

ACT Government Input into Green Paper Consultation on Homelessness

Introduction and Overview

The ACT Government welcomes the Australian Government's commitment to addressing homelessness and the development of a new approach to tackling this complex and widespread social issue.

The Australian Government has stated that the new approach to homelessness will aim to:

- Prevent homelessness;
- Improve crisis services;
- Create exit points to secure long term housing; and
- Stop the cycle of homelessness.

The ACT supports these objectives for the new approach to homelessness as they are consistent with the strategic directions of *Breaking the Cycle – the ACT Homelessness Strategy*, the ACT Government's policy commitment to improving responses to homelessness. Launched in April 2004, *Breaking the Cycle* was developed in response to the findings of the SAAP IV evaluation to provide a blueprint for ACT sector reform consistent with the subsequent SAAP V Strategic Priorities and national reform agenda.

Implementation of the ACT Homelessness Strategy, finalised in July 2007, has enabled the ACT to identify and address its specific jurisdictional issues and at the same time make significant progress in realising the national reform agenda articulated in SAAP V.

However, more work is required at both an ACT and national level.

Homelessness occurs when complex interpersonal and social issues intersect with broad systemic failure of the service system. Underlying socio-economic factors, such as violence, poverty and disadvantage, also underpin the causal and consequential factors of homelessness.

SAAP was conceived as, and continues to function as the last resort safety net for people experiencing, or at risk of homelessness, with considerable divergence nationally about its performance in addressing homelessness. It is critical that such a 'safety net' response remains in some form or another, however this should be accompanied by recognition that this crisis response always occurs after the failure of the broader service system in preventing or responding to homelessness and that overwhelmingly the crisis intervention is provided to people who are already experiencing homelessness.

Over-emphasis on the uneven performance of SAAP as the national response to homelessness misses the opportunity to recognise that the SAAP data collection provides a valuable mechanism to enumerate and measure the broad failure of mainstream services in addressing homelessness. The SAAP NDC provides a limited measurement of the extent of homelessness, capturing only those people accessing SAAP services.

Regardless of the outcomes of the Green and White Paper processes, it is critical that the future homelessness data collections draw from the data sets of multiple agencies. This will enable progress toward a data set which measures the extent of homelessness beyond those people who access SAAP. It will also provide critical information on the extent to which mainstream agencies are already supporting people at risk of, or experiencing homelessness, and therefore quantify the spectrum and successes of mainstream services' prevention and early intervention. Over time, this approach will begin to map the service usage and pathways of those homeless people who do not access SAAP. It will also build a sound evidence base to inform future development of performance and accountability measures that reflect a continuum of support responses which address homelessness.

The development of a new national approach to homelessness should focus on resolving the structural and personal issues which cause homelessness, on both an individual and systemic level. Any new national approach to homelessness should, therefore, build on the strengths and achievements of the various iterations of SAAP and continue progress toward realising the SAAP V strategic priority to increase and improve multi-agency responses to homelessness.

On an individual client basis, this should translate into the provision of tailored, client-directed support in which specialist and mainstream services become tools that assist people to rebuild and redress social and systemic breakdowns. Support should enable people and provide them with opportunities to meet their aspirations, including access to housing and, more importantly, positive economic and social participation.

The ACT Government acknowledges and supports the broad direction for the development of the new National Affordable Housing Agreement (NAHA) and its bringing together of homelessness, social housing and affordable housing under the one Agreement. This approach generates significant possibilities in establishing a continuum of service from homelessness to housing and is consistent with and recognises the ACT Government's commitment to expanding the supply of affordable housing, under its *Affordable Housing Action Plan*, which will create additional exit points for people transitioning from homelessness.

This submission draws on the experience of the ACT Government in achieving comprehensive homelessness reform and the implementation of the ACT Homelessness Strategy.

Section One provides an overview of ACT SAAP reform undertaken under the ACT Homelessness Strategy and findings from ACT research on children's experience of homelessness. Section Two provides an appraisal of each of the three options presented in the Green Paper. Section Three discusses future directions, with particular emphasis on improving data collection within SAAP and across multiple agencies. Section Four proposes accountability mechanisms and performance indicators for consideration in the new national approach to homelessness.

The ACT is pleased to provide this submission in response to the Homelessness Green Paper and for the opportunity contribute to the future direction of homelessness service provision.

Section 1) ACT Innovations and Sector Reform

Underpinning Breaking the Cycle was additional ACT Government funding aimed specifically at addressing gaps in the existing service system and responding to priority target groups. This funding established additional services for families, including fathers with children and couples without children, single men and targeted outreach services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders, young people, single men and fathers with children and women. The addition of these services increased the overall capacity of the ACT sector by 30% and resolved some key issues about the overall quality of the ACT's homelessness response.

For example, prior to the establishment of the service for couples without children, men and women regularly had to separate in order to gain access to specific services for single men and single women. Likewise, homeless families were splitting up to access support, with men going into the ACT's only single men's refuge while women and children primarily accessed Domestic Violence services.

These examples clearly demonstrate a homelessness sector in which service model rigidity governed the responses available, often to the detriment of individual and family outcomes. It also demonstrated that homelessness agencies were operating as individual and discreet agencies, as opposed to a service system which provided continuum of support and worked to meet the needs of people experiencing homelessness.

The new services established under the ACT Homelessness Strategy represent a suite of innovative and contemporary service models. The services moved away from congregate living responses, accommodated individuals and families within their own dwelling and offered tailored, flexible outreach support based on need which steps down over time as client needs are resolved. When appropriate, tenancy of the property is transferred to the client and ongoing support is provided as required.

The Australian Government's *A Place to Call Home* adopts the same model. The ACT's successful roll out of this approach means that the ACT is well positioned for early implementation through the enhancement of the existing services.

The success of these new services was twofold.

Firstly, the services demonstrated that crisis support could successfully be provided in a different way to the traditional refuge model and still achieve positive outcomes, especially for children. Clients develop and maintain links with family and community.

Secondly, the accomplishment of these services successfully challenged the traditional SAAP nexus that the type of accommodation available determined the type of support provided and that transition through the homelessness system required a series of moves through a series of discreet and separate crisis, medium and then longer term services.

These strategic successes formed the basis for ongoing service and sector development work undertaken as part of the implementation of the ACT Homelessness Strategy. This work, undertaken in partnership with SAAP funded community agencies, sought to consolidate the movement of SAAP from being a model based service approach, to a client focussed and responsive approach working as a system in which the availability of accommodation no longer determined the availability and nature of support available.

Considerable administrative efficiencies and increased coordination were also gained through the amalgamation of a number of crisis and medium term services. The ACT had a number of stand-alone medium term services which operated as individual agencies. Many of these services were provided by the same agencies which also provided crisis services. The ACT Government amalgamated these services, revising the service models accordingly. Services were able to provide a mix of crisis and longer term accommodation and support services which did not require clients to exit one accommodation service and enter into another as their support requirements diminished.

The outcome of these reforms has been the creation of multi-faceted service system, based on the support requirements of individuals and families, with the flexibility to respond to people from crisis through to post SAAP support. Concurrent ACT Government reforms to Housing ACT, discussed further in Section 2, established a service continuum from homelessness to housing services, with improved public housing allocation and assessment processes, contributing to better SAAP through-put, making more crisis places available for people requiring intensive support. Transitional support from SAAP has been focused on assisting people to maintain tenancies as they enter public housing.

Children and Intergenerational Homelessness

The ACT supports the Green Paper's focus on children and responding to intergenerational homelessness. Anecdotal evidence from ACT service providers indicates that they are now supporting clients who have reached third-generation homeless.

The increase in intergenerational homelessness highlights some of the limitations of the SAAP policy framework and its overall success in assisting individuals and families to resolve their immediate crisis and, more importantly, overcome the broader structural and systemic issues which also contribute to homelessness. Despite the efforts of various iterations of SAAP, homelessness continues to be experienced as a cyclical process marked by reoccurring homeless crises, followed by a period in supported accommodation services and subsequent transition to long term housing, often without the necessary skills or ongoing supports needed to sustain independent living.

The cyclical nature of homelessness support – in its current form - does not assist people to achieve successful resolution of the causal factors which contribute to their homelessness, such as addiction or domestic violence. It also places real limitations on their ability to improve their economic and social participation and effectively break the cycle of homelessness without the ongoing and effective intervention of mainstream support agencies.

The implication of these failings of the current homelessness response are complex and not immediately apparent because service provision is structured around episodic contacts geared toward addressing only the most immediate presenting issues around homelessness. Whilst SAAP has attempted to identify children as clients within their own right, these efforts have achieved mixed results in better identifying and responding to issues facing children. It has also struggled to embrace the fact that families present with diverse and often conflicting needs and issues arising from homelessness and that a mixture of individual and family support is necessary.

Continued failure to adequately recognise and measure the range and types of support provided to children within the SAAP National Data Collection Agency weakened the imperative to achieve better immediate results and longer term outcomes for children in SAAP. It has also maintained a cloak of invisibility around the longer term impacts of homelessness on children because it does not enable measurement of intergenerational homelessness.

The ACT has made some achievements in recognising and responding to children in their own right. All services for families in the ACT are required to employ a designated children's worker to provide case management and other supports to assist children with the immediate and future issues associated with their homelessness.

The ACT Government also commissioned research by the Institute of Child Protection Studies (Australian Catholic University) to undertake qualitative research with children and young people who had experienced homelessness. The research project aimed to inform policy and practice across the ACT service system. A copy of the report, *Finding their way home: Children's Experience of Homelessness* is at [Attachment 1](#) to the ACT's submission to the Green Paper.

The children involved in the research felt that homelessness was more determined by their connection to family and community and their absence of fear, insecurity and instability, rather than their housing status. Many felt that, even though they had experienced homelessness as traditionally defined, they had not been homeless because they had had families who had looked after them and kept them safe regardless of their housing status. Conversely, often when housed (either in homelessness services, temporary accommodation or longer term housing options), children felt that they had been 'homeless' because they had felt unsafe, insecure and not in control of their environments. This was further heightened when there was instability and a lack of permanence in their housing environment.

The research found that children who had experienced homelessness often experience problems with their health, education and making and forming friendships and that some of the 'pathways' into homelessness, such as parental drug and alcohol misuse and domestic violence, present further risks for children as they experience homelessness. Overwhelmingly, children involved in the research identified that homelessness services were unsafe places, feelings heightened by not having enough space, having to share accommodation with strangers in crisis and having no control over who the family shares with. These feelings impacted negatively on children's health and schooling and many children experienced social isolation because they were not able to, or were reluctant, to have friends visit refuge accommodation.

The report highlights a number of key issues of relevance to the service system. Where some children were able to talk positively about the workers and support they received while they were homeless, others were critical of worker's engagement with them and their issues. Having people there to listen was seen as being essential for children experiencing homelessness and yet most children could not identify adults who filled this role for them. Instead, children often felt alone - particularly when they thought that they couldn't or shouldn't talk to their parents (or other adults) about their fears and concerns because of their desire not to overburden their parents or for fear of Care and Protection involvement.

Children identified that all workers in homelessness services should receive training and support to become accessible and responsive to their needs. They felt this was important so that children would always have someone available and so that they had some choice about who they worked with and how this would occur.

Worker continuity was identified as an important aspect of supporting children, as the feelings of grief and loss associated with homelessness (leaving pets, other family members, schools, friends and possessions behind were all identified as being 'the worst parts of being homeless') are compounded for children when a trusted worker moves on. Schools were identified as critical points of stability and security for children to remain in contact with friends, community and to 'feel normal', however some remembered experiences of feeling 'exposed' and not supported. Moving school often results in disruption and dislocation for children experiencing homelessness (11 children had moved schools more than three times), however it was of note that the majority of children in the survey had moved schools less often than they had moved homes.

The report also highlights negative experiences of family separation which resulted from the policies of some homelessness services and the broader service system. One mother recounted her distress at not being allowed to have her son stay with her at a women's refuge, for example, while one 12 year old young man recounted having to sleep in the car park of the rehabilitation service his mother was accessing.

While the report presents invaluable information and critical findings about the experiences of children who have been homeless and the services they receive, it also overwhelmingly confirms the individual resilience of the children involved and their families. Children talked about the 'tough' parts of being homeless, but they also identified the strength and resilience of their families as a source of comfort, stability and support. Many of the children identified that they felt that their experiences of homelessness had made them more confident to handle future crisis.

The project's participants (including parents and workers) confirmed that intergenerational homelessness was present within the ACT, with five young people and one parent confirming that they had experienced homelessness as children and then again as adults with their own accompanying children.

The ACT Government is implementing a range of responses to the findings of this research, including the development of a toolkit for service delivery staff across multiple agencies to develop skills and consistency in engaging and supporting children and young people experiencing homelessness. This toolkit will be based on practices adopted by the research team in engaging children in the project.

A further outcome arising from this research project has been the recognitions that ACT's Children's workers required a framework to guide their work with children and their families.

The ACT Government has subsequently commissioned a Needs Analysis of Children and young people living in public housing to ensure that public housing provided to the family appropriately meets the needs and circumstances of the children.

The study will assess the needs of more than 6000 children and young people currently living in ACT public housing properties will be undertaken throughout 2008-09.

The Needs Analysis will inform future policy and service development and, in particular, will provide direction on ways in which allocation and assessment practices, for example, can be improved so that they better identify and respond to the needs of all family members, not just adult tenants.

The three models put forward in the Green Paper have been intended to generate discussion and act as possible starting points for the development of possible future directions for homelessness nationally.

A number of strategic themes underpin the Green Paper:

- Accommodation and support is required to address homelessness but not necessarily in a Supported Accommodation model;
- Support is the key component in addressing long term individual and social issues and will be given primacy in the new approach;
- Success should be measured against social inclusion outcomes which require responsibility, measurement and accountability to be shared across multiple agencies and over time; and
- Mainstream and specialist service responses across portfolios to form a support continuum which also achieves systemic change.

The ACT Government recommends that the development of a new national approach to homelessness which embrace these policy and program challenges.

OPTION 1 – Transform SAAP to build a national homelessness response focused on distinct stream

Homelessness services in the ACT have always had a strong affiliation and sector identity with SAAP. This has been further strengthened through its recent work with Government to develop a homelessness service system.

Within this system, there are sub-sectors grouped according to target groups:

- Young people;
- Families;
- Men; and
- Women, including domestic violence and sexual assault crisis responses.

This structure recognises the need for, and provision of, specialist responses for across homelessness target groups and the service pathways of people experiencing homelessness. Each stream in the ACT has undertaken a sector development process (Pathways) which has improved service coordination and via the development of agreed operational principles and practices and the development of an ‘any door is the right door’ approach. This has minimised points of contact for clients accessing the homelessness crisis system. From the first point of contact with SAAP, clients are supported to identify and access the service which best meets their needs and is able to provide them support.

ACT Pathways groups have identified the next step in improving the service system is the inclusion of mainstream agencies in the pathways process – an opening of more doors into the system. However, this sector driven response to improved service collaboration between SAAP and other systems is slow and relies on the participation of mainstream agency involvement.

Without major policy and performance drivers for participation in a broad reform process, this participation is difficult to lever.

A key benefit of Option 1 is that it creates an easily identifiable platform for mainstream agencies to adopt a homelessness response. Allocating program and policy responsibilities to mainstream agencies will drive them to quantify and articulate their role in early intervention and prevention of homelessness. Cross-agency requirements to work towards a national policy and program objective may also engender broader social change which major social change which reduces the incidence of homelessness into the future.

This option also potentially allows for greater career/sector development for homelessness specific support workers and break down misunderstandings that currently occur around responsibilities. By collocating facilities within the identified streams, homelessness support workers and mainstream providers are more likely to achieve common goals and strategies, develop clear understandings of each others responsibilities and work practices and create possibilities for career changes within the streams.

OPTION 2 – Improve the Current SAAP response

SAAP was established as and continues to provide the service response of last resort for people in homelessness crisis and in reality this options maintains the status quo.

Any improvements proposed under this model should be recognised as necessary improvements to the effectiveness of the safety net response but will not achieve lasting changes for people experiencing homelessness or achieve national results and systemic change.

It is important to recognise that SAAP has had considerable success in working with people within a case management framework. However, the increasing complexity of clients presenting in SAAP has challenged the capacity of the system to respond.

The ACT Government has worked with the homelessness sector to deliver considerable reform to its response in line with the national reform agenda and the ACT Homelessness Strategy. No additional major reforms of the ACT homelessness system is considered necessary.

The ACT Government recognises the need for additional work in achieving better cross-agency responses to homelessness as critical to development of more effective and longer term outcomes.

The ACT Homelessness Strategy sought to strengthen relationships with mainstream service providers and encourage multi-agency responses to homelessness, including the development of protocols between SAAP and Care and Protection and SAAP and Mental Health Services. The development and negotiation of these protocols between agencies in a jurisdiction the size of the ACT was protracted and time consuming for all parties and will deliver only minor operational improvements.

Option 2 will not provide the impetus necessary to lever further change within the ACT and it will not progress or resolve national systemic issues.

It also does not significantly address some of the issues that have been identified both in the SAAP IV evaluation and in the Green Paper itself.

OPTION 3 – Improve the mainstream response to homelessness and restrict SAAP to responding to crisis interventions

A crisis accommodation response is still required under the new approach to homelessness, but it is critical that it not be isolated from the provision of intensive and specialist support services that are best equipped to address complex needs.

A service continuum is required and the ACT has sought to break the nexus between support and accommodation, or change the support provided being tied to a 'model' of delivery rather than being responsive to the needs of clients. This allows for the involvement of a range of mainstream services (rather than the client being 'owned' by a SAAP service), and allows the continuation of already established relationships with non-SAAP support providers to continue, both within SAAP and in the transition from SAAP to independence. Early findings from a research project currently being undertaken by AHURI, strongly indicates that successful outcomes are achieved through the maintenance of stable and reliable support relationships over time.

As part of these reforms, and consistent with the strategic directions of the SAAP multi-lateral agreement, the ACT has moved to understand the need for service provision to occur across a continuum, that must include appropriate post crisis supports, that address peoples needs and aspirations beyond the point of crisis.

While this reform has been successful within the SAAP sector itself, the experiences of the ACT Homelessness Committee reveals some of the difficulties in encouraging ongoing commitment by mainstream services. To be successful, there would need to be clear drivers for their involvement across and within mainstream services.

Improving mainstream service responses also allows for the development of a more comprehensive picture of homelessness. We know that 70% of people who experience homelessness do not access a SAAP service. There is no doubt that many of these people are receiving support from a range of mainstream services. At present this is not considered in the discussion of the 'problem of homelessness' and this not only renders us with an incomplete picture of homelessness, it also potentially hides some innovative and effective early intervention and prevention strategies.

Expanding the responsibility for addressing homelessness to mainstream services also provides some leverage for the implementation of joint accountability measures across both SAAP and mainstream services and joint data collection

The ACT Government acknowledges that the inclusion of homelessness within the broader policy and program framework of the National Affordable Housing Agreement (NAHA) and that this provides considerable opportunity for service and sector reform nationally.

The ACT Government's co-location of housing and homelessness services under the administrative structure of Housing and Community Services has enabled the development of a continuum from homelessness to housing. This has resulted in an increased recognition that public housing has a role in identifying and supporting people who are vulnerable and at risk of homelessness. Accordingly, Housing ACT has implemented additional measures to ensure that it remains as the post-crisis response for people who require housing assistance and that appropriate community-based support services are available to assist public housing tenants to achieve and maintain sustainable housing outcomes.

An example of this is a pre-allocation case conferencing mechanism, which identifies the needs of the applicant, agencies who are providing support and assists in making appropriate allocations. Mental health and mainstream support agencies are regularly involved in case conferences.

These new measures compliment the role and function of Housing ACT's three Client Support Coordinators (CSC). The role of the CSC is to identify and assist tenants to access appropriate supports. The CSC also provides a mentoring and coaching role to Housing Managers to improve their skills in identifying and responding to the range of client issues, including the early identification of debt, disruptive behaviour and other issues such as mental health crisis which can result in risk to tenancies.

Other mainstream responses to supporting people who are at risk of homelessness include services which adopt a community development approach to sustainable tenancies, supporting people who are at risk of eviction for rental arrears and or disruptive or anti-social behaviours. Mediation and resolution services can also assist in this matter. The ACT Government also provides a range of financial support and emergency relief services which can assist tenants

to manage their finances, particularly when they are at risk of eviction, and which can alleviate the impact and burden of poverty.

The need to link data sets across the Special Purpose Payment's (SPP) is important to the development of a national picture of homelessness and its causes. The ACT Government recognises the NAHA as a significant step towards this goal. It also supports development of a NAHA performance indicator framework which recognises provision of long term sustained public and social housing as a post-homelessness outcome. This was not possible under the previous funding and reporting structures.

The ACT currently measures indicators including the provision of housing to those most in need, length of tenancy, period of time on Centrelink before earning income after being housed which can be drawn together to form a more complete picture of housing outcomes beyond the SAAP data collection.

Section 3) Data and Information Management

While the SAAP national data collection provides useful indicators of homelessness, it is in reality a collection which measures the failings and limits of the homelessness response.

Improvements in data collection must underpin the new approach to homelessness. The existing SAAP data collection must be improved and a range of new data is necessary to enumerate homelessness and understand the full extent of its impact across the service system.

Delivery of a truly outcomes based reporting framework, which realises the Green Paper's vision for system of homelessness and mainstream support which is continued, client focused and outcomes based, not model and service reliant, requires rethinking the need for integrated data collection across systems. Statistical linkages will be critical to firstly enumerating and identifying the full extent of homelessness services but also to measuring people's life outcomes, rather than episodic periods of support.

The ACT Government will continue to work towards reducing primary homelessness to as close to zero as possible by 2013, under the *Canberra Plan*. Consideration will be given to establishing a biennial census of homelessness to supplement the *Counting the Homeless* report and assist in identifying progress against this target.

Data and information sharing improvements on a service delivery and agency level is also critical to the new approach. The legislative frameworks around privacy and information sharing are complex and difficult to negotiate and often act as a barrier to effective service collaboration which must be addressed.

The ACT Government supports the development of a national information management plan, addressing data collection and reporting frameworks and issues around information sharing as a key requirement for the new approach.

Section 4) Cross-Agency targets and performance indicators

For an effective national multi-agency response to be fully achieved, the onus of sector collaboration and integration needs to be shared beyond SAAP. All relevant services and service systems, including Primary Health, Acute Care and Mental Health, Justice, Education and Training and Centrelink need to be charged with achieving specific targets toward service integration and responding to homelessness for a truly national approach to homelessness to be realised.

It is an opportune time to consider the development of future responses to homelessness, given the concurrent work being progressed through the COAG reform of SPP's.

One way of achieving the real participation of other sectors in the national response to homelessness is to codify the role and involvement of sectors such as Centrelink, Health, Education, Disability via the inclusion of specific performance indicators and homelessness targets within each of the SPP's.

This approach has been adopted by the COAG working groups in recognition of the systemic and complex structural disadvantages facing the Indigenous population and the need for complex and multi-agency responses to achieve long term changes to the lives of individuals, families and communities. The homeless population also experience the impacts of systemic breakdowns and also require a similar cross-agency response to effectively break cycles of homelessness poverty and disadvantage.

The inclusion approach will deliver the necessary national leadership to deliver a systemic and social change in homelessness service provision and develop a shared responsibility and accountability across Australian, State and Territory Governments and portfolios. Further, such a mechanism also opens possibilities for performance indicators of the new approach to homelessness to be drawn from other key agencies and sectors, such as health and mental health.

It is important, however that any mechanisms established to realise Social Inclusion should retain a strong focus on ensuring that service provision works to achieve real outcomes. Within this context it may be feasible once a Social Inclusion Board, is established, to set a series of consistent performance objectives around homelessness for inclusion in SPP arrangements. Such a model would achieve a balance between systemic and social change on a strategic level underpinned by service deliverables and social outcomes.

Appendix 1

Breaking the Cycle – Key Achievements

The evaluative work undertaken on *Breaking the Cycle – the ACT Homelessness Strategy* highlights a number of key achievements of the ACT's Homelessness Strategy, including:

Service Capacity

- 1). Increased capacity, through the establishment of new services and enhancement of existing services, for single men, men with children and families. There was also an increase in the number and range of accommodation placements through the construction of a new boarding house for older women and the transition of a large supported accommodation site to a community-housing model;
- 2). The Indigenous Supported Accommodation Service (ISAS) was launched to offer crisis and transitional supported accommodation to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families who are homeless or at risk of homelessness. The Indigenous Boarding House Network was established to respond to demand for Indigenous longer term accommodation, especially for people accessing Canberra for medical and other services. The Boarding House Network offers flexible responses able to cater for diverse target groups and has the capacity to offer crisis accommodation in the event of changes in demand;
- 3). Establishment of outreach services to provide more flexible support options to people at risk of homelessness and at various stages of the homelessness continuum;
- 4). The Canberra Emergency Accommodation Service (CEAS) was launched to provide brokerage and an improved entry point into crisis accommodation;
- 5). Establishment of the Couch Surfing and the Exiting Detention Pilot Projects for young people, made possible through the introduction of the SAAP V Innovation and Investment Funds, to provide a greater range of response options to young people. Note the ACT's 3rd SAAP Innovation & Investment fund (I&I) project, Outreach Support to Young People Transitioning to Independence, was approved by the Australian Government in May 2008. The project will have a strong focus on establishing linkages for young with education and employment opportunities
- 6). Recent developments St Vincent de Paul has commenced a 15-month pilot "Young Parents Accommodation Project". The program targets young parents (25 and under) and provides a safe and secure environment for them to learn the necessary skills in relation to maintaining a tenancy while also coming to terms with their parenting role.

7). The Domestic Violence (DV) Christmas Program was funded, providing short-term crisis support for women and children escaping domestic violence over the Christmas/New Year period. The initiative had an immediate impact on the homelessness service system by providing an additional 1114 bed nights during the 2005/06 Christmas period, 1188 bed nights over the 2006/07 Christmas period and 1112 over the 2007/08 Christmas period. The long-term benefits of the DV Christmas Program include the development of the Transitional Housing Program (THP);

8). The THP utilises Housing ACT properties that are available in the short term, to accommodate individuals and families leaving SAAP services, awaiting long-term housing. The THP provides more exit points from SAAP services, freeing up crisis accommodation for those who needed that level of support. The THP contributes the equivalent of an additional \$6 million of capital funding into homelessness service provision; and

9). The Kanangra Youth Stairwell that provides a stairwell of flats for supported transitional accommodation for young people.

Sector Development

1). Development of the ACT Homelessness Charter – A Statement of Rights for homeless people and a Service Guarantee for homelessness service providers;

2). Development of joint protocols between SAAP services and mental health to clarify roles and responsibilities;

3). Development of joint protocols between youth SAAP services and the Office for Children, Youth and Family Support;

4). Initiation of a move away from the old model of congregate living towards models of independent living which are better able to focus on the individual needs of the client; and

5). The development of the Youth Homelessness Action Plan (YHAP) to guide responses for young people experiencing homelessness.

Public Housing Reforms

1). Major reforms within Housing ACT that established a service system that is built around the needs of clients and provides community based support from the start of an application for assistance. Other reforms within Housing ACT improved the process for priority setting for housing assistance to focus on people with complex and high needs, and the establishment of a Multi-Disciplinary Panel (MDP), drawing on representatives from across government and community service sectors, to assist in the categorisation of Housing ACT applicants with high and complex needs;

- 2). Implementation of a revised Public Rental Housing Assistance Program and the Multi Disciplinary Panel had the effect of reducing waiting times from up to 12 months to under 60 days for priority housing thereby creating a flow through of clients from SAAP to public housing;
- 3). Housing ACT developed approaches to enable clients to sustain their tenancies through pre-allocation assistance, and case conferencing with multi-agency input;
- 4). Head leasing arrangements were introduced to support high risk and complex clients whose tenancies with Housing ACT were at significant risk;
- 5). An increase in SAAP clients accessing public housing after a period of SAAP; and
- 6). A significant increase in the proportion of SAAP clients who live in public/community housing after they received assistance from SAAP.