



Submission No. 26
(homelessness legislation)
A.O.C. Date: 20/08/09

12 August 2009

The Secretary
Standing Committee on Family, Community, Housing and Youth
PO Box 6021
House of Representatives
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Committee Secretary

Inquiry into Homelessness Legislation

I respond to the invitation to provide a submission to the Inquiry and offer the following comments.

In the first instance, I would argue that a clear, workable definition of homelessness must underpin the development of any comprehensive, long term plan to tackle such a complex social problem. Consideration should also be given to incorporating a definition of those deemed at risk of becoming homeless if the new strategy is to be preventative in nature.

Without a common understanding and agreement at the national level on the parameters of homelessness, it will be impossible to achieve consistency in approach or to gauge the scale of success or any improvement in the situation. As well as establishing definitions to determine the number of homeless people and those at risk, performance measures to achieve the target goals should also be put in place.

- 1. The principles that should underpin the provision of services to Australians who are homeless or at risk of homelessness.**
 - Respect and consideration should form the basis of any system to support homeless people.
 - Establish links and communication between Federal and State government departments and services to achieve a consistent policy approach with a person-centred focus.
 - Provide long-term accommodation in the first instance, rather than a series of shelters¹.

¹ Rosanne Haggerty, *Ending Homelessness in South Australia*, Adelaide Thinkers in Residence, July 2005, p.5.

- Move beyond crisis management of homelessness to ...
 - Prevention and early intervention
 - Established criteria to identify those at risk of becoming homeless
 - Consistent application of the criteria.
- Provide financial literacy training, drug and alcohol counselling, *pro-bono* legal services, and address family breakdown and domestic violence as the initial causes of homelessness.
- Work with families to lessen the rate of teenage homelessness, ie employ mediation to encourage young people to remain at home and counselling to promote reunification, where appropriate, where teenagers are already estranged.
- Establish service collaboration and inter-departmental client management that incorporate health, including mental health, education, training and employment, corrections, foster care and juvenile justice.
- Implement policy to prevent young people leaving the Guardianship of the Minister and entering into a homeless state; similar principles should apply to people being released from custody.
- Introduce the structure of an ongoing case manager to foster trust and ensure ongoing advocacy and support at a personal/individual level.
- Implement training for case workers to develop their ability to motivate and support homeless people in sustaining tenancies, re-engaging with the community and social and economic participation.
- Increase funding for public and community housing.
- Promote public education and awareness of the causes and impact of homelessness.

I would stress the need to recognise and address the multiple and often inter-related causes of homelessness: mental illness, family breakdown, domestic violence, poverty, addictive behaviour, poor educational skills and, thus, a limited ability to engage with the system itself and impaired employment prospects. A network of remedial programs to counter the multiple aspects of this complex social issue is therefore fundamental.

Clearly, to achieve any degree of significant change, the Government will need to commit to a well-resourced sector to coordinate the many services and support staff essential to reducing homelessness and offering people the opportunity to participate in a meaningful social life and contribute to their community.

Yours sincerely



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Member for Fisher