young people still have. An adult worker needs to negotiate with the parents to stabilise the situation as a placement and brokerage money may be needed to cover additional costs that the family could not otherwise cope with. While it is possible to develop this kind of response under an Adolescent Community Placement model of home based care for young people, under statutory orders, there are some reasons to doubt whether the current care and protection system, which is already under strain, could appropriately pick up this option. There is also advice that family placements in rural towns are difficult to develop and maintain. However, couch-surfing is what happens in almost all cases and the family sheltering the runaway usually knows the young person. What we don’t have currently is a practice in place or any organised program that can respond quickly for a young person staying informally with the family of a friend. Since some 48 percent of the homeless of all ages are staying temporarily with friends this type of outreach work could be particularly important for rural settings and not just for young people.

RECOMMENDATION 8

THAT A PILOT PROJECT BE DEVELOPED TO INVESTIGATE THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE COUCH SURFING PLACEMENT OPTION FOR YOUNG PEOPLE.

There is a need to expand Reconnect nationally (Chamberlain and Mackenzie, 2004) which in the context of this project and the Murray and Campaspe Shires, means a Reconnect service in Echuca. Evidence gained from fieldwork contact with Vinnies Reconnect in Deniliquin suggests that this program is a good example of an effective Reconnect service in a program that has been found to be

broadly effective. The national evaluation of Reconnect found a significant improvement in the capacity of young people and their families to deal with intra-family conflict, improved communication and more positive attitudes to school. About 70 percent of Reconnect clients achieve positive outcomes, either reconciliation if they were detached, or a more stable family situation for the larger group referred because they are deemed at risk.

RECOMMENDATION 9

THAT JOINT REPRESENTATION IS MADE BY ST LUKE'S, VICTORIA AND ST. VINCENT DE PAUL IN DENILQUIN TO THE COMMONWEALTH GOVERNMENT FOR FUNDS FOR A RECONNECT SERVICE IN ECHUCA.

In our view, strategically, the development of diversionary alternative early intervention options for recently homeless young people is a policy priority. Given the ongoing issues between SAAP agencies and Family Services about responsibility for young people less than 16 years of age, the development of a couch-surfers placement program could be major breakthrough for rural communities.

Finally, the issue of cross border coordination needs to be taken up at a service provision level in a number of areas. SAAP youth service providers, St Luke's in Victoria and Vinnies in Deniliquin should more formally coordinate their support for homeless young people, not only in terms of submissions and advocacy for a Reconnect service in Echuca, but also for the suggested 'couch-surfing placement pilot. Coordination and cooperation need some kind of formal process and structure to be implemented as an on-going feature of the homeless service system across Murray and Campaspe Shires. In Victoria, the School Focused Youth Service funds 41 community coordinators who work with agencies and schools facilitating the development of a community of action between these sectors. The program not only picks up the issue of homelessness but any issues affecting young people that are perceived as an 'issue' by the community of stakeholders. No other state currently has such capacity, although the Queensland Youth Support Coordinators program may be undertaking some similar functions. The two main service providers should be encouraged to work more closely through a coordinating and liaison meeting together with the secondary schools in Murray and Campaspe Shires and any other stakeholder programs that work with homeless young people in the two shires in any significant way.

RECOMMENDATION 10

THAT ST LUKE'S, VICTORIA AND ST. VINCENT DE PAUL IN DENILQUIN FORM A COORDINATING COMMITTEE TOGETHER WITH THE SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN MURRAY SHIRE, DENILQUIN AND CAMPASPE SHIRE AND OTHER SALIENT STAKEHOLDERS IN ORDER TO IMPROVE THE COORDINATION OF SUPPORT TO HOMELESS YOUNG PEOPLE.

Initially, this work would not be supported by additional resources but a joint approach to the School Focused Youth Service program and discussions with the NSW Department of Community Services should be pursued to attempt to secure backing. Other philanthropic funds should also be sought. Another source would be the national Homeless Strategy communications stream of funding that can be approached at any time over the next 12 months to two years.

AFFORDABLE HOUSING

The housing boom that has dominated the private sector housing market over the past 4 – 6 years has also had an impact on the private rental market in regional and rural areas. In turn, this has affected the level and percentage of affordable housing available to low income earners or those on benefits (i.e. Centrelink). For regional and rural areas, this situation has been exacerbated by a historic lack of public housing as well as an increase in tenants with high and complex needs entering public housing either on Victoria's segmented system or under the NSW priority housing policy. The result has been a squeeze on the affordable housing market which now means that more and more people, who otherwise would have been housed in social housing, are unable to gain timely access. They are too poor to afford private rents in the current market but are also not disadvantaged enough to gain access (within a reasonable time frame) to the limited public housing stock in regional areas (Hillier et al 2002).

There are currently a number of initiatives underway in both NSW and Victoria to address the issue of a net lack of affordable housing. For example, the Affordable Housing Network in NSW was established in April 2004 to provide a forum for sharing information about affordable housing initiatives and providing opportunities for collaborative action by organizations such as research, lobbying or other campaigning, educational events, and housing partnerships/joint ventures. Also in NSW, the Local Government Affordable Housing Strategy (DoH, 2004) was developed to provide DoH with a coordinated approach to working with local government in building strategic solutions. Local governments are seen as the most appropriate level of government to respond to this issue in concrete practical terms and both state governments proclaim the need for strategic alliances and partnerships with local councils in order to effectively respond to the net lack of affordable housing:

Councils are very well placed to distinguish local need and provide localized responses to affordability problems within their communities. Councils can influence housing supply and impact on housing affordability through land use planning and building control functions, as well as through social and community planning, community service provision and local infrastructure provision (NSW Affordable Housing Strategy, DoH, 2004)

There is a policy argument that local government is better informed about local needs and responsive to local issues than state governments, although the Commonwealth and the states have major responsibilities to ensure that adequate funds are available (Milligan et al 2004; Standing Committee on Primary Industries and Regional Services 2000). There are also some good examples of local government authorities playing an increasingly pro-active role in shaping local housing outcomes, such as the provision of affordable housing. While this is by no means the norm it is a growing trend with many expressing commitment to extending this role. Murray Shire has been working with a group of parents, agencies, community and local government representatives to develop group accommodation for people with disabilities in Moama. The identified need is that as carers' age there should be appropriate options in the community to house and support the disabled family member. This is a good example of local government working with community groups to create

affordable housing, in this case for a particular high need group. In terms of the 'tree change' and retiree shift from capital cities to quieter and more affordable rural settings, local government has an important facilitating role in enabling such developments to go ahead. The Murray Shire project should be supported as an exemplar of what is likely to be more common within the Shire in future years.

In Victoria, the 'Housing and Local Government Network', which was established in 1997, is a professional interest group of local government officers, councillors and their associates, within the Municipal Association of Victoria. In addition, the VHS, through its strategic framework, identified a number of specific strategies that target local government participation in assisting to alleviate the burden of homelessness through creating more affordable housing. These strategies include: pursuing alternative growth approaches that involve innovative partnering and fiscal arrangements; fostering relationships with local governments to promote better planning and development; and further funding for the Social Housing Innovations Project (SHIP) to stimulate commercial and community investment in the provision of social housing. In 2002 the Affordable Housing Steering Committee was formed to investigate a future strategy for affordable housing in Victoria. The committee's final report, "Toward a State and Local Government Affordable Housing Strategy" was endorsed by government and forms the policy direction for affordable housing approaches in Victoria. Both NSW and Victoria have identified rural and regional needs as a priority area for responding to the lack of affordable housing.

RECOMMENDATION 11

THAT MURRAY AND CAMPASPE SHIRES DEVELOP A COMMON POSITION ON AFFORDABLE HOUSING AND A JOINT STRATEGY APPROACH SO THAT AFFORDABLE HOUSING FITS AS A COMPONENT PART OF THEIR RESPECTIVE SOCIAL AND COMMUNITY AND/OR ENVIRONMENT PLANS.

RECOMMENDATION 12

THAT MURRAY AND CAMPASPE SHIRE COUNCILS PURSUE A JOINT SUBMISSION TO NSW DOH AND VICTORIA'S DHS, (OFFICE OF HOUSING) FOR A PARTNERSHIP INITIATIVE TO FURTHER EXPLORE APPROPRIATE OPTIONS FOR INCREASING AFFORDABLE HOUSING WITHIN BOTH SHIRES.

There is a clear and strong case for more public housing in Murray Shire. Deniliquin has 16.6 percent public rental housing which is close to the NSW average of 17.7 percent. The adjacent Shire of Campaspe has 23.9 percent public housing which is above the Victorian average of 14.3 percent. The Victorian rural city of Echuca has 31.6 percent public housing. Whatever the historical reasons for the Murray anomaly the population and housing growth in Murray Shire clearly indicates there is a case for priority provision.

In Deniliquin, which is where much of the public housing in the area has been historically placed, there is a rental market of 844 dwellings while in Murray there are 445 rental dwellings or about half. Yet in Deniliquin, there are 140 public housing rental properties while on ABS figures in Murray there are nine. To bring Murray shire up to the level of the Central Murray SSD that includes Deniliquin [i.e. 8%] would require about an additional 35 dwellings. To bring Murray to 15 percent public housing

rental in the municipality would require about 70 public housing rental dwellings. These calculated figures highlight the gap. There is a strong case for priority allocation to this area.

The case requires an increasing population and a developing local economy. Both these conditions are satisfied in Murray Shire.

Given the long-term decline in Government investment in the public housing sector and the long lead times, other public type housing options do need to be considered such as community housing, public-private projects that provide some incentives for developers to build a certain number of public housing units as part of the overall commercial development and other community based developments. Market forces are not enough to make this happen but Council policy and approvals powers are a powerful form of leverage. In fact some of these other options are already under consideration. The following recommendation specifically focuses on advocacy for more public housing rental stock in Murray Shire.

RECOMMENDATION 13

THAT MURRAY AND CAMPASPE SHIRES TOGETHER WITH HOUSING SECTOR STAKEHOLDERS ADVOCATE FOR PRIORITY PROVISION OF PUBLIC HOUSING PROPERTIES IN MURRAY SHIRE TO THE NSW DEPARTMENT OF HOUSING AND ALSO TO THE OFFICE OF HOUSING IN VICTORIA.

Perhaps the nature of the affordable housing has to be reconsidered. As one informant in the hearings pointed out, standards are fine but they can become a barrier to provided reasonable housing in rural areas. Recently the Victorian Government announced an allocation of \$49.6m over 5 years (The Age, 27 April 2005). Under this package it was stated that 100 homes would be built for low income families with the first \$19.9m which translates into approximately a unit cost of \$200,000 per dwelling. On the one hand high quality factory built 2-3 bedroom homes can be delivered and erected on site for around \$60,000 to \$100,000. The greater use of re-locatable housing ought to be considered not only because of the cost saving but also the flexibility of re-locatable dwellings. The higher building costs in rural areas are thereby avoided with a much shorter lead time from decision to build to building. In most rural towns and areas land availability is not the limiting issue and local government has a vital role to play.

FAMILY/DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

Family and domestic violence is a major cause of homelessness among women and children in metropolitan areas, but it is perhaps even more hidden in rural and remote areas. The figures for Apprehended Violence Orders in 1997 for New South Wales published by the NSW Bureau of Crime and Statistics Research suggest that domestic violence is somewhat higher in rural and regional areas than in Sydney. Murray here is not the Shire of Murray but the ABS statistical division of Murray which includes Albury and the three sub-divisions of Upper Murray, Central Murray and Murray-Darling in the New South Wales bordering the Murray River.

Table 42: No. & rate per 100,000 of apprehended violence orders within NSW, 1997

	MURRAY	RURAL NSW	SYDNEY	NEW SOUTH WALES
# OF AVOs	325	8032	8635	16,667
RATE PER 100,000	293	290	220	266

(Source: NSW Bureau of Crime & Statistical Research)

On this indicator, Murray is about average but the rates of domestic violence tend to be higher in rural areas than in the city and this pattern is generally true around rural and regional Australia.

This can be attributed to several factors: geographical isolation that comes with living in country townships or rural farms, higher levels of alcohol consumption, rural poverty stress and limited support resources on the ground; more conservative community attitudes in some areas and social change processes (Adkins et al, 2003). Within Murray Shire and its surrounding areas there are 3 Domestic Violence service providers and a range of dedicated crisis properties clustered in the major centres of Echuca, Bendigo and Shepparton. Women's refuges are a well-established part of the Domestic Violence service system, largely funded under SAAP and like metropolitan refuges the women's refuges accessible from Murray Shire-Campaspe Shire-Deniliquin and the surrounding areas mainly offer refuge accommodation to women outside of their locality. One respondent noted:

The history of refuges is that women flee their own area and go to an area where they're unknown to anybody and start afresh from there, which is great. However, I think there's a change in that women are now wishing to remain in their own area.

Since the 1970s, protection in secure supported accommodation has been the dominant model in the women's refuge system as it was seen to be the only way that domestic violence services could guarantee a woman's safety and security, when law enforcement by police and through the courts was inadequate to deal effectively with the issue of domestic violence (WESNET 2000; DHS 2002; Parkinson 2003; Council to Homeless Persons 2000). However, this way of responding to domestic violence is being thought about critically as it is not necessarily meeting the needs of many women who are reluctant to detach from their social and community support networks (Council to Homeless Persons 2002; WESNET 2000). The argument is not that women's refuges do not have an important place in the system but what else can be done or how can a response be done differently. It is now well recognised that helping homeless people to remain in their local community, where friends, family and other community supports remain accessible [social connectedness] is more likely to achieve positive outcomes over the longer-term and reduce marginalisation (Erabus 2004; Crane & Brannock 1996; Council to Homeless Persons 2002; OoH 2004) Sometimes women want to move out of the area but often they don't. One worker comments on the issue of relocation:

Not always. Sometimes yes, and sometimes no and that makes it difficult when they don't because we just don't have anything here. You know, we've only got one crisis house, and because we don't have anything else, no people to go to, sometimes that crisis house becomes transitional and they stay

longer. So another option is to look up the Internet and to see if there's a property somewhere in the region. Usually you find there's something in Swan Hill, because Swan Hill has fourteen transitional houses. The thing is if they don't want to go to Swan Hill, then we're stuck, yeah. And then if it's really serious, there's a refuge option. We try to organise a refuge for them ... {but} that could be anywhere..

Young people tend to be more flexible and ready to make a new start but moving to new areas can effectively degrade social support networks and disrupt school attendance. In this sense providing emergency accommodation while moving people out of their communities maybe in part contributing to the problem and increasing their disconnectedness (Crane & Brannock, 1996).

The effect on children of moving out of their familiar community context, changing schools and making new friends may exacerbate the trauma they have already suffered as a result of the homelessness of the family group. In rural areas, moving to another secure location is not like moving suburbs or even regions in metropolitan centres of Melbourne and Sydney. One worker stated that moving from say, one town to another was 'like moving inter-state'.

Current research on domestic violence supports an approach where women and children remain safely in the family home (i.e. Commonwealth Government 'Partnerships against Domestic Violence' Strategy; Young et al, 1998; WESTNET, 2000). This is not a model that suits all family violence situations and the need to prioritise the safety of a woman and her children should never be compromised. However, an approach which holds a perpetrator accountable for his actions and which supports the family to remain in their local community has considerable potential to alleviate a key cause of homelessness and reduce the upheaval and dislocation associated with having to move into an unfamiliar area. Positive work is underway in Albury-Wodonga on this model and some discussion should be initiated with the key people involved to draw from their experience and to enlist their help for a Murray-Campaspe proposal.

We propose that a pilot initiative be undertaken to further explore this model in key locations where there are established DV services such as Echuca, which is the largest centre to Murray Shire and the location of the Campaspe-Murray Family Violence network. While there is still a significant amount of work to be done on this model (i.e. legislative change to enable police to remove and detain a perpetrator for more than four hours), the grounds for piloting the model are in place and it is being attempted in certain places elsewhere. It is also the subject of current debate in the women's and DV sector. We would argue that in particular this model is relevant to rural and regional areas where options for housing and accommodation for women escaping family and domestic violence are limited.

RECOMMENDATION 14

THAT MURRAY AND CAMPASPE SHIRES FACILITATE A MEETING OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE SERVICE PROVIDERS IN THE SURROUNDING AREAS TO SEEK FUNDING FROM PARTNERSHIPS AGAINST DOMESTIC VIOLENCE (PADV), TO CONDUCT A PILOT INITIATIVE IN AN APPROPRIATE SITE (SUCH AS ECHUCA) TO TRIAL NEW APPROACHES TO RESPONDING TO DOMESTIC VIOLENCE WHICH SUPPORT THE REMOVAL OF A PERPETRATOR INTO A SECURE LOCATION FOR TREATMENT AND INTERVENTION.

Past research suggests that some women escaping domestic violence will access cross target services when they are unable to gain the assistance from DV services (Hanover, 2003). This is particularly pertinent for women who do not wish to leave their local community but who are seeking assistance for homelessness and for young women aged less than 18 years of age. Generally, DV services are targeted to adult women and frequently lack the resources and expertise to provide a comprehensive service to the younger age group. Younger women will tend to seek out a youth service or a gender specific youth service in preference to a domestic violence agency because they may not view their situation as a domestic violence situation. Young women will frequently present to youth services citing 'relationship problems' or 'family breakdown' as reasons for accessing the service. For some of these young women their situation is later re-assessed as domestic violence, but it is not until they have been engaged by a worker and built some level of trust that this information becomes apparent.

RECOMMENDATION 15

THAT CAMPASPE AND MURRAY SHIRES SUPPORT THE CAMPASPE MURRAY FAMILY VIOLENCE NETWORK TO SEEK FUNDING FOR AN ADDITIONAL DOMESTIC VIOLENCE OUTREACH WORKER TO WORK ACROSS THE TWO SHIRES AND SURROUNDING AREAS.

7. LIST OF RECOMMENDATIONS

RECOMMENDATION 1

THAT THE SHIRES OF MURRAY AND CAMPASPE, TOGETHER WITH HOMELESS SERVICES IN THE SURROUNDING AREAS OF NSW AND VICTORIA, ADVOCATE FOR A REVIEW OF HOMELESSNESS FUNDING. IN VICTORIA THIS SHOULD BE ADDRESSED TO THE DHS FUNDING MODEL REVIEW IN ORDER TO REDRESS FUNDING IMBALANCES BETWEEN REGIONS ON THE BASIS OF A MORE DETAILED ANALYSIS BY DHS POLICY AND PLANNING EXPERTS, WHILE IN NSW THIS SAME ISSUE SHOULD BE RE-EXAMINED AS PART OF THE DECISION-MAKING PROCESS ABOUT FUNDING UNDER SAAP V.

RECOMMENDATION 2

THAT MURRAY AND CAMPASPE SHIRE COUNCILS FACILITATE DISCUSSIONS BETWEEN ST. VINCENT DE PAUL SOCIETY (DENILQUIN), ST. LUKE'S (ECHUCA), THE VICTORIAN DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES (LODDON-MALLEE REGION) AND THE NSW DEPARTMENT OF COMMUNITY SERVICES (WEST REGION) ABOUT THE FEASIBILITY OF A PROGRAM WHEREBY SITES WITHIN EXISTING CARAVAN PARKS COULD BE LEASED FOR CABINS OR CARAVANS TO PROVIDE EMERGENCY ACCOMMODATION FOR HOMELESS PEOPLE SUPPORTED BY SAAP WORKERS.

RECOMMENDATION 3

THAT THE DEBATE AND DEVELOPMENT OF THE SOCIAL ENTERPRISE CARAVAN PARK MODEL BE MONITORED BY ST. VINCENT DE PAUL (DENILQUIN) AND ST. LUKE'S (ECHUCA) AND THE REGIONAL DEPARTMENTAL STAKEHOLDERS AS A POTENTIALLY APPLICABLE RURAL MODEL OF CRISIS AND EMERGENCY ACCOMMODATION FOR MURRAY SHIRE AND ITS SURROUNDING AREAS IN BOTH NSW AND VICTORIA.

RECOMMENDATION 4

THAT ST LUKE'S AND ST. VINCENT DE PAUL JOINTLY DEVELOP A POLICY FOR IMPROVED OUTREACH SERVICES FOR HOMELESS PEOPLE LIVING IN IMPROVISED DWELLINGS AND SMALL INFORMAL SETTLEMENTS, AND MAINTAIN AN ON-GOING LIAISON TO IMPROVE THE COORDINATION OF OUTREACH SUPPORT TO THIS GROUP.

RECOMMENDATION 5

THAT THE WINTRINGHAM MODEL FOR OLDER HOMELESS PEOPLE BE INVESTIGATED AS A POSSIBLE RESPONSE FOR A LONG TERM GROUP OF OLDER HOMELESS MEN (AND WOMEN) IN MURRAY AND SURROUNDING AREAS.

RECOMMENDATION 6

THAT MURRAY AND CAMPASPE SHIRES CONTINUE THE JOINT APPROACH TO WORKING ACROSS THE NSW/VICTORIAN BORDER. THE COUNCILS SHOULD SEEK TO BRING THE VICTORIAN DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES AND THE NSW DEPARTMENT OF COMMUNITY SERVICES TOGETHER TO DEVELOP A MORE COOPERATIVE CROSS BORDER APPROACH TO FUNDING HOUSING AND HOMELESSNESS SERVICES IN THE AREA.

RECOMMENDATION 7

THAT ST LUKE'S AND ST. VINCENT DE PAUL JOINTLY DEVELOP A CROSS-BORDER PROTOCOL WITH FORMAL SERVICE PROCEDURES AND REGULAR FORMAL COORDINATION MEETINGS. THIS PROTOCOL WOULD ALSO INCLUDE THE SHARING OF DATA, A JOINT APPROACH TO DHS AND DOCS FOR RECOGNITION AND SUPPORT, AND JOINT SUBMISSIONS FOR ADDITIONAL RESOURCES. AS PART OF THIS PROCESS A THOROUGH EXAMINATION OF THE DISTRIBUTION OF CURRENT RESOURCES AND SERVICES OUGHT TO TAKE PLACE.

RECOMMENDATION 8

THAT A PILOT PROJECT BE DEVELOPED TO INVESTIGATE THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE COUCH SURFING PLACEMENT OPTION FOR YOUNG PEOPLE.

RECOMMENDATION 9

THAT JOINT REPRESENTATION IS MADE BY ST LUKE'S, VICTORIA AND ST. VINCENT DE PAUL IN DENILQUIN TO THE COMMONWEALTH GOVERNMENT FOR FUNDS FOR A RECONNECT SERVICE IN ECHUCA.

RECOMMENDATION 10

THAT ST LUKE'S, VICTORIA AND ST. VINCENT DE PAUL IN DENILQUIN FORM A COORDINATING COMMITTEE TOGETHER WITH THE SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN MURRAY SHIRE, DENILQUIN AND CAMPASPE SHIRE AND OTHER SALIENT STAKEHOLDERS IN ORDER TO IMPROVE THE COORDINATION OF SUPPORT TO HOMELESS YOUNG PEOPLE.

RECOMMENDATION 11

THAT MURRAY AND CAMPASPE SHIRES DEVELOP A COMMON POSITION ON AFFORDABLE HOUSING AND A JOINT STRATEGY APPROACH SO THAT AFFORDABLE HOUSING FITS AS A COMPONENT PART OF THEIR RESPECTIVE SOCIAL AND COMMUNITY AND/OR ENVIRONMENT PLANS.

RECOMMENDATION 12

THAT MURRAY AND CAMPASPE SHIRE COUNCILS PURSUE A JOINT SUBMISSION TO NSW DoH AND VICTORIA'S DHS, (OFFICE OF HOUSING) FOR A PARTNERSHIP INITIATIVE TO FURTHER EXPLORE APPROPRIATE OPTIONS FOR INCREASING AFFORDABLE HOUSING WITHIN BOTH SHIRES.

RECOMMENDATION 13

THAT MURRAY AND CAMPASPE SHIRES TOGETHER WITH HOUSING SECTOR STAKEHOLDERS ADVOCATE FOR PRIORITY PROVISION OF PUBLIC HOUSING PROPERTIES IN MURRAY SHIRE TO THE NSW DEPARTMENT OF HOUSING AND ALSO TO THE OFFICE OF HOUSING IN VICTORIA.

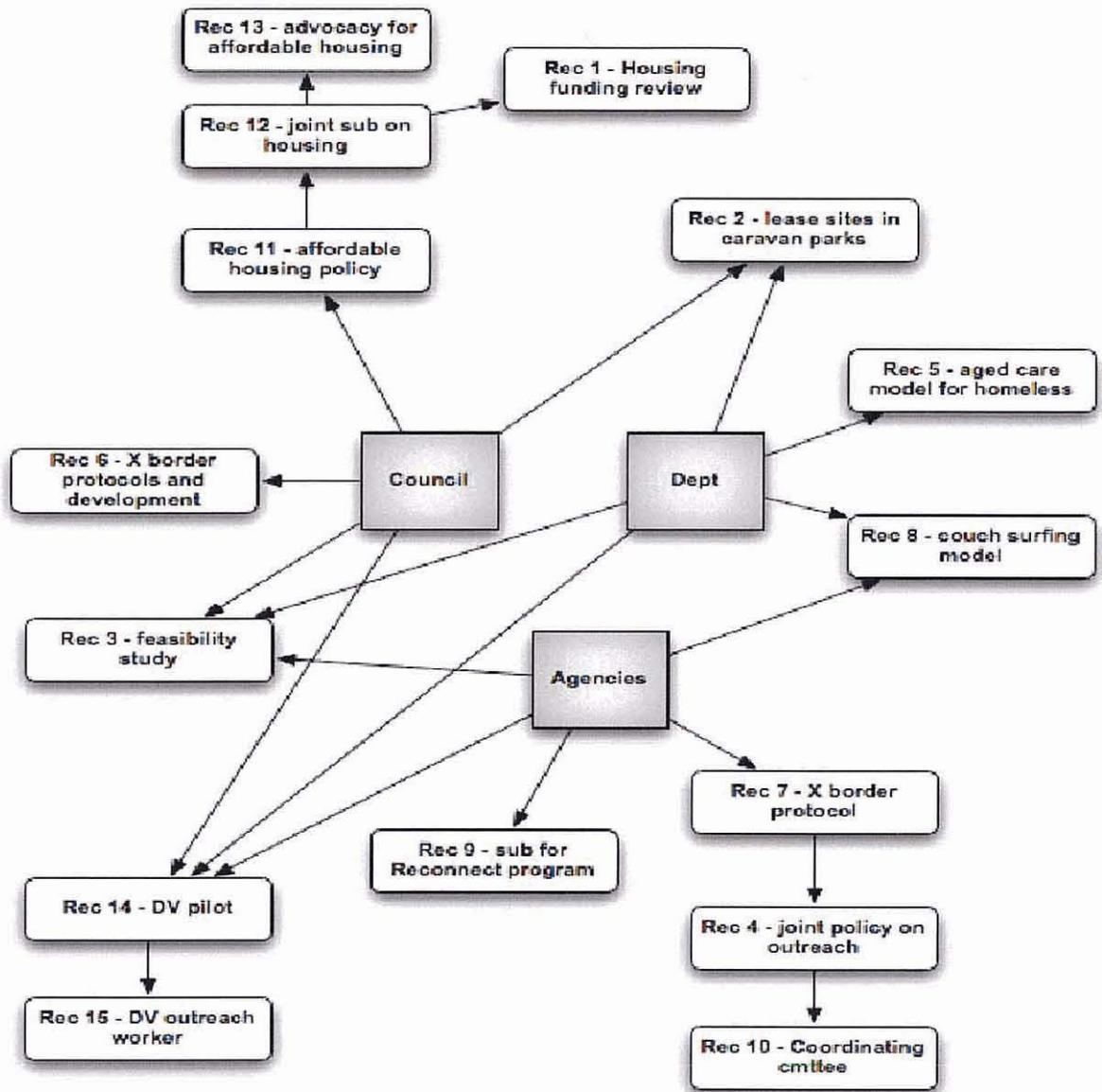
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THAT MURRAY AND CAMPASPE SHIRES FACILITATE A MEETING OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE SERVICE PROVIDERS IN THE SURROUNDING AREAS TO SEEK FUNDING FROM PARTNERSHIPS AGAINST DOMESTIC VIOLENCE (PADV), TO CONDUCT A PILOT INITIATIVE IN AN APPROPRIATE SITE (SUCH AS ECHUCA) TO TRIAL NEW APPROACHES TO RESPONDING TO DOMESTIC VIOLENCE WHICH SUPPORT THE REMOVAL OF A PERPETRATOR INTO A SECURE LOCATION FOR TREATMENT AND INTERVENTION.

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Recommendations Diagram



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