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Our Ref: GOV/226

Mr James Catchpole  
Committee Secretary  
Standing Committee on Family, Community, Housing and Youth  
PO Box 6021  
House of Representatives  
Parliament House  
Canberra ACT 2600

Dear Mr Catchpole

**RE: INQUIRY INTO HOMELESSNESS LEGISLATION**

Thank you for your invitation to make a submission to the House's inquiry into homelessness legislation.

The purpose of this submission is to draw the Committee's attention to the considerable evidence base on homelessness in Australia developed by the Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute (AHURI). This submission is structured to provide:

1. a brief introduction to AHURI;
2. an overview of AHURI's activities;
3. a guide to the research conducted and underway on homelessness relevant to the Inquiry's terms of reference.

All AHURI's research is available free from our website and the links to the relevant research have been included throughout this submission.

**About AHURI**

AHURI is a national, not-for-profit organisation that funds and conducts high-quality research into housing, homelessness and urban issues. It aims to inform the policy making of governments, industry and the community sector and to stimulate debate on these issues in the broader community.

Primary funding for AHURI is provided by the Australian Government, all state and territory governments and the Institute's eleven university partners. In the 2008-09 year, AHURI invested over \$3 million in housing and urban research.

AHURI's network comprises a small management company, AHURI Limited, based in Melbourne, and seven Research Centres that span eleven universities throughout Australia. The role of AHURI Ltd is to lead the organisation, manage and coordinate the research and dissemination process, and stimulate policy debate.

### **AHURI's activities**

Established in 2000, AHURI has completed over 130 research projects and published more than two hundred reports on a wide range of housing policy issues. These include all aspects of the Australian housing system: homelessness, Indigenous housing, public housing, the private rental market, and home ownership. This research is not just about housing per se, but about the foundational role of housing in securing positive economic and social outcomes for the nation.

A constructive engagement between the research and policy communities is essential to the conduct of policy relevant research. AHURI facilitates engagement through a range of activities including: project specific advisory groups, roundtable discussions about the implications of research findings for policy development; and conferences including the bi-annual National Housing Conference.

The sustainability of this high quality, policy relevant National Housing Research Program is underpinned by AHURI's research capacity building activities. Postgraduate top-up scholarships, post-doctoral fellowships, and an annual symposium of postgraduate students are some of the key activities funded by AHURI.

### **AHURI research on homelessness**

The AHURI evidence base has much to offer regarding the provision of services to people who are homeless, or at risk of homelessness. The evidence base generated by AHURI research reflects the diversity of the homeless population. The importance of a whole-of-government approach to homelessness is emphasised in a number of AHURI research projects; and many of these explore the efficacy of existing policies, programs and legislation. The following relates the findings of AHURI research in homelessness to the first two terms of reference of the Inquiry.

*1. The principles and service standards that should underpin the provision of services to those who are homeless or at risk of homelessness.*

An AHURI examination of international literature on case management for homeless people (Gronda, 2005) has found that effective case management involves a relationship between the client and the case manager or case management team which has the qualities of persistence, reliability, respect and intimacy, and which delivers comprehensive, practical support. Direct provision of comprehensive, practical support is preferable to brokerage or referral to other services.

Robinson (2003) found that stable accommodation was not enough to fix the issue of homelessness for those experiencing mental illness and iterative homelessness as many interviewed indicated that they had maintained secure accommodation in the past. Therefore, an important principle is to adopt a holistic approach whereby accommodation, support and mental health care were available, with the capacity to form on-going, care-based relationships with clients.

Research into older people and homelessness by Judd et al (2005) indicates that the values of independent living and security of tenure are of high importance to this group, much as they are for all older people. It is possible to identify older people who are at greater risk of homelessness before it occurs. In these instances intervention should occur early. The research concludes that the provision of increased public housing to older people is a solution that meets the objectives of maintaining independent living and offering security of tenure.

Chris Chamberlain and David MacKenzie (2004) found that schools are a key strategic site in preventing youth homelessness, and broad based activities directed to all students are recommended to build protection against homelessness. Improving the ability of schools to intervene on behalf of students, and improving linkages between schools and other welfare services is recommended. Education about available support services is also important. This has implications for the way early interventions strategies might be formed (presently under sections 8(c) of the *Supported Accommodation and Assistance Act 1994*.)

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

Hulse and Stone (2007) found that there is a measurable link between social connectedness and stability in housing. Where people live in unpleasant places this also undermines social connectedness: while neighbourhood problems can make people more active in their local areas in the short term, they may also drive people away. Housing policies that aim to enable people to 'put down roots' in an area so they can form relationships based on place and attachments to a neighbourhood are helpful in encouraging social connection

Baldry et al (2003) found that over half of the prisoners interviewed post-release were highly transient, and this was a predictor of return to prison. The study found that connection with helpful support to address drug problems, family relationships and employment both prior to release and post release (with an allocated case-worker throughout the process) was important in assisting with their post release housing situation. However a 'one-size-fits-all' housing support approach may not be appropriate for ex-prisoners.

Andrew Beer and Paul Foley (2003) interviewed 434 recently arrived refugees (Permanent Protection Visas and Temporary Protection Visa holders) and found that around one third had been homeless at some stage since their arrival in Australia. The extension of arrival accommodation and housing assistance for a wider range of arrivals including TPV holders released from detention would reduce the risk of homelessness and increase housing stability for this group.

Memmott, Long, Chambers and Spring (2003) considered the issues relating to defining homelessness for indigenous people, and suggested that it should not be defined around lack of accommodation, but also the loss of sense of control over, or legitimacy over where a person lives. There were three categories of homelessness: public place dwellers, those at risk of homelessness and spiritually homeless people. Official definitions of homelessness (under the SAAP IV Memorandum of Understanding) recognise that indigenous homelessness may be different in nature from non-indigenous concepts of homelessness. However the researchers found that this recognition did not provide any guidance as to what these definitions were, and thus it was difficult for this understanding to inform policy or its implementation.

Randolph (2006) examined the national and international literature on models for meeting the needs of young homeless people in rural areas. The research also examined how state and Australian Government policies impact on young homeless people in rural areas, and found the impact was significant. The study also found that there were important differences between the experiences of young homeless people in rural areas compared to urban areas. The findings emphasise the need to provide programs and services for homeless youth in their home towns. A modified version of the Miller Foyer project suitable for rural Australia is developed and proposed.

## **References**

The reports mentioned above, and other AHURI research reports that are relevant to the Inquiry are attached below. This list includes direct links to these reports on the AHURI website, and a short summary of the research approach and findings.

## **Testimony**

AHURI is also able to facilitate direct communication with the authors of AHURI research, should further evidence be of assistance in the Inquiry hearings. Authorities in the area of homelessness include:

Associate Professor Chris Chamberlain – RMIT University, Melbourne

Associate Professor Kath Hulse – Swinburne University, Melbourne

Associate Professor Paul Flatau – Murdoch University, Perth

Professor Andrew Beer – Flinders University, Adelaide

Professor Bill Randolph – University of New South Wales, Sydney

Dr Hellene Gronda – Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute (National Office), Melbourne

Professor Paul Memmott – University of Queensland, Brisbane.

We would like to thank the committee for its consideration of our submission. We would welcome the opportunity to elaborate further on this submission.

If there is any way we can be of assistance in the Inquiry, please contact me on 03 9660 2300.

Yours sincerely,



**Ian Winter**  
**Executive Director**

## **AHURI Research Projects relevant to homelessness legislation**

Baldry, E. (et. al) 2003 **Ex-prisoners and accommodation: what bearing do different forms of housing have on social reintegration for ex-prisoners?** (Project 70068)

Eileen Baldry, Desmond McDonnell, Peter Maplestone and Manu Peeters found that over half of the prisoners interviewed post-release were highly transient, and this was a predictor of return to prison. The study found that connection with helpful support to address drug problems, family relationships and employment both prior to release and post release (with an allocated case-worker throughout the process) was important in assisting with their post release housing situation. However a 'one-size-fits-all' housing support approach may not be appropriate for ex-prisoners.

<http://www.ahuri.edu.au/publications/projects/p70068>

Beer, A. and Foley, P. 2003 **Housing Need and Provision for Recently Arrived Refugees in Australia** (Project 40048)

Andrew Beer and Paul Foley interviewed 434 recently arrived refugees (Permanent Protection Visas and Temporary Protection Visa holders) and found that around one third had been homeless at some stage since their arrival in Australia. The extension of arrival accommodation and housing assistance for a wider range of arrivals including TPV holders released from detention would reduce the risk of homelessness and increase housing stability for this group.

<http://www.ahuri.edu.au/publications/projects/p40048>

Chamberlain, C and MacKenzie, D. 2004 **Youth Homelessness: Four Policy Proposals (The development of prevention and early intervention services for homeless youth: intervening successfully)** (Project 30516)

Chris Chamberlain and David MacKenzie examined 1600 case studies of homeless school students, and developed recommendations based upon interviews in 92 schools and 8 *Reconnect* services. Schools are identified as a key strategic site in preventing homelessness, and broad based activities directed to all students are recommended to build protection against homelessness. Improving the ability of schools to intervene on behalf of students, and improving linkages between schools and other welfare services is recommended. Education about available support services is also important.

<http://www.ahuri.edu.au/publications/projects/p30516>

Flatau, P. (et. al) 2008 **The Effectiveness and Cost-Effectiveness of Homelessness Prevention and Assistance Programs** (Project 80306)

Paul Flatau, Kaylene Zaretsky, Michelle Brady, Yvonne Haigh and Robyn Martin conducted this research which comprised a small scale survey of homelessness support programs, and in depth surveys of clients of these programs in Western Australia. The findings indicate that the cost of providing homelessness prevention services was more than off-set by the reduced use of health and criminal justice services by clients. The results indicated a negative cost per client and whole of government savings of potentially twice the cost of providing effective homelessness programs. It is hoped that this research will be extended to other states in the 2009 AHURI funding round.

The study found that homelessness support services must focus upon the broader needs and outcomes of people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness. Particular needs beyond housing that are identified in this research include assistance accessing; mental health services, health services, drug and alcohol abuse services, income and money management assistance. Important client outcomes include an improved housing position and improved feelings of safety, and an improved employment outlook.

<http://www.ahuri.edu.au/publications/projects/p80306>

Flatau, P. (In Progress) **Intergenerational Homelessness and the use of Homelessness Support Services** (Project 80516)

This project aims to improve our understanding of the intergenerational use of homelessness support programs including the Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP). It will examine the patterns and determinants of intergenerational homelessness and homelessness service use in Australia, and the role and impact of service delivery and policy interventions designed to avert or break the cycle of homelessness across generations.

<http://www.ahuri.edu.au/publications/projects/p80516>

Gronda, H. 2009 **What makes case-management work for people experiencing homelessness?** (Final report no.127)

Hellene Gronda, found that effective case management involves a relationship between the client and the case manager or case management team which has the qualities of persistence, reliability, respect and intimacy, and which delivers comprehensive, practical support. Direct provision of comprehensive, practical support is preferable to brokerage or referral to other services. Comparative studies have shown that case management is most effective when it provides direct assistance with practical and specialist support needs. The evidence demonstrates that effective case management is a time- and resource-intensive intervention. However, controlled experiments show that it is cost-effective because it reduces other system expenditure such as hospitalisation. Multidisciplinary teams providing a case management relationship with the required qualities has been proven to deliver reduced homelessness and more client satisfaction at no extra total system cost than office-based services, for clients requiring a complex service response.

<http://www.ahuri.edu.au/publications/search.asp?ShowSearch=False&Search=Properties&Keywords=&Year=&Centre=&Search-Title=&Search-Summary=&Search-Author=&PublicationType=fr&Sort=Search-Title&Direction=ASC#results>

Heintjes, A. 2005 **Responding to Homelessness** (Research and Policy Bulletin Issue 66)

This report synthesises the evidence from a range of AHURI and other research on homelessness. The key findings are that: a good definition of homelessness allows for better understanding of measurement and response; homelessness is a whole of government, and whole of community responsibility; and responses to homelessness are complicated by funding shortfalls, program gaps and discrimination.

<http://www.ahuri.edu.au/search.asp?sitekeywords=Issue+66&CurrentPage=1>

Hulse, K. and Stone, W. 2007 **Housing, housing assistance and social cohesion in Australia** (Project 50300)

Kath Hulse and Wendy Stone show using quantitative data that there is a measurable link between social connectedness and stability in housing. Where people live in unpleasant places this also undermines social connectedness: while neighbourhood problems can make people more active in their local areas in the short term, they may also drive people away. Housing policies that aim to enable people to 'put down roots' in an area so they can form relationships based on place and attachments to a neighbourhood is helpful in encouraging social connection.

<http://www.ahuri.edu.au/publications/projects/p50300>

Judd, B. (et. al) 2005 **Housing Options and Independent Living: Sustainable Options for Older People who are Homeless** (Project 70135)

Bruce Judd, Kay Kavanagh, Alan Morris and Yuvisthi Naidoo conducted this research which involved a survey of agencies responsible for the Assistance with Care and Housing for the Aged program, and also included in depth interviews with workers and clients. This research into older people and homelessness indicates that the values of independent living and security of tenure are of high importance to this group, much as they are for all older people. It is possible to identify older people who are at greater risk of homelessness before it occurs. In these instances intervention should occur early. The research concludes that the provision of increased public housing to older people is a solution that meets the objectives of maintaining independent living and offering security of tenure.

<http://www.ahuri.edu.au/publications/projects/p70135>

Memmott, P. (et. al) 2003 **Categories of Indigenous homeless people and good practice responses to their needs** (Project 20168)

Paul Memmott, Stephen Long, Catherine Chambers and Fred Spring, highlighted the issues relating to defining homelessness for indigenous people, and suggested that a key aspect of reconceptualising homelessness for this group was that it should not be defined around lack of accommodation, but also the loss of sense of control over, or legitimacy over where a person lives. There were three categories of homelessness: public place dwellers, those at risk of homelessness and spiritually homeless people. Official definitions of homelessness (under the SAAP IV Memorandum of Understanding) recognize that homelessness can encompass a range of concepts and definitions, and in particular indigenous homelessness may be different in nature from non-indigenous concepts. However the researchers found that this recognition did not provide any guidance as to what these definitions were, and thus it was difficult for this understanding to inform policy or its implementation. The researchers recommended working further with indigenous organizations to address all aspects of indigenous homelessness.

<http://www.ahuri.edu.au/publications/projects/p20168>

Randolph, B. and Beer, A. 2005 **Evaluating the Miller Foyer Pilot Project** (Project 70020)

Bill Randolph and Andrew Beer examined the Miller Foyer model of providing secure accommodation to young people at risk of homelessness which has been used in Europe. The researchers sought to examine the applicability of the model to Australian rural youth by looking at a pilot scheme introduced in Liverpool, Western Sydney. The study

suggested that the model had promising potential in preventing homelessness and criminal activity.

<http://www.ahuri.edu.au/publications/projects/p70020>

Randolph, B. 2006 **Developing Models of Good Practice in Meeting the Needs of Homeless Young People in Rural Areas** (Project 40160)

This project examined the national and international literature on models for meeting the needs of young homeless people in rural areas. The research also examined how state and Australian Government policies impact on young homeless people in rural areas, and found the impact was significant. The study also found that there were important differences between the experiences of young homeless people in rural areas compared to urban areas. The findings emphasise the need to provide programs and services for homeless youth in their home towns. A modified version of the Miller Foyer project suitable for rural Australia is developed and proposed.

<http://www.ahuri.edu.au/publications/projects/p40160>

Robinson, C. 2003 **Understanding iterative homelessness: the case of people with mental disorders** (Project 70072)

Catherine Robinson found that there was an important dimension to homelessness that is often ignored in favour of more static definitions of the concept. Iterations of homelessness were shown to be triggered by the repetition of traumatic experiences and the general chaos that was found to characterize the lives of this particular group with a mental illness. Stable accommodation was not enough to fix the issue of homelessness for this group as many interviewed indicated that they had maintained secure accommodation in the past. Therefore, an important principle is to adopt a holistic approach whereby accommodation, support and mental health care were available, with the capacity to form on-going, care-based relationships with clients.

<http://www.ahuri.edu.au/publications/projects/p70072>