Homelessness Policy, programs and new models to address homelessness in the 21st Century.

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Introduction

Today we come together in this place at this time on the land of the Kaurna people. They have gone before us here for thousands of years. And, they will go beyond us. Their song lines stretch forward and back across this place - this place of ceremonies, celebration and renewal.

And so it is important to honour this past, present and future, and pay my respects to elders, families and descendents.

I want to thank the Don Dunstan Foundation and the University of Adelaide for the invitation to speak today about new policy programs and models to address homelessness in the 21st Century.

This is an important moment to pause and reflect on where the homelessness sector has come from , what we can learn from this journey and where we need to go to shape an effective response to homelessness in the 21st Century.

It is an important moment as we are now 5 years post- release of the Rudd labour government's homelessness white paper, *the Road Home* (2008). We have a new liberal/national coalition government who have provided a one year reprieve on the *National Partnership Agreement of Homelessness* while a new funding platform is negotiated beyond this. And homelessness was recently described by Minister Andrews recently as a 'moral blight'.

Clearly in half an hour it is not possible to say all that needs to be said about new homelessness policy and programs to address homelessness. Today I focus my brief attention on commonwealth led policy reform.

Earlier this week I gave another talk about innovation in homelessness programs for Homelessness week in which I provided a 12 point plan for program innovation. If time permits I will outline this plan at the conclusion of the talk.

Background

To prepare for the future it is important to look to the past. We need to discern both our achievement and our failings and the key ideas that have informed our policy, programs and practice.

Prof Andrew Beer has provided some complementary detail about the past in is earlier talk today. I will try not to repeat this and instead refer you to his talk/power-point presentation.

SAAP
While the issue of homelessness has long been with us in Australia arguably it was not until 1985, when the joint Commonwealth State funded *Supported Accommodation and Assistance (SAAP)* was established to provide a "last resort safety net" for homeless people that homelessness was profiled as a social issue demanding a coherent, organised policy and program response.

In other words SAAP put homelessness on the social issue map. This position was consolidated in 1989 with the release of the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission report on youth homelessness, colloquially known as the *Burdekin report*. And it was reinforced by 4 subsequent SAAP agreements that spanned 23 years until 2008/9 when the National Affordable Housing Agreement (NAHA) was established with the National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness (NPAH)

SAAP began as a program providing supported accommodation for the permanently homeless with three broad sub-programs general services (hostels and shelters) women's services and youth services.

Successive evaluations and attempts at reform - reform sought to expand the scope of service delivery from:
- select populations (youth, women and chronically homeless) to broader populations (e.g. families),
- shift the focus from crisis responses to transitional housing responses that promote independence and self -reliance,
- from secondary intervention to early intervention and prevention

Despite these achievements it was clearly recognised that SAAP had failed to deliver a systemic response to homelessness. In short it failed overall to deliver long-tem outcomes for clients in housing, as well as

employment, and training. Clearly there are many reasons but I shall suggest only a few:

- **Division between Housing vs Support**

Structurally SAAP as a program sat at arms length from housing policy and programs at a State and Territory government level (e.g. public housing in State government departments).

This reflected a fundamental division between housing services and support services. And at the heart of this was the very way that homelessness itself was conceptualised.

For the homelessness sector, homelessness was less about a lack of housing and more about the complex issues that, if not caused then certainly exacerbated homelessness. This included issues like, substance abuse, mental illness, domestic violence....family conflict.

While programmatic responses delivered by the homelessness sector routinely sought exits to public housing for clients, support for these other individual causes arguably became a focus of service delivery. This was especially true when the homelessness sector struggled to deliver housing outcomes due to housing affordability and supply issues.

- **Conflation of symptom with cause**

There was a tendency to frame program responses around the symptoms of homelessness and sometimes the trigger (DV) rather than the structural level causes (income, legislation to protect victims of violence etc.). And in a related way…

- **Prioritisation of individual rather than a structural level causes**

Programmatic and policy responses that Focus on individual level cause (eg. drug and alcohol) and fail to grapple with the broader economic and institutional structural drivers of homelessness (housing policy, income support policy etc)

- **segmented population responses** with poor overview of the system as a whole proliferation of ever more targeted response at the same time as some big elisions- children

- **emerging reliance on evidence and data**

- **Residual and disempowered service system reflecting a residual issue**

Many housing and homelessness departments had limited power to effect change in other (commonwealth but especially state/ territory) service sector program areas or big departmental portfolio's of government (e.g. education, employment). These departments typically regarded homelessness and its impact as " not our problem".

- **housing, housing, housing**
For the 23 years that the SAAP agreements spanned there was little sustained and systematic investment in housing solutions to homelessness including (public and social housing and private rental pathways to housing security)

- **no coherent or consistent emphasis on promoting and enabling social and economic participation**
While there was some early recognistion of the need to assist young people in particular to re-engage in education and wrok thorugh the (JPET) program this program was not taken to scale acorss the country. SAAP dabbled in the space rather than becoming an expert provider.

- A focus on managing problems rather than developing solutions

Fast forward to 2008-09 - The NPAH

In 2008 Rudd Labour Government released the green paper *Which Way home?* followed by the white paper, *The Road Home* and the NPAH.

These papers signalled and reflected unprecedented government focus on the issue of homelessness and developing means to address it.

The white paper comprised a three prong strategy to address homelessness,
- *turning off the tap*- early intervention
- *expanded and improved service offer*- with housing and social and economic participation in view
- *breaking the cycle* - rapid rehousing with support when needed to move people out of homelessness quickly and keep them out

The Road Home articulated a clear vision and indeed understanding of homelessness, including its

- **causes** – mental illness, substance abuse, DV, affordable housing, exits form statutory care…
- **its effects** – unemployment, social exclusion, disengagement from education,
- **and some of its contemporary faces** – families, children, older people…

And it pointed to if not seeded some solutions involving genuine social investment in this funding policy and program.

- First and foremost the Road Home and then the partnership agreements hanging off the National Affordable Housing Agreement (NAHA) - NPAH, NPSH, NPISPH) recognised and invested in addressing some of **the key structural drivers of homelessness** – particularly housing, investment in them 1.2 billion over 5 years housing. (800 mill on services, 400 mill on supply of affordable housing social housing). This also included investment in tenancy support, no exits from statutory care, etc

- It recognised the need for an **investment in employment and training.** (For example, three quarters of the homeless population was under 44 years and most who came into and/or exited the HSS were not employed)
- It recognised the need **to mobilise mainstream services** to engage with and address the needs of people who are at risk of homelessness
- While there was a recognition that **practice reform and improvement was required** – new models and practices, the emphasis structural issues meant that this was not the only focus of the reform – nevertheless it developed quality standards

- And importantly **Leadership of the reforms** sat with Prime Minister and Cabinet (PMC) and was led in particular through the Prime Ministerial Council on Homelessness and FacHSIA. This involvement of PMC was important. It meant that other departments were called to account for homelessness issues in their policy and programs areas(e.g DEEWR).

- It uses **key targets to drive reform** - the headline halve homelessness by 2020; offer supported accommodation to all rough sleepers by 2020, plus an array of interim 2013 targets

- **Reporting data was significantly improved** through AIHWs SHIP dataset along with an unprecedented commitment to the development of the evidence base through research- 14.5 million – resulting in nearly 100 projects as well as the longitudinal study- *Journey's Home*

- Recognition that **prevention and intervention strategies** need to be developed around key transition points: school to work, becoming a parent etc

- A **significant investment in rough sleepers**-

- And it did **seed real innovation** – across the life course – for children, for young people, for rough sleepers, for older people

- And cross-cutting innovation- private rental support, etc

While the Road Home achieved some real success there were some investment and implementation failures

Most of these failures relate to a lack of focus and a lack of strong robust evidence to provide focus.
  For example,
- While commonwealth led, each state developed its own implementation plan with a broad list of outputs- e.g street to home initiatives. As **few were mandatory** the investment was dispersed and unfocused and difficult to measure between states and territories and collectively. And links to other commonwealth reform agendas -in health, aged care, income support and employment were largely lost.

- One clear example of this was the **investment in children**. While recognised as critically important only 3 states elected to develop a specialist children's homelessness response and only in limited locations. They largely did this without reference to each other. None had clear pathways to the mainstream. And support service

for women and children fleeing DV were optional rather than mandatory outputs of the NPAH even though DV was recognised as the primary cause of homelessness for women and children.

- While the paper set targets these targets were not incorporated into the NPAH and nor was data collection and research focused on assessing the efficacy of the reforms against these targets

- There was Insufficient focus on **indigenous homelessness** - even though ATSI populations are over-represented in the HSS; it provided insufficient support to strengthen and co-ordinate existing providers, especially those in rural and remote areas

- While there was unprecedented investment in data and research- resulting in improved national data collection however requires more emphasis on outcomes and tied to NPAH funding. 14 million was set aside for research- which delivered, for example, **Journeys Home,** however the research strategy lacked focus and did not align with program changes and did not incorporate white paper targets in the NPAH so that the States and territories could work with commonwealth to achieve targets

- It pointed to the need to focus on key life transitions – and to use these as way of informing the organisation of service responses , however this concept was not really operationalised at a policy and program level. but failed to really deliver

- It pointed to the critical need to establish links to the mainstream but the mainstream narrowly conceived and not really leveraged to provide outcomes- eg Job Services Australia

- The bulk of the effort was not directed at prevention and early intervention

Where to from here?

This is a particularly pertinent question to ask in the context of rising unemployment and underemployment, and profound housing market changes including
- An Increasing reliance on private rental and lengthier periods of private rental

- Increase of rent relative to income
- greater percentages of low income people experiencing housing stress
- shortage of affordable housing stock
- decline of public housing tenants in paid work etc etc

As Saul Eslake puts it we are experiencing the affects of over "half a century of housing policy failure"

All this at a time when we have:
- a reduced funding environment
- re-orientation in some jurisdiction at least (e.g. Victoria) away from homelessness as an issue towards primary individual levels causes or antecedents of homelessness
- an inability of the sector to deliver on its core – housing solutions
- myopic sector that has failed to properly identify and articulate its expertise

In relation to homelessness and housing policy we need to learn from the strengths and weaknesses of the past housing/homelessness specific policy reform. In short we need a
- renewed NPAH – but one with select and strongly mandated outputs focused on early intervention and prevention initiatives at key points in the life course. (youth, children, women and children fleeing DV, older people)

- National Affordable housing strategy led by the PM, with independent advisory committee and with COAG housing ministers actively engaging in national reform- eg tax etc

- Tenancy legislation reform to encourage longer term tenure and better protection for private rental tenants

- Housing assistance with integrated models of support that focus on economic and social participation (eg foyers)
- Increase CRA to reflect real and differentiated cost of living in different areas- needs to be indexed against a new indicator rather than cpi to reflect real rent increase
- Financing models for housing

But because homelessness is an issue with multiple structural and individual level causes **broader policy reform is** also required -

especially in relation to income support, employment services and education to build human capital and social capital. For example, we need to address

- **Income support**- Increase the rate of social security payments to reflect real cost of living- align pensions and allowances; increase the liquid assets threshold so that people in private rental can retain a reasonable safety net. And encourage workforce participation by increasing the capacity of Newstart Allowance recipients to engage in part-time employment without losing benefits. Build financial literacy through dedicated programs routinely delivered by Centrelink and other providers

- **Employment-** Current employment services do not adequately meet the needs of jobseekers facing barriers to employment. Less than a third of this cohort find employment and a third of these end up in the JSA with in six months. We need to design the new JSA to build capability- personalised coaching, vocational guidance, stronger links with employers and labour markets, rapid interventions to avoid prolonged disengagement, skill building so that we can create a line of sight to real jobs for homeless people

- **Education –** The current VET sector is failing to meet the needs of highly disadvantaged people. We have some good knowledge now about how to connect these people to mainstream education and training including - flexible delivery, core skill development, vocational guidance, shared models of support between VET and the Community Welfare Sector.

And it is time for a radical re-think in relation to our programs because even though we have seen innovation they have not been systematically developed

This is my twelve point plan….. It demands a real investment in service development and a preparedness to think outside the homelessness square

1. First look for **inspiration beyond the homelessness service system**
   - As a sector we have been too myopic. When we have looked for inspiration we have typicaly adapted international models

but have not looked to programs in other service education and employment domains.

2. Be **solutions rather than problem focused** - prioritise what people can do rather than what they can't. As a sector we have focused much of our effort on identifying and managing people's problems rather than recognising and building their skills and capabilities and their networks with people who can help them get on to build independent yet connected, sustainable lives.

3. Develop strong **conceptual frameworks for our service models and practice approaches –** As a sector we have become Increasingly attentive to and reference evidence –particularly the evidence of need literature that describes the characteristics of the population and its problems but we remain light on in terms of the conceptual frameworks that provide a rationale for the work that we do. (notable exceptions -Trauma informed, advantaged thinking used in Education First Youth Foyers)

4. Develop service responses underpinned by a **life course- life transitions** approach. This approach should consider the key developmental issues that pertain to and need to be achieved in:
   o **the particular life stage** - early years, middle childhood, youth adulthood, older adulthood; and the
   o **the particular life transition (e.g.,** youth to adulthood; working age to retirement and beyond**)**

   Why is this important? Because its starting point for service development is not the service user as homeless person but the service user as person

5. Look to, expect and use **mainstream and universal services** to provide core elements of the service response. Wintringham led the way but has been a lone voice. We need to connect people to their mainstream entitlements, demand of the mainstream that they accommodate the needs of this client group and most importantly recognise the expertise of mainstream providers (eg education,)

6. **Develop clarity about expertise and scope of role- (ours, theirs shared and why)**
   We have typically filled the gaps of other service and education and health delivery platforms and failed to fully recognise that we are dab

Our role is to assist people to remain engaged or transition to in the mainstream rather than developing an alternate service models

And whether we like it or not our role is to develop expertise, in developing housing service models (including housing finance models) We have some good models yet many these have not been taken to scale,.

7. **Re-think our partnerhsips**
   All these points indicate the need to have real clarity about the partnerhsips that we require to deliver on our service offer – Eg Foyer

8. Look to alternative funding sources to seed innovation (business, philanthropy, mainstream) It is hard to seed innovation from tied dollars through government funding and service agreements

9. **Fully explore alternative approaches to practice** - Case management is exhausted.

10.   **Develop the evidence base about what works** rather than simple describing the characteristics of the population - including cost benefit

11.   **Re-focus our advocacy away from the sector** - Stop speaking just to ourselves. We need to speak advocate and influence those who do not understand the issues of homelessness rather than those who do.

12.   **Governance, governance governance –** if we are going to effect change in other service delivery and education and employment programs and draw attention to the needs of homeless populations then we need to reflect this ambition in those who govern the development of our policies, programs , services and practices