



10 March 2022

Estimates and Financial Operations Committee
Parliament House
4 Harvest Terrace
West Perth WA 6005

To the Estimates and Financial Operations Committee,

**RE: SUBMISSION TO THE INQUIRY INTO THE FINANCIAL ADMINISTRATION
OF HOMELESSNESS SERVICES IN WESTERN AUSTRALIA**

St. Vincent de Paul Society WA (Inc.) thanks the Standing Committee on Estimates and Financial Operations for the opportunity to provide a submission to the Inquiry into the Financial Administration of Homelessness Services in Western Australia.

We attach our submission for the Committee's consideration. Please do not hesitate to contact me via email or via telephone on should any further information or clarification be required.

Yours sincerely

Susan Rooney
CEO

Submission - Financial Administration of Homelessness Services

Background and Experience

St Vincent de Paul Society WA (SVdPWA) has a long history of providing services to people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness including housing services, homelessness prevention services and programs, mental health services and specialist homelessness services. SVdPWA is a founding member of the WA Alliance to End Homelessness

SVdPWA specialist homelessness services for adults and youth are provided through Vinnies Tom Fisher House (TFH) in Northbridge and Passages Youth Engagement Hubs (PYEHs) in Northbridge and Peel. These services operate from a unique and specialised Low Threshold and Change Model, recognising that those who are most need, are the hardest to reach, with the most challenging life issues. Underpinning the Low Threshold and Change Model, is a well-grounded trauma informed practice approach that recognises that there are four critical elements that every individual needs to thrive in day to day life. These elements are the need to feel that they are safe, significant, related (sense of belonging) and respected.

Vinnies Tom Fisher House has been in operation for 8 years, Passages Perth 23 years and, Passages Peel 10 years. In the 2020-21 financial year SVdPWA recorded 1,477 new and existing clients at the Hubs, with 5,477 total visits by clients to the two facilities. Over 700 referrals were provided for additional support services, which clients accessed on more than 33,000 occasions. These services included legal, medical, alcohol and drug support, Centrelink and financial support. TFH provides intensive support responding to individual journeys. Last year, TFH supported 676 individuals and 552 referrals were made, but not limited to, various specialist homelessness services, counselling, drug and alcohol rehabilitation services.

Key Submission points

Current funding and delivery of services

We would firstly like to recognise that in the last few years there has been considerable financial investment as well as time, energy and effort, directed towards ending homelessness in WA. There remains however, key areas of concern in respect to the homelessness services system in WA, these include:

- **The practice of 'rolling over' Department of Communities (DoC) funding** – this not only creates sustainability issues for the funded services but this practice also prevents unfunded innovative and efficacious services accessing DoC funding therefore impacting their medium to long-term viability. There are some occasional exceptions made to the latter situation but it is not immediately evident as to the process by which these exceptions are made.

We are aware that the intent of the DoC commissioning plan is to end this practice however the current 2 year 'roll over' of contracts means the situation still exists and, in this period, critical unfunded services may be compelled to significantly reduce their services or close, with considerable negative impact to the homelessness system. On the face of it, this issue seems to disproportionately affect Youth Homelessness services.

We provide as but one example, Passages Youth Engagement Hubs (PYEHs) - a joint venture between SVdPWA and Rotary Clubs of Perth and Mandurah. PYEHs are a vital part of addressing youth homelessness in Perth and Mandurah (in partnership with other youth specialist services). The Department of Communities provides no funding for the Perth PYEH and the grant funding which part-funds PYEH Mandurah is reconsidered annually. PYEHs operate fully and uniquely within a Low Threshold and Change model as does Vinnies Tom Fisher House. This model is articulated in the "All Paths Lead to Home" strategy as a highly desired model within the homelessness system. There is a significant risk to the continued operation of PYEH Perth in that Rotary Perth can no longer contribute funding for the lease (around 100k per annum) and as SVdPWA already funds around \$1million in operating costs for the Hubs it will be problematic for the organisation to take this on as well.

- **There is no complete map of homelessness services therefore preventing a system-wide identification of service gaps or consideration of the efficacy, reach and impact of services.** The document "Homelessness Service System Alignment Analysis and Road Map" only considers services that are currently funded by the DoC (excluding those that are funded through grants) and even within these parameters the list of services in the document is incomplete. This means that the Department has no clear 'line of sight' of unfunded services, of which there are a considerable number, and therefore an incomplete picture of the current system. Further, we understand that the aforementioned document will significantly inform the DoCs commissioning process going forward, which is problematic if it is not supplemented with additional information.
- **Significant underinvestment in Youth Homelessness services** – the increased investment in homelessness services has been almost exclusively adult focused with the critical issue of youth homelessness largely overlooked. Around 50% of young adult rough sleepers have experienced homelessness when they were young therefore funding specialised youth homelessness services is fundamental to ending homelessness into the future.

'All Paths Lead to a Home', Western Australia's 10-Year Strategy on Homelessness 2020-2030

We are extremely supportive of the All Paths Lead to a Home strategy document and related action plan and as previously mentioned, acknowledge the significant investment that has been made in this regard. We would however make the following points:

Specialised Housing First for Youth model

International evidence indicates that adult Housing First programs are not as efficacious for young people, as the causes and conditions of youth homelessness and the needs at this developmental stage, are different.

Housing First for Youth (HF4Y) is an internationally developed approach which adapts the broader Housing First model by acknowledging and addressing the distinct causes and conditions of youth homelessness. The goal is not simply to provide an individual with housing stability, but to support a young person with the holistic intensive services required to assist them to achieve their goals and facilitate a healthy transition into adulthood.

The Canadian HF4Y Program Model Guide articulates both the philosophy behind HF4Y and its key differences from the adult Housing First model – this document should form the basis of any model considered in WA.

To date there has been no investment in a specialised Housing First for Youth and it is vital that this is rectified.

Recognition of the need and focus on lower barriers to service delivery

We strongly support the need for lower barriers to service delivery as the people who need support most, are often those who are harder to engage.

Tom Fisher House and Passages Youth Engagement Hubs have been operating within a Low Threshold and Change (LTC) Model for many years and have expertise in the areas that can, and is being, utilised as a resource for the sector.

It should be noted however, that there is a distinct difference between low barrier models and the Low Threshold and Change Model and this needs to be fully understood. The LTC model goes beyond access to services and is an intensive support model that aligns closely with trauma informed approaches and Therapeutic Crisis Intervention. This enables a safe space where staff are aware of potential triggers, focusing on what individuals need in order to feel safe and begin the healing process for change to occur. Providing new experiences where individuals can start to practice and establish trust is vital for reversing the impact of trauma in the brain. Both low barrier and LTC services need to be available in the community however it should be made clear that there is a difference, so clients can access the most appropriate and efficacious option.

There needs to be safeguards to ensure that youth are very clearly separated from adults in service design and provision so as to avoid the potential for predatory behaviours and risk to youth. We know that disconnected youth will seek out artificial attachments as a form of connection, which can be very damaging and attending adult services increases this risk, forming the next generation of adults experiencing homelessness. Specialised Youth low barrier and Low Threshold and Change services are vital to ensuring the unique developmental needs of young people are met.

Increasing accommodation options for complex and vulnerable groups particularly young people

It has been our experience that for many of the people that access our specialist Low Threshold and Change services, the restrictive entry criteria of many accommodation options limit their opportunity for continuation of the journey of change they have started and, their continued engagement with support services.

It is crucial to provide suitable options for the most vulnerable and complex individuals and recognise that not one model fits all. Most notably the current youth accommodation landscape largely excludes young people that present with high complex needs. Complex youth with co-occurring complex mental health and AoD issues have historically, and without investment will most likely remain, excluded from all accommodation services - the notable exception being Perth Inner City Youth Services whose capacity is sorely limited by lack of funding.

Young people that have experienced complex trauma, require a service that can work with and understand complex PTSD and trauma from a developmental perspective; understanding that young people require different support. A specialised low barrier/low threshold and change youth approach would require accommodation models that provides this support and is staffed by Youth Workers that work under the Youth Workers Code of Ethics.

Youth services are often left with no other option but to refer young people to adult accommodation services. These options further entrench youth into a spiral within the adult sector and they often become victim to further exploitation.

Tom Fisher House, Boorloo Bidee Mia and Koort Boodja accommodation services have made huge advances in providing services for highly complex clients however for the reasons outlined above, these adult services are not appropriate for young people.

We are aware that the action plan identifies the need to develop and support low-barrier / low threshold accommodation options for young people however we are unaware of any planning or funding investment in this regard.

Existing data systems and how data informs service delivery

The data around street present and couch surfing young people are incomplete and scattered, and much of youth homelessness is hidden.

Some data on youth homelessness is collected on the By Name List and more exists in agencies that have specialist programs for homeless youth e.g. SVdPWA collects data on the young people we see in our Passages Youth Engagement Hubs. However, if programs are not funded by the Department of Communities (like PYEH Perth) the information is not included in the Specialist Homelessness Information Platform (SHIP) data and therefore the DoC has no line of sight of the extent of the youth homelessness which means planning and commissioning in this area is not data informed.

References

- Collective IQ (2021) Homelessness Service System Alignment Analysis and Road Map
- Cost of Youth Homelessness in Australia Research Briefing (2016) D. MacKenzie, P. Flatau, A Steen and M Thielking
- Gaetz S, Walter H and Story C (2021), THIS is Housing First for Youth. Part 1 — Program Model Guide, Canadian Observatory on Homelessness Press, Toronto
- State Government of Western Australia Department of Communities (2019) All Paths Lead to a Home | Western Australia's 10-Year Strategy on Homelessness 2020–2030
- State Government of Western Australia Department of Communities (August 2020) All Paths Lead to a Home | Action Plan 2020 – 2025
- 'YACWA & WA Alliance to End Homelessness (2019) Youth Homelessness Action Plan