

Youth

NYCA NATIONAL YOUTH COMMISSION AUSTRALIA
INQUIRY INTO YOUTH EMPLOYMENT AND TRANSITIONS
National Youth Commission Australia

**A RENEWED COMMITMENT TO ADDRESS
YOUTH HOMELESSNESS
AND HOUSING**



ABOUT THE NATIONAL YOUTH COMMISSION AUSTRALIA'S INQUIRY INTO YOUTH EMPLOYMENT AND TRANSITIONS

The National Youth Commission Australia launched the Inquiry into Youth Employment and Transitions in March 2019 to develop ideas on how young people could be better prepared and supported in their transition from school to work, now and in the future.

The Inquiry heard from over 1,200 individuals and organisations at public hearings and community consultations across all states and the Northern Territory over a total of 47 days. Of the 1,200 people who Commissioners and workshop leaders met face to face, more than half were young people of school age or in early adulthood, both in and out of the workforce. The Commission also convened focus groups with young people to gather information on their experiences.

The Commission convened the Youth Futures Summit in August 2020, which brought together over 1000 participants in a week-long virtual event to discuss some of the biggest issues facing young people in 2020. Participants included young people, educators, employers, community service workers and policy-makers from around Australia. The Inquiry's interim findings report, *What Future?*, and the proposed *Youth Futures Guarantee* were released during the Summit.

THE YOUTH FUTURES GUARANTEE

The Youth Futures Guarantee lays out a framework of reforms and initiatives that will support young people to meet the challenges of the future, but these also benefit Australian businesses and the wider Australian community. The Guarantee consists of nine policy pillars reflecting the priority concerns expressed to the Commissioners at public hearings, in community consultations, in submissions and during the Youth Futures Summit.

Within each of the nine policy pillars the Commission has identified contributions from governments, organisations, businesses, and communities that will improve the lives of young people and assist their transition from adolescence to adulthood.

YOUTH HOMELESSNESS AND HOUSING IS A PILLAR OF THE YOUTH FUTURES GUARANTEE

In December 1990 Australia ratified the *Convention on the rights of the child*.¹ This Treaty is binding on Australia as a matter of International Law. In the Teoh Case (1994)² the High Court ruled that the Australian government and all government officials are obliged to respect the rights of all children set out in the Convention, including:

- The right to adequate housing
- The right to special protection, and
- The right to protection from abuse and exploitation

Homelessness needs to be addressed within this paradigm and analysed in this context. In other words – shelter is a basic human right – it is not just a housing issue or a welfare issue.

The primary focus of the National Youth Commission Australia Inquiry into Youth Employment and Transitions is on the pathways to sustainable livelihoods and independent lives for young Australians. Inevitably, during transitions to independence, some young people face housing issues leading to homelessness.

The Commission's first Inquiry in 2008 focused on youth homelessness³ and was formative in the Australian Government's White Paper, *The Road Home*.⁴ Yet since the 2008 Inquiry, little progress has been made and the Commission has found that young people continue to have their transitions from dependence to independence delayed by intermittent experiences of homelessness. For some homelessness is experienced early on while they are still attending school. For others, many of whom leave school before completing Year 12, homelessness is something they experience later.

At least 40 per cent of young people who pass through the Specialist Homelessness Services (SHS) system leave crisis services into a situation of continuing homelessness. The incidence of young people needing and seeking help from SHS has not reduced significantly since the Rudd government in 2008 committed to halving homelessness by 2020. All governments since have failed to take responsibility or meaningful action on this issue. The existing approach has not been able to reduce the incidence of homelessness nor guarantee to every young person who experiences homelessness a changed life course. There is a compelling case for reform but, what could a reformed system look like?



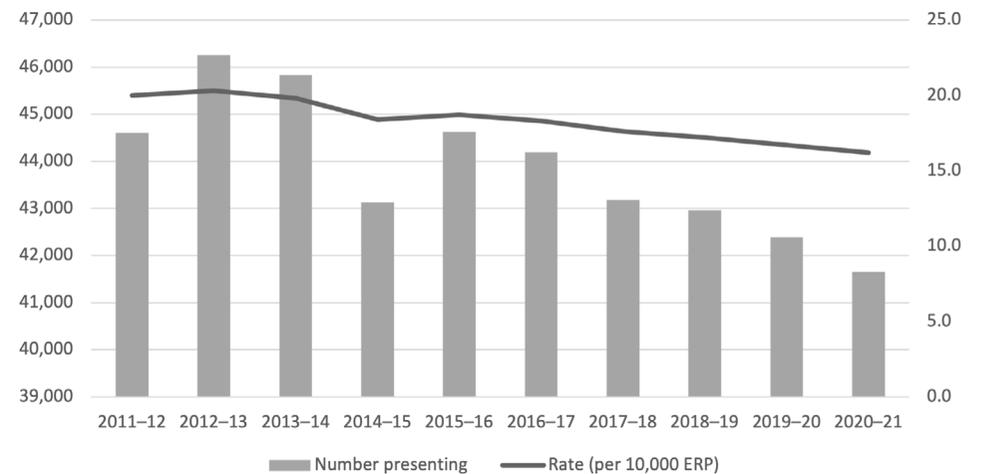
THE PROBLEM OF YOUTH HOMELESSNESS

Youth homelessness remains a stubborn problem. In 2020-21, 56,200 young people aged 15 to 24 years presented to homelessness services either alone or with at least one family member.⁵ Approximately 14,500 of these young people presented with their family. This is a slight increase from 2011-12 when 55,900 young people presented to homelessness services either alone or with family. It is evident that over the past decade youth homelessness overall has plateaued. This is not an acceptable outcome and successive governments must be made accountable for the lack of focus and attention in responding to this wicked problem.

In 2020-21, 41,652 young people aged 15-24 years presented to a homelessness service seeking assistance without a parent.⁶ This represents 15 per cent of all clients who presented to homelessness services in 2020-21.⁷ There were also 62,316 children aged 0 to 14 years who were accompanying a parent(s) and a further 14,584 individuals most of whom are either young parents or an adolescent accompanying a parent(s).⁸ So, 76,900 young adult parents and children presented for assistance as family units, mostly single parents with accompanying children.

Since 2012-13 the number of young people (aged 15 to 24 years) presenting to homelessness services without a parent has fallen from 46,256 each year other than 2015-16 (see Figure 1). This is despite the overall number of homeless people increasing in Australia⁹ and the number presenting to homelessness services also rising.¹⁰ While the number of unaccompanied young people going to homelessness services might be falling, there are still far too many homeless young people.

Figure 1: Young people presenting alone to homelessness services



Source: Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (2021) *Data Tables: Specialist homelessness historical data 2011-12 to 2020-21*, AIHW, Canberra.¹¹

Whilst there has been a slight fall in the number of unaccompanied young people attending Specialist Homelessness services over the past decade there is no data available to explain why this fall has occurred. It should also be noted again that the overall number of homeless young people both accompanied and unaccompanied has not fallen over the past decade.

The Commission heard many stories about young people's experiences of homelessness throughout the public hearing process. A case study of a young woman, Caitlin (not her real name) illustrates what many adolescents go through at the early stage of homelessness:

School was becoming a place where she didn't feel she belonged, and she now had other friends who were young people who didn't go to school. Caitlin didn't want to be at home, or at school anymore. She decided

she would stay with her friend to get away from her mother for a few days. This turned into a couple of weeks, and then she wasn't able to stay there anymore, as the family wasn't able to continue supporting her. She was feeling more connected at this friend's house and felt a sense of belonging. So, when she needed to move out of this place, she decided she needed to apply for a Centrelink payment in order to support herself. Her focus was now on surviving, and not attending school. Caitlin spent her days working out where she was going to stay that night and could not pay attention to attending school. When she was granted a Centrelink payment, she was required to attend school as part of that payment, and she found that really difficult as she had no stable accommodation, and day-to-day she didn't know where she was going to stay.

Toby Stoddart, Colony 47, Hobart, Tas, 4 June 2019

There is a stigma attached to homelessness, which makes it difficult for young people to access employment and a steady income.

Negative stigma and negative stereotypes. Employers do not want to hire people who are experiencing homelessness (e.g. if their address is a homelessness service).

Youth Homelessness Representative Council, Submission, 29 October 2019

The Commission also heard evidence from homelessness services about the unique challenges young people are facing in South Australia:

So, if we look more closely at a snapshot of data related to the group of young people that we've seen come through our homelessness service, which is the Western Adelaide Homeless Service, in the last 12 months what it tells us is that 357 young people between the ages of 15 and 24 have accessed these homelessness services with 20 per cent of them presenting due to domestic and family violence. 64 per cent are female and 36 per cent male and 30 per cent were Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Just under half of these people were identified as having a mental health issue. A quarter of these young people were enrolled in study but not surprisingly finding it difficult to maintain their enrolment

due to housing stress with nearly 40 per cent couch surfing, 7 per cent living in emergency or shelter accommodation, and 4 per cent rough sleeping. ... homeless young people have been found to have much poorer physical and mental health than others of their age. They have notably high incidence of reported self-injury and attempted suicide. They also have greater likelihood of leaving school early along with significantly higher unemployment rates than their peers.

Margie Fahy, Uniting SA, Adelaide SA, 20 June 2019

For many of these young people moving into a fully independent living situation is difficult because they are passing through a major developmental stage in life:

There is increasing recognition within the youth homelessness sector that young people need more than just a place to sleep. The developmental needs of young people require the provision of a range of specialised intensive and appropriate education and employment support services in order to ensure young people don't progress into long-term homelessness.

Youth Homelessness Representative Council, Submission, 29 October 2019

Developmentally, many of these young people are not ready to live independently and are highly vulnerable... Invariably their tenancies break down for a variety of reasons. Nationally, over 40 per cent of young people who are accommodated by specialist homelessness services re-enter homelessness.

Margie Fahy, Uniting SA, Adelaide SA, 20 June 2019

Numerous people told the Commission that the experience of homelessness has a major impact on successful completion of secondary schooling and their transitions to employment.

The longer a young person remains disengaged from the school system, the more difficult it is to re-engage at a later stage.

Youth Homelessness Representative Council, Submission, 29 October 2019

So, homelessness obviously has a major impact on young people, particularly as they transition out of school and into the workforce. Unstable housing options for young people of working age make it difficult for them to focus on further studies and gain employment. And then it becomes a vicious cycle. So, with poor education and employment outcomes, it makes it even more difficult to secure stable housing without some form of external support.

Amy Lawton, WESTIR Ltd, Penrith NSW, 11 November 2019

... what happens when you're marginalised, and homeless, and at risk. It just makes the journey so much harder for the young people that we are dealing with on a daily basis. The ones that we're making connections to, and trying to transform lives, it's just very, very difficult for them to take up those opportunities.

Yvonne Hunt, Crossroads, Perth WA, 13 August 2019

What we see with our young people is that the most common reason for disengaging from school will be family conflict. More than 50 per cent of our referrals are for this reason. Leaving school early or disengaging all together from school puts that young person highly at risk of probably initially couch surfing and then eventually homelessness and a greater risk of contact with the criminal justice system.

Jodie Burnstein, Barnardos, Sydney NSW, 29 October 2019

... even when young people are on the cusp of being suspended or excluded, trying to work with the education system ... that was too hard for the education system. So, I think one of the challenges is that when young people are exited early from education, they're not connected with anything. Families are left to find an alternative or find another school that will take their child, that's if they're with family and if they're not with family then they just disconnect altogether.

Annemaree Callander, Brisbane Youth Services, Brisbane QLD, 23 September 2019)



HOMELESSNESS SERVICES DON'T REDUCE YOUTH HOMELESSNESS

Broadly speaking, homelessness is not being adequately addressed, and this compounds for young people who are often an overlooked cohort of the homeless population. The number of homeless people continues to increase¹¹ and the cost of responding to them also continues to rise. Some in the homelessness sector say that 'homelessness is the failure of other support systems' – this is partly true. Others argue that 'homelessness is caused by structural factors and if we don't change these factors homelessness continues', that 'homelessness is a result of an insufficient supply of affordable housing' or that 'every night our crisis services are forced to turn away people seeking assistance' – all true, but what does this mean in a systemic context? There is not a lot of disagreement about these problematic issues but the challenge is how to move beyond the status quo – and what would a reformed system look like?

CRISIS MANAGEMENT

The Australian Specialist Homelessness Services system is funded to provide supported accommodation to young people, adults and children who seek help because they are homeless or at-risk of becoming homeless. Taking a systems view, the Specialist Homelessness Service system is about crisis management. The 2020 AHURI report, *Redesign of a Homeless Service System for Young People*, draws the picture of a 'homelessness service system (that) is largely crisis-oriented, made up of crisis and transitional services funded through bilateral agreements that sit under the NHHA – the SHS system'.¹²

Crisis services, even if expanded substantially, cannot possibly reduce and end homelessness. There will always be a role and a need for crisis services, but unless there is a focus on prevention/early intervention and post-homelessness support and housing, which are under-developed in the current system but are hugely cost effective, then the rolling back of the problem will not occur.

SILOED SERVICE SYSTEMS

Over many years, commentators from the community sector, researchers and public servants have pointed out the endemic problem of Australia's siloed service systems. While there is a lack of services for children and families, the service system is designed as separate organisations and agencies, which further compounds disadvantage and exclusion'.

The Centre for Community Child Health, Royal Children's Hospital suggests that:

One of the major challenges for Australia today is to make the change from traditional models of 'siloed' service delivery, which no longer serves the needs of children and families, to a stronger, more integrated system of support services for families.¹³

The Smith Family, in its submission to the Productivity Commission's Inquiry, *Introducing Competition and Informed User Choice into Human Services: reforms to Human Services*, commented that the:

... issues faced by disadvantaged people and communities are complex and people needing service support can be involved with multiple parts of the service system to achieve an outcome. Family and community services can often not be separated from the broader service system, each part of which works to a set of separate, siloed outcomes. At present, our service system is characterised by erratic and often incoherent approaches to policy, service design and data collection and analysis across levels of government.¹⁴

EDUCATION, TRAINING AND/OR EMPLOYMENT SUPPORT

Young people experiencing homelessness need additional support to stay engaged in school. Mainstream schools do not offer one-on-one support and as a result there are high dropout rates for homeless young people.

Youth Homelessness Representative Council, Submission, 29 October 2019

About one-quarter of Australia's 19-year-olds have not completed Year 12 or its equivalent.¹⁵ Around half of those will re-engage with education and training but the other half will not attain a Year 12 certificate or equivalent, and will be disengaged from full-time work, study or training for most of their lives.¹⁶ In comparison, more than two-thirds of homeless young people have left school before completing Year 12.¹⁷

Family dysfunction, family conflict, and family violence are the predominant drivers of youth homelessness, as opposed to loss of employment or stable income. However, young people who become homeless while still secondary students have a high risk of leaving school early. Young people who leave school early, even where homelessness is not an issue at the time, will tend to experience long-term disadvantage including a high risk of homelessness at some point in their lives. A young person who leaves home but can obtain relatively stable employment is unlikely to experience homelessness.

Typically, a young person who experiences homelessness and has no way to reconcile with their family, not only has a problem finding an affordable housing option but also has significant barriers to accessing the labour market and gaining a sufficient income to live on. Education, training, employment and an adequate income support safety net are the surest ways to avoid the reoccurrence of homelessness. In addition to the support systems needed to ensure young people remain engaged in education and employment, significant improvement is needed to actual housing support for young people.

MEASUREMENT OF OUTCOMES IS SELDOM ONGOING NOR PUBLICLY AVAILABLE

During the 1990s, a good deal of cooperative work was undertaken by the Australian Government and the states and territories to further develop the Supported Accommodation and Assistance Program to include a National Data Collection. This has since been redeveloped and strengthened by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) which reports annually by jurisdiction and on selected topics about homelessness and housing in Australia. The AIHW collects some data on outcomes from homelessness services.

The Commission believes that there is no consistency as to when evaluation studies will be undertaken. Ongoing data collections that provide useful information on the outcomes being achieved are not common. While client information for various programs is collected, it is for contract management and accountability purposes mainly, not outcomes measurement.

The Commission further believes that all policies and programs should be evaluated appropriately, rigorous data collection allowing for outcomes measurement should be undertaken. Governments need to commit to the timely building of credible bases of evidence for policies and program areas.



RECOMMENDATIONS

THE CASE FOR A YOUTH HOMELESSNESS STRATEGY

In general, when issues are regarded as a high priority the Australian Government develops national strategies to address them and reporting against progress are put in place. Examples include the National Suicide Prevention Implementation Plan, the National Drug Strategy 2017-2026, the National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children 2010-2022 which is accompanied by the Fourth Action Plan 2019-2022, the National Disability Strategy 2010-2020, and the rather thin National Strategy for Young Australians in 2010. The existence of social policy strategies is evidence of a priority given to an issue, apart from whether the strategy is likely to be effective or is competently implemented.

In 1999, the Australian Government launched a National Homelessness Strategy (NHS), designed to provide leadership in developing approaches for the prevention and reduction of homelessness and to promote integrated service delivery to people who are at-risk of homelessness or experiencing homelessness. The NHS was supposed to:

- provide a strategic framework that will improve collaboration and linkages between existing programmes and services, to improve outcomes for clients and reduce the incidence of homelessness;
- identify best practice models
- build the capacity of the community sector; and
- raise awareness of the issue of homelessness.

In retrospect, the National Homelessness Strategy achieved very little as seen by the number of people experiencing homelessness rising.



Given this experience how can a 'strategy' to reduce youth homelessness be useful? The Commission believes that the weaknesses of previous homelessness strategies can be overcome by using the following principles to design the strategy:

- Co-design: young people with experience of homelessness should be front and centre in the design and implementation of the strategy.
- Ownership: the strategy needs to be the responsibility of all agencies that work with and fund services for young people including housing and homelessness services, education systems and schools, health, and youth services.
- Authoritative: the strategy should map the means to end youth homelessness, how that can be done, how long it might take and at what cost, to governments, organisations and the community.
- Accountable: The strategy should include measurable goals and outcomes to which governments and agencies are held responsible for achieving

The March 2019 National Youth Homelessness Conference convened by Youth Development Australia in partnership with other youth sector leaders and held in Melbourne in March 2019, issued a Communique that called for a Strategy Plan for Ending Youth Homelessness, and highlighted four key areas for strategic action:

1. early intervention.
2. rapid rehousing.
3. engagement with education, training and employment opportunities.
4. extended state care.

This call for a strategy to end youth homelessness – including actions needed to make a significant and measurable difference in the years to come – was endorsed again at the 2021 National Youth Homelessness Conference.

The Commission is calling for a strategy to end youth homelessness underpinned by the four areas of strategic action (listed above) developed by the Australian Government, state and territory governments in partnership with non-government organisations and young people with a lived experience of homelessness.

The proposed project is an eminently efficient way to go about this work. It will draw on a huge reservoir of social capital. It will not stand in conflict with the existing public administration arrangements but inform the work done within that set of arrangements. A federal/ state/territories and NGO joint project, that will stand as a reference for the planning and implementation that various state and territory governments undertake well into the future. Nothing quite like this has been proposed before. We cannot continue with the same responses and see no real shift in the dial on this national crisis.

RECOMMENDATIONS

That the Australian Government along with each state and territory government fund the National Youth Commission Australia to work with young people, governments, the not-for-profit sector and other stakeholders to develop a strategy to end youth homelessness.



PRE-HOMELESSNESS PREVENTION /EARLY INTERVENTIONS OPTIONS

For many young people, their first experience of homelessness begins during adolescence, therefore, focussing early intervention efforts on young people has the potential to reduce the incidence of youth homelessness significantly.

Danielle told the Commission her story of homelessness. Her story shows how there were no supports to prevent her transition into homelessness. Early intervention could have prevented her homelessness by re-establishing and repairing family connections avoiding years of crisis.

When I lived with junkies and we went to Centrelink, I remember speaking with a social worker ... meeting with them three or four times ... (but) ... there was no help and at this point during these conversations and these interactions, I had been kicked out of living with (my parents) again ... I said to her: "I have got nowhere to go" and she says: "go back with your parents" and at that point I was so heavily influenced thinking that my parents were abusive that I could not go back there.

It wasn't until I managed to escape that area and that situation that I realised that no my parents were decent people ... and that at any point in time I could have gone back, but I didn't know, because of the drugs, the abuse, and the manipulation.

I have tried to get into some sort of community housing or government housing since I was 14. Throughout my youth I was failed by the government. I have been homeless numerous times. I've had to couch surf. I've had to sleep in parks. I've slept in gardens, I've slept under bridges. All those really traumatic things that nobody should endure I endured from a very young age.

I live in community housing after nearly becoming homeless again as an adult, and I still attend university. Overall, life has not been easy when you encounter adversity in your youth. Mine was indirect due to getting into a horrible relationship, because prior to that my childhood was fantastic.

Danielle King, Adelaide SA, 18 June 2019

The 'Community of Schools and Services' model of early intervention

In terms of its available evidence base on social and educational outcomes, the Community of Schools and Services model of early intervention (COSS model) stands as probably the most promising early intervention initiative that if applied systematically could significantly reduce the flow of young people into homelessness.

The COSS model, first developed in Geelong, is a place-based collective impact approach to addressing social and educational issues prior to crisis events arising. The model is based on the organisation of a community collective of agencies and schools that all work together to provide support to vulnerable young people and their families.

Figure 2. A representation of the four foundational components of the COSS Model



In practice, the COSS model has led to a significant reduction in youth homelessness rates. Geelong, for example, saw a 40 per cent decrease over two years in the number of young people experiencing homelessness.¹⁸ In addition, Geelong saw improved engagement with school by 50 per cent and reduced early school leaving of the identified at-risk students, with 85 per cent remaining at school.¹⁹

The model has attracted increasing interest from overseas and there are sites elsewhere in Australia as well as in the UK and Canada. Two parliamentary inquiries have recommended that there needs to be a shift from the entrenched crisis orientation of funded homelessness services to prevention and early intervention.

RECOMMENDATIONS

That state and territory governments implement a place-based strategy of prevention and early intervention for young people at-risk of homelessness.

That all state and territory governments review the two parliamentary reports on homelessness, the Inquiry into homelessness in Australia report (August 2021) and the Inquiry into homelessness in Victoria report (March 2021) to incorporate the findings and recommendations into forward planning for homelessness services and social and affordable housing investment.

INCREASE THE LEAVING CARE AGE TO 21

It has been well-established over several decades, that young people who leave the care system and have no other option but to attempt to live independently, are at high risk of experiencing homelessness. One study found over one-third of young people leaving out-of-home care experience homelessness within 12 months of leaving.²⁰ Another study found that a significant proportion of young people (30-50%) who had to leave their out-

of-home care placements experienced homelessness, prison, unemployment or became a young parent within the first few years after leaving care.^{21 22} Of those clients of the Specialist Homelessness Services system in 2020-21 who had exited the care and protection system, about one half (49%) had experienced family and domestic violence, 1 out of 6 had problematic drug and/or alcohol issue, 2 out of 5 had a current mental health issue, and nearly 1 in 3 had multiple issues.²³

Reports to the Commission were consistent with research and community sector reports.

We know that young people who are transitioning from care, are more likely to experience homelessness. Some 25 per cent of them experience it in the first year that they exit. They're more likely to have mental health issues like anxiety, depression and post-traumatic stress. They struggle to remain actively engaged in education. They find training and entry to employment really difficult.

... 65 per cent of young care leavers do not complete Year 12 education. They represent over 60 per cent of the youth homeless population and nearly 50 per cent of young men with a care experience become involved with the juvenile justice system. Young care leavers also experienced 30 per cent unemployment compared to the national average of 9.75 per cent.

Peter Sanderman, Anglicare SA, Adelaide SA, 18 June 2019

The issue of leaving care has been known and written about and some small-scale pilot initiatives have also been implemented since the early 1990s and yet this issue has persisted for nearly thirty years without major reform nor any major systemic initiative, until the Home Stretch campaign.

The national Home Stretch campaign was launched in 2016 to extend the leaving care age for young people in Out-of-Home-Care in all Australian state and territory jurisdictions from 18 to 21 years of age. This campaign turned the idea of leaving care support on its head by arguing that: to rectify the problem of poor leaving care outcomes, continue providing care to the child, don't sever it, and provide that care, not for three months, (like many leaving

care programs), but for three years until they 'get the key to the door', when they turn 21 years. Advocates for extending care suggest that there will be demonstrably improved outcomes in life readiness, employment, income, health, and economic return for the children.²⁴

Evidence from the United Kingdom and the United States supports the contention that extending care will improve the lives of care leavers. For example, an evaluation of Staying Put: 18 Plus Family Placement Programme extending care had a range of benefits, including better transitions to independence and better engagement with education.²⁵ An evaluation of extending care to 21 in California found that young people benefited from extended care with lower rates of homelessness, improved educational outcomes, higher earnings, and less involvement with the criminal justice system.²⁶

As at 2022, extended care is offered in six of the eight Australian jurisdictions with approximately 1,000 young people currently accessing from the new arrangements. There are about 3,350 care leavers across all jurisdictions every year²⁷, so despite the policy breakthrough and practical measures taken so far, there is clearly much more to be done. Also, there is no nationally consistent extended care model yet agreed upon or trialled.

Given the wide variation in the needs of young people who leave the Out-of-Home-Care system, the extended care support will need to be flexible and rigorously needs-based. A special housing allowance, until at least 21 years of age or even somewhat longer, will need to be a component of the package.

The Commission believes there are two major requirements for how policy should be implemented: firstly, to ensure that a uniform national and universal model of extended care is in place that provides a safety net to support all care leavers; secondly that the model is promptly evaluated to assess its adequacy for preventing continuing pathways from out-of-home-care to homelessness and other forms of long-term disadvantage.

The Australian Government is not directly responsible for delivering Out-of-Home-Care services; however, it does have carriage of the National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children, oversight of national standards

and responsibility for ensuring that children throughout Australia are equitably supported in Out-of-Home-Care and in the emerging extended care arrangements.

RECOMMENDATIONS

That care be extended to the age of 21 years in the remaining jurisdictions.

That the Australian Government work with the States/Territories and the Out-of-Home-Care sector including young people in care or who have been through the care system to develop and benchmark a uniform model of extended care

That the Australian Government enshrine national standards of extended care in the National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children.

That the extended care arrangements be evaluated from the beginning of extended care support and the results of the evaluation are publicly reported to hold all governments accountable.



POST-HOMELESSNESS SUPPORT AND HOUSING OPTIONS

Prevention and early intervention implemented sufficiently will reduce the flow of young people experiencing homelessness, but in some cases, despite the best efforts, it will fail from time to time, and young people will fall into homelessness. What can happen for these young people will in part depend on their age and their maturity. Young people aged 15 or younger are not going to be able to live independently and the Child Protection system is going to be the main option available, but a situation where they are able to live with a member of their family if not with their parent or parents is preferable. For those aged 16 and over other options are needed.

Housing First for Youth

There is increasing recognition within the youth homelessness sector that young people need more than just a place to sleep. The developmental needs of young people require the provision of a range of specialised intensive and appropriate education and employment support services in order to ensure young people don't progress into long-term homelessness.

Youth Homelessness Representative Council, Submission, 29 October 2019

Housing First is the idea that homeless people are more successful recovering from homelessness if they can move quickly into permanent housing with appropriate supports. If housing is a human right, then the provision of safe and stable housing is the priority regardless of the person's perceived 'readiness' or other compliance issues. Then, housed tenants are provided with the services and supports needed during their transition to sustainable independence. When delivered with fidelity, there is a robust body of evidence that Housing First is effective. However, what works for older adults does not necessarily work anywhere near as well for young people under the age of 25 years.

Housing First for Youth (HF4Y) adapts a Housing First model specifically to meet the needs of young people. There are five core principles of a HF4Y as follows:

- A right to housing with no preconditions. All young people have the human right to housing that is safe, affordable, and appropriate. This housing should reflect the needs and abilities of developing adolescents and young adults. Housing is not conditional on housing 'readiness,' sobriety, or abstinence.
- Youth choice, youth voice and self-determination. HF4Y emphasises youth choice regarding housing and supports, as well as provides a framework for young people to bring their ideas, opinions, and knowledge to bear on the services and housing they access.
- Positive youth development and wellness orientation. HF4Y is not simply focused on providing housing and meeting basic needs, but on supporting recovery and wellness. Through HF4Y, young people have access to a range of supports that enable them to nurture and maintain social, recreational, educational, occupational, and vocational activities. The HF4Y model employs a 'positive youth development' orientation — a strengths-based approach that focuses not just on risk and vulnerability, but also youth's assets. This orientation means focusing on building assets, confidence, health, and resilience.
- Individualised, client-driven supports with no time limits. Supports are client-driven and individually-tailored to young people and their expressed needs. The central philosophy of Housing First is that people have access to the supports they need as they choose, and these supports should be flexible and adaptable with respect to timeframes.
- Social inclusion and community integration. HF4Y promotes social inclusion through helping young people build strengths, skills, and relationships that will enable them to fully integrate into and participate in their community, in education, and employment. This requires socially supportive engagement and the opportunity to participate in meaningful activities.

The principles of HF4Y inform the nature of the housing options, the approach to case management support, and other specialist social, health and education supports that are required to meet the needs of developing adolescents and young adults.

It is difficult to deliver a timely supply of open HF4Y options in a community without at the same time having major investment in early interventions to

reduce the number of young people moving through the crisis system. In Australia, probably the closest development along the lines of HF4Y is the youth-specific and youth-appropriate social housing model pioneered in New South Wales in the form of the My Foundations Youth Housing Company.

RECOMMENDATIONS

That state and territory governments develop and fund Housing First for Youth models of social and community housing as a part of the 2023 National Housing and Homelessness Agreement.

YOUTH-SPECIFIC SOCIAL HOUSING

The need for more social housing for young people has existed for a long time, but until 2015, it relied on special boutique projects that governments were prepared to fund. For years homeless young people have found it difficult to access housing through community housing providers. There are several reasons for this, including the low rate of Youth Allowance doesn't suit the rental management models used by community housing providers and young people are stereotyped as 'difficult tenants'. New models of youth-specific social housing such as those run by the My Foundations Youth Housing Company need to be developed and supported by state and territory governments so that young people have access to social housing.

The My Foundations Youth Housing Company has a promising youth-specific social housing model - the Transitional Housing Plus (THP) model provides housing integrated with support to assist a young tenant get their lives on track over a longer tenure period (up to five years). This is supported housing that engages young people in training and employment opportunities, as well as providing support for any other issues. The program aims to transition young people into fully independent living arrangements by the end of a five-year period or earlier. This extended tenure better aligns with a young person's physical and emotional development and provides the stability and time that young people need to identify and manage personal issues, set goals, make plans and realise those goals.

RECOMMENDATIONS

That the Australian Government support a national project to plan, develop and roll out a social housing for youth model with every state and territory governments.

YOUTH FOYERS IN AUSTRALIA

Youth Foyers are a youth housing model being developed throughout Australia. The Commission's Inquiry into Youth Homelessness in 2008 received some testimony from a handful of foyer-like projects that were around at the time. The model mainly based on the foyers that had been developed in the UK. At the time, the Commission suggested that:

... foyers provide a degree of independence but in a supported environment. In the Australian context, foyers would provide a link between the SAAP-funded crisis accommodation and independent living.

On the Commission's Roadmap for Youth Homelessness, there were ten 'must do' strategic areas for action.²⁸ One was affordable housing but a second housing-related pitch was for 'a new form of youth housing which links housing to education, training and employment programs' and an Australian version of the UK/European Foyer youth housing model, as well as a broad suite models of supported housing for young people that incorporated the link between support/ accommodation/ education/ training/ and employment pathways. Over the past decade, some 16 foyer projects have been developed in Australia as part of the response to homelessness. During the current Inquiry the Commission heard from several providers about their Youth Foyers. There are two current approaches that share many similarities, but which are also different in some respects.

The first group are the 'education first' youth foyers which provide housing linked strongly to education and training programs. This model was launched in three Victorian locations in Shepparton, Broadmeadows and Glen Waverley.

The education first approach is described as:

... the Education First Youth (EFY) Foyer model expands on the youth foyer approach by prioritising mainstream education and training as a pathway to a sustainable livelihood. These foyers target young people aged 16 to 24 years who are at risk of, or experiencing homelessness and are committed to pursuing education and training. As such, EFY Foyers are better understood as a form of supported student accommodation rather than a crisis housing response. ... the Education First Youth Foyer model prioritises education through primary partnerships with the tertiary education institutions where foyers are located.²⁹

The second could be called an 'employment first' approach that links housing and employment services on the basis that financial independence is a pathway out of homelessness. Based in Leederville in Western Australia, Foyer Oxford is the largest single-site youth accommodation service in the country, with 98 self-contained apartments over four purpose-built floors. Operating on the site since February 2014, young people have the flexibility over the duration of their stay, with the average stay about 14 months. John Thompson, Anglicare WA, told the Commission:

Foyer Oxford is slightly different from other foyer projects that you may be familiar with over in the east coast, and we don't operate on an education first model. We're very much part of the homelessness sector here and operate essentially as the exit point from crisis accommodation services across the metro area. Our focus on work and studies are a reflection of the understanding that financial independence is the way to break the cycle of homelessness for young people. And whilst young people living a Foyer Oxford have always had access to employment support, for the past two years we've employed a part-time employment and projects officer in response to the changing economy and young peoples' experience of mainstream employment services.

John Thompson, Anglicare WA, Perth WA, 13 August 2019

Thompson explained to the Commission that the Foyer Oxford offers an employment service which supports:

... the development of young peoples' practical employability skills to help them gain and maintain work and to broker opportunities through partners and through partnerships with employers and organisations that can support the transition of young people into work, through the provision of work experience, internship, industry exposure, volunteering and employment.

John Thompson, Anglicare WA, Perth WA, 13 August 2019

The Commission believes that it is essential for social and affordable youth housing to be linked with education and training, or employment opportunities and pathways. Social and affordable youth housing ideally should be located near employment, education, training, services, and transport, because transport is a significant barrier to young people accessing opportunities and assistance.

Wrap-around support should be provided for young people who have experienced homelessness, poor mental health, and/or substance abuse, etc. Such support promotes housing stability and as well as addressing the health needs of young people. The goal of social and affordable youth housing and associated supports is about viable independent living arrangements. Young people need flexible, temporary arrangements, but with sufficient security, over multiple years while they work out their path in life.³⁰

Generally, Youth Foyers conform to these criteria, although a two-year residency which is reported as an average term seems too short to achieve sustainable outcomes. A commitment to education/training and employment is a core criterion for being accepted as a foyer resident and there is no problem with this criterion. However, not all young people, who have experienced homelessness and are due to leave a crisis service, will be able to satisfy this criterion but many will be able to. Reports that young people who are regarded as having 'high needs' are not appropriate for foyers raises some serious questions.

There are some concerns about the high cost of foyer projects and whether intake is sufficiently connected to young people experiencing homelessness. Nevertheless, the major redeeming feature of the model is the explicit link between support, accommodation and education, training, and employment pathways.

RECOMMENDATIONS

That all state and territory governments funding youth foyers require that foyers funded with homelessness funding strictly intake young people exiting the Specialist Homelessness Services system, but with a requirement that residents do commit to education/training and employment programs.

That the Australian Government fund a national evaluation project to assess the impact of the Australian foyer sector and advise on its prospects for further expansion including the strengths of the model, possible areas for improvement and advise on a cost-benefit model that would support a sustainable expansion.

PRIVATE RENTAL

Given the problems of access to social housing for homeless youth, for many crisis services supporting young people into private rentals is a more immediately practical exit option but one dependent on income and the availability of affordable private rental housing. Research by Anglicare Australia found that of 45,992 residential listings across Australia only eight rentals, were affordable for a single person on Jobseeker payment and there was only one rental affordable for a young person on Youth Allowance.³¹ The lack of affordable private rental accommodation is a factor in housing stress, where lower-income households pay 30 per cent or more of their household income in rent. The latest available data from 2017-18 shows that 57 per cent of lower-income households in the private rental market were in housing stress.³²

Young people will, more often than not, lack a rental history and be less likely to demonstrate a stable employment history. These factors put young people at a competitive disadvantage in a tight rental market and are a cause of young people feeling discriminated against in by real estate agents and owners.³³

Unemployed young people on Youth Allowance or Jobseeker payments may be eligible for Commonwealth Rent Assistance (CRA). CRA is a supplement to Centrelink payments available to people in the private rental market. Like other Centrelink payments, rent assistance has not increased in line with the market rents. The result is that Centrelink recipients are paying a greater proportion of their income in rent leading many to live in housing stress. Increasing rent assistance will assist in reducing housing stress.

State and territory governments can provide additional assistance to support young people in the private rental market to alleviate housing stress. The NSW Government's Rent Choice Youth model subsidises private rental housing for young people aged 16 to 24 years. The model requires young people to pay 25 per cent of their income in rent plus any CRA they receive, and the NSW Government pays the remaining rent. A support worker is also provided, and the young person must be motivated to work or complete education or training. The aim is for the young person to gain employment and afford private rent without assistance.³⁴

An increase in CRA and subsidies from state and territory governments will temporarily alleviate housing stress of young people on income support. The Commission has proposed a long-term solution the Youth Income Guarantee. The Youth Income Guarantee is a single payment to eligible young people at a level that enables recipients to live a healthy life.³⁵ Implementing the Youth Income Guarantee will substantially increase income support payments and will reduce youth homelessness and the housing stress felt by young people.

RECOMMENDATIONS

That the Australian Government increase Commonwealth Rent Assistance (CRA) to ensure that young people are not in housing stress. This could be achieved by adopting the Youth Income Guarantee.

That the Australian Government and states and territories co-develop a supplementary support package to the CRA modelled on the NSW Government's Rent Choice Youth model.



CONCLUSION

Over the past 15 years, successive governments have failed homeless young people. There has been no significant decrease in the number of homeless young people in over period. It is difficult to know what the impact of COVID-19 has had on the number of homeless young people. What we do know is that crisis services have had to shoulder a great load over the past two years.

Before COVID the homelessness service system was largely about crisis management with under-developed capacity in early intervention and supported housing options for young people. Reducing the flow of young people into homelessness or 'Turning off the tap' is fundamental for any strategy to end youth homelessness. Also, supported housing for young people who need to live independently prior to finishing their education and gaining employment and sufficient income to live independently is a policy imperative and a co-priority. Re-orienting to a place-based approach in which early interventions are aligned with post-homelessness supported housing and post-school employment support would provide a fine-grained measure of the community-level social and educational outcomes across a range of inter-related youth issues, including homelessness

The Commission's Inquiry into Youth Employment and Transitions found that homelessness amongst young people and their need for access to safe and affordable housing is a critical issue, not a new issue, but one that has been neglected and derailed from achieving an effective policy response. It is a human rights issue and not to provide adequate resources to ensure young people have access to adequate support and housing is a breach of the Convention on the Rights of the Child that Australia has signed up to.

The Commission's findings echo the findings of the two parliamentary inquiries and the recommendations put forward in the report outline how to achieve progress on this issue.

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