

Background Paper

SOCIAL JUSTICE UNIT

BACKGROUND PAPER – DECEMBER 2010

Mapping the Road Home

Tracing responses to
homelessness in NSW

We would like to thank UnitingCare Children, Young People and Families staff who participated in consultations and made other contributions as part of the preparation of this submission.



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Executive Summary

The purpose of this background paper is to examine the current state of homelessness and government responses to homelessness in NSW. While the Federal and State Governments have allocated a large pool of funding to support the Australian Government's Homelessness White Paper titled '*The Road Home: A National Approach to Reducing Homelessness*' (the White Paper), it is difficult to easily determine where this funding has or will be specifically spent, and this background paper aims to unpack this.

UnitingCare Children, Young People and Families (UCCYPF) has a variety of services support people at risk of, or experiencing homelessness in NSW. The HOME Advice program is a pilot program entering its eleventh year in six locations, one in each state. UCCYPF run the HOME Advice program in Wyong, NSW, under the name HABITAT. Reconnect, a federally funded program aimed at young people at risk of becoming homeless as a result of family breakdown, is being run by UCCYPF in three regional and remote locations across NSW. These programs were the only two programs referred to specifically in the White Paper and evaluations have found a strong evidence base for their methodology. In addition, UCCYPF works with homeless young people and at risk young people through a variety of crisis and support services.

UCCYPF has a number of services that do not work directly to address homelessness, but are well placed to identify children, young people and families at risk of homelessness. Housing stress and homelessness have been identified across our service group as one of the most concerning issues facing disadvantaged and vulnerable children, young people and families.

It has been widely recognised that there is a significant and concerning lack of affordable housing in Australia. Programs funded from the White Paper and the National Building - Economic Stimulus Plan will increase the number of affordable dwellings, but the effectiveness of this will be limited by the short length of the program. Without a similar level of ongoing funding, the gains from these programs will disappear quickly as the NSW population increases.

There are only a small number of research projects in the Australian context that have shed light on the economic cost of homelessness. More research into homelessness is needed to provide an evidence base for the cost effectiveness of proactively preventing and intervening in homelessness. Additional research is needed in the Australian context to ensure solutions are suitable for the Australian experience.

1. Introduction

Homelessness affects over 105,000 Australians every night. Over 27,000 of these people are in NSW. Homelessness is an issue that disproportionately affects children, young people and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders.

UnitingCare Children, Young People and Families (UCCYPF) is a service group of UnitingCare NSW.ACT. Our concerns for social justice and the needs of children, young people and families who are disadvantaged inform the way we serve and represent people and communities. UnitingCare Children, Young People and Families is made up of UnitingCare Burnside, UnitingCare Unifam, UnitingCare Disability and UnitingCare Children's Services. Together these organisations form one of the largest providers of services to support children and families in NSW.

UCCYPF supports those at risk of homelessness and experiencing homelessness through a number of our services. HABITAT in Wyong supports 50-70 at-risk families per year to maintain their tenancies. The Drum in Campbelltown works with young people experiencing homelessness or at risk of homelessness to find crisis and long-term accommodation. Our Aftercare programs support young people exiting out-of-home care to transition into permanent tenancies. In Dubbo, our DOORWAYS program helps young people find accommodation after the age of 18. We operate Reconnect programs in Dubbo, South-West Sydney and Gosford, which provide support to young people and their families where there is family conflict, placing the young person at risk of homelessness.

In addition to homelessness services, our services work with children, young people and families at risk of homelessness. We operate Brighter Futures programs which work with families to find stable accommodation while primarily supporting them to improve child safety and wellbeing. Our Newpin services offer family budgeting and financial training as part of their work with at-risk families to support them to maintain their tenancies. UCCYPF supports children, young people and families through a spectrum of services – homelessness prevention, early intervention services and support for those experiencing homelessness. Housing stress and homelessness have been

identified across our service group as one of the most concerning issues facing disadvantaged and vulnerable children, young people and families.

In 2009, the Australian Government released a Homelessness White Paper titled 'The Road Home: A National Approach to Reducing Homelessness' (the White Paper). By 2020, the White Paper sets two national targets:

- a 50% reduction in homelessness
- elimination of primary homelessness.

Homelessness has serious impacts on children, young people and families and UCCYPF is committed to supporting the targets identified in The Road Home and will work to analyse government actions related to the eradication of rough sleeping and a halving of total homelessness in NSW, particularly as they relate to reducing the number of children and young people experiencing homelessness.

2. Homelessness in Australia and NSW

The experiences of our services and the research on homelessness shows that it is not as an isolated issue, but as a symptom of other societal and individual issues. Strategies to reduce homelessness rest on three goals:

- to ensure that nobody experiences 'rough sleeping'.
- to help anyone who experiences homelessness to receive support to be permanently housed as soon as possible.
- to ensure that those who experience homelessness do not experience it again.

Homelessness can be defined as falling into 3 categories:

- Primary homelessness includes all people without conventional accommodation, such as people living on the streets, sleeping in parks, squatting in derelict buildings, or using cars or railway carriages for temporary shelter.
- Secondary homelessness includes people who move frequently from one form of temporary shelter to another. Secondary homelessness also includes people residing temporarily with other households because they have no accommodation of their own and people staying in boarding houses on a short-term basis, operationally defined as 12 weeks or less.
- Tertiary homelessness refers to people who live in boarding houses on a medium to long-term basis, operationally defined as 13 weeks or longer. They are homeless because their accommodation situation is below the minimum community standard of a small self-contained flat.

(Chamberlain & Mackenzie 2003, as cited in Chamberlain & Mackenzie 2006)

Based on Australian Bureau of Statistics analysis of the 2006 census:

2.1 Who does homelessness impact?

Based on Australian Bureau of Statistics analysis of the 2006 census:

- there were more than 27,000 homeless people in NSW
- 28% were aged 12-24 and 11% were children under 12, making 39% of people experiencing homelessness children and young people
- 7.2% of people experiencing homeless were Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islanders, compared with 2.2% of the general NSW population
- 13% were identified as "rough sleepers" or living in improvised dwellings
- 40% were living with friends and relatives

- 28% were in boarding houses
- 19% were in Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP) accommodation

(Chamberlain & MacKenzie 2008)

The White Paper analysed specialist homelessness services data 2008/09:

- one in every 105 Australians (125,800 clients and 79,100 accompanying children) received specialist homelessness service support
- 45.2% of people seeking support from specialist homelessness services are under the age of 18
- 1 in every 50 females aged 15-19 accessed support
- 1 in 63 children aged 0-11 accessed support
- 1 in 39 children aged 0–4 years accompanying a parent or guardian accessed support
- 18% of clients and 25% of accompanying children were Indigenous, compared with 2% of the general Australian population aged 10 years and over and 5% of children aged 0–17 years.

(AIWH 2007 as cited in FaHCSIA 2008b, p. ix–9)

Additionally, we know that other vulnerable groups overlap with those experiencing homelessness:

- 90% of children and young people on remand under the jurisdiction of the Department of Juvenile Justice are unable to prove suitable accommodation at the time of their arrest (Wood 2008, p. 558)
- over 50% of young people leaving out-of-home care experience homelessness (Mauders et. al. as cited in Wood 2008, p. 836)

2.2 Responses to homelessness

It is well established that where homelessness is a symptom or outcome of other issues, so a flexible approach is required. Critically, a person centred approach means people should define their own needs and goals. A variety of responses to homelessness have been implemented, with varying success.

These responses include:

- increasing the housing stock available, particularly affordable low-income housing.
- supporting people suffering from homelessness to find housing and through providing support services.

- preventing people from becoming homeless
- crisis support for people suffering homelessness.

Often a homeless individual or family will cycle through these responses, starting in crisis support, receiving support to find housing and then receiving support to prevent them falling back into homelessness. Due to the demand for homelessness services expanding beyond the sector's capacity, many people will not receive the support they need to avoid falling back into homelessness, resulting in cycling through services. An expanded emphasis on preventative services to reduce the need for crisis services is required. So far, while there has been significant support in the research, a preventative approach has not been extensively implemented.

2.3 Cost effectiveness of responses to homelessness to date

There are a small number of research projects in the Australian context into the economic cost of homelessness. For an individual or family to remain homeless there are a number of immediate costs, as well ongoing costs associated with a loss of productivity to the economy. Felicity Reynolds has identified the variety of costs associated with homelessness (Reynolds 2008, pp. 35-36). Immediate costs include:

- increased hospital, mental health service etc. visitation
- increased interaction with private security, police, court systems and correctional facilities
 - 7% of prisoners reported they were homeless at the time of their arrest (AIWH 2007 as cited in FaHCSIA 2008b, p. 9)
- increased reliance on welfare support and stays in homelessness hostels.

Reynolds states that the long term costs are considerable and include:

- loss of contact with employment and subsequent loss of productivity in the economy
- loss of social inclusion and cohesion
- loss of contact with education
- increased likelihood of drug or alcohol dependency
- increased likelihood of mental health issues
- increased likelihood of physical health issues and disability
- reduced life expectancy.

(Reynolds 2008, pp. 35-36)

For children who experience homelessness at an early age, this damage is significantly higher. The impact of homelessness on education for children is particularly of concern when considering the long-term costs of homelessness. The combination of education and wellbeing impacts on children and young people suggests that the costs of homelessness are high.

Homelessness experienced by families and young people increases these costs as homelessness also causes disruption to education and training and damage to mental health, which is a serious concern for children and young people in particular. For example, Youth Central has found that only 51% of homeless young people remain engaged with education. Other estimates, such as Chamberlain and MacKenzie's analysis of the 2006 census, put this figure as low as 34% in NSW. (Chamberlain & MacKenzie, cited in Youth Central 2010; CHP 2009; Chamberlain & MacKenzie 2008, p.19) This loss of educational engagement for young people is an ongoing economic cost as poor educational outcomes are known to decrease employability, which will result in reduced economic productivity later in life as the adult does not reinvest into the economy nor reach their productive potential.

In the 2007 study by Flatau et. al., the cost-effectiveness of a variety of homelessness services in Western Australia were studied and it was found that services funded by the Supportive Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP) were highly successful in reducing homelessness and were value for money. By helping people at risk of homelessness to find support programs and housing, SAAP reduces client's usage of other government services significantly:

“For all programs, the value of annual population offsets is at least twice as large as the annual program cost, inclusive of the opportunity cost of capital, resulting in a significant potential net government cost savings from providing assistance.” (Flatau, et. al. 2008, p. 151)

Although research that has been conducted has shown the cost effectiveness of a proactive response to homelessness in certain instances, UCCYPF believes that more research would strengthen the evidence base for reducing homelessness as a saving to the Australian economy.

2.4 A lack of housing stock

From 2007, the gap in supply of dwellings in Australia to demand has been climbing. Despite recent significant investment in housing stock from Federal and State governments as part of their homelessness response, without continued increases in funding, this shortfall will increase:

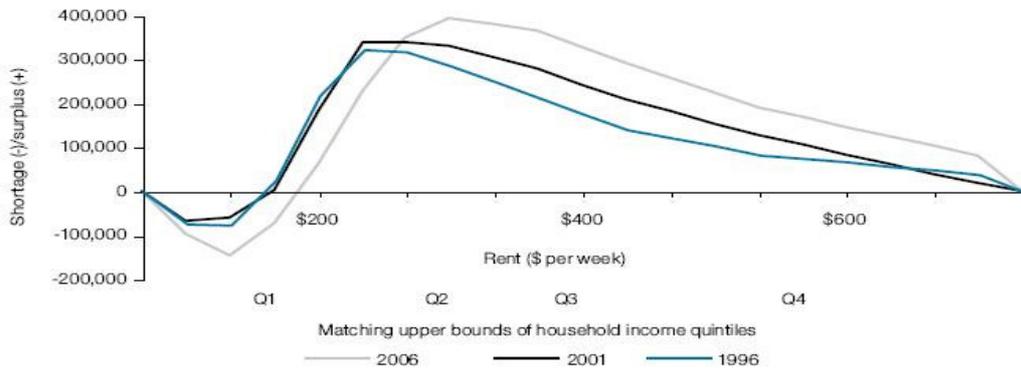
Year	Net gap in dwellings (increase in demand minus increase in supply)
2002	23 400
2003	30 200
2004	32 000
2005	29 600
2006	32 800
2007	66 500
2008	99 500
2009	178 400
2014 (projected)	308 000
2029 (projected)	640 600

(National Housing Supply Council 2010, p. 64-69).

Key to reducing homelessness is increasing the number of dwellings in Australia, but in the form of increasing the number of 'affordable' dwellings. In this case, affordable housing refers to housing that is affordable to low-income earners. Julian Disney has defined this as housing that costs less than 30% of weekly income for incomes in the bottom 40% of income distribution (Disney, 2007). Research by the National Housing Supply Council has shown that while housing stock grew over the past decade, affordable housing did not: "In 2006, there were 236,000 more private rental dwellings than in 1996. However, there were 125,000 fewer dwellings with rents less than \$232 per week (in 2006 dollars) than in 1996." (National Housing Supply Council 2009, p. 95)

Adding to this shortfall is an increase in the number of higher income families residing in low-income dwellings, a trend that has increased in the past decade. As seen in Figure 1, affordable housing is experiencing a net shortage while more expensive housing is experiencing a net surplus, tracked against income bands. When taking into account the number of affordable low-income houses occupied by higher-income families, there is a shortfall of 251,000 affordable and available dwellings, based on 2006 census numbers (National Housing Supply Council 2009, p. 98).

Figure 1: Availability of housing, based on income, Australia wide.



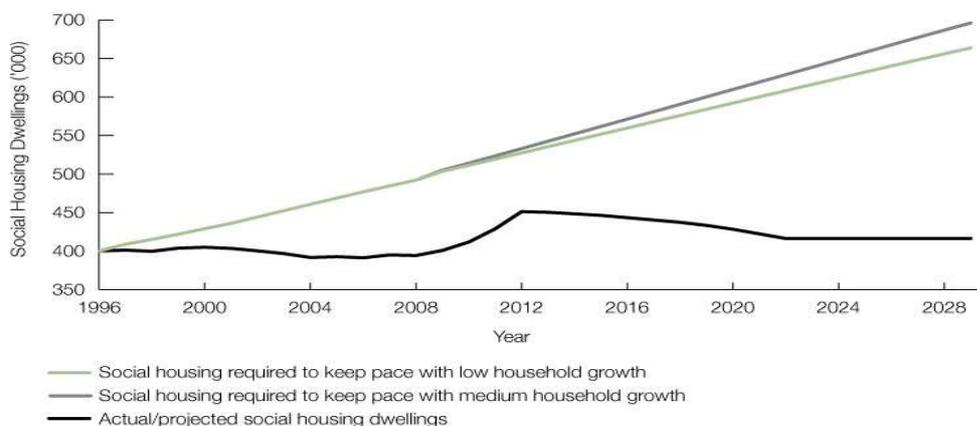
Note: Rents are in real terms as at 2006.

Source: National Housing Supply Council 2009, p. 97

By 2012, growth in social housing will go some way to reducing the gap between supply and demand for affordable housing. However, projections show that the housing gap post-2012 will begin to widen again. Figure 2 displays information presented by State, Commonwealth and Territory housing ministers, showing the widening gap between supply and demand for social housing.

Despite significant investment in affordable housing from all levels of Australian government, it can be seen that following this investment there will still be a shortage of 80,000 – 100,000 affordable and available dwellings across the country. Without continued investment at the level currently offered, we can expect to see this shortage increase rapidly.

Figure 2: Forecast growth of social housing against forecast growth of demand in Australia.



Source: Victorian Government Department of Human Services 2009, p. 16

3. The White Paper: a new approach

In June 2009, the Australian Government released a Homelessness White Paper titled 'The Road Home: A National Approach to Reducing Homelessness'. Since this release, the Federal Government has worked collaboratively with State and Territory governments to implement programs and structures that will aim to achieve the significant reductions in the numbers of people at risk of or experiencing homelessness identified in the paper as the national targets.

As part of the White Paper, the Federal Government allocated \$1.2 Billion of new funding in conjunction with \$4.9 Billion from State and Territory governments for homelessness and housing programs for the 2008-2013 period. This funding agreement represents a welcome change in the government response to homelessness and social housing, following a period of relative stagnancy and inaction. From 1996 to 2007, the availability of social housing stock dropped slightly while comparably demand increased dramatically in the same period. In 1996, the social housing sector matched demand for affordable dwellings with an available stock of approximately 400,000. By 2007 however, there was a shortfall of over 75,000. (Victorian Government Department of Human Services 2009, p.16)

In addition to the \$6.1 Billion of funding pledged in the White Paper, an additional \$5.6 Billion from the 'Nation Building – Economic Stimulus Plan' will build 19,200 new social housing dwellings and renovate a further ten thousand by 2011/12 (Productivity Commission 2010, p. I.11). Consequently, around \$11.7 Billion will be invested in affordable housing and homelessness reduction by 2013 across Australia.

In order to disseminate this funding, a series of agreements have been signed by the Federal and State governments. Previously affordable housing and homelessness was covered under a number of separate agreements. The main agreements were the Commonwealth-State Housing Agreement (CSHA), which included Commonwealth Rent Assistance (CRA), which provided housing assistance and the Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP) which provided short to medium term accommodation and support to those experiencing homelessness.

As of January 1st 2009 The National Affordable Housing Agreement (NAHA) was introduced and replaced existing funding arrangements with a new funding structure. The NAHA covers all specialist homelessness services previously covered by the CSHA and SAAP funding. This change aims to bring all SAAP and CSHA programs under a single agreement, so that housing and homelessness programs are coordinated. Over 400 specialist services in NSW previously covered by SAAP will come under the NAHA. The anticipated benefits of the NAHA are a more coordinated homelessness service system, with continuity of support from prevention and early intervention through to crisis support.

In addition, the NAHA has a number of COAG partnerships attached to it:

- The National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness (NPAH) will be allocated money to work specifically on supporting people who are experiencing homeless or are at risk of homelessness, such as the separately funded A Place to Call Home program.
- The National Partnership on Social Housing will be used to allocate funding to provide increased stock of public & community social housing and in part be used to leverage additional funds.
- The National Partnership on Remote Indigenous Housing will receive \$1.9 billion from 2010-2019 to address overcrowding in indigenous social housing and boost supply of housing in remote areas.
- The National Rental Affordability Scheme (NRAS) will provide incentives for non-government and private enterprise to build 50 000 – 100 000 affordable dwellings across the country.

(FaHCSIA 2008b, p. 17)

Research was also identified as an important agenda item in the White Paper and as such there has been a \$5.5 million package under the National Homelessness Research Agenda provided from FaHCSIA to fund 16 research projects that will evaluate areas of the homelessness response. AHURI has stated that it wishes to complement and augment this evidence base, and will be commissioning research to support this through its National Housing Research Program 2011.

Additional research into homelessness is an important part of the overall response, in particular to identify cost effective responses to homelessness. Additionally, research that identifies policy gaps, program shortfalls and

expands our understanding of the social and economic benefits of action is needed.

4. NSW homelessness actions

4.1 NSW Homelessness Action Plan 2009-2014

The NSW Homelessness Action Plan sets out the NSW whole of government approach to reducing homelessness. As a signatory to the National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness (NPAH), the NSW Government has pledged combat homelessness. To this end, they have set targets by 2013 of:

- A 7% reduction in homelessness.
- A 25% reduction in primary homelessness.
- A 33% reduction in ATSI homelessness.

These targets will be checked against data collected in the 2011 census, although it is unclear if there will be additional data collection to reflect changes between 2011 and 2012/13.

Under the NPAH, NSW had pledged \$67.2 million for projects in 2009/10. In addition, \$18 million was allocated to NSW from Commonwealth funding. Information about the specific allocation of this Commonwealth funding in 2009/10 is currently unavailable. As of yet, a breakdown of funding for 2010/11 has not been released.

While a significant proportion of the funding was Federal funding, the State government has taken on the role of coordinator of the housing/homelessness response in NSW. The primary department for this has been Housing NSW. Housing NSW is using the Housing Policy and Assistance Program (HPAP) to coordinate Commonwealth and State funding for a number of homelessness services in addition to managing their social housing stock.

In 2010/11, Housing NSW has reported that the Federal funding commitment towards the HPAP in NSW will be:

- \$418.4 million from the Nation Building – Economic Stimulus Plan
- \$321.4 million from NAHA, including:
 - \$15.5 million from NPAH
 - \$43.8 million (existing funds from 2009/10 Housing NSW budget will be spent.)
 - \$47.5 million from the National Partnership on Remote Indigenous Housing

- \$8.4 million for A Place to Call Home

In addition to Commonwealth funding, the NSW government will contribute \$154.6 million and Housing NSW will contribute \$701.7 million, therefore the total funding for the HPAP in 2010/11 is \$1.652 billion. (Housing 2010b, p.5) In contrast, the total funding for the HPAP in 2009/10 was \$2.6 billion however this included \$1.2 billion for the Nation Building – Economic Stimulus Plan. (Housing NSW 2009d, p. 5)

The Department of Human Services, Community Services, provides specialist homelessness services under what was previously called SAAP. The funding levels for these services by the Federal government has not been declared in the NSW budget, although NCOSS estimates the total funding for this program at \$127.1 million for 2010/11, which is an increase from \$124.3 in 2009/10 (NCOSS 2010a, p. 18). There is a \$66 million discrepancy between Commonwealth declared funding to the NSW homelessness response in 2010/11 and Housing NSW funding for HPAP, so this \$66 million potentially represents the Commonwealth portion of state specialist homelessness services funding

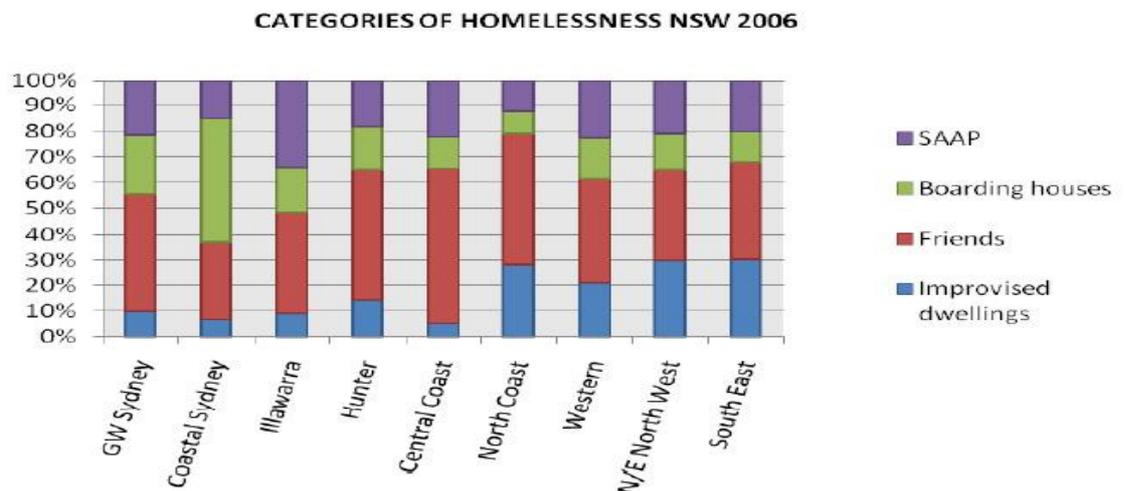
4.2 Regional Homelessness Action Plans

In June 2010, the NSW Regional Homelessness Action plans were released, detailing additional funding for the remaining 3 years. Each of the action plans were created with local input, including service providers and consumers of homelessness services. Approximately fifty per cent of the \$283.4 million has already been allocated to programs started in 2009/10, which will have recurrent funding till 2013. The remaining funding will be allocated over the three years to 2013/14 based on a “realignment of resources to shift the focus of effort towards prevention of homelessness and long term housing for homeless people” (Housing NSW 2009c, p. 5).

The Regional Homelessness Action plans have mapped out what programs will be funded over the next three years but do not link these programs with specific funding amounts. It is hoped that the budget will be released for each Regional Homelessness Action plan as they are formally launched; however UCCYPF supports the release of this information across NSW, as it will allow for better analysis of the NSW homelessness response. The regional plans aim to more

effectively respond to specific forms of homelessness, as the nature of homelessness across NSW is diverse, and highly dependent on geography. Figure 3, from the Planning Framework for the Regional Homelessness Action plans by Housing NSW details the difference between the categories of homelessness dependent of the region of NSW. For example, in Coastal Sydney, 48% of the homeless population reside in boarding houses compared to only 9% on the North Coast. Each Regional Action Plan provides the detail of the priority issues for the local area, on the basis of the data from the 2006 census. This is a promising method of tackling homelessness in NSW, as it recognises the diverse nature of the issue across the state and creates local solutions based on local knowledge with each region detailing core forms of homelessness to work on.

Figure 3:



Source: Housing NSW 2009c, p. 8

There are a number of areas where Federal and State statements of funding do not match up. The reason for this is unclear, although it may relate to changing budgetary estimates between the time Commonwealth budgets are released

(May) and when State budgets are released (June). The grouping of the CHSA and SAAP under the NAHA has not resulted in increased transparency or coordination of funding arrangements. UCCYPF would like more information on this issue in order to better understand the state of the homelessness sector and monitor changes to it, and will be looking to receive a consolidated homelessness response budget from the NSW Government.

Analysis of the funding arrangements for housing and homelessness strategies in NSW is currently incomplete as additional information about the funding for each project identified in the Regional Action Plans is needed where currently there are no funding values assigned. UCCYPF believes there is not sufficient information on most projects to make a judgment on their design, efficacy or evidence base.

5. Major homelessness prevention, support and specialist services

5.1 Specialist homelessness services

Specialist homelessness services previously fell under the Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP) funding, which has been replaced by the NAHA. While the change in program does not affect individual services, it brings the old SAAP services under the same funding structure as other homelessness prevention and support services. While specialist homelessness services are part-federally funded, they are currently coordinated by the Department of Community Services NSW and received \$127.1 million in 2010-11 (Housing NSW 2010b, p. 5). It has been announced that the specialist homelessness services policy unit will be transferred to a newly created Office for Homelessness reporting directly to the Director General of Human Services NSW.

The specialist homelessness services sector works with people experiencing or at risk of homelessness. The support can range from crisis accommodation in the form of refuges, to medium term programs of accommodation and support. The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare conducted an evaluation of SAAP data in 2008/09 wherein there were 358 specialist homelessness services funded with an average of \$330,000 per service across NSW. Together, these services supported 37,400 clients with sixty-two thousand support periods, of which almost one half included accommodation. In addition, more than eighteen thousand accompanying children were supported with 24,900 support periods, of which 9,300 included accommodation. Taken together, the SAAP program in NSW was providing support to 56,000 people experiencing homelessness at a cost of \$118.7 million in 2008/09 (AIWH 2010a, p. 7-15).

As there is a large variety of support services within the service system, aimed at different target groups, it is difficult to generalise about the system. Figure 4 and 5 detail the variety of client groups and types of service funded through the specialist homelessness service program. There are a number of groups that are disproportionately accessing these services. Young people are over-represented - while making up 17.5% of the NSW population, they represent over 35% specialist homelessness service users. (Housing NSW 2010a, pg. 4).

Single parent families make up 58% of overall homeless families, but make up 80% of families accessing specialist homelessness services. Conversely, two parent families make up 42% of homeless families, but only make up 20% of families in these services, while representing 78% of families “rough sleeping”. (Chamberlain & MacKenzie 2008, p. 25)

Figure 4: Specialist Homelessness Services by Client Group – 2008/09

Young People	149
Single Men only	32
Single Women only	14
Families	24
Women escaping Domestic Violence	88
Cross-Target/Multiple/General	51
Total	358

Figure 5: Specialist Homelessness Services by type – 2008/09

Crisis/Short-Term	132
Medium/Long-Term	95
Outreach support	13
Telephone information/Referral	7
Multiple	76
Other	35
Total	258

Source: NSW Department of Community Services 2009

Of concern is the demand of these services, particularly for children. Based on the number of people turned away from SAAP services after requesting accommodation and/or support nationally in 2008/09, we can see a significant lack of service availability:

- 62 per cent of all people were turned away
- 70 per cent of accompanied children were turned away
- 57 per cent of adults and unaccompanied young people were turned away
- Over half of the people not receiving accommodation were under the age of 20
- Over a quarter of the people not receiving accommodation (28 per cent) were from Indigenous populations.

(Council to Homeless Persons 2010, p. 1)

With the new approach to homelessness discussed in the Road Home, there is a move to shift some specialist homelessness services to a non-residential model, offering brokerage for clients to attain permanent housing quickly and then once the client has acquired permanent housing, the service will provide case-management to support the maintenance of tenancy. This is based on the 'housing first' model – provide permanent housing first, then follow up with support, as opposed to making housing dependent on case-work in short-medium term accommodation. There is concern that this model may not support young people who require more intensive, constant support, however for the adult and family homelessness system, this model appears to be a more effective method of reducing homelessness.

Case Study: DOORWAYS (*Dubbo Orana Options Referral With Brokerage Accommodation & Young peoples Support*)

DOORWAYS is a Burnside youth homelessness support service funded through SAAP and CGSP that operates in the Dubbo and Orana region. DOORWAYS provides brokerage and accommodation information to support young people at risk or experiencing homelessness. Doorways is a good example of a service that offers case work, outreach and support in a variety of accommodation options – rather than being confined to a residential location.

- Doorways has a strong relationship with the local area police service and this is of benefit when advocating for young people who have come in contact with the police and criminal justice service.
- Where Doorways has a strong relationship with housing offices, they find improved outcomes for young people.

While there is need for the specialist homelessness service system, a key point in The Road Home was that support services are not as cost-effective as prevention in reducing homelessness. Increases to the permanent housing stock and increasing prevention services will reduce the demand for specialist homelessness services, which are vital in many acute cases of homelessness, and will enable them to work with a reduced number of 'turn-aways'. Increasing housing options (outputs) while reducing the number of people becoming homeless (inputs) will result in:

- reducing the period of support required per client, as permanent housing will be available more readily
- reducing the demand for specialist homelessness services as fewer clients will become homeless.

Case Study: The Drum Youth Resource Centre

The Drum supports young people in the Macarthur region with brokerage and accommodation information and referrals. It is part funded through SAAP (on a pre-2009 contract). It has the capability to adapt its support to the needs of the young people, with case work or brokerage support available. They have had significant results with young people maintaining their leases and to support young people access accommodation through other SAAP services or social housing systems. Of concern for the service is the difficulty they have in building relationships with local private real estate agencies, which are hesitant to offer leases to young people engaged with a support service.

- The Drum (Campbelltown) has improved outcomes with specialist homelessness services and other generalist services that it has an established relationship with, and often struggles with services that it has no relationship with.
- The Drum has had success with its Youth Tap accommodation, which was created in partnership with Hume Housing (a community housing organisation) and Housing NSW. This community housing provides stable short-term accommodation to young people using the Temporary Accommodation program (TA), but unlike other versions of TA does not require the young person to reapply every day, and costs the Department of Housing far less (approx. \$110 per week) than alternatives which include a local hotel (approx. \$490 per week).

The specialist homelessness service system benefits from diversity of models, as homelessness is rarely simple and each case requires an individualised response. The expansion of funding for the sector has the potential to better cater to the diversity of the homeless population. The specific, targeted groups identified in each of the Regional Homelessness Action plans demonstrate a desire to achieve this.

The NSW Department of Community Services provides funding to the specialist homelessness service sector. However, it is difficult to ascertain which way the funding is allocated and there has been no information provided detailing changes planned across the sector under new tenders for funding. More transparent information about funding allocations is required so that an analysis of how the system is responding to homelessness and the impact of ongoing changes to the sector can be assessed. With the shift to a stand-alone office for homelessness in the Department of Human Services, it is hoped that more information on funding arrangements and strategies will be made available.

5.2 Crisis Accommodation

Crisis Accommodation is typically provided through the Housing NSW program, Temporary Accommodation (TA) or through specialist homelessness services. TA provides bridging assistance to ensure individuals and families “experiencing the immediate and acute crisis of homelessness” do not become “rough-sleepers” (Mitchell, Pollock & Farquhar 2009, p.2). In the 2010/11 NSW budget, \$10.9 million has been allocated to provide 27,550 TA assistances (Housing NSW 2010b, p. 6). TA aims to provide safe accommodation while long-term housing is found. Unfortunately, due to the lack of housing stock and the over burdening of the supportive specialist homelessness system, many use up their allocation of TA accommodation or specialist short-term service without having secured housing to move to. While little research into crisis support has been conducted, a study of a crisis accommodation centre in Melbourne found that only 23% of families using the service moved to permanent private accommodation on leaving the service, with another 35% leaving into medium-term specialist homelessness services. Of the families, 97% were eligible for public housing, however no dwellings were available. (Mitchell, Pollock & Farquhar 2009, p.6)

Within the Regional Action Plan for Greater Western Sydney, the NSW Government has stated its plan to “reshape the provision of Temporary Accommodation to improve support and private rental brokerage” (NSW Government 2010b, p. 43). While this may be a good adjustment for the Temporary Accommodation structure, the reshaping has only been allocated a scoping phase, which is planned to be completed by the end of 2010 and the project is not discussed or referenced in other Regional Action Plans. UCCYPF would like more information released on this plan, with information as to what will occur following the scoping phase and whether this project will affect TA across NSW or only in the Greater Western Sydney region.

5.3 Reconnect

The Reconnect program is run in forty locations across NSW & the ACT, including three run by UnitingCare Burnside in Dubbo/Orana Far-West, South West Sydney and the Central Coast. The program works with young people aged 12-18 years who are homeless or at risk of homelessness as a result of family breakdown and their families. It offers mediation, case work and family

workshops to assist the young person to return to or remain in the family home and to engage with education.

This program aims to prevent young people becoming homeless, particularly where family breakdown is the primary cause. An evaluation of the program undertaken in 2003 showed that the proportion of young people living in the family home increased from 57.5% to 62% after engagement with Reconnect (Ryan 2003, p. 9). Recent statistics from NSW show unchanged percentage of young people living in the family home after engagement with Reconnect.

Figure 6: Living situation of clients of Reconnect in NSW/ACT for the period 2009-2010

	Case Commencement (%)	Case Cessation (%)
Living with 1 or more parent/guardian	64	62
Extended Family/Family Friend	17	17
Partner/Friends/Alone	13	13

Data obtained from Reconnect Helpdesk, FaHCSIA, see Appendix 1 for full data set.

6. Promising practice, new models

6.1 The Foyer model

The Foyer is a model of supportive accommodation for young people at risk of homelessness who are, or are seeking to be, engaged in training, education or employment. The first Australian Foyer was the Miller Live 'N' Learn Campus in south-western Sydney, which currently provides medium term accommodation to 28 young people with an emphasis on access to training, education or employment and provision of life skills development through counselling and support services (Randolph & Wood 2005, p. 16-17). The campus was piloted in 2003 and evaluated in 2005.

As part of the NSW Regional Action Plans, this program is expanding to cater to 45 young people at a time and an additional 38 young people who have come in contact with Juvenile Justice over three years using an outreach model. (NSW Government 2010b, p. 39). In addition to the Miller campus, a Foyer model program is being funded through Community Services in the Illawarra to support 25 young people per year. Evaluations of these programs will occur in the next three years.

Foyer housing offers a support service which is more intensive than many other specialist homelessness services, coupled with promoting social inclusion through employment or education for young people. This creates a program with an increased cost per client than other specialist homelessness services, but with a higher efficacy rate. Although little research has been done in the Australian context, there is a large body of evidence from UK programs pointing to Foyer being a cost-effective method of homelessness support. The Foyer Federation in the UK has found that for the 5,000 young people who have used UK Foyer model projects; there was an increase from 39% to 75% who were engaged with employment or education (Foyer Foundation c. 2010).

Given the significant discussion of the Foyer model in *The Road Home*, it is expected that based on the evaluation of the Illawarra and South-West Sydney Foyers, we will see an expansion of the program across certain areas of NSW experiencing youth homelessness.

6.2 The HOME Advice program

The HOME Advice program was featured as a successful model in the Federal Government's white paper on homelessness, *The Road Home*. The UnitingCare Burnside program HABITAT in Wyong is the sole provider of this service in NSW. It supports 50-70 families per year at risk of homelessness as a result of financial hardship. This support is in the form of case-work support, financial aid and advocacy to Housing NSW, private real estate agents and the local Community Housing provider. This program achieves high levels of success at a cost-effective rate. Despite significant praise in *The Road Home*, this program has not received additional funding as part of the National Partnership on Homelessness.

An evaluation of the program in 2005 found it reduced the number of families in rental stress – 43% of families prior to support, reduced to 34% after support – in addition to 60% of participating families achieving a wiping out or reduction in debt levels. The evaluation also praised the program for its work with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families:

“Not only was the FHPP successful in reaching and engaging A&TSI [Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander] families, it also managed to effect real improvements that largely mirror those for non-A&TSI families.” (RPR Consulting 2005, p. xi)

Overall the evaluation commended the pilot:

“The pilot was effective in improving families' resilience to stress and sense of ability to direct their lives—this is a significant finding and indicates the success of the holistic and strengths-based approaches adopted in the FHPP model.” (RPR Consulting 2005, p. xi)

A second evaluation of the program in 2007 also noted successful outcomes:

“The level of program effectiveness achieved in the HOME Advice Program was higher than that of the youth homelessness pilot program in the lead-up to the Commonwealth's decision to launch the national Reconnect Program. The sustainability of housing stability and evidence of increased resilience for the supported families in the HOME Advice Program is a significant outcome of the program.” (MacKenzie, Desmond, Steen 2007, p. xvi)

In addition to this, the program is cost effective:

“Without early intervention at risk families face the prospect of homelessness and the need for supported accommodation through the Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP). The HOME Advice Program average cost per client family of \$3,079 is lower than the average cost of supporting families in SAAP [\$4,551 per family support period]. However, these SAAP cost figures are based on support and operational costs and do not include a cost component for buildings. The total potential cost offsets from providing assistance to families at risk of becoming homeless will be substantially greater than the average cost of support to homeless families in SAAP.” (MacKenzie, D, Desmond, K, Steen, A 2007, p. xvi)

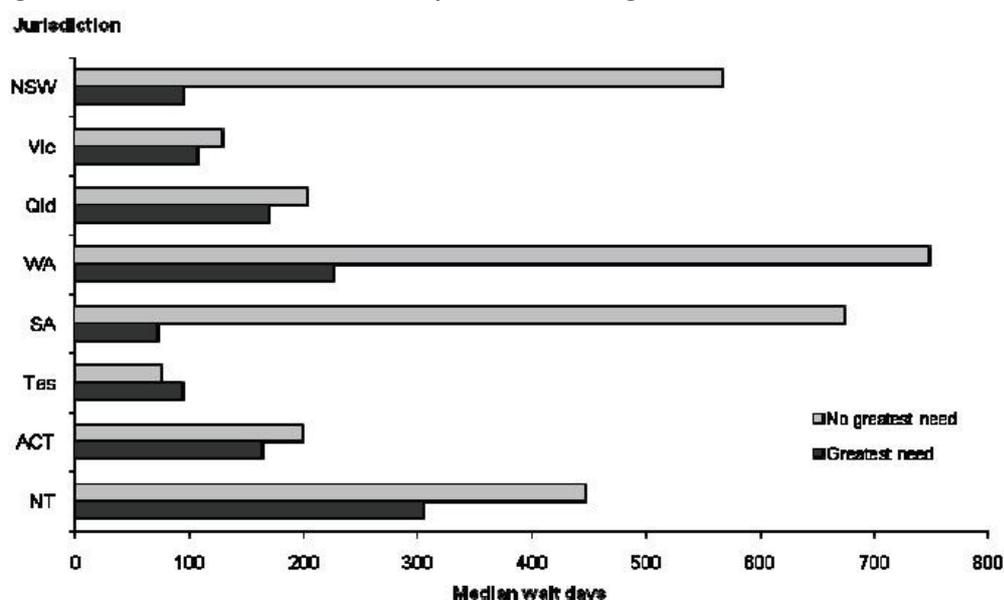
Expanding the HOME Advice program is an opportunity for a clear, simple early intervention to a type of homelessness, by increasing funding for a successful, cost-effective, evidence-backed program that uses prevention and early intervention to stop families at risk of homelessness from becoming homeless. In doing so, this will prevent the economic burden that homelessness creates.

7. State responses to affordable housing

7.1 Public Housing

Public housing, managed by Housing NSW, is one method to reduce and prevent homelessness. Applicants are assessed on their 'need' and if they are eligible for public housing they are either placed in the priority list or the standard waiting list. The waiting period can be long and many homeless people, particularly young people who may move location, have difficulty keeping their application updated, which can result in a new application having to be submitted, returning the applicant at the end of the housing list. It is not uncommon for waits to exceed 2 years. Figure 7 details the median wait times experienced by public housing applicants.

Figure 7: Median wait times for public housing



Notes:

1. SOMIH data are not available for Tas and are not applicable for ACT or NT.
2. Qld's data are not comparable with previous years, with a new housing needs assessment commencing on 22 September 2008.

Source: AIHW analysis of National Housing Assistance Data Repository.

Source: AIWH 2010d, p. 17

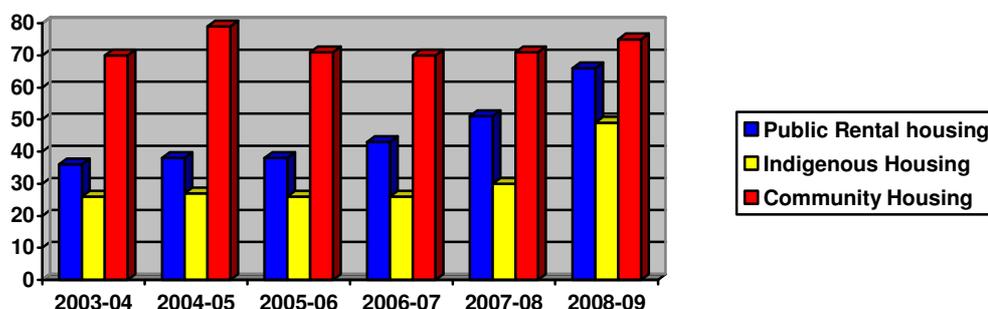
Currently, construction of new properties and significant renovation to existing properties is occurring through the Nation Building Economic Stimulus Plan (NBES) although 90% of new properties constructed by Housing NSW will be transferred to community housing providers. This is an important step in

increasing the existing housing stock, a precursor to reducing homelessness. However, for young people, “public housing is rarely a realistic option, because of the long wait times and also a general reluctance by young people to view public housing in a positive light” (Burke, Neske & Ralston 2004 as cited in Johnson, G, Natalier, K et al. 2009, p. 15). A number of UCCYPF services have identified the negative stereotype associated with public housing.

By June 2012, 6,000 new social housing dwellings will have been constructed as part of the NBES to add to the existing stock of 117,000 dwellings in NSW, although this will not cover the approximately 47,000 applicants on the waiting list for public housing. (AIWH 2010b, p. 6)

Traditionally, public housing was designed as mainstream low-cost housing accessed by families in times of need. Now, it is increasingly being used to house families and individuals in ‘greatest need’ – that is, those with significant or multiple disadvantages, particularly families with young children and indigenous families. In 2006 in response to evidence that indicated that the current lifetime tenancies were unsustainable and resulted in significantly reduced the number of available social housing residencies, eligibility criteria and the lengths of tenancies were altered, creating 2,5 or 10 year leases in order to ensure those in ‘greatest need’ could gain access to public housing more quickly. While this has increased turnover in public housing, the Tenant’s Union of NSW has reported that these changes have had the unintended consequence of removing low-income families from public housing, where the private rental market is too expensive. This is of particular concern for families and individuals that qualify as in ‘greatest need’, who may require support to manage a tenancy. (Martin 2006) The increasing percentage of housing given to those in ‘greatest need’ can be seen in Figure 8.

Figure 8 – Percentage of new social housing tenants who are in ‘greatest need’.



Source: AIWH 2010d, p. 36

7.2 Community Housing

Community housing usually utilises public housing properties, managed and leased by local community organisations. This removes some of the stigma attached to the residences, improving the likelihood that young people will feel comfortable to apply for housing through this scheme. The Community Housing sector will see a significant increase in their housing stock as a result of the current arrangements demonstrated better outcomes than Housing NSW in assisting people to maintain their tenancies by integrating case management support with the provision of housing. (Productivity Commission 2010, p. 1.10) Currently, the community housing sector houses over 16,000 households, with over 20,000 individuals on the waiting list, many of whom are also on the wait list for public housing. (AIWH 2010c, p. 4).

Through the Housing Pathways program, an application for social housing will add an applicant to both the community and public housing waiting lists. This removes the difficulty that individuals suffering homelessness had with maintaining multiple applications for each different housing provider in their area. Community Housing providers report that this is providing a simpler system for clients to apply for housing, with an online application allowing for outreach workers to help individuals and families who are experiencing homelessness to apply from on a wireless laptop without requiring the client to apply in person. This will improve the ability of both services and clients to maintain their applications for social housing.

Given the increase in community housing stock, homelessness services for families and individuals in NSW can expect to have more contact with local community housing services. Services with good relationships with their local community housing service and ensure that support workers working with families who display the risk signs of homelessness are aware of the application process for community housing in their area are more effective. The Drum, a UnitingCare Burnside youth homelessness service in South-West Sydney, has had success working with their local community housing service (see page 26).

7.3 A Place to Call Home

Through *A Place to Call Home*, the Federal and State government have co-funded a small number of accommodation and support services for homeless individuals and families. This initiative uses the Housing First model where permanent housing is provided immediately to the individual or family, with support services working with the client until they “develop greater capacity to live independently”. This is currently time-limited to one year per client (Housing NSW 2009b, p. 30). Roughly twenty-five dwellings are allocated to this program per year in NSW. In the period 2008 – 2010, accommodation was only offered to twenty-five families and fifteen individuals that were “rough sleeping”. Of those allocated to families, thirteen families are specifically targeted to address domestic violence issues and of the remainder a further five are optional allocations.

While this appears to be an excellent program, with a strong evidence base, there are a number of concerns regarding conflicting information in the funding models from FaHCSIA and Housing NSW. FaHCSIA states that each family unit or individual will receive 1 year of support services upon which time their dwelling and their tenancy reverts to the public housing system, resulting in tenants remaining in their housing permanently (FaHCSIA 2009). Conversely, Housing NSW has budgeted support services for each family unit or individual to continue until 2013/14, so properties built in years prior to 2012/13 will get increased periods of support, i.e. in 2009/10 each property will provide 4 years of support, in 2010/11 each will provide 3 years of support and so on (Housing NSW 2009b, p. 32).

It is unclear if this is a miscalculation in the NSW Implementation plan or that this program will be providing support packages to more family units individuals (409 support packages) than the number of houses that it is building (155 dwellings).

In addition, the stated aim of the program is that dwellings will be “transferred to the public housing pool in each jurisdiction” following the support period. However, in 2010-2011, the Commonwealth funding for this program will go to the Camperdown “Common Ground” project, which will not relegate its dwellings to Housing NSW after support has been completed (Housing NSW 2010b, p. 5).

Given the potential for this program to support some chronically homeless families and young people, UCCYPF is in favour of a model that provides wrap-around, long term support. The conflicting descriptions of the A Place To Call Home program is a concern and further details from Housing NSW is required regarding the funding, forward planning and model of this program in NSW. The limited funding available for this program, will reduce its capacity to make a significant difference to the homeless population in NSW.

Common Ground

Utilising the Housing First concept, the Common Ground model has been appropriated from a successfully run program in the USA. Currently there is a Common Ground facility being built in Camperdown NSW, funded through the *A Place To Call Home* program. This will house over 100 people with the support of a number of charitable and community organisations, with a number of other similar projects already providing housing in South Australia.

The Common Ground model emphasises intensive support for individuals suffering from chronic homelessness. Situated in an apartment-styled building, a Common Ground project will accommodate a mix of long-term homeless and low-income individuals to facilitate a social mix. Each individual gets a small apartment, with emphasis on socialising in common areas. This is combined with 24-hour access to case-work support. An individual may remain living in their apartment for as long as they like, although they will be encouraged to move into the private or social housing sector when they are ready.

While research on the model in an Australian context has not been conducted, extensive research in the USA suggests that the cost of running a Common Ground program costs approximately \$36 per day per individual (Common Ground 2010). If this cost is replicated in the Australian context, this will place it far below the cost of TA or even the cost of leaving people in chronic homeless, which Australian research places at up to \$93 per day (Reynolds 2008, p. 35).

8. National responses to affordable housing

A number of programs have been implemented as part of the NAHA in response to the national housing affordability crisis.

8.1 The National Rental Affordability Scheme

With funding of \$623 million, the National Rental Affordability Scheme (NRAS) is a scheme to provide incentives for the construction of up to 50,000 new affordable rental dwellings by 2012. Incentives of \$9,140 per annum (\$6 855 federal, \$2 285 state) for ten years are provided for every new rental property created for rent at 20% below market rate. If uptake by 2012 is strong, an additional 50,000 incentive eligible vacancies will be offered. Community housing providers have taken up the offer, claiming fifty-two per cent of incentives to date, with private providers taking the remainder (Victorian Government Department of Human Services 2009, p. 26). FaHCSIA have allocated 1,363 dwellings in the NRAS for NSW and there are at least 38,000 incentives are yet to be allocated nationally, (NSW figures for remaining allocations are unavailable). (FaHCSIA 2010b, CHFA 2009). This program has the potential to significantly increase access to affordable accommodation by increasing the stock of private and community rental housing, however UCCYPF is concerned that there has been no analysis of how the ending of the ten year incentive program will impact on those renting these properties, particularly where NRAS incentives have been allocated to for-profit housing providers. Up to 100,000 low-income families could potentially have a 25% rent increase imposed following the ending of this program, which would simply delay the impacts of current housing stress.

32% of the Australian population resides in NSW. The NSW state government offered to match 27% of the 11,000 available incentives in rounds 1 and 2. Currently, the NSW Government has only offered to match 2,160 of the 39,000 incentives being offered by the federal government in rounds 3 and 4. This will result in a maximum of 5.5% of NRAS buildings being built in NSW (NCOSS 2010b). This program has the potential to greatly improve housing affordability in NSW and increased funding by the NSW government is required.

8.2 National Quality Framework

The Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FaHCSIA), in conjunction with State and Territory governments, is developing a National Quality Framework to inform the work done by homelessness services and to provide standards of service for clients. This will likely include a complaints system, standards of operation, requirements around collaboration between services and an accreditation process, operating parallel to existing accreditation processes. The existing accreditation schemes are typically state-based and the new Quality Framework will provide a standardised format across the country. However, existing accreditation processes will likely remain as an alternative.

In the UCCYPF submission to the first round of consultations, we emphasised the need for a rights-based approach and a space for consumer participation in decision making processes. This would be realised through enshrining the right of consumers to have access to housing, a financial investment by government in creating the framework, and placing the response to homelessness as a key deliverable in other National Partnership Agreements, such as those on Disability, Healthcare, Indigenous Reform and Education. The UCCYPF submission also emphasised the need to acknowledge the particular challenges faced by smaller services and those in rural and remote communities in adhering to a framework such as this, asserting that a reasonable timeframe for compliance and the provision of appropriate resources would be essential to support these services.

8.3 Government support in the private market

The Commonwealth Rent Assistance (CRA) scheme provides subsidised rent for low-income earners to encourage renting in the private market. This provides immediate support for those at risk of homelessness, but does not reduce the cost of housing or increase the housing stock, merely shifting the burden to government for a portion of the cost.

The Productivity Commission's research report on the contribution of the Not-for-Profit sector includes a case study of social housing. Within it, the Commission is highly critical of the CRA:

“The effectiveness of demand-side strategies is... questionable when housing supply is relatively inelastic. Policies such as CRA and the first home buyer’s grant can inflate rents and house prices, reducing the ability of those on low incomes to access well located quality housing”
(Productivity Commission 2010, p. I.13)

9. Sector Development within NSW

9.1 Regional Homelessness Coordinators

In a number of regions, homelessness coordinators have been funded to improve collaboration and coordination between services in an area. These individuals are in part superseded by the Regional Homelessness Action plans, which ostensibly have a regional action group, however it is difficult for this collaboration to occur when the coordination is divided between a number of individuals. Areas where there have been regional homelessness coordinators, have reported positive outcomes for those experiencing homelessness, as services are more targeted in their support and clients receive support for all issues, as opposed to support for single issues from a single service. These coordinators have been funded in an ad hoc way, with no ongoing funding or plan to expand their use.

9.2 Collaborative regional projects

There are a number of collaborative projects targeting specific at-risk groups in NSW, funded under the Regional Action Plans. These typically involve partnerships between local non-government homelessness services, Housing NSW, local community housing service and Health NSW, in addition to other organisations. The projects use a 'housing first' approach, offering permanent housing to clients. The auspice organisation utilises brokerage funds to provide wrap-around support for the homeless target group, engaging all relevant local organisations to provide support. These pilot projects have experienced high levels of effectiveness, by being able to flexibly respond to the specific needs of clients through the numerous organisations involved. These projects are an effective response to homelessness. Funding to enable similar projects in all regions with high-levels of at risk homeless people would be a cost-effective method of reducing the homeless population.

Case Study: Nepean Youth Homelessness Service (NYHS)

The NYHS program brings together more than 20 non-government and government services to provide support to young people in the Nepean region. Funded as part of the Western Sydney Homelessness Regional Action Plan, the project utilises housing stock from Mission Australia Community Housing and Housing NSW.

When a person needing support is identified, the coordination group matched the needs the client has identified with brokerage funds to engage relevant support organisations. For example, a young person with an alcohol dependency and mental health issues who has been sleeping rough for a significant period of time will be placed in permanent housing and provided with a case-work plan which deals with alcohol dependency, mental health counselling and building living and goal setting skills. These provisions may be provided by different organisations and each client will receive an individualised support package. Although costly, the program has a very high rate of success, with over 80% of clients with high and complex needs maintaining long term tenancies.

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