

RISK ADVISORY SERVICES

# ACT Department of Disability, Housing and Community Services

Evaluation of 'Breaking the  
Cycle'- the ACT Homelessness  
Strategy

December 2007

GOVERNMENT

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## **1 Executive Summary**

The final evaluation on Breaking the Cycle, the ACT Homelessness Strategy (the 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 the Government, service providers and individuals and makes recommendations about areas for future focus.

The evaluation draws upon stakeholder consultations, and analysis of nationally available Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP) and Housing data.

The evaluation highlights that there have been considerable improvements in short-term and potential long-term benefits for people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness in the ACT. The sector has now reached a stage where the foundations have been laid for a mature service system to develop.

The evaluation finds that the Strategy:

- has delivered improved outcomes, against a number of measures, to specific groups of clients;
- has introduced initiatives that have improved short-term crisis management;
- demonstrates early indications that long-term outcomes will be delivered;
- has had a mixed impact on the specific priority populations it identifies;
- has delivered considerable soft outcomes;
- was implemented and managed appropriately and efficiently and has been particularly effective at creating a strong, maturing service system; and
- has led to increasing levels of working in partnership

Stakeholders identify a number of elements that have contributed most to the success of the Strategy:

- the strong consultative approach in which the Strategy was developed and the collaboration between services to implement the Strategy after it was launched;
- the effort and commitment of stakeholders at Department and at provider level to implement the Strategy and introduce the changes required during the reform of the service system;
- the development of the pathways groups (led by an independent consultant) to map existing services and facilitate the sector to identify how the system needed to be reformed;

- the injection of new funding to build up capacity initially for men and families; and
- the consultative approach taken with developing service models for new services which have led to well focused programs that match service delivery to meet client needs.

The next steps are crucial to continue to nurture and strengthen the working relationships that have been established. Care must also be taken to recognise the hard work and achievements of the sector so far and to ensure that the sector has the capacity and will to continue sector improvements in the future.

There are a number of elements and focuses that need to be considered to take forward the work carried out so far to improve outcomes for people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness.

#### Future focus and priority

The focus and priority areas for the future are:

- improving the provision and cultural sensitivity of services to Indigenous individuals and families;
- expansion of outreach services as a key component in prevention and early intervention to break the cycle of homelessness;
- building on transitional support programs to continue to create exit points from crisis to be able to respond in a more timely way to new crises;
- developing further links with mainstream services to involve them in responses and support to people who are homeless;
- close working within DHCS to find solutions to the increased demand on services as a result of housing affordability in the ACT; and
- improvements to the suitability of housing stock.

#### Carriage of future initiatives

The Strategy was developed to drive reforms between 2004 to 2007. Over the next three to five years further improvements in the sector must be driven by clear objectives and articulated outcomes, with annual action plans that are developed and agreed by the sector and DHCS and taken forward by the Joint Pathways group.

It is recommended that this is recorded in a concise document that is made available to all stakeholders. A realistic number of actions each year should be agreed, with realistic consideration of how to involve other stakeholders.

The Joint Pathways group should oversee the future development of the service system. The group should have representation from across the sector, from wider

stakeholders and from cross government departments. Governance for future development of the sector should sit jointly with the sector and DHCS. This may require some capacity building to skill up sector representatives to take on the role and to develop skills of Government representatives to work in such a partnership.

The ACT was well positioned at the start of SAAP V to deliver priorities set out in SAAP V agreements. It is expected that, by the end of the SAAP V agreements, the ACT will be leading the way in delivering a truly joined up service system that can flexibly provide crisis and post crisis support and is providing effective prevention support. Therefore, the ACT will be well positioned to provide essential learning and direction for discussions regarding the future direction of SAAP, nationally.

#### Further partnership working

The last three years have seen the SAAP and Housing sectors make improvements that have built the foundations for a strong service system. There is now the need to expand this further and explore how the ad hoc, informal relationships that SAAP and Housing have with other sectors can be improved and strengthened. This will ensure that the full range of holistic support is available for clients who need support from other professional areas, such as mental health, to break their cycle of homelessness. The joint pathways group will be key in taking this forward through negotiations with other mainstream services.

#### Workforce development and training

The issue of developing and retaining a strong, skilled workforce remains. Work has already been started by the Joint pathways group to identify how this can be taken forward. It is crucial that, in order to succeed, the approach to workforce development in the SAAP and housing sectors must be part of an integrated cross-government response to workforce development.

In a context where people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness have many different needs, it is important that they are able to identify and respond appropriately to these needs. Similarly, workers from other sectors would benefit from understanding more about the causes and impacts of homelessness to provide more responsive services to their clients. This calls for training and development that is integrated across a range of different health and human service disciplines. A system involving co-located workers, or the opportunities for short-term secondments would greatly enhance the overall knowledge of the sector.

#### Innovation and new ways of working

There is still a prevalent view from much of the sector that 'bricks and mortar' and the availability of brokerage funding for emergencies and short term relief are the solution for breaking the cycle of homelessness. While bricks and mortar are important, it is important to move away from these finite resources as the only answer and to look for innovative alternatives to make the most use of what is available. While stakeholders at (mainly) senior levels in the sector and DHCS recognise this, this culture of innovation needs to be more firmly embedded throughout the whole sector to find alternative solutions.

## Measurements and on-going evaluation

Strong key performance indicators with detailed, verifiable targets must be developed to be able to monitor progress in the future. To achieve this, baseline data must be collected against the targets, to be able to measure change over time. Without this, much of the information about progress that has been made comes from stakeholder responses which can be unintentionally biased or based on a limited perspective<sup>1</sup>.

On-going evaluation against clear targets will provide direction for future changes that will be required in the service system as the needs and the responses to clients change. Hard data will also create a stronger evidence base for decision making and, if communicated appropriately, can be useful for informing stakeholders about improved outcomes for clients.

Measuring impact is not complete without getting the views of clients who are experiencing SAAP and housing services. Annual satisfaction surveys would be invaluable in this regard. Services could also use informal or formal focus groups throughout the year to ask clients for their views on service provision and their experiences.

There has traditionally been difficulty in engaging SAAP clients but lessons can be learnt from Housing ACT (who conduct an annual satisfaction survey) and from consumer groups that are well established in the mental health field.

## Communication

A clear communication strategy must be developed to guide how information will be shared with the sector and with external stakeholders in the future. This needs to be continually revisited and updated to ensure that all stakeholders are notified of and are mindful of the changes that are taking place and how it affects them and their clients.

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<sup>1</sup> However, this should be tempered by the fact that collecting data will be challenging, given the transient nature of SAAP clients.

## **2 Introduction**

### **2.1 Introduction**

This chapter gives an overview of the aims and purpose of the evaluation of the Breaking the Cycle, the ACT Homelessness Strategy (the Strategy) and describes the methodology used in the evaluation. It also describes how the report is structured and outlines the content of each chapter.

### **2.2 Purpose of the evaluation**

The Department of Disability, Housing and Community Services (DHCS) commissioned KPMG to conduct a final evaluation of the Homelessness Strategy to identify the Strategy's impact on:

- people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness;
  - short term outcomes for people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness;
  - likely long term outcomes that the Strategy will deliver;
  - improving short -term crisis management; and
  - specific priority population groups.

The evaluation also looks at:

- soft outcomes of implementing the Strategy;
- efficacy of the Strategy's implementation structure;
- actions and outcomes that have been most effective; and
- issues that were raised during the third annual progress report, namely:
  - the impact of consolidating the actions of the Strategy in 2006;
  - the effects that an improved focus on efficiency had on service delivery;
  - how the needs of young people under fifteen years have been met; and
  - the impact of increased capacity in the sector.

The evaluation identifies priority areas for future focus and development to better meet the needs of people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness in the future.

Recommendations are made on:

- how to take the work of the Strategy forward;
- what mechanisms for on-going evaluation of Strategy outcomes; and
- continued improvement in engaging with and creating partnerships with the community.

## **2.3 Evaluation design**

The evaluation methodology was designed to balance quantitative approaches with qualitative approaches to ensure that changes and impacts that result from the Strategy cannot only be captured but be assessed in terms of their value.

The Evaluation was overseen by the Project Steering Group, which reported to the ACT Homelessness Committee (AHC). Presentations about interim findings and progress were made to the Steering Group and AHC periodically throughout the Evaluation.

Broadly, the evaluation approach involved the following components.

### **2.3.1 Understanding the background and context**

A literature scan of relevant documents, including the Strategy and the three annual progress reports was undertaken to identify the evaluation questions and focus. Feedback from the third annual progress report also informed the final evaluation of the Strategy.

### **2.3.2 Gaining stakeholder perspectives**

Stakeholder perspectives regarding the impact of the Strategy, were gathered from:

- Project Steering Group and AHC;
- Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP) service providers;
- ACT Government staff, including DHCS and other government departments;
- Staff from regional service organisations;
- Peak bodies; and
- SAAP service users.

Australian Government Department of FaCSIA<sup>2</sup> staff were invited to participate in the evaluation but declined as the Australian Government was in caretaker mode during the period of the evaluation.

Stakeholders were engaged using a variety of methods:

- face to face and phone interviews;
- focus groups; and
- email feedback to questions.

SAAP service users were engaged in consultations by SAAP service providers. All other consultations were conducted by the consultants. Consultations were conducted in October and November 2007.

During consultations, stakeholders were asked to reflect on:

- positive outcomes the Strategy has delivered to:
  - people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness;
  - service providers;
  - priority groups as identified in the Strategy;
  - the community;
  - DHCS; and
  - other government departments;
- challenges and barriers to delivering the Strategy and the solutions used to overcome these;
- strengths and weakness of the Strategy as an agenda for change and the process and structures used to implement the Strategy; and
- the key priorities that remain to improve outcomes for people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness and how these might be addressed in the future.

SAAP service users were asked to reflect on:

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<sup>2</sup> Changed to Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FaHCSIA) in November 2007.

- how they access the SAAP service and how easy this was;
- what their experience of the service had been and what could improve it; and
- whether their current experience with SAAP services was different from any previous experiences they may have had.

The list of stakeholders and the questions used during semi structured interviews and consultations can be seen in the Appendix.

### 2.3.3 Quantitative analysis

To assess the impact of the Strategy on a number of measures, secondary data was collected from a range of sources, including DHCS, SAAP annual reports, Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) publications and the Report on Government Services (ROGS).

A number of assumptions and indicators were agreed for each measure. Qualitative information has also been used to illustrate success of the Strategy where quantitative data is not available. A discussion about the limitations of quantitative data collection and analysis is given in Chapter 7.

## 2.4 Purpose and structure of the report

The purpose of the final evaluation report is to present the findings on the impact of the Strategy. It is structured in the following sections:

- Section 3 provides a brief overview of the Homelessness Strategy Evaluation and sets the context for the evaluation;
- Section 4 gives an overview of the progress of the Strategy from 2004 to 2007, based on findings from the three annual progress reports;
- Section 5 presents an analysis of the development and implementation of the Strategy, including governance arrangements and management structures that supported this;
- Section 6 presents consultation findings relating to the impact of the Strategy against the four themes of the Strategy;
- Section 7 provides an overview of the measures of success relating to the Strategy implementation, based on qualitative and quantitative data and information;
- Section 8 discusses overall conclusions about the impact of the Strategy and the implications of the findings;
- Section 9 presents a discussion on future directions for the homelessness sector and provides key evaluation recommendations.

## **3 Background**

This chapter introduces the context within which the ACT Strategy has been developed and implemented and looks at:

- the definition of homelessness;
- the national response to homelessness, including SAAP ;
- homelessness in the ACT.

### **3.1 Homelessness in the ACT**

The Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP)<sup>3</sup> Act 1994 defines homelessness as<sup>4</sup>:

“if a person has inadequate access to safe and secure housing. A person is taken to have inadequate access to safe and secure housing if the only housing to which the person has access:

- damages, or is likely to damage, the person's health; or
- threatens the person's safety; or
- marginalises the person through failing to provide access to:
  - adequate personal amenities; or
  - the economic and social supports that a home normally affords; or
  - places the person in circumstances which threaten or adversely affect the adequacy, safety, security and affordability of that housing; or
- the person is living in accommodation provided under SAAP”.

The most commonly used definition of homelessness is the Chamberlain and MacKenzie definition that divides homeless people into two groups<sup>5</sup>:

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<sup>3</sup> Described in more detail in Section 3.2

<sup>4</sup> Section 4 (1-3) SAAP Act 1994, taken from [http://www.austlii.edu.au/au/legis/cth/consol\\_act/saaa1994359/](http://www.austlii.edu.au/au/legis/cth/consol_act/saaa1994359/) on 7<sup>th</sup> December 2007

- **Absolute homeless (primary homeless):** People without conventional accommodation (living on the streets, in deserted buildings, improvised dwellings, in parks, etc.).
- **Relative homeless (secondary and tertiary homeless):** People staying in boarding houses, people using Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP) and other similar emergency accommodation services, or people with no secure accommodation staying temporarily with friends or relatives in private dwellings.

Homelessness affects people from all parts of society and multiple factors contribute to people becoming homeless. Personal and societal factors can both interact to influence a person's risk of becoming homeless. Such factors include:

- availability of affordable housing;
- unemployment;
- poor health (physical and mental);
- family violence;
- relationship or family breakdown; and
- drug and/or alcohol abuse.

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 also affect an individual's ability to maintain employment and for younger people to attend school or other forms of education.

ACT residents, while members of a relatively affluent society, are not immune to homelessness. It is estimated that some 1 229 people in the ACT experienced homelessness in 2001<sup>6</sup>. This number appears to be increasing, with 1 950 people receiving supported accommodation assistance in 2005-06.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> This definition is used by the ABS to count homeless for the 2006 census. Taken from <http://www.abs.gov.au/websitedbs/d3310114.nsf/51c9a3d36edfd0dfca256acb00118404/34b1ea06ea93fe8aca25715e0028a3db!OpenDocument> on 25<sup>th</sup> February 2008.

<sup>6</sup> Chamberlain, C. and MacKenzie, D. (2003). Counting the Homeless 2001- Australian Capital Territory. Victoria: Swinburne University and RMIT University.

<sup>7</sup> Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (2006) *Homeless people in SAAP: SAAP National Data Collection annual report 2005-06 Australian Capital Territory supplementary tables*. Pg 6, Canberra: AIHW. This is the most recent report available at the time of developing this evaluation.

The fact that the ACT is seen as a relatively affluent society contributes to a widely held belief that there is no homelessness in the ACT. Another factor that contributes to this belief is that, generally, people who are homeless in the ACT are much less visible than in other cities due to city/state design and climate.

## 3.2 The policy context

### *Breaking the Cycle, The ACT Homelessness Strategy*

The main policy document guiding the ACT response to homelessness is “Breaking the Cycle - the ACT Homelessness Strategy”.<sup>8</sup> This 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.”<sup>9</sup>*

Essentially, the Homelessness Strategy (referred to as ‘the Strategy’) sets out an agenda for change for the sector. Its goal is to prevent and reduce homelessness so as to enable individuals and families to lead safe, active, participative and rewarding lives<sup>10</sup>. While the Strategy sits within the responsibility of DHCS, it requires a whole of government and community services approach to reduce homelessness.

The strategy includes 82 actions and thirteen objectives grouped around four themes:

- 1 Integrated effective service responses
- 2 Client focus and client outcomes
- 3 Access to appropriate housing and housing assistance
- 4 Supporting and driving innovation and change

A Youth Homelessness Action Plan has also been developed under the Strategy to outline specific service responses for young people.

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<sup>8</sup> Department of Disability, Housing and Community Services (2003), *Breaking the cycle – the ACT Homelessness Strategy*. Viewed at: <http://www.dhcs.act.gov.au/pubs/documents/BreakingCycleHomelessness.pdf>. Last accessed May 2007.

<sup>9</sup> The Legislative Assembly for the Australian Capital Territory. (2007). *Breaking the cycle: the ACT Homelessness Strategy. Second annual progress report July 2005 – June 2006*. Viewed at: <http://www.dhcs.act.gov.au/hcs/Services/Homelessness/Homelessness.htm>. Last accessed May 2007. p.2.

<sup>10</sup> Department of Disability, Housing and Community Services. *Breaking the cycle – the ACT Homelessness Strategy*. op.cit.

Seven underlying principles of the Strategy are:

- client centred;
- responsive;
- prevention and early intervention;
- partnership;
- effectiveness;
- evidenced based; and
- innovation.

The Strategy clearly sets out what it will deliver for people who are homeless, those who are at risk of homelessness, service providers, the wider community and the ACT Government<sup>11</sup>.

Underpinning the Strategy was a funding commitment of \$2.4 million in 2003-04. This increased to \$3.093 million in 2004-05 and \$3.89 million in 2005-06 to build capacity and expand the provision of supported accommodation services to support the delivery of the Strategy. The Canberra Emergency Accommodation Service (CEAS) was also funded with approximately \$500 000 new funding per year in 2004-05 and 2005-06<sup>12</sup>.

### *The Canberra Social Plan*

The Strategy aligns to the *Canberra Social Plan, Building Our Community*,<sup>13</sup> (the Social Plan) which identifies the changes in Canberra's social environment and the determinants of disadvantage and exclusion. It highlights the means of achieving sustained improvement in access, equity and participation for the people of the ACT. The key priorities of the Plan are:

- economic opportunity for all Canberrans;

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid, pp. 11-12

<sup>12</sup> This included \$423,060 (Anglicare) and \$82,351 (Lifeline) in 2004-05 and \$446,580 (Anglicare) and \$86,420 (Lifeline) in 2005-06.

<sup>13</sup> ACT Government. *Building Our Community: The Canberra Social Plan*. Australian Capitol Territory, Canberra 2004. Viewed at:  
[http://www.cmd.act.gov.au/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0012/1236/Social\\_Plan.pdf](http://www.cmd.act.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0012/1236/Social_Plan.pdf)

- respect, diversity and human rights;
- a safe, strong, cohesive community;
- improvement in health and well being;
- lead Australia in education, lifelong learning and training;
- housing for a future Canberra; and
- respect and protect the environment.

Within the Plan, the ACT Government has given a commitment to reduce primary homelessness (people who sleep rough) to as close to zero as possible by 2013. The Plan also commits Government to trial a 'poverty-proofing' process, to ensure government decisions do not act to increase the levels or causes of poverty.

#### *Supported Accommodation Assistance Program*

Launched in 2004, the Strategy straddles both SAAP IV (2000-2005) and SAAP V (2005-10) Agreements. SAAP was established in 1985 to provide a coordinated approach for homelessness programs funded by individual state and territory governments and the Commonwealth. Jointly funded by Australian and state and territory governments, SAAP is Australia's primary response to homelessness. SAAP programs aim to assist people who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless to "*achieve the maximum possible degree of self-reliance and independence by providing transitional supported accommodation and a range of related support services*"<sup>14</sup>.

The Strategy was developed concurrent with Bilateral Agreement between the ACT Government and the Commonwealth Government negotiations leading up to the launch of SAAP V.

The Strategy is aligned to the three SAAP V priority areas<sup>15</sup>:

- 1 increase involvement in early intervention and prevention strategies;
- 2 provide better assistance to people who have a number of support needs; and

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<sup>14</sup> Taken from:  
[http://www.facsia.gov.au/internet/facsinternet.nsf/aboutfacs/programs/house-saap\\_nav.htm](http://www.facsia.gov.au/internet/facsinternet.nsf/aboutfacs/programs/house-saap_nav.htm)  
on 7th December 2007

<sup>15</sup> Taken from:  
[http://www.facsia.gov.au/internet/facsinternet.nsf/aboutfacs/programs/house-saapv\\_strategic.htm](http://www.facsia.gov.au/internet/facsinternet.nsf/aboutfacs/programs/house-saapv_strategic.htm)  
on 25th February 2008.

3 provide ongoing assistance to ensure stability for clients post crisis.

### **3.3 Delivering the Strategy**

To fully implement all strands of the Strategy, there was a need for strong partnership working at all levels, from high-level policy, support structures and research to front line delivery of services to people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness.

Overall carriage of the Strategy sat with DHCS. However, there is recognition that the Strategy provides a whole of government and community response to reduce homelessness.

The ACT Homelessness Committee has responsibility for governing and driving the implementation and evaluation of the Strategy. The Committee provided regular reports to the Minister for Disability and Community Services. The Committee has representation from a wide range of community and government stakeholders, reflecting the holistic response needed to meet the objectives of the Strategy.

In 2005/06, in the ACT, 49 services received SAAP funding to deliver crisis and transitional supported accommodation and related support services to people who are homeless<sup>16</sup>. Although some services have multiple target groups, the majority primarily target one of the following groups:

- young people;
- single men only;
- single women only; families,
- or women escaping domestic violence.<sup>17</sup>

Social housing also has important roles to play in providing assistance to low-income households, unable to access appropriate or affordable housing in the rental market. Public housing, through Housing ACT, provides the majority of assistance to low-income households, through publicly owned housing properties. In June 2007, there were approximately 11 557 publicly owned properties in the ACT, housing approximately 25 000 people.

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<sup>16</sup> Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2006. *Homeless people in SAAP: SAAP National Data Collection annual report 2004–05 Australian Capital Territory supplementary tables*. P 4, Canberra: AIHW

<sup>17</sup> *ibid*

Community housing is delivered by five not-for profit organisations (a reduction from 11 in 2003). By June 2007, over 850 properties or tenancies were available through community housing. Some of these are targeted at specific groups, such as international students, Tamil senior citizens, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders and people with physical and sensory disabilities.

### 3.3.1 Specific groups for focus

The Strategy identifies a number of groups for specific attention, based on findings from *The needs analysis of homelessness in the ACT*. These are:

- Aboriginals and Torres Strait Islanders;
- single men;
- single women;
- couples;
- accompanying children;
- young people;
- families; and
- people leaving custody or those who are involved in the criminal justice system.

The Strategy focuses on these groups to ensure that it remains relevant and targeted to those most in need.

## 3.4 Measuring progress

The three annual progress reports have clearly documented the activities and actions taken to implement the Strategy. This 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.

## 3.5 Environmental and other factors

This section describes some of the environmental and other factors that may impact on the Strategy and its implementation.

The most significant external factor to affect the implementation of the Strategy in 2006-07 was the focus on improving the efficiency of the sector in 2006. Over the year efficiencies were introduced in both the SAAP and the Community Housing sectors to realise over \$2 million in savings (\$1 million from each sector).

Throughout 2006, youth SAAP services requested that DHCS apply the SAAP Act to exclude very young people (under 15) from their services. They believed that these young people, often presenting with high and complex needs, were putting a strain on their resources, as additional staff were required to manage the residents. This was reducing the capacity of services to cope with the demands of working with the over fifteen group.

As a result, in January 2007, DHCS made the decision to reinforce the SAAP Act which stipulates that SAAP services are provided to meet the specific needs of independent young people above the school-leaving age. Therefore, the Youth SAAP (YSAAP) services directed their focus only at young people over the age of 15 years during 2006-07. Care and Protection services report that only a 'handful' of young people have entered Care and Protection Services instead of SAAP services as a result of this decision. The final evaluation examines more closely the impact of this decision on under 15 year olds who are not longer in SAAP services.

### 3.5.1 The impact of housing affordability

Housing is a large and essential expenditure for most families and common factors contributing to homelessness include rising house prices and rents. Rising private sector house prices mean fewer people can afford to purchase their own home. This can lead to increased demand for rental stock, placing upward pressure on rental prices and making it more difficult for social housing tenants to transition into the private sector market. It also means that more people in the private market, either as renters or owners, face difficulties in meeting rent or mortgage payments, putting more pressure on social housing accommodation and support services.

Housing affordability has gradually deteriorated since 1998 both in the rental and purchasing market. In 1998, housing costs represented just over 20 per cent of the average income. This has since grown to just over 40 per cent at the beginning of 2007<sup>18</sup>.

Many service respondents in the evaluation reported seeing increasing numbers of people in housing stress due to a decrease in housing affordability. These clients presenting to services were in addition to those experiencing homelessness because of their own high and complex needs. In light of this, and to explore this further, future

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<sup>18</sup> ACT housing affordability data sources:

- ACT Average Weekly Earnings (males): Australian Bureau of Statistics 6302.0 TABLE 12H. Average Weekly Earnings, Australian Capital Territory (Dollars) - Seasonally Adjusted
- ACT median house price December Qtr 1998 to June Qtr 2007 (Source *Residex* custom data)
- ACT median rent December Qtr 1998 to June Qtr 2007 (Source *Residex* custom data)
- Average variable mortgage rate – Reserve Bank of Australia (RBA) Reserve Bank of Australia (RBA) <http://www.rba.gov.au/>



developments in the SAAP and housing sectors need to be mindful of developments in the area of housing affordability.

## 4 Progress of the Strategy

A considerable number of changes over the course of the Strategy have led to the current status of the sector. Many of the more recent initiatives and actions could not have been achieved without the ground work and incremental steps that took place early on.

This chapter discusses how the Strategy has been implemented over the last three years. It briefly outlines the actions that have been completed and gives examples of the initiatives undertaken. It is based on the three annual progress reports<sup>19</sup> and summarises all achievements that have contributed to the success of the Strategy.

### 4.1 Progress 2004-05

During the first year of the Strategy (2004-05) one of the most significant achievements was to encourage the homelessness services to start to evolve from a series of discrete services to a coordinated service system. This has been absolutely crucial to the work that has been achieved in the following two years. Forum, working groups and sub-committees were set up to enable regular policy and practice discussions and to engage the service sector, government departments and peak bodies. Over the course of 2004-05, these evolved to be led by the sector, co-chaired with DHCS. This created a closer working relationship between community providers and fostered ownership of the Strategy and the change process that was necessary to deliver the Strategy.

2004-05 saw the commencement and expansion of a number of new services to target priority groups and the development of the Youth Homelessness Action Plan, by the Youth Homelessness Working Group. Particular focus was given to increasing the services available for single men and for families. A number of projects with a homelessness focus were also funded through the newly established Community Inclusion Fund.

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<sup>19</sup> The Legislative Assembly for the Australian Capital Territory. (2007). *Breaking the cycle: the ACT Homelessness Strategy. First annual progress report July 2004 – June 2005*. Viewed at: <http://www.dhcs.act.gov.au/hcs/publications>

The Legislative Assembly for the Australian Capital Territory. (2007). *Breaking the cycle: the ACT Homelessness Strategy. Second annual progress report July 2005 – June 2006*. Viewed at: <http://www.dhcs.act.gov.au/hcs/publications>

KPMG (2007) *Breaking the cycle: the ACT Homelessness Strategy. Third annual progress report July 2006 – June 2007*. (not published)

Major achievements during 2004-05 include:

- increasing capacity, through the establishment of new services and additions to existing services, for single men, men with children, families, crisis accommodation for men, and moving towards a model of independent living, as opposed to congregate living;
- the introduction of outreach services to provide flexible support to people at risk of homelessness and at various stages of the homelessness continuum;
- the launch of Canberra Emergency Accommodation Services (CEAS) to provide brokerage and an improved, focused entry point into crisis accommodation;
- commencing work on the Charter of Rights<sup>20</sup> to set standards of service delivery and articulate the aspirational rights of people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness;
- development of Housing ACT approaches to enable people to sustain their tenancies through providing pre-allocation assistance, case conferencing with multi-agency input and providing assistance for tenants experiencing housing stress;
- the establishment of an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Working Group and a Youth Homelessness Working group to provide advice and recommendations to develop appropriate responses for these priority groups;
- work done by members and groups in the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community to identify how outreach and temporary accommodation services could be best established to provide support to individuals and families from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander backgrounds;
- development of a Youth Homelessness Action Plan (YHAP), based on findings from DHCS commissioned research, to guide responses for young people experiencing homelessness. The Plan included actions to support integrated service response and delivery mechanisms and early prevention and intervention approaches; and
- introduction of head leasing arrangements to support high risk and complex clients whose tenancies with Housing ACT were at significant risk.

During 2004-05, Strategy implementation timelines were revised to be more realistic to achieve sustainable outcomes. This was based on the recognition that more time was needed to enable relationships in the sector to develop, to facilitate further, long-lasting change.

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<sup>20</sup> Later changed to be known as the ACT Homelessness Charter – a Statement of Rights

The 2004-05 progress report summarised that good progress had been made towards achieving the vision of the Strategy but that there was much work still to be covered.

## **4.2 Progress 2005-06**

During 2005-06, work continued on strengthening relationships in the sector and on moving towards an integrated service system. Significant progress was made towards creating a joint operational framework, a key objective of the initiative, through a number of projects.

Reform of the Housing ACT Services enabled the establishment of a service system that is built around the needs of clients and provides community based support from the start of an application for assistance. This was coupled with the creation of an improved process of priority setting for housing assistance to focus on people with complex and high needs. By the end of 2005-06, the service system had largely been reformed along a continuum of care for people experiencing homelessness and at risk of homelessness: Housing ACT were positioned as the post-crisis response and SAAP providing the crisis response.

In 2005, a women's pathway group was established to identify service gaps and 'blockages' in the system that reduced the level and availability of responses to women, particularly involving domestic violence. One of the outcomes of the women's pathway group was the successful Government funded Domestic Violence Christmas Initiative over Christmas 2005. This project provided short-term crisis support for women and children escaping domestic violence over Christmas time. It had the long-term affect of encouraging joint working and providing a catalyst for change in creating a system that was better able to respond appropriately to crises. The initiative also provided evidence that clients could move through the service system if the system was working effectively. This learning led to the development of the Transitional Housing Program.

The model of the women's pathway group has since led to the development of further pathway groups that have become instrumental in informing a joint operational framework across the whole sector.

2005-06 also saw an increase in the number and range of accommodation placements through the construction of a new boarding house and the transition of a supported accommodation site to a community housing model. Work also continued on raising standards of service provision across the sector and on developing a Charter of Rights to recognise and promote the rights of people experiencing homelessness in the ACT. DHCS completed a review of funding to the sector and funding agreement management plans and service schedules were developed. Work also commenced on a Service Guarantee to establish a clear framework for service delivery expectations and a guarantee of service standards.

Other major achievements during 2005-06 include:

- Housing Applicant Support Project to provide Housing ACT applicants with support during the application and waiting period, rather than just delivering an application form processing function;

- reform of the legislative program for housing assistance, the Public Rental Housing Assistance Program (PRHAP) to create a top priority classification to enable individuals with complex needs to be housed within 3 months;
- establishment of a multi-disciplinary panel (MDP), drawing on representatives from across government and community service sectors, to assist in the assessment and categorisation of Housing ACT applicants with high and complex needs;
- trialling a case conferencing approach for complex clients at the time of allocating them an Housing ACT property, to ensure the property meets their needs and that appropriate community support were in place;
- restructuring of the Housing ACT Gateway Services into teams to provide support for applicants at the time they make an application and while they are on the waiting list for a property;
- development of the Transitional Housing Program (THP), which used Housing ACT properties that were available in the short term, to accommodate individuals and families leaving SAAP services and awaiting long-term housing. The THP provided more exit points from SAAP services and freed up crisis accommodation for those in need of a crisis response;
- structural reform in the Supported Accommodation and Social Housing Sectors to achieve greater coordination and effective, efficient service delivery and to reposition the ACT Government as an “expert purchaser”;
- development of a Service Guarantee (previously known as the Code of Conduct for Service Providers) to articulate a clear framework of service delivery expectations;
- launch of the Indigenous Support Accommodation Service (ISAS) to offer crisis and transitional supported accommodation to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families who are homeless or at risk of homelessness;
- rejuvenation of a training calendar for Housing ACT staff to ensure Housing Managers and Assessment and Allocation staff has the skills required to deliver culturally appropriate support and tenancy management; and
- development of a standard service funding agreement (generic schedule 2) with involvement of the SAAP sector to better describe the services provided by SAAP and agree definitions about types of services provided.

By the end of 2006, 41 of the original Strategy actions had been completed. The remaining actions were consolidated into 26 actions that remained outstanding. A decision was taken to ‘draw a line’ under the completed actions to obviate the need to report on them further.

However, it is important to recognise that the outcomes and products of these completed actions remain on-going. For example, one action was to “coordinate outreach services in regional locations in the ACT to provide an early intervention and

preventative response to people in housing stress, people at risk of homelessness and those who are homeless". In June 2004, DHCS funded new services or enhanced existing capacity to provide outreach services to provide support to young people, single women and single men or single men with accompanying children. These services continue to provide outreach.

After the actions were consolidated, three out of an original 12 remained for Theme 1; nine out of an original 28 remained for Theme 2; two out of an original 19 remained for Theme 3; and 12 out of an original 23 remained for Theme 4 to be taken forward in 2006-07.

### **4.3 Progress 2006-07**

Progress during 2006-07, the third year of the Strategy, concentrated predominantly on creating an integrated service system and establishing the joint operational framework. Although the final year saw a number of tangible outcomes, such as the common assessment and referral form and the implementation of the THP, the most significant progress was the changes in the culture and ethos that are evident in the sector.

By June 2007, the ACT Homelessness Sector had started to mature into a system where joint working, collaboration and a shared understanding of client needs and system development was strongly evident. The year saw initiatives started previously, such as priority access to complex clients, the MDP and the THP become more firmly embedded in practice.

As a result of work conducted by the pathways groups, services have become more engaged with the agenda for change. Service providers also reported a change across organisations, with a better, more informed focus on practice and on providing a client focused service. Levels of trust, openness and transparency were perceived to have increased and there was evidence of a more sophisticated understanding of the use of data in planning and development of services. This encouraged a culture in which stakeholders were more comfortable to reflect on their practice, to acknowledge areas for improvement and to work collaboratively to achieve improvements. While the groundwork for this culture change was set before July 2006, the final year of the Strategy saw the culture more firmly embedded across the sector.

The sector was challenged during this year with an emerging focus on improving the efficiency of service delivery and the cessation of the Research and Development service. During this time services demonstrated a willingness to work collaboratively to achieve efficiencies and to improve the overall effectiveness of the sector.

The major achievements during 2006-07 include:

- establishment of the young people pathways group to take forward the YHAP, to develop a service map and to negotiate joint protocols and procedures with other government departments to improve responses to young people experiencing homelessness;

- development of joint protocols with mental health to clarify roles and responsibilities in relation to shared clients;
- introduction of the “any door is the right door” concept to ensure that there are no turnaways and to make sure that all services provide an entry point into the system for anyone seeking support;
- shift of focus of CEAS Anglicare from providing crisis entry points to the SAAP sector to providing transitional support to help people move out of crisis accommodation;
- the evolution of the individual pathways groups into a Joint Pathways Group as a mechanism for taking forward the change agenda in a joined up way;
- reforms to public housing to increase capacity to provide housing assistance to those most in need through reviewing existing tenants with an income of over \$80,000 and those in properties that exceeds “housing size” guidelines;
- the launch of the Couch Surfing and exiting detention projects for young people to provide a greater range of response options to young people;
- a head tenancy program funded to work with tenants who face an imminent risk of eviction, require intensive tenancy management or receive a significant number of complaints from neighbours. This program has been a successful response for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander clients;
- on-going discussions to establish an Aboriginal Boarding House Network;
- completion of research into Children’s Experience of Homelessness that has led to improvements in the way in which the sector responds to children entering SAAP services as clients in their own rights; and
- launch of the “Housing is a Human Right” campaign to raise the profile of adequate housing as a fundamental human right. This Campaign was an independent project conducted by ACT Shelter, ACTCOSS, Tenants Union, Welfare Rights and Legal Service, Youth Coalition of the ACT and Unions ACT.

At the end of the third year of the Strategy, one action out of an original 12 remained for Theme 1; seven out of an original 28 remained for Theme 2; one out of an original 19 remained for Theme 3; and seven out of an original 23 remained for Theme 4.

#### **4.4 External factors**

A number of external factors have taken place outside the scope and control of the Strategy which have directly or indirectly impacted on people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness. These factors, in addition to the Strategy, have positively impacted on people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness.

### *Changes to Community Housing*

A number of changes in the community housing sector were implemented during the period of the Strategy:

- the community housing sector was strengthened, with a large SAAP funded accommodation service being transferred to a community housing model where residents are provided with supported, independent living;
- efficiencies in the community housing sector were made to consolidate organisations and tenancy management; and
- an injection of new funding and a repositioning of one of the main providers has positioned the sector to respond to the growing need for affordable housing. This is aimed at individuals and families who are not eligible for public housing, but who would be under housing stress in the private market.

### *Introduction of the SAAP V Innovation and Investment Funds*

Innovation and Investment Funds were initiated with the SAAP V agreements to help SAAP V deliver the reform required in the sector. Introduced in 2005, the funding supported pilots of models of practice and research to identify good practice before replicating it more widely. When the funds were made available, the ACT were in the position to truly trial innovative pilots and research, as the work already conducted under the Strategy had created a good baseline of services in the sector.

## 5 Implementing the Strategy

A clear, focused and appropriately targeted strategy is key to guiding a reform agenda within any sector. Equally important is the way in which the strategy is managed and implemented.

This section details feedback about the Strategy in terms of:

- development;
- implementation and management;
- measurement and progress monitoring;
- communication;
- involvement of wider stakeholders; and
- influence of external factors, such as focus on efficiencies to rationalise services.

### 5.1 Development of the Strategy

The Strategy was developed through an extensive consultative process during 2003, facilitated by an external consultant. Stakeholders who were involved in this process report that it was a positive experience and that they benefited from being involved in the development of the Strategy.

The resultant Strategy is considered to be an aspirational guidance document that has been an important driver for change in the homelessness and housing sector. This view is held by all stakeholders, both from within the SAAP sector and from other sectors, regardless of whether they were involved in the development of the Strategy. Non-SAAP stakeholders reported that they found the Strategy useful to inform them about the direction and focus of the response to homelessness. Some stakeholders also commented that the direction DHCS had taken in developing and implementing the Strategy was an example of how reform could be managed in other areas.

#### *Alignment with SAAP V*

The Strategy was developed prior to the end of the SAAP IV national agreements and the introduction of SAAP V. In this regard, the Strategy was before its time in identifying and addressing the priorities of SAAP.

The strategy positioned the ACT well to deliver SAAP V priorities. By the time the SAAP V agreement was signed, initial steps had already been taken to move towards a whole service system that prevents crisis and improves post crisis support. The Strategy was also explicit in developing a system that had strong links to other holistic services and promoting the view that homelessness is a community responsibility.

### *The Strategy actions*

A view shared by the majority of stakeholders was that the Strategy included too many actions. In practice, this meant that actions were seen as divorced from and not necessarily related to the business of developing a whole service system approach. While many stakeholders were aware of progress being made toward an integrated service system, through the pathways work, it was predominantly people in DHCS or involved in the Committee who were more aware of the progress being made in achieving the 82 Strategy actions.

At the end of the second year of the Strategy, the remaining actions were consolidated to provide more focus for the final year. Concerns were raised from a number of stakeholders about:

- the affect this would have on the outcomes of the Strategy; and
- whether this undermined the Strategy and the consultative process that led to its development.

However, this evaluation has not found evidence that the consolidation of actions led to a reduction in the scope or quality of activity during the last year. This might suggest that the initial actions may have been too explicit and detailed and could have been condensed into a smaller number. Indeed, stakeholders reported that, in hindsight they would have preferred a Strategy that remained clear about the aspirations of reform, but that outlined a small number of target areas. This is a key learning for future reforms programs.

## **5.2 Implementation and management**

### *ACT Homelessness Committee*

Stakeholders report, on the whole, that the ACT Homelessness Committee (AHC) has been the right vehicle to oversee the implementation and management of the Strategy. The AHC endeavoured to ensure that all relevant stakeholders were represented and that a wide range of views were heard. It included representatives from the community sector and peak bodies as well as from across government departments.

AHC members report that the group worked well together and were able to openly challenge and debate the implementation as it progressed. This ability grew as the AHC became more settled over time. However, there are views from many stakeholders that it was a challenge to appropriately engage all representatives who might have contributed to implementation, in a timely way. For example, a number of key stakeholders only joined the AHC after implementation had already started.

In particular, a number of the late joiners from other government departments were reported to have been key in progressing cross-sector working to improve responses to meet holistic needs of SAAP clients once they became engaged. It is possible that earlier representation on the AHC by these representatives may have had an impact on the speed with which some actions were progressed. An example of this is the

development of protocols and procedures with the Office for Children, Youth and Family Support (OCYFS) regarding roles and responsibilities for working with children and young people who are experiencing homelessness.

There was also feedback that some community sector representatives left the AHC after finding it difficult to contribute, either because they did not feel engaged by the process or because they felt they could not contribute in a way they wanted. As a result of this, there was some reported feedback from the sector that the Committee did not have enough community representation. This is further discussed in section 5.1.3, below.

Despite attempts to engage Aboriginal leaders and stakeholders in the Committee and in the reform process, it was noted that this remains a gap in the implementation of the Strategy. This is an area that will continue to need focus to identify appropriate means of engaging indigenous groups in the future.

The challenge of ensuring that committees are representative, functional and add value to the delivery of strategies is common across many areas. In particular, there is a growing recognition that engaging community representatives (and service users, patients or clients) in formal committee processes requires specific skills and development of all Committee members. While this skill development was not explicit in the establishment of the AHC, this evaluation finds that the AHC was able to appropriately guide the implementation of the Strategy and included good representation from an appropriate range of stakeholders.

### *Administration of the Strategy*

DHCS provided the secretariat function to the AHC and to the number of working groups and sub-committees that initially took the Strategy forward. Although this was reported to be onerous, reports also suggest that this function enabled effective implementation of the Strategy.

Pathways groups were facilitated by an external consultant who had an extensive knowledge of the sector and was well regarded. Stakeholders report that this independent, external facilitation was key to bringing everyone together and to moving towards an integrated service system. It was identified that the progress achieved would not have been possible had the pathways been facilitated by one SAAP provider, who would have struggled to remain independent and impartial and to dedicate the time required.

Stakeholders from the sector report that being involved in, and having joint responsibility for, delivering the Strategy (in some cases leading implementation) was positive. The ideal was to have joint governance between DHCS and the sector. However, there was a general sense from the sector that leadership and guidance needed to be provided by DHCS with clarity around roles and responsibilities. This might suggest that there was a need for capacity building within both the sector and at Government level to equip and enable the sector to take on and jointly lead the change agenda from the start.

Another comment regarding the administration and implementation of the Strategy was that it relied too heavily on certain sector representatives who put their hands up to be involved in the working groups and pathways. The commitment required for this was considerable and in many cases was in addition to program work that these individuals had to continue to deliver.

### *Bringing about change*

Some reports from stakeholders suggest that, although the Strategy was developed using a very consultative approach, the extent of the change required to deliver the Strategy was at first not fully understood by the sector.

During the initial stages of the Strategy implementation, stakeholders report finding it difficult to conceptualise how to practically deliver the aspirations set out in the Strategy. The delivery of the joint operational framework is a good example of this. Stakeholders report that they did not clearly understand what this would look like in practice until they had developed elements of the framework that were tangible, such as the service standards and the common assessment and referral tool.

A number of stakeholders indicated that several actions in the Strategy, particularly those relating to Theme 4: Supporting and driving innovation and excellence, could not be achieved through the Strategy. For example, actions relating to workforce development and developing a workforce blue print were perceived as being target areas across government, rather than just the responsibility of the SAAP and housing sectors.

### *Measuring impacts*

None of the actions or measures of success in the Strategy were translated to targets or key performance indicators. This means that it has been difficult to measure actual intended impact of the Strategy. The three annual progress reports provide an overview of the activities that have been completed each year to deliver the Strategy.

Annual reports from SAAP and data from Housing ACT have also provided quantitative data about the activities and outputs relating to people who are in crisis and those in public housing. However, until this evaluation there has been no systematic analysis of the actual impact of the Strategy on delivering improved outcomes for people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness.

## **5.3 Communication**

Many stakeholders commented on the importance of clear communication between all stakeholders to effectively deliver and monitor progress against the Strategy. A number of mechanisms have been established to achieve this, such as the SAAP forums that are reportedly well attended. However, stakeholders on the ground, in both SAAP and non-SAAP services still commented that they would have benefited from more feedback and updates on the Strategy implementation.

It was observed that different stakeholders had different knowledge about the Strategy and the progress achieved. In fact, some stakeholders used the consultation sessions for this evaluation to learn more about the Strategy and elements that had a direct impact on them and their clients.

The fact that there is no clear communication strategy, with rationale, objectives and timeframes for communication, may have contributed to this discrepancy in knowledge and understanding about the Strategy. Without a communication strategy, information about the Strategy implementation has not been shared with all stakeholders in a planned, consistent way. It also means that, other than through informal means, there has been no feedback process established to see if staff on the ground are getting the information they need about the Strategy, in a way that is meaningful and useful to them. This is exacerbated by a high turn over of staff in the sector which makes it a constant challenge to ensure that staff are kept informed.

Lack of systematic communication is also evident in responses from some stakeholders about how the Strategy has been implemented. Some responses illustrate that information is not 'getting through to the ground level' and this has led to some misconceptions and misunderstandings. Examples of these are:

- a perception that the Committee did not have appropriate community representation;
- lack of understanding about the rationale behind the sector efficiencies and a sense that there has not been an appropriate "de-brief" with the sector;
- a perception that the removal of SAAP Research and Development Service (SAAPRaDS) as part of the efficiencies in 2006, had a significant impact on the delivery of training and workforce development, when figures show that the training was poorly attended<sup>21</sup>; and
- concerns over consolidating the actions and the impact this would have on client outcomes and questions about undermining the consultative approach of the Strategy development.

Maintaining a two-way flow of information between those responsible for implementing the Strategy and those who see the impacts of implementation will always be a challenge. To address this, more consideration needs to be given to ensuring that relevant information is given to stakeholders in a timely, appropriate way. This might differ for different groups of staff, according to their interest and their roles and responsibilities.

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<sup>21</sup> It is acknowledged that SAAPRaDS had a wider scope than the delivery of workforce development and training.

#### **5.4 Involvement of wider stakeholders**

Engagement with stakeholders external to SAAP and Housing has been important to deliver the Strategy objectives and to address the priority areas of SAAP V. While engaging with other Government Departments was slow to start, there is now good representation at the AHC level of a range of relevant Departments. There is also evidence of good close working on the ground between SAAP, Housing and other providers, as detailed in section 6.2.3.

However, the majority of stakeholders recognise the need to increase the engagement of external stakeholders, at all levels of an organisation, further in the future to deliver a holistic approach to breaking the cycle of homelessness.

#### **5.5 Summary and conclusions**

The Strategy was well developed and provided good guidance for reform. However, it was reported that the Strategy contained too many actions, a number of which were superfluous. Many stakeholders believed the language was difficult to understand and indeed, the reform agenda of the Strategy was never clearly articulated. A number of actions were also considered over ambitious and required further cross-government commitment and responsibility to deliver.

All stakeholders acknowledged the considerable effort and commitment that government and the sector has put into ensuring the successful implementation of the Strategy. The use of an external, well respected, consultant was seen as key in delivering effective changes through the pathways groups.

The issues that were reported during the evaluation consultations were generally a result of:

- communication that did not meet the needs of all stakeholders; or
- the uncertainty and increased workload that often accompany a period of significant reform.

## **6 The impact of the Strategy**

This chapter discusses stakeholders' feedback on the impact the Strategy has had since it was launched in 2004. It draws together findings from consultations with all stakeholders.

### **6.1 Introduction**

Findings on the impact of the Strategy are grouped according to the four themes of the Strategy. It should be noted, however, that over the implementation period, it has become increasingly difficult to distinguish between where one theme stops and another starts. For example, a stronger focus on client centred services has necessitated a move towards integrated responses from the whole sector. Similarly, improvements in the effectiveness of service responses has led to improved access to appropriate housing.

Findings in each theme are presented to illustrate:

- impact as a result of the Strategy; and
- barriers and challenges that remain in providing appropriate responses to people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness.

It can often take a number of years for the impact of reform agendas of the nature prescribed by the Strategy to be observable, particularly to those who are not directly involved in implementing the changes. It is important to bear this in mind when interpreting findings and observations from stakeholders who had varying degrees of involvement in the Strategy.

### **6.2 Theme 1 - Integrated and effective service responses**

The aim of Theme 1 is to ensure there is an agreed, integrated approach to homelessness between government and the community sector in terms of policy, funding and operational requirements. The objectives under this theme are to:

- establish mechanisms to support integrated service responses and delivery; and
- increase focus on prevention and early intervention in order to reduce the incidence of homelessness.

#### **Key findings:**

- Clients are viewed as "common" to all services, with SAAP and housing services taking shared responsibility and working towards common goals;

- Social Housing and Homelessness Services, including Housing ACT, and SAAP providers recognise their role as part of a whole service system;
- A continuum of services is provided, including crisis, transitional and post-crisis accommodation and support;
- Growing engagement by other sectors, but more work to be done;
- Improved client focus through initiatives such as “any door is the right door”;
- Perception of additional work created through “any door is the right door” and a housing application through the Multi Disciplinary Panel; and
- Concerns that Housing prioritisation is “squeezing out” individuals and families who do not have complex needs.

#### 6.2.1 A whole system approach - a changed culture

A large part of the reform set out by the Strategy focused on creating a service system that was integrated and operated collaboratively. Stakeholders report that this has been achieved and that SAAP providers and DHCS, including Housing ACT now view themselves as part of a whole system that is responsible for providing different but integrated programs of support to clients to achieve common objectives. This is demonstrated in a number of ways:

- greater recognition that clients are common to a range of different services and that everyone has a responsibility to these clients;
- greater understanding that better support provided during and post crisis leads to better long-term outcomes for clients in public and other housing and a reduced chance of recurrent crises;
- greater transparency in the way programs are delivered and in the way decisions are made, for example through the Multi Disciplinary Panel;
- greater respect and mutual understanding between SAAP service providers, Social Housing and Homelessness Services (SHHS) and Housing ACT; and
- understanding how the actions of one part of the service system have an impact on other areas.

Closer working relationships and a better appreciation of how integrated responses provide better outcomes for clients has led to a general “de-siloing” of initiatives and activities. At the same time, better communication and collaboration between community services and DHCS has improved the support that community sectors

receive, for example reducing the likelihood of providers collapsing, as has happened in the past.

Stakeholders acknowledge that SAAP services are starting to define and work towards common goals, as articulated by the joint operational framework. There is reportedly better communication and information sharing within the sector and between the sector and SHHS and Housing ACT. Decisions about changes to services or programs are more likely to be made within the context of a wider service system, with a perspective about how changes will impact the whole sector. An example of this is the launch of the Transitional Housing Program which provides additional supported exit points out of SAAP services using Housing ACT properties available for short term leases.

Finally, stakeholders report that there is now a culture of mutual learning across all organisations and of addressing issues and challenges that arise in an open, collaborative way.

Many of these changes underpin service delivery improvements that will have a direct impact on clients. For example, the MDP uses an open, transparent mechanism for allocating housing to priority clients. Stakeholders from organisations including Mental Health and the Office for Children, Youth and Family Support report that involvement on this MDP has helped them better understand the pressures on the homelessness and housing sector and to provide expert input into determining priorities for those with the most complex needs. This means that professionals from these sectors now have a better understanding of the causes and results to homelessness.

An indirect outcome of Housing ACT's re-prioritisation project and the MDP is reported to be a closer working relationship between SAAP workers and Housing workers due to increased contact and face to face meetings.

Despite the overall positive perception of a move to a whole system approach, stakeholders did identify a number of minor concerns. With a 'constant state of change' throughout the public housing and SAAP sectors, stakeholders report that it is difficult to keep up to date with the changes and to keep clients informed. This finding is also highlighted in the annual public housing tenant satisfaction surveys, detailed in section 7.4.4.

Another concern that was raised was that, although sharing information was seen as a positive, there is a perception that elements of confidentiality and privacy are not being observed. This made workers uneasy about sharing information in certain circumstances although there was no evidence that this has led to a refusal to share information.

## **6.2.2 Improved responses to clients**

The majority of stakeholders from the sector report that one of the most significant impacts of the Strategy has been the introduction of the 'any door is the right door' approach. In practice, this means that clients need only approach one service to "access" the whole range of SAAP services available in the ACT. This is further explored in sector 7.4 of this report.

SAAP service providers report that, in the long term, the 'any door is the right door' approach will improve clients' experience of accessing support from SAAP services: initial screening will only be conducted once (using the common assessment and referral tool) and clients will only have to contact one service, rather than being signposted to a number of different services. On the other hand, SAAP service providers have identified that, in the short term, the approach has created additional work, as all services now have the responsibility to respond to anyone who contacts them, rather than focusing solely on their own target group.

Non-SAAP service stakeholders reported that they appreciate the benefit that 'any door is the right door' will have for clients. However, they also stressed that feedback must be given to a referring (non-SAAP) agency about which service(s) clients are referred onto after the initial contact so that they can continue to support them appropriately.

Other initiatives under the Strategy are also reported to have considerably improved targeted responses to clients. The introduction of outreach services provided by SAAP is reported to have led to an increase in the number of targeted interventions for clients who are on a SAAP waiting list or who are at risk of homelessness. This is supported by data presented in 7.3.3 which shows that families with accompanying children and people who are experiencing primary homelessness have particularly benefited from increased targeting of support.

New funding at the start of the Strategy was used to develop new SAAP services to respond to men and families, groups that historically had fewer service options. Stakeholders reported that this has led to more targeted responses that are better able to meet the needs of these groups. A number of external stakeholders reported a perceived reduction in the number of men under 25 years who are sleeping rough or who were experiencing housing crisis. It was reported that this was due to the efforts of Canberra Men's Centre, and in particular the Men's Accommodation and Support Service.

It was also reported that the increase in services aimed at families means that families facing crisis no longer have to be separated to be supported by or housed by SAAP services. This is evidenced in a rise in the numbers couples with accompanying children who are receiving support from SAAP services, as described in section 7.3.3.

The prioritisation of clients with multiple and complex needs has led to a reduced waiting time of less than three months for these clients to access public housing. Stakeholders recognised the importance of providing quick access to housing for priority clients but comment that this focus on clients with high, complex needs makes it "more difficult to get other people into Housing".

There were a number of concerns voiced about the process of the application for priority housing through the MDP. It was reported that this process requires significant input by workers and clients and there is significant (and increased) pressure on SAAP workers to collect evidence to demonstrate that clients have complex needs. There are also strong concerns that the prioritisation and decision making process does not consider evidence from SAAP services as sufficient to demonstrate that a client has high and complex needs. There perhaps needs to be some flexibility in this as many SAAP services have extensive and long-term knowledge of clients facing many

episodes of homelessness and feel their views should be afforded the same weight as the views of other professionals.

### 6.2.3 Involvement with other sectors

Throughout the implementation of the Strategy there is evidence of more working and collaboration with other non-SAAP or Housing services. For example:

- the development of joint protocols with Mental Health ACT and the Office for Children, Youth and Family Support (OCYFS) to determine roles and responsibilities in relation to people experiencing homelessness;
- joint care coordination program for people experiencing mental health problems who are Housing ACT or SAAP clients;
- close working between Probation and Parole and a women's SAAP service to support women experiencing homelessness or at risk of homelessness to meet all their supervision requirements and complete community service order requirements;
- close working between Justice and Community Services (JACS) and the Canberra Men's Centre to identify working protocols and effective service delivery models for men exiting prisons; and
- involvement of a range of stakeholders on the Multi-disciplinary Panel to prioritise applications to public housing.

Without exception, all stakeholders involved in working across sectors identify the experience and outcomes as positive for staff and clients. For example, the women's service working with Probation and Parole report a drop in breaches and detrimental outcomes for their clients as a result of the joint working and a better understanding of the issues facing clients by the SAAP workers.

However, stakeholders report a difference in the extent of involvement by different sectors. The ACT Homelessness Committee has a broad representation from across different Government departments. As demonstrated above, there are a number of examples at a practice level where SAAP services have a good working relationship with programs and services in other sectors, mainly as a result of individual contact building between services.

Some stakeholders reflected that the last three years have been used to "get the homelessness house in order", before looking outwards to fully engage other sectors. Now that a strong SAAP and housing sector has been developed, there is a need in the future to continue to engage with other sectors, at all levels and on a more formal basis on the ground (rather than just through individual professional relationships) to continue to tackle the causes of homelessness holistically.

## 6.3 Theme 2 - Client focus and client outcomes

The aim of Theme 2 is to ensure the rights of people who are homeless are recognised, respected and realised and that services provide client centred approaches based on comprehensive assessment. The objectives of this Theme are to:

- 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; and
- develop strategies to address the needs of individuals within the identified group for specific attention.

### **Key findings:**

- New initiatives that demonstrate improved focus on client need and on achieving outcomes for specific groups;
- Recognition of aspirational rights of people who are homeless through the Charter of Rights for homeless people; and
- Further work needed to improve outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders experiencing or at risk of homelessness.

### 6.3.1 Improved client focus

Stakeholders reported, directly and indirectly, an improved focus on clients. Direct examples of this are evident in the development of the Charter of Rights, the Service Standards and the Service Guarantee. These documents were developed through the pathways groups and with extensive consultation with the sector and with clients.

Adherence to the standards laid down in these documents also forms part of a SAAP service's contractual agreement with DHCS. Stakeholders reported that this was a positive step to ensuring that all services in the SAAP deliver and maintain high quality, client focused services. There was feedback that a next step would be to extend the scope of the Charter to include Housing ACT and other services to further improve the service received by clients who are common to a range of different services.

Indirect evidence of how the focus on clients has improved comes from examples of how changes have been made to service and program delivery. For example:

- Establishment of family services in West Belconnen, Gungahlin and Tuggeranong to provide service responses that allow people to remain in their community when they experience homelessness.
- The development and launch of the common referral tool supports the 'any door is the right door' approach. This means that clients only have to contact one service to access SAAP and only have to complete one initial (brief) assessment.
- The Men's Accommodation and Support Service (MASS) service model where properties are head leased from Housing ACT and clients receive support to achieve independent living before the property lease is passed back over to Housing ACT with the tenant incumbent. This allows the client to remain in their property without disruption, but enables the crisis support to move to respond to new clients.
- Services now endeavour to provide support that is attached to clients, rather than to properties. In practice, this means that if a client(s) moves properties, for example into transitional accommodation to free up crisis places, they continue to receive support from the same worker with whom they have built a relationship.

Another example that was given to demonstrate an improved focus on clients refers to people waiting on the Housing ACT list:

*"We have shifted from having a list, where we say 'these are your choices', to recognising that we need to target people more appropriately to be sensitive to their needs as individuals. We've ended up providing a better service".*

*- SAAP provider*

### 6.3.2 Improved outcomes for specific groups

Improved outcomes for children and young people, single men and women and children escaping domestic violence are particularly noted by stakeholders. In part, this improved response is due to the increased capacity of the sector to respond to particular groups. For example, there are more services available for families and for single men, including a small group who are returning to the ACT after a period of incarceration.

The stronger focus on what clients really need and what is in their best interests has also encouraged services to think more creatively about how best to provide for this need and improve outcomes. For example:

- The Domestic Violence Christmas Initiative, delivered through collaboration between a number of different services and the Domestic Violence Crisis Service, was developed to improve the crisis responses for women and children escaping domestic violence. As well as improving direct service delivery to a particularly vulnerable group, the initiative also paved the way for the launch of the Transitional Housing Program (THP) and other pathways groups.

- Most services now have workers who specifically focus on meeting the needs of children and young people entering SAAP services, in line with research findings and recommendations about what children want from the “Children’s Experience of Homelessness<sup>22</sup>” research.

Stakeholders report a perception that outcomes have not been improved from unaccompanied young people in SAAP services and for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders. This is yet to be confirmed by empirical evidence.

An enforcement of the SAAP Act to provide only Youth SAAP services to young people over school leaving age has caused concerns that young people who would previously have been in SAAP services are being forced to find less suitable alternatives. Anecdotal evidence from stakeholders suggests that, as a result of the changes, more young people are experiencing secondary homelessness, finding temporary accommodation, which may be unsafe and unsuitable, with friends and acquaintances. There is no evidence that the changes in Youth SAAP eligibility has led to an increase in the number of young people on care and protection orders.

However, stakeholders also acknowledge that the changes to the profile of Youth SAAP services, and an increase in the numbers of older, male youths in crisis and transitional accommodation, means that these programs are no longer suitable for younger individuals. Suggested alternatives included further engagement with schools to raise their awareness and ability to respond to young people experiencing secondary homeless and an extension of initiatives such as the couch surfing program, discussed in more detail in section 6.4.1, below.

Considerable efforts were made throughout the implementation of the Strategy to launch culturally appropriate support services for people from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island backgrounds. There are a number of innovative examples of how support has been provided to this group, for example, through the head tenancy initiative and through outreach programs.

However, a number of stakeholders indicated that the response to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders as a specific group for focus has improved the least during the course of the Strategy. They comment that there is still considerable work to do to improve outcomes for this group: This is not unexpected, due to the often complex needs experienced by Indigenous people. Although crisis and transitional supported accommodation is available for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders, there remain concerns that this is not managed by an Indigenous service provider and that available accommodation support has not expanded as much as required.

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<sup>22</sup> Moore, T., Noble-Carr, D. & McArthur, M. (2007) *Finding their way home: Children’s experience of Homelessness*, Canberra: Institute of Child Protection Studies.

## 6.4 Theme 3 - Access to appropriate housing and housing assistance

The aim of Theme 3 is to ensure that there is an appropriate range of medium and longer-term support options for all people who are homeless, particularly for those with specific needs. This includes support for finding and maintaining appropriate accommodation. The Strategy objectives under this Theme are to:

- increase the available supply of appropriate, safe and adaptive housing for people at risk of homelessness or who are homeless;
- establish the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Boarding House Network;
- develop accommodation options to address the needs of individuals within the priority target groups; and
- assist people to achieve or maintain their tenure.

### **Key findings:**

- An increase overall in the number of crisis and transitional accommodation places provided through SAAP;
- Joined up planning across SAAP and Housing ACT to identify housing needs and manage stock;
- Increase in programs that provide appropriate and targeted responses to particular groups; and
- Change in culture towards supporting tenants to maintain their tenure and introduction of initiatives to support this.

### 6.4.1 Increase in suitable accommodation and housing

An increase in access to suitable accommodation and housing during the period of the Strategy is evidenced by:

- an actual increase in numbers of crisis and transitional accommodation places;
- closer attention paid to what is “suitable” for clients, based on their needs and circumstances; and
- joined up planning across the SAAP and Housing sector to match up available stock to appropriately meet clients’ needs.

An initial injection of new funding in 2003/04 undoubtedly led to an increase in the number of crisis services available for target groups, particularly men and families.

Close working relationships existed between the government and service providers during the planning of the tendering process for new programs. This also ensured that programs were developed with very clear, focused service models, that were able to meet the needs of the intended target groups.

The sector has seen a move away from congregate living for families during the period of the Strategy. This move comes from a recognition that congregate living environments are not always suitable and can place additional pressures on families and have negative impacts on children. However, a number of congregate living environments have remained, to provide this type of arrangements to families who draw strength and support by sharing a house.

Particular projects have also been launched to provide appropriate accommodation and support for specific groups identified in the Strategy:

- MASS has five placements allocated for men involved with the criminal justice system including those returning to the ACT who have been incarcerated. The program is designed to provide an alternative to refuge accommodation and enables the men to secure appropriate, supported accommodation even if they do not meet Housing ACT's residency criterion<sup>23</sup>;
- The couch surfing project was funded through the national SAAP V Innovation and Investment fund to provide brokerage support to young people who are experiencing secondary homelessness or are staying with family, friends or other young people. This project was established as an alternative to young people entering the SAAP system;
- A project was established to provide transitional support for young people exiting detention (Quamby), to enable them to make a smooth transition from incarceration to independent living;
- The Kanangra Youth Stairwell provides a stairwell of flats to provide supported, transitional accommodation for young people.

These projects provide additional crisis and transitional support placements in a way that is believed to be more appropriate to the needs of specific groups.

The Transitional Housing Program has increased the number of placements available for people in housing crisis by creating additional exit points from the SAAP sector. This means that clients who are no longer in crisis can continued to be supported

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<sup>23</sup> To be eligible for housing through Housing ACT, clients must have been resident in the ACT for a period of at least 6 months prior to making an application to Housing. However, if an ACT resident is sentenced to a term of imprisonment by an ACT Court he or she is deemed to meet the residency criterion.

during their transition to post-crisis accommodation, while freeing up crisis placements for people in crisis. Although stakeholders from SAAP services report that this has worked well, there are also comments that the THP requires clients who are already vulnerable to make an additional move into a new property, which might be in a new area, away from existing community support networks they may have. There were also reports that the properties used for the THP are often not desirable<sup>24</sup> and not always suitable to the clients' needs.

The asset management team of Housing ACT has contributed to increase suitable accommodation and housing stock by realigning the stock portfolio with client needs. One such example is a focus on developing a stock portfolio that includes a range of placements types (e.g. flat, townhouse) with ranging numbers of bedrooms to be able to accommodate different family groups within "housing size" guidelines. In recognition of a growing number of single individuals requiring public housing, there has also been an increase in the number of one and two bedroom properties. However, stakeholders report that finding suitable accommodation for large families has become problematic as there are not enough properties with an appropriate number of bedrooms to prevent overcrowding.

Stakeholders have also reported that the Housing ACT allocations team have improved their attempts to match a client's needs to suitable properties. However, there are still anecdotal reports of clients who have refused their two offered properties on the grounds that they were unsuitable, for example, a mother with young children refusing properties in blocks of flats with no lifts. This suggests a need in the future to explore how to match placement offers to a client's need more appropriately and to ensure that there is a range of "suitable" stock for a whole range of clients.

#### 6.4.2 Improvements in supporting people to achieve and/ or maintain tenure

Stakeholders report that a number of initiatives have had a positive impact on helping clients to achieve and/ or maintain a tenure. The majority of these initiatives stem from the recognition that if clients are not supported to achieve and then maintain a tenancy, they may face homelessness and require, more expensive, crisis support.

The prioritisation of housing has been seen as positive to support people with complex needs to achieve timely tenures. The pre-allocation case conferences that have been established are also viewed as positive to prepare clients for a transition to public housing and to strengthen the likelihood that tenures will be maintained.

Client Support Coordinators (CSC's), employed to help tenants who experience difficulties, and the debt management initiative are both reported to be positive steps in intervening early to prevent loss of tenure. A demonstrated reductions in the number of

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<sup>24</sup> In part, this is due to the fact that properties used for THP are often those waiting for refurbishment, sale/redevelopment or are hard to let properties.

evictions during 2006/07 (section 7.3.9.) support this and demonstrate evidence of the culture shift towards the view that eviction is not always the right answer or best solution for tenant struggling to maintain their tenure.

## **6.5 Theme 4 - Supporting and driving innovation and excellence**

The aim of Theme 4 is to ensure that the service and support system is able to provide quality services, supported by evidence based decision making, and respond to the changing needs of people who are at risk of homelessness and those who are homeless. It also aims to ensure that the sector's workforce is able to respond to changing needs and requirements. The objectives are to:

- 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; and
- increase public awareness of homelessness in the ACT.

### **Key findings:**

- Overall improvements in consistency and standards of service quality;
- Active involvement in research and projects to identify best practice;
- Emphasis on mental health and cultural awareness training but difficulties in addressing general challenges of developing and maintaining the workforce; and
- Some progress towards breaking down barriers to addressing homelessness and raising general awareness.

This theme was reported to be the most difficult to implement and the one least likely to be observed through direct impact on clients. Partly this is due to the intangible nature of continuous improvement, evidence based research and workforce development. Stakeholders report that many of the actions against this theme required considerable cross government and cross sector working to deliver, beyond the scope, sphere of influence and timeframe of the Strategy.

### 6.5.1 Improving quality

There is no doubt that the work of the pathways has led to an improvement in the standards and consistency of quality across the sector. The expectation of the delivery of high quality services has been documented, for example in the service standards, the Service Guarantee and the Charter of Rights. Embedding these documents in the Funding Agreement Management Plans (FAMP) for all services has ensured a continued focus on quality and quality improvement. An improvement in standards should have an impact on the services clients will receive, for example in terms of responsiveness, timeliness, appropriateness and consistency.

All SAAP and Department stakeholders were aware of the focus on quality improvement. However, some stakeholders commented that not all services were living up to the standards now expected of them. Contracts detailing expected standards, aligned to FAMPs, have only started to be renegotiated and contract management has not yet started to measure services' against the standards they have committed to delivering. This is something that needs to be monitored in the future to ensure that all services are delivering the same high, consistent quality of service.

Throughout the Strategy, DHCS has been proactive in participating in and facilitating research to contribute to knowledge around best practice to inform service delivery. Reportedly, the most successful of these research projects was the research into children's' experience of homelessness<sup>25</sup>. As a result of the findings of this research a number of changes have been made to services to improve outcomes for accompanied children in SAAP services, such as investigating the role of the designated children's worker in each new family service.

### 6.5.2 Development of a skilled workforce

The Strategy recognised the importance of a strong, skilled work force with appropriate support and training to meet the needs of clients accessing services and to be able to deliver the reforms. A particular focus has been on providing training for SAAP services around mental health and cultural awareness and this has been well received by the sector.

However, the issue of training and workforce development is still identified as a significant challenge, experienced across many sectors in the ACT and in other jurisdictions. It was reported that the ACT community sector has an annual staff turnover of around 30 per cent and identifies a problem in recruiting appropriately experienced and skilled staff. Recruiting Indigenous staff also remains a challenge.

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<sup>25</sup> Moore, T., Noble-Carr, D. & McArthur, M. (2007) *Finding their way home: Children's experience of Homelessness*, Canberra: Institute of Child Protection Studies.

This high turn over, as demonstrated in Chapter 5, means that there is a continued need to ensure that all staff are aware of the ACT's objectives with regard to homelessness and continue to be on board with the on-going changes.

### 6.5.3 Wider recognition of homelessness

The majority of stakeholders report that there has been an increased recognition of the incidence, nature and causes of homelessness, across government departments, within services delivering to clients and among the public. ACT Shelter's Housing is a Human Right Campaign launched in 2006 was frequently cited and was identified as a very effective at raising awareness, although stakeholders indicated that it needed to be part of an on-going approach to raising awareness.

The growing involvement of other sectors in supporting the delivery of outcomes for people who are homeless is perhaps evidence of this growing awareness and the recognition that homelessness is "everyone's problem". Stakeholders identified that the Strategy (both as a document in its own right and as a program for change) has broken down some of the barriers to addressing homelessness as a universal problem. It was seen as an effective starting point to continue to seek commitment from other sectors to further address homelessness. However, it was also recognised that improving awareness and recognition of homelessness requires on-going effort and should never be seen as an "action point to be ticked off".

## 6.6 Client feedback

During the evaluation, SAAP service providers sought feedback from their current clients to get their views on:

- how SAAP services were accessed and how easy this was;
- the best things about the service and the things that could be improved; and
- (for clients who had experienced SAAP services before) whether the services had changed since their last support period and how.

A small number of clients from youth residential services (seven clients) and an outreach service (two clients) participated in the evaluation feedback.

Eight of the ten clients reported that it had been easy or very easy to access the service. Six had been referred to the service by another SAAP service and nearly all report being accepted onto the service on the same day, with accommodation starting almost immediately. One client responded that accessing the service had "*turned my life around*".

The most positive aspect about the service was reported to be the high level of support and the help provided by the workers. If clients had suggestions about what could be improved, these predominantly focused on the availability of material things, such as computers, double beds and bus tickets, or on an increase in the number of outings. However, two of the clients identified a need to improve repair damage and fix broken

fittings in the property and one client suggested that being able to stay longer than three months would be desirable.

Six of the clients had experienced SAAP services previously, all from youth services: for four clients this previous experience was less than 12 months prior to their current support period. Two of the clients commented that their current experience was better than their previous experience. Two clients were unable to make a comparison as they had received a different type of support during their first contact with SAAP. One client noticed no difference in their experience and one client indicated that the resources available to tenants were worse during the current experience.

This information gives a very narrow snapshot of the views of clients in Youth SAAP services and cannot be used to draw conclusions across the whole sector. However, the responses suggests that:

- the service was easy to access through other SAAP services;
- clients have seen improvements since previous support periods;
- there is room for improvements to the standard of the property maintenance; and
- young people are accessing more than one support period in a twelve month period.

## **6.7 Challenges and barriers**

Feedback from stakeholders clearly illustrates that the implementation of the Strategy has been a period of significant change in the service system. While there is evidence of uncertainty and overcoming challenges over the three years of the Strategy, many of these are natural consequences of a process of change. While there is evidence from stakeholders that in many cases the changes have led to an improved relationships and way of working, stakeholders raised a few concerns about challenges and barriers that still exist.

It is less clear what actual impact the changes in the sector have had on clients up to the point of the evaluation. However, assumptions could be made that the initiatives introduced will improve the experience clients have of accessing services in the future. However, as many of the initiatives were introduced in the latter part of the Strategy implementation period, impacts might not be recognised by stakeholders for a number of years.

### *Stretched resources and increased expectations*

However, there is also a perception that, in this continued period of change, “*more and more is being expected of service providers, with fewer and fewer resources*”. Service providers report that while they recognise the improvements that the changes will bring to clients in the future, they are under pressure and stretched to deliver. A large part of this stems from a reported increase in the number of people that are approaching SAAP and other regional organisations for help with issues they face as a result of

housing affordability issues. While this is outside the scope of the Strategy, and this evaluation, it is obviously an issue experienced keenly by service providers, and one which has the potential to overshadow the good work that has been achieved through the Strategy.

Other reported causes were the increased workload as a result of the 'any door is the right door' approach and involvement in pathways work. The view of being stretched and under pressure is exacerbated by a perception from some stakeholders that there is not always parity in the way services are meeting standards, or engaging in the implementation of the Strategy. There were hints of some feelings of resentment from stakeholders that others are not contributing appropriately to the work that has been required to implement the Strategy.

#### *Engagement of service users*

The limited engagement of clients in the SAAP services at the time of the evaluation has restricted the conclusions that can be made about the impact of the Strategy from a client's perspective. However, the feedback that was received from clients shows a service system that is easy to access and which provides clients with a better experience than they had previously. Difficulty in engaging SAAP clients has been a theme throughout the Strategy implementation period and better ways to achieve this need to be explored in the future.

#### *Availability of places*

Despite the increase in crisis and transitional supported accommodation places, a number of stakeholders from SAAP and non-SAAP services report a perception that there is still a lack of suitable placements. In particular, gaps in provision were reported for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders experiencing homelessness and for people who do not meet Housing ACT's requirements of having lived in the ACT for six months before making an application.

Stakeholders also report a perceived lack of suitable exit points from SAAP services and of suitable housing stock. The THP is seen as an innovative solution to support clients while freeing up crisis accommodation. However, there are reported concerns that moving clients into another property, one that stakeholders report may be substandard, does not create a stable environment for families and individuals whom are still vulnerable, regardless of the supports that might remain in place.

Finally, stakeholders report not being clear about the escalation processes that are currently in place in the sector to find an emergency bed(s) for an individual or family if all services say they are full and if no brokerage money can be found. These perceptions require more detailed interpretation to understand their true impact on the service system. This should be pursued as an outcome of this evaluation.

#### *Prioritisation for public housing*

Changes to the Public Housing Rental Assistance Program have been introduced to provide priority housing to people who have complex and multiple needs, as determined by a multi-disciplinary panel. This has undoubtedly been successful in

providing public housing, in a timely way, to those most in need. However, stakeholders from SAAP and other service providers report concerns that this raised the bar and has made it more difficult for clients who are not considered to have complex needs to secure housing. They are particularly concerned about this in light of the growing housing affordability problems that many of their clients are reportedly facing.

SAAP workers also report that preparing an application through the multi-disciplinary panel is onerous and that the recommendations of SAAP workers are not given as much weight as those of other professionals. This can lead to frustrations for clients and workers, as many clients may not have good working relationships (or be in contact) with workers from non-SAAP and are reliant on their SAAP worker to put forward their housing applications. Stakeholders also comment that this discrepancy in 'weighting' of opinion is also contrary to the culture that is being promoted of joint, integrated working to collectively break the cycle of homelessness<sup>26</sup>.

#### *Working with complex clients*

Stakeholders were able to give examples of joint working with other services to meet the needs of specific individuals or families. However, on the whole, it was reported that it remains difficult to provide support to clients with a range of needs, such as mental health or drug and alcohol issues, in a truly integrated way with other services. Stakeholders on the ground were aware of close joint working at a senior level, but reported that changes in practice were slow to filter to on the ground workers. As a result of this, stakeholders indicated that SAAP services still struggle to meet the needs of clients with complex needs.

Feedback was given that carrying out more intensive work with complex clients meant that the service system as a whole was operating at a slightly decreased capacity. It was identified that SAAP services could be used more effectively, and could provide more effective responses to complex clients, if SAAP clients were also supported by professionals from other sectors.

## **6.8 Summary and conclusion**

Different stakeholders hold different views about the impact of the Strategy on clients and on the SAAP sector. Those who have been closely involved in delivering the Strategy see that the sector is more client focused and that changes will ultimately improve the 'journey' for clients. Those who have not been as closely involved in the Strategy delivery don't recognise the immediate effect and any impact is overshadowed by concerns they have over the issues of housing affordability. However, they can see the intended benefits of many of the initiatives that have been introduced, for example, the debt management program.

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<sup>26</sup> At the time of writing, the MDP was being internally appraised.

In terms of impact on providers, SAAP service stakeholders recognise the part that they play in a whole service system, but feel under pressure to deliver. Stakeholders who have not been involved in the delivery are encouraged that the Strategy exists and report that they need a demonstration of success and how they can “fit into” the work that is taking place to break the cycle of homelessness.

It is not questioned that there has been a considerable amount of change to structures and, while there are still some barriers and challenges to overcome, the majority of stakeholders can see the tangible benefits that the changes have already brought and will bring in the future.

In the short term, the Strategy has improved professional relationships and has introduced new ways of working that are more client focused and lead to a more efficient, quality, streamlined service to clients. It has also directly and indirectly raised the profile of homelessness in other sectors and has made inroads into encouraging joint working.

The changes have not been in place long enough to have a demonstrable and observable impact on the experience of client who are homeless or at risk of homelessness. However, it is recognised that the changes over the last three years will lead to tangible benefits to clients in the future in terms of:

- improved access to services,
- support and accommodation that is tailored to the needs of clients; and
- greater support to maintain tenancies and avoid homelessness.

Stakeholders have been able to give examples of individuals who are already experiencing these benefits, as well as those who are still experiencing a less than desirable service and outcome. It is difficult to tell at such an early stage of the reform whether these examples are exceptions or indicative of the whole.

## **7 Measurements of success**

This chapter uses qualitative and quantitative information to demonstrate the success of the Strategy against measures outlined in the Strategy document, including:

- incidence measures;
- infrastructure measures; and
- community based measures.

Quantitative data has been sourced from:

- Housing ACT;
- SAAP National Data Collection Agency (NDCA) at the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW); and
- Report of Government Services 2007 (Chapter G: housing).

Community Housing data has not been included. This is because, consultations with stakeholders suggested that the Strategy has not had an impact on, or been significantly impacted by the Community Housing sector.

Where possible, data has been collated from 2001/02, to enable a comparison of measures before and after the Strategy was launched.

Qualitative data was provided through consultations with stakeholders during the third annual progress report and the final evaluation period.

### **Data limitations and analysis**

There are a number of limitations of the data that need to be considered in analysis and interpretation.

Firstly, for most measures outlined in the Strategy document there is no data available to *precisely* illustrate or demonstrate success or progress. This is because the current SAAP and public housing data collections focus on numbers and types of services and supports provided, and numbers and characteristics of clients assisted, rather than on *impacts* of services and supports provided to clients. As a result, a number of different data has been used to attempt to illustrate success or progress, though in many cases it has been difficult to draw any firm conclusions.

Secondly, it is important to bear in mind that the Strategy has only been in place for 3 years, and that much of the first year involved developing a service system that was capable of taking forward changes to improve outcomes for clients. Therefore, it would be premature to expect the quantitative data to demonstrate strong trends or impact,

even short-term, on clients that can be attributed to the Strategy. This is compounded by the fact that SAAP and ROGS<sup>27</sup> data is only available until June 2006, just two years into the three year strategy. Data sourced from Housing ACT is available (and presented here) up to June 2007.

Other cautions regarding the data are well documented in the data sources (as referenced) and include:

- changes to the SAAP reporting framework and categories prior to 2005/06 data collection. This means that some categories of data are not directly comparable across all years;
- rounding up of raw data in SAAP National Data Collection Agency (NDCA) published data to protect client confidentiality and some missing data due to lack of valid consent from client to use data for reporting purposes;

## **7.1 Overview of service provision**

This section provides an overview of the provision of transitional and crisis support to people experiencing, or at risk of, homelessness.

Overall, the number of SAAP clients declined from 2001-02 to 2004-05, though this decline was reversed in 2005-06 to reach levels similar to those in 2001-02 (1,900 clients).

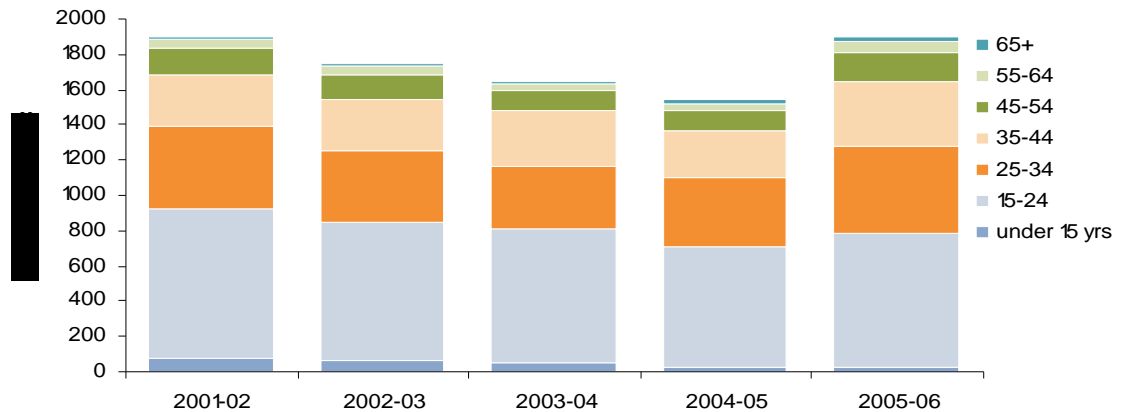
The majority of SAAP clients are aged 15-24 years, though proportionally this has declined over time (again, with a slight increase in 2005-06 over 2004-05, reversing a previously declining trend). The vast majority of clients are aged less than 45, with very few clients aged 65 and over.

Figure 1 below illustrates SAAP clients by age over the period 2001-02 to 2005-06.

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<sup>27</sup> Sourced from <http://www.pc.gov.au/gsp/reports/rogs/2007>

### Number of SAAP clients - total and by age



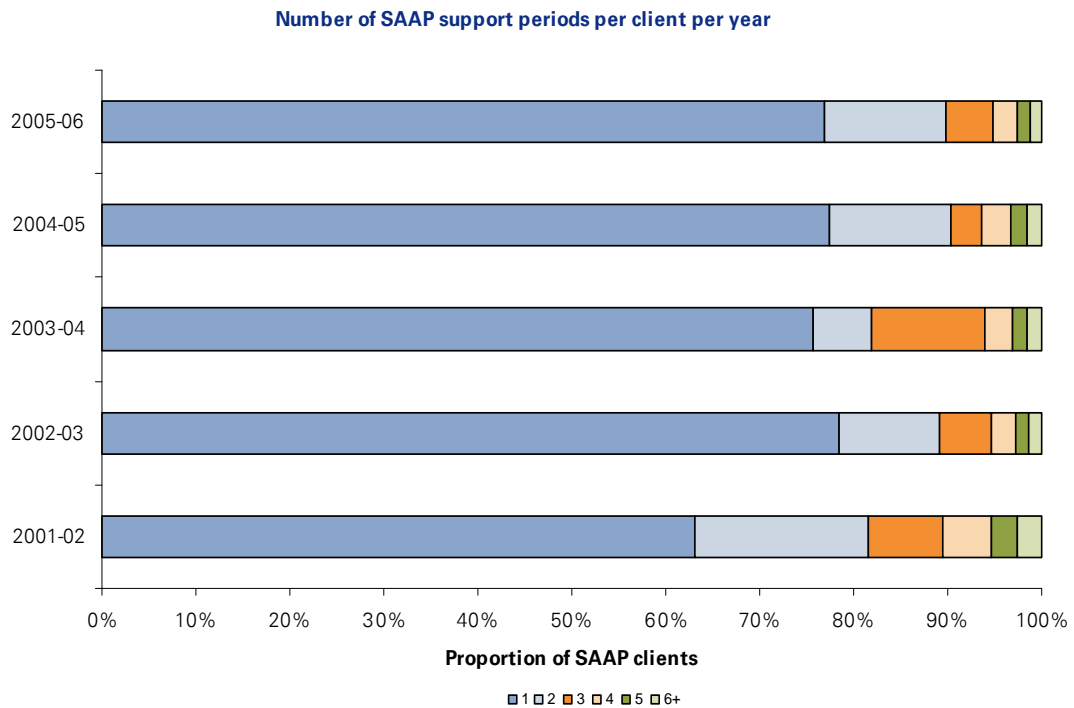
**Figure 1: Number of SAAP clients by age, 2001-02 to 2005-06**

Source: NDCA SAAP data 2001-2006<sup>28</sup> Table 4.1

Most SAAP clients access only one period of support per year, and this has remained relatively constant over time (at 76 to 77 per cent). This is illustrated in figure 2 below:

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<sup>28</sup> The SAAP data measures collected by the NDCA have changed marginally over the years included in the analysis for this evaluation. This means that, as the NDCA annual report has developed over the years, the tables numbers reporting measures are not consistent. The sources indicated here state the table numbers from the 2005-06 report.



**Figure 2: Number of SAAP support periods per client per year**

Source: NDCA SAAP data 2001-2006 Table 4.3

## 7.2 Overview of progress

The following table summarises the measures of success for the Strategy, as outlined in the Strategy document, and identifies the data available and conclusions which are able to be drawn to illustrate the progress achieved to date.

This data, and conclusions which are able to be drawn from this data to illustrate progress, are further discussed in the following sections. The table indicates the section in which each measure is discussed.

Measure of success	Data available	Progress made
<i>Incidence measures</i>		
7.3.1 Reducing primary homelessness to as close as zero as possible by 2013	Number of SAAP support periods provided to clients experiencing primary homelessness	<p><i>Partial Progress</i></p> <p>Increasing number of SAAP clients and support periods provided to people experiencing primary homelessness. This suggests greater targeting of transitional and crisis support (SAAP) services to people experiencing primary homelessness.</p> <p>Impact of this increased targeting on primary homelessness as a whole is unknown at this stage, however.</p>
7.3.2 Fewer individuals and families living rough on the streets who do not have access to appropriate housing	<p>Number and proportion of SAAP clients experiencing primary homelessness (as above)</p> <p>Proportion of SAAP clients who move into public/community housing</p>	<p><i>Partial Progress</i></p> <p>As above, increasing number of SAAP clients and support periods provided to people experiencing primary homelessness, though impact of this is unclear.</p> <p>Increasing numbers of people who are homeless moving into public/community housing after a SAAP support period.</p>
7.3.3 Reduced number of children experiencing homelessness	<p>Number of accompanied children experiencing homelessness receiving SAAP support</p> <p>Number of SAAP support periods provided</p>	<p><i>Partial Progress</i></p> <p>Increased targeting of SAAP services to accompanied children experiencing primary homelessness, evidenced though increased number of families with children accessing</p>

Measure of success	Data available	Progress made
	to accompanied children experiencing primary homelessness	SAAP and the number of support periods provided to families with children.  Impact of this increased targeting on number of children experiencing primary homelessness is unknown at this stage, however.
7.3.4 No waiting lists for crisis accommodation providers	Average number of clients turned away from SAAP services per day	<i>Significant progress</i>  Significant decline in average number of people turned away from SAAP services each day.
7.3.4 Reduced waiting list for social housing providers	Number of people on the waiting list for public housing - all applicants and those assessed as in 'greatest need'	<i>Progress</i>  Increasing number of people on waiting list for public housing up to 2004, then a marked decline from 2004 to 2005 - for all applicants and for those applicants assessed as in greatest need.
7.3.5 Reduction of people being excluded from social housing due to past evictions	Number of people excluded from receiving public housing due to previous debt (public housing rent arrears)	<i>Progress</i>  Decline in numbers of people excluded from receiving public housing due to previous debt from 2004-05. However, numbers excluded are relatively small in each year examined.
7.3.6 Reduction of the rate of return for individuals and families into crisis and transitional housing	Proportion of SAAP clients receiving more than one support period in any one year  Mean number of SAAP support periods per	<i>Progress</i>  Decline in proportion of clients accessing more than one support period per year, and decline in mean number of SAAP support periods accessed per client per year,

<b>Measure of success</b>	<b>Data available</b>	<b>Progress made</b>
	client per year	indicating a reduction in rate of return
7.3.7 Increased numbers of people who are homeless able to access social housing	Proportion of SAAP clients who move into public/community housing	<i>Significant progress</i>  Significant increase in the proportion of SAAP clients who live in public/community housing after they received assistance from SAAP.
7.3.8 Individuals and families in 'housing stress' able to access the necessary supports and services in a timely manner so as to secure and maintain their tenure and their ability to live independently in the community	No specific data available  Impact of policy changes to Housing ACT waiting lists	<i>Partial Progress</i>  It is difficult to measure progress for this indicator with the data that is available.  Policy changes mean that complex clients can now access Housing Act properties within three months.
7.3.9 Lower levels of evictions from social housing	Number of evictions from public housing due to breaches of tenancy or rent arrears  Evictions as a proportion of all terminations	<i>Progress</i>  Decline in the number of evictions from public housing (due to rent arrears or breaches of tenancy).  However, evictions as a proportion of total terminations has remained constant.
<b><i>Infrastructure measures</i></b>		
7.4.1 People spending a reasonable time in transitional accommodation and able to exit to appropriate housing which meets their individual	Length of SAAP support period, by time category, and average length of SAAP support period per year  Proportion of SAAP clients who move into	<i>Partial Progress</i>  Increase in the proportion of SAAP support periods longer than 1 month in duration, and increase in the average length of time of a SAAP support period (unclear whether this is

<b>Measure of success</b>	<b>Data available</b>	<b>Progress made</b>
circumstance and needs	public/community housing	'reasonable' however).  Significant increase in the proportion of SAAP clients who live in public/community housing after they received assistance from SAAP.
7.4.2 Greater supply of housing stock matched to the needs of people seeking low cost accommodation	Number of public housing dwellings  Number of public housing dwellings - by no. of bedrooms  Proportion of public housing households reporting overcrowding and underutilisation	<i>Partial progress</i>  Significant increase in number of households with 1 or 2 bedrooms, and significant decline in households of 3 or more bedrooms - between 2004 and 2007. There has been a marginal increase in the stock of houses overall.  Increase in the proportion of public housing households reporting 'moderate overcrowding' between 2004 and 2005. However, there has been a decrease in 'underutilisation' of properties over time.
7.4.3 Increased stability in tenure for people in accommodation suitable to their circumstance and needs	Length of tenure	<i>Partial Progress</i>  Increasing length of tenure over time, though no information on whether housing remains suitable to clients' needs.
7.4.4 Increased satisfaction of individuals and families with their accommodation	Public housing tenant satisfaction (National Social Housing Survey and Housing ACT survey)	<i>Partial Progress</i>  Increase in the level of tenant satisfaction up to 2005, and constant level of satisfaction since 2005. Decrease in the level of satisfaction on specific measures (eg "the condition of the home") since 2005, however.

***Community-based measures***

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<b>Measure of success</b>	<b>Data available</b>	<b>Progress made</b>
7.5.1 Understanding and attitudes to homelessness and related issues among the general community	Anecdotal information only available	<i>Partial progress</i>  Anecdotal evidence suggests that there has been an increase in awareness in homelessness and the factors that prevent or lead to homelessness.

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## 7.3 Incidence measures

### 7.3.1 Reducing primary homelessness to as close to zero as possible by 2013

*Partial progress*

Increasing number of SAAP clients and support periods provided to people experiencing primary homelessness. This suggests greater targeting of transitional and crisis support (SAAP) services to people experiencing primary homelessness.

Impact of this increased targeting on primary homelessness as a whole is unknown at this stage, however.

The 1996 census and the 2001 report, *Counting the Homeless*<sup>29</sup> provide the most comprehensive information on the numbers of people experiencing homelessness. These reports count primary homelessness as those who live in “improvised homes, tents and sleepers out”. This includes sheds, tents, humpies, and other improvised dwellings, as well as people sleeping on park benches or in other ‘rough accommodation’<sup>30</sup>. Table 1 below shows the numbers of homeless and primary homeless individuals based on the 1996 and 2001 reports.

	1996	2001
Homeless people	1229	1198
Homeless people living in improvised homes	~	73 (6% of total)

**Table 1:** People experiencing homelessness in the ACT (Source: *Counting the Homelessness, 2001*)

Source: *Counting the Homeless report (2001)*

The ACT Needs Analysis (2002)<sup>31</sup> estimated that the number of people sleeping rough in the ACT “*may be between 120 and 315 people each night or approximately 10 [per cent] of people experiencing or at risk of homelessness*”. This is higher than the 6 per

<sup>29</sup> Chamberlain, C. and MacKenzie, D. *Counting the Homeless, 2001*. Australian Bureau of Statistics. Commonwealth of Australia 2003.

<sup>30</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics 2001 p. 197

<sup>31</sup> Needs Analysis of Homelessness in the ACT. Department of Education Community Services, June 2002.

cent identified in the 2001 Census. Until the 2006 Census data is available, in 2009<sup>32</sup>, more up to date data is not available.

It is unclear from available data, therefore, whether there has been a reduction in homelessness in recent years. Anecdotal information from stakeholders who provide outreach and food assistance suggest that there is a perception of a reduction in the number of people who are experiencing primary homelessness in the ACT.

SAAP data does, however, illustrate that Housing ACT is providing increasing levels of transitional and crisis support for people who are experiencing primary homelessness (that is, those who are recorded as living in a car/tent/park/street/squat). Data shows:

- The proportion of SAAP support periods accessed by people experiencing primary homelessness remained constant until 2005-06, when there was a significant increase: 17.2 per cent of SAAP support periods in 2005/06 were to people experiencing primary homelessness, compared with 6.6 per cent in 2004/05 (figure 2 refers).
- The number of support periods provided to people who are experiencing primary homelessness increased from 155 in 2004/05 to 482 in 2005/06 (table 2 refers).

This indicates a greater targeting of this client group by SAAP services to provide them with support to maintain independent living. It also suggests that SAAP services have improved the support (for example, through outreach) they can provide to people experiencing homelessness and are attracting more people to access services.

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<sup>32</sup> Information on this is not yet available.

Per cent of support periods for clients experiencing primary homelessness before and after a SAAP support period

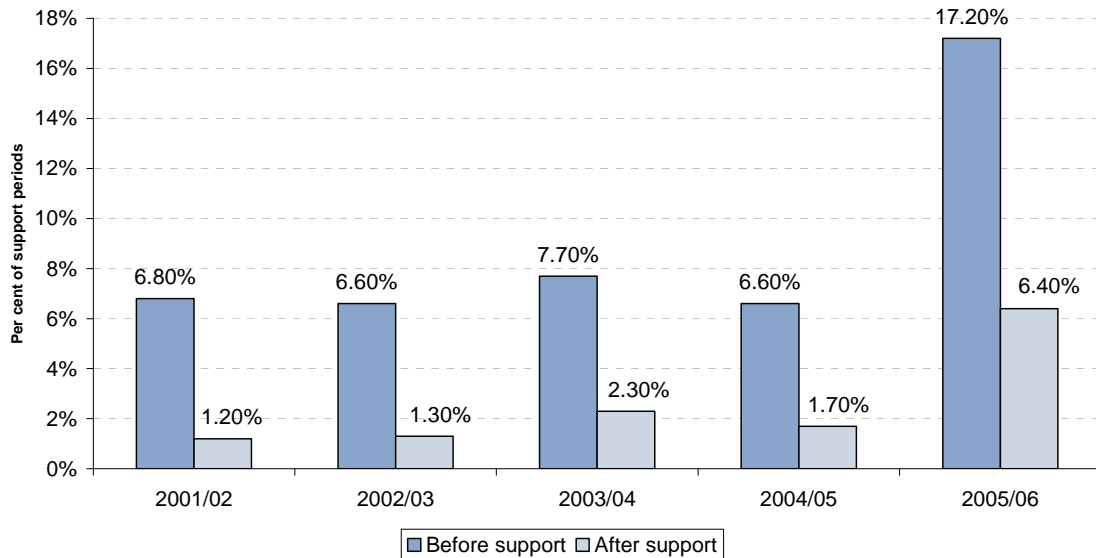


Figure 2: Support periods for experiencing primary homelessness before and after a SAAP support period comparing a) clients receiving support periods to obtain/ maintain independent housing and b) all clients receiving support periods, as a per cent of all support periods

Source: NDCA SAAP data 2001-2006 Table 8.5

	2001/02	2002/03	2003/04	2004/05	2005/06
No. of support periods	180	168	235	155	482

Table 3: Actual number of support periods for people experiencing primary homelessness

Source: NDCA SAAP data 2001-2006

It is important to bear in mind that NDCA data categories changed in 2005/06 to capture more accurate information about primary homelessness and so some of the increase might also be exaggerated due to greater accuracy in data capture.

### 7.3.2 Fewer individuals and families living rough on the streets who do not have access to appropriate housing

#### *Partial progress*

Increasing number of SAAP clients and support periods provided to people experiencing primary homelessness, though impact of this is unclear.

Increasing numbers of people who are homeless moving into public/community housing after a SAAP support period.

People experiencing primary homelessness may not be able to access appropriate housing for a number of reasons, including:

- housing that is 'appropriate' for them is not available;
- they might have complex needs that cannot be managed by the SAAP services and which prevent them from securing or maintaining an appropriate tenure;
- individuals do not wish to be "accommodated".

As indicated in the previous section, it is difficult to estimate the number of people experiencing primary homelessness, or the change over time. However, the previous section outlined increased targeting and support provision to people experiencing primary homelessness, indicating that increasing numbers of people in this category are being assisted.

Further, data suggests that there are increasing numbers of homeless people (including primary homeless) moving into public/community housing after receiving support through SAAP. While not directly reflective of progress for people who sleep rough on the streets, the data does show that SAAP is assisting more people to secure longer-term accommodation. This data is discussed further in section 7.9.

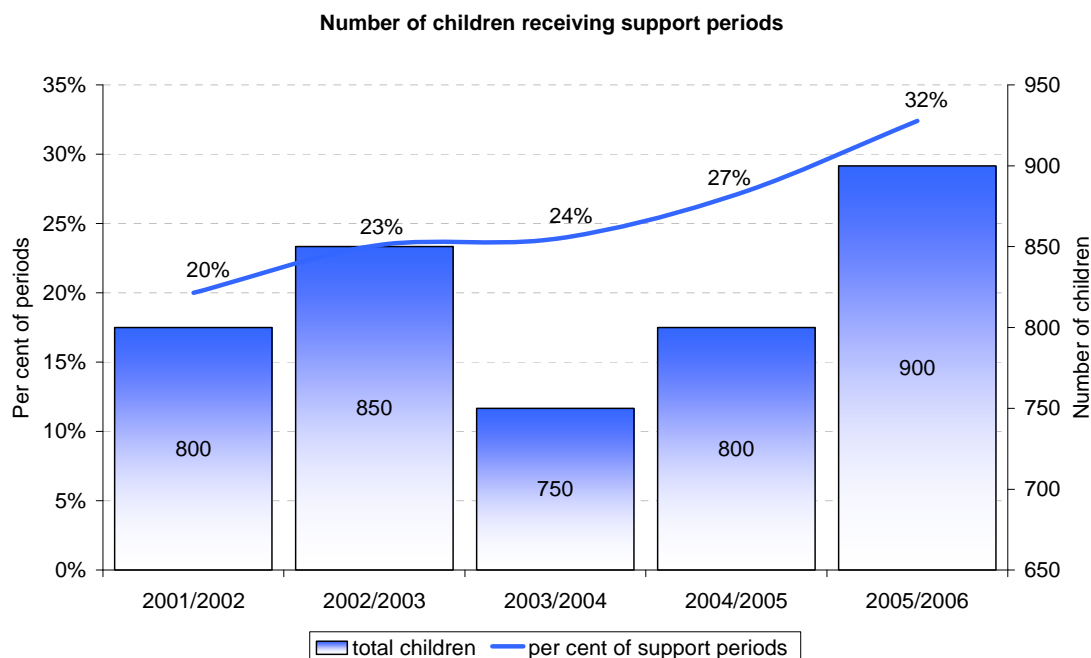
### 7.3.3 Reduced number of children experiencing homelessness

#### *Partial progress*

Increased targeting of SAAP services to accompanied children experiencing primary homelessness.

Impact of this increased targeting on number of children experiencing primary homelessness is unknown at this stage, however.

Figure 3 demonstrates that the total number of accompanied children in SAAP services has ranged from a low of 750 in 2003/04 to a high of 900 in 2005/06. There has also been an increase in the per cent of support periods that are provided to accompanied children from 20 per cent in 2001/02 to 32 per cent in 2005/06. There is no explicit data available for the number of unaccompanied children in the SAAP reports.



**Figure 3: Number of accompanied children and the per cent of all support periods provided to accompanied children**

Source: NDCA SAAP data 2001-2006 Table 4.4

The rise in support periods for children has risen more than the relative number of accompanied children in SAAP services, suggesting that services are increasingly focusing on providing support for children and families. This is also demonstrated by the comparative mean number of support periods for all clients compared to those for accompanied children, shown in table 4.

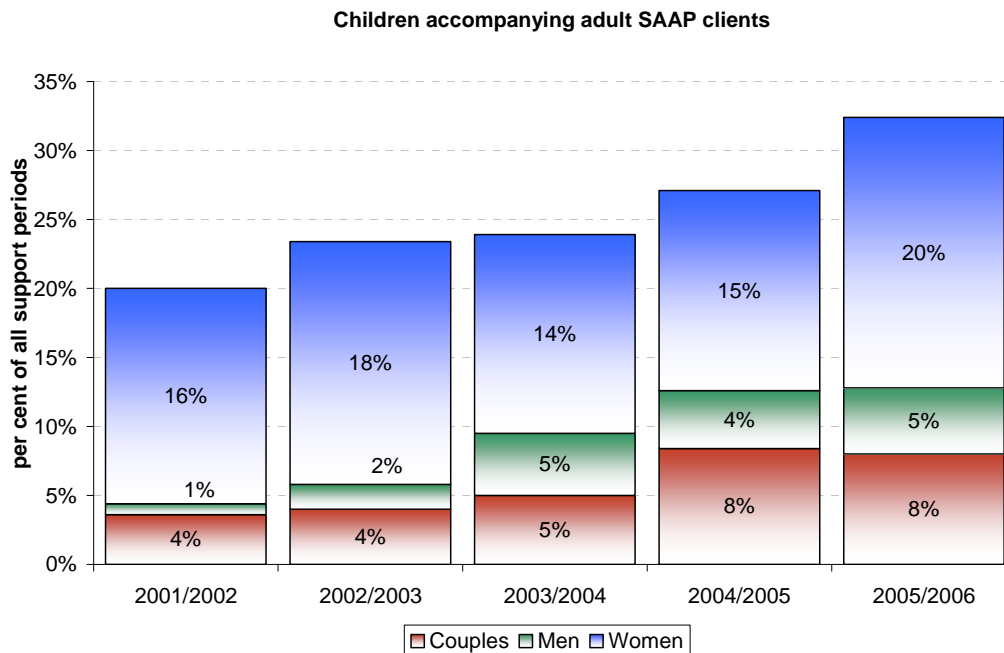
	2003/04	2004/05	2005/06
Mean no. support periods per client	1.81	1.47	1.40
Mean no. of accompanying child support periods per accompanying child	1.48	1.16	1.34

**Table 4: mean number of support periods per client and per accompanying child.** (data only available from 2003/04 onwards)

Source: NDCA SAAP data 2001-2006 Table 5.2

These figures show that in all years, children experience fewer mean support periods than other SAAP clients, perhaps indicating that more focus is placed on supporting and finding suitable accommodation solutions for families, thereby reducing the need for them to return to SAAP.

There has been a particularly large growth in accompanied children and young people receiving support from SAAP services between 2004/05 and 2005/06. Figure 4 shows that there has been an increase in the number children accompanying women into SAAP services in 2005/06. In 2004/05 there was also an increase in the number of couples entering SAAP service with children.



**Figure 4: accompanied children in SAAP services, as a per cent of support periods received and the client group**

Source: NDCA SAAP data 2001-2006 Table 5.1

An increase in the number of children accessing SAAP services may suggest that there has been an increase in the number of children experiencing homelessness. This may be due to a decrease in housing affordability, leading to more families in housing stress than previously. This might particularly be the case where marriages or partnerships involving children break up, leaving one or both of the parents in housing difficulties. However, increasing numbers of children accessing SAAP services may indicate an increase focus on and targeting of families with children, or services recording more accurately the children who accompany adults into SAAP services. There was also an additional an increase in family services in 2004 by 30 properties.

#### 7.3.4 No waiting lists for crisis accommodation providers and reduced waiting lists for social housing providers

##### *Progress*

Significant decline in average number of people turned away from SAAP services each day.

Increasing number of people on waiting list for public housing up to 2004, then a marked decline from 2004 to 2005 - for all applicants and for those applicants assessed as in greatest need.

*Crisis accommodation and support*

The AIHW produces annual reports and bulletins to determine demand based on the number of clients seeking accommodation support who are turned away<sup>33</sup> from services<sup>34</sup> over two 2- week collection periods each year. Figure 5 shows that the turn away rate reduces slightly between 2001- 2004 from a high of 15 to 12 in 2004/05. There is then a considerable drop in 2005/06 to a daily average turn away rate of seven clients. This might be as a result of the impact of the “any door is the right door” approach. If clients can access the SAAP service through any service, they should not need to approach more than one service, which will lead to a reduction in the number of times they are turned away from different services.

It is likely that the number of daily turnaways is exaggerated as it is known that many clients contact and are turned away from more than one service.

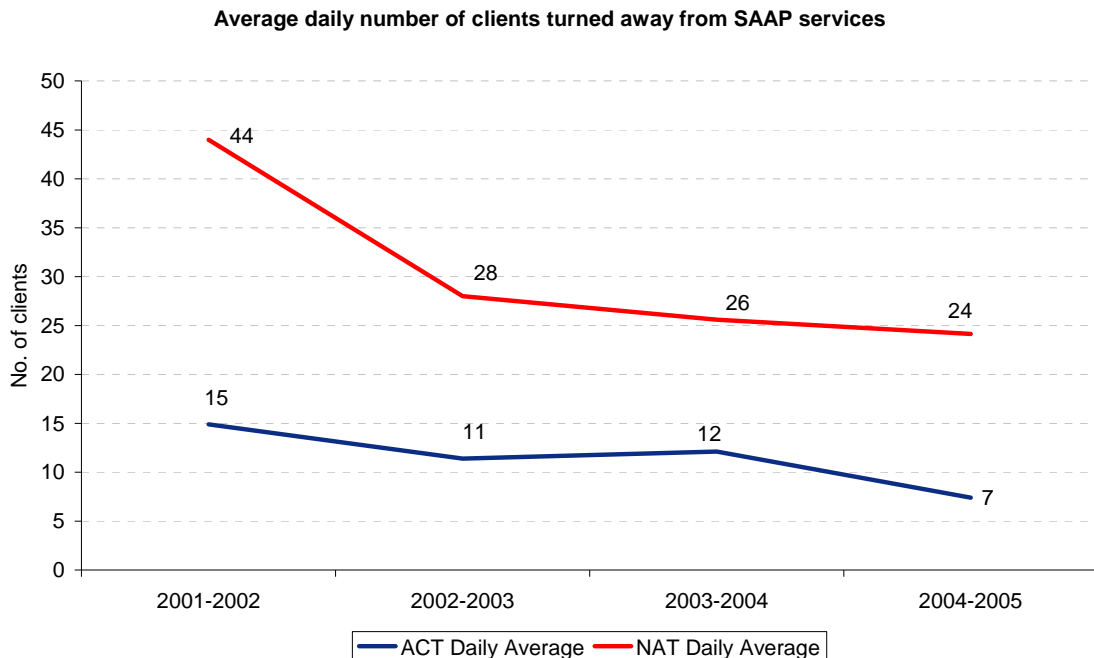
Figure 5 also shows that the ACT has a lower daily average of people turned away from SAAP services than the national average. It is also likely that the number of daily turnaways in the ACT is exaggerated as it is known that many clients contact and are turned away from more than one service

These figures, and feedback from stakeholders, illustrate that there are still waiting lists for SAAP services. However, with the increase in the number of outreach (non-accommodation) support periods provided from 2005 onwards, it would be expected in the future to see a reduction in the turn away figures and a move towards recognising that accommodation support is not the answer in all cases. Turn aways and waiting lists should further reduce as the “any door is the right door” approach continues to take effect.

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<sup>33</sup> A “turn away” refers to when a client is not admitted access to a service, usually because the service is operating at capacity. Service might also turn clients away if they are not willing to provide them with a service, usually on the basis of previous experience of working with the client. This practice of “black banning” is against contracting requirements and practice standards and has been removed in the ACT during the course of the Strategy implementation.

<sup>34</sup> Taken from AIHW (various years) *Demand for SAAP accommodation by homeless people: A report from the SAAP National DATA Collection*, Canberra: AIWH  
[http://www.aihw.gov.au/publications/index.cfm/subject/13/sort/bytitle/startRow/41\\_on\\_12th\\_December\\_2007](http://www.aihw.gov.au/publications/index.cfm/subject/13/sort/bytitle/startRow/41_on_12th_December_2007). The most recent report available is for 2004/05.



**Figure 5: the average number of clients turned away from SAAP services each day, compared to average national, daily turn aways.**

Source: AIHW Demand for SAAP accommodation reports

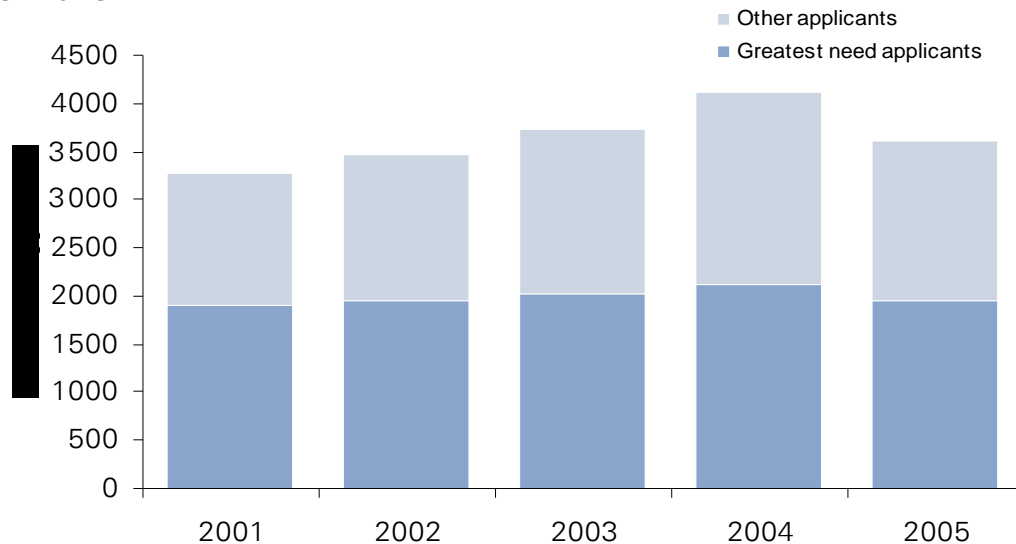
### *Social housing*

The number of people on waiting lists for public housing in the ACT has been increasing steadily since 2001, reaching a peak in 2004 (when there were 4,119 applicants on the waiting list). However, there was a significant decline in numbers waiting for public housing in 2005 over the previous year, reducing to 3,600 applicants.

This trend is also evident for applicants assessed as being in greatest need (the highest priority) - with numbers reducing from 1 993 in 2004 to 1 651 in 2005 - a 17 per cent decrease.

Figure 6 below shows the number of people on waiting lists for public housing as at 30 June each year.

### Number of applicants on waiting list for public housing as at 30 June



**Figure 6: number of applicants on a waiting list for public housing, as at 30 June**

Source: ROGS Report 2007, table 16A.1

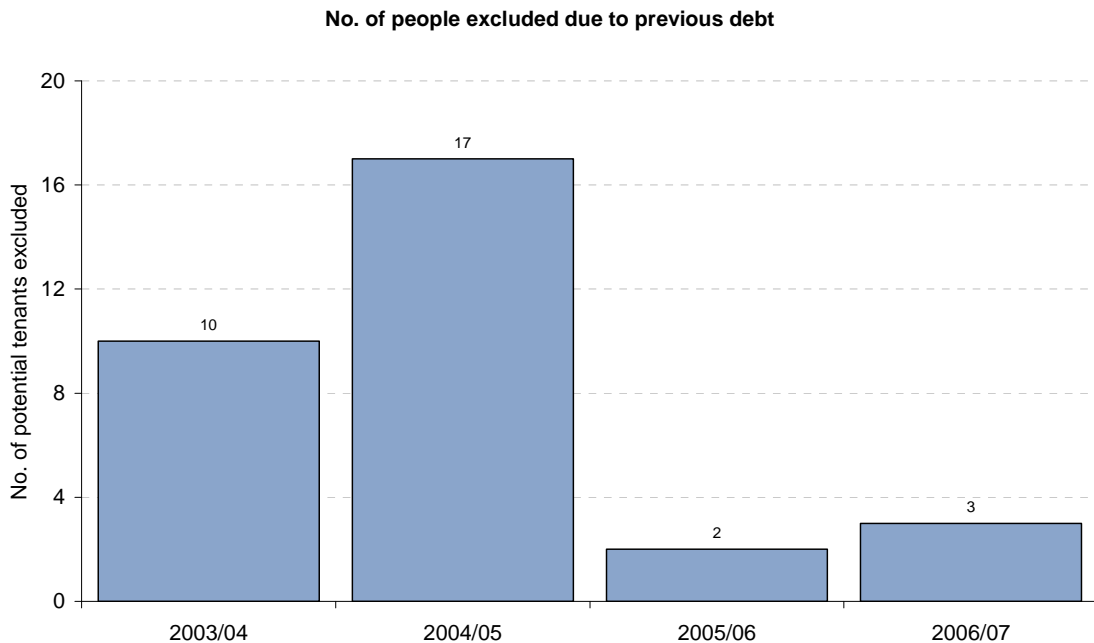
The most likely reason for this decrease is the amendment to the Public Rental Housing Assistance Program. The re-prioritisation of the housing waiting list in early 2006 will have led to a reduction in the number of people classified as those in “greatest need”. It is likely that these figures will decrease further over the coming years as the approach of housing clients with complex and high needs within three months continues.

#### 7.3.5 Reduction of people being excluded from social housing due to past evictions

##### *Progress*

Significant decline in numbers of people excluded from receiving public housing due to previous debt from 2004-05. However, numbers excluded are relatively small in each year examined.

Public housing tenants are evicted due to breaches to their tenancy agreement and due to arrears in rent. Although Housing ACT data does not indicate exclusions as a result of previous arrears, data is collected on the number of people excluded due to previous debt. Data shows a considerable reduction in the number of exclusions from public housing due to previous debt (as shown in figure 7). This reflects general changes to the policy introduced in 2004/05 which led to a culture where people are not excluded due to past debt, but are instead supported to enable them to achieve and maintain a new tenure.



**Figure 7: Number of people (individuals and families) seeking Public Housing accommodation excluded from the waiting list due to previous debt.**

Source: data provided by Housing ACT, December 2007

### 7.3.6 Reduction of the rate of return for individuals and families into crisis and transitional housing

*Progress*

Decline in proportion of clients accessing more than one support period per year, and decline in mean number of SAAP support periods accessed per client per year, indicating a reduction in rate of return

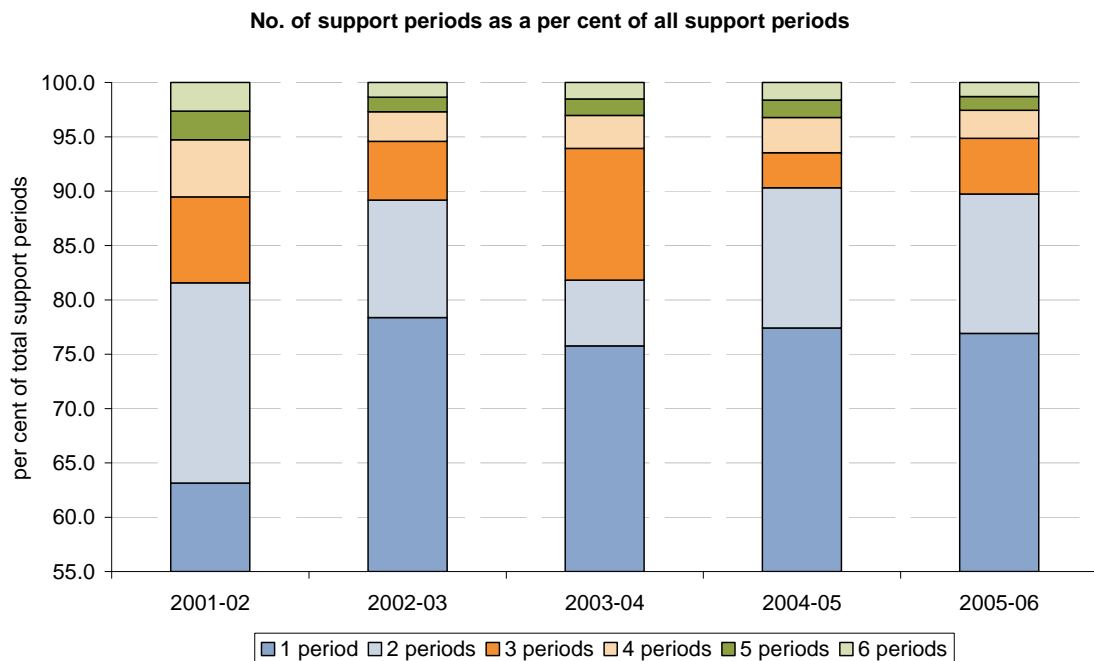
In an ideal service system in which SAAP services truly break the cycle of homelessness, all people entering SAAP should only require one support period before being able to achieve and maintain appropriate tenancy in social or private housing.

The number of support periods<sup>35</sup> clients have in a year gives an indication about the reduction in the rate of return into crisis and transitional housing during a 12-month

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<sup>35</sup> This includes accommodation support as well as support, such as outreach in which the client does not require accommodation.

period. Figure 8 shows that the majority of clients who enter SAAP services only require one support period. Since 2002/03, the number of clients receiving only one support period has remained consistent, ranging from 76% to 78% of all clients.



**Figure 8: Number of SAAP support periods per client as a per cent of all support periods**

Source: NDCA SAAP data 2001-2006 Table 4.3

The figures also show that the proportion of clients receiving greater number of support periods (i.e. 3 or more) has reduced over the past few years. This is also illustrated in table 5, below, which shows that the per cent of clients receiving three or more support periods has decreased to 10% during 2004/05 and 2005/06. This is reflected in a reduction in the mean number of support periods per client.

Year	2001/ 02	2002/ 03	2003/ 04	2004/ 05	2005/ 06
Per cent of clients with one support period	63%	78%	76%	77%	77%

Per cent of clients with 2 support periods	18%	11%	6%	13%	13%
Per cent of clients with 3 or more support periods	18%	11%	18%	10%	10%
Mean no. support periods per client	1.87	1.41	1.81	1.47	1.40

***Table 5: Per cent of clients with varying number of support periods and mean number of SAAP support periods per client per year***

Source: NDCA SAAP data 2001-2006 Table 4.3

There is no significant variance between the number of different support periods for men and women across any of the years. This might indicate that SAAP services targeting both groups are addressing the needs of those groups equally.

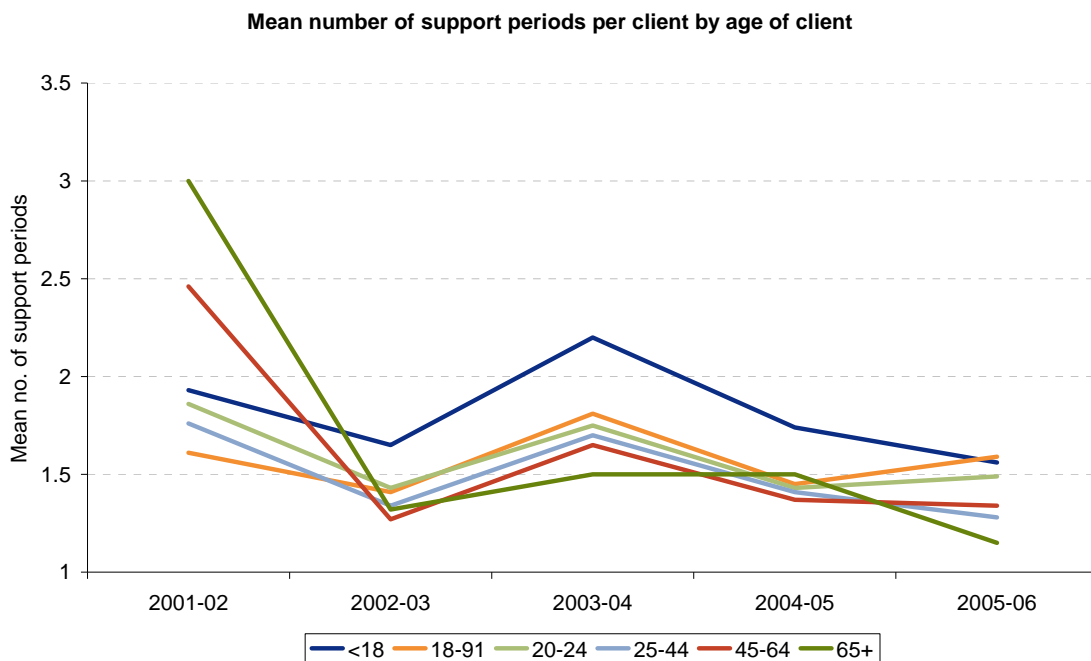
Although it is too early to tell whether this trend will continue, it is a positive indication that the Strategy is having an impact on the number of clients (as a whole group) returning to SAAP for support. This may be due to the fact that the Strategy has enabled services to provide more targeted support to more effectively meet the needs of complex clients, who are most likely to be “repeat” SAAP clients.

It should also be noted that these figures do not track clients who return to SAAP services after 12 months, or who seek support over two different reporting periods. It would be useful to be able to identify this client group in the future, particularly to be able to identify the impact of outreach services to clients.

There is some variation in the age of clients and the mean number of support periods per client. Figure 9 shows that the young people under the age of 18 years have the greatest mean number of support periods of all clients, except during 2001/02<sup>36</sup>. This might be a reflection of the complexity of needs for young people and a result of difficulties in engaging young people during adolescence.

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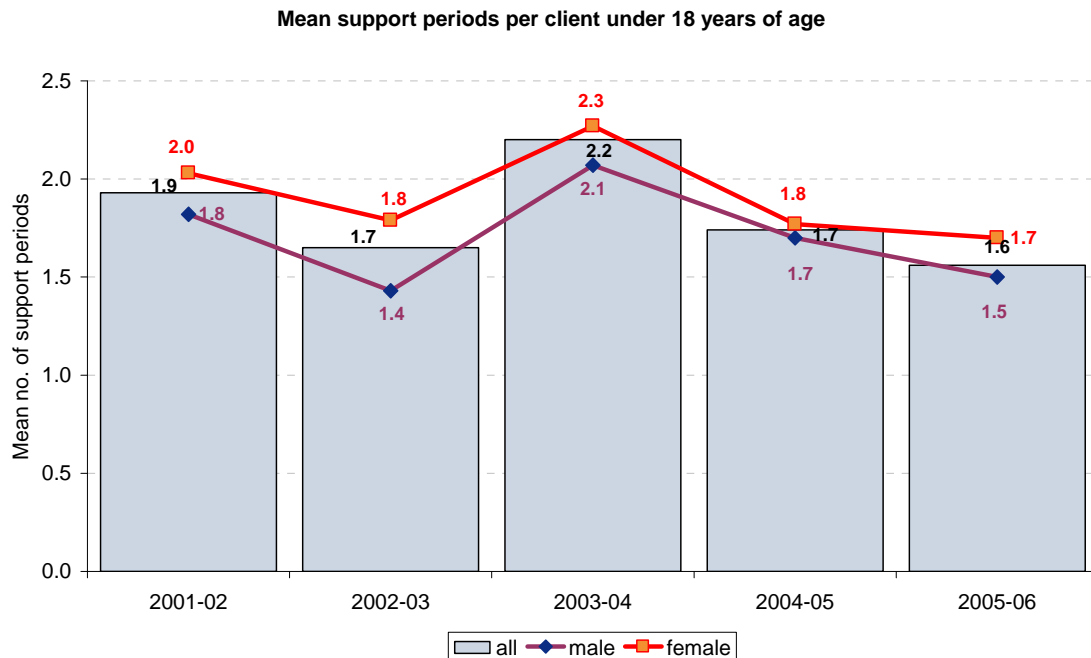
<sup>36</sup> In 2005/06, the NDCA report splits the data for young people into two age ranges, under 15 and 15-19 years. Previous years only record one data set up to 18 years.



**Figure 9: mean number of support periods per client, by age of client**

Source: NDCA SAAP data 2001-2006 Table 4.3

To break this down further, we can see from figure 10, for all years, females under 18 years are marginally more likely to require more support periods in a year than males.



**Figure 10: mean number of total support periods per client under 18 years and for males and female SAAP clients under 18 years**

Source: NDCA SAAP data 2001-2006 Table 4.3

The per cent of clients receiving only one support period has remained at 77 per cent during 2004 to 2006. The mean number of support periods has dropped marginally from 1.47 in 2004/05 to 1.40 2005/06, indicating that young people who have repeat support periods in a twelve month period are having fewer repeats. This may indicate that services are getting better at targeting and engaging young people and are better able to meet their needs in fewer support periods.

Although there has been a decreasing trend in the number of support periods for young people, this is an area for future focus as young people, particularly girls still require more support periods than other clients. It is also interesting to note that, as demonstrated in section 7.3.3, the mean number of support periods for accompanying children is lower than for all clients.

However, the figures from 2005/06 show that there is a difference between the mean number of support periods for young people over 15 years to those under 15 years, as shown in table 6, below.

	Male	Female	Both clients
Under 15 years	1.05	2.01	1.56
15 to 19 years	1.49	1.65	1.59

**Table 6: mean number of support periods of male and female young people under 15 years and between 15 and 19 years in 2005/06.**

If we make an assumption that the majority of young people entering SAAP services over 15 are entering unaccompanied, the figures demonstrate that there is a difference between the levels of support required between unaccompanied and accompanied young people. For both categories girls have the largest mean number of support periods, but unaccompanied boys require more support periods than accompanied boys.

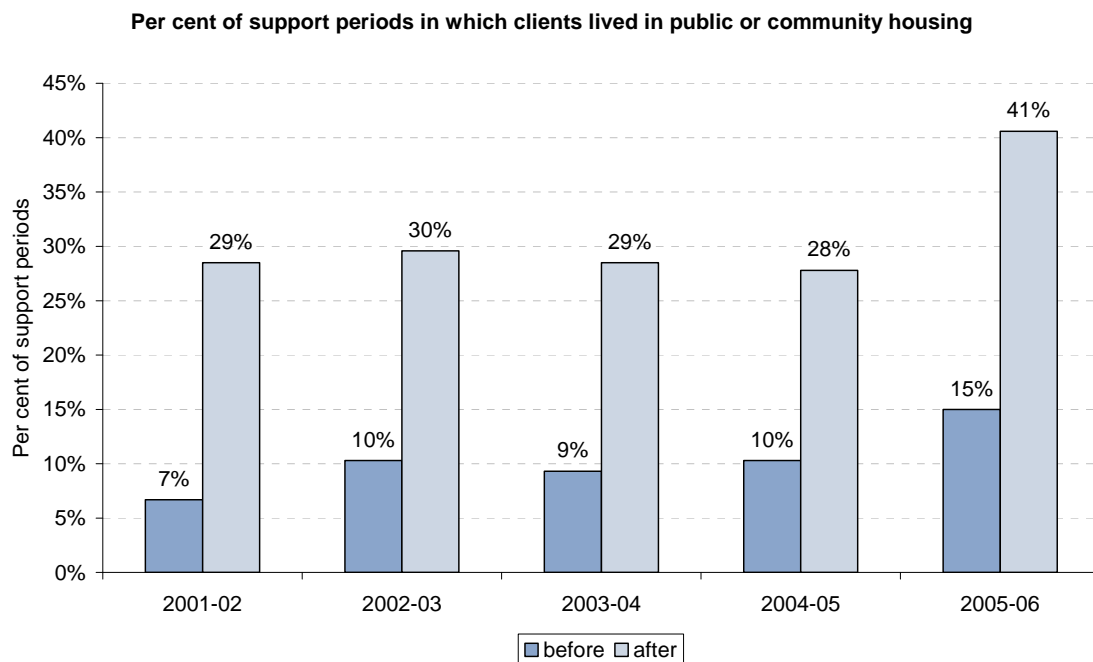
*Significant progress*

Significant increase in the proportion of SAAP clients who live in public/community housing after they received assistance from SAAP.

Available data demonstrates a significant increase in 2005/06 in the per cent of support periods in which clients were able to access public or community housing after a period of support through SAAP.

There is also an increase in the proportion of clients already in public or community housing that access SAAP to maintain their accommodation. This might be the result of increased joint working between SAAP and social housing, particularly Housing ACT, to encourage tenants to seek support from SAAP services.

Figure 11 shows the per cent of support periods in which clients lived in public or community housing before and after they sought assistance from SAAP to obtain or maintain independent living.



**Figure 11: per cent of support periods in which clients lived in public or community housing before and after they sought assistance from SAAP to obtain or maintain independent living**

Source: NDCA SAAP data 2001-2006 Table 8.5

During years 2001 to 2005, SAAP data does not make a distinction between the number of clients leaving SAAP to access public or community housing. Separate data is available for 2005/06 and demonstrates that only a relatively small number of clients leave SAAP to access community housing (6.9 per cent go to community housing, compared to 33.7 per cent to public housing). This is consistent with the response from the community housing sector that the Strategy has not had a huge impact on or been impacted by the Community Housing sector.

**7.3.7 Individuals and families in 'housing stress' able to access the necessary supports and services in a timely manner so as to secure and maintain their tenure and their ability to live independently in the community**

*Partial progress*

It is difficult to measure progress for this indicator with the data that is available.

It is difficult to illustrate progress made for this indicator as there is no data that is available to specifically measure the time it takes individuals and families experiencing housing stress to receive transitional or crisis support or more permanent accommodation.

However, following changes to the Public Housing Rental Assistance Program (PHRAP), clients with high and complex needs can now access public housing within three months, and often within two. While this is an improvement for these clients (and a more transparent way of prioritising allocations), the new approach may be seen as worse by some families and individuals who might previously have been given an "out of turn allocation".

However, as indicated in section 7.3.4, the numbers of people turned away from SAAP services each day, on average, has decreased over time, and the number of people on the waiting list for public housing has also decreased. This may indicate that more individuals and families in housing stress, at risk of homelessness, or experiencing homelessness, are able to access services in a timely manner.

In addition, Housing ACT advise that the length of tenure for public housing is approximately 8 to 9 years, and this is increasing by approximately one month per year. This indicates that people are maintaining their tenure in public housing, although the data cannot indicate whether this is desirable.

**7.3.8 Lower levels of evictions from social housing**

*Progress*

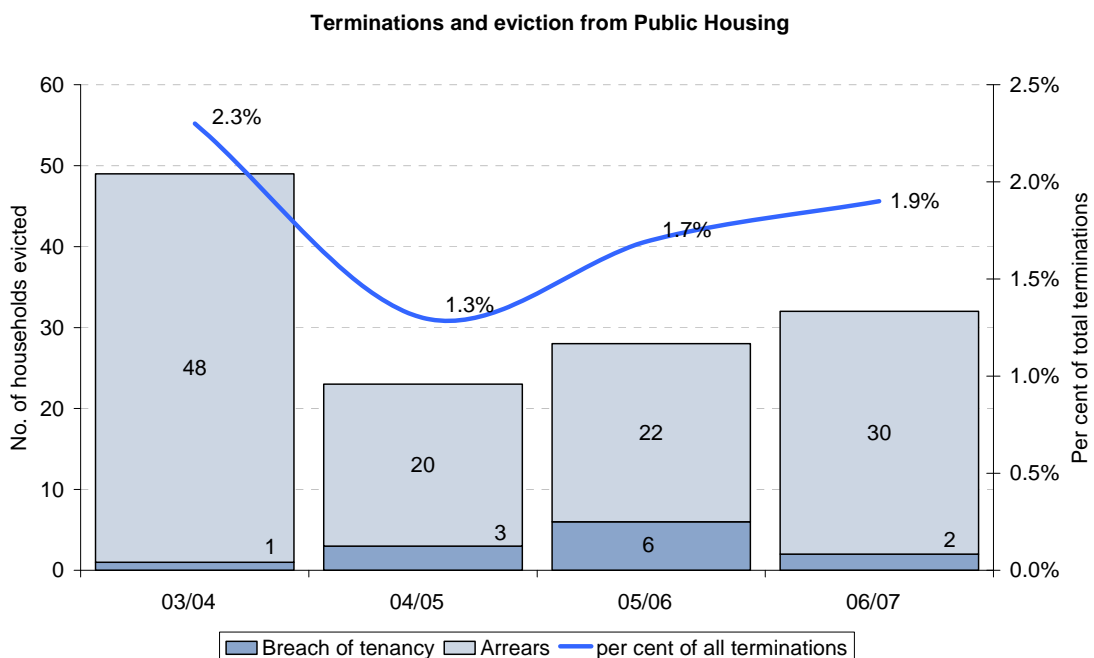
Decline in the number of evictions from public housing (due to rent arrears or breaches of tenancy).

However, evictions as a proportion of total terminations has remained constant.

Public Housing tenants can be evicted due to breach of tenancy or due to arrears in rent. Tenants who are evicted from public housing are likely to continue to require housing support from another source and may need to reapply to public housing at a later date. A key focus of the Strategy has been to encourage a culture of working with tenants to find solutions to help them maintain their tenancy rather than evicting them (thus a reduction in the number of evictions). This is supported by Figure 12, which shows that the number of evictions of households from public housing has reduced from 49 in 2003/04 to 32 in 2006/07.

However, evictions as a percentage of the total number of terminations (also shown in figure 12) has stayed approximately the same, ranging from 2.3 per cent of total terminations in 2003/04 to 1.9 per cent of total terminations in 2006/07.

These results may indicate that, although the change of policy brought about through the Strategy has reduced the total number of evictions, people evicted for rent arrears or for tenancy breaches as a proportion of total terminations has remained the same. These individuals or households may be the ones that require the most intensive support to maintain their tenancies.



**Figure 12: Number of evictions as a percentage of total terminations from public housing per year**

Source: data provided by Housing ACT

## 7.4 Infrastructure measures

### 7.4.1 People spending a reasonable time in transitional accommodation and able to exit to appropriate housing which meets their individual circumstance and needs

#### *Progress*

Increase in the proportion of SAAP support periods longer than 1 month in duration, and increase in the average length of time of a SAAP support period (unclear whether this is 'reasonable' however).

Significant increase in the proportion of SAAP clients who live in public/community housing after they received assistance from SAAP.

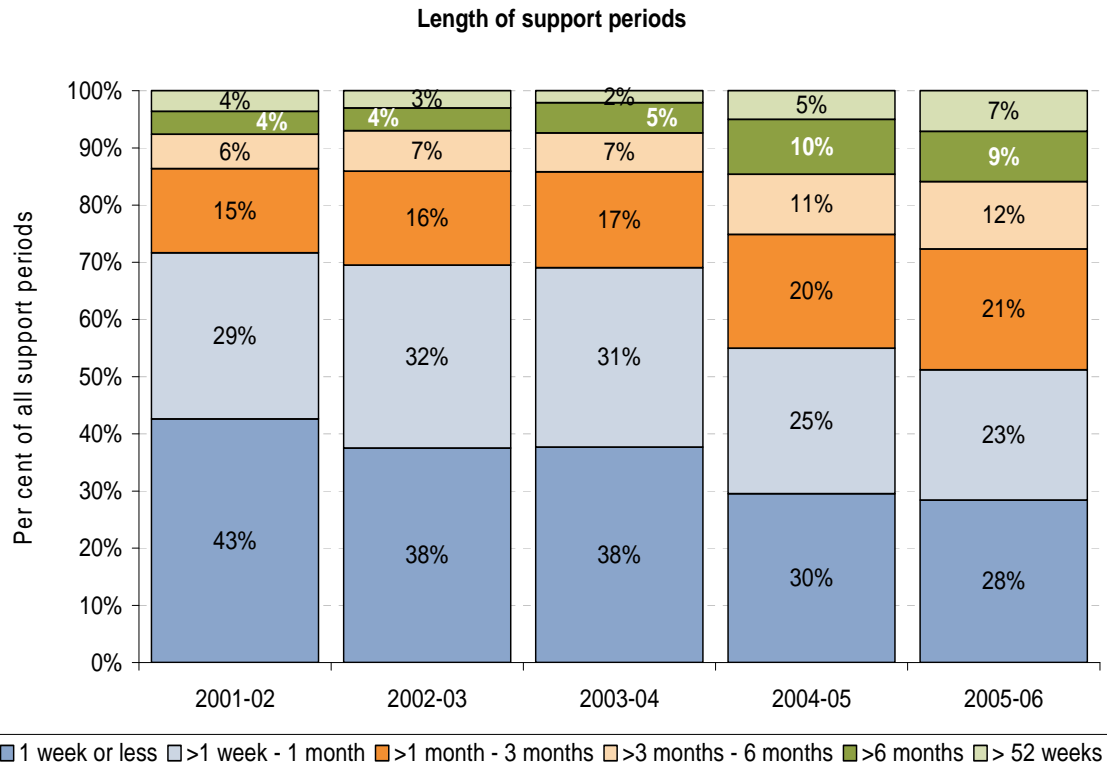
#### Reasonable time in transitional housing

It is difficult to quantify a "reasonable" amount of time in transitional accommodation as different clients will require different accommodation support periods. All SAAP programs have criteria around the maximum length time<sup>37</sup> that they provide support to a client. For example, the Christmas Domestic Violence Initiative and the Transitional Housing Program both provide support to clients for up to three months. Other services will provide accommodation support for up to 6 or 12 months in a support period.

Figure 13, below, illustrates that in the last two years, there has been an increase in the per cent of support periods of one month or longer. This indicates that since the Strategy commenced longer support periods are being delivered to clients. In 2005/06, 72 per cent of all support periods (2 016 support periods out of a total of 2 800 for the year) were for less than 3 months. This compares to 87 per cent (2 306 out of 2 650) in 2001/02. This might be a reflection of an increased complexity of clients' needs, or of a greater recognition by the sector that homelessness (and/or the risk of homelessness) cannot be "fixed" quickly, but requires longer periods of support.

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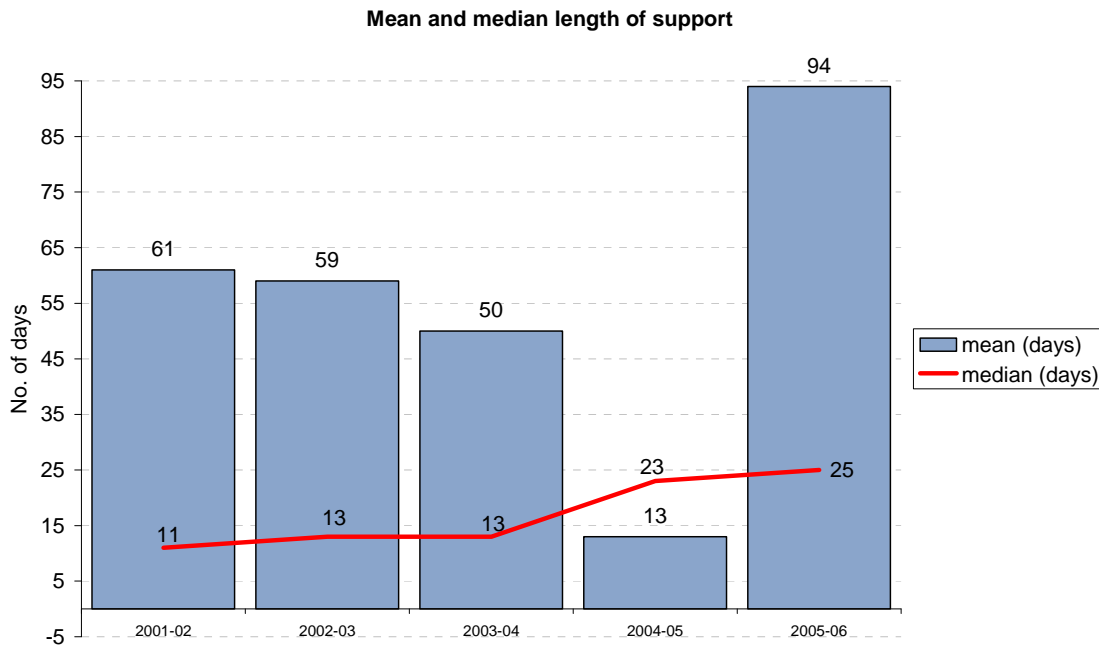
<sup>37</sup> In a small number of cases these periods may be exceeded.



**Figure 13: Length of support periods, as a per cent of all support periods in a year**

Source: NDCA SAAP data 2001-2006 Table 6.1

This trend is also illustrated in a comparisons over the years in the variations between the mean and median length of support periods, as shown in figure 14. In 2005/2006, the mean support period of 94 days is a result of a relatively small number of cases who are receiving longer periods of support: In the same year, 50 per cent of clients received 25 days or less of support (median). The low mean number of days support in 2004/05 is an anomaly in the data as a result of an increase in the number of short-duration outreach support periods during this year.



**Figure 14: Mean and median length of support in number of days**

Source: NDCA SAAP data 2001-2006 Table 6.1

### Exiting to appropriate housing

It is important to have appropriate accommodation for clients to exit into following crisis and transitional housing. This will maximise the chance that clients will be able to cope with and maintain the tenancy in their new accommodation and not return to or be at risk of further crisis. Again, appropriate housing is difficult to define explicitly as it varies for the circumstance of each individual. It may be based on the needs of the individual (or family), the modifications required for special needs, geographical location, proximity to certain areas, size of property or affordability of property.

Stock data from Housing ACT demonstrates an increase in two bedroom properties to provide appropriate accommodation for the growing number of single men and women who are experiencing homelessness. However, stakeholders report that it is become more difficult to find suitable accommodation for larger family groups. This is also discussed in section 7.4.2.

Anecdotally, stakeholders report that they still face occasional challenges in finding suitable accommodation for their clients to exit into. Stakeholders highlighted the need to review the process of only offering clients on housing waiting lists two choices of properties, without ensuring that that properties offered are suitable to the client's needs.

Other anecdotal feedback is that some clients take properties they are offered that are not suitable for them, to "get a roof over their heads" and then transfer to a more

suitable property within Housing ACT at the earliest possible opportunity. This observation is supported by Housing ACT data.

#### 7.4.2 Greater supply of housing stock matched to the needs of people seeking low cost accommodation

*Partial progress*

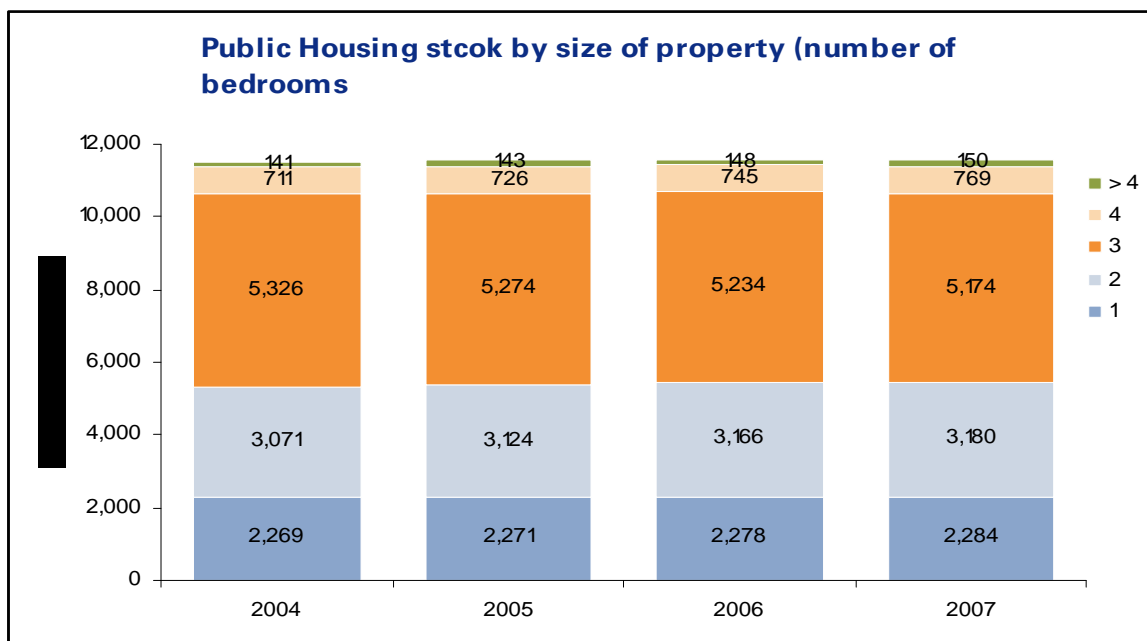
Significant increase in number of households with 1 or 2 bedrooms, and significant decline in households of 3 or more bedrooms - between 2004 and 2007. There has been a marginal increase in the stock of houses overall.

Increase in the proportion of public housing households reporting 'moderate overcrowding' between 2004 and 2005. However, there has been a decrease in 'underutilisation' of properties over time.

The Housing ACT stock has increased marginally since 2004 - from 11 518, in 2004 to 11 557 in 2007 - an increase of less than one per cent.

Since the start of the Strategy there has been an increased focus on realigning housing stock to better meet the needs of clients. Therefore, as well as the change in the total stock it is also important to consider the change in type of stock and how it reflects the changing profile of clients. There have been notable increases in 2 bedroom properties since 2004 (75, or 3.5 per cent increase) and 4 bedroom properties (56, or 8 per cent increase). The number of 3 bedroom properties fell by 109 properties - a 4.1 per cent decrease.

Figure 15 below illustrates the public housing stock available, by size of property.

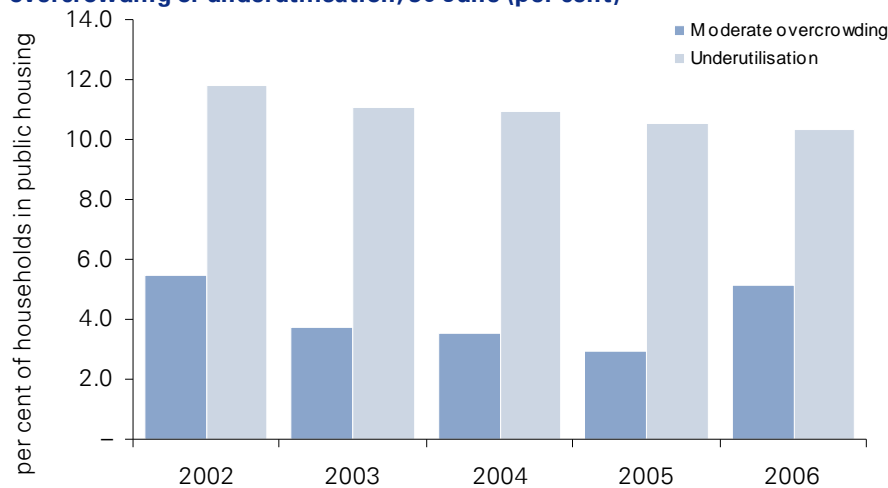


*Figure 15 Public housing stock by size of property (number of bedrooms).*

Source: data provided by Housing ACT

There has been a steady decline in the proportion of households in public housing recorded as underutilising the properties they occupy since 2002 - from 11.8 per cent in 2002 to 10.3 per cent in 2006. Over the same period the proportion of households experiencing overcrowding declined slightly from 5.5 per cent to 5.1 per cent. However, there was a marked difference between 2005 and 2006, with proportions of households experiencing overcrowding increasing from 3 per cent to 5.1 per cent. This is illustrated in figure 16 below.

**Proportion of households in public housing with moderate overcrowding or underutilisation, 30 June (per cent)**



**Figure 16; Proportion of public housing households reporting overcrowding and underutilisation**

Source: ROGS Report 2007 Table 16A.77

#### 7.4.3 Increased stability in tenure for people in accommodation suitable to their circumstance and needs

##### *Partial progress*

Average length of tenure for public housing is approximately 8 to 9 years, and this is increasing by approximately one month per year, which may indicate increasing stability in tenure, though does not indicate that this increased tenure maintains people in accommodation suitable to their needs.

As indicated in 7.3.8, the average length of tenure for public housing is approximately 8 to 9 years, and this is increasing by approximately one month per year. This indicates that people are maintaining their tenure in public housing. However, it does not indicate the degree to which individuals and families move to alternative (public or private) accommodation as their circumstances and needs change over time (eg children leave home, family begins to care for an elderly relative).

Section 7.4.1 explores the impact the Strategy has had on clients being able to exit transitional accommodation into more permanent accommodation. Section 7.4.2 discusses the increase in appropriate housing stock.

#### 7.4.4 Increased satisfaction of individuals and families with their accommodation

##### *Partial progress*

Increase in the level of public housing tenant satisfaction up to 2005, and constant level of satisfaction since 2005. However, there has been a decrease in the level of satisfaction reported on specific measures - for example, "condition of the home" - since 2005

Client satisfaction with public housing is assessed biennially through the National Social Housing Survey (NSHS), commissioned by the AIHW. Originally started in 1996, the NSHS was last conducted in 2007<sup>38</sup>. Using the same methodology, Housing ACT also conducted internal surveys of public housing clients in 2004 and 2006<sup>39</sup>.

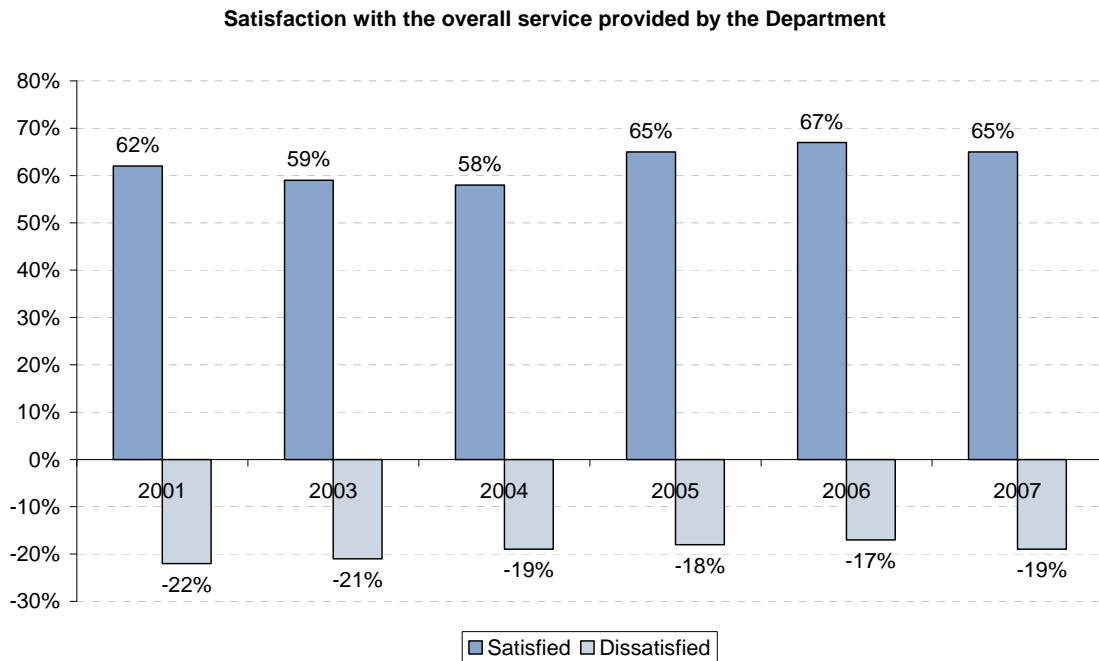
The results of the surveys show that in 2005 there was a marked increase in the overall level of satisfaction with DHCS. This has held consistent 65 to 67 per cent between 2005 and 2007.

The levels of overall satisfaction of Housing ACT tenants with DHCS are shown in figure 17.

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<sup>38</sup> Sourced from <http://www.aihw.gov.au/housing/assistance/nshs/index.cfm> on 30th November 2007

<sup>39</sup> Information provided by DHCS.



**Figure 17: Satisfaction and dissatisfaction levels of Housing ACT tenants with DHCS**

Source: NSHS and Housing ACT survey

The finding about decreased satisfaction in treatment by staff and staff knowledge appears to contradict feedback from professional stakeholders during the evaluation. Stakeholders reported a view that Housing ACT staff were helpful and many examples were given where they had “gone out of their way” to provide a service to tenants.

Compared to the findings from other jurisdictions, tenants in the ACT are, overall, “less likely to be satisfied with the overall service provided by DHCS (65%). Other jurisdictions recorded satisfactions levels ranging from 63% in NSW to 79% in Queensland<sup>40</sup>. The 2007 survey also shows that ACT tenants have reported a decrease in satisfaction levels between 2005 and 2007 for ‘the condition of the home’, ‘treatment by staff’, ‘knowledge of staff’ and ‘provision of clear information’.

Client satisfaction is not routinely measured by SAAP services outside of informal relationship building during case work. A national SAAP client satisfaction survey was conducted in 2004 which looked at client satisfaction against a range of measures. Comparisons of satisfaction in different states and territories indicates that client ratings of ‘good’ are consistent across the country. However, a lower proportion of ACT clients rate the satisfaction of the help they received as “really good” compared to other states

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<sup>40</sup> Roy Morgan Research (2007) 2007 National Social Housing Survey Public Housing Australian Capital Territory Report, Roy Morgan: Melbourne

and territories. Using this survey as a baseline, it would be useful to develop an on-going client satisfaction tool to continue to measure satisfaction and changes in satisfaction in the future.

## **7.5 Community based measures**

### **7.5.1 Greater awareness of homelessness and the factors that prevent and/or lead to homelessness**

#### *Partial progress*

Anecdotal evidence suggests that there has been an increase in awareness in homelessness and the factors that prevent or lead to homelessness.

Measuring awareness of homelessness and the factors that prevent or lead to homelessness involves surveying opinions and views of the public as well as professionals in all services and at all levels. It could be argued that this level of surveying requires unique consideration as part of a whole of government approach to assessing people's views and awareness on a range of health and human services issues. At present there is no formal feedback available on the level (or change in level) of awareness of homelessness.

However, anecdotally, stakeholders report that there has been an increased awareness in homelessness and the factors that prevent or lead to homelessness in professionals working across government and in community services in different sectors. This increased awareness is evidenced in the move towards joint working that the sector has experienced and in the policy changes that have been brought about since the Strategy started (such as the changes to the PRHAP and supporting clients to maintain their tenancies).

## **8 Summary and conclusions**

This chapter answers the following evaluation questions in terms of the evidence and findings from consultations and data analysis against performance measures.

### **8.1 Has the Strategy delivered short-term results for people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness?**

Yes, the Strategy has been able to deliver improved outcomes against a number of dimensions, to specific groups of clients. For example:

#### **Short-term responses**

- an introduction of new services at the start of the Strategy has led to more equal availability of services to the range of different groups experiencing homelessness;
- a more targeted response to people experiencing primary homelessness has led to an increased number of SAAP support periods for this group;
- individuals and families are receiving support from the moment they contact a service, rather than from the moment they are accepted as clients;
- accompanied children and young people in SAAP services are receiving focused support, through dedicated workers, based on a better understanding of the experience that children have of homelessness;
- there has been a decrease in the number of turn aways from services;
- clients contact SAAP services now only have to make one phone call and complete one initial assessment/ referral form;
- there has been a reduction in the number of evictions from social housing and exclusions due to past debt; and
- more SAAP clients are accessing public housing after a period of support.

Stakeholders have also been able to give a number of examples of good outcomes for clients.

### **8.2 Has the Strategy improved short-term crisis management?**

Yes, initiatives have been introduced that improve short-term crisis management:

#### **Crisis management**

- the initial introduction of CEAS lifeline provided an important entry point to services early on in the Strategy implementation, but moved into a role supporting transition from crisis as the service system matured;

- the domestic violence initiative has proved successful at responding to women and children in crisis who are escaping domestic violence over the Christmas period;
- outreach services have provided additional capacity to provide response to people in crisis for whom there is no accommodation available; and
- the Transitional Housing Program (THP) allows greater through flow from crisis services for people who are ready to be transitioned, thus freeing up crisis accommodation to be used for individuals and families in crisis.

#### Concerns

- Stakeholders noted that they are unsure how to respond to a client in immediate crisis where there “really is not bed and no brokerage available”. This may indicate that, for some cases, short term crisis management has not been improved.

### 8.3 Is the Strategy likely to deliver long-term results?

Yes, the strategy is likely to deliver long-term results to clients. Some early indicators of this are that:

#### Long-term results

- ‘any door is the right door’ will continue to move the sector towards a whole system and will ultimately lead to more streamlined access for all clients. It will also have the impact of reducing over counted turn aways and waiting lists with double counting, as a turn away will only be counted once and people seeking support will only appear on one waiting list;
- changes to housing stock will continue to improve the ability to match client need with appropriate housing;
- there is an emergent trend of a reduction in the mean number of support periods that a client (individual or family) has within a twelve month period. With more targeted, client-centred programs, it would be expected that services will address clients’ needs more effectively in fewer support periods;
- outreach programs and early intervention and prevention initiatives, such as debt management and client service coordinators will minimise the likelihood that individuals and families will lose their tenancies; and
- support initiatives such as the pre-allocation case conferences will maximise the likelihood that clients attaining a tenure will manage to maintain that tenure in the long term.

#### Discussion

A few issues and challenges need to be addressed to ensure that improvements for clients continue in future. Part of this is ensuring that the partnership working between DHCS and the sector continues to strengthen and that momentum and ‘good will’ is not lost.

- More regard needs to be given to the growing issue of housing affordability. While this is outside the scope of the Strategy, workers see it as a significant issue that

affects their professional lives and impacts on their capacity to provide services. More clarity and communication is needed around how services should respond to the change in their client group that they are witnessing as a result of housing affordability and around how the ACT is addressing the issue.

- A number of issues arose from stakeholders that related directly to undergoing a period of change, which brings about instability and uncertainty. Stakeholders indicate that they have come a long way during the course of the Strategy and have contributed significantly to its success. This needs to be recognised and rewarded before the next steps are taken to continue the work the Strategy started.
- There were also differences in expectations about communication, which have led to some misunderstandings and covert tensions that need to be addressed.

#### **8.4 Has the Strategy had a positive impact on specific priority population groups?**

##### **Impact on priority populations**

The Strategy has had a mixed impact on the specific priority populations it identifies.

- More crisis and transition accommodation and other support is available to single men, families and couples than prior to the Strategy.
- The enforcement of the Youth SAAP minimum age criteria is thought to have led to unaccompanied young people going “underground” and staying in temporary accommodation with their peers and acquaintances, often putting themselves at risk.
- Accompanying children are receiving a better, more child-centred service as a result of better understanding of their needs as clients in their own right.
- Some services are available to individuals from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander backgrounds but this has not increased as much as was intended by the Strategy. In addition, the accommodation services continue to be provided by a non-Indigenous organisation, which is not considered ideal.

#### **8.5 Has the Strategy delivered any soft outcomes through implementation?**

##### **Soft outcomes**

The Strategy has delivered considerable soft outcomes<sup>41</sup>. For example:

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<sup>41</sup> Soft outcomes refer to intangible benefits, such as increased understanding, better working relationships, skills transfers, etc. Soft outcomes are usually end results or consequences that do not occur as a direct consequence of an activity but are often a ‘by-products’.

- a culture has been developed that recognises that SAAP and housing services share clients and that a joined up approach must be taken to ensure that public housing clients do not experience homelessness or risk of homelessness.
- stakeholders report a closer, more transparent way of working, with a greater understanding of how all services fit together and work together as a whole service system;
- awareness and understanding of the issues and causes of homelessness is more evident in other sectors, both at Government and service level.

## **8.6 Was the implementation structure efficient and appropriate?**

### **Implementat ion**

Yes, on the whole the Strategy was implemented and managed appropriately and efficiently but there were a number of identified areas of learning.

- The ACT Homelessness Committee was considered the right vehicle to move the Strategy forward, despite some difficulties in ensuring the appropriate breath of representation from relevant stakeholders.
- considerable progress has been made, with considerable effort and input from all stakeholders, to move the sector towards becoming a mature service system that demonstrates collaboration and planned, joined up approaches to service development and delivery;

### **Learnings**

- Keeping staff up to date and informed was a considerable challenge, particularly with a high staff turnover and with a significant number of changes over relatively short periods of time. This has led to some misunderstandings and differences in expectations.
- Achieving a balance of joint governance for the Strategy implementation between DHCS and the sector was at times a challenge. Stakeholders from the sector report that they value 'leading' the service reforms but expect clear guidance and overt involvement from Government.
- The task of managing and providing secretariat support for the implementation of the Strategy was onerous, partly due to the large number of action areas that needed to be addressed and the number of working groups convened to achieve these.

## **8.7 Which actions and outcomes have contributed most to the success of the Strategy?**

### **Elements that contribute the most**

Stakeholders identify a number of elements that have contributed most to the success of the Strategy:

- the strong consultative approach in which the Strategy was developed and the collaboration between services to implement the Strategy after it was launched;

- the effort and commitment of stakeholders at Department and at provider level to implement the Strategy and introduce the changes required during the reform of the service system;
- the development of the pathways groups (led by an independent consultant) to map existing services and identify how the system needed to be reformed;
- the injection of new funding to build up capacity initially for men and families; and
- the consultative approach taken with developing service models for new services (such as the Men's Accommodation Support Service) which have led to well focused programs that match service delivery to meet client needs.

## **8.8 Community engagement and partnership working**

### **Partnership working**

Increasing partnership working is evidenced throughout the Strategy implementation although there is more work that can still be done to improve this. There is less evidence of effective or sustained community engagement.

- The ACT Homelessness Committee now has representation from a broad range of cross-government departments, after some challenges in engaging these parties towards the start of the Strategy implementation. This has led to a better understanding at Government level of the causes and impact that homelessness has on individuals and on communities.
- Partnership working between Housing ACT and the Social Housing and Homelessness Services, under DHCS has led to the development of a continuum of crisis and post- crisis services that would not have been possible without the partnership approach.
- SAAP services are demonstrating increased partnership working on the ground with the introduction of approaches such as 'any door is the right door' and the common assessment and referral form.
- Individual programs and services have demonstrated good partnership working with service providers from other sectors and can highlight examples where this joint working has improved outcomes for shared clients.

### **Community engagement**

- The most significant activity to engage communities and to raise their awareness of homelessness was the "housing is a human rights' campaign, conducted by ACT Shelter. Although this was considered to be a success, it was not directly a result of the Strategy and has not been followed up to reinforce the message.

# Appendices

## A Appendices

The appendices includes:

- Stakeholders involved in consultations
- ACT Homelessness Committee members
- Consultation questions and semi structured interview formats

### A.1 Stakeholders consulted

Thanks go to the following stakeholders, were involved in informing the final evaluation through face-to-face and phone consultations.

Maureen Sheehan	Executive Director, Housing and Community Services
Kylie Beer	Manager, Social Housing and Homelessness Services
David Matthews	Director, Public Housing Reforms Implementation Team
Bridie Doyle	Assistant Manager Social Housing and Homelessness Services
Linda Trompf	Executive Director Policy Division, , ACT Health
Gerald Franks	Men's Pathways Representative and Executive Coordinator, Canberra Men's Centre
Shaun Kelly	Senior Project Manager, Housing and Community Services

### A.2 ACT Homelessness Committee

Ms Sandra Lambert (Chair)	Chief Executive	DHCS
Ms Ricki Bailey	Territory Manager	Dept Families, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs
Mr Kevin Bray	Executive Member	ACT Churches' Council
Ms Pauline Brown	Director	Housing ACT, DHCS

Ms Penny Farnsworth	Director	Social Policy and Implementation, CMD
Mr Gerald Franks	Executive Coordinator	Canberra Men's Centre
Ms Traci Harris	Indigenous Liaison Worker	Women's Legal Centre
Mr Martin Hehir	Deputy Chief Executive	DHCS
Ms Kim Hopper	Board Member	AFHO
Ms Meredith Hunter	Director	Youth Coalition of the ACT
Ms Fiona Macgregor	Manager	Student Services and Student Equity Dept of Education and Training
Ms Megan Mitchell	Executive Director	Office for Children, Youth and Family Support, DHCS
Mr Malcolm Parker (resigned April 2007)		COTA Seniors (ACT)
Mr Brett Phillips (resigned April 2007)	Deputy Chief Executive	Dept Justice and Community Safety
Mr Barry Petrovski	Executive Officer	Mental Health Community Coalition
Ms Elena Rosenman	Board member	ACT Shelter
Ms Anna Saxon-Taylor	Member	Women With Disability Australia (ACT)
Ms Maureen Sheehan	Executive Director	Housing and Community Services, DHCS
Ms Linda Trompf	Executive Director	Community Policy, ACT Health
Mr Maurice Walker	Chair	Chief Minister's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Advisory Committee
Ms Winsome Willow	Manager	Inanna Inc
Mr Paul Wyles	Director	Child and Adolescent Services, Office for Children, Youth and Family Support, DHCS

The evaluation was overseen by the Steering Committee, comprising:

Maureen Sheehan	Executive Director, Housing and Community Services
Kylie Beer	Manager, Social Housing and Homelessness Services
David Matthews	Director, Public Housing Reforms Implementation Team
Linda Trompf	Executive Director Policy Division, , ACT Health
Winsome Willow	Women's and Families Pathways Representative and, Manager, Inanna Inc
Meredith Hunter	Young People's Pathways Representative and Director, Youth Coalition of the ACT
Gerald Franks	Men's Pathways Representative and Executive Coordinator, Canberra Men's Centre
Neil Harwood	Director, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Services, Office for Children, Youth and Family Support
David James	Chief Minister's Department
Di Lucas	Consultant
Shaun Kelly	Senior Project Manager, Housing and Community Services
Robyn Martyn	Manager, Beryl Inc
Toni McGuinness	Client Service Coordinator, Domestic Violence Crisis Service

### **A.3 SAAP service client questions**

Over the past few years some changes have taken place at the service level in the SAAP and Housing sectors. An evaluation of the changes is currently being conducted and we would like to get your thoughts about your experiences of the SAAP services.

Date of entry into the service (this episode): \_\_\_\_\_

1. How easy was for you to access the SAAP service?
2. Please briefly describe how you accessed the service; e.g. who you called/visited, how long it took to get a response, what kind of support you got when you first made contact with the service?
3. From your experience, what are the three best things about the service?
4. From your experience, what are the three things you would improve and how?
5. Have you accessed SAAP services before? If so, how long ago? How does your experience with the SAAP service now differ to your experience from before? What has improved? What has got worse?