

2007

**THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY FOR THE
AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY**

**BREAKING THE CYCLE:
THE ACT HOMELESSNESS STRATEGY**

SECOND ANNUAL PROGRESS REPORT

JULY 2005 - JUNE 2006

Presented by

**Ms Katy Gallagher MLA
Minister for Disability and Community Services**

Breaking the Cycle – the ACT Homelessness Strategy for the period July 2005 to June 2006

INTRODUCTION

Last year I had the privilege of presenting the first annual progress report on implementation of *Breaking the Cycle, the ACT Homelessness Strategy*. The first progress report gave an impressive account of the new services which had been established to address homelessness and its causes, and gave a range of case studies of how the service responses to homelessness had made a real difference in the lives of the people they worked with.

This second progress report records how we have taken implementation of the Strategy to the next stage of moving from a range of effective but none the less discrete services, towards an integrated service system. Importantly, we have made major legislative reforms to the provision of housing assistance, and we have refocused the role of Housing ACT by instituting organisational change. Housing ACT now has the role of working to ensure that community based support begins from the time individuals and families apply for housing, and keeps them going until the time they are ready and able to sustain a tenancy in the community, with appropriate supports in place. This is how we will succeed in breaking cycles of homelessness.

We have established the Indigenous Supported Accommodation Service for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families, and we have developed the Charter of Rights for Homeless People.

The Homelessness Strategy is one of the ACT's key strategies for social change. It sits under the policy framework of the Canberra Plan and the Social Plan. *The Social Plan* provides the ACT community with its long-term target of reducing primary homelessness to as close to zero as possible by 2013.

Multiple factors contribute to homelessness, such as domestic violence, drug and alcohol misuse, physical and mental illness, relationship breakdown, unemployment and poverty.

So too, the responses and strategies required to alleviate its impacts, reduce its likelihood and support people to transition from homelessness are complex. This requires the commitment of a range of support services and must recognise and respond to individual experience and circumstance.

The Homelessness Strategy provides the blue-print through which the community will work together to reduce the level of homelessness, as well as its causes and effects.

Make no mistake, the ACT Homelessness Committee is in the business of achieving social change. The Government agencies which are our partners in implementing the Homelessness Strategy have a clear mandate to work with the community to substantially improve the lives of its most disadvantaged and socially excluded members. We do this through direct service delivery, such as through our housing, disability, care and protection, health and therapy services; through the development of informed and consultative policy and advice to government and through funding to the community sector which delivers the bulk of our homelessness services.

I believe that social change is more than the sum of its parts, or if you like the sum of the programs we provide. Social change requires change in our ways of thinking as a community and, importantly, how we structure the community's institutions. Our bureaucracies, our institutions, our community organisations, and our service systems must all play a part in responding to disadvantage.

In developing and implementing the Homelessness Strategy, we have set out a program of social change. Achieving social change, as we seek to do through the implementation of *Breaking the Cycle*, requires a long-term commitment from all parts of the community. It requires shared responsibility and a partnership approach, which have continued through our second year of implementation of the Strategy and our work in the ACT Homelessness Committee. I would like to personally acknowledge the hard work and commitment of all members of the ACT Homelessness Committee and its various working groups.

Many people have been involved in the development and implementation of the Strategy to date. Their commitment to achieving its goals, embracing new ways of working and reducing homelessness is a proud achievement for the ACT community.

At the end of the second year of the Strategy the Minister for Disability and Community Services and the Committee have considered it appropriate to consolidate groups of related actions which are the primary focus of the final year of the Strategy.

The overarching structure of the Strategy has not been altered through this process. The original four Themes and underpinning objectives have been retained.

Actions that have been completed have been removed from the Strategy. 'Drawing a line' under these actions, will obviate the need to repeatedly report on items, and will better focus the Strategy on areas where more ongoing work is required. Forty one actions have been noted as completed.

Fifteen actions have been consolidated, thus producing a concise, forward looking Homelessness Strategy, as we move into our final year.

This approach to consolidating the Strategy is detailed in Attachments 2 and 3.

Attachment 2 shows progress against the original 82 actions and identifies which actions have been consolidated or completed.

Attachment 3 shows the Strategy with related actions consolidated and completed actions removed. The 26 actions remaining in the consolidated Strategy represent the priority action areas for the final period of the Strategy.

I am pleased to present this Second Progress Report on behalf of the ACT Homelessness Committee.

Sandra Lambert
Chair

Theme 1: Integrated and effective service responses

Objectives:

- Establish mechanisms to support integrated service responses and delivery
- Increase focus on prevention and early intervention in order to reduce the incidence of homelessness

Progress

Theme 1 aims to ensure that there is an agreed integrated approach to homelessness between government and the community sector in terms of policy, funding and operational requirements.

The first Action under this theme is to establish a “Joint Operational Framework” for the provision of services to people who are homeless or are at risk of homelessness. The framework will ensure that there is agreement and clarity around the goals and outcomes to be achieved from the service system, while providing a clear mandate for the reforms, which are needed to create a service system out of a range of discrete services.

There has been significant progress during 2005-06 in creating the framework, through several key projects: the housing applicant support project (and related projects), and the Women’s Pathways Project.

Housing Applicant Support Project

Major reform has occurred within Housing ACT over the past 12 months to refocus the service provided to applicants for housing assistance away from an application form processing function, to an applicant support function. This is to actively ensure that those who are homeless or are at risk of homelessness have been connected to the support they need in the community for the period they are waiting for housing to be provided, whether that is public or community housing, or private rental accommodation.

This support is provided in the community sector through the Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP) accommodation and outreach support, but it is also provided by the government sector, by way of support from the Office of Child Youth and family Support (OCYFS) in their support for children and families, from mental health services, alcohol and other drug services, disability support services, as well as clinical services where necessary.

Housing ACT initiated the first major step in the establishment of the framework by creating a service system built around the needs of applicants for public housing. The end point of this approach was the reform of the legislative program for housing assistance, the Public Rental Housing Assistance Program (PRHAP) that was announced by the ACT Government on 6 June 2006. The reforms to PRHAP create a new top priority classification for housing assistance which focuses on complex need, and will enable those in the group to be housed within 3 months, compared to the previous “wait turn” system which was taking up to 12 months to house homeless applicants.

The Housing Applicant Support Project was undertaken from September 2005 - March 2006 by a project team comprising Housing ACT staff from Gateway Services (which is responsible for assessment of applications and allocation of properties); the SAAP Resource and Development Service from ACTCOSS (which is responsible for training and resourcing SAAP services and supporting the implementation of the Homelessness Strategy) and Northside Community Services (which provides SAAP domestic violence services, family support, community development support for public housing tenants and community housing tenancy management.)

The project team undertook project management training, and gained qualifications in project management. The use of the project management tool and approach ensured that the objectives and deliverables of the project were clear, and all phases of the project and related tasks were properly scoped, allocated and completed. The project management training for community organisations has had spin off benefits, as the project management approach has been rolled out to a range of programs at Northside Community Services, and more recently at the Canberra Rape Crisis Service through the SAAP RaDS/ACTCOSS training.

The implementation of the outcomes of the Housing Applicant Support project was rolled into the implementation of two other projects related to applicant support undertaken by Housing ACT. The first project successfully developed and then trialled a case conferencing approach for housing applicants at the time of the allocation of a property, to ensure that the property met the needs of applicants with complex needs, and that community based supports were in place to support the person to live independently in the community. That project was completed in March 2006.

The second project was a review of Housing ACT “Gateway Services” from December 2005 - February 2006. It was always envisaged that to implement the outcomes of the applicant support projects described above it would be necessary to restructure those Gateway Services into teams based on providing support for applicants at the time of assessment and for the period of waiting for housing, as well as at the time of allocation of the property. Once community based supports are in place, it is expected that the Housing ACT tenancy management teams will operate within a strengths based framework and assist tenants to sustain their tenancy.

The reforms in Housing ACT throughout 2004-05, which were reported in the first Annual Report of the implementation of the Homelessness Strategy, have resulted in a sustainable tenancies approach to tenancy management, which has seen a dramatic drop in the rate of eviction from Housing ACT properties, from 41 in 2003-04 to 18 in 2004-05 and 26 in 2005-06. There has been a resultant reduction in homelessness caused by eviction, particularly for women with children.

Women's Pathways Project

In the later half of 2005, at the same time as Housing ACT was working on creation of a service system at the housing support end of the service continuum, women's services were grappling with the problem of "blockages" in women's services, such that there was no longer a range of accommodation types for women in crisis, particularly involving domestic violence.

There should have been a range of accommodation available from crisis accommodation through to medium and longer term, as this range of services was specified and purchased by government through service purchasing agreements with the SAAP sector, but individual stand-alone services were essentially full and not operating to provide the service type they were contracted to provide. There needed to be a circuit breaker to free up enough supported accommodation to actively operate that accommodation as crisis beds only, and then achieve movement through the system.

The Chief Executive, Department of Disability, Housing and Community Services (DHCS), Ms Sandra Lambert, took the initiative to establish a Women's Services Round Table in November 2005. As a result of discussions at the Round Table it became clear that both government and community members expected that government should take the leadership role of "expert purchaser" and define the range of services required, specify them for service providers in service purchasing agreements, and support and monitor services to ensure that the full range of accommodation types and related support services were being provided to people experiencing or at risk of homelessness. In this way there could be movement through the system.

A group was formed of expert government and community members to specifically map pathways around women's homelessness, (with or without accompanying children), especially in relation to escaping domestic violence and identify where the service gaps were resulting in the known and demonstrable problems causing the "blockages". This group became the Women's Pathways Project. The Project will also propose changes to the current system, in order to improve the continuity of care for clients and avoid blockages.

Pilot of a service system for women and children – Christmas 2005 Initiative

At the Women's Service Round Table the focus was on the inadequacy of crisis accommodation responses for women and children escaping domestic violence. As the much-needed "circuit breaker" the department funded a Domestic Violence Crisis Initiative in December 2005 – January 2006, in recognition of the increase in demand for crisis accommodation services over the Christmas period. This was loosely based on the model of transitional housing used successfully in Victoria and South Australia.

Twelve Housing ACT properties were provided to Inanna Incorporated and Doris Women's Refuge to provide interim crisis accommodation for 6 weeks to women and children escaping domestic violence. The Domestic Violence Crisis Service (DVCS) managed the intake into the properties, which enabled women and children to be supported by DVCS and accommodated in the properties after hours, and Inanna or Doris took up and maintained the support the following day. This initiative provided in excess of 1000 bed nights to women and children in need of immediate safety during this period.

The success of this pilot depended upon Inanna and Doris being able to manage the entry and exit in to the properties by incorporating them in to the their broader services, and working with other SAAP providers and Housing ACT to find other accommodation options for women in those properties at the end of the 6 weeks of the trial, for which the properties were available.

It meant that crisis accommodation had to be managed as crisis accommodation, and exit points found for that accommodation, so that it was not "filled up" and becoming de facto medium or longer term accommodation.

This is exactly what happened. The trial was able to demonstrate that it is possible to operate services as crisis services, as per the contract with the department. It also demonstrated that it was easier to achieve this outcome when there was a "circuit breaker" in terms of the transitional properties.

The success of this trial has informed the development of a Transitional Housing Program (THP) in 2006, which was announced by the ACT Government on 6 June 2006. The THP will use Housing ACT properties that are available in the short term, to accommodate individuals and families who are leaving SAAP services and awaiting long-term housing. The THP began operation in October 2006.

Consolidation of funding agreements within Social Housing and Homelessness Services

In developing the concept of government as “expert purchaser”, the ACT Government undertook structural reform in the supported accommodation and social housing sectors, to achieve greater coordination and effective and efficient service delivery. This responds to key priorities of the ACT Social Plan, SAAP V Bilateral Agreement, the Commonwealth State Housing Agreement and *Breaking the Cycle – the ACT Homelessness Strategy*. This reform process is underpinned by strategies to achieve greater efficiency and efficacy of funding provision.

Consolidation of services and associated schedules in funding agreements

This will drive organisational and service reform by requiring organisations to provide a full spectrum of services from crisis support through to transitioning clients into the community, and will include:

- Opportunities for innovation and flexibility;
- Development of administrative consistency; and
- Identification of efficiencies from these consolidations.

Policy Discussions in SAAP forums

SAAP forums have been restructured and are now co-facilitated by a government and a community chair to better reflect the cooperative and collaborative relationship between the ACT Government and SAAP services. These regular forums enable the exchange of information and the development of operational consistency across the SAAP sector. This work informs the development of the Joint Operational Framework for homelessness service provision, which will enhance integration and collaboration.

Key Achievements

- Reform of Housing ACT Gateway Services
- Government as expert purchaser
- Christmas 2005 domestic violence service response
- Women’s Pathways service response

Challenges Ahead

Joint Operational Framework

The development of the joint operational framework, in its simplest terms, seeks to create consistency across a range of diverse individual services and sectors to ensure that people who experience homelessness are able to more effectively access and receive high standards of support appropriate to their needs as they move from crisis to recovery and reestablishment of their lives in the community.

The framework is being built through the Housing ACT reforms, and the Women's Pathways Project. Discussion of associated service wide issues are being progressed at the regular SAAP and Youth SAAP Forums, which are now co-convened by DHCS and the SAAP sector.

For example, the introduction of a common referral form is being discussed and actively considered for adoption by SAAP services. Implementation of initiatives such as this requires a significant amount of discussion and consideration by all parties to talk through the practical and ethical implications of their introduction. For example, development of a common referral form needs to ensure that the form upholds the principles of privacy and confidentiality for clients, meets the needs of services and promotes appropriate information sharing and coordination between agencies.

The emphasis on the development of the framework, as with the broad reform agenda outlined in *Breaking the Cycle*, requires change across all organisations that provide services and support to people experiencing homelessness.

Future Actions

- Transitional Housing Program operating at 20 properties
- Housing ACT top priority housing group housed within 3 months
- Consolidation of services and related funding agreements for providers
- Youth Pathways Project
- Men's Pathways Project
- Families Pathways Project

Theme 2: Client focus and client outcomes

Objectives:

- Develop mechanisms to ensure the rights of people who are homeless, or who are at risk of homelessness, are recognised.
- Enhance client centred needs assessment, planning and decision-making to support quality outcomes.
- Design and deliver services to effectively respond to break the cycle of homelessness.
- Develop strategies to address the needs of individuals within the identified group for specific attention.

Progress

Theme 2 aims to ensure the rights of people who are homeless are recognised and respected and that mechanisms are established to ensure these rights are realised. Theme 2 also aims to ensure that client centred approaches and comprehensive assessment processes to identify client need are integral to service provision. Specific responses to enhance the capacity of the current service system are identified for groups requiring specific attention.

Homelessness Charter

A key deliverable of *Breaking the Cycle* is the development of the *ACT Homelessness Charter*, which recognises and promotes the rights of people experiencing homelessness. Throughout 2005-06 the ACT Homelessness Committee (AHC) and working groups developed the draft *ACT Homelessness Charter – A Statement of Rights*. Community consultation was undertaken with homelessness service providers in forums and meetings and extensively with clients of homelessness services. This feedback will be incorporated in the final Charter, which will be launched in 2006-07.

The Charter acknowledges that people who are experiencing homelessness have the same basic human rights afforded to the community. It also recognises the right of Inclusion; rights to Dignity, Respect and Non-Discrimination; and rights to Safety and Freedom as particularly important to people experiencing homelessness.

Development of the a Code of Conduct for Service Providers (Service Guarantee)

The Code of Conduct for Service Providers has been renamed the Service Guarantee, to refocus attention of the outcome of such a document for service users. It is intended to establish a clear framework of service delivery expectations between service users and service providers in regard to services for people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness.

The draft Service Guarantee encompasses aspects of standards and processes that can improve the service system's consistency and responsiveness to address the needs of people experiencing or at risk of homelessness. The Service Guarantee acts as a secondary document to complement the ACT Homelessness Charter - A Statement of Rights.

The draft Service Guarantee also acts as a key component of the development of a broader quality framework for the homelessness service system that includes a focus on assuring quality services and on improving service delivery. The Service Guarantee is intended to reflect 'good practice' rather than basic or minimum standards consistent with the culture of continuous improvement in the community sector.

The Service Guarantee is not intended to override individual agencies' codes of practice. Rather, the Service Guarantee should be considered as an adjoined document to *Raising the Standard* (2002), which is a manual to guide quality improvement in ACT community service organisations. The manual covers good practice standards for community service organisations, a guide for self-assessment and quality planning, and tools to support self-assessment and quality planning.

The draft Service Guarantee was distributed to service providers for comment and was 'workshopped' at SAAP Forums. The feedback provided by homelessness services was that further consultation was required prior to its inclusion in funding agreements. This consultation will be undertaken in 2006-07 and included in funding agreements in 2007.

Indigenous Supported Accommodation Service (ISAS)

The Indigenous Supported Accommodation Service offers crisis and transitional supported accommodation to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families who are homeless or at risk of homelessness. ISAS will also provide outreach support to families in a case management framework and specialist children's case management. The service is contracted to provide 2190 supported accommodation days annually.

Inanna will provide the crisis accommodation available to Indigenous families through ISAS.

Families Experiencing Accommodations Transitions in Tuggeranong (FEATT)

The YWCA program, FEATT, was funded in June 2004 to provide a crisis supported accommodation service to families in the Tuggeranong area. FEATT continues to strive to improve outcomes for service users by developing strong links within the local community. In addition, FEATT has provided transitional support to families, in keeping with the objectives of the SAAP V strategic theme *“to provide ongoing assistance to ensure stability for clients post-crisis”*. During the reporting period 1 January - 30 June 2006, FEATT provided support to 44 adults and 42 accompanying children.

Raja Service

Raja, auspiced by Inanna, is a service for families who are homeless or at risk of homelessness and offers supported crisis accommodation, intake and referral support, and workshops. Raja has an understanding of family that is broad and includes any partnership of adults (inclusive of same, opposite and other sexed), or any single adult with accompanying children in their care. Persons seeking support will identify who is in their family and this could include other related people or people who have made a family together.

Raja is funded to provide 12 crisis accommodation places for families with or without accompanying children who are in distress and are experiencing homelessness. Raja provides crisis accommodation for up to 3 months (and in exceptional circumstances, medium term accommodation), support to address a broad range of problems, referral, advocacy and information. Raja has a case management approach to client work, and review and evaluation are part of that process. For the reporting period 1 January - 30 June 2006, Raja Service provided 2675 bed nights to 33 families, consisting of 38 adults and 78 children.

Canberra Fathers and Childrens Service (CANFaCS)

CANFaCS has demonstrated experience in the provision of innovative and responsive supported accommodation for homeless fathers and their children, utilising a model that recognises and responds to the particular trauma and experiences of homelessness facing children. The service provides crisis and medium term accommodation with transitional support and case management. For the reporting period 1 January - 30 June 2006, CANFaCS provided crisis supported accommodation to 9 sole father families with a total of 18 accompanying children. During this period, the organisation also provided 1068 medium-term supported accommodation days to 10 homeless sole father families, with a total of 32 accompanying children. In addition, 85 single fathers with a total of 173 accompanying children benefited from outreach support through its portion of the Outreach Support Service for Men. CANFaCS also provides a total of 1300 hours of face-to-face transitional support and case management over a typical six-month period.

Men's Accommodation Support Service (MASS)

The Men's Accommodation and Support Service (MASS) is a program within Canberra Men's Centre. MASS is funded to provide supported accommodation for 15 single men with complex needs, who are homeless or at risk of homelessness. The MASS program recognises that, from time to time, participants require access to certain services in order to enhance their well being and/or to sustain their tenancies. Such support can range from assistance with linkages with other services, through to support with basic living skills. The broader aim is to achieve self-management, enhance relationships, and to engage in the general community. During the reporting period 1 January - 30 June 2006, 24 men were provided with supported accommodation, 14 of whom have successfully taken over the tenancy of the property. Of these 24, 10 were referred from Justice and Community Safety (JACS), 4 of whom have successfully taken over the tenancy to the property.

Aleta Outreach Service for Women

Aleta, auspiced by Toora Women Inc, provides outreach support to approximately 20 women at any one time. The target group is flexible, taking into account the varying levels of support required. At the initial time of accessing Aleta, all of the women seeking support had significant issues affecting their ability to maintain safe and appropriate housing. Currently, 25% of the women supported by Aleta have involvement with Child Protection Services. Of these, 60% have children in care and 20% had care restored and are under care and protection orders. The other 20% are under the direction of Family Services Branch.

Aleta has been working closely with services such as Probation and Parole (P&P) in supporting women to strengthen their relationships with P&P workers, in order to meet all requirements identified within the supervision, as well as completing community service order requirements. This has contributed to a significant drop in breaches and detrimental outcomes for women with whom Aleta works. The support interventions provided by Aleta have assisted in women achieving significant improvements in dealing with emotional, physical, mental and financial stresses, which may have impacted on their ability to maintain appropriate housing.

STREETS (Sustaining Tenancy through Referral Education Empowerment and Tailored Support)

STREETS, auspiced by Anglicare, is a youth housing outreach program, which is contracted to provide outreach support to 20 young people. This includes a combination of intensive support and short term support to service users. These clients are provided with a variety of support services, including:

- assistance in entering crisis accommodation;
- assistance in obtaining medium to long-term accommodation;
- support in the management of Housing ACT debt;
- general Housing ACT advocacy;
- Centrelink advocacy; and

- support to maintain independent accommodation.

STREETS is a flexible, client-driven service, which seeks to meet the changing and complex needs of clients by responsive staff and service practice. For the reporting period 1 January - 30 June 2006, STREETS had a total of 23 young people in case management over the period.

Outreach Support Service for Men

The Outreach Support Service for men is a partnership between Canberra Men's Centre (CMC) and Canberra Fathers and Childrens Service (CANFaCS). This service targets single men and single fathers with accompanying children, who are homeless or at risk of homelessness. Support for single men without children is provided by CMC, while support for single fathers with accompanying children is provided by CANFaCS. For the reporting period 1 January - 30 June 2006, the Outreach Support Service for Men supported 36 single men. During the same period, 85 single fathers with a total of 173 accompanying children benefited from outreach support.

Changes to the Public Rental Housing Assistance Program (PRHAP)

Amendments to PRHAP were announced as part of the ACT Budget on 6 June 2006 and were introduced on 7 June 2006. The changes will ensure Housing ACT can provide housing assistance in a more timely way to applicants with high and complex needs.

The PRHAP changes require that all applicants on the waiting list will be re-assessed and their priority status updated in accordance with the new income and residency criteria, and the housing needs categories.

On 1 October 2006, Housing ACT established a multi-disciplinary panel to assist in the assessment and categorisation of applicants with high and complex needs. The panel has been drawn from other ACT Government agencies and the Department of Disability, Housing and Community Services. It is intended that members will also be drawn from Government funded community service organisations. The aim is to house people in the new Priority Category within 3 months.

The changes position Housing ACT as the post crisis-housing provider, and as part of the service continuum where SAAP provides the crisis response.

Key Achievements

- Development of Homelessness Charter
- Amendments to the Public Rental Housing Assistance Program (PRHAP)
- Establishment of multi-disciplinary panel to assess applicants with high and complex needs
- Housing ACT repositioned as the post crisis housing provider, and as part of the service continuum where SAAP provides the crisis response.

Challenges ahead

Work with school counsellors and youth workers

Future directions include “The Couch Surfing Project” which will be established to increase involvement in early intervention and prevention strategies. The aim of the initiative is to support young people to access support services before the point of homelessness.

The project will aim to provide early intervention support to young people who are at risk of homeless but not accommodated in SAAP services to:

- establish stable accommodation;
- re-establish family connections; or
- develop capacity to live independently, as appropriate.

The pilot service will foster partnerships, utilise SAAP case management principles, participate in SAAP sector development activities and develop strong linkages to other SAAP and long-term housing assistance providers.

Developing service model for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander boarding house network with Aboriginal Hostels Australia (AHL)

In collaboration with Aboriginal Hostels Australia, the department is in the process of developing an agreed approach for a service delivery model. The department will purchase a network (6 houses) for this purpose rather than a hostel style building. Three properties were purchased in 2006. It is anticipated that the network will be established and operating prior to 30 June 2007.

Future Actions

- Establish Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander (ATSI) Boarding House Network
- Launch ACT Homelessness Charter and consultation report
- Finalise Service Guarantee and incorporate into Service Funding Agreements

Theme 3: Access appropriate housing and housing assistance

Objectives:

- Increase the available supply of appropriate, safe and adaptive housing for people at risk of homelessness or who are homeless.
- Develop accommodation options to address the needs of individuals within the priority target groups
- Assist people to achieve or maintain their tenure.

Progress

Theme 3 aims to ensure there is an appropriate range of medium and longer-term support options for people who are homeless. Complementing this are specific strategies to respond to the needs of groups requiring specific attention, as well as strategies to better support people to find and maintain appropriate accommodation.

Ainslie Village Reform

In August 2005, the then Minister for Disability, Housing and Community Services, Mr John Hargreaves MLA, announced that Ainslie Village would transition from a supported accommodation site to a community housing model, during which an existing community housing provider would assume responsibility for housing, site and tenancy management. Following an open tender process Havelock Housing Association (HHA) assumed responsibility from Centacare on 1 December 2005 for a three-year period.

During the transition the DHCS provided funding to Centacare to provide drug and alcohol and mental health specialist case management support to 40 residents of Ainslie Village, in addition to existing support services on-site. Through this transition an additional 180 places were created within the Community Housing sector.

Gungahlin Boarding House

Construction of the Gungahlin Singles Boarding House was completed in November 2005. This was the third and final project in the ACT Government's pilot boarding house program. Havelock Housing Association (HHA) was the successful tenderer to provide the tenancy management of the service. The boarding house provides affordable accommodation for men and women over the age of 18 in individual units. The clients have low support needs but may need assistance and information to re-establish themselves in long term accommodation within the community. The accommodation also assists people with low levels of mental illness into a mainstream housing environment.

Older Persons' Units

Housing ACT has 1481 Older Person's Units (OPU's) including twenty-five additional OPUs acquired during the reporting period.

Community Housing head leased properties

During the reporting period 52 tenancies were allocated to community organisations through the Community Organisations Rental Housing Assistance Program (CORHAP). At 30 June 2006 a total of 523 properties were head leased to community organisations.

Ongoing operation of Erin House

Erin House was established in December 2003. This service provides medium term accommodation for women as they transition from Karinya House to independent living. During the reporting period, additional outreach support for clients of the service was provided through the Community Inclusion Fund.

Canberra Emergency Accommodation Service

Recurrent ACT Government funding (\$434,260 per annum) was provided to the Canberra Emergency Accommodation Service (CEAS), which provides flexible responses to homelessness, including the provision of crisis accommodation brokered by Anglicare. Anglicare also has the capacity to provide financial support to assist people who are at risk of homelessness to maintain their tenancy, until such time as more affordable and appropriate housing options are identified. This has been particularly successful in maintaining tenancies for families who are in private rental accommodation while they await allocation of a Housing ACT property. This approach has created strong links with some real estate agents and private landlords, who have developed an increased understanding of homelessness and its causal and consequential factors. An additional \$50,000 has been allocated to CEAS for the brokerage component of the service. The ACT Government has also committed to increasing the number of properties to be managed by CEAS before May 2007.

Funding for Gugan Gulwan Aboriginal Corporation and Winnunga Nimmityjah Aboriginal Health Service for Outreach Support

Winnunga received additional funding to supplement their Housing Liaison Service. Gugan Gulwan received additional funding to enhance their Reconnect program. The services will ensure the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community receives appropriate and up to date support, information and referral with regard to housing and homelessness support options.

Community Linkages Program

The Community Linkages Program has three service components for residents of public and community housing. The first provides funding for community development activities to foster community capacity and facilitate links between residents and a broad range of community services. The second provides support services to residents who may require assistance to maintain their tenancy and the third is a tenant-initiated activities grants program, which funds individuals and resident groups to facilitate community development activities and projects.

In 2005-06 the DHCS continued to fund six services under the Community Linkages Program (CLP). Four of these services provide community development and activities and two services assist public and community housing tenants in the management of their tenancies.

In 2005-06, 32 tenant initiated projects were recommended for funding under the program ranging from a 'Social Group for Men' to establishment of a 'Learning Exchange Program'. Annual funding rounds will be continued under CLP, providing grants for individual tenants or resident groups. Public and community housing tenants were assisted to make applications to this grants program by CLP Community Development providers.

Development of training Calendar for Housing and Community Services (HACS) Staff

A rejuvenated training calendar for Housing ACT staff was launched during 2005-06, focusing on giving Housing Managers and Assessment and Allocation staff the skills required to provide culturally appropriate support and tenancy management. Training programs include cultural awareness, domestic violence, debt management, managing difficult behaviours, mental health, first aid, Occupational Health and Safety and critical incident management.

Key Achievements

- CMC MASS - 14 tenancies handed over to service users
- Reform of Gateway Services
- Training program for HaCS staff
- Moving Ainslie Village from SAAP to Community Housing Management
- Additional 180 Community housing places at Ainslie Village
- 52 new CORHAP community housing tenancies
- Gungahlin Boarding House

Challenges ahead

Improving access to appropriate housing and housing assistance is an ongoing challenge. A key initiative for the next policy cycle of the Homelessness Strategy will be the evaluation of the pilot Transitional Housing Program.

Transitional Housing Program

The development of a pilot Transitional Housing Program (THP) by October 2006 is a key component of the proposed reform of the supported accommodation sector and a major initiative for the next policy cycle of the Homelessness Strategy. The implementation of the THP will be supported by changes made to the PRHAP. The objective of the THP is to increase the crisis capacity of the supported accommodation sector by providing an accommodation alternative for clients who are ready to leave supported accommodation and simply waiting for long term housing options.

The project will utilise Housing ACT stock that is vacant short-term or “hard to let”, and outreach support will be provided by the relevant SAAP service. The THP aligns with the *SAAP V Agreement* strategic priority to provide ongoing assistance to ensure stability for clients post-crisis. The project will enhance the ability of SAAP services to provide appropriate services to meet individual need by ensuring that a range of accommodation options is available.

Preventing evictions from Housing ACT

Managing Disruptive Behaviours

Housing ACT has developed policy guidelines to manage disruptive behaviours. The policy places the task of managing disruptive behaviours within the context of a social housing approach. It is based on the belief that members of our community are entitled to live in a safe and peaceful environment and demonstrates Housing ACT’s intent to provide assistance to all those affected by such actions. Housing ACT will coordinate provision of resources in resolving disruptive situations and/or achieving positive behavioural change to assist tenants to sustain their tenancies.

Managing debt

Housing ACT has introduced a new output reporting measure to capture and monitor tenant accounts where the debt is in excess of \$500. This will enable Housing ACT to negotiate a repayment arrangement and ensure the tenant is complying with the arrangement.

The overall purpose of the process is to offer assistance to tenants to help them meet their rental commitment and, when they experience financial problems, to ensure that they are given the opportunity to repay their arrears at an affordable amount. This assists tenants to retain their home and avoid the possibility of homelessness.

Housing ACT funds CARE Financial Counselling Service to provide financial counselling to tenants to assist tenants with rental debt, to help them to develop a realistic budget based on their income, which enables them to make repayments on their debt, as well as meet weekly living expenses. This is very important for people on a low or fixed income.

In addition, Client Service Co-ordinators (CSC) have been employed to help tenants who experience difficulties and the CSC may refer the tenant to additional support and assistance such as Mental Health ACT, the Public Trustee, Welfare Rights and Legal Centre, Domestic Violence Crisis Service and other community support agencies, if necessary.

Future Actions

- Transitional Housing Project
- Achieve 90% of tenants in debt over \$500 on repayment agreements
- Achieve housing top priority waiting list applicants within 3 months
- Consolidate Ainslie Village community housing and establish tenant participation

Theme 4: Supporting and driving innovation and excellence

Objectives:

- Undertake program evaluation and continuous improvement to ensure service quality and effectiveness.
- Undertake research to enhance evidence based decision making and service development.
- Develop and implement a workforce planning strategy to maintain a high level of skill and capability in the sector.
- Increase public awareness of homelessness in the ACT.

Progress

Theme 4 aims to ensure that the service and support system is able to provide quality services, supported by evidence based decision making, and responding to the changing needs of people who are at risk of homelessness and those that are homeless. In addition, this Theme aims to ensure that the Sector's work force is able to respond to changing needs and requirements. Complementing this is an active awareness program targeted at increasing the community's understanding of the impact of homelessness on people and the wider community.

Community Housing Funding Review

The department undertook a review of funding for community housing in 2005. The final report of the funding review of community housing was provided to the department in October 2005.

The review analysed the current financial arrangements between the ACT Government and community housing providers, identified the range and level of activities undertaken by community housing providers and determined a transparent, fair and equitable basis for funding community housing providers. It involved extensive consultations with the ACT community housing sector.

The department's response adopted recommended benchmark payments for tenancy management and tenancy support, and outlined parameters forming the basis for future funding arrangements. The department's response to the Funding Review will be implemented in 2006-07. This includes 3 year funding agreements, the direct funding of tenancy management by organisations previously funded through Community Housing Canberra Ltd and the application of standard benchmark payments for all community housing providers. The new arrangements will provide the department with a consistent and transparent approach to funding Community Housing providers.

Review of financial and material aid services

A review of Community Service Program (CSP) and the SAAP funded financial and material aid services was finalised in March 2006.

A grant program was announced in September 2005 to provide \$300,000 for financial and material aid to community organisations on a one-off basis. Guidelines for the grant program were derived from and are consistent with the findings and directions of the draft Report. Sixteen projects were funded and commenced in February 2006.

Research into Children's Experiences of Homelessness

The Department of Disability, Housing and Community Services engaged the Australian Institute of Child Protection Studies (Australian Catholic University) to undertake research into children's experience of homelessness. The final report was due to the department in December 2006, and will also deliver a resource manual for children's workers.

SAAP Forums

Ongoing SAAP forums provide training and networking opportunities for the sector. SAAP Forums continue to be integral in the implementation of *Breaking the Cycle*, with sector consultation and information opportunities utilised to inform the development of the ACT Homelessness Charter – A Statement of Rights and associated Service Guarantee for Homelessness Service Providers.

SAAP Forums have been restructured and are now co-facilitated to better reflect the cooperative and collaborative relationship between the ACT Government and SAAP services. These regular forums enable the exchange of information and the development of operational consistency across the SAAP sector. This work informs the development of a Joint Operational Framework for homelessness service provision, which will enhance integration and collaboration. As part of sector development activities each forum is themed to encourage innovation and reform across the sector. Services are also encouraged to present a practice issue that demonstrates innovation and practical responses to service delivery challenges to the forum. Themes for discussion include:

- Who is homeless, what issues are arising that increase people's likelihood of being homeless?;
- Defining Service Models;
- Tenancy and occupancy agreements;
- Pets in services;
- Protocols with Mental Health and the Office of Children Youth and Family Support and how they might be enacted.

Development of a Standard Service Funding Agreement

Consistent with the ACT Government Community Sector Funding Policy, consultation was undertaken with the SAAP sector at a SAAP Forum to develop a new generic Schedule 2 that better describes the services provided, and contains agreed definitions about the types of services provided, such as crisis and transitional accommodation and outreach.

Sector Development

The Coalition of Community Housing Organisations of the ACT (CCHOACT) continued a training program for community housing providers with eleven modules in the Certificate IV Social Housing delivered by the NSW Federation of Housing Associations. The final four modules were delivered in late 2005.

The Department provided CCHOACT with additional funding of \$150,000 to undertake a range of sector development activities and initiatives outlined in the ACT Government's Community Housing Policy Framework. These initiatives include assisting community housing organisations with business planning and organisational viability. SOUL Housing Association and Poachling Inc were able to develop business plans and present these to the department to allow these organisations to develop independently of continued government subsidies.

Data collection

During the reporting period Social Housing and Homelessness Services was involved in ongoing work with the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. The ACT played a lead role in having accompanying children recognised as clients in their own right through the National Data Collection. ACT SAAP services will trial the new SMART6 data collection tool.

Women's Round-table

The Chief Executive of the Department of Disability, Housing and Community Services took the initiative to establish a Women's Services Round-table in November 2005. As a result of discussions at the Round Table it became clear that both government and community members expected that government should take the leadership role of "expert purchaser" and define the range of services required, specify them for service providers in service purchasing agreements, and support and monitor services to ensure that the full range of services were being provided to people experiencing or at risk of homelessness. Full details of this Project are discussed in Theme 1.

Ongoing participation in SAAP V Coordination and Development Committee (CAD)

The ACT continues to participate in the CAD as the coordination group for the activities of state, territory and Australian governments under the SAAP V agreement. The CAD is established by legislation, and is a formal sub committee of the Community and Disability Ministers Conference. The CAD has developed the evaluation framework for SAAP V, and advises Ministers on the research agenda and funding of homelessness services under SAAP V.

Research into young women self harming

During the reporting period the Australian Government provided Lowana Young Women's Service with Service and Research Program (SARP) funding to undertake local research into young women self-harming. Lowana presented the research findings to the ACT SAAP sector at a SAAP Forum as part of the service sector development strategy for sharing knowledge and research within the sector.

Key Achievements

- Launch Children's Homelessness Research
- Women's Roundtable
- Children recognised as clients in their own right
- Development of Funding Agreement Management Plans to guide contract management

Challenges ahead

Supporting and driving innovation and excellence will continue into the next reporting cycle of the Homelessness Strategy and beyond. Key challenges ahead include the implementation of the Service Guarantee addressing a range of practice issues identified by the SAAP sector; and an early trial of the new SMART6 data collection and reporting tool.

Future Actions

- Launch research into children's experience of homelessness and manual
- ACT services to trial SMART 6
- Further training to be delivered to outreach workers on ACT Residential Tenancies ACT 1997