



The Salvation Army Tasmania Division

**Alcohol Toll Reduction
Submission 2008**



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The Salvation Army

Our Core Values



Compassion



Community



Justice



Hope



Human Dignity

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Executive Summary

The Salvation Army has prepared this submission on behalf of people dealing with alcohol abuse in Tasmania. The submission represents The Salvation Army's desire to be involved in the development of policy solutions that address the needs of disadvantaged people. We seek opportunities that enable people in our community to reach their full potential as citizens contributing constructively to our economy, institutions and community.

The Salvation Army invests \$1.5m annually in the Tasmanian community to provide social services to disadvantaged Tasmanians. These funds are raised through public appeals and are used in areas where The Salvation Army identifies additional needs or gaps in existing social services. A significant proportion of these funds are allocated to the provision of Alcohol and Drug Treatment, Emergency Relief and Prison Support Services. The Salvation Army also provides supplementary funding to (SAAP) support programs where the demand for services has outstripped government funding.

This submission covers four priority areas that The Salvation Army believes needs to be addressed in order to improve the health and wellbeing of the disadvantaged in our community. These areas are:

- Alcohol Toll and Treatment
- Affordable Housing
- Homelessness
- Poverty Relief

The Salvation Army has assisted more than 15,000 people over the last 12 months who have needs relating to at least one of these four priority areas. The culture, complexity and stresses of modern society can lead people to use alcohol or other drugs as a coping strategy and that will relate to one of the priority areas.

The Salvation Army seeks to support disadvantaged people in Australia. In order to achieve that objective we submit the following submission to the Commonwealth Government. In this submission we call on the Government to join with The Salvation Army to improve society so that all Australians receive an equitable, just and compassionate response to their physical needs, especially those dealing with alcohol and other drugs.

Summary of Recommendations

Alcohol Toll and Treatment

- 1.1 A fixed funding formula for Alcohol and other Drug services with a Commonwealth government commitment to cover or at least match State government contributions to the operating expenditure of Rehabilitation Programs.

Responsibility: Department of Health and Ageing

- 1.2 Additional Commonwealth government investment in infrastructure in order to improve social services in the areas of health, housing, support, financial assistance and counseling for people dealing with alcohol and other addiction issues.

Responsibility: Department of Health and Ageing

- 1.3 Increase funding to ex-prisoner support programs dealing with alcohol addiction in order to improve the range of services trying to re-integrate ex-prisoners into the community.

Responsibility: Department of Justice

Affordable Housing

- 2.1 Increase the supply of social housing over the next four years to provide more affordable and secure accommodation for people dealing with alcohol addiction.

Responsibility: Department of FaHCSIA

- 2.2 Increase the level of tied funding to the Community Housing Program in order to promote affordable and sustainable housing option for people dealing with alcohol issues.

Responsibility: Department of FaHCSIA

- 2.3 Appoint a Federal Ministerial Advisory Committee to appraise and inform social housing policy, procedure and practice.

Responsibility: Department of FaHCSIA

Addressing Homelessness

- 3.1 Develop a whole of government housing and homeless strategy involving the community, local and state government. The housing and homeless strategy will need to outline inclusion, support and transition mechanisms for people dealing with alcohol and other drugs by the end of 2008.

Responsibility: Department of FaHCSIA

- 3.2 Increase SAAP funding in order to address the unmet need for emergency and transitional accommodation. SAAP services are bearing the brunt of homelessness and related alcohol and drug addictions due to the shortage of low cost rental housing.

Responsibility: Department of FaHCSIA

- 3.3 Increase the provision of CAP funding available for non-government organisations.

Responsibility: Department of FaHCSIA

Poverty Relief

- 4.1 Develop an action plan that will address social, economic and cultural poverty with reference to alcohol education and treatment.

Responsibility: Department of Premier and Cabinet

- 4.2 Review public policy regarding the concentration of disadvantaged people with alcohol and other drug issues in public housing broad acre suburbs without family or professional support networks.

Responsibility: Department of FaHCSIA

- 4.3 Increase the level of alcohol education funding received by public schools as a long-term strategy aimed at reducing social, economic and cultural poverty.

Responsibility: Department of Education and FaHCSIA

Introduction

In 1865, William and Catherine Booth formed an evangelical group dedicated to helping people living in poverty in London's East End. Their ministry recognised the interdependence of material, emotional and spiritual needs. In addition to preaching the gospel of Jesus, they became involved in the feeding and shelter of the hungry and homeless and in the rehabilitation of alcoholics.

Since those beginnings The Salvation Army has continued to meet the needs of the disadvantaged in communities around the world. The basic social services developed by the Booths have remained a visible expression of the Army's strong religious principles. In addition, programs that address contemporary needs have been established. Among these are disaster relief services, day care centres, services for the aging, shelters for women and children escaping domestic violence, family and career counselling, vocational training, correction, support and rehabilitation services. More than 30 million people each year are aided by services provided by The Salvation Army worldwide.

The Salvation Army offers caring support for a range of issues 'from the cradle to the grave.' Our services are as wide-ranging and as diverse as the needs of the community and act as an additional safety net for Australia's most disadvantaged people. Each program is linked with the other services in the Salvation Army network to enhance and increase our capacity to help those people who are most in need.

In 2007 The Salvation Army spent \$1.5m in Tasmania alone and met the physical and social needs of 15,000 Tasmanians. There were many social and economic challenges facing The Salvation Army in Tasmania, in particular the 11% increase in the number of people seeking our community welfare, homelessness and rehabilitation services over the past financial year.

The increase in people seeking assistance can be attributed to the lack of affordable private rental housing. While the top 10% of income earners live on more than \$1500 per week, the bottom 10% are forced to live on less than \$177 per week. Out of this meagre amount people are required to pay rent and all the other necessities that life demands, like groceries, clothes, heating and health related costs.

Those struggling to survive below the poverty line typically cannot afford to live near services because rent is higher in these areas. This means they rely on their aging car or public transport. When you put all these facts together, it is easy to see that life for many Australian is difficult, and why they access non-government agencies for financial support.

The Salvation Army wishes to advocate on behalf of the people who are most marginalized and struggling with alcohol and other drug issues. We do this by submitting the following request to the Commonwealth Government. In this submission we ask the Government to work with The Salvation Army to improve our society so that all Australians can receive an equitable, just and compassionate response to their needs.

The Salvation Army recognises the achievements of the new Commonwealth Government. We acknowledge the government's investment and future commitment in the areas of health and housing. However The Salvation Army has identified four high priority areas, which require further investment. They include:

- ▶ Alcohol Toll and Rehabilitation
- ▶ Affordable Housing
- ▶ Homelessness
- ▶ Poverty Relief

While Australia has experienced a period of economic growth The Salvation Army has witnessed an increase in the social and economic needs of communities around the nation. The increased levels of need and the complexity of the issues facing some disadvantaged people limit our ability to respond appropriately. The economic gap between the rich and poor, employed and the unemployed is widening and this poses difficulties for disadvantaged people especially those with alcohol and other drug issues to engage in mainstream community life.

The Salvation Army receives constant demands and community expectations to address social problems, like alcohol and drug addiction. It is important that Commonwealth and State Governments makes an appropriate commitment to organisations like The Salvation Army so that they have the capacity to meet the rehabilitation needs of people with an alcohol and other drug addiction. The Salvation Army requests that the Commonwealth Government responds to our four areas of concern in writing.

1.0 Alcohol Toll and Treatment

The Salvation Army is Australia's largest non-governmental provider of alcohol and other drug (AOD) treatment services. The Salvation Army has made a significant financial investment in a range of rehabilitation programmes it operates in Tasmania addressing alcohol, drug, gambling, and other addictive behaviour. These programmes include needle exchanges, sobering-up units, counselling and referral, home-based support programs, residential treatment services, programs for ex-prisoners, support groups, and programmes specifically designed to meet the needs of special populations (i.e. correctional clients, ex-prisoners, women and homeless people).

It is the policy of The Salvation Army to look at the needs of this group in a holistic manner, working to address the underlying psychosocial aspects of misuse as well as linking into the range of other treatment services often required to achieve lasting outcomes. The Salvation Army rehabilitation programs work with each client towards negotiated goals, which are based on life enhancement principles. In addition, these programs, within the limits of available resources, follow up clients' post treatment within their own living environment in an effort to provide after care and effectively put prevention strategies in place. Support is also provided to the families and friends of people who are dealing with addiction.

For several decades, The Salvation Army has observed with concern, the acceptance of alcohol and drug use within the general community. While we are heartened by the decline in injecting drug use over recent years; we remain alarmed at the high levels of harm associated with alcohol and recreational drug use, particularly among young people.

Figures from the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare report released in June 2005 suggest that:

- 40% of the total Tasmanian population are found to be at risk or high-risk of alcohol related harm in the short term, which is 4.7% above the national average.
- Overall illicit drug use in Tasmania has also grown, while nationally it has fallen. .
- Ecstasy use in Tasmania has doubled in three years since 2001

- Teenage smoking rates have risen 50% (nationally rates have fallen nearly 50%).
- In 2004, 15.4% of Tasmanians reported that they took one of a range of illicit drugs, over 10% used marijuana.
- Tasmania is experiencing increased availability and use of methamphetamine.
- The widespread injection of benzodiazepines is also a feature of Tasmania's illicit drug market with use amongst local IDU consumers at a relatively high level in comparison to other Australian states.

The Salvation Army is well placed to make recommendations in relation to alcohol and drug related harm and its treatment. Our research shows that drug treatment programs (as opposed to other interventions) offer the best value and outcomes to the community. These programs are under threat due to the inability of government funding to keep pace with the increased demand for and cost of treatment. We call for the following strategic approaches for treatment programs:

- 1.1 A fixed funding formula for Alcohol and Drug services with an additional government commitment to match State contributions to cover operating expenditure in Rehabilitation Programs.
- 1.2 Additional government investment in infrastructure in order to improve social services in the areas of health, housing, support, financial assistance and counseling for people dealing with alcohol addiction issues.
- 1.3 Increased funding to ex-prisoner support programs dealing with alcohol and other drugs in order to improve the re-integration of ex-prisoners into the community. Decreasing recidivism rates in Australia will reduce the costs associated with courts and prisons.

The Salvation Army believes that a response to these issues is critical to the effective delivery of community services. A greater government commitment to Alcohol and Drug related harm minimisation programs, like the Hobart Bridge Centre, would result in improvements to the health, well being and the productivity of many young people.

2.0 Affordable Housing

The Salvation Army believes that it is the right of every Tasmanian to have affordable, appropriate, safe and secure accommodation. The Salvation Army supports the development of Affordable Housing options for disadvantaged people.

Affordable housing is defined in terms of low-income earners as any accommodation that costs less than 30% of the household income to rent. There are also affordable housing issues for homeowners, especially first homebuyers, who are struggling to purchase properties due to the property boom.

In Tasmania house prices are ‘nearing historical levels of un-affordability’ (Macquarie Property 2005). Tasmania has experienced ‘exceptional house price growth, with prices growing 233% in the four years to March 2005. This is way above the national average growth in house prices. The data has house prices growing at an annual rate of 15% (Macquarie Property 2005).

The demand for affordable housing was initially driven by a dramatic contraction in low cost rental housing in the private sector (Wood 2001: Yates and Wulff 2000). Between 1986 and 1996 the number of low cost properties let at less than \$100 per week nationally fell by 28% (Wood 2001, 425: Yates and Wulff 2000).

Currently there are 250,000 low-income renters in Australia paying over 30% of their income in rent, leaving them at risk of after housing poverty (AHI, November 2004). In Tasmania it is estimated that there are over 25000 low-income households who cannot afford to meet other basic needs after they have paid the cost of private rental.

The health and well-being of Tasmanians is dependent upon access to affordable long-term housing. A growing number of Tasmanians are experiencing ‘housing stress’ which leads to difficulties in meeting basic living costs, over crowding, family breakdown, health issues and homelessness. The number of Tasmanian households currently experiencing housing stress is estimated to be over 25,000.

The University of Tasmania Housing and Community Research Unit (HACRU 2007) suggests that there is ‘a basic deficit in the number of dwellings in Tasmania...of around 5800 dwellings.’ We need more dwellings and more affordable social housing to meet the needs of disadvantaged people.

In 2006 the State Government launched Tasmanian Affordable Housing, which plans to increase the supply of affordable social housing properties. The Salvation Army supports this initiative, however, we call on the Commonwealth government to retire to the state housing debt so that we can increase the supply of social housing available for disadvantaged people including the people dealing with alcohol and other drug issues.

- 2.1 Increase the supply of social housing over the next four years to provide more affordable and secure accommodation for people dealing with alcohol addiction.
- 2.2 Increase the level of tied funding to the Community Housing Program in order to promote affordable and sustainable housing option for people dealing with alcohol issues.
- 2.3 Appoint a Federal Ministerial Advisory Committee to appraise and inform social housing policy, procedure and practice.

3.0 Homelessness

Analysis of the 2001 ABS census data revealed that on census night there were 2,415 homeless people in Tasmania. This figure is up by 400 people from the 1996 census. Of the 2,415 people homeless in Tasmania on census night only 314 people (13%) were accommodated in services funded specifically for the homeless through the Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP).

An issue of concern for all Tasmanians should be the fact that although we have had 5 years of economic growth since the 2001 census we have seen no improvement in the numbers or condition of homeless people. Trickle down policies are not helping the unemployed, disabled, aged and people dealing with alcohol and other drugs. The homeless and disadvantaged are economically worse off and more marginalized than they were 10 years ago.

The Salvation Army calls on the Commonwealth Government to promote strategic and intensive support interventions, which provide genuine pathways out of homelessness for people dealing with alcohol and other drugs

- 3.2 Develop a whole of government housing and homeless strategy involving the community, local and state government. The housing and homeless strategy will need to outline inclusion, support and transition mechanisms for people dealing with alcohol and other drugs by the end of 2008.
- 3.2 Increase SAAP funding in order to address the unmet need for emergency and transitional accommodation. SAAP services are bearing the brunt of homelessness and related alcohol and drug addictions due to the shortage of low cost rental housing.
- 3.4 Increase the provision of CAP funding available for non-government organisations.

There needs to be a genuine understanding that intensive and supported transitions out of homelessness need to be adequately resourced. There is a general level of frustration among NGOs with the inadequate level of resources provided to meet the needs of the most disadvantaged in our community.

4.0 Poverty Relief

The Salvation Army is the largest provider of emergency relief in Tasmania delivering financial assistance through twelve outlets across the state. This assistance takes many forms, including emotional and material support such as food vouchers, utility, petrol and rental assistance.

The demand for assistance far exceeds The Salvation Army's ability to respond adequately. We hope to raise the awareness of government and business representatives in order to facilitate change, not only to the circumstances of those experiencing financial hardship, but also in terms of the wider community understanding of the link between alcohol addiction, poverty, wellbeing and social participation.

The major issues effecting The Salvation Army's ability to respond to the increased level of demand include soaring private rental costs for low and middle income earners, limited public transport options for those living in regional and remote communities, increasing transport and petrol costs and an increase in the number of people requesting treatment for addictive behaviors.

Tasmanians earn 20% less, on average, than their mainland counterparts. The net worth of Tasmanian households is nearly 31% less on average, than mainland households. Fewer than 57% of Tasmanians of working age (15 and over) are employed, compared with nearly 62% of mainlanders. Of those Tasmanians who are employed, 68% have a full-time job compared with over 71% of mainlanders (Social Trends 2006).

The Salvation Army Tasmania calls on the Commonwealth Government to.

- 4.1 Develop an action plan that will address social, economic and cultural poverty with reference to alcohol education and treatment.
- 4.2 Review public policy regarding the concentration of disadvantaged people with alcohol and other drug issues in public housing broad acre suburbs without family or professional support networks.
- 4.3 Increase the level of alcohol education funding received by public schools as a long-term strategy aimed at reducing social, economic and cultural poverty.

Conclusions

In 2001 25% of the population aged over 15 years in Southern Tasmania's most disadvantaged areas did not go to school or finished school before year 10.

In "No time to lose" Richardson and Prior (2005) argued that disadvantages linked to individual circumstances (including family break-up, substance abuse and poverty) tend to be more likely in government schools.

Intervention is required on the part of the Federal and State governments and school authorities to address the low levels of academic achievement in these areas, which have been reinforced by the concentration of disadvantaged families in public housing estates.

The Salvation Army suggests that funding for public schools in disadvantaged areas should be higher than the total per pupil expenditure in affluent areas, taking into account both public inputs and locally raised funds. The expenditure should be used to provide extra teachers and additional educational and cultural resources focused on the risks associated with alcohol and other drug usage.

Alcohol addiction and disadvantage need to be addressed at a local level through the combined resources of the Federal and State Governments, and the wider community if we want to see a reduction in the effects of alcohol addiction and intergenerational poverty, and help to bridge the divide between those who are enjoying the benefits of economic growth and those who remain disadvantaged and homeless in Australia.