

# Homeless South Australia: A 2015 Stocktake of Homelessness

Presentation to the Don Dunstan Foundation  
Addressing Homelessness: Valuing the Homelessness Sector

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# Agenda

- Understanding Homelessness
- 15 Years of Change
- Reforming the Homelessness Sector
- Outcomes
- And Where have we Landed?

# Understanding Homelessness

- A Vulnerable Population

- The highest levels of housing stress are found in the private rental sector
- Tenants are further disadvantaged by the insecurity associated with private rental housing, with many forced to move involuntarily.
- Households fall out of home ownership, often because of relationship breakdown
  - Some women remain in the family home but lack sufficient income to service their mortgage, eventually surrendering their home and becoming homeless
- Violence in the home may force a woman – and children – to leave the family home at short notice;
- New arrivals into Australia may be especially vulnerable in the housing market;
- Persons with psychiatric disabilities often struggle to maintain their tenancy;
- Access to public rental or social housing has become more difficult ;
- Immigrants, Aboriginal South Australians and young people are likely to encounter discrimination in the private rental market; and
- Persons leaving institutions – including the Guardianship of the Minister or incarceration - find securing accommodation especially difficult.



# Understanding Homelessness

- 2011 Census there were 105,237 homeless persons in Australia
  - 49 homeless persons per 10,000 Australians.
- 5,985 homeless South Australians
  - some 38 homeless persons per 10,000 South Australians one of the lowest levels in Australia,
    - but still unacceptably high.
- While homelessness persons increased by 10 per cent across Australia between 2001 and 2006, it rose only 2.4 per cent in South Australia



# 15 Years of Change

- 2002 - Rann Labor Government signalled a significant re-emergence of homelessness as a priority of governments and the community.
  - The establishment of the Social Inclusion Board reflected international policy trends, especially the British Blair Labour Government's focus on social exclusion and focused on building 'the community of the State' (Cappo 2009 p. 5).
  - Foundation priorities included:
    - Homelessness;
    - Drug abuse;
    - Aboriginal health and wellbeing;
    - Youth offending;
    - Mental health; and
    - Disability services.

# 15 Years of Change

- The Social Inclusion Board noted the commitment to reduce homelessness by 50 per cent over the life of its term by:
  - preventing homelessness amongst populations known to be at risk;
  - intervening early with those at immediate risk of homelessness;
  - minimising the length of time people spend homeless; 15 Years of Change
  - improving the integration and co-ordination of services.
- The South Australian Strategic Plan committed the state to halving rough sleepers in South Australia by 2013
  - but in 2012 the South Australia's Strategic Plan Audit Committee concluded it was unclear this goal would be achieved.

# 15 Years of Change

- We [the government] don't believe homelessness is something which a country as wealthy as ours in the 21st century can just ignore.
  - *Prime Minister Kevin Rudd 2008*
- Green Paper and White Paper on homelessness
- Three key strategies
  - “Turning off the tap” –stopping new entrants into homelessness through a mixture of measures aimed at prevention and early intervention.
  - Improving and expanding services by enhancing the capacity of government and non-government services to provide appropriate assistance to the homeless. This strategy sought to maintain already-established specialist homelessness services as providers of temporary crisis accommodation, while also reforming mainstream services across all sectors – in order to achieve ‘joined up’ service delivery.
  - “Breaking the cycle” of repeated homelessness amongst special risk groups, through social housing supply and personal support services.
    - Centred on three groups considered at risk of cycling ‘in and out of’ homelessness:
      - people vulnerable to chronic homelessness
      - rough sleepers
      - children.

# Reforming the Homelessness Sector

- Reform stimulated by the injection of new funds under the National Partnership Agreement on Housing (NPAH).
- The South Australian Implementation Plan for the Partnership Agreement on Homelessness (2009) set out a number of principles to inform this process of reform:
  - A housing first approach to provide safe and secure housing as a first step to ending homelessness;
  - The consolidation of services to achieve economies of scale and reduce duplication in provision;
  - The regionalisation of services to provide consistent high quality services in each South Australian region;
  - The enunciation of a ‘no wrong door’ philosophy that ensures that clients receive a consistent response regardless of where or how they access the service system;
  - Standardised best practice case management and integration of services;
  - The separation of tenancy management and support provision to minimise the potential for conflicts of interest;
  - Culturally competent responses to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people;
  - Priority for the safety of women and their children; and
  - Acknowledgement of children as clients in their own right.

# Reforming the Homelessness Sector

- Reform resulted in the consolidation and standardisation of services and the establishment of Regional Homelessness Roundtables of service providers.
  - The Roundtables – alongside other homelessness consultative groups - were then represented on a newly-created body, the SA Homelessness Strategic Group (HSG).
  - Additional funding was provided to meet demand in identified ‘hot spots’.
  - Introduction of a 24 hour a day, 7 days a week Homelessness Gateway Service to complement the Domestic Violence and Youth Gateway services already operating.
  - The introduction of the Homeless to Home (H2H) database which was introduced as a mechanism for both monitoring outcomes and provide a mechanism to ensure continuity in service provision to homeless persons as they move between services.
    - The H2H to allow twice yearly monitoring of outcomes and reflected a shift from monitoring throughputs – which was a feature of the previous Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP) – to measuring achievement.
  - The introduction of formalised case management plans for individuals, for the entire period of their need.

# Outcomes

- Social Ventures Australia (2013) undertook a review of the impacts of the 2009 homelessness reforms using Social Return on Investment (SROI).
- Concluded reform process had resulted in a number of positive impacts, including:
  - the introduction of better systems for case management
  - a greater number of persons in supportive housing
  - fewer people turned away from homelessness services
  - more individuals assisted
  - improvements in service quality, including greater consistency across regions and target groups
  - a higher level of collaboration amongst providers and greater accountability and auditing oversight to ensure high-quality outcomes.
- They anticipated other benefits to emerge, including growth in housing options for the homeless, fewer people becoming homeless as a result of the implementation of early intervention measures, fewer people sleeping rough, a reduction in the total volume of homelessness, better data and links to mainstream services.
- Their analysis suggested the reform process had made a measurable contribution to the wellbeing of individuals and society, valued at just over **\$20,000 per individual assisted.**

# Outcomes

- **It's now a sector that operates at scale**
  - DCSI data shows 2014-15 the homeless services sector provided 29,508 periods of support to 22,832 individual clients,
    - 14 per cent of whom were aged under nine.
  - While the sector as a whole provided 29,508 instances of support, approximately one in three interactions with the homelessness sector involved multiple agencies,
    - There were 39,783 individual interactions with the agencies in the sector

# Outcomes

- **It's a sector that demonstrably deals with those in greatest need:**
  - 35% of those seeking services do so because of domestic or family violence, 29% are affected by mental health issues, 28% were already homeless when they sought assistance and 3% had a non-psychiatric disability.
  - In 2014 25% of recipients of homelessness support were Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islanders, and 38% of cases for this population group involved family violence.
  - In 2014 organisations providing services to the homeless received 44,000 requests for assistance with housing, and of this total 55% were for assistance to sustain a tenancy or prevent tenancy failure, approximately 25% were for short term or emergency accommodation and ten% were for long term housing.
  - In most instances agencies reported they were able to meet housing needs, but 25% of requests for long term housing assistance could not be met.

# Outcomes

- **The formalisation of ‘best practice’ works**
  - DCSI analysis found rough sleepers who received a formal assessment were:
    - more likely to exit into sustainable housing;
    - less likely to exit into housing that is not sustainable; and
    - less likely to exit back into rough sleeping than those who do not receive an assessment.
  - The same relationship was evident for rough sleepers who received a case plan, compared to those who did not.
    - The results were statistically significant.
  - The data also showed rough sleepers who did not receive a case plan or an assessment were more likely to revert to sleeping outdoors.
    - The results were statistically significant.

# Outcomes

- **But change has its frictions:**
  - The Independent Community-Wide Homelessness Administrators Group (2011) noted reform has carried with it substantial costs for many agencies.
    - The focus on preferred providers and achieving economies of scale in provision has been controversial at times
    - The H2H program has been contentious, especially with respect to the time and cost of data input by frontline workers (ICHAG 2011).
    - At a more fundamental level, there has been a great deal of concern with the ‘target and audit’ culture associated with policy innovation.
      - Attempts by the Social Inclusion Board to focus on those sleeping in the open and the associated use of a ‘rough sleeper count’ focused on the City of Adelaide to measure change have been controversial (ICHAG 2011).

# And Where have we Landed?

- It's a lean sector:
  - DCSI (2015) estimates that in 2015 state and federal outlays on homelessness services will total \$57 million
    - relative to state budget of \$6bn. This finite level of resourcing supports 40 organisations – four government and 36 non government – who have 96 agency outlets between them.
    - Data on the number of services and total public funding for the sector suggests that:
      - each sector-wide service provided to a homeless person costs just \$1,931.
      - each individual agency support costs just \$1,432.

# And Where have we Landed?

- But is lean good?
  - a tsunami of industrial change with associated redundancies
    - The vulnerable will be most affected
    - The impacts will emerge in the medium to long term and will surface in multiple and complex ways
  - the sector may not be large enough, or sufficiently well resourced, to cope

# And Where have we Landed?

- **Fragmentation remains an issue – in two senses:**
  - First, specialist homelessness services are but one part of a wider network of entities – non government agencies, philanthropic trusts, local governments (City of Salisbury 2012), advocacy organisations, faith-based bodies *et cetera* – that provide assistance to vulnerable South Australians and are *de facto* or *de jure* interacting with the homeless .
    - While many agencies have infrequent, or small-scale, engagement with the homeless, in aggregate their impact is profound: allocating resources, shaping behaviours, providing opportunities and influencing public debate.
    - A more integrated approach would deliver substantial benefits to individuals at risk.
  - Second, fragmentation has been institutionalised by the process of tendering for the provision of homelessness services.
    - When given the opportunity to articulate its vision for a new, more efficient, future, the homelessness sector highlighted the fact that tendering made collaboration difficult, were an impediment to innovation, reduced diversity within the sector and resulted in high ‘transaction’ costs (SHS and Housing SA 2014).

# And Where have we Landed?

- **Shifts in the priority government awards to homelessness is a risk.**
  - NPAH funding from 2009 provided resources to help reform the sector and boost service delivery. However, there has been uncertainty since the initial funding period, with one-year funding extensions initially, and a two-year funding extension announced in 2015.
  - The funding future is uncertain, but security of funding is essential for the effective delivery of homelessness services (SHS and Housing SA 2014).
  - The Australian Government's reform of the Australian Federation has formally identified housing and homelessness policy as one area for change, including – potentially – the Australian Government abrogating responsibility in this field and calling upon the states and territories to guide and fund this policy domain (PM&C 2015).
- There is, however, the possibility of a new Federal engagement with the Minister for Social Services, The Hon Scott Morrison recently outlining his vision of 'compassionate conservatism' and noting that:

There are few issues more important to ensuring the welfare of Australians than housing. Housing provides the stability and certainty needed for individuals and families to deal with the many challenges they face – unemployment, the breakdown of relationships, a place to care for those who need care, a place of refuge from violence and the list goes on.

.... You will find housing failures at the centre of most social service challenges. It is either a cause or consequence (Morrison 2015).

# And Where have we Landed?

- Final Thoughts:
  - Evident new managerialism, performance monitoring and professionalisation
    - Probably necessary evils
    - Perhaps the sector needs to ‘lean into the change’ and identify which elements can work to its advantage
  - Resources for homelessness are modest (at best) and current debates around social impact bonds and early investment in welfare may offer opportunities for innovation
  - We cant ignore the impacts of economic change
  - There are likely to be benefits associated with greater co-ordination across the sector, with the full resources of the not for profit and community sectors not yet fully deployed