

2008

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

**THIRD ANNUAL PROGRESS REPORT AND
FINAL EVALUATION
BREAKING THE CYCLE:
THE ACT HOMELESSNESS STRATEGY**

TABLING STATEMENT

**Presented by
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Minister for Disability and Community Services**

Mr Speaker, I am pleased to table in the Assembly today the third annual progress report on the implementation of *Breaking the Cycle: The ACT Homelessness Strategy*, and the final Evaluation of *Breaking the Cycle: The ACT Homelessness Strategy*.

This third annual progress report of *Breaking the Cycle: the ACT Homelessness Strategy* provides an overview of the range of activities associated with implementation from July 2006 to June 2007.

This progress report notes numerous highlights from the Strategy's third year of operation. A few highlights there are:

- Finalisation of the ACT Homelessness Charter – A Statement of Rights for homeless people and a Service Guarantee for homelessness service providers;
- Development of policy, strategies and frameworks designed to improve service responses and coordination by reducing the number of contact points for clients;
- Finalisation of research into Children's Experience of Homelessness and development of an implementation plan to incorporate key findings of the research into SAAP sector practice

While this and the preceding annual progress reports have clearly documented the activities and actions taken to implement the Strategy, the Final Evaluation builds on that work by identifying how well, as a whole, these activities and actions have improved outcomes for people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness.

The Final Evaluation of *Breaking the Cycle – the ACT Homelessness Strategy* assesses the impact of the Strategy on people who are

homeless or at risk of homelessness against a number of measures. In doing so, it considers the short-term and likely long-term benefits for Government, service providers and individuals, and makes recommendations about areas for future focus.

Mr Speaker, the social and economic costs experienced by people experiencing homelessness are high.

Homelessness has a significant impact on an individual's ability to participate in the community and to maintain relationships with friends and family.

It can affect an individual's ability to maintain employment and for younger people to attend school.

The final evaluation documents how the Homelessness Strategy provided a framework for a coordinated community response to homelessness, so as to reduce these negative impacts and enable individuals and families to lead safe, active, participative and rewarding lives.

The Homelessness Strategy set out an ambitious program for social change, and the evaluation documents the considerable improvements made in the short-term and outlines potential long-term benefits for people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness in the ACT.

We have moved a long way from the environment that existed prior to the development and implementation of the Strategy, where discrete services for homeless people often operated in isolation, and

mainstream services, such as public housing, were often hard for homeless people to access.

The evaluation highlights that from its first year of operation, one of the most significant achievements of the Strategy has been engineering the evolution of the homelessness sector, from a series of discrete services to a coordinated service system that includes homelessness services, public and community housing.

Stakeholders report there is now a culture of mutual learning across all organisations and of addressing issues and challenges that arise in an open and collaborative manner.

Closer working relationships and a better appreciation of how integrated responses provide better outcomes for clients are likely to have the long-term benefits of continuing to streamline access for all clients, whilst also assisting with future sector development by improving data.

From its first year of operation the Strategy began to change the landscape of Homelessness in the ACT.

The capacity of the sector was increased through the establishment of new services and additions to existing services, for single men, men with children, families, and crisis accommodation for men.

Outreach services were introduced to provide more flexible support options to people at risk of homelessness and at various stages of the homelessness continuum.

The Canberra Emergency Accommodation Service (CEAS) was launched to provide brokerage and an improved entry point into crisis accommodation.

A Youth Homelessness Action Plan (YHAP) was developed to guide responses for young people experiencing homelessness; and

Head leasing arrangements were introduced to support high risk and complex clients whose tenancies with Housing ACT were at significant risk.

As the Strategy progressed into its second year the reorientation of the homelessness services sector continued to move towards an integrated service system.

The reforms assisted the repositioning of services along a continuum of care for people experiencing homelessness or at risk of homelessness, with Housing ACT providing the post-crisis response and SAAP providing the crisis response.

The Strategy has informed numerous reforms along this continuum, including major reforms within Housing ACT that established a service system that is built around the needs of clients and provides community based support from the start of an application for assistance.

Other reforms within Housing ACT improved the process for priority setting for housing assistance to focus on people with complex and high needs, and the establishment of a multi-disciplinary panel (MDP), drawing on representatives from across government and community

service sectors, to assist in the categorisation of Housing ACT applicants with high and complex needs.

During this period a women's pathway group was established to identify service gaps and 'blockages' in the system that reduced the level and availability of assistance to women, particularly involving domestic violence.

As a direct outcome the Domestic Violence Christmas initiative was funded, providing short-term crisis support for women and children escaping domestic violence over Christmas/New Year period.

The initiative had long-term benefits that led to the development of the Transitional Housing Program, which provides additional options for individuals and families leaving SAAP service, freeing up space in those services for people who need a crisis response.

The report outlines how in the third year of the Strategy work initiated in the first two years was built upon to consolidate working relationships in the creation of an integrated service system. As a result service providers reported a change across organisations, with a better, more informed focus on providing a client focussed service.

Other Highlights from the Strategy's third year include the finalisation of the ACT Homelessness Charter – A Statement of Rights for homeless people and a Service Guarantee for homelessness service providers and finalisation of research into Children's Experience of Homelessness and development of an implementation plan to incorporate key findings of the research into SAAP sector practice.

Overall, the evaluation finds the Strategy delivered improved outcomes, against a number measures to specific groups including women, young people and families.

The Strategy introduced initiatives that have improved short-term crisis management and there are early indications that long-term outcomes will be delivered.

This work has been delivered within an environment that at times has been challenging. As you would recall the 2006/07 Budget required the homelessness services sector to make significant savings, in the order of \$1 million dollars. However, I am also pleased to say that the ACT Government continues to provide \$3M over matched funds for homelessness services each year, as well as our \$6M yearly contribution to SAAP.

Those involved in the delivery of the Strategy have risen to its challenges. The evaluation finds that the Strategy was implemented and managed appropriately and efficiently, in a way that was particularly successful in creating a strong, maturing service system.

The success of the Strategy would not have been possible without the collaboration, effort and commitment of key stakeholders, both at the service provider and departmental level.

The ACT Homelessness Committee oversaw the implementation of the Strategy and was comprised of members from the Australian Government, ACT Government agencies and from the community.

The role of community agencies, from peak bodies such as ACTCOSS, ACT Shelter, the ACT Churches Council and the Youth Coalition of the ACT, to the frontline homelessness services, in the successes so far cannot be overstated.

Although the Strategy has enjoyed numerous successes, Mr Speaker, we cannot afford to rest on our laurels. There is hard work ahead of us, and much of it.

The evaluation of the strategy outlines for us the elements and focuses that need to be considered as we take forward the work carried out so far.

In tabling this report I would again like to acknowledge the work of the ACT Homelessness Committee and would like to thank its members for their work over the past three years.

I would again like to acknowledge the contribution, under Minister Hargreaves' leadership, of Housing ACT to providing the post crisis response to homelessness. Its reforms are instrumental in our struggle against homelessness.

I would also like to acknowledge the work of the Department of Disability, Housing and Community Services, with which the overall responsibility for the delivery of the Strategy has sat.

I look forward to our future achievements as we address and respond to the causes and effects of homelessness as a community, and build on the work of *Breaking the Cycle – the ACT Homelessness Strategy*.

[end]