

Parliamentary Inquiry into the principles and service standards for new homelessness legislation

Submission from Wesley Mission Melbourne

It is with pleasure that Wesley Mission Melbourne (Wesley) makes a submission to the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Family, Community, Housing and Youth's Inquiry into Homelessness Legislation.

About Wesley Mission Melbourne

Wesley Mission Melbourne provides a range of community services for young people at risk, older people, people with disabilities in the community and in residential, people struggling or at risk of homelessness and counseling services through Lifeline Melbourne. Wesley has been delivering services and supports to people experiencing homelessness since its inception in 1893. Wesley has delivered a homelessness support service in the Eastern Region of Melbourne area continuously since 1991. Our current homelessness services in this area include, a crisis service, generalist housing support services for young people (both Supported Accommodation and Assistance Program (SAAP) funded), a service focusing on the particular needs of vulnerable children, and a youth refuge.

Within our vision of an Australia where all belong, Wesley undertakes work with homeless Victorians in the Eastern Metropolitan Region. We approach our work through an understanding of social inclusion embedded in a human rights approach that recognises our clients' individuality and right to autonomy, expressed through our belief that they should be provided with the highest quality service that we can provide. Our service model includes the provision of significant expenditure on client service, material aid and accommodation, in addition to what we are funded for through our funding and service agreements under the SAAP. This represents the investment of our organisation and our donors to those experiencing homelessness.

Wesley's Social Inclusion and Belonging Policy frames all our work, and emphasises the importance of each individual having a say in, and control over, how they live their life. By working to build people's capabilities and material resources, we aim to ensure that all those we work with can engage with and participate in community and social life in ways which are meaningful to them. As part of our Social Inclusion and Belonging Policy, we commit to advocate for social change that provides people with the opportunity to influence the development of social systems and structures, including the supports and services they

require to meet their needs. We believe that the voices of those experiencing homelessness are important, and within the constraints, and time and resources, sought to place their perspective into this submission.

We would be pleased to assist the committee in meetings with Wesley clients who are experiencing or have experienced homelessness. We also expect that the committee will receive submissions from the Council to Homeless Persons and PILCH Homeless Persons Legal Clinic - both of whom have been expanding their advocacy work with people who are or have experienced homelessness. It is critical that the voices of those experiencing homelessness, in addition to organisations like ours who work with them, are heard in this inquiry.

This submission addresses each Term of Reference. It also provides some vignettes of individual cases, which reflect the service system experiences of some of the individuals and families that we work with.

1. The principles that should underpin the provision of services to Australians who are homeless or at risk of homelessness.

Wesley believes that homelessness represents a violation of the right to housing - a right Australia has signed up to in international law. The right of all Australians to shelter is the fundamental principle that Wesley believes should underpin the provision of services to those who are homeless or experiencing homelessness. The other principles that we identify in this submission - which we also categorise in terms of the right to individuality - reflect both the Wesley values of Hope, Justice and Compassion and our observation of gaps in the current homelessness service system.

We also support the Victorian Homelessness Assistance Standards of Respect, Dignity, Fairness, Participation, Flexibility and Privacy. As a provider in Victoria we comply with these standards, yet are concerned that they, whilst laudable, are difficult to implement in an environment of scarce resources.

When seeking to reshape the legislation and homelessness service system it is critical to respond to the desire to be aspirational, while not risking the creation of a disconnect between highly principled policy statements and a service system that is unable to meet them. For example, there is no point having a principle of fairness or flexibility if the service system is rigid and inflexible, or so poorly funded that the service is forced to offer only "one size fits all". There is clear evidence that high levels of demand, coupled with tight time-based target funding, means that services today are limited in the flexibility they can offer clients. Conversely, a principle of flexibility that drives programs to provide the ability for services to tailor solutions to individual clients is an outcome Wesley would strongly support.

The issue of resources is critical when considering overarching policy principles, as there is a risk that high minded principles that are not funded are more harmful than more basic principles that are funded, and therefore implemented into the service system.

Wesley, like every other homelessness organisation, is funded to deliver services through the achievement of time-based service targets. Our crisis service has targets for 1650 client contacts per year, and our generalist SAAP service (aimed at young people in

homelessness) has case loads of 12 young people per worker, with an average of 2 hours per week for 13 weeks each. At the same time, we comply with quality based standards such as flexibility and dignity. For Wesley, it would be preferable for services to be funded to deliver individual, client based outcomes and/ or “quality of service” standards, rather than be funded to deliver time based targets which inevitably have a rigidity, rather than the measure of flexibility required to truly assist those experiencing homelessness.

The fundamental Human Rights of people experiencing homelessness

Wesley believes that the right to housing must be the guiding principle of the provision of services to Australians who are homeless or at risk of homelessness. Apart from it being a right Australia has signed up to in international law it is a right that those experiencing homelessness in Australia believe has been violated.

One of the most powerful features of the current *Supported Accommodations and Assistance Act 1994* (SAAP Act) is the way the preamble lists the human rights that Australia has signed onto in respect to housing and homelessness. Australia played a leading role in the establishment of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and is a signatory to a number of human rights conventions that provide for the right to housing. Former Human Rights Commissioner, Chris Sidoti, powerfully outlined these rights in a speech he gave to the National Homelessness Conference organised by the Council to Homeless Persons in 1996¹.

Yet despite the strong principles language of the preamble the legislation, which Wesley supports but believes can be strengthened, there is no human right to housing or to service incorporated in the Act. The right to housing could take many forms and this will be articulated further below in response to Term of Reference 3.

The experiences of homeless Victorians have been documented in a 2004 Victorian Council of Social Service Project, “Housing as a Human Right”². This project spoke with 185 people in 65 suburbs about their experiences of housing. While partly a community development undertaking, it is not surprising that the project uncovered significant breaches of the right to housing and other international law.

Between March and May 2009 the PILCH Homeless Persons Legal clinic ran 18 focus groups with 145 people experiencing or at risk of experiencing homelessness³. Their report makes sobering reading with 50% of respondents stating their belief that “the current protection of my human rights is inadequate”.

The right to be treated with respect

‘Gavan’ has significant mental health issues and has been homeless, on and off, for a long time. He first came to us because he had been evicted from public housing, on the basis of ‘anti-social behaviour’, and had no where else to go. Once a tenant is evicted for anti-social behaviour, they are not able to re-apply for public housing for a 12 month period.

What Gavan really needs is one-person accommodation. Because he needs intensive support to maintain a tenancy, private rental is not an option. In the Eastern Region of Melbourne, there is very little one-bedroom public or community housing available.

Gavan's behaviour is a function of his mental illness, which has worsened over time. Now, many services in the area won't deal with him because he is 'difficult to manage', so he can't access the supports he needs – further exacerbating his situation. When he does try to access services, behaviour management requirements are placed on him before he has had time to build trusting relationships with service staff. In doing this, the system emphasises 'housing readiness' over a 'life-readiness' approach, which would more effectively meet his needs for housing AND long term support.

Homelessness can be an incredibly stressful and disorientating experience. This is often made more difficult when people have other complicating factors, including, mental health conditions or other health care needs. The presence of children in homeless families also complicates the provision of appropriate service responses. Wesley staff too often see clients who present to our service having been denied services elsewhere. The highly fragmented nature of the broader service system, often funded by different parts of Government, mean that many people are not assisted by the first contact they make. Telling and retelling one's story many times understandably leads to frustrations, and can make people angry and upset. It is also an experience that costs both the individual and services significant time and energy.

Wesley clients have told our staff that being treated with respect is important to them and makes their difficult experience easier to deal with. While it is difficult to legislate for respect, it is an important principle that those experiencing homelessness deserve. Involving service users in decision making and in service feedback is important, and should be a funded requirement of funding and service agreements. The involvement of service users in service planning and development is a key feature of Wesley's new Strategic Plan (2009 – 2012), but carries with it significant resource implications which are not reflected in current service funding arrangements.

The PILCH survey mentioned above also asked people the following question: "Have you ever been treated in a cruel or degrading way while experiencing homelessness?" and 80% answered in the affirmative. They were also asked "Do services/ agencies treat you with dignity and respect and recognise your rights?" 58% answered sometimes while only 20% said always.

The right of all Australians to access universal services

'Mardi' comes from a troubled and unstable family, and he and his brothers and sisters largely grew up in care. As an adult, he has poor mental health, long-term drug and alcohol abuse, and low skills. He needs a whole range of supports, including mental health and psychological counselling, drug and alcohol support, general health services and housing support to help him towards a more independent life. His early life has left him with significant attachment issues, which make it difficult for him to form relationships – including those with service workers.

Currently all the services he needs are available in the broader service system. However, the fragmented nature of the system means that he would need to access services for multiple providers – and this is beyond his capabilities. Co-ordinated service provision is essential for Mardi. However, because of the restrictions on case loads and service provision, it is very difficult to this. Under the current SAAP restrictions it is not possible to arrange a generic service response which would meet all his needs, even though the services are available.

Wesley's experiences confirm the Commonwealth's recent Green and White Papers into homelessness, which state clearly that there are many entry points into homelessness. Many of the clients Wesley sees have entered homelessness due to failures of other systems. Many clients of Wesley also find it difficult to access mainstream services.

The failure of our mainstream (non-homeless) service system to provide pathways to affordable and appropriate housing leads to many people experiencing homelessness. This leaves a specialist homelessness service system having to plug gaps in systems far broader than itself. For instance, whilst we recognise that the current Government has made improvements in this area, anecdotal evidence from service providers suggests that the practice of breaching Centrelink benefits caused many at risk of experiencing homelessness to find need to access homelessness services.

The right to a client centred service

'Julie' first came to see us following the death of her father. He was the only person in her family, and her closest relationship. Generally speaking, Julie is high socially isolated with few friends or other close relationships, and needs support to live independently.

When she came to us, she had nowhere to live, and she had a dog with her. The dog had belonged to her and her father, and was her only link to him. We were unable to arrange public housing for her because the Transitional Housing Manager would not allow her to rent with a dog. For Julie, it was a choice between having somewhere to live, and her dog.

Wesley strongly believes that all clients have the right to be treated as individuals. The needs of a young person escaping violence will be different to that of an older person dealing with years of untreated mental illness, or the impact of long-term alcohol abuse.

Wesley is confident that our service could provide a more holistic response to those experiencing homelessness, and one that would permanently assist clients, if homelessness services were funded to spend more time with clients. Indeed, in Scotland each client has a single worker, paid appropriately to work with a client through the full scope of their needs. We hope that the new pilot funded by the Victorian and Commonwealth Governments at Sacred Heart Mission, "A Journey to Social Inclusion", shows the positive results of intensive tailored support delivered over a sustained period.

2. The scope of any legislation with respect to related government initiatives in the areas of social inclusion and rights.

With the commitment of the Commonwealth, States and Territory to halving homelessness by 2020, there is a clear need for holistic, whole of Governments' approach to homelessness. Wesley supports moves to legislate for a charter of rights, or some other domestic human rights instrument. Recent consultations among stakeholders in Victoria in preparation for a new homelessness plan have shown that agencies believe strongly that mainstream services and departments, other than human services and housing departments, should play a role in combating homelessness. It is therefore important for homelessness to be both dealt with as a discreet policy issue requiring a specialised response, and as part of a broader policy approach to deal with social exclusion, and associated moves to make Australia a fairer and more inclusive country.

This term of reference indicates that perhaps a broader scope than homelessness is contemplated. Wesley is supportive of placing responses to homelessness within part of a wider social inclusion effort. The recent changes to the Prime Minister's website, which include placing "A Fairer Australia" as the second of three challenges for the Government, are certainly promising⁴.

It is generally accepted that homeless Australians are among our disadvantaged citizens. Homelessness is often the end result of poverty and disadvantage. While many people are often said to be "a pay packet or two away from homelessness", the reality is that those with greater social networks and supports are more likely to be able to ensure that any crisis they experience doesn't result in them losing their housing. For those who are unable to avoid losing their home, early intervention may ensure that they are re-housed relatively quickly. Wesley's staff report, however, that the scarcity of appropriate housing (be it public, community, mental health or low cost private rental) means that even those with relatively un-complex housing needs are forced to wait for appropriate housing. And evidence from our service delivery suggests that while they wait, their quality of life is actually worsening. Whether it be mental or physical health, or the life chances of their children, who often suffer breaks in formal education, the longer someone is homeless, the more difficult it can be to return them to a mainstream life.

It is the experience of Wesley that many clients who present to our service are socially isolated and excluded. One middle aged male client to our service said that "I like coming here, the lovely girl behind the desk treats me nicely". This client has significant mental health needs and often sleeps rough. The fact that it is the respect he receives from the service that he values highly highlights the depth of social isolation that many clients of services feel.

Wesley strongly endorses calls by organisations including PILCH Homeless Persons Legal Clinic and the Council to Homeless Persons for the right to housing to be included in any human rights legislation or charter.

3. The role of legislation in improving the quality of services for people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness.

As the expression of the will of the Parliament, legislation plays an important role in providing expression to the priorities of the nation. Legislation can also fade from the view of the public if it not enforced or used. In the case of homelessness, the role of legislation in improving the quality of services is directly linked to the SAAP Agreement between the Commonwealth, States and Territories. While the legislation defines the scope of matters to be considered, it is the jurisdictions that make an agreement that governs the scope of services, and which sets the level of funding for the program. Wesley's comments in response to this, and the Term of Reference, highlight the narrowness of scope of the SAAP Act, and the need for stronger measures to be included to ensure that the legislation does indeed improve the quality of service for those who are homeless or at risk of homelessness. Such measures include both homelessness reduction targets and quality outcomes measures which are responsive to individuals' situations and aspirations (such as exist within the disability sector in Victoria, in the State's Disability Quality Framework).

As expressed earlier, one of the most important aspects of the current SAAP Act is the way in which its preamble clearly articulates the need to promote the human rights of those experiencing homelessness. Wesley is concerned, however, at the extent to which this human rights approach is both promoted and then limited. The following sentence in the preamble, coming just after four dot points listing the international conventions and agreements signed up to by Australia, highlights this tension:

"Legislation relating to homeless people should include a focus on the provision of appropriate support to meet the individual needs of the clients of the Supported Accommodation Assistance Program ("SAAP") and on their right to an equitable share of the community's resources."⁶

In practical terms such a statement highlights the subordination of the right to housing of homeless Australians to a political or economic debate about what is an "equitable share of the community's resources".

While one of the strengths of this Act is its breadth in ensuring a range of services is provided to people experiencing homelessness, one of the weaknesses of the current Act is the lack of firm targets and accountabilities linked to a whole-of-Governments approach, and including quality or personal outcomes measures as part of the implementation of SAAP to replace the existing time-based targets.

Legislation should enshrine the homelessness reduction target agreed at the November 2008 Council of Australian Governments meeting. Further the Act should provide for greater transparency and provide for an annual report to parliament on the progress. Wesley would also welcome initiatives to encourage the active participation of homeless people on committees and process undertaken by both the Commonwealth and State Governments.

There also needs to be a sufficient allocation of resources to the meet the targets. In seeking an increased allocation of resources, Wesley is not lacking in awareness of the many calls on the Governments of Australia in the area of community services, not to mention the range of other spending. While accepting that no country can provide an open

ended funding stream to any one group in the community, a country should be able to respect the universality of human rights in both international and domestic arenas. There are also significant social and economic costs associated with homelessness that funding to eradicate homelessness would save.

4. The effectiveness of existing legislation and regulations governing homelessness services in Australia and overseas.

Wesley is of the view that the effectiveness of homelessness legislation cannot be divorced from the implementation of that legislation and the broader state of the homelessness service system. Wesley will principally address the Australian legislation, and our experience in Victoria, as it is our area of expertise, though we note that some international jurisdictions have much stronger legislative protections in the area of homelessness. In particular, this section will address the effectiveness of the legislation as it is delivered in the community. It is critical for the Committee to consider both the role of the legislation, and the way that legislation is delivered in communities.

It has been the experience of Wesley that legislation has not been the driver for reform that perhaps the SAAP Act was intended to be. While Australians are arguably well served by national homeless legislation, its impact is weakened by the fact that significant gaps still exist in the homelessness service system. The lack of resources devoted to homelessness, until the COAG partnership agreement in November 2008, has meant that States, Territories and homeless services have constantly had to target, retarget and reprioritise clients and client groups to ensure the resources are spread around to all those who need it. Wesley believes that whilst the service architecture is currently in place for delivery to a broader range of needs (than is currently being met), resourcing limits service availability and access in terms of where an individual lives, and what their particular attributes are.

The SAAP Act 1994

The SAAP Act does two main things; create the legislative power for a Commonwealth and States homelessness agreement; and, provide for a Commonwealth Advisory Committee on homelessness. It also provides for a national data collection agency. By delivering a national agreement it has certainly delivered on its major goal. However, in an environment where homelessness is a national priority, and all Australian jurisdictions have agreed on targets for homelessness reduction, Wesley believes a stronger legislative approach is required. Our earlier comments in this paper indicate our preferred approach to delivering this.

The inability of the current service system to end homelessness

Wesley Mission routinely experiences the frustration of not being able to deliver the sort of service that will truly ensure an individual's (or family's) pathway out of homelessness. This is compounded when working with individuals and families whose experience of homelessness spans generations. While significantly exceeding our contracted service

targets with the Victorian Department of Human Services, and investing more than the money we receive under SAAP, we are still unable to provide for all those who would benefit from our service. The SAAP Act does much to put in place a homelessness service system. Yet it has significant gaps. By highlighting some of the gaps and some of the additional services Wesley provides in the Eastern Metropolitan Region of Victoria, we hope to provide the Committee with a sense of the place of the Act in the community.

Wesley is proud to have contributed to service innovation. We provide different types of support and meet targets far in excess of those which we are funded to deliver under the SAAP contract that we hold with the Victorian Department of Human Services. However, even that additional amount of time is almost never sufficient to fully meet the needs of our clients, some of whom have experienced decades of social isolation and poverty. A significant gap in the data collected through the SAAP system includes data relating to inter-generational homelessness.

Wesley Homelessness and Support Services has developed effective linkages with mainstream services, such as Financial Counselling, Drug and Alcohol Counselling and Support Services, Mental Health Services, Parenting and Family Support Services, Domestic Violence Services, Centrelink, Community Legal Services, financial counselling and others. These linkages have meant that service users can be offered a comprehensive response which can address multiple needs. The main barriers to success are inability of mainstream services to offer immediate service due to long wait list times and limited resources, and the lack of accommodation options available.

Wesley provides extra support to the value of approximately \$320,000 per annum, with the majority spent on accommodation. SAAP service funding essentially funds staff time, yet there is a need to spend on non staff time, including accommodation and the provision of material assistance. Wesley initiatives include, the provision of a shower and washing machine for use of clients, the ability for clients to use the Wesley office as a mailing address (a service used by over 100 clients) allowing, among other things, for voting. Material aid-blankets/ sheets, a drop in waiting room with free tea/ coffee/ magazines and TV, breakfast and lunch and a food room (funded by Commonwealth emergency relief funding as well as donations to Wesley) are also provided. A significant addition to the funded program for children in families experiencing homelessness, Resilient Kids, includes funding for food, entry fees and camps. Wesley also adds to the number of people it assists with services provided under the Housing Establishment Funds (HEF) in the region by assisting people who are not eligible or excluded under the HEF criteria, in particular those who are public housing tenants whose rent arrears exclude them from HEF funded services.

The lack of affordable housing

The experiences of Wesley staff suggest that all the innovation, service and care that are provided do not replace the place that housing has to make a practical difference to our clients. The ability to offer, or broker, suitable long term accommodation is critical. Often Wesley is only able to provide extremely short term motel or rooming house accommodation for our clients.

The Eastern Metropolitan Region of Melbourne suffers from a chronic shortage of public and community housing, with waiting lists for priority housing often being as long as 18

months, significantly more than other regions in Melbourne. This is coupled with a chronic shortage of affordable private rental housing. While significant nation-building stimulus investment is welcome, Wesley believes that areas with low proportions of social housing, like the Eastern Region, must receive priority in relation to the additional supply, and that such supply should address specific, identified local need (i.e. include a range of dwelling types, including one- and two- person occupancy, as well as larger dwellings).

While searching for longer term accommodation Wesley assists in providing an immediate need for crisis accommodation through motel and rooming houses. This can often be extremely trying for clients, and can lead to stressful living conditions for families. In order to provide a better service than motel accommodation for short term or crisis needs, Wesley has been piloting a new more “home like” service, called “Lincoln Road”. These two properties are leased by Wesley from a private landlord, and is service initiative funded on top of the SAAP services Wesley is contracted to deliver.

The landlord provides fully furnished rooms with maintenance and cleaning, and clients are able to cook and clean in a much more home-like environment. The ability to live in more than one room is of particular benefit to larger families with children. Wesley intends to publish its evaluation of the pilot shortly, and would welcome the opportunity to discuss the benefits of this approach with the Committee.

The problems of data collection

The SAAP Act provides for the collection of data by a central data collection agency- the SAAP National Data Collection Agency (NDCA). Wesley supports the collection of quality data to assist Governments, policy makers and services. There are concerns about the nature of the data collected through the NDCA.

The data is collected in a very rigid way that doesn't allow services to identify additional types of support or indeed contacts of less than 45 minutes. Data is de-identified to protect privacy, a laudable protection in one sense, however, this means it is not possible for either the State or Commonwealth Government to track how many people come back through the system, further limiting the utility of the data. It is also hard for policy makers and services. Wesley has actively participated in the establishment of the Eastern Homelessness Network (EHN) Website⁶ which is an attempt to include a broader range of attributes from the region to assist in service planning.

The EHN has data on risk factors including mental health, drug and alcohol, family relationship/ domestic violence and safety. This all provides a region-wide picture of needs which assists the networker and services advocate for additional or specialised services and helps services plan.

By contrast the NDCA is a relatively inflexible system that doesn't allow free entry or specificity of service offered. For example children presenting with adults are not considered clients but are categorised as an “accompanying person or persons”. In addition there is no need to report on unmet need or on contacts of less than 45 minutes, meaning the sort of incidental contact that many clients have with Wesley (tea and coffee, a shower, collecting mail, someone to say hello to) is not recorded as a data contact.

Improved access to data, coupled with initiatives to increase the flexibility of the system, will assist both Governments and services provide better services to people experiencing or at risk of homelessness.

International homelessness legislation

Australia could learn from those jurisdictions that have acted to legislate more explicitly to end homelessness. For example, Scotland passed legislation in 2003 which provides that by 2012 everyone assessed as being “unintentionally homeless” will be entitled to permanent accommodation⁷. While Australia’s SAAP system provides a safety net homelessness response, with a series of generalist and specialised homelessness providers, there is no provision in the SAAP Act which provides such a universal guarantee.

Scotland has also recognised the rights of women and children by passing an order to ensure that local councils do not place pregnant women and children into unsuitable temporary accommodation unless there are exceptional circumstances. With the rise in women and children living in rooming houses⁸ (tertiary homeless), and the reliance by SAAP services on motels and caravan parks/ such legislative protection, backed up with appropriate resources, and even support for services such as Lincoln Road, would be beneficial in Australia

The United States, often referred negatively in social policy debates, has also been expanding its legislative response to homelessness. Recently Congress passed the Hearth Act, which among other things expands the definition of homelessness to include people who are going to lose their home within the next 14 days and don’t have the ability, financial or otherwise, to obtain housing⁹.

5. The applicability of existing legislative and regulatory models used in other community service systems, such as disability services, aged care and child care, to the homelessness sector.

Wesley strongly supports robust regulatory measures to ensure that people experiencing homelessness receive high quality services that meet the legislative and program standards. Wesley is open to other models, such as those that apply in other service systems, but cautions the Parliament to consider both the costs and benefits of service reform. This submission has highlighted deficiencies in the current service system that includes a significant regulatory burden. It has also outlined how scarcity (of affordable housing and of staff, to name just two) has reduced the ability of service providers like Wesley to provide the service required to truly address the various issues of its clients.

Disability

The disability services sector in Victoria is regulated under the 2006 Disability Services Act, which has two primary objectives which relate to the rights of people with a disability to access the resources they need to construct a life of their choice. Specifically, the Act provides a framework which enables Victorian with a Disability to receive tailored,

individualised services, where the money for service provision is linked to the individual. Secondly, it proscribes community inclusiveness, so that Victorian with a Disability can access the services and supports they need in a fair and equitable manner.

Service delivery is regulated under the Victorian Disability Quality Framework, which contains two sets of service standards. The Industry Standards require services to monitor and report on governance and financial arrangements for their service delivery. Services are also required to implement and report against Client Outcomes, related to 17 life areas, for every individual they provide services to. Funding is tied to the planning processes embedded in the implementation of the Client Outcomes component of the framework.

Whilst we recognise that full implementation of this new framework will take some time, Wesley believes that if such a model were to be adopted by the SAAP system, it would result in the provision of more flexible, individually responsive services that we have promoted elsewhere in this document.

Wesley believes that the need to strongly ensure that providers meet high standards of service should be balanced against the risk of burdensome red tape. As an organisation with a long history, international standards certification and a series of contractual arrangements with funding agencies we have both strong internal and external accountability. We also know that service models are only as good as the resources that are invested in them.

Concluding Comments

In concluding this submission Wesley Mission Melbourne believes that a national focus on reducing homelessness can be achieved through stronger legislation and a service response that more adequately funds the services required to assist those experiencing homelessness.

Wesley has made a number of suggestions for policy, legislative and program change in this submission. These can be summarised as follows:

- That the sustainable and long term reduction of all forms (primary, secondary and tertiary) homelessness is the key goal of any national response to homelessness
- That the human right to housing is introduced into Australian domestic law
- That the homelessness reduction targets are included in the SAAP legislation
- That those experiencing homelessness have an opportunity to participate in legislative change designed to improve their rights
- That the lack of affordable housing and the requirements for appropriate crisis housing are funded as part of SAAP services and that access to long term public, community and private rental housing is available for those experiencing homelessness
- That the principles of respect, to universal services, and to client centred services be introduced as principles in the SAAP Act
- That there are improvements to the collection of data to ensure that the breadth of service provided and attempts to reduce client representations are captured.

Wesley would be pleased to provide more evidence to, to appear before or to offer the committee the opportunity to visit Wesley's Ringwood office location or view its Lincoln Road pilot, or associated report.

To discuss any aspect of this submission you can contact: Sarah Pollock, Executive Manager, Research and Social Policy on (03) 9666 1233 or at spollock@wesley.org.au



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- ¹ Siodti, Chris "Housing as a Human Right" Speech to the National Conference on Homelessness, Council to Homeless Persons, 4 September 1996, accessed at http://www.hreoc.gov.au/pdf/human_rights/housing.pdf on 31/7/09
- ² "Little Piece of heaven, thoughts from Victorians on Housing as a Human Right", 2004, accessed on 2/8/09 <http://www.vcross.org.au/documents/VCOSS%20docs/Housing/Heavenweb.pdf>
- ³ Promoting and Protecting the Rights of People Experiencing Homelessness in Australia, PILCH Homeless Persons Legal Clinic, 15 June 2009, as accessed on 10 August 2009 at: <http://www.pilch.org.au/Assets/Files/Promoting%20and%20Protecting%20the%20Human%20Rights%20of%20People%20Experiencing%20Homelessness%20in%20Australia.pdf>
- ⁴ www.pm.gov.au as accessed on 10 August 2009
- ⁵ SAAP Act (1994), page 1
- ⁶ www.ehn.net.au
- ⁷ Homelessness Etc (Act) Scotland 2003
- ⁸ "Welfare Groups challenge Government to tackle slumlords", 6 July 2009, media release from Coalition of groups as accessed on 2/8/09 at http://www.chp.org.au/public_news/items/2009/07/00254-upload-00001.pdf and also at <http://www.news.com.au/heraldsun/story/0,27574,25737590-2862,00.html>
- ⁹ http://homelessness.change.org/blog/view/congress_passes_the_hearth_act_obama_expected_to_sign_today