



# **ACT GOVERNMENT**

## **RESPONSE TO**

### ***ACCOMMODATION AND SUPPORT SERVICES FOR HOMELESS MEN AND THEIR CHILDREN***

## **REPORT NO.2**

## **OF THE**

## **STANDING COMMITTEE ON COMMUNITY SERVICES AND SOCIAL EQUITY**

**November 2002**

**Authorised by**

**Mr Bill Wood MLA**

**Minister for Disability, Housing and Community Services**

## INTRODUCTION

The ACT Government is acutely aware of the need to address homelessness and support issues in the Canberra community. Research and consultation over the past five years suggests that there are gaps in service provision which require a co-ordinated, whole of government approach to tackling the issues. The Report by the Standing Committee on Community Services and Social Equity makes an important contribution to these discussions.

In considering how best to address the complex issue of homelessness, the ACT Government commissioned the ACT Council of Social Service to prepare a *Needs Analysis of Homelessness in the ACT*, which was delivered to government in July 2002. The Government then convened a Community Consultation Forum in September 2002, to assess the Report of the Needs Analysis and gauge community reaction to it.

The participants in the Forum were broadly supportive of the Needs Analysis report, and recommended that the Government Response to the reports of both the Standing Committee and the Needs Analysis should be considered, and responded to, in tandem. With this in mind, the Department of Disability, Housing and Community Services will now be developing, in conjunction with the ACT Homelessness Advisory Group, an *ACT Homelessness Strategy*.

It is important to recognise that the Needs Analysis identified a range of groups which have claims to an enhanced level of service delivery, including homeless men and their children. The complexity of the needs, which have been identified will require a response that is comprehensive, considered and soundly developed.

The ACT Homelessness Strategy will ensure for the first time, that the ACT has an integrated and planned response to homelessness. The Strategy will ensure that an investment now will bring long-term community benefits. It will provide a basis for enhancing community-government partnering, as well as addressing issues broader than the basic provision of shelter to those in need.

This Government Response is therefore set against the background of ongoing work on the *ACT Homelessness Strategy*, which will involve extensive consultation with non-government and government agencies.

The Government Response agrees with three recommendations, agrees-in-principle with two recommendations and notes one recommendation.

The ACT Government would like to thank the Members of the Standing Committee for conducting the Inquiry into Accommodation and Support Services for Homeless Men and their Children, as well as those community organisations and individuals which contributed to the Committee's deliberations.

## **GOVERNMENT RESPONSE TO THE RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE STANDING COMMITTEE**

**Recommendation 1:** *The Government draw to the attention of the relevant Commonwealth authority the inadequacy of the current SAAP definition of homelessness with a view to including in the definition people 'sleeping rough'.*

### **GOVERNMENT RESPONSE: NOTED**

The SAAP definition of homelessness is prescribed within Section 4 (1) of the *Supported Accommodation Assistance Act 1994* and applied within the Memorandum of Understanding and the Bilateral Agreements between the Commonwealth and States and Territories.

The inclusion of people experiencing primary homelessness should be considered as implicit in the SAAP definition of homelessness – *A person who does not have access to safe, secure and adequate housing.*

The specific inclusion and articulation of the term 'sleeping rough' requires consideration of the negotiation of the next Memorandum of Understanding on SAAP between the Commonwealth and States and Territories, as well as amendment to Commonwealth legislation.

The terms of the current Bilateral Agreement between the States and Territories and the Commonwealth and the focus of programs operating under this Agreement are binding until 2005. Revision of the SAAP definition of homelessness would require national consultation and agreement between the Commonwealth, States and Territories, and the drafting of amendments to the MOU and Bilateral Agreements.

**Recommendation 2:** *The Government provide additional crisis accommodation services for single men over 25 years of age and families who are homeless or at risk of homeless.*

### **GOVERNMENT RESPONSE: AGREED IN PRINCIPLE**

The Government is monitoring the level of demand for crisis accommodation services for single men and families who are homeless or at risk of homelessness. The government will work closely with existing providers to

ensure they are resourced and positioned to provide high quality and appropriate service to their clients. This includes ensuring adequate training and conditions for support workers; appropriate service models, maintenance of service standards and meaningful accountability mechanisms in funding agreements.

The need for additional crisis and medium term accommodation services for homeless single men will be considered in the context of the government's priorities for future service provision in this area.

**Recommendation 3:**     ***The Government continue to monitor the need for additional accommodation and support services for homeless men and their children; and the appropriateness of the funding available.***

**GOVERNMENT RESPONSE:    **AGREED****

The Government currently allocates \$184,269 to the Canberra Fathers and Children Service (CANFaCS) auspiced by Marymead Child and Family Centre. CANFaCS provides an accommodation and support to homeless fathers and their accompanying children. The Government will continue to monitor the level of unmet demand for this service.

Funding of \$243,344 is allocated to St Vincent De Paul to provide longer term, support and accommodation to homeless families (including sole supporting fathers) through St Judes. Accommodation is provided for up to seven families in independent dwellings.

The YWCA receives \$327,261 to provide a Family Housing Outreach Service. This service is provides long term support accommodation to up to six families (including sole supporting fathers) in independent dwellings as well as some ongoing outreach support services.

**Recommendation 4:**     ***The Government examines ways to provide more appropriately designed crisis accommodation facilities for families who are homeless.***

**GOVERNMENT RESPONSE:    **AGREED****

The Government will undertake this examination as part of the process being used to develop the *ACT Homelessness Strategy*. This process will follow the successful forum to discuss the Needs Analysis of Homelessness, and be highly inclusive of community partners and clients.

**Recommendation 5:** *The Government implement as a matter of urgency the recommendations of the Needs Analysis of Homelessness in the ACT in relation to support for children.*

**GOVERNMENT RESPONSE: AGREED IN PRINCIPLE**

The Government acknowledges the important findings in the Needs Analysis in relation to children who are homeless or at risk of homelessness. The heightened vulnerability of this group of children is not underestimated.

The ACT Homelessness Advisory Group and the development of an ACT Homelessness Strategy provide important mechanisms to ensure all agencies and providers in the ACT work collaboratively to afford ACT children the care, protection and opportunities we expect for them. This will require significant cross agency effort and also be considered in the context of the development of the ACT Children's Plan.

Additional resources to build the capacity of the SAAP providers to respond to the needs of accompanying children will be considered in the context of the government's priorities for future service provision in this area.

**Recommendation 6:** *The Government provide ongoing funding for intervention programs for boys to prevent the perpetuation of domestic violence*

**GOVERNMENT RESPONSE: AGREED**

This recommendation appears to relate to the provision of intervention programs in supported accommodation services. A number of supported accommodation services currently, and will continue to, receive funding to provide such programs.

The additional risk factors associated with witnessing and/or experiencing domestic violence are well documented. The Needs Analysis report confirmed the occurrence of second generation homelessness in the ACT, the incidence of family violence in these circumstances is highlighted for action.

The Government will continue to ensure that front line providers are adequately informed and resourced to respond to the complex needs of these vulnerable children and young people.