Smart Moves:

Spending to Saving, Streets to Home

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Rosanne Haggerty
Thinker in Residence 2006

Smart Moves:
Spending to Saving, Streets to Home

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Rosanne Haggerty

Rosanne Haggerty is a leading creator of solutions to homelessness. A real estate entrepreneur, Rosanne conceived and founded Common Ground Community, a not-for-profit housing development and management organisation in New York City, which provides innovative housing opportunities for homeless people.

Supportive housing, the heart of Common Ground's mission, combines affordable accommodation with on-site services, including mental health and addiction counselling, job training and placement, and assistance with life skills, such as cooking, cleaning, and money management. Common Ground also operates business ventures, among them a number of franchises, to provide jobs for residents. Supportive housing tenants include the formerly homeless, people with mental and medical disabilities, the elderly, and low-income professionals.

Common Ground's work has demonstrated that homelessness is solvable; that providing housing and related support is far more cost effective than emergency approaches to homelessness, and that well designed and operated housing facilities can be an asset to any community and a stimulus for economic revitalisation.

Common Ground is now the largest developer of supportive housing in the United States, and the organisation's work has been widely imitated both in the US and abroad.

The following partners were involved in Rosanne Haggerty's residency:

Department of the Premier and Cabinet
Social Inclusion Initiative
HomeStart Finance
Department for Families and Communities
Department of Health
Adelaide City Council
Department of Education and Children's Services
Office for Youth

Sponsored by Urban Construct

Foreword

Rosanne Haggerty's period as an Adelaide Thinker in Residence in 2005 and 2006 was an outstanding success.

Rosanne consulted with a wide range of people and organisations capable of working together to end the scourge of homelessness in South Australia.

She established a new homelessness initiative – Common Ground Adelaide – which is managed and promoted by South Australian business leaders.

And – through this report – she has now left us with a number of other good ideas and suggested plans for the future.

During her time here, Rosanne dared to ask the question "what would it take to end homelessness?", and she worked on the premise that homelessness in both solvable and preventable.

South Australia is making tangible progress on homelessness – with David Cappo's Social Inclusion Board, in particular, helping 1300 homeless people to move into temporary or long-term housing, and helping to stop a further 3300 "high-risk" people from spiralling downward into homelessness.

Still, we in the State Government are not complacent, and we believe that there is an enormous amount of work still to do.

Rosanne's recommendations in this report continue her admirable focus on practical measures.

I warmly thank Rosanne for her bold and energetic approach, and I strongly commend this report to all those concerned about the fair, proper and widespread provision of a basic human need and right: decent, affordable housing.

Mike Rann
Premier of South Australia
Minister for Social Inclusion

Contents

Abbreviations

AusSMC	Australian Science Media Centre
CaFE	Children and Families Everywhere
CHAST	City Homeless Assessment Team
COAG	Council of Australian Governments
DECS	Department of Education and Children's Services
DFC	Department for Families and Communities
DHS	(former) Department of Human Services
DPC	Department of the Premier and Cabinet
RDNS	Royal District Nursing Service
SAAP	Supported Accommodation Assistance Program
SAS	Specialised Accommodation Services
SRF	Supported Residential Facility
TAFE	Technical and Further Education

Summary of Recommendations
Recommendations

1. Build on progress

To build on the Social Inclusion Board's progress, the government should consider action to:

- extend interagency coordinating structures throughout metropolitan Adelaide
- complete the common assessment protocol across agencies and implement it in inner city Adelaide and expand it to the rest of the State
- create targets for expansion of successful programs, and establish specific quarterly outcome measures
- adopt a unique identifier for each homeless person seeking services to expedite and improve care
- add the Office for Youth and Department of Education and Children's Services to Inter-Ministerial Committee on Homelessness.

2. Enhance the quality of data on homelessness to better assist those with complex needs

To better assist homeless people with complex needs, the government should consider action to:

- within privacy guidelines, adopt unique identifiers for recipients of government funded services
- create data collection and matching capabilities to track heavy users of emergency systems
- develop a housing priority list made up of the primary homeless and the homeless who are the most frequent users of health and behavioural health services
- use the housing priority list to guide resource allocation decisions
- make annual street counts in each area of the State
- implement an ongoing cost tracking and analysis program to document homeless individuals' past and current use of healthcare and other government services before and after obtaining housing.

3. Improve services for homeless people with complex needs

To improve services for homeless people with complex needs, the government should consider action to:

- integrate delivery of mental health and substance abuse services for homeless individuals with complex needs throughout metropolitan Adelaide by the third quarter of 2007
- create a system for central management of the housing placement process by the second quarter of 2007 to ensure that high-need people receive priority attention
- review the eligibility criteria and practices of all contracted service programs in the first quarter of 2007 and eliminate barriers to access for high need individuals
- establish transitional service links between mental health, substance abuse and corrections systems by the second quarter of 2007 to create continuity of care as people return to the community following incarceration.

4. Provide services that keep vulnerable people in stable housing

To prevent homelessness, the government should consider action to:

- realign the focus of SAAP contracts and consolidate where necessary to shift resources to long-term support and to priority populations
- move to an incentive based contracting model, making SAAP contract agencies responsible for sustainable housing outcomes for the chronic homeless, with financial consequences for non-performance
- establish new outcome measures to monitor SAAP contracts for effectiveness in serving target groups
- retrain government agency staff to work across agencies where needed to deliver effective, evidence-based services to individuals and families
- create training and coaching opportunities for organisations and staff in the homeless services sector to meet professional requirements of a changed system.

Summary of Recommendations

5. Expand affordable housing options

To expand affordable housing options, the government should consider action to:

- identify sites for initial Common Ground supportive housing projects in inner city Adelaide and in Port Adelaide
- establish an artist housing workgroup to advise on integration of arts and artist housing into the two Common Ground projects
- develop a production timeline for 3900 units of special needs housing
- complete a property audit to identify under-utilised government owned property. In particular, prepare an analysis of Glenside and Julia Farr properties and their potential for partial redevelopment as mixed income, mixed use supportive housing
- formalise a target of a 15% reserve for affordable units in all projects involving the use of government-owned land
- meet with the Commonwealth Government to request the transfer of Keswick Barracks property to SA to redevelop as mixed income, mixed use housing incorporating a supportive housing component
- collaborate in creating a centralised management process for matching high need individuals with appropriate housing
- meet with local councils throughout the State to consider rate abatement programs to assist in creation of supportive and affordable housing
- test a land price deferral concept
- examine the range of fees and project expenses and propose possible exemptions
- establish a sustainable housing work group to explore and promote green building technologies and opportunities for business creation in South Australia
- complete an inventory and analysis of under-utilised historic properties in the inner city, their ownership and potential for redevelopment as supportive housing
- launch an SRF and boarding house demonstration project, with incentives for owners to improve environments and services
- complete an inventory of expiring use aged care facilities to identify opportunities for conversion to supportive housing.

6. Enhance the quality and range of housing options for Aboriginal South Australians

To enhance the quality and range of housing options for Aboriginal South Australians, the government should consider action to:

- bring 85% of Aboriginal homes into compliance with the nine 'Healthy Living Practices' defined by Healthabitat
- develop, build and display two prototypes of alternative dwellings designed in collaboration with the Aboriginal community
- integrate training in traditional and sustainable building crafts into curricula at Wiltja School and TAFEs
- investigate business development opportunities in the manufacture of sustainable building materials that can be sourced/created in remote areas and used for Aboriginal homes.

7. Engage the community in ending homelessness

To engage the community in ending homelessness, the government should:

- invite community, faith and educational leaders to play new roles in addressing the issue.

8. Create new school and training opportunities linked to housing for young people

To end homelessness among young people, the government should consider action to:

- complete a feasibility study for an Adelaide City School
- add a target for reducing youth homelessness to South Australia's Strategic Plan
- complete a cost analysis of the economic impact of youth homelessness
- focus on youth homelessness in expanding CaFE Enfield and in school curricula development
- improve data and reporting system to measure youth homelessness
- create new housing rental opportunities for young people
- commission an analysis of homelessness and housing needs among Aboriginal youth, young people with physical and intellectual disabilities, mentally ill young people, young families, gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender young people, and young people leaving juvenile detention centres.

9. Create a high level communications strategy to advance social inclusion efforts

To advance the State's social inclusion agenda, the government should consider action to:

- create a position at the Australian Science Media Centre to illustrate and communicate social science data
- engage communication expertise to articulate the Social Inclusion Board agenda and achievements.

10. Lead a national effort to end chronic homelessness in Australia

To demonstrate South Australia's social policy innovation and leadership, the government should consider action to:

- craft an agenda for national action
- introduce a goal of ending chronic homelessness nationally at COAG.

Introduction

For twelve years, Mr. W 'slept rough' in the north parklands. He came to Adelaide from his home in the country following the death of his wife. He didn't have ties to anyone in Adelaide, or a plan to support himself. He staked out a place near the Women's and Children's Hospital where he became a familiar presence. Neighbours kept an eye on him, bringing him meals and blankets, and empty cans which Mr. W would take to a recycling depot in Mile End.

He was one of several men and women who were regularly sleeping rough in the north parklands. They usually got along well enough, but when his Centrelink cheque arrived, Mr. W was frequently robbed of it and occasionally beaten up as well.

Mr. W's health had not been good to start with. During his years of sleeping outside, his illnesses grew to include epilepsy, angina, heart disease, chronic psychosis and chronic alcohol dependence. He was treated at the Royal Adelaide Hospital (RAH) for chest infections, fractures, cuts and abrasions from being assaulted, and alcohol intoxication and all its related health problems. Ultimately, he was hit by a car, which left his mobility impaired. Most winters, he caught pneumonia; that usually meant a hospital stay of up to eight weeks.

Most services had given up on Mr. W, and had banned him because of his difficult behaviour when drinking. Yet outreach teams – City Homeless Assessment Team (CHAST) and the Aboriginal Sobriety Group – continued to work with Mr. W for many years. They monitored his situation, brought him blankets, helped him clean his cart. They saw to it that he received treatment for his many health problems. They visited him at the RAH during his frequent stays there.

It may have appeared that Mr. W was living simply and cheaply, without rent to pay, and not placing any burden on the community beyond the distress felt by residents and business operators near his spot in the north parklands. But in fact, each time the police responded after Mr. W was robbed it cost the public roughly $850 in police time. The many times Mr. W was brought to the hospital in an ambulance, treated in the emergency room or admitted to the RAH, added up to a considerable expense to the public.

Mr. W had his illnesses and the personal demons of psychosis and addiction to overcome. But the actual concrete help he needed – assistance in finding and maintaining a safe and stable home, and help with his chronic health problems – just wasn't available. Instead, he used hospitals, jails, the police, and outreach assistance. They helped to keep him alive, but did not correct the principal problem: Mr. W needed a home, and he wasn't going to get better, move out of the north parklands, or cease requiring expensive emergency services, until he had one.

The challenge of homelessness, how to approach it, how to solve it, has bedevilled communities throughout the world. In advanced democracies, where homelessness during peacetime was rare until the last twenty five years, homelessness has been particularly disturbing and uncomfortable to deal with: too complicated, too vast, too much of an affront to our societies' faith in social and economic progress. Homelessness evokes ambivalent responses from government and the public. Debates continue over whether homeless people have created their own problems through irresponsible behaviour and how much society should do for them.

Adding to the problem are the complex situations of homeless individuals themselves. Mr. W is very typical of people who become homeless. They have lost their family, they are poor, their health is bad, they suffer from mental illness, they abuse drugs or alcohol, they have few social supports, and they often struggle with a combination of these challenges.

Yet the sense of despair around homelessness is now changing. Innovative programs that aim to end homelessness permanently have achieved results and have spread. The cities that have adopted them have seen significant reductions in homelessness. In London, rough sleeping has declined by 75%. In the past one to two years alone, rough sleeping has declined in San Francisco by 28%; in Portland (Oregon) by 20%; in Denver (Colorado) by 11%; and in New York City by 13%, to name just a few. These cities are practising a new strategy that focuses on housing, not sheltering, homeless people, and all are proving successful.

South Australia is similarly committed to ending homelessness. The State's Strategic Plan calls for a 50% reduction in homelessness and the building of a more socially inclusive society. South Australia created the Social Inclusion Board to test new approaches to homelessness and other issues of social exclusion, applying strategies proven elsewhere to South Australia. Most importantly, the Social Inclusion Board created a plan to reduce homelessness. The plan included new initiatives and rigorous measures to monitor their progress, and it is beginning to show impressive results.

Introduction

Results like a new life for Mr. W. After years of encounters with various Adelaide homeless service providers offering shelter or other short-term help, the Street to Home program, begun in July 2005, offered to help him move into a home. He agreed almost at once. They found a place for him. They arranged for Meals on Wheels to come by every day. They set up regular visits from Royal District Nursing Service (RDNS) nurses who made sure Mr. W was taking his medication and minding his health. He now sees a General Practitioner at No Pulgi[1] instead of going to the RAH emergency room.

Mr. W has been living in his own flat in Thebarton for a year now, not far from the recycling centre he visits each day. 'Before, it was bad', he says, but now: 'I'm very happy with Meals on Wheels, having a feed every day, washing, keeping warm in a bed, seeing different mobs of workers, really happy with the workers and support, and on weekends, too.' Workers who visit him say how well he looks – clean, tidy, sober, and in much improved health.

From a policy standpoint, Mr. W's journey illustrates what must be done: first, find, house and support homeless people with the most complex needs – those who have been homeless the longest – and second, allocate the resources saved to create a system that prevents homelessness among vulnerable people and shortens the length of time that anyone is homeless.

I was privileged to visit Adelaide twice as Thinker in Residence on Ending Homelessness in South Australia. It was necessary to divide my residency into two stays of three weeks due to my work at Common Ground in New York City. The gap between visits proved fortuitous. I was able to see initiatives in the planning stage and, later, to consider the effect of those programs after their implementation. I was able to deepen relationships with non-profit and government leaders who visited Common Ground or corresponded with us during the fifteen months between my visits.

This report, and the interim report of my visit in 2005 (available at http://www.thinkers. sa.gov.au/rhaggerty.html), are offered to encourage progress toward these important and achievable goals. In it, I suggest ways to apply the proven strategies that are driving reductions in homelessness in other communities to South Australia. The report identifies recommendations for action in three areas: homelessness, housing and community. Many of the recommendations endorse the work already taking place, or urge the further development of ideas raised by creative leaders in South Australia.

In preparing this final report on my observations and recommendations, I am struck by what an achievable goal it is to substantially reduce – even largely end – rough sleeping and other forms of homelessness in South Australia. This is true because there are proven approaches that the State is moving to adopt, and because of the determination of the truly outstanding group of people who are working to end homelessness in South Australia. I am grateful to have been able to participate in the effort.

1. 'No Pulgi', meaning 'no home' in Ngarrindjeri, is an outreach primary care service for all homeless people in the Adelaide CBD.

Homelessness

Build on progress

Since 2003, a range of measures undertaken through the Social Inclusion Board have made a measurable difference to homelessness. They have helped 1300 people into temporary or long-term housing. Over 3300 have been helped to avert homelessness, including over 1900 in particularly high risk situations. The development of new initiatives by the Social Inclusion Board, and collaborative ventures by government agencies such as the Department for Families and Communities and Central Northern Adelaide Health Service, have seen programs such as Street to Home and the Exceptional Needs Unit assist a remarkable number of habitual rough sleepers into their own homes.

The Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP, a joint Commonwealth and State program) combines Australian Government strategies with the State's efforts to implement long-term measures to end homelessness. The reorganisation of housing and disability services in the Department for Families and Communities, and reforms under way in mental health and substance abuse services, all contribute to a new framework for responding in an integrated, results-oriented way to the challenge of homelessness.

The progress is noteworthy, as has been the leadership shown by staff in many agencies – non-profit and government – who have been open to re-examining long-held practices. New cross-agency structures that can deliver more effective services for homeless people are emerging.

A case in point is the Inner-City Homelessness Integrated Services Network. Homeless people are often everyone's but no one's client. They receive services from every agency in a community, but the bits and pieces don't add up to long-term housing and an end to homelessness. To change that, the directors of non-profit and government programs for the homeless operating in the inner city have met monthly to coordinate their work. By communicating with each other through the Network, organisations can eliminate redundancy and ensure that there is an agency taking the lead to secure the housing and services needed by shared clients.

The Inter-Ministerial Committee on Homelessness plays this role on a state-wide level. Its focus on the integration of activities across government is essential, as is its importance in monitoring the implementation of the recommendations in this report. Toward that end, Committee membership should evolve to include the Department of Education and Children's Services and Office for Youth to ensure comprehensive and coordinated whole-of-government action.

Action needed

With many successful demonstration projects showing results, it is now essential to extend these successful approaches to all non-profit and government agencies working on homelessness. As the oversight bodies for the State's homelessness initiative, both the Social Inclusion Board and the Inter-Ministerial Committee should now consolidate successful Social Inclusion Board initiatives into mainstream service delivery and expand them state wide.

Targets should be set by all government agencies and all non-profit agencies working under contract to government. Cross-agency structures such as the Inner City Homelessness Integrated Services Network can be put in place in communities throughout the State. Homeless individuals should receive the same coordinated, housing-centred assistance whether they are first encountered by a hospital, an outreach team, a day centre or mental health worker.

The breakthrough work of the Social Inclusion Board is ready to move into its next phase under the leadership of Chair Monsignor David Cappo.

Enhance the quality of data on homelessness to better assist those with complex needs

Better data is, to a remarkable degree, helping to reduce homelessness. Further improvements in data quality are fundamental to increasing the effectiveness of programs to reduce homelessness.

Until the late 1990s, no-one had found a way to see inside the black box of homelessness. Certain causes seemed clear enough – the de-institutionalisation of the mentally ill, the loss of unskilled jobs, family breakdown – but few clues were available to guide a strategic response. The homeless appeared to be one large, undifferentiated group defined by their common condition of being without a stable home. Services reflected this generalised understanding of the homeless, and tended to be generalised themselves. Shelters, day centres, transitional housing, outreach teams and other services supplied the same basic necessities to everyone who fitted behavioural and other criteria (such as women only, male drinkers) established by the program, usually on a first come, first served basis.

Recommendation

To build on the Social Inclusion Board's progress, the government should consider action to:

- extend interagency coordinating structures throughout metropolitan Adelaide

- complete the common assessment protocol across agencies and implement it in inner city Adelaide and expand it to the rest of the State

- create targets for expansion of successful programs, and establish specific quarterly outcome measures

- adopt a unique identifier for each homeless person seeking services to expedite and improve care

- add the Office for Youth and Department of Education and Children's Services to the Inter-Ministerial Committee on Homelessness.

In the late 1990s, however, breakthrough insights were made in London and Philadelphia that revealed a previously unseen pattern within homelessness.

Dr. Dennis Culhane of the University of Pennsylvania in Philadelphia has researched homelessness for over 20 years. He describes regular visits to shelters for the homeless during the 1980s and 90s, and realising that, while most of the faces changed between visits, a small group was consistently present. At the same time, Louise Casey, who was placed in charge of reducing homelessness in Great Britain by Prime Minister Tony Blair in 1999, had observed the same thing as an outreach worker in London earlier in her career: most homeless people she encountered moved on and were seen only intermittently, but a few individuals could be found regularly, night after night, month after month, year after year.

This awareness that a relatively small subgroup is consistently homeless has been verified through the analysis of public agency data. Government agencies in New York and Philadelphia began regular reviews of their shelter usage in the late 1990s and were able to document what Culhane and Casey had observed: most homeless people resolve their situation quickly, and use government and community services on a temporary basis. But ten to fifteen percent of the homeless are chronically so.

Data further revealed that these individuals have many things in common: chronic mental or physical health problems or substance abuse issues, and sometimes all three. They have few attachments to support networks and are not aligned to the common rhythms of society as a result of their disabilities and unstructured lives. As government agencies matched their data with other government departments, they realised that many of the chronic homeless were also frequent clients of the health or mental health, substance abuse and correctional agencies. Not only that: they were often among the heaviest users of government assistance and among the most 'expensive' clients of government agencies. This pattern has since been verified in every city that has undertaken a similar analysis, including Sydney. In March 2006, Sydney's City Council published data showing that, during a two-year period, 20 high-need homeless people used 68 different government or community services on 2491 occasions at an average cost of $34,000 per person per year.

The SAAP national data collection has not proven particularly helpful in the quest to better assist those with complex needs. The data collected tends to reflect the supply of services and is only reported annually at a state level. With the current reform of SAAP by the Australian Government there is an important opportunity to address these issues.

Together, this data illustrates that in homelessness, as in health care, those suffering from a chronic condition have an extreme impact on the systems that care for them. They tend to have more complex needs and account for a disproportionate (given their number) share of spending. In healthcare, it is widely understood that the chronically ill require a different approach to their care than those with acute health needs. Treating chronic patients in an acute care system doesn't resolve their health problems; it jams emergency rooms and increases waiting time for everyone. It is also the most expensive way to deliver healthcare. The same holds true for homelessness, which in its chronic form presents itself as a high-cost medical condition as well. This can be verified by matching data from Street to Home and Exceptional Needs Unit clients with Department of Health data.

Developing a system for regular data collection and matching across all agencies that serve homeless people will reveal the overlap between the common clients of multiple agencies who require integrated care, and those with enduring, chronic and complex health needs, who require prioritised attention. DFC has received funding in the last budget toward the development of a common case management system and common client information system. This is an essential step for improving care for vulnerable people, and for reducing homelessness and its burden on individuals and society.

Working with Centrelink to access its extensive database would help to locate homeless people who are moving between systems, and must be prioritised for housing and comprehensive assistance.

There are important matters of privacy that must and can be resolved to create better data to improve services for the homeless. Signed releases to allow sharing of information between agencies can be obtained from homeless people. Some cities have considered an 'enrolment' process, whereby those suspected of being heavy users of chronically homeless and heavy users of government services are invited to apply to see if they would qualify for housing and enhanced services. This would serve as a release for purposes of confirming homelessness and prior involvement with government systems. Rigorous controls limiting the number of those who can work on data sets, and the uses to which the data can be developed to protect privacy. Appropriate privacy considerations need not be an insurmountable obstacle to providing more effective services for vulnerable people.

Street counts

An essential quantitative tool for reducing homelessness is conducting regular street counts of the homeless. For years, many places didn't want to know how many in their community slept rough. Local officials seemed fearful that knowing the extent of rough sleeping would be politically dangerous: it might be higher than imagined. Advocates, on the other hand, often resisted counts out of what appeared to be fear that the number might be much lower than they'd stated, and belie their claim that 'the problem is getting worse.' Ignoring the fact of homeless people on the streets and their number allowed everyone to shirk their responsibilities and helped maintain the status quo.

Communities that are serious about ending homelessness make regular counts of how many of their citizens are sleeping rough. It is the best way to monitor changes in the size of the homeless population and show whether investment in particular services and strategies is working.

Street counts are not the same as a formal census. In fact, while it has been the principal source of information on homelessness, the Australian Census is not a particularly useful tool for measuring homelessness. To monitor the effect of programs, communities need a continuous flow of information; the census is too infrequent to provide this. Moreover, its methods do not allow the effectiveness of new programs to be assessed. Having the right data is more important than simply having data.

Similar methods are used in many communities to create annual, bi-annual, even monthly surveys of those sleeping rough. They are typically conducted at night or in the very early morning hours by professional outreach workers and volunteers. The count area is divided into districts and separate teams cover each area. Descriptions of each rough sleeper are recorded in order to eliminate duplicate counting of those who may be awake and moving from place to place. Statistically-based sampling methods have been developed for street counts in non-urban areas.

This regular, comprehensive review of the scale and trends of rough sleeping can improve the speed and effectiveness of service responses. It gives feedback to show whether efforts to reduce homelessness are having their intended effect. Counts also provide an opportunity for the public to be involved in bringing to light new information on the needs of homeless people. The public, when informed and actually involved in the count, can become the advocates for expanded housing and other services needed by those on the street.

I had the opportunity to participate in a street count in Adelaide in June 2006. Beginning at 4.30 am on 12 July 2006, I joined Street to Home staff and a group of volunteers to count rough sleepers in inner city Adelaide and the parklands, following the methodology used in other cities. A total of 37 rough sleepers were found. This was a far lower number than many anticipated, a pattern common in most communities. Daytime estimates of rough sleeping tend to be much greater than the actual number of people who sleep rough. Daytime assessments inevitably include those who are perceived to be homeless by their appearance, or who are housed but nevertheless use day centres or other services primarily organised for the homeless.

The usefulness of conducting counts at off hours is made clear by the Adelaide example. Observing those who are actually sleeping rough or moving about overnight cuts through perceptions to reveal the real dimensions of street homelessness in a community. No street count can presume to be a perfect measure of rough sleeping but, as a snapshot of the scale of rough sleeping, the process has proven trustworthy, especially when done repeatedly.

Over time, the counts become increasingly useful as the method is refined, more hidden sleeping places are identified and more homeless people are helped off the street. The 12 July count results highlighted the progress that has been made in the inner city in assisting long-term rough sleepers into housing. The low numbers of remaining rough sleepers make it clear that South Australia is on the right course with its focus on the chronic homeless, and that this dimension of homelessness can indeed be solved.

Reducing homelessness in South Australia will require the development of data systems that identify the chronic homeless. This must involve intra- and cross-agency data matching programs to determine common clients and patterns of heavy service use. Finding those with extreme service needs is an urgent public health task, and is the key to this vulnerable group receiving appropriate and effective care.

Having identified the chronic homeless, South Australia must prioritise these individuals for housing and other key services. The support packages developed by the Department for Families and Communities for those with psychiatric disabilities illustrate the kind of targeted, hand-crafted approach that works best to end homelessness and stabilise the health of chronically homeless people with multiple and complex needs. The effect of this highly successful program will be improved when data systems can better identify the chronically homeless when they appear in hospitals or jails, and when packages or their equivalent can be provided to all the chronic homeless.

Homelessness

It is also essential to routinely track the cost of homeless people's repeated hospitalisations and other emergency care to be able to understand the implications of maintaining the status quo versus investing in solutions to homelessness. Communities have discovered that many of the resources needed to end chronic homelessness are already available, but tied up in the healthcare system. Better system use data will demonstrate to the Department of Health that mimicking the DFC support packages by providing funding or homecare workers to enable chronically homeless people to maintain themselves successfully in stable homes is an opportunity to provide better care at lower cost to some of their most expensive patients.

In the healthcare system, providing clinically effective and economically rational care demands that chronic conditions are treated differently from acute ones. This same awareness of chronic versus acute and of the need for different treatment strategies is now being put to work to reduce homelessness. Reducing homelessness requires data systems that identify the chronic amongst the larger population of homeless, and that identify the homeless among the larger population of regular patients of health, mental health and substance abuse treatment facilities. These chronically homeless, chronically ill individuals must be prioritised for housing and personalised assistance that will get them permanently 'unstuck' from homelessness and chronic dependence on emergency or acute services.

Action needed

Within privacy constraints, data collection and matching systems must be implemented both within the Department of Health, and also across all agencies that provide services to homeless people to identify common clients and those who are heavy users of emergency services. This is essential for linking those with complex needs to the integrated services they will need to be able to overcome homelessness. Rigorous data collection can also support targeted policy initiatives such as encouraging the development of Department of Health-funded housing support packages for homeless individuals who are high cost patients. Other quantitative tools such as street counts to measure the effectiveness of services must be part of the new results-oriented culture of assistance for homeless people in South Australia. The cross-government nature of the task, and its fundamental importance in driving effective policy, will require leadership at the highest level.

Recommendation

To better assist homeless people with complex needs, the government should consider action to:
- within privacy guidelines, adopt unique identifiers for recipients of government funded services
- create data collection and matching capabilities to track heavy users of emergency systems
- develop a housing priority list made up of the primary homeless and the homeless who are the most frequent users of health and behavioural health services

- use the housing priority list to guide resource allocation decisions
- make annual street counts in each area of the State
- implement an ongoing cost tracking and analysis program to document homeless individuals' past and current use of healthcare and other government services before and after obtaining housing.

Improve services for homeless people with complex needs

Cross agency data reviews reveal that homeless people with complex needs systematically fall between the gaps of government services because their needs are more complex than any one agency can address. Service providers turn the homeless away because of a complicating substance abuse problem. Substance abuse agencies turn them away because of a complicating mental health problem. And housing providers turn them away because of behavioural or credit problems or poor tenancy histories due to their mental health and substance abuse problems. It is true everywhere: the most vulnerable homeless people have been the ones least likely to obtain the housing and support services they need.

What is now solving homelessness is the evidence that we must focus on this group of chronically homeless people first, and provide them with the type of housing and support services they need to remain stably housed. By doing so, communities are:
- caring effectively for their most vulnerable homeless citizens
- un-jamming their emergency systems
- redirecting public and community resources to be spent on services that prevent homelessness and shorten peoples' experience of homelessness
- offering effective housing and support services to a wider group of non-chronically homeless people out of the savings achieved.

There is a close relationship between the effectiveness of a community's efforts to reduce homelessness and the effectiveness of its mental heath system. The mental health and substance abuse services must see the homeless as a priority group. Responsive community-based mental health and substance abuse services are necessary for homeless people to adapt to living in a place of their own. Close alignment between mental health, disability and housing providers can also assure that those leaving institutions who do not have housing to move into are given housing assistance as part of standard discharge practices. The reorganised Housing SA and Disabilities SA must closely link with Mental Health to create this common pathway.

Mental health and substance abuse services must be interwoven to avoid the too familiar situation of a client in need being shifted between the two. Services must also operate flexibly and be available when and where they are needed. The success of the Supported Accommodation Program in Northern Metropolitan Adelaide in placing mentally ill clients into stable homes was attributed by a Housing SA manager to just such a commitment to flexible support. 'We knew they'd (Mental Health) take responsibility if there was a problem with one of their clients in one of our houses,' he said. 'We could call any time.'

Mental health and substance abuse services not only need to be better integrated with each other, they must coordinate with Disabilities SA to see that individuals and families receive appropriate, well-coordinated and effective services.

South Australia must also revisit the formal and informal rules that non-profit community-based mental health and substance abuse services use to accept or screen out those seeking help. In too many cases, those most in need of services are kept out by rules requiring levels of stability, sobriety, financial wherewithal or behaviour completely at odds with the reality of their circumstances. Government funders must be vigilant to see that those most in need are not blocked from receiving the help they need by unrealistic and unworkable program admissions criteria.

The best way of doing so is for DFC to control the placement process for all government-assisted housing. This would involve DFC – perhaps through Disabilities SA – identifying the chronically homeless and requiring that all placements into government-assisted housing be drawn from this prioritised list until all are housed. Ending homelessness in South Australia will necessitate aligning the most extensive services to those with the most complex needs.

Mental health and substance abuse services must also be better integrated with the corrections system. Those leaving correctional facilities who are mentally ill and/or struggling with substance abuse must be given priority. The three agencies must identify individuals requiring these services and establish housing and service links BEFORE discharge from correctional facilities, and create the follow up mechanisms to guide these individuals through their transition and resettlement into their communities.

The new Community Rehabilitation Centres are an important step in creating a modern community mental health system for South Australia. The Social Inclusion Board is considering adopting a stepped model of care for the delivery of mental health services in South Australia. This means creating a service system with a range of steps from the least intensive (and therefore least expensive per unit) to the most intensive and expensive, and limiting the need for the latter by providing timely access to sufficiently large volumes of the less intensive services. These and other measures which will provide a wider and healthier range of living options for South Australians with mental health and/or substance abuse problems are essential to ending homelessness. Needed reforms are underway in both the mental health and substance abuse systems. These must be closely aligned with changes being simultaneously pursued in homeless, housing and disability services. All are interconnected.

Action needed

Integrated services targeted at the homeless with complex needs have already proven to be a powerful and effective way to reduce homelessness in South Australia. This is evidenced by the success of the Street to Home program and the DFC Psychiatric Disability Support Packages. The reform of mental health services and new initiatives in community-based care must ensure that the work of agencies is integrated and targeted, as is seeing to it that the unit cost per homeless person of providing this community-based care remains competitive.

In particular, mental health and substance abuse services must be integrated to provide seamless services to those with complex needs, and to connect effectively with housing and community service providers.

To reduce homelessness, these integrated services must prioritise homeless people and individuals leaving correctional facilities who are in need of them. The Social Inclusion Board has already identified that the range of new services it has sponsored for the prison population – housing advocacy, Through care, and drug rehabilitation – need to be better focused and integrated. To accomplish all that is possible, it will be necessary to reallocate the financial and clinical resources currently trapped in the State's outdated institutional mental health system.

Minister Gail Gago is leading efforts to improve the quality of community mental health services. Her work should be complemented by attention to the admissions standards of community-based programs to reduce exclusionary practices. As the reform of mental health services gathers pace, and the reforms being made in the housing and disability service area continue, they must be aligned with one another so that housing is secured for clients of the mental health system who need it, and that South Australians requiring support to maintain themselves in housing are assured of receiving it, as well as the mental health and substance abuse services they need.

Homelessness

To improve services for homeless people with complex needs, the government should consider action to:

- integrate delivery of mental health and substance abuse services for homeless individuals with complex needs throughout metropolitan Adelaide
- create a system for central management of the housing placement process to ensure that high-need people receive priority attention
- review the eligibility criteria and practices of all contracted service programs and eliminate barriers to access for high need individuals
- establish transitional service links between mental health, substance abuse and corrections systems to create continuity of care as people return to the community following incarceration.

Provide services that keep vulnerable people in stable housing

A familiar challenge in pursuing a results-oriented strategy to reduce homelessness is the inflexibility of government funding programs. They are often tied to the old paradigm of providing emergency assistance rather than permanently ending homelessness. It is a common frustration for reform-minded communities that significant resources continue to be channelled into the dead-end directions of the past, consuming resources needed to adopt proven practices that end homelessness.

In 2006, however, a small miracle occurred. The State and Commonwealth governments agreed to a set of reform directions for the Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP) that would support South Australia's goal to end homelessness. The SAAP reforms provide an extraordinary opportunity for redirecting Commonwealth and State funds to support initiatives that prevent and end homelessness, and in particular provide the long-term help that will keep vulnerable people housed and move people permanently out of homelessness.

South Australia has already demonstrated the effectiveness of linking services to long-term housing. The Supported Tenancies Program documented the benefits of linking tenants with support services as a way of avoiding evictions that could result in homelessness, and of reducing problematic behaviour in Housing SA properties. This evidence-based approach is now being expanded, and should be made standard operating procedure in Housing SA and Community Housing properties. Improved coordination among housing managers, mental health services and community agencies will enable early and comprehensive intervention wherever problems surface to preserve tenancies and protect properties and communities from suffering as the result of troubled behaviour. This can only happen when tenancy officers know their tenants well and assertively manage problem situations.

Not all SAAP funds should be redirected to housing support, but the balance must shift. SAAP funded programs have been very effective in rendering short-term and emergency assistance. Many of those who received crisis help through these programs did not return for prolonged assistance, indicating that their crisis was successfully resolved. Some ongoing capacity to provide crisis services, housing links and the like will always be needed by those in a short-term emergency.

Yet the reality is that many people now receiving SAAP funded services need much more than short-term assistance. Continuing to supply services that do not resolve a person's homelessness is a poor use of limited resources and a poor service to clients. Individuals who need longer-term assistance must be able to obtain this help from SAAP-funded services. Substantial SAAP funding should be shifted into these long-term services.

Over 45 organisations throughout the State receive SAAP contracts, mainly for emergency oriented services that are part of the old paradigm. The Department for Families and Communities (DFC) must clearly articulate the service priorities of the future: funds for sustained tenancy support for primary homeless with complex needs, for homeless young people with complex needs, and for effective and sustained services at transitional residences such as Afton House, to offer just a few examples. DFC must re-examine the service environment, and determine, for example, whether Adelaide is over-served by day centres, and whether it is necessary to sustain all programs or to encourage prudent consolidation of services. It must set clear outcome measures and establish performance standards for agencies receiving funding, and be prepared to hold groups accountable for concrete results, such as numbers of clients housed and services that maintain vulnerable people in their housing.

In cities that hold their contracted service providers accountable, homelessness is declining. This shift requires a commitment to effectiveness on the part of government contracting agencies as well as community-based service providers.

Homelessness

The reorganisation of Housing SA and Disabilities SA, and reform in the mental health sector, reflect the need for more accessible, coordinated, responsive and effective government services for those in need of them, as well as for a more accountable and cooperative culture across government agencies themselves. This will require new standards of performance and retraining of staff.

The DFC and others – philanthropists, South Australia's faith community, and citizens – can assist service-providing agencies in adapting to these changes and work with them to establish new standards and practices during the period of transition.

As the approach to homelessness changes, caught in the middle are the staff and volunteers who, for years, have worked in the old system of shelters, day programs, emergency services and soup runs. These workers have dedicated years to assisting homeless people within a paradigm that many believed was the best answer to the crisis of homelessness. They must now face the possibility that their jobs, and the future of the organisations in which they work, are at stake.

If lasting change is to be made toward eliminating homelessness, government and philanthropic supporters must recognise and respond to the anxieties and tensions created within service provider organisations by this paradigm shift. Because resistance to new and better approaches is usually rooted in fear, the stress and uncertainly faced by those working under the old systems must be acknowledged.

Secondly, groups will need support to plan, to re-train staff and, perhaps, to consolidate or close their current activities in order to support the work of ending homelessness.

Many of those working at shelters and in other emergency programs have done so for much of their adult lives and have helped many people in the best ways they knew how. For them, there is much work to be done on the other side of the homeless 'emergency', in operating the new types of services that are needed, such as homelessness prevention and housing programs. By re-training organisations and the workers who operate emergency programs, this transition can be eased and their future work better aligned with the aspirations of their homeless clients for real homes and long-term connections.

What this has meant for Common Ground is that we target our housing and services not at homeless people generally, but at the group of homeless people with complex needs who have been homeless the longest. This was a change for us and other groups. Previously, we had entry standards for our buildings that excluded people who had active substance abuse problems, or histories of very disruptive behaviour. We had to engage in soul searching about the purpose of our work and ask ourselves whether it was to run orderly programs, or to solve homelessness. We made the choice to put evidence about what succeeds into practice and to work exclusively with those with the most complex needs, in the belief that this was the way to reduce homelessness.

This embrace of evidence has been more than vindicated: homelessness is decreasing in many cities for the first time; and in rigorous monitoring at Common Ground buildings, we have found that the chronically homeless have been fine tenants, virtually indistinguishable in behaviour from our other residents, and have not compromised our building operating standards in the least. This shift in purpose and practice has given all of us tremendous pride and a renewed sense of value in our work.

What is needed at each level – government, philanthropic funders, service providers, volunteers and by the homeless themselves – is for leaders to act in the manner of those seeking to eradicate a devastating disease, and to work passionately to make their jobs obsolete by eliminating the problem. The director of an Oakland, California emergency program for homeless families encapsulated this moral challenge in a statement he made at a recent national meeting of service providers in the United States. After reminding the group of the values that led them into working with the homeless in the first place, he asked, '...are we going to be followers, resisters, or leaders?'

Action needed

Services that concentrate on moving vulnerable people permanently out of homelessness must replace services that sustain people in homelessness. With the opportunity created by the reform of SAAP, a new balance of services must be found. New contracts with community providers of SAAP funded services must explicitly stipulate the services and results that will be expected and insist that services prioritise those with complex needs. To ease the service provider community through this transition, the philanthropic community should be urged to support agencies in planning new housing and homelessness prevention services to take the place of previous activities, and in training their staff for new roles. The Department for Families and Communities, which oversees the SAAP program in SA, must courageously lead the reform efforts in transforming community-based services.

Recommendation

To prevent homelessness, the government should consider action to:

• realign the focus of SAAP contracts and consolidate where necessary to shift resources to long-term support and to priority populations

• move to an incentive based contracting model, making SAAP contract agencies responsible for sustainable housing outcomes for the chronic homeless, with financial consequences for non-performance

• establish new outcome measures to monitor SAAP contracts for effectiveness in serving target groups

• retrain government agency staff to work across agencies where needed to deliver effective, evidence-based services to individuals and families

• create training and coaching opportunities for organisations and staff in the homeless services sector to meet professional requirements of a changed system.

Housing

Expand affordable housing options

Throughout Australia, the lack of affordable housing is emerging as a major challenge for cities. The problem has compounded after years of declining Commonwealth support for the supply of affordable housing. The consequences of this federal policy have been particularly harsh for Adelaide, severely affecting the capacity of public housing to provide for those with low income, and exacerbated by Adelaide's low vacancy rate for private rental housing. It is less than one percent in the metropolitan area. The situation is particularly acute for South Australians with limited incomes – the elderly, the young, lower wage workers – and falls hardest on homeless people living in substandard accommodation or no accommodation at all. To address this gap, it is essential to claim all benefits available through Australian Government funding, mainly from the Commonwealth Rent Assistance program.

The Housing Plan for South Australia has set targets for producing new affordable housing – 15% of new housing is to be affordable, including 5% for those with high or complex needs. This recognises the fundamental housing supply challenge facing metropolitan Adelaide, and along with new efforts such as the Affordable Housing Innovations Fund, creatively harnesses resources available to the State to increase the number of new affordable units. The State is pursuing national reform efforts to increase Commonwealth participation in supporting affordable housing through meetings with housing, local government and planning ministers. The Adelaide City Council is sponsoring affordable housing developments at several sites in the inner city.

Yet beyond the imperative to add to the basic supply of affordable housing there is another need. To reduce homelessness, South Australia must add to the range of housing types available.

For the homeless with physical, mental health and/or other complicating challenges, affordable long-term housing combined with regular support has proved to be a permanent and cost effective remedy to homelessness. Called 'supportive housing' in the United States, the basic model has spread from New York City, where it was first developed, to dozens of cities in the US and Canada. Programs are also now under way in Tokyo, and in the planning stages in London.

The idea behind supportive housing is simple. Years of effort showed that neither affordable housing or support services alone could reliably provide stability, self-sufficiency and improved health for homeless people with complex needs. Yet the combination of the two has proven stunningly effective. Retention rates in housing typically exceed 85% for even those with the most difficult problems. And wherever it has been developed, supportive housing is far less costly to provide than allowing homeless people to remain so. Studies documenting the cost of repeat encounters with health, mental health, substance abuse, shelter and correctional services – facts of life for a rough sleeper – make clear that supportive housing is not only a more humane, but a wiser investment of public resources.

Supportive housing can be provided in at least two ways. One approach, known as 'scatter site', is to secure an apartment for a homeless person in a private rental building, or through Housing SA or a community housing provider in South Australia, and arrange for support staff to visit as often as necessary to see that the person learns to manage independently. This approach has the advantage of speed: there is no need to create a new facility, merely to coordinate the housing and services in existing housing. For some individuals, living in a more private, socially heterogeneous setting fits their personal and psychological needs.

The other popular approach, called 'congregate housing', is to create purpose built supportive housing. If focusing on single adults, this typically involves renovating an existing structure or building a new one, with studio or one bedroom apartments.

Common Ground operates scatter site supportive housing as well as congregate supportive housing. In these purpose built residences, we provide attractive and affordable apartments to low-wage workers as well as the formerly homeless. In many of our buildings, artists, musicians and other creative workers make up a substantial percentage of our tenants. Depending on the location, buildings may incorporate retail spaces, which create job opportunities for building residents. All buildings set aside areas for support workers and for common building amenities such as an exercise room, computer lab, and a space for meetings and community events.

The Prince George, one of Common Ground's intergrated supportive housing residences, New York City

Housing

A benefit of congregate housing in a low vacancy rate environment like metropolitan Adelaide is that it adds to the supply of affordable housing at a time when it is badly needed. It provides an attractive new housing option for those with low incomes as well as giving the formerly homeless a safe and supported environment.

We have also found that congregate housing accomplishes a range of other community objectives. Frequently it acts as an economic development catalyst in areas of a community where investment is needed, or where a troubled or vacant property exists. It has offered a solution to many historic buildings that are uneconomical to redevelop as market rate housing. It has demonstrated new sustainable building technologies. It combines housing for creative workers, students and others important to a city's economic growth. In sum, it offers an elegant and synergistic solution to many community needs at once.

Creating a variety of living arrangements can better serve individuals and families with non-traditional households as well as the homeless or those most likely to become homeless. For example, senior citizens or disabled individuals with need for regular support, but who do not require the comprehensive services of an institution, face limited housing options.

Young people finishing their education or beginning a first job are frequently shut out of conventional apartment rental arrangements. High quality transitional housing arrangements are needed by a range of groups: those leaving institutions, such as hospitals or jails and getting their bearings again in the community, or those visiting metropolitan Adelaide and other regional centres from remote communities.

Aboriginal families who must accommodate numbers of visiting family members from time to time speak of the need for homes that are designed for that purpose. Artists and other creative workers with modest incomes needing space to live and work struggle to find such spaces. Comfortable, modestly priced and well managed options beyond those provided in privately owned, for profit supported residential facilities and boarding houses are particularly serious gaps in the housing supply. Many of those with both mental health and substance abuse challenges require housing specific to their needs. Intentionally developing a wider range of housing choices can help to meet the housing needs of all the State's citizens.

Not all of these options need to be newly created. Existing Housing SA developments such as walk-up cottage flats could be adapted to be more secure and staff-enriched communities by adding a 24-hour management presence and regular support staff. Facilities such as Linsell Lodge on Whitmore Square, which is currently operated as an aged care facility, could be converted to supportive housing when their licences lapse. Sometimes, subtle changes to design and staffing, coupled with regular and effective support to residents, is all that is required to make a successful housing environment for those with special needs.

It is particularly important to consider vacant or under-utilised government-owned properties when looking for places to create supportive housing or other non-traditional accommodation. Properties used for institutional purposes, such as hospitals, are particularly well suited for adaptation to mixed income and mixed use supportive housing. Converting institutional settings can achieve cost reductions in the institutions and introduce new and additional revenue streams while continuing to serve vulnerable populations.

South Australia has announced its intention to create a flagship 'Common Ground' supportive housing residence serving a mix of homeless individuals and low-wage workers. A high-level support group has come together to raise $5 million in private pledge. The residence is planned for the inner city, and potential sites have been found. Several opportunities for synergy should be kept in mind.

Adopt a 'housing first' philosophy

'Housing first' is the principle of focusing on housing a homeless person or family first, THEN connecting them with appropriate services for as long as necessary. It is a simple innovation that has reduced chronic homelessness in city after city. It challenges the conventional wisdom that homeless people need a progression of services starting with shelter or treatment, and must first somehow prove their readiness for housing. South Australia has demonstrated the effectiveness of this approach with the Exceptional Needs Unit, the Street to Home program, and other highly successful initiatives. This philosophy must guide the State's thinking and planning.

Prioritise those with complex needs

Government-assisted housing resources must be able to respond to the 'housing first' approach. This challenges the idea that some people are 'too hard to house.' There needs to be ready access to housing for homeless people with complex needs, where individuals can be linked to the services they need to rebuild their lives. Housing SA, working with Disabilities SA, is well placed to create the systems to prioritise access to government-assisted homes.

Housing

Create a supportive housing development pipeline

In addition to a downtown site, bear in mind opportunities such as the Julia Farr Centre, now partially vacant, that have a distinguished history of serving the disabled. Creating a mixed community there for the disabled, low-wage workers, students, artists and the formerly homeless would answer many needs in an elegant and attractive way. Other properties in flux, such as Glenside Hospital and the Keswick Barracks, similarly offer exceptional opportunities for developing high quality supportive housing within a mixed community.

Use supportive housing consciously as an economic development catalyst

The State's Strategic Plan seeks to boost the creative workforce and creative economy of South Australia. Offering attractive, affordable, well located housing to practising artists has been effective in cities seeking to rejuvenate neighbourhoods and build creative capital. Arts leaders in the State agree. Carolyn Ramsey, Planning Officer Arts and Living Culture for the Adelaide City Council, reports, on average, one to two calls weekly from artists seeking housing and/or studio space in Adelaide. Stephen Bowers, director of the Jam Factory, describes how programming could be enhanced if housing were available for visiting artists. Combining supportive housing with housing for artists at a downtown site could advance these multiple goals. A number of vacant or under-utilised privately owned sites, as well as property acquired by the Adelaide City Council for development as affordable housing, offer excellent opportunities for such a program.

Julia Farr Centre, South Australia

In addition, developing a site in Port Adelaide as supportive and artists' housing could help catalyse new development in that community. A mixed supportive and artists housing project in a transformed warehouse building in the 'woolshed' area, near the major Port Adelaide development site, could complement the development and add affordable housing to the Port Adelaide redevelopment plan.

Use supportive housing as an historic preservation strategy

North Terrace is dotted with beautiful, historically significant properties that no longer have a purpose. The features that make them and other historic properties beautiful and significant frequently make them uneconomic to develop for market rate use. A supportive housing project may offer a solution since it may be underwritten as a charitable enterprise and not need to be profitable.

With reasonable accommodations made by Historic Preservation officials to satisfy disability, fire safety and operational needs, many historic buildings in the United States have been rescued from obsolescence and gradual decay to be restored and converted to serve communities as supportive housing. Similar opportunities exist in Adelaide.

Use supportive housing as a model and standard to reform boarding houses and supported residential facilities (SRFs).

Residents of boarding houses are considered 'tertiary homeless'; they are a group of people whose housing and support service needs overlap with those of the primary homeless. Two fine and troubling reports issued in recent years by the (former) Department of Human Services (DHS) document the issues faced by boarding house and SRF residents. They paint a picture of residents of these facilities who are poor, dependent on government assistance, frequently with physical and mental health challenges and rarely receiving the level of support or care that is appropriate to their needs.

Residents in both types of facilities largely fund their own care; SRFs typically collect around 80% of a resident's income. In a meeting at the Magdalene Centre with a group of Adelaide residents who have experienced homelessness, several described boarding houses as generally the only accommodation option for people trying to overcome homelessness. Yet the excessive fees charged for poor quality rooms make it impossible for them to save for permanent accommodation. Many would prefer to sleep rough than be trapped in poor quality housing that robs them of the opportunity to save for a real home.

Much-needed support services have now been channelled into boarding houses and SRFs. Yet concerns remain about the suitability of these facilities. South Australia's boarding houses and SRFs, with over 2000 residents, require most to fend for themselves in poor quality, impermanent housing.

New legislation is being developed to set standards for boarding houses and SRFs. It is always the case that even in a troubled industry some practitioners stand out as decent and responsible. South Australia can begin the process of improving boarding houses and SRFs by creating incentives and rewards for strong and responsible operators to provide a higher standard of accommodation and care for their residents. This might mean providing financial assistance to help responsible operators bring their buildings up to an acceptable standard; reducing the percentage of income charged to residents; help with linking to local service providers to gain support for residents; and regular government monitoring of conditions and practices.

Some creative and attractive alternative housing arrangements have already been developed, such as the shared housing arrangements created by Specialised Accommodation Services. This is the right direction. A wider range of housing options would serve South Australians living in poor quality housing or who are without accommodation altogether.

Housing

Use supportive housing to demonstrate sustainable building technologies.

Sustaining South Australia's fragile environment is one of the principal goals of the State's Strategic Plan. Improving the environmental performance of buildings is a major opportunity for achieving this. Publicly-assisted residential developments are ideal places to demonstrate new technologies and to encourage their wider adoption. In particular, the energy cost savings attributable to sustainable features increases the affordability of these units for lower income households. Common Ground has been an early adopter of green technology; our buildings in the United States incorporate environmentally friendly materials, high efficiency mechanical systems, and features such as 'green' roofs to reduce emissions and storm water run-off while limiting heat loss.

There are many reasons this makes sense. We are helping to familiarise builders and developers with a new way of thinking, new materials and new suppliers. We are creating a healthier living environment for our tenants. We are reducing our energy costs, and we are being responsible citizens. Supportive housing can play just such a catalytic role in South Australia.

In places where sustainable design is becoming mainstream, government has been the principal actor. Insisting that new public buildings be constructed to high efficiency standards creates a market for green technologies. This in turn creates opportunities for new business development in the State in the local production and distribution of green building materials. Sustainability must also be factored into the location of affordable housing. Creating housing in areas convenient to public transport and workplaces will allow South Australians to reduce their transportation expenditures, will support connections to employment, and diminish automobile use, cutting traffic and emissions.

South Australia's housing investments are an opportunity for leadership in sustainable building. Adelaide Thinker in Residence Stephen Schneider, an American climatologist with whom I overlapped in Adelaide, made a parallel recommendation in his report. Schneider urged use of a '7/11' rule to guide green design: if the additional investment required yields a 7% return and pays itself back in energy savings within 11 years, it is financially rational as well as environmentally beneficial. Applying this formula to supportive and other publicly assisted housing development is an excellent place to begin.

The Housing Plan for South Australia anticipates that over 20,000 new affordable housing units will be created by 2014, stimulated by the Plan's incentives to private developers and the Affordable Housing Innovations Fund created by the Plan. Halving the number estimated for unmet high needs, 3900 additional dwellings will be required for those with complex needs.

In conversations with housing developers, having a clear signal from the State that a pipeline of programs and resources will support a new line of business would justify their taking on the challenge of creating more affordable products. Many had suggestions about how to stimulate this climate of active affordable housing development.

South Australia is at the leading edge of a conversation that is happening throughout Australia about the shrinking supply of affordable housing. It is looking at the issue nationally with other states to urge an expansion of Commonwealth assistance. The Property Council of Australia has recently made its own affordable housing recommendations at the national level. These efforts can be given more weight by including the banking and homebuilding industries as well as faith-based and housing advocacy groups to call for the creation of new resources and, especially, new tools to enable the creation of affordable housing.

Low cost financing, provided through government loans or guarantees, tax-exempt bonds or various tax credits, has been an essential element of affordable housing strategies in American cities. Incentives that do not require federal involvement, but can be created at the state and local level, will be the most attractive options to explore in the short term. With cross-state conversations under way on national housing policy, ambitious federal level proposals for new direct or tax driven subsidies of affordable housing should also be considered.

Locally, Adelaide might consider using its local rate structure to create incentives for building affordable housing. In American cities, it is not unusual for the local rates on affordable housing developments to be phased in over five to twenty years. Likewise, many communities are stimulating affordable housing development by deferring or waiving altogether the land costs where property owned by a government entity is made available for affordable development. Reducing or waiving other fees should also be explored.

Christie Walk Eco Housing, Adelaide

To reach the State's housing goal and, in particular, to create adequate numbers of units to house the homeless or those with complex needs, every publicly owned site must reserve a number of units for those with very low incomes or high and complex needs. The Playford North development site, with a 15% affordable reserve, is a model of this sensible practice. Cheltenham Racecourse should include at least 15% affordable units as well. The massive redevelopment of Port Adelaide ought to have an affordable component. This should be considered for buildings/areas not yet fully planned or adjacent to the Port Adelaide redevelopment sites.

A full audit of all government property holdings will identify other opportunities for affordable and supportive housing development. The Land Management Corporation should be made a partner in efforts to increase and widen the State's affordable and specialised housing options.

Action needed

Creating adequate housing opportunities for all South Australians must be a project for the entire real estate industry, not only for government and community housing providers. State and local governments must look at the whole housing market and create new options for the socially excluded to secure stable housing in the private sector market, and for the entire affordable housing market to expand. The Department for Families and Communities, Planning SA and the Land Management Corporation at the state level, and local governments throughout South Australia, are the critical actors in setting the

context for developing a more integrated and responsive housing market capable of serving all citizens. A culture of innovation and results informs the reorganised Housing SA and Disabilities SA within the Department for Families and Communities. These recommendations build on their plan.

To expand affordable housing options, the government should consider action to:

- identify sites for initial Common Ground supportive housing projects in inner city Adelaide and in Port Adelaide
- establish an artist housing workgroup to advise on integration of arts and artist housing into the two Common Ground projects
- develop a production timeline for 3900 units of special needs housing
- complete a property audit to identify under-utilised government owned property. In particular, prepare an analysis of Glenside and Julia Farr properties and their potential for partial redevelopment as mixed income, mixed use supportive housing
- formalise a target of a 15% reserve for affordable units in all projects involving the use of government-owned land
- meet with the Commonwealth Government to request the transfer of Keswick Barracks property to SA to redevelop as mixed income, mixed use housing incorporating a supportive housing component
- collaborate in creating a centralised management process for matching high need individuals with appropriate housing

- meet with local councils throughout the State to consider rate abatement programs to assist in creation of supportive and affordable housing
- test a land price deferral concept
- examine the range of fees and project expenses and propose possible exemptions
- establish a sustainable housing work group to explore and promote green building technologies and opportunities for business creation in South Australia
- complete an inventory and analysis of underutilised historic properties in the inner city, their ownership and potential for redevelopment as supportive housing
- launch an SRF and boarding house demonstration project, with incentives for owners to improve environments and services
- complete an inventory of expiring use aged care facilities to identify opportunities for conversion to supportive housing.

Enhance the quality and range of housing options for Aboriginal South Australians

Homelessness within the Aboriginal community has distinct features and origins. It requires approaches that respond to its unique, complex and urgent qualities.

Homelessness in the Aboriginal community is intertwined with poor housing conditions in remote and urban areas, widespread chronic illness in remote communities coupled

with the lack of medical services in those areas, and issues of domestic violence and community breakdown, all of which drive individuals and families from their homes and communities. Traditional migration patterns, especially those from desert to coastal areas during the hot weather months and to fulfil cultural and family obligations, can also manifest as homelessness when temporary accommodation cannot be provided or when those being visited are overwhelmed by too many guests.

Primary homelessness does affect members of the Aboriginal community. In fact, the number is disproportionate to the population: while comprising 1.6% of the general population, Indigenous people make up 8% of the homeless population. These individuals need the same priority assistance and the same results-oriented services that all the primary homeless need. Beyond this high need group, however, a collection of forces creates conditions which produce forms of temporary housing need that can appear as homelessness, and which stress those experiencing it as well as the communities in which these forces operate.

Migrations to regional centres unprepared to accommodate regular and sizable waves of temporary residents produces seasonal 'rough sleeping', and overcrowded conditions in Aboriginal households in those communities. Local services are strained, host families see their lives disrupted, and the greatest stress of all is felt by those who have left their homes for reasons of basic necessity and encounter expensive, unwelcoming, or overcrowded accommodation – or none at all – in the places they go to for help or respite.

Housing

An excellent paper, 'Aboriginal Lands Response NW Adelaide 2005–2006' by Jude Allen, traces the impact of chronic health issues on migration. Forty-five percent of South Australia's Anangu population over the age of 15 living in remote communities in the far north of the State have chronic health conditions, she writes, which necessitate regular visits to regional centres for treatment. This suggests at least two areas of action: improve the living conditions in remote communities, particularly housing; and develop adequate affordable temporary housing in regional centres.

Housing conditions in remote communities are a major contributor to poor health. As documented by Healthabitat (the renowned Australian organisation that has developed health standards for indigenous housing and has improved nearly 6000 indigenous homes in its 20 year history), substandard housing encourages infectious disease, respiratory illnesses and preventable accidents. The health and economic implications of neglecting poor housing conditions are enormous as these conditions can evolve into chronic illnesses.

Beyond the suffering involved, receiving treatment for these illnesses without adequate access to health services in remote areas creates a logistical and financial burden for those having to travel to regional centres for care. The high cost of treating chronic conditions burdens State healthcare resources that are already badly stretched. The need to absorb those coming for medical care as well as their families, burdens regional centres and creates overcrowding and family tensions.

Typically, the ill family member arrives in a regional centre for treatment in the company of other family members. The expense of Aboriginal hostels, hotels and other formal types of temporary accommodation discourages their use. The tight curfew and behavioural rules imposed by many hostels deter even more. The remaining options, to stay with family in the area or to sleep rough, are the ones usually chosen.

Other movement patterns to regional centres – whether in search of work, cooler weather during summer months, to deal with law enforcement issues, to visit family members or other voluntary or obligatory reasons – similarly highlight the need for expanded temporary accommodation options. Much of what appears to be homelessness can be corrected with investments that will produce community and fiscal benefits and improve the lives of Aboriginal South Australians.

As a starting point, South Australia should complete the work of bringing Aboriginal housing throughout the State to a liveable standard. The nine 'Healthy Living Practices' developed by Healthabitat for Indigenous housing, and the process that the group has developed in the course of improving health-related features of Aboriginal homes, are a practical and straightforward guide to what must be done. South Australia's record is better than most states and territories in what it has already accomplished.
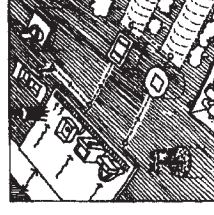

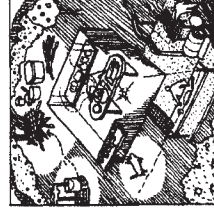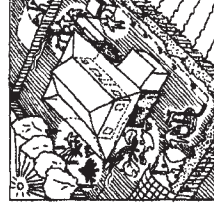**'Nine Healthy Living Practices for Indigenous Housing'**
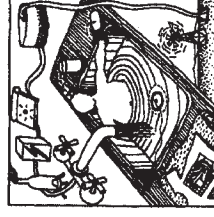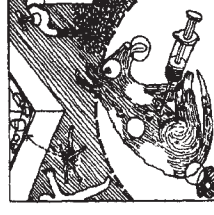
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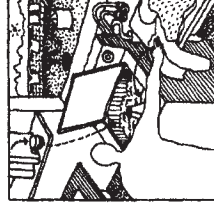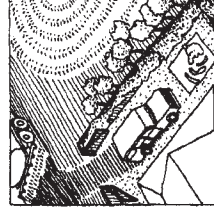
washing clothes

removing waste safely
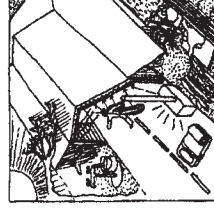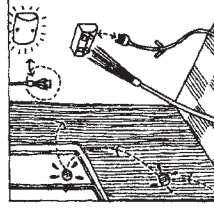
improving nutrition

reducing crowding

separating people from animals, vermin or insects

reducing dust

controlling temperature

reducing trauma

Bringing 85% of Aboriginal homes up to the level where one's home won't make you ill is a remarkably cost effective way to improve health conditions for Aboriginal families, to reduce chronic illness, and to curb health-related migration to regional centres and the problems that ensue. With financial support, Healthabitat teams could do the work.

They are made up of local residents, building professionals, and trained coordinators who organise improvement projects where entire communities have their homes improved in a 'blitz' of repair activity. Better yet, the Healthabitat standards and methods could be incorporated into the work of Housing SA and become part of the agency's regular practice.

Housing

Some of the movement into regional centres can be expected to decline once the need for health-related travel is reduced. Yet movement will continue, and again practical responses are needed. Two strategies for providing adequate temporary accommodation for those who must travel between communities and to regional centres merit focus. First, a new kind of hostel may be needed, at a price that is more in line with the resources of many Indigenous travellers and with more accommodating rules. Such facilities may well need, and merit, a subsidy from government if they can provide a comfortable, orderly environment for visitors from remote communities with necessary business to attend to.

Second, and ultimately, new types of Aboriginal homes will be needed as well. A workshop on Indigenous Housing on 6 July 2006 produced a consensus around the kind of flexibly designed dwelling options that are needed:

- different configurations of indoor and outdoor spaces
- capacity to expand living space by adding modular rooms to accommodate visiting family members
- different arrangements of common facilities, for cooking and washing in particular
- greater opportunities for privacy at times when visitors are sharing the home
- built to a more extreme systems capacity, so that plumbing, for instance, could support a maximum demand load during significant periods of use by visitors in addition to regular occupants.

To show what might be possible and build interest in new forms of housing, it will be important to build prototypes of new housing designs that reflect these preferences. This will allow families to see what these homes look like. There are at least two opportunities to test these ideas. The Affordable Housing Innovations Fund at Housing SA could create a prototype in its building program. Also, the Design Build program at the School of Architecture at the University of South Australia, headed by David Morris, could be asked to expand its role in assisting Housing SA with new residence designs involving these principles.

Indigenous Housing near Ceduna, South Australia

Encouraging more diverse building styles, and developing and using materials that are environmentally sustainable (and more easily obtained or even manufactured) in Indigenous communities, are other opportunities that many in South Australia are eager to explore. Minister Paul Caica sees the possibility of the TAFE system incorporating training in traditional and/or sustainable building crafts. There are many local resources to work with. The Wiltja Program at the Woodville High School might add training in these building methods to its curriculum, to expose Aboriginal students to these techniques and the skills required to use them. Ecopolis, a local architecture firm that has built housing in Adelaide using sustainable materials, is just one example of expertise available in the community that could be engaged in determining which building materials can be developed and used in Indigenous communities.

All of these suggestions will be enhanced and made more useful if members of the Aboriginal community actively help to develop the ideas and plans and convey the goals and purposes of these initiatives to the Aboriginal community. Even while Commonwealth-level policies on Aboriginal concerns create uncertainty about many Indigenous issues, it is an opportune time for South Australia to promote measures that will improve health and housing as well as reduce housing overcrowding and rough sleeping among Aboriginal South Australians.

Action needed

An integrated strategy to improve the housing conditions of Aboriginal South Australians is the best way to reduce the various forms of homelessness experienced by Indigenous people. By bringing together expertise and resources already in the State – such as Healthabitat, UniSA's Design Build program, the Innovations Fund, TAFE, the Wiltja School and the talents of local architects and builders – better quality housing that improves the lives and health of Aboriginal citizens can be built. Setting ambitious but achievable standards for improving housing quality, housing design, and housing options will create a framework, and an example, for other states and territories to follow in pursuing similar improvements.

Recommendation

To enhance the quality and range of housing options for Aboriginal South Australians, the government should consider action to:

- bring 85% of Aboriginal homes into compliance with the nine 'Healthy Living Practices' defined by Healthabitat
- develop, build and display two prototypes of alternative dwellings designed in collaboration with the Aboriginal community
- integrate training in traditional and sustainable building crafts into curricula at Wiltja School and TAFEs
- investigate business development opportunities in the manufacture of sustainable building materials that can be sourced/created in remote areas and used for Aboriginal homes.

Community

Engage the community in ending homelessness

Government and community service providers alone cannot end homelessness. It will require a whole-of-community response. Private landlords and property developers have an enormous role to play in providing housing. Faith-based institutions and civic groups can sponsor and provide mentoring support to homeless individuals and families in resettling. Businesses can sponsor school-based apprenticeships and other employment opportunities for those rebuilding their lives from homelessness. Community volunteers can assist with street counts. Neighbours can support housing programs in their community.

Among community strategies worth paying attention to are those created by the cities of Atlanta, New York, Denver and San Francisco.

In Atlanta, Mayor Shirley Franklin has enlisted religious institutions in and around the city to sponsor homeless families or individuals. This means helping to locate a home, donating the furniture, and taking responsibility for welcoming the family or individual into the community.

In New York, almost 2000 citizen volunteers help in the city's annual street count of the homeless. Volunteers accompany professional outreach workers in searching all five city boroughs, from midnight to 4 am on a winter night.

In Denver, Mayor John Hickenlooper has also enlisted the faith communities of the region in sponsoring individuals and families. In addition, university students have been organised to meet with neighbourhood groups throughout the area to educate residents on homelessness, the city's strategy to find housing for homeless people, and how supportive housing operates. Communities where residents have been educated in this way have proven much more receptive than others to welcoming formerly homeless neighbours.

The City of San Francisco has created the most dramatic community strategy of all. Every two months, San Francisco holds a one-day 'Project Homeless Connect' event at which community volunteers assist homeless people with medical and legal needs, securing benefits, completing housing applications, and link the most vulnerable to immediate housing. Over thirty American cities now hold Project Homeless Connect events at least once a year.

What is needed is a community-wide commitment to not leave vulnerable people to fend for themselves on the streets and in emergency programs when what they need is a home.

Action needed

The Social Inclusion Board and Department for Families and Communities should explore ways to engage the broader community in the work of preventing and ending homelessness. An effective communication program will be particularly important to develop this dimension of the State's work.

A campaign around the housing needs of young people would be a place to start. As recommended by the Youth Policy Action Team, an effort is needed to:

- engage residents to rent additional bedrooms to young people
- engage schools to provide special support to young people facing homelessness
- encourage landlords to rent to young people
- urge employers to support young people through school-based apprenticeships.

Involving community volunteers in the State's street counts will also raise the level of public engagement and support of efforts to end homelessness.

Create new school and training opportunities linked to housing for young people

The acute need of young people for safe and affordable housing and steady adult guidance merits a broad community response in South Australia. There is a worrisome gap between the level of need and the current level of community awareness. Minister Jane Lomax-Smith reports a growing pattern of children and young adults acting as caregivers to parents who are compromised by physical, mental health and substance abuse issues. Over three hundred 15- to 17-year-olds were in the care of the State last year, most of whom will 'age out' of care at age 18 without adult support to navigate the process of finding housing, employment and continuing their education. School drop-out rates are the subject of Social Inclusion Board initiatives. Educators and the staff of Service to Youth Council's 'Trace a Place' service report that loss of housing is frequently the reason for a young person's failure to complete school.

The dimensions of youth homelessness in South Australia are sizable. Thus it was extraordinarily helpful to be able to work with a team of young policy officers from eight different state agencies and the Adelaide City Council to explore the dimensions of youth homelessness in the State and to frame the following recommendations. I am grateful for the outstanding work of Rebecca Pearson and Michael Kay of the Department of Further Education, Employment, Science and Technology; Sean O'Connor and Julia Keane of the Department for Families and Communities; Adrian Moulds of the Department of Health;

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Ben Kilsby of the Adelaide City Council; Emily Glover of the Office for Women; Bettina Blefari of the Office of Public Employment; Deborah Barry of the Department of Education and Children's Services; and Kathy Eleutheriou of the Office for Youth, who coordinated the team's work. Here is what needs to be done.

Improve data and reporting systems to measure youth homelessness

The State should collect meaningful data about youth homelessness to inform the development and implementation of programs and responses. In addition, the economic and social cost to the State of a young person failing to complete his/her education or participate in the workforce due to homelessness should be analysed. This can provide a clearer rationale for housing initiatives for young people and for engaging the community's participation in addressing youth homelessness.

Create a target for reducing youth homelessness in South Australia's Strategic Plan

Young people are over-represented among South Australia's secondary homeless population. Twelve- to eighteen-year-olds made up 9.6% of the SA population in 2001; 8.3% of the boarding house population; 15.5% of the shelter population; and 49% of the 'couch surfing' population – that is, 39% of the secondary homeless population – in addition to being 9.3% of the primary homeless population. A target to reduce youth homelessness will encourage the government and community action to achieve sustainable housing outcomes for homeless young people.

Develop an education and training effort to prevent homelessness among young South Australians

Schools and community organisations can increase young peoples' awareness of the challenges of living alone. The Department of Education and Children's Services can introduce curricular modules covering living out of home, budgeting, tenancy obligations, where to go for support, and skills needed to live with other people. Some of these materials have already been developed by Service to Youth Council. A 'Good Tenant' accreditation course and certificate can also be used to give private landlords confidence in a young person's knowledge of tenancy obligations, and to reduce the difficulty now faced by young people attempting to rent housing on their own.

The role of schools in addressing youth homelessness cannot be understated: the Service to Youth Council found in surveying homeless young people that 100% of those surveyed had made their school aware of their circumstances, but that schools had few resources of any kind with which to respond to students' housing needs.

Develop a general awareness campaign to encourage a response to youth homelessness by all South Australians

South Australians will be alarmed, and can be moved to action, by knowing the scale of youth homelessness in the State. To make it a priority for residents, businesses, schools and community organisations, a campaign is needed to communicate the facts of youth homelessness in the State. The campaign might highlight the cost to society of losing a young South Australian to homelessness; describe what each sector of the community can do to help; and highlight the businesses, landlords and ordinary citizens who are helping young people to overcome homelessness.

Incorporate housing information and referral services into the CaFE² Enfield model

CaFE Enfield integrates child development, education, South Australian Certificate of Education (SACE) preparation and health services into a single, community managed and driven program serving the Enfield community. Its success in allowing young mothers to complete their SACE, in improving parenting skills and in strengthening the community has led to plans to expand the CaFE's integrated philosophy into additional communities across the State.

Incorporating housing assistance into the services offered would enhance its effect on struggling communities. This could be accomplished in a number of ways: by hosting regular visits by a Housing SA Housing Officer and/or Private Rental Liaison Officer to explain their services and how to access them, and to offer instruction in how to be a successful tenant; by providing life skills training related to maintaining one's home; by providing access to internet-based housing listings; by having a central housing assistance unit supporting all CaFE Enfield-inspired programs and the young people and families who use their services. This central office could function as a clearinghouse for information on housing and employment for young people. Such a service would be a valuable resource for all secondary school teachers and administrators when faced with students who are homeless.

Those involved in the CaFE Enfield project – the Department of Education and Children's Services, the Department of Health, the Social Inclusion Unit – as well as Housing SA should augment the successful CaFE Enfield program with the housing assistance that, for some, is essential to completing their education.

2. Children and Families Everywhere

Community

Create a rental vacancies website

The internet could help close the information gap faced by many young people needing housing. Existing resources, including the Adelaide City Council's website listing rental vacancies in the inner city (www.cityofadelaide. com.au), and 'Craig's List' (www.craigslist. org), a free on-line advertising service in many cities, could be expanded in South Australia to centralise information on rental vacancies throughout the State. This would be an efficient service to private landlords with an apartment, or homeowners with a room to rent, or someone with an apartment to share, as well as to young people seeking housing. This effort would require leadership and management to set up, market and popularise the service as well as to keep the listings up to date. The Adelaide City Council and Department for Families and Communities/ Housing SA might collaborate to create and manage this service.

Expand affordable housing options for homeless young people

Housing specifically built for young people living alone and attempting to complete their education and/or get started in the workforce is also needed. One model, popular in Europe and now found in North America, is called the 'foyer'. Foyers provide modestly priced accommodation linked to employment and educational services for those under age 24. St. John's Youth Service hopes to develop a foyer for young people in Adelaide. This could be combined with an educational initiative (see recommendation 9), or be freestanding. Student housing catering to South Australian young people, or conventional affordable

housing oriented to young people, are other options. Under-utilised government owned properties such as the Hampstead Centre or Strathmont Centre could be considered as locations for housing for homeless young people, perhaps combined with training and education programs. This housing could be combined with international student housing or affordable housing for other groups. Privately owned properties might also be considered.

Promote home-stays within the community

It is not uncommon for South Australian families to provide lodging to visiting international students. The same community capacity to offer housing to these students might be put to use serving South Australian young people without housing who are attempting to complete their education or are working in low-wage jobs. A home-stay coordinating body could make the links between young people needing housing and residents with the space to house a young person. The coordinating group, or a designated person at the young person's school, could be an ongoing support to the arrangement, help to secure a housing bond, and help to address any problems that arise. A three-way contract arrangement between the family, the young person and the coordinating group could detail the obligations of all the parties in sustaining the arrangement.

The DFC and DECS are best positioned to take the lead in exploring and implementing this idea.

Adelaide City School

Completing school not only increases a young person's employment prospects: research shows that it is a significant protective factor against future homelessness. Innovative strategies to help young people who have left school, or whose housing situations put the completion of their education at risk, can contribute to many aspects of the State's Social Inclusion agenda.

A group of educators has been looking at solutions. One particularly exciting concept is to create a work–study curricular option, using the new School-based Apprenticeship program. This could be linked to the TAFE system and would provide a flexible, integrated way to keep young people in school, prepare them for work, and draw on the capabilities of South Australia's employers to support young people in building stable, productive lives. The work–study programs would involve the creation of personalised learning programs for each young person. Such programs could be offered at designated schools throughout the State.

A 'hub' for this concept might be a dedicated 'Adelaide City School' in the inner city, which would be connected to housing. The housing component need not be operated by educators, but through a partnership with a community or youth housing provider. Being able to secure housing would add an incentive for young people to remain in school. Students coming to Adelaide from remote areas, young people in guardianship situations, young care givers, those on their own and struggling to remain housed and in school, as well as young people with stable housing who would be drawn to the different curriculum, could all benefit from a personalised learning and support program linked to housing.

A property such as the old Girls' High School on Grote Street is a good example of an existing building which could serve as the campus for the Adelaide City School. It was built as a school, backs up to a student housing complex and includes an adjacent vacant property that might be appropriate for redevelopment as a foyer or residential facility for young people completing school.

DECS and DFC and the committee of educators who are developing the idea should complete a feasibility study of the concept and develop a plan for curricular options that will attract unconnected young people back to school and provide for their housing needs.

Additional recommendations

The Youth Policy Action group worked through an enormous agenda of issues and ideas. They identified the need for additional research and more effective responses to needs beyond the nine areas they covered. DECS, DFC and the Office for Youth should investigate the housing, education and employment needs of the following groups:

- young Indigenous people
- young people with physical and intellectual disabilities
- mentally ill young people
- young families
- gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender young people
- young people leaving juvenile detention centres.

Community

Action needed

The recommendations of the Youth Policy Action group, reflecting the suggestions of many working in education, youth services, housing and homelessness, provide a rich starting point for a number of initiatives that can improve the lives of struggling young people. These would strengthen South Australian society, economically and in all respects, for generations to come. A whole community response, but with clear goals and accountabilities, is needed to realise the many possibilities identified. A starting point would be the creation of a framework for coordinating the work of the Office for Youth, Department of Education and Children's Services, and Department for Families and Communities, the Social Inclusion Unit and other key agencies around the goal of reducing youth homelessness.

Recommendation

To end homelessness among young people, the government should consider action to:

- complete a feasibility study for an Adelaide City School
- add a target for reducing youth homelessness to South Australia's Strategic Plan
- complete a cost analysis of the economic impact of youth homelessness
- focus on youth homelessness in expanding CaFE Enfield and in school curricula development
- improve data and reporting system to measure youth homelessness
- create new housing rental opportunities for young people
- commission an analysis of homelessness and housing needs among Aboriginal youth, young people with physical and intellectual disabilities, mentally ill young people, young families, gay, lesbian bisexual and transgender young people, and young people leaving juvenile detention centres.

Create a high level communications strategy to advance social inclusion efforts

There is a sharp disconnection between the outstanding work that is going on to reduce homelessness in South Australia, and the number of people who know about it.

The new initiatives of the Social Inclusion Board and agencies such as the DFC and Department of Health are particular cases in point. Some remarkable outcomes: 723 homeless people with complex needs have been identified and assessed through the Street to Home program. Over 200 have been housed of whom 101 have been supported into long term housing; just over 950 families and individuals prevented from becoming homeless through eviction; and 55 homeless people with complex needs supported in housing through the Psychiatric Disability Support Packages, to name just a few, demonstrate that homelessness is not the intractable condition it was once thought to be. The results, and the fact that South Australia is demonstrating that homelessness is solvable, need to be known in the community. It is part of the work of ending homelessness to regularly communicate the vision and the results of bold new efforts, both successes and setbacks, and what was learned from them.

Social movements always require good communication. In the case of Great Britain, the dramatic reduction they achieved in rough sleeping was accompanied, and very likely assisted, by a sophisticated media program to explain the government's plan to the public and enlist the community's help in key areas. Similarly, Denver and San Francisco, which have both seen significant decreases in homelessness, have been helped by effective communication strategies that have drawn support and resources to their efforts. Denver, in fact, expects that its media campaign will raise $12 million (US) from private philanthropy and the public to implement its plan to end chronic homelessness in the city.

South Australia has abundant talent to draw on to develop a communication strategy for its social inclusion initiatives. And it has a wonderful resource in the Australian Science Media Centre to share, within the State and nationally, the evidence being gathered that homelessness is turning around.

Because the Social Inclusion Board's agenda touches on many of the conditions that contribute to homelessness – joblessness, educational failure, inadequate mental health services, to name a few – it makes sense to create a communication program for the entire Social Inclusion Board, not just its work on homelessness.

This effort should be complemented by adding to the capacity of the Australian Science Media Centre (AusSMC) to translate data on homelessness and related social issues into information for mainstream media consumption. Technical capability in graphic design and animation would enhance the outstanding work being done at AusSMC and their ability to engage the public in understanding the workings of natural and social sciences and the impact of social policy initiatives.

Action needed

The Social Inclusion Board should incorporate a high level communications function into its mission. Translating program and policy issues into a mainstream public awareness/ engagement campaign will require particular expertise. In addition, the dearth of social science information on homelessness throughout Australia is a prime opportunity for the Australian Science Media Centre to create unique value and capability. Adding a capacity to translate data in inventive ways to the Centre would enrich the State's communication efforts, within South Australia and nationally.

Recommendation

To advance the State's social inclusion agenda, the government should consider action to:

- create a position at the Australian Science Media Centre to illustrate and communicate social science data
- engage communication expertise to articulate the Social Inclusion Board agenda and achievements.

Community

Lead a national effort to end chronic homelessness in Australia

South Australia has a reputation in policy circles for detecting and addressing emerging issues before the nation's other states and territories. This is abundantly true with respect to homelessness. Since South Australia launched its Social Inclusion initiative in 2003 and made reducing street homelessness a goal of the State's Strategic Plan, other states and major cities have taken notice. Interest in re-thinking approaches to homelessness is now surfacing among local and state governments and non-profit leaders in Melbourne, Sydney and Brisbane, and perhaps other communities as well. The moment is ripe for these separate conversations to come together. South Australia is the natural leader of such an effort.

In Great Britain and the United States, the changes of approach that led to significant reductions in homelessness were accompanied by nationwide campaigns to inform the public that change was possible, and to engage every level of government in adopting the practices that result in homeless people being housed. In Great Britain, Prime Minister Tony Blair played the role of champion, supported by the work of Louise Casey at the Homelessness Directorate. In the United States, Philip F. Mangano, the Executive Director of the federal Interagency Council on Homelessness, has enlisted 285 mayors of American cities to undertake local five to ten year plans to end chronic homelessness in their communities. Forty nine of the fifty American states now have inter-agency councils on homelessness to streamline funding and coordinate services for homeless people. Mangano, a state-level advocate for the homeless prior to taking the federal position, rallied local officials to the issue by sharing data on the costs their communities were bearing by perpetuating emergency approaches to homelessness. He then unified the efforts of disparate cities and states into a national movement to adopt proven strategies that reduce homelessness and to move away from the inadequate efforts of the past.

Both in Great Britain and the United States, national leadership required personal advocacy embodied in a leader; the data to illustrate the cost and inadequate results of emergency-driven responses; the evidence of effective alternatives; and a strong communication effort. South Australia can do more than reduce homelessness in the State alone: it can bring together leaders of other states, territories and major cities in a national effort to end chronic homelessness in Australia.

Action needed

In Premier Mike Rann, Minister Jay Weatherill and Social Inclusion Board Chair Monsignor David Cappo, South Australia has leaders who can foster a national movement to reduce homelessness throughout Australia. It is a role in keeping with the visionary and pragmatic social policy leadership that the nation has come to expect from South Australia.

Recommendation

To demonstrate South Australia's social policy innovation and leadership, the government should consider action to:
- craft an agenda for national action
- introduce a goal of ending chronic homelessness nationally at COAG.

Conclusion

In the last Australian National Census in 2001, 897 South Australians, like Mr. W, were found to be sleeping rough. In addition to these 'primary' homeless, 6690 more South Australians were found to be in less extreme states of homelessness, but were nevertheless without a stable place to live. They might be moving from one borrowed couch to another, or be in a temporary or marginal housing situation.

While it is terrible to imagine 897 vulnerable people living without shelter, and 6690 in unstable living situations, in a progressive state of 1.5 million people, these are not overwhelming numbers. With the right strategy in place South Australians can have confidence that eliminating homelessness is an achievable goal.

One of the reasons that homelessness has attracted new attention and resolve is that governments have come to understand that the cost of solving homelessness and providing vulnerable people with a stable home and a chance at a decent life is less than the cost of maintaining the status quo. Even the most ambitious recommendations I have made should be considered in this light: housing, appropriate services, supporting the education and training of vulnerable young people, improved living standards in Aboriginal homes – all cost less to provide than what is spent to cope with the damage done if these investments are not made.

Acknowledgements