



# Shelter WA Update

## June 2008

### **Green Paper on Homelessness “Which Way Home? A New Approach to Homelessness”**

On 22 May 2008, the Prime Minister released the Government's Green Paper: 'Which Way Home? A New Approach to Homelessness'. The Green Paper aims to promote public discussion on homelessness, highlight the challenges faced by people who are homeless and suggest options to reduce homelessness over the next 12 years. In response a White Paper will be released in September 2008. The White Paper will set out a national plan of action to 2020.

The Green Paper provides three Options for discussion, teamed with 18 questions for input. The three options look at SAAP and mainstream services and how these can be used and developed to combat homelessness.

**Option One** looks to transform SAAP to build a national homelessness response focused on distinct streams. This option would provide a new national homelessness response which focuses on four streams of support, tailored to particular life events and circumstances, the streams proposed are for: youth, people experiencing or escaping domestic violence, single people, and families in housing stress. Shelter WA believes that Option One ignores people who do not fit into these distinct streams. Indigenous, CaLD, people with mental illness and seniors are just some that will fall through the gaps with this option.

**Option Two** looks to improve the current SAAP response. This option would provide extra investment to reform crisis services to give a greater focus to long term outcomes. This option is long overdue, proposing that employment packages for SAAP workers will be made more competitive with more resources given to professional development, training and IT. A positive inclusion in option two is the removal of time limits for clients on interventions so SAAP service recipients get support for as long as they need it. However this option allows the government to continue to marginalise and undervalue homelessness, and the non-government provision of homeless services and risks continuing the current situation where information from SAAP and non-government services being fed to government is not acted on.

**Option Three** looks to improve the mainstream service response to homelessness and restrict SAAP to responding to crisis interventions. This option would endeavour to boost the capacity of mainstream services to respond to homelessness with a particular focus on early intervention and prevention. The mainstream service system would then share responsibility with homeless and crisis services for reducing homelessness.

#### **Shelter WA's position**

For too long the government has not taken an active role in homelessness responses. Because SAAP, through the non-government sector, has been the dominant vehicle for servicing this client group, public and mainstream agencies have not taken an active role, and have in effect relinquished responsibility to non-government. The approach outlined in option 3 and a change of government is an initial indicator of policy direction to include homelessness service provision within mainstream services. There is a significant lack of public housing and affordable housing exit points for SAAP clients and this is directly related to governments relinquishing responsibility to help the most vulnerable and then not responding to their needs for the most basic services afforded to other members of the community. The priority waiting list for public housing is defined as those people with highest need, yet they wait for many months. By requiring mainstream services to take on a homelessness response, homelessness and the issues surrounding it will once again be on government agenda.



Shelter WA would like to see;

- All states to commit to a *Homelessness Act* and a *Human Rights Act* by 2010, these legislative vehicles should ideally be in conjunction with Federal laws; however the lack of a Federal law should not allow state governments to remain inert. This target is directly in line with the social inclusion primary goal. All people deserve the right to home, the most important foundation for social inclusion.
- halving the numbers of homeless households in temporary accommodation, and rough sleepers
- more public, community and social housing stock, both in real terms and as a proportion of total stock.
- all social housing, particularly housing in remote areas and indigenous communities to meet a decent homes standard
- State and Local governments assess and plan for current and future housing needs of the population and through this establish home ownership, affordable rental investment schemes and other instrumental assistance to give greater choice and opportunity to low income home buyers, social tenants, key workers and low income people who rent privately
- legislate for a minimum proportion of social / public / community housing in all new land development or brown site re-developments of at least 20%, with an ultimate aim of 10% of all housing stock to be available to low-income and otherwise disadvantaged consumers
- increased support to facilitate social inclusion for people who have experienced homelessness and other disadvantage, linking a range of supports to individuals and allowing choice in provision and location
- local and regional authorities are best placed to take the lead strategic housing role for an area, and should be required to identify, plan and respond to housing need and homelessness within their geographical jurisdiction
- local authorities to take a more strategic approach to housing by developing collaborative working relationships with state and federal governments. Strategic housing activity needs to link with; the delivery of other services (including health, education, community amenities); a safe environment; accessible transport; a strong sense of community; and a decent home for all at a price people can afford.

Homelessness trends in England since the implementation of the 2002 Homelessness Act display remarkable decrease in rough-sleeper figures, halving the homeless population. When comparing these figures to other industrialised countries the success of a strategic UK approach is unparalleled. In 2005 the United Kingdom set a goal to halve homelessness by 2010. Within 3 years (2003–04 and 2006–07<sup>1</sup>) homelessness rates in the UK have reduced by 50 per cent.

Shelter WA calls for uniformity in the consumer protections available to people who have experienced homelessness, and the same resources, salaries and conditions available to employees in homelessness service delivery. Shelter WA believes that by restoring the responsibility for homeless service delivery to government agencies and re-integrating SAAP within public mainstream service provision, much can be gained in re-focusing and prioritising the problem, consistent data reporting, raising service standards, improving quality control and the integration, acknowledgment and professionalization of the sector.

Submissions for the Green Paper close on 27 June 2008. Shelter WA's draft submission is available from Shelter WA by emailing [shelterwa@shelterwa.org.au](mailto:shelterwa@shelterwa.org.au) or telephoning 08) 9325 6660

Visit [http://www.facsia.gov.au/internet/facsinternet.nsf/housing/new\\_approach\\_stage1.htm](http://www.facsia.gov.au/internet/facsinternet.nsf/housing/new_approach_stage1.htm) for more information.

---

<sup>1</sup>See Pawson et al, 2007, *Evaluating homelessness prevention*, Department for Communities and Local Government [www.communities.gov.uk](http://www.communities.gov.uk)

