

Part III.

Population

groups



10. Indigenous people

Indigenous Australians are much more likely to experience poor health, unemployment, incarceration, contact with the care and protection system, poverty and homelessness than their non-indigenous counterparts. Substantial resources and effort are required to prevent and reduce indigenous homelessness. In particular, the principles of self-determination, community capacity-building and equity must be embedded into human services such as income support, housing, education and health.

10.1 Goals

- To develop a better understanding of indigenous homelessness and a range of localised responses to it in partnership with ATSIC and indigenous communities.
- To increase the supply of housing owned and managed by indigenous people.
- To reduce the barriers faced by indigenous people attempting to access mainstream housing, particularly in the private rental market.
- To increase the availability of culturally appropriate, affordable, safe and secure private and public housing.
- To reduce number of indigenous people experiencing homelessness.
- To improve the health status and longevity of indigenous people experiencing homelessness.
- To increase longer-term housing stability.
- To increase indigenous home-ownership
- To increase and improve awareness and understanding of how the legacy of history continues to affect the emotional and social wellbeing of indigenous people.

10.2 Priority actions

CONVENE a national forum of government and non-government stakeholders on indigenous homelessness to develop a set of priorities for action.

ENCOURAGE the Indigenous Community Capacity Building Round Table to provide advice to government on appropriate employment strategies for marginalised indigenous people.

INTRODUCE more effective pre-release and post-release support programs for indigenous people in custody to break the cycle of incarceration by reducing the risk of prisoners being released into homelessness.

WORK with the Real Estate Institute of Australia and other industry bodies to educate agents and landlords about the discrimination provisions in tenancy legislation and develop positive relationships with indigenous communities.

Who is involved?

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission
- Commonwealth Department of Health and Aged Care
- Commonwealth Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs
- Commonwealth Department of Family and Community Services
- Centrelink
- State and Territory departments of family and community services
- State and Territory departments responsible for education
- Local government
- Government guardianship agencies
- Community groups and community-based agencies serving older indigenous people
- Residential services for older people
- Private landlords and real estate agents
- General practitioners and primary health-care providers
- Residential tenancy tribunals
- Stakeholders with concerns about deaths in custody
- Indigenous elders
- Indigenous families and communities

ENFORCE legal penalties against discrimination in the provision of housing and other services.

INCREASE the number of indigenous people working in housing policy and the housing industry.

10.3 Rationale

Indigenous homelessness is a chronic problem in many parts of Australia. It affects metropolitan, regional and remote communities. SAAP data shows that indigenous people are over-represented in the homeless population. They make particularly high use of family violence refuge services.

However, recent national research (based on extensive consultation with indigenous communities) suggests that indigenous people may have a very different idea of what homelessness means. Compared to the non-indigenous population, they are significantly less likely to define themselves as homeless even when they have no secure accommodation. For many indigenous people, homelessness has a spiritual as well as a physical dimension. Indigenous people may not see themselves as homeless as long as their connections to their home place and community are still intact.

The same study identified three major causes of indigenous homelessness: the absence or inaccessibility of appropriate housing, transience associated with cultural obligations, and historical reliance on family networks to provide shelter and support. The second and third of these causes are specific to indigenous people.

Indigenous communities and families also experience greater poverty, health deficits and discrimination than other Australians. Racism still prevents indigenous people enjoying equal access to basic services, including the private rental market. This severely limits the housing options available to them.

The unique cultural, social and economic circumstances of indigenous people demand appropriate responses from agencies charged with providing support services — not least for the homeless and those at risk of becoming homeless.

For example, while the plight of indigenous people in custody has received considerable attention in recent times, they are still grossly over-represented in the prison population. More effective pre-release and post-release support programs could reduce the risk of prisoners being released into homelessness and hence the likelihood that they will re-offend. Indigenous people are also over-represented in the care and protection system. Culturally appropriate prevention programs for young people at risk of entering care and protection, and support programs for young people exiting care, would also reduce the risk of indigenous people becoming homeless.

Related initiatives

- Commonwealth–State Working Group on Indigenous Homelessness
- Home and Community Care Programs
- SAAP IV
- Commonwealth–State Housing Agreement
- State and Territory indigenous homelessness strategies and programs
- NHS-funded demonstration projects:
 - documenting good practice of Safe Houses in remote areas
 - transitional support for people moving from remote communities to metropolitan areas
 - combined homelessness and parenting support, focusing on needs of homeless children

10.4 Evidence

Indigenous people make up a little over 2 per cent of the Australian population, but nearly 14 per cent of those using SAAP services.

Other indicators provide an equally damning picture of indigenous disadvantage. Only 33 per cent of indigenous Australians own their own home (the national average is 71 per cent). Another 33 per cent are in private rental (20 per cent for the Australian population as a whole) (AIHW & ABS, 1999).

These figures make it clear that the two dominant housing models in Australia — private ownership and private rental — are not working for indigenous people. The reasons for this may be complex, but the biggest single contributor to housing insecurity in indigenous communities is undoubtedly poverty. In the 1996 Census only 40.7 per cent of indigenous people were in employment (compared to 56.4 per cent of the total Australian population), and the median weekly income for indigenous people was \$228 per person, just under three-quarters of the median income for all Australians (ABS, 1998b).

Further research

We need to know more about:

- the underlying housing status of indigenous people who are homeless and their experience of using mainstream, indigenous, private and public services
- the barriers indigenous people face in the private rental market and what forms of collaboration are required between private landlords, real estate agents and indigenous housing services to increase the supply of private rental housing
- the effect of reforms to the CSHA on accessibility and affordability for those indigenous people with the most urgent needs.

11. Families with children

Families with children make up a growing proportion of those accessing homelessness services. This is worrying, because people who experience homelessness as children are more likely to find themselves homeless as adults. The incidence of homelessness among sole-parent families is especially troubling; they represent a disproportionate number of the homeless families using SAAP services. Prevention, early intervention, crisis transition and support services are all needed if we are to reduce the level of homelessness and poverty faced by many Australian families.

11.1 Goals

- To ensure that children whose families experience homelessness are not adversely affected by that experience in later life.
- To give families access to secure, appropriate and affordable accommodation which in turn gives them access to community resources and support structures.
- To ensure that homeless families receive priority access to housing, and that they are linked with childcare and other service networks.
- To help families at risk of homelessness secure and maintain appropriate housing.
- To make it easier for people to stabilise their housing arrangements when they separate.
- To protect people from domestic and family violence.

11.2 Priority actions

ESTABLISH prevention and early intervention programs to identify and assist families at high risk of homelessness, including:

- families with children who are at high risk of long-term harm to their health and psychological and educational development
- families that move frequently
- families at risk of eviction from public housing
- families that have had income security payments stopped for breaching benefit conditions
- families of prisoners.

INCREASE the availability of stable, affordable housing to sole-parent families at risk of homelessness.

ENSURE that single parents have access to employment assistance programs.

ENSURE that homelessness programs for families are linked to employment and childcare assistance.

Who is involved?

- Commonwealth Department of Family and Community Services
- Centrelink
- Child Support Agency
- State departments responsible for child protection
- State-funded family services including counselling services
- Child support services
- Domestic violence agencies
- SAAP services
- Schools
- Child-care services
- Child Support Agency
- Legal services
- Police

11.3 Rationale

The fact that families with children become homeless tells us that there are major gaps in the community support networks these families depend on. Individuals who experience homelessness in childhood are more likely to experience homelessness as adults. They are more likely to be witnesses to, or victims of, family violence. Individuals who are abused as children are more likely to be victims and perpetrators of abuse as adults. Children who live in poverty are more likely to live in poverty as adults. Children who experience homelessness may have their education interrupted and their health compromised. For these and other reasons, there can be an intergenerational cycle of homelessness.

Parents (whether single or partnered) face a triple challenge — caring for the children, stabilising the family in appropriate housing, and addressing the problems that led to the family's homelessness. The challenge is even greater for sole parents, who must do these things alone. Sole-parent families are over-represented among users of homelessness services, reflecting the fact that sole-parents must often contend with many causes and effects of disadvantage, including unemployment, poverty, family violence and, increasingly, chronic drug and alcohol abuse.

The only sure and permanent way to reduce the number of homeless families with children is to eliminate the factors that lead to family homelessness. Responses need to include prevention, early intervention and crisis and transition programs. Factors that make a person vulnerable to homelessness must be addressed at the earliest stage possible. Early intervention programs need to support families before they lose their homes. Stable and secure accommodation needs to be made available to families that have become or are at risk of becoming homeless — remembering that many of the already limited housing options open to other people experiencing homelessness, such as boarding houses and private hotels, are inappropriate for families.

11.4 Evidence

SAAP workers frequently attest that families with children are the fastest growing sector of the homeless population.

Data from 1999–2000 shows that children accompanied clients to SAAP agencies on 31,600 occasions in that year. The majority of these children were in sole-parent families headed by females, although couple families and male-headed sole-parent families are also found among SAAP clients. Family or domestic violence was cited as the main cause the family's homelessness in the majority of cases. Over half of the children concerned were aged five or under.

Recent research on homeless families indicates that homelessness is often the final twist in a downward spiral that has taken them from one form of accommodation to another in rapid succession — hotels, caravan parks, staying with family and friends (Bartholomew, 1999).

Related initiatives

- Stronger Families and Communities Strategy
- Partnerships Against Domestic Violence
- SAAP
- State and Territory domestic violence initiatives
- State and Territory homelessness strategies
- Commonwealth–State Housing Agreement

Further research

We need to know more about:

- the level of intergenerational homelessness — possibly through panel studies of poverty and families
- school absence and transient attendance among children in homeless families and in marginal housing
- the long-term outcomes for sole parent families who experience homelessness, including the impact on children
- the effect of family separation on the incidence and duration of homelessness
- the interconnections between homelessness, family violence, child abuse, and other contributing factors in the long term.

Homeless families come into contact with child welfare authorities and protection services more often than other families.

It is also clear that children who experience homelessness are more likely to experience poor health, poor educational outcomes, social isolation from their peers and behavioural problems (Horn et al, 1996).

Sole-parent families

Most sole-parent families in Australia are created when couples separate. While male sole parents typically offer one of several reasons for seeking support from SAAP — relationship breakdown, eviction, financial difficulty — most female sole parents (57 per cent) cite domestic violence.

Whenever relationships break up, at least one partner has to find new accommodation. The parent who assumes primary care of the children after separation almost invariably suffers a drop in income, despite having access to income security payments (Smyth & Weston, 2000). This often means the primary carer can no longer afford to stay in the family home, regardless of whether it was rented or being purchased. Only 39 per cent of sole-parent families own or are purchasing their home, compared with 76 per cent of couples with children (DFaCS, 2000). There is also anecdotal evidence that sole-parent families face discrimination in the private rental market, where, given the choice, landlords would rather rent to childless or two-parent households.

Sole parents have lower rates of workforce participation than partnered parents, partly because they have fewer employment opportunities and partly because their childcare commitments make it difficult for them to compete in the labour market.

12. Young people

Between 10,000 and 19,000 young people are estimated to be homeless nationally. These young people most commonly cite family conflict as the main reason for accessing homelessness services. Some of the other factors that contribute to youth homelessness are unemployment (the youth's or their parents'), family poverty, cultural clashes, gambling (by the youth or their parents), substance abuse (by the youth or their parents), and physical, sexual and mental abuse. Young people exiting care and protection systems or the juvenile justice system are substantially more at risk of homelessness than other young people. A broad and intensive range of prevention, early intervention and crisis and long-term support programs — focusing on the family, the education system and young people themselves — are required to reduce youth homelessness.

12.1 Goals

- To reduce youth homelessness by:
 - improving integration between Commonwealth and State programs for young people
 - getting first-to-know agencies to focus on the early detection of factors that contribute to the risk of homelessness
 - reducing the number of young people leaving the care and protection system and becoming homeless.
 - reducing the number of young people leaving the justice system and becoming homeless.
 - increasing the availability of safe, affordable, appropriate and sustainable housing and associated support services for young people
 - increasing the retention in schools of young people at risk of homelessness.

12.2 Priority actions

EXPAND prevention and early intervention programs that address family conflict, parenting skills, drug and alcohol abuse and child abuse.

BUILD the capacity of schools and other first-to-know agencies to identify and respond to youth homelessness.

STRENGTHEN the youth protocol between the Commonwealth and State governments responsible for care and protection to ensure that young people aged 12–17 who are not living with their families and are not entitled to income support can access support through the care and protection system.

MAP AND EVALUATE existing State inter-service agreements relevant to the care and protection of young people aged 12–17.

ESTABLISH AND EXPAND juvenile justice programs that focus on diversion, development of interpersonal and independent living skills, and exit plans including accommodation and ongoing support.

Who is involved?

- Commonwealth Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs
- Commonwealth Department of Employment, Workplace Relations and Small Business
- Commonwealth Department of Family and Community Services
- Centrelink
- Commonwealth Department of Health and Aged Care
- State departments responsible for education
- State departments responsible for child protection
- State departments responsible for juvenile justice
- Child and adolescent mental health services
- Schools
- Substitute-care providers
- Homelessness service providers
- JPET providers
- Youth services
- Young people and their families

REVIEW SAAP legislation that prevents services targeting homeless young people under 16.

RESOURCE SAAP agencies to support young people under 18 experiencing homelessness and their families.

STRENGTHEN AND IMPROVE service systems that allow support to follow a young person from crisis accommodation to intermediate and longer-term housing.

INCREASE longer-term supported housing options for homeless young people under 18.

INVESTIGATE the relationship between Youth Allowance payment levels for young people under 18 and young people's capacity to participate in social and economic life.

PROVIDE income support for young people under 18 who are exiting the care and protection or justice systems and living independently to cover the cost of establishing stable accommodation, including bond, rent in advance and the first-time purchase of furniture and other household requisites.

IMPROVE access for young people to programs and opportunities in employment, education and training.

PROVIDE comprehensive information on programs and opportunities in employment, education and training.

PROVIDE youth-specific drug and alcohol detoxification, treatment and support programs (including accommodation and support) that encourage parental involvement where appropriate.

Related initiatives

- Stronger Families and Communities Strategy
- Reconnect
- Footprints to the Future
- State care and protection systems
- State-funded alternative care and transitional support programs
- SAAP IV
- Youth crime prevention programs
- National Drug Strategy
- Second National Mental Health Plan 1998–2003
- NHS-funded demonstration project:
 - *Schools Research Kit* — develop information and education tools on youth accommodation options

12.3 Rationale

Young people under 18 represent a high and growing proportion of the homeless population. The most common reason cited by young people for accessing homelessness services is family breakdown. Families may not have the skills to resolve conflict and may be experiencing substantial stresses that escalate rather than diffuse conflict. Causes of conflict between young people and their families include unemployment, poverty, poor health, cultural clashes, gambling, substance abuse and physical, sexual and mental abuse. Unemployment, gambling and substance abuse are just as likely to create difficulties whether the youth or their parents are affected.

The conflicts and stresses that increase the risk of homelessness often begin while young people are still at school. Recent initiatives such as Reconnect have focused on rebuilding family relationships to prevent or quickly remedy youth homelessness.

Young people who have experience with the juvenile justice system, the child welfare and protection system, or both, are particularly vulnerable to homelessness. Most homeless young people are not street kids — they simply move from one form of unstable accommodation to the next.

One of the best ways to prevent and reduce youth homelessness is to improve family relationships. Yet for some young people, living with family is neither safe nor appropriate.

A small but significant percentage of young people may become parents themselves (this percentage is much higher for young women leaving institutional care). Many young people who have spent long periods in foster care and institutional care exit that system under 18 and become homeless. Another group of homeless young people never make contact with or receive support from the care and protection system. For these young people, independent living is extremely difficult. The disappearance of unskilled jobs and an increasingly competitive labour market have almost totally excluded young people under 18 from employment. Most young people on income support are unable to access safe, affordable, long-term housing. Some of them have trouble adjusting to life independent of a structured protective environment, while others have limited independent living skills or are excluded from rental housing altogether because landlords discriminate against them.

A substantial number of homeless young people under 16 access SAAP services. It is highly unlikely that young people in this age group will be ready to live independently in the short or even the long term. If these young people are not living with their families and not picked up by the care and protection system, they are at high risk of becoming homeless or entering detention.

More and more young people abuse drugs, alcohol and other substances. An alarming and disproportionate number of homeless people have serious and sometimes longstanding substance abuse problems. Young people find it hard to get help for substance abuse. Many detoxification services do not cater for young people under 18 because they are worried about risks to safety, mixing younger and older clients, or the legal ramifications of treating minors. Longer-term treatment programs have similar inhibitions.

Young people often have trouble finding their way through the tangle of employment, education and training programs available to them.

Further research

We need to know more about:

- the information needs of first-to-know agencies
- the causes of family conflict that leads to youth homelessness and prevention and early intervention strategies to reduce and diffuse that conflict
- the number of young people who are not living with their families and not being provided for by the care and protection or homelessness systems
- long-term outcomes for young people under 18 who access SAAP services
- effective homelessness prevention strategies for young people in care
- integrated employment, education and training programs offering effective pathways for young adults who are homeless or at risk of homelessness.

12.4 Evidence

In 1991, McKenzie and Chamberlain estimated the number of homeless young people to be 15,000 to 19,000 nationally (McKenzie & Chamberlain, 1992). Over 10,000 — or 13 per cent — of the people using SAAP services in 1999–2000 were under 18.

When questioned in connection with the Youth Homelessness Pilot Program, 57 per cent of young people experiencing homelessness cited conflict with their parents as their reason for leaving home and 9 per cent cited physical or emotional abuse. Other factors cited include changes in family structure, trouble at school and drug and alcohol abuse. Parents were less likely to nominate abuse and more likely to nominate conflict as the reason for the young person leaving home (Prime Minister's Taskforce on Youth Homelessness, 1998).

Many homeless young people are still in school — one study concluded that as many as 10,000 of the students attending Australian schools at any given time are homeless (Chamberlain & Mackenzie, 1998). As long as homeless young people remain in school, there is an opportunity to provide early intervention programs to a captive audience. Early intervention and prevention programs can reduce the number of young people experiencing homelessness, especially long-term homelessness.

The Prime Minister's Youth Pathways Action Plan Taskforce report, *Footprints to the Future*, highlighted that many young people are falling through the gaps of existing services or cannot relate to the help being offered. Others are already adrift from their families, schools and other support systems and need assistance to re-establish a connection. Identifying with a community, feeling connected, and having a sense of belonging have been shown to lead to positive outcomes for young people. The report recommended that attention be given to addressing the complex disadvantage facing those who are already disconnected from family, social or school networks and that a more coordinated and holistic approach is needed to assist young people for the future (Prime Minister's Youth Pathways Action Plan Taskforce, 2001).

13. Young adults (aged 18–24)

Young adults are the largest single group of homeless people using SAAP services. Making the transition to independent living is increasingly difficult. The disappearance of unskilled jobs and the growing demand for workers with post-secondary qualifications have led to high unemployment in this age group. Recent changes to income support eligibility have resulted in young adults being dependent on their parents for longer. Some young adults cannot live at home, find employment, or obtain secure, affordable housing. A few have drug and alcohol abuse problems and mental health issues to deal with. All of these factors put young adults at high risk of homelessness.

13.1 Goals

- To help young adults make a smooth transition to adult life by:
 - identifying those at risk of homelessness early and intervening quickly
 - ensuring, through coordinated Commonwealth–State action, that young adults leaving care and protection systems have pathways to work, stable accommodation and independent living
 - ensuring, through coordinated Commonwealth–State action, that young adults exiting the justice system have pathways to work, stable accommodation and independent living
 - providing independent young adults with appropriate opportunities and sufficient means to financially support themselves and, where applicable, their dependants
 - reconnecting them with their families where appropriate.

13.2 Priority actions

INCREASE the supply of affordable public and private housing for young singles, couples and families in areas with high employment.

PROVIDE sufficient income support to help young adults who are leaving the care and protection system or exiting detention secure stable accommodation and buy household requisites.

INCREASE job creation programs for young adults.

GIVE employers incentives to provide opportunities that are likely to have long-term benefits for young adults.

TARGET domestic violence prevention and early intervention programs focusing on healthy relationships to young men and women.

INCREASE parenting and relationship support for young parents at risk of homelessness.

ENSURE mental health issues are identified early and appropriate treatment and support is provided.

Who is involved?

- Commonwealth Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs
- Commonwealth Department of Employment, Workplace Relations and Small Business
- Commonwealth Department of Family and Community Services
- Centrelink
- Commonwealth Department of Health and Aged Care
- State departments responsible for education
- State departments responsible for child protection
- State departments responsible for juvenile justice and correctional services
- Mental health services
- Education and training providers
- Drug and alcohol service providers
- Employers
- Private business
- Homelessness service providers
- Housing providers
- JPET providers
- Youth services
- Community service providers

DEVELOP formal protocols for local and regional cooperation between drug and alcohol agencies, SAAP services, health services and mental health services.

IMPROVE access for young people to programs and opportunities in employment, education and training.

PROVIDE comprehensive information about programs and opportunities in employment, education and training.

Related initiatives

- Stronger Families and Communities Strategy
- SAAP IV
- Labour market programs
- National Drug Strategy
- Second National Mental Health Plan 1998–2003

Further research

We need to know more about:

- longer-term outcomes for young adults experiencing homelessness.
- effective prevention strategies
- the long-term effects of delayed access to independent income, housing and employment
- the long-term effects of drug and alcohol use and the interaction between substance abuse, mental health and homelessness
- how we can create effective, integrated employment, education and training programs and pathways for young adults who are experiencing homelessness or at risk of homelessness.

13.3 Rationale

People aged 18–24 have very high rates of homelessness — a fact reflected in their heavy use of SAAP services. The transition to adulthood is challenging for all young people, particularly today when they face conflicting expectations about how independent they should be, and increasing pressure to obtain ever-higher educational qualifications. Some young people have negative experiences and achieve poor results in the education system. There are fewer and fewer employment opportunities for these people and they are over-represented among the unemployed.

Some young adults are parents themselves. With only limited job prospects, they may experience poverty and find it hard to provide for their families.

Those who experience marginalisation and homelessness during young adulthood have a greatly diminished chance of finding a stable and productive role in the community in the longer term.

Community awareness of youth homelessness has been heightened by several high-profile reports and enquiries in the last decade, including the Burdekin report and the report by the Prime Minister’s Taskforce on Youth Homelessness. However, most of the discussion has been about those aged under 18 and how family relationships may influence their risk of homelessness. The level of homelessness among young adults aged 18–24 is also worryingly high, and it is time for a renewed focus on their needs.

Young adults who are drug and alcohol dependent are at high risk of homelessness. SAAP workers report an alarming increase in the number of young adults using SAAP services who have significant drug and alcohol issues.

There are very few SAAP services that specifically target young women who do not have dependent children. The main reason for seeking assistance reported by young women who do access SAAP services is domestic violence.

13.4 Evidence

People aged 18–24 make up 25 per cent of the SAAP client population. SAAP service providers attribute their high levels of homelessness to:

- high unemployment — the rate for this age group ranges in various States from 16 to 20 per cent, compared to a national rate for the general population of 6.9 per cent
- disconnection from family and community support networks when young adults migrate from rural and regional areas to cities in search of work
- the absence of measures to smooth the transition from the child welfare and protection system to independent living once young people reach 18
- the combination of low incomes and heavy reliance on the private rental sector, which leaves young adults with a very narrow range of affordable housing options
- high rates of drug, alcohol and substance abuse and an inadequate supply of treatment services.

14. Single adults (aged 25–plus)

Many homeless single women are escaping domestic violence. Many of the single men accessing homelessness services have experienced substance abuse or mental health problems. There are very few services specifically for single women, and the services available for single men are often geared to provide bed and breakfast rather than intensive support. Single accommodation is frequently not affordable for people on income support or low wage incomes. Prevention, early intervention and treatment programs focusing on domestic violence, drug and alcohol abuse and mental health are needed to prevent and reduce homelessness among single adults. There must also be a range of affordable housing options available to single adults with intensive, long-term support needs.

14.1 Goals

- To increase the number and variety of accommodation and support options for single men and women who are homeless or at risk of homelessness by:
 - better aligning homelessness services for single adults with alcohol and drug services
 - better aligning homelessness services for single adults with mental health and psychiatric services
 - providing a wider range of housing and support choices for single adults
 - providing appropriate and affordable accommodation options for single women and men, particularly in rural and remote areas
 - putting more emphasis on breaking the cycle of abuse and homelessness for single women and men.

14.2 Priority actions

PROVIDE prevention and early intervention programs for men and women who are at risk of becoming homeless.

DEVELOP innovative crisis responses to address the needs of homeless single adults in regional and remote areas.

DEVELOP integrated policies and cross-program funding arrangements to help homeless single adults with a history of mental illness, drug abuse or alcohol abuse secure and maintain appropriate housing and support.

ESTABLISH dedicated services that provide integrated accommodation, domestic violence, sexual assault and incest services for women, with an emphasis on breaking the cycle of abuse and homelessness.

DEVELOP affordable long-term housing options that include varying levels of support in transition to unsupported accommodation.

INCREASE public housing stock and long-term private housing suitable for single adults.

Who is involved?

- Commonwealth Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs
- Commonwealth Department of Employment, Workplace Relations and Small Business
- Commonwealth Department of Family and Community Services
- Centrelink
- Commonwealth Department of Health and Aged Care
- State departments responsible for juvenile justice and correctional services
- Mental health services
- Education and training providers
- Drug and alcohol service providers
- Employers
- Employment service providers
- Private business
- Homelessness service providers
- Housing providers
- Boarding houses
- Counselling services
- General community service providers

14.3 Rationale

Single men and women represent the largest group accessing SAAP services and a growing proportion of the homeless population. Traditionally, most single homeless adults have been men; however, in recent times, the number of single homeless women has been increasing.

There are many reasons why single adults may become homeless or be at risk of homelessness, including financial hardship; lack of appropriate housing options; relationship breakdown; drug, alcohol and substance abuse; domestic violence; sexual abuse; poor mental health; and psychiatric disability. Any number and combination of these factors might be present in any given case.

De-institutionalisation has seen a large number of single people with psychiatric disabilities move into the community with few — if any — social networks and family connections. Many of them lack the skills to live independently and some require substantial support — 24-hour support in some cases.

Housing options for single adults are limited. Social housing stock for singles is in high demand and comparatively short supply. Private housing suitable for singles is also in high demand and short supply in many areas, particularly in regional and remote Australia. Low incomes often preclude single adults from renting a place on their own, leaving communal or group living as the only affordable option.

However, group living is not suitable for all single adults. People who have experienced abuse may not feel safe living in communal accommodation. Those with mental health problems and psychiatric disabilities may not have the social skills to manage conflict or even carry off everyday interactions in a group household. Those with drug, alcohol and substance dependencies may exhibit behaviours that make them unacceptable to potential housemates. Finally, some single adults require a high level of support to live independently — which can be hard for other members of a group household to cope with, particularly if they have come from crisis situations themselves.

Just as there are many reasons why single adults may be homeless or at risk of becoming homeless, many different kinds of support and housing are required to get them out and keep them out of homelessness.

Related initiatives

- Job Network
- Partnerships Against Domestic Violence
- National Drug Strategy
- Second National Mental Health Plan 1998–2003

Further research

We need to know more about:

- effective long-term treatment options for people with drug, alcohol and substance dependencies
- the support needs of homeless people with a history of mental illness
- innovative and effective crisis response options for single adults in rural and remote areas
- the effectiveness of integrated funding programs and how they can be developed in future
- the long-term impact of early intervention programs on the abuse and homelessness of women.

14.4 Evidence

The most common reasons single men gave for needing SAAP services in 1999–2000 were financial difficulty (26 per cent) and drug, alcohol or substance abuse (18 per cent). Since the second figure represents only self-identified drug, alcohol and substance abusers, and only those who consented to answer related questions in an NDCA survey, it almost certainly understates the importance of this factor. These figures should also be treated with caution because SAAP agencies classified as high-volume — which deal exclusively with single adults and frequently only with men — did not collect information about why people accessed their services.

The most common reason single women gave for using SAAP services was domestic violence (19 per cent). Research tells us that the single best predictor of whether women will experience violence in adulthood is whether they suffered physical and sexual abuse as children (Doherty et al, 1999). While single women are increasingly at risk of homelessness, only 46 of the 1,126 SAAP agencies focus exclusively on their needs and less than 4 per cent of the annual SAAP budget is spent on services for single women.

There are 34,547 single people aged 25–54 on public housing waiting lists around Australia. Of these, 22,231 (64 per cent) are men and 12,316 (36 per cent) are women. There are another 19,100 single adults aged 55 and above waiting for public housing (DFaCS, 1999a).

The maximum Rent Assistance for singles is \$88 a fortnight. To be eligible for this level of assistance, a person must pay more than \$195.33 a fortnight in rent. In high-rent locations, private single accommodation is often not affordable even after Rent Assistance is taken into account. For example, in Sydney nearly 40 per cent of single people pay more than half their income in rent.

15. Older people

The number of older people on income support relative to the number of younger workers is expected to increase substantially over the next ten years, placing additional stress on income support and housing and welfare services. Older people are at increased risk of homelessness due to reduced income, declining health, lack of safe, appropriate, affordable housing options, social isolation and increased vulnerability. In order to prevent and reduce homelessness among older people, a substantial increase in housing and support services will be needed over the next ten years and beyond.

15.1 Goals

- To increase the support services available to older people experiencing homelessness.
- To increase the number of homeless older people obtaining places and receiving appropriate care in universal aged residential and community care services.
- To increase the provision of designated public housing for older people together with appropriate supports.
- To reduce social isolation among older people who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless.
- To reduce the number of older people becoming homeless.
- To improve the health and longevity of older people experiencing homelessness.

15.2 Priority actions

MAKE the homeless a special needs group in the National Aged Care Strategy.

PREVENT homelessness among older people by providing necessary support services to those who have difficulty living independently.

INCREASE the supply and accessibility of affordable, safe, secure and appropriately located private and public housing for financially disadvantaged older people.

PROVIDE programs to address the social isolation of older people who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless.

IMPROVE the operation of national universal aged-care programs to provide for the needs of older people experiencing homelessness.

PROMOTE awareness of the special needs of homeless older people among private and public health, housing and welfare services.

BRING ACHA, HLCP, CACP, HACC, Residential Aged Care and related programs for the elderly together under a specialist unit expressly created for this purpose within the Department of Health and Aged Care — this unit would also be charged with actively fostering cooperation with State and Territory agencies.

Who is involved?

- Commonwealth Department of Family and Community Services
- Centrelink
- Commonwealth Department of Health and Aged Care
- Local government
- Government guardianship agencies
- Police
- Correctional services
- General practitioners
- Emergency health-care providers, including public hospitals
- Community groups and community-based agencies serving older people
- Residential services for older people
- Homeless service providers
- Private rental landlords and real estate agents
- Older people
- Families and communities

EXPAND, REFINE AND BETTER TARGET ACHA services to build the capacity of agencies working with homeless older people.

ENSURE that future Commonwealth-State Housing Agreements better reflect the needs of older people with high support needs.

RE-INTRODUCE capital funding for residential aged-care facilities — but only to those which undertake to provide more than 90 per cent of their places to concessional residents.

ADJUST National Aged Care Planning ratios to allow for homeless men and women who are younger than the national averages.

FUND a demonstration residential aged-care facility to provide exclusively for homeless older people with high and complex needs.

15.3 Rationale

Accelerating growth in the number of older Australians over the next fifteen to twenty years will lead to unprecedented pressures on housing, income support and community services. While the health and life expectancy of the general population are improving, those of older people who are homeless and living in marginal housing are very poor. People experiencing homelessness age prematurely — so much so that that for most, old age begins closer to fifty than to seventy.

There are many older people effectively living outside mainstream society. They have high and complex needs, and those needs are not being met. Many are economic and psychological prisoners of low-quality private rental housing, compelled to live in areas that lack the services they need because accommodation in better serviced areas is beyond their means. However, this is imprisonment without security — they can be precipitated into homelessness by rent increases, the loss of a partner (which generally means losing income and may mean losing their main carer as well), and the termination of tenancies to clear the way for redevelopment.

Many older people with intellectual and psychiatric disabilities who formerly lived in institutions now live more or less independently in a wide variety of community settings. They are among the most vulnerable members of Australian society. With the population ageing and governments committed to de-institutionalisation, the number of older people living in the community with mental health problems and cognitive impairments such as dementia is likely to increase.

The needs of older people who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless are not sufficiently reflected in aged-care or housing policies. It is particularly troubling that many find it difficult to obtain places in supported aged residential and community care facilities. Urgent action is required to remedy this situation.

Related initiatives

- National Residential Aged Care Program, including Community Care Packages
- Home and Community Care Program
- Supported Accommodation Assistance Program
- Mental Health Promotion and Prevention National Action Plan
- *Yesterday's Hero* initiative, Commonwealth Department of Veterans' Affairs
- State and Territory homelessness strategies
- State and Territory aged-care and homelessness programs
- Commonwealth–State Housing Agreement
- Wintringham — Older Persons Homelessness Prevention — International Research

15.4 Evidence

An ageing population

Between 1999 and 2011 the Australian population over 65 is projected to increase by 31 per cent and the population aged 55–64 by 56 per cent. Because there will be relatively low growth in many younger groups, the dependency ratio — which measures how many people there are in the workforce for each person receiving government income support — is expected to increase from 5.5 in 2001 to 4.8 in 2011 (ABS, 2000b).

Access to homelessness services

Only 1.5 per cent of SAAP clients are aged over 65. However, a number of international and local studies have demonstrated that the elderly homeless age prematurely as a direct result of the living conditions they have endured. The Department of Health and Aged Care has recognised this by allowing service providers working with the elderly homeless to accept referrals for people experiencing homelessness aged 50 and above. With this in mind, it is worth noting that 8.1 per cent of SAAP clients are over 50.

Experience of agencies and workers

Reports from homelessness workers suggest that some homeless older people experience discrimination in the aged-care system. They would benefit from the provision of dedicated aged-care services.

Older people with difficult behaviours

Research on homeless older people with difficult behaviours has led to the development of successful models that can be replicated.

Boarding houses

People tend to think of boarding houses as the haunts of older males. However, of Australia's estimated 57,561 boarding house residents, only a minority are aged over 50.

Social isolation

A recent study indicated that social isolation is on the increase among older people, and that it adds to the risk of homelessness.

Further research

We need to know more about:

- predictors and causes of homelessness among older people
- the characteristics and experiences of older people living in residential aged-care, special accommodation and rooming houses, and accommodation provided by homelessness services
- the health of homeless older people and their experience with general practitioners and public hospitals
- the links between social isolation and homelessness among older people
- the support services required to help older people find and maintain appropriate housing
- the extent to which rooming houses and special accommodation services are a product of the housing market's failure to provide supported residential accommodation for older people.

16. Women and children affected by domestic violence

The most common reason women with children give for accessing SAAP services is domestic and family violence. In most instances, the woman and her children are forced to leave the family home. Financial and legal constraints — and considerations of personal safety — often make it difficult to find alternative accommodation that is stable and affordable. This is especially true in rural and remote communities. Domestic violence has a profound impact on children, who need to be supported in their own right.

16.1 Goals

- To eliminate family and domestic violence in Australian communities.
- To reduce the number of women and children forced to leave the family home because of domestic violence.
- To increase affordable housing options for women and children.
- To establish adequately resourced, child-focused intervention programs to deal with the effects of family and domestic violence.
- To improve the quality of life for women and children affected by domestic and family violence.

16.2 Priority actions

INCREASE the availability of safe, affordable private and public housing and associated support services for women and children affected by domestic and family violence.

DEVELOP intervention programs to prevent homelessness for women and children who have experienced domestic and family violence, especially by assisting women to remain in their own homes.

INCREASE support for women endeavouring to maintain secure and safe accommodation or re-establish their independence and restabilise their lives after experiencing domestic and family violence.

PROMOTE awareness of the special needs of children and young people affected by domestic and family violence.

IMPROVE the range of services to children and young people affected by domestic and family violence.

PERSUADE financial institutions to change their lending practices (especially procedures for restructuring loans) to make it easier for women to remain safely in their own homes following the breakdown of a relationship due to family and domestic violence.

DEVELOP child and youth mental health services to address the affects of domestic violence, especially for children and young people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.

Who is involved?

- Commonwealth Attorney-General's Department
- The judiciary
- Commonwealth Department of Family and Community Services
- Centrelink
- Child Support Agency
- Commonwealth Department of Health and Aged Care
- State housing authorities
- Local government
- Homelessness peak organisations
- Police
- Correctional services
- General practitioners
- Emergency health-care providers, including public hospitals
- Community groups and community-based agencies providing domestic violence services
- Homelessness service providers
- Private rental landlords and real estate agents
- Community housing associations
- Family and youth services
- Children's services
- Financial institutions
- Legal service providers
- Rural and remote communities
- Families and communities
- Indigenous communities
- Women and children escaping domestic violence

EXPAND the functions and capacities of emergency accommodation services for men to include sheltering men removed from the family home as a result of domestic violence.

DEVELOP an integrated, whole-of-government response to removing the perpetrator from the family home.

DEVELOP an education package for magistrates on the operation and enforcement of restraint and exclusion orders with a view to increasing the use of sole occupancy and exclusion orders to remove the perpetrator of domestic violence from the family home (in cooperation with the Australian Institute of Judicial Administration and the Australian Association of Magistrates).

MAKE discretionary funds available as part of the standard funding formulae which can be brokered to meet the specific long-term home security needs of women who have experienced domestic and family violence.

DEVELOP training and information packages to help service providers form mutually productive relationships with local real estate agents.

IDENTIFY and promote best practice in outreach services, women's refuges and other domestic violence services, and use these services to meet strategic objectives — across jurisdictions where appropriate.

PILOT a coordinated service system response in a regional area for women and children experiencing domestic violence with the aim of giving them the option of remaining safely in their own home.

GIVE indigenous communities the support they need to develop community-led and community-owned initiatives to address domestic violence.

DEVELOP perpetrator programs that are culturally and linguistically inclusive.

16.3 Rationale

Women and children who experience domestic and family violence inevitably also experience social and economic dislocation and disadvantage as a result. This makes the task of finding secure, affordable and suitable housing both more urgent and more difficult.

Most women and children experiencing domestic and family violence are forced to leave their homes and seek alternative accommodation. Some of these women become socially isolated as a result of the perpetrator's abusive behaviour and may not have friends or family to turn to. They must be able to draw on a wide variety of services if they are to re-establish themselves safely and quickly — and services must be flexible enough to meet individual needs. In particular, they should be geared to helping women stay in the family home where appropriate. The woman's wishes and safety should be the central consideration. At the same time, domestic and family violence also has a profound impact on the wellbeing of children, and services should recognise their independent need for assistance and entitlement to support.

Related initiatives

- Commonwealth–State Housing Agreement
- Partnerships Against Domestic Violence
- SAAP IV
- State and Territory domestic violence initiatives
- State and Territory homelessness strategies
- DV Clearing-house
- WESNET

16.4 Evidence

Domestic violence is the most common reason people give for needing SAAP services. In 1999–2000, 23 per cent of all clients cited it as their main reason for seeking assistance, rising to 44 per cent for single women aged over 25, and 57 per cent for women with children. The figures were even higher for indigenous women and women from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.

Children do not merely suffer from witnessing and living with the consequences of domestic violence. Recent research suggests that domestic violence and child abuse frequently go together — a child who experiences one is much more at risk of experiencing the other (PADV, 1999). This makes it even more important that children be placed beyond the reach of the perpetrator, in an environment where they can feel safe.

Further research

We need to know more about:

- best practice in outreach services and women's refuges, for women in different circumstances and locations
- the relationship between domestic violence and child protection.

17. People from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds

People from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds are vulnerable to homelessness — especially when they are ineligible for income security, have little or no family support, are not familiar with the environment in which they find themselves, do not speak English, or have difficulty accessing housing, employment and support services due to discrimination.

17.1 Goals

- To prevent homelessness among people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds by:
 - helping them cope in their new environment
 - increasing access to support services
 - providing pathways into employment
 - facilitating effective communication
 - providing culturally appropriate services that meet specific needs.

17.2 Priority actions

DEVELOP culturally specific information on Australian housing and support services for newly arrived migrants and refugees.

PILOT an early assessment and intervention strategy for newly arrived migrants whose sponsorship is at risk.

PROVIDE appropriate early intervention programs for people at risk of homelessness in different cultural groups.

INTRODUCE training packages on domestic violence for interpreters.

RESOURCE counselling services for women and children from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds in their own languages.

TARGET culturally appropriate employment programs to people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.

DEVELOP and disseminate culturally and linguistically diverse information packages for people experiencing and at risk of homelessness.

Who is involved?

- Commonwealth Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs
- Commonwealth Attorney-General's Department
- Commonwealth Department of Family and Community Services
- Centrelink
- Child Support Agency
- Commonwealth Department of Health and Aged Care
- State housing authorities
- State and Territory multicultural affairs bodies, e.g. the NSW Interdepartmental Committee on Migrant Settlement (NICOMS)
- Local government
- Homelessness peak organisations
- Association of Non-English Speaking Background (NESB) Women of Australia
- Federation of Ethnic Community Council of Australia
- General practitioners
- Health service providers
- Mental health service providers
- Homeless service providers
- Private rental landlords and real estate agents
- Community housing associations

17.3 Rationale

While people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds who experience homelessness have much in common with the broader homeless population, they often follow different pathways to homelessness and have different support needs. Some are refugees coping with a legacy of trauma and dislocation. Some are having trouble finding work and shelter in a country that is still strange to them. Some are victims of prejudice and discrimination. Some are unable to understand English or the culture of mainstream services.

People from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds often have no family in Australia they can turn to for accommodation or other assistance in times of need. A few of them find that the Australian housing market simply cannot supply their needs — particularly for housing that allows extended families to live together. Others are precluded from using the income security system or Medicare under the terms of their entry visa. In some jurisdictions, people without permanent resident status or a steady income are also barred from using public housing.

People from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds are over-represented in crisis accommodation for women escaping domestic violence.

There is no question that we can assist people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds who are homeless or at risk of homelessness more effectively by ensuring that services are responsive to their particular cultural circumstances.

17.4 Evidence

Just over 11 per cent of SAAP clients came from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds in 1999–2000, with the figure slightly higher for females than for males. The group is actually under-represented in homelessness programs relative to its overall population share. This could mean people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds experience less homelessness, or it could simply mean they are less aware of SAAP services and their right to use them.

The needs of those who do use the service are often acute. SAAP clients from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds are twice as likely to have no income compared to other clients. It is even worse for members of this group aged over 25 — they are three times more likely to have no income than other people using SAAP (SAAP, 2000). This is largely an effect of the requirement that new migrants must wait two years before they can apply for income security payments. It may also reflect the uncertain status of asylum-seekers, which in many cases prevents them from obtaining employment.

- Migrant resource centres
- Association of Trauma and Torture Services
- Family and youth services
- Children's services
- Financial institutions
- Legal service providers
- Families and communities

Related initiatives

- PADV
- SAAP IV
- Mental Health Promotion and Prevention National Action Plan

Further research

We need to know more about:

- the impact of domestic violence on women and children from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds
- the needs of people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds with mental and emotional health problems.

18. People with high and complex needs

Around 18 per cent of people accessing SAAP services are defined as having high and complex needs — that is, more than seven different support requirements. There are also many homeless people whose needs are not being met by current programs. Existing services and supports must be tightly integrated to ensure that these people do not fall through the cracks. However, if we are serious about saving people with high and complex needs from homelessness, we must also be willing to expand the range of programs on offer and fund them appropriately.

18.1 Goals

- To provide appropriately designed and funded services to meet the special needs of people with the highest and most complex needs and ensure that they can access these services.
- To prevent people with high and complex needs from becoming homelessness by providing early intervention programs and appropriate community supports.
- To improve coordination and links among health and human service agencies to provide a better framework for joint service delivery.

18.2 Priority actions

REAFFIRM SAAP's role in meeting the needs of people with high and complex needs and resource this function appropriately.

DEVELOP more flexible funding models which enable agencies to adjust for ebbs and flows of activity as high-need clients come and go — drawing more funds when the demand for services peaks and less when demand troughs.

PROVIDE training and resource materials to help hospitals, schools and other institutions recognise vulnerability to homelessness among people with mental illnesses, drug and alcohol problems, and disabilities — and to provide appropriate referrals and support.

FIND ways to satisfy unmet demand for accommodation in disability support.

BUILD better links between the Commonwealth agencies responsible for homelessness policy and programs and those responsible for mental health, drug and alcohol abuse, and disability accommodation.

Who is involved?

- Commonwealth Department of Family and Community Services
- Centrelink
- Commonwealth Department of Health and Aged Care
- State housing authorities
- Police
- Correctional services
- Government guardianship agencies
- Local government
- Homelessness peak organisations
- General practitioners
- Health service providers
- Mental health service providers
- Private rental landlords and real estate agents
- Community housing providers
- Homelessness service providers
- Sexual assault services
- Family and youth service providers
- Children's services
- Financial institutions
- Legal service providers
- Service providers for people with disabilities
- Disability support groups
- Families and communities
- Rehabilitation centres

INTRODUCE an accreditation system for SAAP providers to ensure that they honour user rights, encourage user participation and understand their duty of care, especially to those with high and complex needs.

18.3 Rationale

Some members of the homeless population experience problems so pervasive or severe that it is difficult for current services to provide appropriate accommodation and support for them. These problems include mental illness, disability and drug and alcohol abuse. In extreme cases, they can make it almost impossible to take part in normal daily life. Even when that does not happen, they still give rise to high and complex needs.

Some people have chronically high and complex needs; others may be in this condition for only a short period. Either way, homelessness services generally do not have the funding, training or other resources to provide the intense and specialised support this group needs. Indeed, some homeless people with high and complex needs never come into contact with a homelessness service. However, there have been enough successful examples of assistance to high-need individuals to show that it is worthwhile and can work. We need to learn from these success stories, replicate them, and ensure that organisations which have found a model for delivering accommodation and support to this group have the resources they need to provide these vital services.

While there is no one correct way to assist people with high and complex needs, there is general agreement that putting them into mainstream housing is seldom the best option — although many high-need people have shown they can make a go of it with the right support.

Also, whatever contact members of this group may have with specialist services, it is important that hospitals, schools and other first-to-know institutions have the capacity to recognise their needs and their vulnerability to homelessness. That way efforts to obtain stable housing and support can begin immediately, wherever and whenever a high-need person comes into contact with human and community services.

Related initiatives

- Mental Health Promotion and Prevention National Action Plan
- SAAP IV
- Home and Community Care Programs
- State and Territory homelessness strategies
- State and Territory disability strategies
- Commonwealth–State Housing Agreement
- PADV's *Out of Sight, Out of Mind* project (South Australia)

18.4 Evidence

People with high and complex needs — defined as those with seven or more support needs — represent around 18 per cent of those accessing SAAP services. Support needs include psychiatric services, drug and alcohol services, family relationship counselling and medical care.

SAAP data also shows that in many cases these support needs are not met — for example, 25 per cent of people in SAAP services requiring psychiatric services in 1999–2000 could not obtain them. A recent study has concluded that there is a lack of community supports for people with mental illness living outside hospitals or institutions, and that this leaves them vulnerable to homelessness (Ecumenical Housing & Thomson Goodall Associates, 1999). Meanwhile, an American study in the early 1990s found that people with mental illness were most vulnerable to homelessness in the period immediately after their discharge from hospital following a crisis episode (Federal Task Force on Homelessness and Severe Mental Illness, 1992).

People with psychiatric disorders have a high risk of becoming homeless; multiply that risk by a factor of seven or more — depending on individual support needs — and you begin to have some sense of the dangers people with high and complex needs face.

Further research

We need to know more about:

- how services provide for people with high and complex needs, and especially how they shop around for funding from a multitude of potential sources
- what practices specialist services use to identify people at risk of becoming homeless
- existing links between agencies that can be expanded and better used.

19. People living in rural and remote areas

People living in rural and remote areas generally have to put up with greater physical isolation, lower incomes, higher living costs, higher unemployment, a narrower choice of housing, fewer support services and poorer housing standards than other Australians. All of these locational disadvantages — combined with the difficulty of providing services to small populations scattered over vast regions — makes the problem of homelessness particularly acute in these areas.

19.1 Goals

- To increase the capacity of communities — especially disadvantaged communities — to assist individuals and families who are at risk of homelessness or in housing crisis.
- To improve links between generalist support services, making it easier to identify people at risk of becoming homeless.
- To improve homelessness services in disadvantaged communities.
- To ensure that housing affordability and availability are given adequate consideration in local and regional planning.

19.2 Priority actions

PROVIDE people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness with access to support services located in their community.

RESOURCE training on domestic violence for workers in rural and remote areas.

SUPPORT and resource community development projects in rural and remote areas.

ENSURE that policies and programs are sufficiently flexible to reflect the needs of different communities.

ASSIST extremely disadvantaged communities to plan, develop funding proposals for, and implement homelessness prevention, early intervention and crisis transition and support services.

ASSIST rural and remote communities to meet their funding requirements and to evaluate their services with a focus on community capacity-building.

DEVELOP culturally appropriate and flexible methods for disadvantaged communities — particularly indigenous communities — to submit funding proposals and meet accountability requirements.

Who is involved?

- Commonwealth Department of Transport and Regional Services
- Commonwealth Department of Family and Community Services
- Centrelink
- Commonwealth Department of Health and Aged Care
- State and Territory departments responsible for primary industries, regional services and regional development
- State housing authorities
- State and Territory departments responsible for families and communities
- Local government
- Standing Committee of HMAAC
- State 1800 domestic violence lines
- Neighbourhood Centres
- Homelessness peak organisations
- General practitioners
- Health service providers
- Mental health service providers
- Private rental landlords and real estate agents
- Community housing providers
- Homeless service providers
- Local business
- Rural and remote families and communities

19.3 Rationale

Homelessness is distributed unevenly across Australia. Variations in housing market conditions and the availability of support services affect how much homelessness there is and how much hardship it causes. Rural and remote areas and small towns and cities of 2,000 to 40,000 people generally find it difficult to provide the specialist services needed to prevent and reduce homelessness.

Locational factors that have an obvious bearing on homelessness include:

- the availability of infrastructure and specialist services to address the issue (which may be especially limited in smaller towns and remote areas)
- the availability of prevention and early intervention programs through generalist services (which are largely restricted to capital cities and larger towns)
- the local availability of jobs, affordable housing and community services, including health services (which makes it less likely that people will become homeless and also more likely that they will recover quickly when homelessness does occur).

Women and children find it harder to escape family violence in rural and remote areas, partly because transport is more limited and expensive, and partly because support services are either non-existent or far way. Even when support services are accessible, confidentiality is difficult to protect in small communities.

19.4 Evidence

An analysis of census data for 1986 and 1996 by the Department of Family and Community Services makes it clear that the social and economic outcomes achieved by Australians are strongly related to where they live (DFaCS, 1999b).

Despite the popular perception that homelessness is an inner-city problem, it is actually a common feature of disadvantaged locations across Australia, including declining rural centres, industrial towns affected by structural adjustment, emerging coastal welfare regions and remote indigenous communities.

Related initiatives

- Stronger Communities (DFaCS)
- 2001 Census of Population and Housing (ABS)
- Programs managed by the Division of Regional Services, Development and Local Government (Commonwealth Department of Transport and Regional Services)
- Research projects on housing and regional disadvantage (Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute)

Percentage share of ...	Capital cities & surrounds	Non-capital cities of more than 40,000	Towns & cities of 2,000 to 40,000	Small towns & rural & remote areas
National population	63.4	10.1	16.4	10.2
Population growth	60.7	11.0	17.8	10.4
Employment	65.7	9.5	14.8	10.0
Employment growth	63.0	11.6	15.6	9.8
Unemployment	60.9	11.8	17.8	9.4
Migrants from NESB	86.2	5.6	5.3	2.9
Indigenous population	31.5	10.6	32.4	25.5
Disposable income	66.8	9.5	14.8	8.9
Transfer payments	59.7	11.4	18.7	10.3

Small towns and cities of 2,000 to 40,000 have significantly higher unemployment compared to cities and surrounding areas; they also have lower employment growth and disposable income. Small towns and rural and remote areas also fair poorly compared to capital cities and surrounding areas on employment and income measures.

The risk of homelessness may be greater in rural and remote areas, where incomes are lower, living costs are higher, employment opportunities are limited and housing quality is poorer. These are the factors that define the disadvantage of rural and remote areas, and it is precisely the same factors that make them vulnerable to homelessness. Rural and remote areas have a much higher incidence of people living in improvised or temporary dwellings. For example, caravans represent 1.4 per cent of dwellings nationally, but 4 per cent of dwellings in small towns and cities of 2,000 to 40,000. Rates much higher than this were recorded in parts of the Northern Territory, Western Australia and Queensland. Improvised dwellings represent only 0.2 per cent of dwellings nationally; however, in Northern Territory towns of less than 2,000 and in non-urban areas the figure is over 17 per cent, with an overall rate of 4.7 per cent across the Territory.

Victorian data has revealed substantial regional differences, with urban-rural fringe areas recording higher homelessness rates per capita than either Melbourne proper or country Victoria, and with unexpectedly high levels of homelessness in rural and remote locations. The pattern is likely to be different in each State and Territory. For example, early analysis of data from Queensland suggests that homelessness rates increase as one moves north along the coast from Brisbane.

The 2001 census should give a good indication of whether these patterns are changing and make it possible to analyse the distribution of homelessness by local government area.

Further research

We need to know more about:

- the locational breakdown of 1996 SAAP and census data, so we can compare results and map trends when the 2001 census returns come in
- the locational dimension of homelessness, housing, employment, transfer payments, demography and community services, and how the relationships between them vary from place to place
- the appropriateness of the current distribution of SAAP services in areas of disadvantage, particularly rural and remote areas.

The risk of homelessness in rural and remote areas is increased by the absence of prevention and early intervention programs and the narrow range of accommodation and support options available, particularly for people in crisis. These deficits tend to limit people's choices — forcing some individuals and families to leave their local community in their time of greatest need, and others to stay put even when they know this is not what is best for them. For example, the modest supply of private rental stock in these areas often means people have no option but to go on living in the family home after domestic violence erupts or relationships break down. When a temporary refuge was set up in rural Queensland for young women escaping domestic violence, demand for its services rose rapidly. The refuge did not create this demand; it brought a problem to the surface which had remained submerged because women who experienced domestic violence had no option but to go on living with the perpetrator.

