



State Commissioning Strategy for Community Services  
Government of Western Australia  
Department of Finance  
16 Parkland Road  
Osborne Park WA

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Via email - [cspp@finance.wa.gov.au](mailto:cspp@finance.wa.gov.au).

To whom it may concern

### **State Commissioning Strategy for Community Services – Response to the Discussion Paper**

Thank you for the opportunity to provide feedback on the State Commissioning Strategy for Community Services Discussion Paper. Shelter WA and the WA Alliance to End Homelessness (WAAEH) write in support of the response provided by WACOSS, and to provide some additional comment pertaining to the commissioning of social housing and homelessness services.

#### **About us**

Shelter WA is the independent peak body in WA that advocates for social and affordable housing and ending homelessness. Shelter WA takes a strategic leadership role, championing the development of an effective housing system and bringing all parts of the system together to achieve this. Shelter WA brings together a strong coalition committed to diverse and affordable housing choice for all with a focus on housing for people on low to moderate incomes and groups that experience housing insecurity. Shelter WA undertakes research and policy development, engagement, and advocacy to drive solutions to build an effective housing system and alleviate housing-related poverty.

The Western Australian Alliance to End Homelessness (WAAEH) is a coalition of individuals, businesses and agencies from the WA community sector that have been active in bringing about change on the issue of homelessness in WA over the past four years. WAAEH launched a 10-year strategy in April 2018 to end homelessness in Western Australia. Collectively, the strategy was developed by homelessness service providers, people experiencing homelessness (lived experience), researchers and academics, service funders, and members of the WA community. This Strategy provides a framework to inform the process for ending homelessness in WA, and providing signposts for action. It is intended to act as a blueprint - replicable in terms of processes, and guidance in terms of approach. Shelter WA acts as the backbone organisation on behalf of the Alliance and its goals closely align with it.

#### **State Commissioning Strategy**

Shelter WA and WAAEH welcome the move towards a more coherent, coordinated and system-wide approach to the delivery of community services. We believe a move towards outcomes-based people-centred and place-based commissioning is a positive step which has the potential to significantly improve the design and delivery of community services. We also believe that successful strategic commissioning must be underpinned by a

genuine collaborative approach and requires significant investment in building sector capacity, capability and sustainability.

### Outcomes based commissioning

Focusing attention away from outputs and activities towards outcomes compels us all to focus on what matters, and as such Shelter WA and WAAEH welcome the move to reframe commissioning approaches towards achieving outcomes. Determination of outcomes and how to achieve these should be a co-designed collaborative effort to ensure targeted outcomes that are important to the individuals and communities utilising services. As outlined in WACOSS's response, embedding a system-wide commissioning approach grounded in outcomes will present a range of significant challenges that must be addressed in a systematic and collaborative way across the sector, utilising the knowledge and positioning of peaks.

In response to the Discussion Paper consultation question '**how can service users be most effectively engaged to design services that meet their needs in the context of place and community?**' we note that there are excellent examples within our sector of best practice work to engage service users and people with lived experience. Peaks are well-placed to support and guide this work. For example, Shelter WA and HOME lived experience advocates (HOME Project participants) have developed a Hear of My Experience (H.O.M.E.) toolkit based on the principles of empathy and equity to enable people with lived experience, government and organisations to work together as equal partners in solving complex issues such as housing insecurity and homelessness. The toolkit is available at <https://www.shelterwa.org.au/home-kit-overview/>. We note that there may be a range of barriers to engaging service users and the community more broadly in service design and that there is significant risk of these processes being ineffective and even harmful if not provided sufficient time, resourcing, support and expertise.

### Delivery approaches

We welcome indications in the discussion paper that the strategy will seek to foster and enable innovative approaches and that specific funding tools could be developed to support collective impact approaches. Shelter WA and WAAEH would welcome the expansion of **Table 1: Delivery approaches** in the Discussion Paper to better reflect the diversity of approaches which could be incentivised and promoted under the Strategy. We believe the Strategy should explicitly recognise that competitive tendering should not be the 'default' method for purchasing services. Partnership-based collaborative commissioning (including collective impact and alliance-based approaches), joint commissioning, Expressions of Interest, Preferred Service Provider processes and Direct Negotiation with existing service providers, among other approaches, can be used to promote collaboration and build service capacity, particularly for place-based and collective impact commissioning.

### Homelessness

Homelessness is a complex issue which can only be tackled effectively through whole system strategic planning and service responses informed by outcomes data. As such it lends itself particularly well to a strategic commissioning approach. For example, it is not possible to end rough sleeping without data informed and aligned place-based strategies to provide access to wrap-around services, including health and mental health services. COVID-19 has also provided a stark example of the direct link between homelessness and health, and the need for commissioning approaches to be able to respond quickly to changing circumstances.

A recent report by the Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute demonstrates clearly that outcomes from the provision of public housing cross many domains including police, justice and mental health, highlighting the whole of system approach required to measure outcomes from the provision of housing. That report found that housing an ex-prisoner in a public housing tenancy generates, after five years, a net benefit of between \$5,200 and \$35,000, relative to the cost of providing them with assistance in private rental and/or

through homelessness services.<sup>1</sup> The study demonstrates the importance of a systems-based approach to commissioning, as well as the need to improve access to linked data to enable the measurement of outcomes across multiple domains. Access to linked, de-identified administrative data from NSW allowed researchers to determine cross-sector outcomes in a way that is generally not-achievable to service providers in WA.

Access to robust, comprehensive and timely data is not only essential for measuring outcomes, but is also instrumental to good service design, identifying need, and knowing where and how to target services. Our most complex problems like homelessness are our most urgent and require systems that can respond quickly and accurately to changing need and new challenges like the COVID-19 pandemic. We welcome recognition within the Discussion Paper of the need to collect and use high quality data in the implementation of commissioning approaches. We acknowledge the need to build capacity in this area, not only across the community services sector, but also across agencies as well as improving mechanisms to support the sharing of data between partners. Investment in systems to harmonise collection, including the development of shared definitions, and facilitate access to data while ensuring protection of individual's privacy, is essential.

#### Case study: WA Alliance to end homelessness - Outcomes Measurement and Evaluation Framework

Homelessness is a complex problem. WAAEH recognises that if the goal of ending homelessness is to be achieved, this complexity needs to be conceptualised and understood, and the multitude of factors that can affect homelessness need to be measured and assessed. With support from Lotterywest, WAAEH commissioned the University of Western Australia Centre for Social Impact to develop an outcomes measurement and evaluation framework to unpack and operationalise the key targets of the WA Alliance to End Homelessness 10-year Strategy, including those relating to the drivers of entry to and successful exit from homelessness and the role of the community and service system in responding effectively to homelessness. The Framework was also designed to conceptualise and operationalise the role of the WAAEH as a social movement. The Framework not only facilitates answering the question of whether we are making progress towards ending homelessness, but also, by capturing its functioning, the role that the WAAEH is playing in that progress.

Development of the Framework is an example of the collaborative work being done in the sector to measure the outcomes of our work. It should be noted that development of the Framework and ongoing measurement required commitment from across the Alliance, expert development from the University of WA, and substantial upfront and ongoing investment.

The most recent report can be access at: [https://www.shelterwa.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/End\\_Homelessness\\_Report\\_FA2\\_web.pdf](https://www.shelterwa.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/End_Homelessness_Report_FA2_web.pdf)<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Martin, C., Reeve, R., McCausland, R., Baldry, E., Burton, P., White, R. and Thomas, S. (2021) Exiting prison with complex support needs: the role of housing assistance, AHURI Final Report No. 361, Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute Limited, Melbourne, <https://www.ahuri.edu.au/research/final-reports/361>.

<sup>2</sup> Seivwright, A., Lester, L., Fairthorne, J., Vallesi, S., Callis, Z., Flatau, P. (2021). The Western Australian Alliance to End Homelessness: Ending Homelessness in Western Australia 2021. Version 2.0 August 2021. Perth: The University of Western Australia, Centre for Social Impact.

### Case study: The Zero Project and By-Name List

The Zero Project and By-Name List represent a significant step forward in sector collaboration and real-time data sharing towards ending homelessness in Western Australia. The Zero Project – Housing First Coordination for WA, brings together the establishment of a shared data set (By name List) to guide and inform the provision of wrap-around support services for individuals, with housing as a first step. The Project, a collaboration between the Western Australian Government and homelessness service agencies, coordinated by Ruah Community Services, takes a collective impact approach towards ending homelessness using the Advance to Zero national methodology. This methodology holds the service system accountable for driving down the number of people experiencing homelessness to the point of achieving functional zero. It recognises that no single service response will end homelessness but requires the whole service system to work in unison towards the agreed outcome of reducing homelessness.

The By Name List is a key tool used by the Zero Project for collaboratively deciding on service responses including allocating housing and support resources. The Perth By-Name list enables organisations from across the sector to collaboratively track and quantify homelessness, so local communities have access to a real time picture of how their service is working and can use that information to drive evidence-based improvements to help reduce rough sleeping and chronic homelessness.

The By-Name list dashboard can be accessed at:  
<https://www.endhomelessnesswa.com/bynamelist-datapage>

### Homelessness Service System Alignment Analysis and Road Map

The recent Western Australian report *Homelessness Service System Alignment Analysis and Road Map* commissioned by the Department of Communities is an important piece of work that has significant implications for the way services are commissioned in the homelessness sector and as such is of particular relevance to the development of a commissioning strategy for community services.<sup>3</sup> The report outlines the need for the current homelessness service system to shift to an ‘accountable community system’ which is person-centred, place-based and outcomes focused. Shelter WA and WAAEH support this transition which aligns well with the aims of a strategic commissioning approach. The Report sets out a roadmap of the steps required to make this shift and proposes a new system of ‘Alliance’ type place-based contracting. The Roadmap outlines the importance of shared understanding, agreed definitions and commitment to working collaboratively, which are also essential for strategic commissioning. We look forward to progress across homelessness system change as outlined in the Road Map. As noted by MacKenzie, ‘change needs to be designed and implemented as a collaborative effort between government and the sector, and it needs strong leadership and clear direction.’

### The Alliance model for delivering services

The use of an Alliance model to commission services to end homelessness is a relatively new development that has now been used in a number of jurisdictions to make impressive gains towards ending homelessness. The Alliance model represents a move away from programs-based single-solution approaches. The model has its origins in co-production approaches and is an inclusive and collaborative way to commission services, utilising the skills, knowledge, experience and expertise of a wide range of partners to find innovative solutions to meet diverse and complex needs.

The model is based on a formal collaboration (an ‘Alliance’) where the partners share responsibility and accountability for the design and delivery of services and new approaches on a “best for people using services” basis, seeking a culture that promotes and drives innovation and outstanding performance. Success is

<sup>3</sup> MacKenzie, G. 2021 *Homelessness Service System Alignment Analysis and Road Map*. Collective iQ

measured through the collective performance of the Alliance and not the performance of individual partners, thus creating a shared incentive to achieve objectives.

#### Case study: Glasgow Alliance to End Homelessness

In 2019 Glasgow City Council undertook an innovative commissioning approach to achieving the target of ending homelessness and rough sleeping by 2030. The Council issued a tender to establish an alliance partnership to transform homelessness services, representing a major shift in the traditional commissioner/provider relationship. The move away from competitive tendering to a more integrated, joined up and collaborative approach brought together government, the community sector and people with lived experience of homelessness to deliver people-centred services with all decision-making guided by a 'What's Best For People?' principle. All homelessness purchased services for people aged 16+ were in-scope for inclusion under the auspices of the Alliance and, after one final competitive tender process, the successful Alliance partnership was delegated responsibility for all commissioned homelessness services in Glasgow. Funding for the Alliance was put in place for 7-10 years.

The model enables:

- Collective ownership, responsibility and accountability for the agreed outcomes
- Collective response to external influences and risk
- Best-for-system decision making
- Pooling of skills, assets and experience
- Hard conversations and opportunities to work through potential conflict
- Flexibility to evolve and adapt.

The successful Glasgow Alliance to End Homelessness experience demonstrates that commissioning approaches can facilitate partnership-based collaborative whole-system approaches, leading to more effective services and improved outcomes, achieving a common goal of services and support for people that are easy to access, effective and joined up.<sup>4</sup>

#### Community housing providers

Shelter WA and WAAEH welcome a strategic approach to the commissioning of social housing and look forward to this facilitating the growth and strengthening of the community housing sector in WA. Community housing is integral part of our housing system yet is arguably undervalued and under-supported with its full potential to access new financing options yet to be unlocked. This potential was highlighted in Foundations for a Stronger Tomorrow, State Infrastructure Strategy Draft for Public Comment<sup>5</sup>. The community housing sector often delivers housing through a range of innovative partnerships and place-based approaches, and Community Housing Providers (CHPs) have a strong history in delivering person-centred services. Many CHPs have tenant advisory committees, ensuring that tenants have a direct say and input into policies which impact on them. They also take a supported landlord approach to managing their tenancies, which ensures that the outcomes for their tenants are at the centre of their business model.

#### Joint commissioning

As is noted in the Discussion Paper, housing support services are commissioned by multiple agencies (Communities, Justice and the Mental Health Commission), often with different approaches. Work is needed to increase alignment of different relevant service delivery components. If done in partnership with the sector, we believe joint commissioning of services by two or more agencies could deliver significant benefit and

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.glasgowalliance.org/the-alliance/>

<sup>5</sup> Infrastructure WA, 2021, Foundations for a Stronger Tomorrow, State Infrastructure Strategy Draft for Public Comment, pages 212-213, [Foundations-for-a-Stronger-Tomorrow-Draft-for-public-comment-web-standard\\_1.pdf \(infrastructure.wa.gov.au\)](#).


improved efficiencies. We would welcome the opportunity for a more coordinated and consistent approach designed in collaboration with the sector.

### The way forward

Ambitious, place-based, whole system approaches are needed to address complex problems like homelessness. Place based approaches that are culturally informed and culturally led and commissioned for outcomes is critical. The development of a commissioning strategy for community services presents an important opportunity to support and drive new models of collaborative service delivery. We all desire an integrated strategic approach that moves the sector from unstable-short-term program-centred funding towards certainty, longevity, local control and people-centred services.

Shelter WA and WAAEH welcome the WA Government's commitment to the development of a new State Commissioning Strategy, and we thank the Department for the opportunity to comment on the State Commissioning Strategy for Community Services Discussion Paper. We look forward to the next steps in this process.

Yours sincerely



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