

# The Road Map

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A discussion paper on the way forward for ACT homelessness services and related services.

Prepared by:  
ACT Department of Disability, Housing  
and Community Services

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## Introduction

The Australian Government's White Paper – *The Road Home*, the National Affordable Housing Agreement and its associated National Partnership Agreements on Homelessness and Social Housing, and the unprecedented investment in social housing through the Nation Building and Jobs Plan, have established the framework to guide the Commonwealth, States and Territories in the delivery of services across the continuum from crisis and homelessness to safe secure, affordable housing.

On 10 June 2009 the Chief Executive of the Department of Disability Housing and Community Services held a roundtable meeting with the ACT social housing and homelessness sector. At this meeting, the Chief Executive presented an overview of the new policy environment and funding context and provided information on the ACT's targets and new initiatives under the National Partnership Agreements.

The purpose of this document is to provide information and seek community feedback on the changing policy context in the ACT and proposed direction of several of the new initiatives under the National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness. This is in recognition that responding to homelessness requires a partnership between government and community to embrace new ways of working to reform the service system.

## Feedback

Written feedback can be provided to Social Housing and Homelessness Services, Department of Disability, Housing and Community Services.

Via mail to:

Social Housing and Homelessness Services  
Department of Disability, Housing and Community Services  
Locked Bag 3000  
Belconnen ACT 2617

Via email to:

[zoe.berzins@act.gov.au](mailto:zoe.berzins@act.gov.au)

Opportunity will be made at key stakeholder meetings such as the Joint Pathways Group, the Homelessness Forum, the Joint Champions Group and through regular contact methods such as service visits to provide verbal feedback on the initiatives.

Timelines for feedback on the discussion paper chapters is as follows:

**Chapter 1 - The Road Map** - 19 February 2010

**Chapter 2 - Central Intake Service** - 24 December 2009

**Chapter 3 - Common Waiting List** – 24 December 2009

**Chapter 4 - Housing Support Services** - 22 January 2010

**Chapter 5 - Street to Home** - The tender for the service was advertised in November 2009

**Chapter 6 – Affordable Accommodation Options for Older Canberrans**- 24 December 2009

### ***Further Information regarding Chapter 6;***

A website has been set-up to provide ongoing information to the Canberra public on the planned developments for affordable accommodation options for Older Canberrans:

<http://www.dhcs.act.gov.au/supportivehousing>

We would welcome comments on Chapter 6 in writing or via telephone.

Phone calls can be made to 6205 3153.

Via mail to:

Affordable Accommodation Options for Older Canberrans Consultation  
Department of Disability, Housing and Community Services  
Locked Bag 3000  
Belconnen ACT 2616

Via email to:

[carmen.ryan@act.gov.au](mailto:carmen.ryan@act.gov.au).

The closing date for submissions is 24 December 2009.

# Chapter 1

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## The Road Map

### **Policy and Funding Context**

This paper outlines a road map to a new response to homelessness in the ACT. It builds on the strengths of our current efforts and embraces new directions and ideas. The Australian Government's Homelessness White Paper – *The Road Home* has established a national goal of halving homelessness by 2020. This paper will provide:

- information on the direction the Australian Government's paper *The Road Home* will take us in;
- an outline of the current homelessness service system in the ACT and what is provided through the system; and
- an outline of the particular challenges and proposed solutions for the ACT in achieving the goal of halving homelessness by 2020.

The ACT Government's policy on reducing homelessness is reflected in *The Canberra Social Plan* and the *ACT Affordable Housing Action Plan Phase II*. These documents outline strategies and targets on reducing homelessness in the ACT including a target of no rough sleepers by 2013.

### **National Context of Addressing Homelessness**

Through the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) at its meeting of 29 November 2008, the Australian Government and States and Territories agreed to the National Affordable Housing Agreement (NAHA) and two associated National Partnership Agreements (NPAs) relevant to the ACT, for Social Housing and Homelessness.

The NAHA is a special purpose payment which includes funding previously provided under the Commonwealth/State Housing Agreement (CSHA) and the Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP) into a single agreement, with funding to be determined at a per capita rate.

In line with the COAG decision to apply an unadjusted per capita funding ratio across all national special purpose payments, funding for the ACT under the NAHA declines from 2.2 percent of total funding in 2008-09 to 1.9 percent in 2011-12, an approximate funding loss of \$2.2 million. A further reduction to 1.6 percent is expected by 2015-2016. Under the SAAP V Agreement the ACT received 3.6 percent of national funding.

The NAHA and NPAs articulate a range of service delivery and policy reforms aimed at improving housing affordability and homelessness outcomes, and more broadly at addressing the issue of social inclusion, including responding to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander disadvantage. Under the Homelessness NPA, the ACT has identified local targets in consultation with the Australian Government.

The key targets are as follows (a complete list of the NPA targets and initiatives is at [Attachment A](#) to this chapter):

- By 2013, a decrease of 7 percent in the number of people who are homeless to fewer than 1268 people.
- By 2013, a decrease by one third in the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who are homeless to fewer than 83 people.
- By 2013, a decrease of 25 percent in the number of people who are sleeping rough to fewer than 62 people.

- By 2013, reduce by 25 percent the number of people experiencing three repeat periods of homelessness at an emergency service in 12 months to fewer than 75 people.

After the 2001 National Census, the ACT introduced new homelessness services and increased funding to existing services. Despite these measures the 2006 National Census showed a small but significant increase in the number of homeless people in ACT. It will take more than new programs and more funding to enable the ACT to meet the targets identified in the NPA, it will require the current service system to be redesigned and reformed.

### **Reform Priorities**

The ACT Government's reform priorities are informed by the NAHA and Homelessness NPA. They include a shift from a high proportion of accommodation support periods to increased periods of non accommodation support. In addition, there will be a significant shift to a 'housing first' approach with wrap around support to ensure that long term positive outcomes are achieved. A capacity for crisis accommodation will be retained to ensure the safety and immediate support needs of vulnerable Canberrans (such as women escaping domestic violence) are met.

Key reform directions:

- Streamlining access to services and housing, achieved through the implementation of a Central Access Point.
- Assertive engagement and persistent support for rough sleepers, hard to engage groups and vulnerable Canberrans.
- Sustaining tenancies to prevent repeat cycles of homelessness.
- Social Inclusion – building links to economic and social participation.

It will be imperative to establish and expand partnerships between specialist homeless services and mainstream service systems to integrate broader change into the lives of people affected by homelessness. The ACT, through the Joint Pathways Group, has been addressing this issue for some time now and is making some progress towards this goal.

The provision of stable housing will see broader social impacts for the community in general, including better health, education and employment outcomes for tenants. It will provide a stable base from which other agencies can focus assistance to their clients to resolve issues other than housing, leading to supported sustained tenancies.

The ACT is well positioned for reform with demonstrated capacity through *Breaking the Cycle – The ACT Homelessness Strategy for 2004-2008*, changes to public housing under the *Housing Assistance Act (2007)* and revised Public Housing Rental Assistance Program, and through the *ACT Government's Affordable Housing Action Plan Phase II*.

### **Financial Implications of the NAHA and NPAs**

A final decision has not been made about how the NAHA funding reduction will be managed, but the ACT has to deal with this reality. The reduction in NAHA funding could be applied to either the housing component, formerly CSHA or the

homelessness component, formerly SAAP, or a combination of both. If the reduction is applied solely to the homelessness component, there would be a \$3.3 million annual shortfall in available funding from 2013/14 (based on current expenditure indexed at 3 percent per year).

Whilst there is a reduction in NAHA funding there is a short term increase in funding through opportunities under the Nation Building and Jobs Plan Package (NBJP) and Homelessness and Social Housing NPAs. A total of \$93.5 million has been approved under the NBJP and \$6.4 million under the Social Housing NPA for the construction of new social housing dwellings. Further funding is available under the Homelessness NPA with \$10 million for the construction of new dwellings under A Place to Call Home and a further \$10.1 million for the other new initiatives outlined in the ACT's Implementation Plan.

The funding available under the NBJP and NPAs will make a significant positive impact in the availability of housing stock to support the homeless, but will not address the reduction in recurrent non tied funds for service delivery available under the NAHA in future years. We need to take this the opportunity to look at the whole system and introduce reforms to best utilise available resources.

### **Housing Continuum**

The ACT Government's co-location of housing and homelessness services under the administrative structure of the Department of Disability, Housing and Community Services (the department) has enabled the development of a continuum from homelessness to housing.

Social housing has an important role in identifying and supporting people who are vulnerable and at risk of homelessness, with improved allocation and assessment processes. It is acknowledged that in some situations tenants may require ongoing support to assist them to sustain their tenancies, ensuring that public housing is a long term housing option.

The service continuum plays a vital role in supporting people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness to get through the crises they experience and move on to stable, secure housing. Already the service system has moved away from congregate living accommodation to accommodating individuals and families within their own dwelling with tailored, flexible outreach support based on need, stepping down over time as client needs are resolved.

### **Homelessness in the ACT**

The report on the 2006 National Census, *Counting the Homeless 2006*, showed that the ACT had the equal lowest rate of homelessness in Australia at 42 per 10,000 people or 1,364. This figure increased from the 40 per 10,000 recorded in the 2001 Census.

Rough sleepers comprised 6 percent (82) of homeless people in the ACT, compared to 16 percent nationally. A greater proportion of the ACT homeless population stayed with friends and relatives than nationally.

76 percent of the ACT's homeless were aged 34 or younger (58 percent nationally), including 22 percent who were children under 12 years (12 percent nationally) and 22 percent aged 12 – 18. Women comprised 53 percent of the homeless population in the ACT, compared with 44 percent nationally.

Although Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people were 1.25 percent of the ACT population in the 2006 Census, they comprised 19.7 percent of people staying in homeless accommodation and 3.8 percent of rough sleepers.

The *Counting the Homeless 2006* report showed that services funded under SAAP provided accommodation for 39 percent (531) of homeless people in the ACT on Census night compared with 19 percent nationally.

According to the National Data Collection Annual Report 2007-08, the number of support periods reported in 2007-08 in the ACT was 2900, up 300 from the 2600 reported in 2006-07. The number of clients in 2007-08 was 2000 compared to 1900 in 2006-07. In total 97.6 percent of people seeking accommodation were accommodated. Turn-away as a proportion of total demand for SAAP accommodation was 2.4 percent, below the national turn away rate of 2.6 percent.

Whilst the data shows that the ACT is generally providing overall higher quality services and producing better client outcomes, the ACT's average costs are significantly higher. The average funding provided per agency was \$335,300 in the ACT in 2007-08; which is much higher than the national average of \$245,800. The average cost of supporting an individual client in the ACT in 2007-08 was \$42 compared to the national average of \$31 per day (source: Australian Institute of Health and Welfare National Data Collection Annual Report 2007-08).

### **Current Funded Services**

The current mix of homelessness services in the ACT include: 13 congregate accommodation refuges; 14 services where clients live in individual dwellings; 19 support services and one sector capacity building service. In 2008-09 a total of \$20.3 million was provided by the Australian and ACT Governments to fund homelessness programs in the ACT. This amount included almost \$2.7 million in additional funding provided by the ACT Government over and above the matching requirements under national funding agreements, an additional amount exceeded only by Victoria.

Since early 2008, the ACT has had the capacity to provide 319 supported accommodation places per night to young people, singles and families which equated to an average of 486 individuals accommodated concurrently. Inclusive of young people, 167 accommodation places are dedicated to single people, and 152 accommodation options for families. There is also emergency accommodation funding available to women and children escaping domestic violence.

Specialist services support people experiencing a range of crises or difficulties in their lives. These include services accommodating women escaping domestic violence, young women with newborn babies and people from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and culturally diverse backgrounds.

These services are delivered through the provision of over 200 properties from the Housing ACT portfolio.

### **Conceptualising a New Service System**

Reducing homelessness will require a whole of community effort underpinned by a revitalised service system response. To continue to do things the same way will not achieve the outcomes that have been set under this national agenda. There is a need for the ACT Government in consultation with the homelessness sector and other mainstream agencies to design a system that will best achieve the NAHA outcomes within the parameters of the funding resources that will be available.

The initiatives of the Homelessness NPA go part way towards addressing the reforms needed to change service delivery and meet the key reform priorities, improve housing and homelessness outcomes, and address the need for appropriate support to vulnerable Canberrans. These initiatives are not the total solution.

The system needs to move beyond 'houselessness' and focus efforts more broadly including fundamental skills development (literacy and numeracy) as a way towards improvements in employment and education outcomes, greater connections with the community and increased social inclusion.

The new system needs to actively address current homelessness and prevent future homelessness by establishing and sustaining long term housing for all those who need it as well as addressing the broader issues around education and employment that contribute to people staying in the homeless cycle.

There needs to be a move away from public housing being seen as the only sustainable option for long term housing, with the growth of community and affordable housing and increased support to access and retain private rental and home ownership.

#### *Social Inclusion*

Social inclusion requires a new approach to developing and implementing policy and programs, requiring strong partnerships between all levels of government, business and community organisations to address economic and social disadvantage in Australia. Social inclusion is more than a sense of belonging; it is about meaningful participation in the wider community and economy. This is not separate to the efforts to reduce homelessness, but central to it is economic participation and educational achievements being acknowledged as being a contributing factor to breaking the cycle of homelessness.

#### *Trauma and Mental Illness*

Another key focus is addressing the trauma and mental illness encountered by many people experiencing homelessness. Australian and international research reveals a high rate of trauma and a high prevalence of mental illness in the homeless population. In the first Australian study on post traumatic stress disorder among homeless adults (N=70) Taylor and Sharpe (2008) found 98 percent had experienced at least one trauma in their lifetime. The twelve-month prevalence of post traumatic stress disorder was considerably high compared to the general population, 41 percent versus 1.5 percent (National Homelessness Summit, September 2009, program). It will be imperative for mental health and other mainstream services to work closely with the homelessness sector to improve outcomes.

### *Domestic Violence*

Because women and children escaping domestic violence is the largest group of people seeking support from homeless services it will be important to maintain part of the system to meet the immediate needs of this group. While this group will not be impeded in moving forward in their life, the service system requires capacity to temporarily house women and children to provide immediate safety and allow time and space for further decision making around which direction they will move in.

### *Older Persons*

Older persons have particular needs in housing which include security, social connection and the ability to maintain independence through provision of both physical and social structures. Appropriate housing is a critical part of achieving healthy aging.

### **The Way Forward**

The foundations of success rely strongly on collaborative partnerships of all parties involved to realise the reforms articulated within this paper, given the parameters of set targets and the reduced funding. It will be imperative to communicate a shared understanding, develop clear processes and commit to change for this to be achieved.

Though there will be challenges to be met in achieving the targets the ACT, inclusive of government, community partners and mainstream services, have already demonstrated a willingness to work together to achieve goals of reform around the homelessness agenda in the ACT. The ACT is well placed to meet this challenge.

## Chapter 1 - Attachment A

ACT targets under the Homelessness NPA. By 2013:

- decrease of 7 percent in the number of people who are homeless to fewer than 1268 people;
- decrease by one third the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who are homeless to fewer than 83 people;
- decrease of 25 percent in the number of people who are sleeping rough to fewer than 62 people;
- increase by 10 percent the number of non-accommodation support periods for women and women with children;
- number of times the *Residential Tenancies Act 1997* Substitution Clause is used;
- reduce by 25 percent the number of people released from such institutions into homelessness to fewer than 98 people;
- reduce by 25 percent the number of people exiting social housing and private rental into homelessness to fewer than 260 people;
- reduce by 25 percent the number of people experiencing three repeat periods of homelessness at an emergency service in 12 months to fewer than 75 people;
- number of young people (12 to 18 years) who are homeless or at risk of homelessness who are re-engaged with family, school and work;
- reduce by 10 percentage points the number of young people (12 to 18 years) who are homeless or at risk of homelessness who are not a student after support.

The NPA on Homelessness has an agreed focus of state and territory effort on four core outputs of:

- A Place to Call Home initiative;
- Street to home for chronic homeless people;
- Support for private and public tenants to help sustain their tenancies; and
- Assistance for people leaving child protection services, correctional and health facilities.

New Initiatives under the NPA on Homelessness:

- **A Place to Call Home** A housing first model of accommodation and support.
- **Street to Home** program will provide services to people where they are, including health and support services.
- **Support for public housing tenants.** This will be a targeted program to assist vulnerable break cycles of homelessness.
- **Expanded Transitional Housing Program** To create more exits from supported accommodation.
- **Managed supported accommodation for people exiting the Alexander Maconochie Centre:** The program will provide a head tenancy and support program for people leaving custodial environments, focussing on the new ACT prison.
- **Housing and Accommodation Support Initiative (HASI):** Support for people with mental health issues and disorders requiring accommodation support.
- **The Foyer Model:** For young people aged 16 to 25 to achieve stable housing and subsequent engagement with education and employment services and improved life outcomes.

- **A Central Intake Service for Homelessness:** To be incorporated into a centralised access point for housing and homelessness that will include a common waiting list for public and community housing.
- **Supporting Victims of Domestic Violence:** To establish a program to enable victims of domestic violence to retain their housing by removing the perpetrator from the lease where a final Domestic Violence Order is in place.

# Chapter 2

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## Central Intake Service

## **Purpose**

The purpose of this chapter is to provide a proposed model and issues for consultation for the implementation of a Central Intake Service (CIS) for Homelessness. The chapter will also outline timeframes for the implementation of the project.

## **Project Aim**

The CIS for homelessness services will be implemented as part of the Central Access Point 'one stop shop'. This project will achieve centralised access for homelessness, housing and other mainstream services. The Central Access Point has three components:

1. CIS for homelessness;
2. common waiting list between public and community housing (which is already being progressed); and
3. combined housing and homelessness shop front ('co-location'), incorporating other government and community assistance programs such as Centrelink, ACT Government service providers and community organisations.

The aim of the Central Access Point is to create an integrated service system that will:

- develop a more efficient and responsive social housing and homelessness sector;
- enhance client access to social housing and homelessness services;
- develop greater equity and consistency of practices;
- improve economic and social participation for service users;
- improve integration of homelessness services, employment and training providers and Centrelink; and
- improve data on service need.

The CIS is one of the ACT Government's commitments under the Implementation Plan for the NPA on Homelessness. A key deliverable from this NPA is to offer 'more connected, integrated and responsive services' for people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness.

## **Background**

The ACT homelessness sector comprises 46 services managed by 32 community-based service providers. This presents several challenges regarding efficient and integrated service provision for those in need.

The ACT Government funds a range of homelessness services, including:

- refuge and crisis accommodation (including specialised services for women and children escaping domestic violence);
- medium-term and transitional supported accommodation;
- free food, outreach, information and referral services;
- peak bodies;
- services for young people and families experiencing homelessness; and
- outreach and supported accommodation services targeted at Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

The CIS will improve timeframes for assistance and pathways through the service system and out of homelessness.

There is broad agreement amongst government and community stakeholders about the importance of this reform which builds upon recent achievements, such as the establishment of 'warm referrals' between homelessness services. In particular, the

department acknowledges that a considerable amount of work has been done in this area by the Joint Pathways 'Any Door is the Right Door' Working Group. The department is committed to working collaboratively with the homelessness sector to develop a model that is complementary to existing processes and reflects the work done to date.

### **Central Intake Service - Proposal**

The CIS will streamline service entry points into the homelessness service system ensuring that clients do not have to negotiate multiple agencies to access services. The CIS will be more than just an information and 'warm referral' service with the ability to allocate clients to accommodation vacancies and provide access to other support mechanisms such as outreach/personal support. The CIS will be managed by a team that will:

- undertake an initial assessment to determine a client's immediate needs and risks;
- allocate clients to homelessness services (where appropriate), in collaboration with the service and the client;
- provide the best possible response using the available, appropriate resources, including connecting clients to financial and material aid;
- manage prioritisation;
- provide access to other housing solutions including access to social housing and private rental accommodation; and
- provide information, advice and support.

While the overarching aim is to balance being client centred and resource efficient, it is acknowledged that the CIS will need to be well informed on aspects relating to assessment and the target group for agencies within the system.

The CIS will be the primary pathway for referral and will be focussed on assisting clients at the crisis end of the housing continuum. However it is not intended to replace existing internal referral channels (for example, from crisis to outreach support).

There will be a variety of channels to enable clients to access the CIS. It is envisaged that access to the CIS will primarily be via phone, however clients may choose to access the service via Housing ACT's (HACT) Gateway Services shopfront. The use of the internet and new technologies will be considered in the future development of the CIS.

The CIS will be consistent with the *ACT Homelessness Charter and Service Guarantee* which affirms the human rights of people experiencing homelessness and outlines their rights to inclusion, dignity, respect, safety, non-discrimination and freedom.

In moving forward, it is acknowledged that change may create some uncertainty across the sector about the current reforms to the service system and the practices within it. Similar central intake models have been successfully implemented in other jurisdictions and information and evaluation from these services will be used to guide the development of this CIS project. Information about Victoria's 'Opening Doors' Framework is at [Attachment A](#) to this chapter.

Concurrently, the department is working towards a 'Housing First' approach whereby it may be possible for some clients to be allocated long term stable housing as a first step. This will include coordinated outreach case management to assist the service user to transition from homelessness to independent living. The CIS will assist by linking clients with the appropriate

support through an assessment of need process. This will alleviate some of the current pressures on the crisis end of the housing continuum.

It is envisaged the CIS will need extended operating hours, to best respond to client need. Analysis of existing ACT data will be used to determine the hours of operation and appropriate after hours arrangements.

### Key Issues

#### Resources

The following funding amounts have been allocated for the CIS through the Implementation Plan for the NPA on Homelessness.

<b>Central Intake Service</b>	2009-10	2010-11	2011-12	2012-13
	\$	\$	\$	\$
Australian Government funding	100,000	128,750	132,613	136,413

It is acknowledged however that additional funding will need to be acquired to deliver the CIS, and that this may include the re-direction of existing funding.

#### Service Provision

The CIS will be physically situated within the HACT shopfront in Belconnen, however the decision on the provider has not been made and could be delivered by either a government or a community-based service provider. The vision of the CIS will be co-created by government and the homelessness sector to guarantee the maximum buy in possible. This will be a crucial element of the project's success.

The advantages and risks of having the CIS administered by the ACT Government or a community-based service provider are summarised below:

Government service provider:

<i>Advantages</i>	<i>Risks</i>
Independent of crisis accommodation	Disconnection from service delivery
Understanding of government systems and processes	Bound by government processes
Has experience in similar intake models through ACT Health and Care and Protection Services	Concerns about client confidentiality, access by some population groups including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders
Contractual relationship with all of the homelessness services	Lack of endorsement from the homelessness sector

Community-based service provider:

<i>Advantages</i>	<i>Risks</i>
Extensive experience in homelessness service delivery	Conflict of interests and 'history' influencing the CIS
Understanding of the homelessness sector	May be seen to favour their own or particular organisations
Existing relationships with stakeholders	Inability to appropriately interface with government
Opportunity to create innovative partnership with government	Service losing its community identity

### **Consultation and Engagement**

In the spirit of partnership a project oversight group has been formed with representatives of both the ACT Government and the homelessness sector. This sub-committee will provide a governance and project oversight role for the CIS and will meet regularly throughout the development stages of the project. During this time, the community-based members of the sub-committee will report back and consult with the broader Joint Pathways group. In addition, the project will also be allocated a dedicated Project Officer within Social Housing and Homelessness Services.

### **Summary**

This document is intended to provide context and issues for consultation for the implementation of a CIS. The CIS will build on the work done to date in this area that will inform the development of the project. The CIS will provide an additional and complementary entry point in to the homelessness system, and will not become an exclusive pathway.

The project also provides an exciting opportunity for a new partnership between the ACT Government and the homelessness sector and will contribute to meeting the overall goal of the NAHA to halve homelessness by 2020.

### *Topics for Discussion/Decision*

- Should the CIS be provided by government or a community-based service provider?
- What resources will be needed and how will they be provided?
- How will the partnerships involved be managed?
- What are the key implementation issues?

### **Timeframes**

Timeframes for this project are short and need to allow for consultation with homelessness service providers through the Joint Pathways Group to consider and respond to the proposed model developed through the current working group process.

If necessary, the procurement phase will commence in early 2010, and will be determined through an open tender process.

In the event that the CIS is based within government, the implementation process will commence in early 2010. The CIS will be operational from 1 July 2010.

## **Chapter 2 - Attachment A: 'Opening Doors' – Victoria's Homelessness Service Co-ordination Model**

Led by the Victorian Department of Human Services, Opening Doors is an area-based service coordination framework that aims to provide timely and effective access to homelessness and social housing services to people seeking assistance. The framework was developed over 2005/06 in consultation and partnership with the community sector and piloted and reviewed in 2006/07.

Key features of the Opening Doors model:

- homelessness services formed into local area service networks (LASNs) responsible for local application of Opening Doors framework;
- visible entry points staffed by initial assessment teams backed up by formally agreed protocols and procedures;
- consistent, high quality practice that reduces multiple assessments and unsuccessful referrals, freeing up time to work with more people or with people for longer;
- interim response – the development of a course of action to access services and prevent homelessness as required;
- tools to support service coordination and practice.

In the Opening Doors model, initial assessment is undertaken for a whole local area by initial assessment workers located at designated homelessness entry points. Each service entry point is backed up by service coordination from all relevant homelessness services, mainstream health services and social housing providers within a catchment area. Currently only homelessness and social housing services are included in the model; however, when the framework is fully implemented, other mainstream services such as health, mental health and drug and alcohol services will be invited to link with local homelessness and social housing networks.

Local area service networks (LASNs) are formed from the funded homelessness assistance services in the local catchment area. Led by the Department of Human Services, the LASNs are responsible for implementing Opening Doors in their local catchment area. The role of each LASN is to:

- develop, implement and maintain Opening Doors in their particular geographic catchment;
- build on consistency and quality of service delivery practice among member agencies;
- coordinate referrals with allied services and services in other areas;
- undertake data monitoring and consumer satisfaction review for the purposes of identifying gaps and trends in service provision; and
- make evidence-based recommendations to the Department about responses to service gaps such as changes in agency catchments, targets and allocation and utilisation of funding.

The tools that each LASN uses to support service coordination and practice are:

- **Data Collection** – seeks to provide an evidence base for researchers, peak bodies, agencies and government to understand more about specific issues related to homelessness;
- **Initial Assessment Form** – supports initial assessment only, that is, what information is required for an effective referral. Case management services make their own deeper assessments once they accept a referral from an entry point agency;

- **Referral Form** – used to deliver client name, contact details and case summary in a written form;
- **Prioritisation Lists** – used to coordinate services to all consumers in a catchment. LASNs develop and manage their own prioritisation system however they are a joint responsibility of several local agencies;
- **Resource Register** – operates at a local level and provides detailed information about available resources to assist initial assessment workers to make a decision about the most appropriate consumer for that vacancy; and
- **State-wide free-call number** - automatically directs people seeking housing and homelessness assistance to their local access point during business hours, and to an after-hours response outside of business hours.

# Chapter 3

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## Common Waiting List

## **Purpose**

The purpose of this chapter is to provide background information and a proposed model for the implementation of a common waiting list between public and community housing. The chapter will also outline timeframes for the implementation of the project.

## **Project Aim**

The common waiting list will be implemented as part of the Central Access Point 'one stop shop'. This project will achieve centralised access for homelessness, housing and other mainstream services. The Central Access Point has three components:

1. CIS for homelessness;
2. common waiting list between public and community housing; and
3. combined housing and homelessness shop front ('co-location'), incorporating other government and community assistance programs such as Centrelink, ACT Government service providers and community organisations.

The aim of the Central Access Point is to create an integrated service system that will:

- develop a more efficient and responsive social housing and homelessness sector;
- enhance client access to social housing and homelessness services;
- develop greater equity and consistency of practices;
- improve economic and social participation for service users;
- improve integration of homelessness services, employment and training providers and Centrelink; and
- improve data on service need.

The common waiting list is one of the ACT Government's commitments under the Implementation Plan for the NPA on Homelessness. A key deliverable from this agreement is to offer 'more connected, integrated and responsive services' for people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness. In addition, the introduction of a common waiting list between public and community housing has also been identified in the *ACT Government's Affordable Housing Action Plan: Phase II* as a means to facilitate easy access to housing and homelessness services.

An internal project team from within Housing and Community Services with representatives from Gateway and Operational Services, Business Development and Social Housing and Homelessness Services has been formed. The project team will provide an advisory role throughout the development stages of the project.

## **Background**

Consultation between community housing providers and the department to discuss the development of the common waiting list has taken place during 2009. Stakeholders agreed that a standard set of eligibility criteria be developed with added eligibility to reflect the specialised nature of some of the providers. Stakeholders agreed that the assessment process should be based on an applicant's relative need and suitability to available properties while recognising client autonomy and choice.

In addition, it was also agreed that single shared housing (such as disability group homes) and congregate living style accommodation (such as Havelock House) be included in the common waiting list, possibly under an approach known as 'choice-based letting'. Given there are a number of complexities involved in appropriately allocating shared accommodation, 'choice-based letting' processes may have a role as they allow individuals

to express an interest in shared housing. When a suitable vacancy arises, the applicants would be informed of vacancies and encouraged to nominate their interest with the housing provider. This would enable the providers to manage the assessment and allocations procedures and ensure that appropriate individuals are offered shared accommodation.

It was also agreed that a mechanism be built in to the common waiting list whereby individuals who accept an offer for share-housing have the ability to remain on the common waiting list with the option of moving to independent living in time.

### **Proposal**

The common waiting list will create a more efficient and responsive social housing system and will provide clients with greater choice regarding available housing products, negating the need to find and negotiate multiple entry points into the social housing system. The common waiting list will also provide clients with access to information and assistance on other housing options.

All funded community housing providers will be expected to participate in the common waiting list. The common waiting list will improve administrative efficiencies and provide a clearer understanding of housing demand which will, in turn, help housing providers become more responsive to those in housing need.

The common waiting list will require three elements:

1. A single application form to capture sufficient information to assess eligibility for any housing provider.
2. A single application list of all information from the application form.
3. A process whereby an agreed eligibility, priority and allocation policy is applied across all providers to ensure that vacancies that arise in public or community housing are offered to those individuals most suited to the vacancy and in accordance with the priority system in place.

The model at [Attachment A](#) to this chapter outlines the proposed process for managing the common waiting list.

The common waiting list will be managed by HACT, whose role will include:

- registering applications;
- verifying eligibility;
- establishing priority status and ranking applications;
- sending providers shortlists of applicants to match vacancies;
- reconfirming circumstances of applicants on a regular basis;
- updating changes in circumstances and preference;
- suspending applications where appropriate;
- deleting applications following allocation;
- fielding enquiries;
- ensuring data integrity and security; and
- reporting on activity and performance.

This will require a clear and current understanding by HACT on the target group and service philosophy of each provider.

## **Key Issues**

### *IT Requirements*

The common waiting list will build on current IT capabilities within HACT. The IT requirements for the common waiting list will be developed within the Business Development Unit in collaboration with the IT provider.

### *Implementation Stages*

The project will have a phased implementation commencing with the development and subsequent introduction of a new common Application for Housing Assistance form. The form will specify a common set of eligibility criteria with added eligibility to reflect the specialised nature of some of the providers. The form will also enable applicants to have greater choice regarding the housing products available to them. In addition, the form will also capture the information required to enable those in greatest need, or with special needs, to be identified.

Following this, an agreed assessment criteria will need to be developed. An integrated assessment provides a safeguard to ensure that all important elements of an assessment are consistently collected, it minimises subjectivity and establishes common language across housing providers. The existing HACT assessment process may be used as the basis for the assessment however it is acknowledged that some components of the existing assessment process will need to be modified to reflect the various housing providers.

Where appropriate, applicants who have a very high need will be offered social housing ahead of applicants who have moderate or lower need, if the housing option available is determined to be suitable and sustainable. HACT will have 'nomination rights' and will recommend which applicants will be put forward to the provider with the vacancy. To assist with this process, a Notification of Vacancy form will need to be developed. The form will outline detailed information about the vacancy to HACT to nominate the most suitable applicants. Providers will then exercise their specific assessment and allocations procedures to determine which applicant is most suited to the vacancy.

The process for merging the existing waiting lists across providers will require all applicants who are not already on the public housing waiting list, but who wish to be considered for housing assistance to complete a new Application for Housing Assistance form. This will enable assessing officers to reconfirm their eligibility and rank them in accordance with the priority system. Those applicants that are eligible under the new system will be added to the combined housing waitlist.

The challenges to be met will include developing a process that minimise confusion and difficulties for applicants and also managing expectations and frustrations arising out of this changed system. These could include a perception that you have 'lost your place' on the waiting list under the new system. It is envisaged that material will be developed to clearly communicate the new system and distributed to clients, staff and community housing providers.

During this time, providers will systematically transition to the new arrangements and adapt to a new focus on the delivery of housing services rather than waitlist management and data collection.

### *Privacy and Recordkeeping*

There are a number of privacy and operational issues that will need to be addressed within the context of a common waiting list. This includes requesting applicants to complete new applications or provide additional information and obtaining applicants' consent to share information. In addition, further discussion is required to determine:

- What records need to be kept?
- How long should record be kept?
- Who get access to what records?

### **Timeframes**

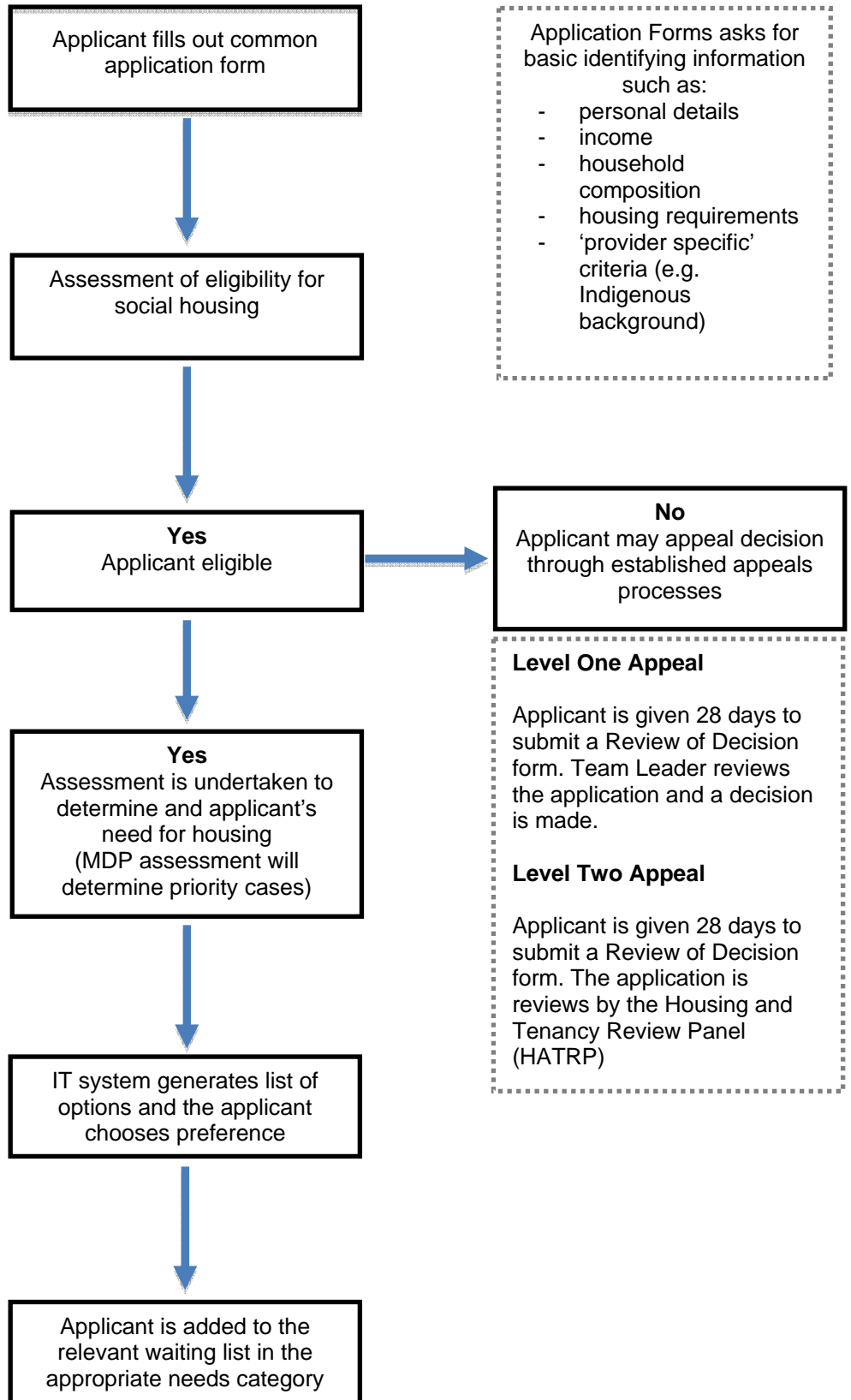
Ongoing discussions will be held between community housing providers and the project team to develop the proposal in more detail. This feedback will inform the final model with completion expected by the end of the calendar year.

Consultation will be held throughout January and February 2010 will be required to develop the common Application for Housing Assistance form, eligibility criteria and assessment process.

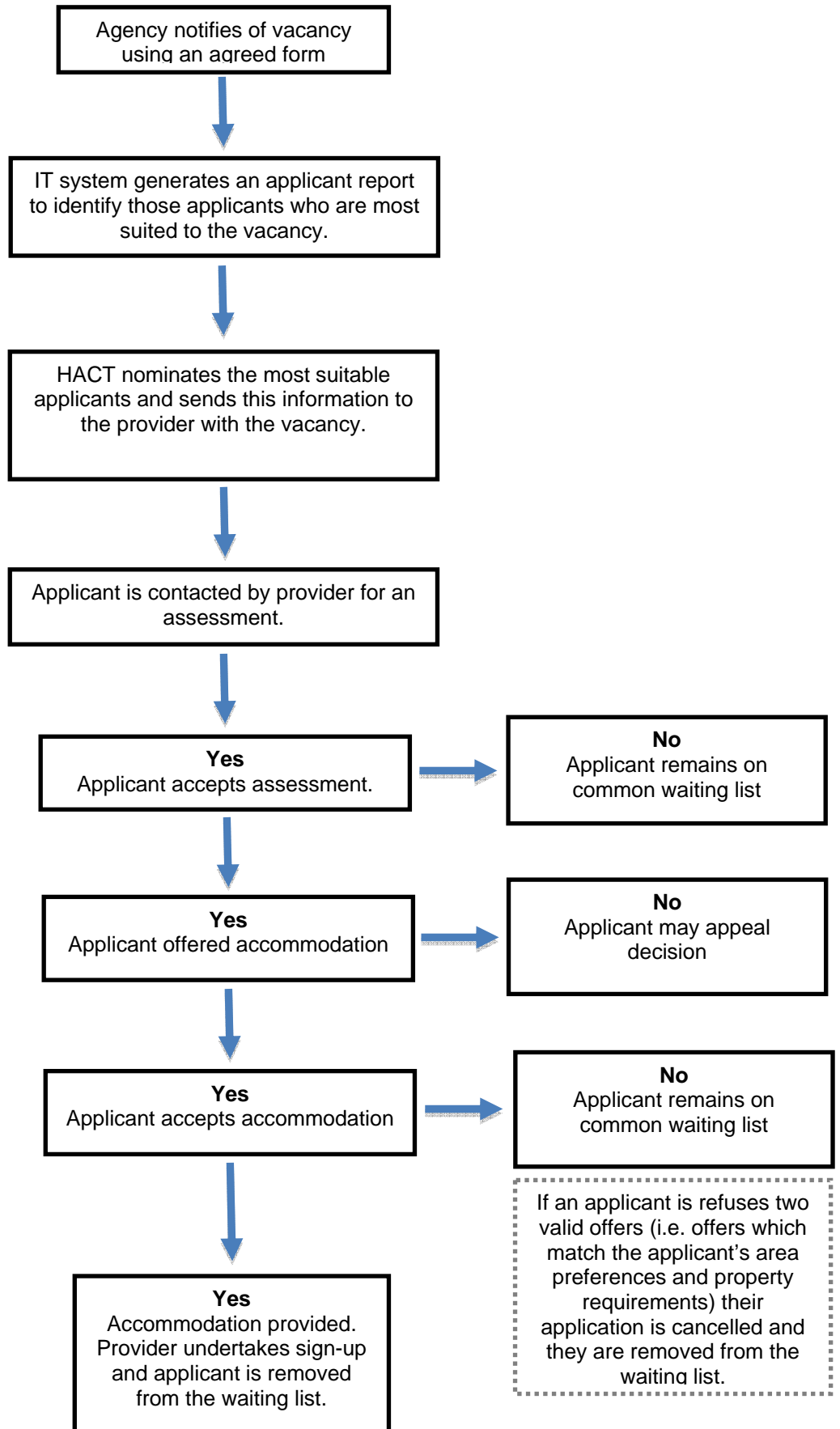
From March 2010, a staged implementation for the project will commence.

# Common Waiting list – Model #1

## Part One



## Part Two



# Chapter 4

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## Housing Support Services

## **Purpose**

This chapter provides information on proposed directions to housing support services including; Community Linkages Providers (CLP); sustaining tenancy programs; and life skills programs funded by the department.

The changes will ensure housing support services for public, community and private housing tenants develop a social inclusion focus that will enable increased social, civil and economic participation in the community and sustainable tenancies.

These approaches will be central in reducing repeat cycles of homelessness, a key objective of the Homelessness NPA.

## **Social Inclusion Agenda**

Alongside the housing and homelessness initiatives the Australian Government has established a social inclusion agenda based on the following principles:

- reducing disadvantage;
- increasing social, civil and economic participation;
- a greater voice, combined with greater responsibility;
- building on individual and community strengths;
- building partnerships with key stakeholders;
- developing tailored services;
- giving a high priority to early intervention and prevention;
- building joined-up services and whole of government(s) solutions;
- using evidence and integrated data to inform policy;
- using locational approaches; and
- planning for sustainability.

A socially inclusive society is one in which Australian people feel valued and have the opportunity to participate fully in a social and economic life. This means:

- ensuring that everyone has access to appropriate services;
- helping everyone to get the skills and support they need so they can work and connect with community;
- making the most of people's strengths;
- governments and communities working together to get the best results for people in need;
- services working together in new and flexible ways to meet each person's different needs; and
- heading off problems by understanding the root causes and intervening early.

The ACT Government has an ongoing commitment to community inclusion and to embed community inclusion policy and practice across ACT Government. This commitment builds on five years of work by the Community Inclusion Board.

In the ACT, community inclusion is understood as having two key elements. The elements are supporting social cohesion (participating and contributing) and addressing disadvantage (or closing the gap). This understanding of community inclusion supports the vision of the 2004 Social Plan that states Canberra will become a place in which, 'all people reach their potential, make a contribution and share the benefits of the community.'

It is proposed that housing support services in the ACT be underpinned by the social inclusion principles of the Australian Government as well as the territories community inclusion policy and practice. These will be a useful tool in strengthening existing responses, including the CLP.

A review of the CLP in 2004 recommended changes to the programs engagement methods with tenants and community members. Given the changes in the national context, the focus has again been placed on the program, and a further refocusing of the current program will be undertaken to ensure a clear link is established with the targets of the Homelessness NPA through the adaptation of models of service based on social inclusion principles.

### **Preventing Cycles of Homelessness**

Sustaining tenancies has gained increased importance in interrupting and stopping cycles of houselessness and homelessness. As the following data shows there is a need to expand the programs to have a higher focus on those in private housing rentals as well as those in public and community housing.

The SAAP National Data Collection annual report 2007 - 08 shows 19 percent of clients in ACT homelessness services came from public housing (including from other jurisdictions), 15.4 percent came from private rental and 2 percent came from community housing, 18 percent were boarding and 15 percent were in rent free accommodation. Of those people accommodated in specialist homelessness services, 34 percent exited into public housing.

This information demonstrates the importance of providing sustaining tenancy programs across different forms of housing tenure, including private tenancies.

The costs associated with failure to sustain a tenancy are high. Providing crisis accommodation support through homelessness services are higher than providing support to a tenant who is already housed. Intervening to reduce the 19 percent leaving established housing and entering homelessness services represents a significant cost saving. Other cost benefits relate to the improved health, education and employment outcomes that come with stable housing. Aside from cost savings, research has shown that sustainable tenancies can result in improved long term outcomes for the individual/family unit.

### **Current Programs**

The ACT Government funds a number of community based service providers under the CLP to facilitate community development, sustaining tenancies, small development grants, life skills, financial counselling and personal and professional support programs. There are also a number of initiatives based within the department aimed at contributing to assisting vulnerable tenants to maintain their tenancies.

#### *Sustaining Tenancy Initiatives*

As part of the CLP sustaining tenancies programs are delivered on a regional basis providing support to public and community tenants living in specific suburbs. The service is provided by two community organisations, one servicing northern Canberra and the other southern Canberra. Each service works directly with tenants to assist them to sustain their tenancies and develop an increased ability to manage their personal and financial circumstances. In recent changes to their funding agreements these providers have been asked to broaden their scope and support private rental tenants, an area that is becoming increasingly important.

### *Community Development*

For the past three years the CLP community development programs have aimed to achieve the following outputs:

- information, referral and support to individual tenants and groups of tenants;
- formal and informal activities including recreational and personal development programs to assist with social interaction between residents and linkages to the wider community; and
- workshops and structured programs to increase the life skills of residents e.g. information technology, budgeting, daily living skills and conflict resolution.

These are funded specifically to support public and community housing tenants in four regional centres. This is in addition to community development funding which is provided to 10 organisations under the department's Community Service Program (CSP). Further funding is provided for community development in the Ainslie Avenue precinct which contains a large proportion of public and community housing dwellings.

Reflecting the national policy the new CLP community development, service funding agreements already have an increased focus on social inclusion activities and life skills training to support the development of skills for individuals and communities, thus enabling them to increase their social, civil and economic participation in the community, with an increased probability of maintaining sustainable housing.

A component of these activities will focus on addressing both social and individual barriers to education and employment. This is based on recognition that social isolation and joblessness have adverse health and social effects on individuals, children and communities.

### *Other living skills/personal development programs*

Services are funded to provide information, referral, advocacy and financial counselling to support people experiencing difficulty maintaining their tenancies or who are at risk of eviction. A specific life skills program at Ainslie Village has been set up to support residents to improve their personal circumstances and reduce support needs.

In addition to the CLP the department has made funding available to community organisations for emergency relief and provides one off assistance to families and individuals to get them through tough times. Much of this funding is used as a stop gap measure to sustain a tenancy until the next time there is financial stress.

These programs have a focus on public and community housing tenants living cohesively together and working towards common goals through recreational activities. They have not had the scope to reach the private rental market or home owners in mortgage stress who are increasingly becoming a part of the target group for sustaining tenancy initiatives. The programs need to change to respond to increase the capacity of the individual through their social inclusion into the wider, mainstream community in the long term.

### *Tenant Initiated Grants (TIG)*

Over the years the TIG have empowered tenants to participate in their environment and make it a better place. However there has been a limited range of proposals and many of them have been of a similar nature such as community rooms at multi-unit complexes or community events such as BBQ's.

#### *Client Support Coordinators (CSCs)*

The department has employed three CSC's within Housing ACT to assist tenants experiencing issues which impact on their ability to maintain their tenancy. The objective is to help tenants get appropriate support assisting them to maintain their tenancy, connecting them to community based and mainstream services providers.

#### *Housing for Youth Pilot Program (HYPP)*

The HYPP is focused on young people entering public housing who have had prior involvement with Care and Protection Services, out of home care, juvenile justice or homelessness. This group is found to be particularly vulnerable to repeated cycles of homelessness. The youth housing managers perform a role similar to a case coordinator until one of the agencies involved clearly becomes the preferred case management provider of the young person.

All of these programs will need to be evaluated to see how they fit with the national policy context and the future directions of housing support services in the ACT and their contribution to the key reform priorities and targets of the NPA. The reform recommendations are open to discussion.

#### **Proposal**

Future program will focus on gaining outcomes for individuals and families within the context of the wider, mainstream community. This can be achieved through initiatives focussed on the individual or broader social grouping identified as experiencing higher rates of social exclusion.

#### 1. Stronger focus in sustaining tenancies across all housing tenures

It is envisaged that the role for community service providers would be to assist in sustaining tenancies of those living in community, affordable and private rental situations as well as those who may be in mortgage stress. This will include assertive programs seeking referrals in conjunction with industry, in conjunction with financial counselling services and personal support.

#### 2. Re-focus of community development to achieve greater outcomes for individuals and family units in relation to social and economic participation

Another key challenge are the existing disincentives for individuals to increase their economic participation due to the income based rents of social housing. Policies will be reviewed to ensure that any disincentives are removed or minimised. The best long term outcomes for individuals and families can be achieved by linking them with education and employment opportunities. This includes addressing the barriers that prevent people accessing these opportunities.

#### 3. That there be a focus on specific target groups

There are specific housing managers for young people but it is also necessary to look toward supporting older tenants in the social housing system. They are some of the most vulnerable Canberrans and it is important that specialised programs are set up to support them to connect with society and maintain stable tenancies. There is currently a pilot project being undertaken within HACT with the assistance of the Council for the Ageing assessing the

needs of these tenants and the results from the pilot will determine a future direction of housing support.

#### 4. Refocusing of tenant grant processes to better align with tenant participation processes

To strengthen the TIG program and simultaneously ensure current programs are not duplicated, the grants could be linked to social inclusion initiatives such as sustainable life skills programs or education and training opportunities or to the Joint Champions Group (JCG). Involvement of the JCG could see the TIG tenant initiated, allocated and evaluated, further empowering tenants and reflecting the national goal of social inclusion. The JCG comprises public housing tenants and HACT staff, and meets regularly to discuss a program of tenant participation activities and to represent tenants' interests by advocating on their behalf on a range of housing issues.

These changes would involve negotiation with the community sector partners and further development of the government based services including increasing the capacity of the tenancy programs.

There can be value in separating the support from the tenancy management so a range of options may need to be maintained.

#### *Topics for Discussion/ Decision:*

- Are the resources in the current sustaining tenancies program directed to those most in need and available when they need it?
- How can sustaining tenancies programs create long term positive outcomes for the individual?
- How can sustaining tenancies initiatives reach those in the private market facing mortgage stress who are increasingly at risk of homelessness?
- How can these programs become an integrated part of the service system?
- How can long term outcomes be created through TIGs?
- Is there merit in linking up the TIGs to the JCG, thus creating tenant initiated, allocated and evaluated grants?
- How can community development and life skills programs assist individuals to sustain their tenancies and contribute to better social and economic participation?
- Given the significant negative impacts of homelessness, are resources better focussed on sustaining tenancies than community development?

#### **Timeframes**

Existing providers of housing support services will be consulted in the latter part of 2009. Feedback will then be used to consolidate models of programs in the early part of 2010. Further consultation will be conducted if necessary with either the general community or existing providers. This will occur through the funding allocation process and service funding negotiations to happen in the first half of 2010 with the services to commence 1 July 2010.

# Chapter 5

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## Street to Home

## **Purpose**

The purpose of this chapter is to present a concept model for the Street to Home Project, a new initiative targeted at reducing the number of rough sleepers in the ACT. This initiative will contribute to meeting the ACT's targets under the Homelessness NPA, specifically reducing the number of rough sleepers by 7 percent by 2013. This initiative will also contribute to the key priorities outlined in the ACT Road Map.

## **Project Aim**

The aim of the project is to link clients with necessary supports and ensure that all rough sleepers will be offered accommodation should they wish to accept, ideally agreeing to move off the street into appropriate accommodation.

The nature of support will be assertive and persistent. Multiple attempts will be made to engage with rough sleepers, even where they are reluctant to access support. The accommodation would include both existing homelessness accommodation services and social housing, with appropriate assertive outreach support to enable a tenancy to be established and sustained over time.

This will be different to existing services due to the persistency of the support offered. Continuity of support will extend for a period of 6 – 12 months depending on individual client needs upon taking up accommodation, at which point referral to an appropriate support service for ongoing case management can be established. For those who choose not to take up the offer of accommodation, support will be maintained and workers will stay in contact, understanding movements, environments and networks while individuals choose to remain sleeping rough.

## **Background**

According to the 2006 Census figures there are 1,364 homeless people in the ACT with 82 people sleeping rough or in improvised dwellings. Nationally this figure is higher with 16 percent of homeless people sleeping rough compared to the ACT's 6 percent.

Whilst hard data has not previously been collected, anecdotal evidence in the ACT suggests that the majority of rough sleepers are male over the age of 25. Anecdotal evidence shows a need for some focus on young people sleeping rough. Where people under the age of 16 are found to be sleeping rough appropriate support will be sought.

The department currently funds or delivers a range of outreach support services in the ACT to provide support to people at risk of, experiencing or transitioning out of homelessness. These programs include:

- **Couch surfers:** a program providing support, including financial assistance to young people who are at school who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless.
- **Young People Exiting Detention:** a program providing support and housing for young people exiting detention.
- **Transitional Support for Young People Exiting Detention:** a program that provides transitional accommodation, tenancy management and associated support for young people as they exit youth detention.
- **Housing for Youth Pilot Program:** a program that provides intensive support to young people who are homeless or have recently exited youth justice, corrections and Care and Protection Services. The program aims to assist young people on the continuum from homelessness into long term sustainable accommodation.

- **Canberra Men's Centre:** provide accommodation and outreach support to single men who are homeless or at risk of homelessness.
- **Toora House:** provide supported accommodation and outreach support to women unaccompanied by children who are homeless or at risk of homelessness.
- **Aleta Outreach Service for Women:** provides outreach support for women who are homeless or at risk of homelessness.
- **Inanna Women's Service:** provides crisis supported accommodation for women with or without dependent children, who are homeless with special and/or complex needs.
- **Free Food Services:** provided by various organisations for individuals who are homeless or at risk of homelessness.
- **Early Morning Centre:** providing free breakfast and a referral service for people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness.

The above services are not specifically required to conduct assertive outreach, where support workers are on the streets, identifying rough sleepers.

### **Proposal**

In line with the Australian Government's goal to halve overall homelessness by 2020 and offer supported accommodation to all rough sleepers who seek it, the Street to Home project will provide support services for chronically homeless people in the ACT.

In signing up to the NPA on Homelessness the ACT has agreed to the target to reduce the number of people who are sleeping rough in the ACT by 25 per cent to fewer than 62 people by 2013. Meeting this target will alleviate pressure on other services.

For the purpose of the project a rough sleeper is anyone who does not have a continued or fixed address, resulting in the person sleeping rough on the streets, the bush, in a tent, an outdoor shelter or in a car for an extended period.

The project targets those individuals who do not currently receive required needs specific support from mainstream services and so remain homeless. The project will be designed as an assertive outreach model providing coordinated service delivery to people where they are, rather than requiring them to attend appointments in offices. This will mean service workers engaging with people in their current environments including various locations across the city, parklands, day centres, accommodation settings and other agencies.

Assertive outreach models focus on seeking out and supporting clients in their own environment. This simultaneously creates more flexibility and allows the client to remain in a familiar setting, maintaining current lifestyle and networks while introducing additional support. The model requires service workers to persistently engage in frequent and long term contact with clients, maintaining relationships and developing rapport with clients. Service workers are required to have multidisciplinary skills. In the ACT this will include a specialised skill set of working with young people.

Assertive outreach models have proven benefits in engaging people who have been failed by mainstream service delivery methods. A similar model was implemented in South Australia in 2007. The model review showed a steady number of active clients however success is dependent on other services identifying and referring rough sleepers. In the ACT this will be managed through the establishment of a 'who's new on the streets' committee to help identify and monitor the support requirements of people who are sleeping rough.

The 'who's new on the streets' committee will consist of existing city park rangers, police, homelessness services, mental health services and hospital social workers. The committee will be co-facilitated by the Street to Home workers and the department. It is expected that the committee will meet once a month upon the commencement of the project then based on demand, required regularity of meetings will be determined. A flexible approach to information sharing including possible teleconferences or emails groupings could be explored in the future.

It is envisaged that referrals for the service will come through the 'who's new on the streets' committee, the new Central Access Point for housing and homelessness services and referrals from other agencies. The Central Access Point system is currently the subject of community consultation, with the service to commence in July 2010.

The services made accessible through the Street to Home workers will include mental health, drug and alcohol and legal support. Legal support to homeless individuals will be delivered through a close partnership with the Homeless and Elder Law Project, a pilot initiative to establish free legal service for homeless people with the auspice provided by Legal Aid ACT and operating out of Welfare Rights Legal Centre.

The Street to Home project will operate as one part of the broader support programs funded or delivered by the department. The project will leverage off existing programs and existing relationships between government and community service providers. Strong partnerships with these service providers and HACT will be developed to ensure an appropriate mix of services - housing, mental health, primary health and other support services are delivered to meet each individuals needs.

Performance Measures will include the following quantitative and qualitative measures:

- Number of people engaged by the service.
- Number of people offered accommodation by the service.
- Individuals are receiving support or have access to support through the service to address health issues.
- Individuals are receiving or have access to legal support through the service.

### **Key Issues**

#### *Data Collection*

Profile data on rough sleepers in the ACT has been difficult to obtain through current data collection methods. To overcome this, the committee will also have a role in collecting and maintaining data on rough sleepers in the ACT. This will better inform service delivery, creating appropriate linkages between user and service, ensuring those individuals who have previously fallen through the gaps will be identified and supported.

#### *Project Requirements*

The Street to Home program will not provide office based services due to the need to be mobile in an outreach capacity, however the program will need to be based in the inner city. Flexible service hours will be a requirement of the service; this includes 24 hour support on occasion when required. The service will include the provision of flexible intensive case management on initial engagement with individuals, including people who have been recently accommodated through the program.

**Timeframes**

The tender for the service was advertised in November 2009 with an operation date of March 2010.

## Chapter 6

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### Affordable Accommodation Options for Older Canberrans

## **Purpose**

This paper is primarily for information purposes as there has already been consultation with the age care sector key stakeholders. This information is from the Draft *Strategic Plan for Positive Ageing, 2009-2014* on issues of affordable accommodation options for older Canberrans. The ACT Government, in partnership with the Ministerial Advisory Council on Ageing, has commenced development of a Strategic Plan for Positive Ageing.

The *Strategic Plan for Positive Ageing*, set within a framework of social inclusion, aims to provide a blueprint for a co-ordinated approach across Government and the community to support positive ageing for older Canberrans, and to nurture a community where older people are respected, valued and supported to actively participate.

## **Background**

During community consultation this is what the community told us:

- Many older people live in houses that do not suit their mobility and self-help needs. This could be addressed by better access to affordable home modification services for current houses and changes to building regulation for future homes, including energy efficiency standards to assist with economic sustainability.
- It is often difficult for older people to secure affordable housing, especially in the private market if they are on the Age pension or a low self-funded pension.
- People who want to downsize their home generally want to stay in the same locality where they have established social and support networks. However, this can be difficult in established suburbs which have higher house prices.
- New housing models need to be explored and developed in the ACT, for example the 'Apartments For Life' model.
- The Government should set minimum targets regarding the percentage of public housing allocated to older people.
- The Government should amend tenancy regulations to allow for co-tenancy carer arrangements.

The final ACT *Strategic Plan for Positive Ageing* is planned to be tabled in the Legislative Assembly in December 2009, but addressing the above issues has already commenced.

## **ACT Affordable Housing Action Plan Phase II**

In addressing the *ACT Affordable Housing Action Plan Phase II*, the ACT Government has taken significant steps to improve housing affordability and availability in Canberra through such initiatives as the Land Rent Scheme and the Own Place initiative. The ACT Government has also been working on more affordable rental accommodation strategies in partnership with public, community and not-for-profit housing providers.

As a result of extra funding being provided by way of the Nation Building Economic Stimulus Plan, and in response to the *ACT Affordable Housing Action Plan Phase II*, HACT has been able to expand its property redevelopment programme to provide more appropriate housing for older tenants by increasing the supply and diversity of affordable housing options for older Canberrans. HACT is also exploring partnership opportunities between HACT and community care providers for the flexible provision of support for tenants.

The anticipated benefits of the programme include:

- an increase in the supply and appropriateness of public housing that better meets the changing needs of older persons;
- a freeing-up of existing housing stock for reallocation to those on the public housing wait list;
- provision of homes to those suffering homelessness or at risk of becoming homeless; and
- Improvements in the range, flexibility and supply of support services provided.

### **Canberra's Ageing Population**

Canberra's population is getting older and the demand for affordable accommodation will increase significantly over the next 20 years. Population projections prepared by the ACT Government estimate this increase for people over 55 will be 62 per cent (to 112,064).

In response to the *ACT Affordable Housing Action Plan Phase II* and consistent with the requirements of the Draft ACT Strategic Plan for Positive Ageing 2009-2014, a significant number of dwellings will be constructed for older Canberrans at eight prime locations across Canberra.

Southside	Northside
Condor	Florey
Bonython	Macquarie
Chapman	
Rivett	
Kambah	
Curtin	

These locations have been identified by HACT as areas with an ageing population and with high numbers of public housing tenants whose family and life circumstances have changed and who are now living in properties that no longer meet their needs.

For many people, the choice to leave the family home and move into a more suitable older persons dwelling is hard. Often this has required people to move away from their community, their friends and their supports.

These new dwellings present opportunities for older people to move into a right sized home that will meet their needs as they age, while remaining in their neighbourhoods and in close proximity to familiar shops and services.

The planned new homes are single story with a minimum of two bedrooms and have a 6 star energy efficiency rating. A small number of homes in each development will have three bedrooms, to support the need of some residents to have a live-in carer. The homes cater for those needing wheel chair access and adapt well to the changing support needs of the tenant, for many older Canberrans they can achieve their wish to 'age in place'.

### **The Rightsizing Program**

HACT recognises that people's needs change over time, and that maintaining the family home and garden can often become a burden as people get older.

Moving from a large family home can create opportunities for people to change their lifestyle and move to more appropriate and low maintenance homes.

Older tenants living in or near the suburbs identified can now plan for their future and choose to move into these new, custom built and centrally located older persons homes, with the support of HACT.

HACT will also approach tenants in homes that may no longer meet their needs to discuss their interest in moving into one of these unique older persons' dwellings. Nobody will be forced to relocate. However HACT will support tenants to move if they choose, and will assist with the costs of relocation.

Right-sizing people into more appropriate sized properties as they get older enables HACT to better meet more people's housing need, freeing up properties that will be used to house families who are currently homeless. There is a high level of demand for family homes and their scarcity means that applicants experience long waiting times to be housed.

### **Design Features**

Incorporated into the design of these homes:

- wider doors and hallways , bathrooms designed to be useable and safe, kitchens with switches, plugs and cupboards within easy reach;
- lock-up garage that has direct access to the kitchen;
- lock-up storage unit;
- best energy efficiency rating available;
- landscaping with raised garden beds;
- personal alarm systems in each home; and
- a second and for some tenants a third bedroom for visiting family or personal carers.

There will be an opportunity for the first residents to influence the final 'look' of their new home by choosing from a range of selected interior colour designs.

### **Community Facilities**

The planned homes are in close proximity to services and facilities. For example, a Community Centre is planned for and adjoins the Bonython site.

To promote social connectedness and build a sense of community, there will be pleasant garden areas within the developments for individuals to get together with other residents, their families and friends.

### **Support Services**

Appropriate housing for older people is a critical component toward achieving healthy ageing. A further component is access to a range of aged and community based support services to assist older people to maintain independent living in their community.

HACT wishes to form partnerships with community and aged care service providers to explore options to ensure that people residing in these new complexes have access to a range of support and assessment services to assist them to maintain their independence.

HACT is exploring ways to enhance current support mechanisms for older tenants. Appropriate and timely support will mean older tenants can live the rest of their lives in an environment that offers security, independence and social connection.

Topics for Discussion/ Decision:

- existing and anticipated support services;
- how to coordinate the delivery of care and other services;
- technical aids to support independent living;
- strategies for building a sense of community;
- the process for tenants downsizing to one of the new properties;
- What support services are currently available?
- What support needs are not being fully addressed or provided for?
- What role could public housing play in providing support?
- What services and/or support can your organisation provide to assist the:
  1. decision making around moving;
  2. process for moving; and
  3. continuation of care and other services?
- What are the barriers to your organisation's involvement?

# Appendix

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Notes from the Homelessness Round Table  
Meeting held 10 June 2009

The meeting was attended by 46 community sector members, representing community organisations, including homelessness services, community housing providers and regional community services. Senior staff from across the department and members of the Social Housing and Homelessness Services team also attended.

The Chief Executive, Mr Martin Hehir, provided an overview of the new policy environment and funding context for homelessness services as described in the Australian Government's White Paper – *The Road Home* with the aim of halving homelessness by 2020 and as provided for under the NAHA, NPAs on Homelessness and Social Housing and the NBJP.

The major changes include early intervention and actions to prevent homelessness by sustaining tenancies; 'Turning off the tap', breaking cycles of homelessness; supporting people in place and an increased emphasis on outreach support; a move to a social inclusion agenda, encouraging individuals to participate in the economy by assisting them to gain access to education and employment.

Mr Hehir described the targets for the ACT under the NPAs and then gave details about each of the new initiatives.

Mr Hehir then described the funding challenges for the homelessness sector which included an overall reduction in funding under the NAHA as payments move from a per population basis to a per property basis.

Mr Hehir noted however, that the ACT Government has made a decision to support funding for services at the same rates as currently provided for the next three years and that there would be challenges from year three onwards.

Mr Hehir noted that notwithstanding some minor changes to output measures to reflect the changes to the funding environment, most services with funding agreements expiring on 30 June 2009 would be offered three year contracts.

The exception to this will be the community linkages and community development programs which will require more significant changes to funding arrangements. These services will be offered a one year extension to enable this re-focussing to take place.

Mr Hehir emphasised the need for shared responsibility in achieving the national and ACT targets and forecast Service Funding Agreements with a revised Schedule 2 in the first instance with provision for re-negotiation.

Mr Hehir also noted there would be a further one month extension to finalise contract negotiations for those services expiring on 30 June 2009.

Mr Hehir explained that the ACT Government would need to develop a Local Homelessness Action Plan in response to the Australian Government's White Paper – *The Road Home*. Mr Hehir noted that this would be developed in consultation with the sector and recognised the leadership role the Joint Pathways group would play in its development.

Mr Hehir then invited questions from stakeholders. The following questions were taken:

- *How will performance against the ACT targets be measured?*

The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare is currently looking at this issue on a national level. On a broad level the goal of the ACT is to have a property to offer every rough sleeper by 2020.

- *Why is there no designated building for homeless people to congregate?*

Housing and Community Services has approved the expansion of the Early Morning Centre and also funds the Toora Day Refuge.

- *How do the deliverables in the National Framework for example young people exiting from care into homelessness link with the new reforms?*

Initiatives such as the youth foyer-like model have been funded that will prevent young people exiting from care in to homelessness. Housing and Community Services is working collaboratively with the Office for Children, Youth and Family Support to ensure that proper planning and support is in place for young people leaving care.

- *Who will run the new services and what will the process be to select the new service providers?*

This will vary depending on the service and ongoing consultation with the homelessness sector. It may include new services in the ACT for example Wintringham Aged Care Service which is currently operating in Victoria. In some cases it may include the expansion of service whilst in other cases new services may go to tender.

- *What about wages and staff development for those working in the sector?*

Terms of Reference are currently being developed for a community sector review which will investigate these issues. There is also some work taking place at a national level regarding the accreditation of community service providers which would impact on these issues.

- *Will emergency relief providers be included in the re-focussing work?*

Not at this stage. More information including better data is required regarding their place in the broader service system.

- *Since the Service Funding Agreement allows for negotiated change, could Housing and Community Services not offer three year contracts?*

The Executive Director of Housing and Community Services, Ms Maureen Sheehan, responded that Housing and Community Services needed to be very clear about its intentions regarding changes to services and as such it would be misleading to offer all services three year contracts.

- *Will it be an open tender process?*

Ms Sheehan noted that everything is open for discussion. The Director of Housing ACT, Mr David Matthews, added that the process for developing and implementing new services would need to get involvement from government and community stakeholders. New services will need to have different imperatives and may involve different stakeholders.

- *How long will services have to respond to the discussion papers?*

Housing and Community Services will seek feedback proactively and not necessarily require written feedback. A four to six week timeframe from feedback is proposed.

- *Will there be funding for current services to be expanded to do more outreach?*

Mr Hehir stated that it was important that Housing and Community Services work within existing funding and look at re-shaping the service system as a whole rather than the expansion of individual services.

#### *Community Linkages and Community Development*

Ms Sheehan discussed a range of issues related to social inclusion and support and noted that the most radical change resulting from the new policy environment was the need to re-design services to break cycles of homelessness, intergenerational cycles of homelessness and to sustain tenancies.

Ms Sheehan stated that this was a great opportunity to re-think the design of current community linkages and community development programs particularly how those services engage with the broader service system. Ms Sheehan noted that significant progress on the development and implementation of this work is required within a 12 month timeframe.

It was agreed that in order to progress this matter, Housing and Community Services would provide a briefing paper to the sector that will identify issues, potential target groups and funding for the sector's consideration and feedback.

#### *A Place to Call Home*

Housing and Community Service will want to negotiate with service providers who have experience in the provision of outreach, support to families and Indigenous people and head-tenancy arrangements.

Ms Sheehan noted that up to 50 percent of the new dwellings would be allocated to Indigenous families.

#### *Street to Home Initiative – Program for Rough Sleepers*

Housing and Community Service will want to work with providers to scope the program which may include a 'who's new on the streets' component and coordination with mainstream services (such as ACT Health). The consultation will include input from homeless people if possible and Housing and Community Services will seek more detailed advice on the demographics of the homeless people to inform the type of services needed for the program.

#### *Central Intake Service for Homelessness*

Mr Matthews noted that this service would provide more than 'warm referral'. Mr Matthews also stated that a Central Intake Service would require trust and cooperation between government and the sector. Ms Sheehan added that Housing and Community Services had commenced scoping modifications to Gateway to enable co-location of services.

#### *Domestic Violence Initiative*

Housing and Community Services is currently working with Domestic Violence Crisis Service on this initiative.

#### *Expansion of Transitional Housing Program (THP)*

Housing and Community Services will consult with current managers and providers using the THP regarding the expansion.

### *Exiting Corrections*

It was noted that the Canberra Men's Centre will provide the men's component of the program through an extension of the Men's Accommodation Support Service and Outreach Service.

Housing and Community Services needs to determine whether a similar model will be used for the women's component and will seek input from the sector regarding what model would work best for women.

### *Foyer-like Model*

It was noted that the funding for the Foyer model would not be available until July 2010. Mr Hehir stated that Housing and Community Services needed to work carefully to ensure systems were developed which foster inclusion and ensure appropriate targeting. Furthermore, the model will need to ensure that those not able to participate would be supported elsewhere to engage in education and employment. The model may include a mentoring component by other young people in education and employment.

