

Inquiry into the financial administration of homelessness services in Western Australia

***West Australian Government response to
Report 88 Funding of homelessness services
in Western Australia***

Introduction

The Government would like to commend the Standing Committee on Estimates and Financial Operations (the Committee) for the extensive work carried out over the course of the Inquiry into the financial administration of homelessness services in Western Australia.

Homelessness is a challenging and complex issue, that significantly impacts some of the most vulnerable people in our community, intersecting with many other deep social, health and economic issues. *Report 88 Funding of Homelessness Services in Western Australia* (Report 88) released by the Committee recognises the complex nature of addressing homelessness in all forms.

Committee Proceedings

On 17 November 2021 the Committee resolved to inquire into and report on the financial administration of homelessness services in WA.

The Inquiry was conducted over 19 months, received 48 submissions and held 27 public hearings including with the Department of Communities, service providers, local governments and people with lived experience of homelessness.

The Committee published the final Report 88 on 22 June 2023.

Committee Recommendations

The final report makes 57 recommendations for response across government agencies.

The State Government remains strongly committed to assisting our state's most vulnerable and is investing record amounts to assist West Australians in line with this commitment.

The State Government is investing a record \$2.6 billion over four years in social housing and homelessness measures, including delivering 4,000 social homes to the system. Since 1 July 2021, the State Government has added 1,356 new social homes, with more than 1,100 homes currently under contract or construction.

The State Government recognises addressing deep social, health and economic issues alongside a housing response is critical to addressing homelessness in all its forms.

This financial year the State Government is investing around \$225 million across Western Australia on homelessness initiatives to fund a broad range of community sector organisations to deliver specialist homelessness services.

There is also additional expenditure across government, including in Health and Justice, to support people experiencing homelessness.

National Housing and Homelessness Agreement

Commonwealth funding is essential to ensure that housing and homelessness responses enable all West Australians to have access to accommodation that is safe, secure and appropriate housing.

Commencing on 1 July 2018, the National Housing and Homelessness Agreement (NHHA) is the primary vehicle for Commonwealth funding that supports delivery of social housing and support services to people who are experiencing or at risk of homelessness, including those experiencing family and domestic violence.

Western Australia's social housing system and homelessness sector receives funding from the Commonwealth Government under the NHHA to achieve specified agreed outcomes. The NHHA funding arrangement under the previous Government was a fifty/fifty split in the contributions made by the State and Commonwealth Government for specialist homelessness services. The State Government contributes significant funding in addition to formal requirements under the NHHA towards addressing homelessness.

In 2022, a review by the Productivity Commission found that the current NHHA was a limited funding agreement which did not drive wider housing policy reform. The current NHHA Bilateral Schedule expired 30 June 2023, and a one-year extension has been agreed to allow for federal initiatives to be designed and implemented.

Negotiation on the NHHA for the years beyond June 2024 will commence shortly with this Government ensuring it secures its fair share for housing and homelessness services in WA. The State Government is continuing to work collaboratively with the Commonwealth, and other jurisdictions, on our agreed housing reform agenda and seeking improved long-term system outcomes.

Achieving change is also dependent on the Commonwealth government leading reform in many areas to alleviate acute poverty and disadvantage, incentivise investment in the delivery of affordable housing and to improve the cost of living for vulnerable people. Responsibility for welfare and income support systems, as well as tax settings, sit with the Commonwealth Government. Multiple sources of evidence highlight that the previous stagnation in increases to income support levels are not adequate for most people and the basic cost of living means that many people live on incomes that are near or below the poverty line.

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

Western Australia's first ever 10-year Strategy on Homelessness, *All Paths Lead to Home: Western Australia's 10-Year Strategy on Homelessness 2020-2030* (the Strategy) is the culmination of intensive work of many partner organisations in the community services and not-for-profit sectors. Development of the Strategy is the result of the ongoing and genuine partnership between the community services sector, peak bodies, Aboriginal organisations, government and the wider community. It recognises the whole-of-community approach required to drive the significant shift in homelessness policy, moving from managing it to aspiring to end homelessness.

The Strategy is the first of its kind in WA and aims to address homelessness in all of its forms, with an initial focus on reducing the most visible and acute form of homelessness, rough sleeping. Implementation of the Strategy prioritises Housing First and No Wrong

Door approaches and is supported by two five-year Action Plans. The first Action Plan which covers the period 2020-2025 contains actions aligned to the four key focus areas of the Strategy:

- improving Aboriginal wellbeing;
- providing safe; secure and stable homes;
- preventing homelessness; and
- strengthening and coordinating our responses and impact

Since its release, the Strategy has supported significant outcomes including:

- Djuripiny Mia 100 Supportive Landlord model is a landmark pilot program that will deliver 100 social homes in the Perth, Peel, South-West regions specifically for rough sleepers. The partnership between Housing Choices and Communities will provide property and tenancy management for 100 social dwellings through a supportive landlord model prioritising people who have experienced prolonged homelessness.
- To compliment Djuripiny Mia 100 the State Government announced \$49 million for a Regional Supportive Landlord in the 2023/24 State Budget to provide 100 supportive landlord homes for people experiencing rough sleeping in regional WA, planning for which is already underway.
- \$2.3 million for a partnership with St Bart's through their Future Homes and Brown Street Homelessness Accommodation facilities to boost short and medium term supported accommodation. The funding will assist St Bart's in expanding the availability of homeless accommodation in Perth by 18 new beds, and enable them to offer specialised case management and support.
- \$1.3 million to improve the quality of data in the By Name List and the transfer of responsibility to run it to the Australian Alliance to End Homelessness, to help drive better coordination and information sharing among service providers.
- Establishment of the Rough Sleeping Coordination Groups (RSCG) in key locations – including Fremantle, the Perth CBD, Geraldton, Bunbury, and Mandurah to streamline governance arrangements, strengthen coordination and responses to people experiencing homelessness, with a key focus on rough sleeping.
- Acquisition of the former Murray Hotel for supported homelessness accommodation services. This new facility will complement current accommodation options, delivering a Housing First supported accommodation service, providing intensive supports to help people who are sleeping rough access appropriate, longer-term housing.
- Establishment of a single Housing First Homelessness Advisory Group to the Minister, focusing on Housing First approaches to reduce rough sleeping. The Housing First Homelessness Advisory Group is comprised of diverse community

and Government sector experts. The membership also includes people with personal or family lived experience of homelessness and those who deliver or have delivered services in regional and remote areas of WA.

- \$2.2 million Country Connect service, which aims to reduce instances of rough sleeping during medical treatment for people travelling to Perth from the regions.
- \$73.5 million for the planning, design, and construction of two Common Ground facilities in East Perth and Mandurah that will provide supported housing for people who are sleeping rough or experiencing chronic homelessness.
- \$34.5 million for the Housing First Homelessness Initiative which is providing wrap around support and linking people sleeping rough in the Perth Metropolitan Area, Rockingham/Mandurah, Bunbury, and Geraldton to accommodation.
- Boorloo Bidee Mia, delivering supported accommodation in the Perth CBD for people sleeping rough. Boorloo Bidee Mia is the first low barrier homelessness service of its kind, offering culturally supported accommodation for some of the most complex individuals, many of whom have experienced long-term homelessness.
- Koort Boodja consistent with a Housing First approach, provides low barrier supported accommodation. Koort Boodja was established following the success of Uniting WA's Beds for Change initiative.
- Homelessness Engagement, Assessment Response Team (HEART) has been established to deliver rapid, flexible assertive outreach and intensive supports primarily for individuals who are chronic rough sleepers in the Perth metropolitan area. HEART has been expanded into key areas and ongoing work continues to drive collaborative outreach.

West Australian Government response to Report 88

Recommendations made by the Committee

1. The Government collect statistical data on homeless deaths including those deaths from recent experience of homelessness in Western Australia.

Supported in principle

The State Government acknowledges reports of the death of people in our community while rough sleeping is deeply saddening. The death of any homeless person, regardless of circumstance, is a tragedy that is devastating in its impact on the families and communities involved.

There is currently no robust way to accurately collate information regarding deaths pertaining to homelessness. Determining cause of death among homeless populations is

difficult due to the frequent presence of multiple co-morbidities complicating the identification of the primary cause of death.

Homelessness is not a cause of death in national data sets, like other Australian jurisdictions, WA does not officially measure or record mortality rates of people experiencing homelessness.

The Strategy recognises the interrelated relationship of health and homelessness and acknowledges that homelessness is likely to result in poorer health outcomes compared to the general population. Communities recognises the critical importance of working to reduce and prevent all forms of homelessness.

The State Government recognises the importance of quality and up to date data in designing and delivering effective, long-term responses to homelessness and is investing significantly to improve data collection and quality through the By Name List and the Zero Project. It should be noted the By Name List captures a record of 'Acknowledgment of Death'. This data represents individuals in the inactive list that have at any time been identified on the By Name List.

2. A majority of the Committee, consisting of Hons Peter Collier, Dr Brad Pettitt and Steve Martin MLCs, recommends the Department of Treasury quantify and publish estimated cost savings of investment in housing and homelessness services across government agencies involved in the delivery of community services, health, mental health and justice services.

Noted

There is a significant existing body of national and international research on the cost-effectiveness of housing and homelessness interventions, indicating mixed results.

The Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute (AHURI) reported a potential cost offset to government from the change in use of non-homelessness services by clients of adult single homelessness and tenancy support services was estimated at \$3685/client/year.¹

Furthermore, the report notes that although a positive offset was observed on average, the extent of potential offsets was dependent upon the non-homelessness service examined. In some instances, an increase in non-homelessness costs was observed.²

Recently, in 2022, AHURI reported evidence that shows that Housing First is a resource-intensive intervention and is most cost-effective for people experiencing chronic homelessness with complex and high needs. AHURI highlights that Housing First

¹ Zaretsky, K. and Flatau, P. (2013) The cost of homelessness and the net benefit of homelessness programs: a national study, AHURI Final Report No. 218. Melbourne: Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute.

² Zaretsky, K. and Flatau, P. (2013) The cost of homelessness and the net benefit of homelessness programs: a national study, AHURI Final Report No. 218. Melbourne: Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute.

programs have a reasonable likelihood of reducing hospital admissions, emergency department use, and involvement with the criminal justice system. Yet service users often face significant challenges in realising non-housing outcomes, resulting in a less conclusive evidence base than for housing outcomes. It is important to note that focusing purely on cost savings neglects the larger concern about the 'human costs' of homelessness and does not measure the effectiveness of outcomes³.

It is widely acknowledged that investment in intervention measures can be an effective, and potentially cost efficient, means to mitigate demand in tertiary services, such as the health, mental health and justice systems. It is noted that efforts to quantify this have produced mixed results due to the inherent complexity of the exercise. The Department of Treasury uses a range of measures and approaches to assess the value of cost impacts of investments and interventions in Government services. The potential flow through impact to mainstream services is assessed as part of this remit.

3. The Western Australian government investigate the use of alternative funding models for homelessness services in Western Australia, including social impact investment.

Supported in principle

This work is already underway through the first Action Plan under the Strategy which includes a priority action to identify and introduce innovative funding opportunities to drive and deliver responses to homelessness. This priority includes actions to develop a Social Impact Investment model and work with philanthropic partners to develop investment projects that address homelessness.

- Examples of innovative funding opportunities and work with philanthropic funding as outlined in Action items 2.4 and 2.4.1 may include; Capital projects that increase the supply of diverse and innovative housing options.
- Non-capital projects that help people to access housing and support.
- Projects that facilitate access to underutilised housing and land.

Communities has actively contributed to this action, through facilitating projects such as the My Home Project to access government-owned land to establish accommodation for people experiencing homelessness. Communities will continue to engage with the community services sector to further progress this action.

The National Housing and Homelessness Agreement is set to be renegotiated between Stated and Territories and the Commonwealth by 1 July 2024. The settings for this

³ Roggenbuck, C. (2022) Housing First: An evidence review of implementation, effectiveness and outcomes, report prepared by AHURI, Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute Limited, Melbourne.

Agreement will impact the assessment of alternative funding approaches and arrangements.

4. The Department of Communities' commissioning process allow for more services to be delivered under a collective impact model.
5. Funding of collective impact programs allow for the costs of coordination of multiple service providers.
36. The Department of Communities commissioning process for homelessness services develop options for ongoing collaborative approaches involving multiple service providers that take into account the costs of delivering collaborative services.

Supported

This work is already underway through a range of collaborative approaches including the evidence-based Housing First Homelessness Initiative.

The Housing First Homelessness Initiative which evolved from the successful 50 Lives 50 Homes Program, is delivering housing support services, case management and coordination support. The Housing First Homelessness Initiative is delivered in partnership with Communities and a consortium of service providers providing coordinated responses to support vulnerable rough sleepers into long-term accommodation with wraparound supports.

To address priorities under the State Commissioning strategy and ensure a sustainable system for commissioning community services, reviews of sustainable funding options will be conducted, along with implementation of trials of innovative solutions in collaboration with agencies and the community services sector.

Communities currently funds a number of services delivered under collaborative models involving multiple service providers and will continue to assess and consider collaborative and collective impact models of funding where appropriate.

In regard to the Housing First Homelessness Initiative, the implementation of the Initiative across metropolitan locations and regional areas in WA, responds to local needs, context and capacity. The Housing First Support Services are currently being delivered by:

- Perth Metropolitan - Moorditj Mia, Noongar Mia Mia and Wungening Corporation
- Perth Metropolitan - Mya Goryat Boorloo, Ruah Community Services, St Patrick's Community Support Centre and Wungening Aboriginal Corporation
- Mandurah/Rockingham – St Patrick's Community Support Centre Ltd, Ruah Community Services and Wungening Aboriginal Corporation
- Geraldton – Centacare Inc
- Bunbury – Anglicare WA Inc, Doors Wide Open and Breakaway Inc.

The Safe Perth City Initiative is another initiative that was developed to deliver a collaborative and coordinated response to anti-social behaviour in the Perth CBD and Northbridge. The Safe Perth City Initiative works collaboratively with the HEART and is complemented by regular community safety patrols by RooForce.

Collaboration across the sector has also been critical for outreach. The Homelessness Engagement, Assessment Response Team (HEART) is a partnership model between Communities and sector partners, St Patrick's Community Support Centre, Wungening Aboriginal Corporation, Uniting WA and Indigo Junction. The service provides a multi-agency assertive outreach response, delivering rapid, flexible outreach and intensive supports primarily for individuals who are chronic rough sleepers, in key locations across the Perth Metropolitan area.

Strengthening and coordinating homelessness responses is a key priority under the Strategy. As a matter of course the Government is open to considerations for greater consolidations of functions for the delivery and coordination of services.

Since the establishment of the Homelessness ministerial portfolio, the State Government has invested in a range of initiatives to improve coordination, including:

- **Homelessness Coordinators:** Through the establishment of the Office of Homelessness, Communities has commenced work to strengthen coordination across government and the community services sector. Communities' Homelessness Coordinators lead and facilitate the coordination of multi-agency and system responses to connect vulnerable people to support and accommodation.
- **Partnership with the WA Alliance to End Homelessness (WAAEH):** The collaboration between the West Australian Alliance to End Homelessness (WAAEH) and Communities increases access to shared resources to strengthen coordination and responses to people experiencing homelessness, with a key focus on rough sleeping.
- **By Name List:** The State Government has invested \$1.3 million to improve the quality of data in the By Name List and the transfer of responsibility to run it to the Australian Alliance to End Homelessness (WAAEH), to help drive better coordination and information sharing among service providers. WAAEH and the Advance to Zero provide sector support, training and a backbone resource on the day to day level.
- **Rough Sleeper Coordination Groups (RSCGs):** To support existing efforts, RSCGs have been rolled out across the Housing First Homeless Initiative regions including Bunbury, Rockingham, Geraldton, Mandurah and Perth metropolitan area. These new arrangements will deliver a more coordinated Housing First approach, improving homelessness responses.

6. The Department of Communities provide ongoing funding for successful pilot programs that have proven to be effective.

Supported

Since the launch of the Strategy in 2019, in a relatively short period of time, the State Government has implemented a large number of contemporary pilot programs. The pilot programs will provide a strong evidence base to guide future investments.

Current pilot programs under various stages of progression and evaluation include:

- Djuripiny Mia 100 Supportive Landlord Model
- Boorloo Bidee Mia
- Koort Boodja
- Supported Accommodation Service – Murray Hotel
- Homeless Engagement, Assessment Response Team (HEART)
- Safe Perth City Initiative

The Strategy recognises data collection, analysis and evaluation are critical for designing and implementing responses that are effective, sustainable and able to deliver long-term improved outcomes and housing for vulnerable people. Communities is currently progressing evaluations of pilot programs to deliver a basis for investment and expansion by articulating what has been achieved, what works and what can be improved.

The State Government continues to invest in evidence-based programs, such as the Housing First Homelessness Initiative which was informed by the 50 Lives 50 Homes program.

Alongside the delivery of the State's first Homelessness Strategy, the State Government announced \$34.5 million to deliver the Housing First Homelessness Initiative.

The Housing First Homelessness Initiative delivers case-management, accommodation and wrap-around support to people sleeping rough in the Perth Metropolitan Area, Rockingham/Mandurah/Bunbury and Geraldton. This funding covers support and case management, coordination, accommodation and evaluation.

While still in pilot phase, the Djuripiny Mia 100 program is based on the long-term success of the mental health Independent Living model which assists people with severe and persistent mental health issues find and sustain housing. A two-year trial of a Supportive Landlord Model under a Housing First Approach formed the foundations of the Djuripiny Mia 100 program.

The Strategy prioritises evidence-based models, delivering permanent, supportive housing for vulnerable people to break the cycle of long-term, chronic homelessness. This is why the State Government has committed significant investments to Common Ground which is

a housing model that originated in New York more than 20 years ago and has been successfully adopted in other Australian cities.

The Common Ground model delivers permanent, supportive housing for adults who are experiencing ongoing homelessness, rough sleeping and/or are earning a low income.

The Common Ground program is a key priority in achieving the Strategy's outcomes of reducing rough sleeping, improving Aboriginal wellbeing, and delivering innovative housing programs. The Common Ground projects are progressing, with a builder appointed to build the East Perth Common Ground, and the Mandurah Common Ground currently undergoing a design review process.

7. The Department of Communities fund, develop and implement a practice model based on Housing First principles for caseworkers supporting Aboriginal people experiencing homelessness and/or seeking housing assistance.

Supported

Under the National Agreement of Closing the Gap, Communities is the lead agency responsible for Socio-Economic Outcome 9 and is already investing in the progress of the *WA Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community Controlled Housing Organisation (ATSICCHO) Strategy*. The WA ATSICCHO Strategy is a 10-year whole-of-government strategy being developed by Communities to build capacity and grow the ATSICCHO sector to create stronger housing outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander West Australians.

Strategy recognises that WA ATSICCHOs are essential for an effective state housing system and to respond to the scope of challenges facing the sector and Aboriginal people more broadly.

Since the launch of the homelessness Strategy, the State Government has implemented a number of programs to deliver ACCO-led culturally appropriate housing and homelessness support Aboriginal people experiencing homelessness and/or seeking housing assistance. This includes the Noongar Housing First Principles which was launched in December 2021 and funded by Lotterywest and the

Aboriginal Housing First Support Service (Moorditj Mia), which was implemented in 2021, as part of the Housing First Homelessness Initiative.

Moorditj Mia 'Strong Home' is delivered by an ACCO consortium led by Noongar Mia Mia in partnership with Wungening Aboriginal Corporation taking culturally informed approach to addressing homelessness. Guided by the Noongar Housing First Principles, developed by Noongar Mia Mia, the service provides culturally safe case management support linking Aboriginal people who are sleeping rough with wrap around support services, including accommodation, employment, health, mental health, financial management, and social support.

Additionally, Boorloo Bidee Mia provides supported homelessness accommodation service in the Perth CBD for people sleeping rough. Boorloo Bidee Mia is the first low barrier homelessness service of its kind, offering culturally supported accommodation for some of the most complex individuals, many of whom have experienced long-term homelessness.

And to support Communities tenants, the Thrive Program which was established in 2019. Thrive aims to deliver tailored, culturally and linguistically appropriate support for tenants' individual needs. Thrive is a state-wide support program delivered in partnership with non-government organisations, including Nirrumbuk Environmental Health and Services and in the Kimberley and Ngaanyatjarra Council in Ngaanyatjarra Lands, to provide advocacy and advice to help people resolve issues that may be preventing them from sustaining a tenancy, and/or addressing issues impacting their wellbeing.

8. The Housing First Homelessness Advisory Group consider the impacts of current housing supply issues on the implementation of a Housing First approach under the 10-Year State Strategy All Paths Lead to a Home.

Supported

Development of the terms of reference and work program for the Housing First Homelessness Advisory Group is already underway. The impacts of current housing supply issues on implementation of housing first approaches will be considered in this context.

9. The Department of Communities map the entire homelessness services system in Western Australia, identifying all funded and unfunded homelessness services.
10. The Department of Communities conduct and publish a comprehensive state-wide place-based analysis of homelessness service need, including the level and type of need required.
11. As part of the commissioning of homelessness services, the Department of Communities conduct state-wide, place-based assessments of the extent to which currently funded services meet identified local needs.

Supported in principle

As part of the Agency Commissioning Plan, Communities is working in collaboration with the sector, Shelter WA, Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations (ACCOs), Elders, people with lived experience and government agencies to improve and understand the current homelessness service system.

Currently, many service providers deliver services within a limited geographical area and may only deliver these services for a finite period of time. Additionally, these services may not be required to address other requirements of contracted service providers such as reporting and collecting data on rough sleepers or obligations to perform functions in line with the Housing First Approach.

Due to the nature and scope of unfunded service providers, mapping out unfunded services may only provide limited benefit to an overall understanding of the homelessness system.

A key focus of the Agency Commissioning Plan is to transition to placed-based, person-centred and sustainable services that reflect the complexity of client needs, with consideration to funding and service sustainability.

The Government notes this recommendation does not have a direct impact on social housing supply or service delivery to support vulnerable people.

12. The Department of Communities develop priority actions targeting prevention of, and early intervention in, homelessness in older people, in particular older women, for inclusion in the second Action Plan under Western Australia's 10-Year Strategy on Homelessness 2020–2030, All Paths Lead to a Home.

13. A majority of the Committee, consisting of Hons Peter Collier, Dr Brad Pettitt and Steve Martin MLCs, recommends that the Department of Communities increase the focus on prevention and early intervention of homelessness under the State Strategy.

Supported in principle

In alignment with the National Housing and Homelessness Agreement, preventing homelessness is a key priority under the Strategy.

Priority homelessness cohorts under the Strategy include:

- women and children affected by family and domestic violence,
- children and young people,
- Aboriginal people,
- people experiencing repeat homelessness,
- people exiting from care or institutions into homelessness and
- older people.

The State Government provides significant investment into other programs for the prevention and intervention of homelessness which are delivered across program areas including, programs to prevent Family and Domestic Violence which is the leading cause of homelessness for women and their children.

The State Government is delivering two Safe Home Safe Family Rapid Rehousing Pilots. These two-year Pilots will trial two initiatives to assist eligible women, with and without children, to leave refuges and secure tenancies in the private rental market. One of the initiatives, being delivered by Wungening, is dedicated exclusively to Aboriginal women. The other is delivered by Zonta.

The Government has expanded the Safer Pathways Program to Midland and Mirrabooka. This program supports women and children at risk of homelessness, where family and domestic violence is the primary cause of tenancy issues.

The Government also funds several safe at home programs providing outreach support, case management, safety planning, security audits, and security upgrades to help women stay in their own home, where it may be safe to do so, and where a woman elects to stay at home.

These investments are in addition to significant investment to strengthen family and domestic violence service delivery and changes to legislation to support women and children to stay safe at home, which include family violence provisions in the *Residential Tenancies Act 1997* and the *Family Violence Legislation Reform Act 2020*.

Across all cohorts, the State Government provides a range of services to support people with sustaining their tenancies. This includes free, independent and confidential financial counselling services, advocacy and advice to support people experiencing financial difficulty. Additionally, through the Department of Mines, Industry Regulation and Safety (DMIRS), tenancy advice and education services can be accessed for tenants who need further advice, require assistance in negotiating with their landlord or property manager, or have a tenancy-related legal issue.

Further, to create pathways towards social and economic independence and wellbeing for Aboriginal people in the Pilbara and Kimberley, the North-West Aboriginal Housing Fund is investing in projects that empower Aboriginal people and communities by increasing opportunities, including stable and suitable housing options outside the public housing system.

14. The Western Australian government establish a separate pool of funding for prevention and early intervention programs to address the causes of homelessness for the main 'at risk' cohorts

Not Supported

As previously mentioned, preventing homelessness is a key priority under the Strategy. Priority actions under the Strategy seek to develop tailored responses for vulnerable cohorts at risk of homelessness.

Separate pools of funding for specific cohorts may have the potential to create barriers of entry and increase complexity of access to services for service users. Narrowing funding results in people with specific needs being ineligible, also limiting funding accessibility and

flexibility across the system. Funding and investment into homelessness responses, including prevention and intervention, should be evidence based.

It is noted that the Committee recommends collective impact programs are implemented but also recommends establishing a separate pool of funding. These recommendations are inconsistent given that separate funding pools may prevent collective responses and quarantine funding for specific purposes rather than wrap around supports that consider individual needs.

15. The Department of Communities publish annual updates about the progress of implementing specific priority actions under the First Action Plan and subsequent Action Plans under the 10-year State Strategy All Paths Lead to a Home.

Supported

The State Government continues to monitor and evaluate the plan for the Strategy. Reporting on the implementation of specific actions and other key reforms will be considered as part of this process.

Additionally, the Housing First Homelessness Advisory Group has been established which will continue to support and guide implementation of the Strategy.

16. The Western Australian government implement measures to increase the supply of long-term housing.

Supported

The Cook Government is investing a record \$2.6 billion over four years, to improve the quality and accessibility of social housing and homelessness services in WA.

Through this investment, we will deliver up to 4,000 new social housing properties and carry out refurbishment and maintenance work to many thousands more to ensure these homes remain part of the state's social housing stock for many years to come.

The investment will also ensure that WA has significant funding for future social housing projects; and will provide our construction industry with a critical pipeline of work in future years.

The State Government has also invested over \$150 million in grants over two years to the Community Housing Sector, representing the construction of close to 340 dwellings for social housing and crisis accommodation, in addition to maintenance work and refurbishment of over 1,000 community housing dwellings in metropolitan, regional and remote areas.

The State Government, through Communities is actively partnering with the private and not for profit sectors to finance, develop and deliver housing to address a number of

cohorts including those experiencing, or at risk of homelessness. And there is a record volume of housing currently under construction due to State and Commonwealth housing grants.

The State Government has introduced a range of reforms and programs targeted at increasing the supply of affordable housing such as the pilot Housing Diversity Pipeline and initiatives to promote build-to-rent developments. This includes providing incentives for a land tax concession for future build to rent developments, which will increase the supply of long-term rentals and provide more security and certainty for renters.

Further, to support new housing developments across Western Australia, the State Government has introduced the Infrastructure Development fund which will remove barriers to new housing developments by supporting with the cost of headworks. Additionally, through the 2022-23 State Budget, \$55 million was invested in water and wastewater infrastructure which will support the development of more housing and builds upon the Infrastructure Development Fund.

The Commonwealth Government announced a National Housing Accord in October 2022, under which all states and territories have committed to contributing 10,000 houses additional to the Commonwealth's total commitment to deliver 40,000 social and affordable homes over five years from 2024. We will continue to work closely with the Commonwealth to progress this commitment in WA.

To continue the work of the National Housing Accord, in June 2023, the Commonwealth Government announced the Social Housing Accelerator delivering over \$209 million in direct investment to WA for the delivery of social housing.

The State Government is also pursuing funding to further boost housing supply through meaningful partnerships between our Government, the National Housing and Investment Finance Corporation, not-for-profit community housing providers, and the private sector.

17. The Western Australian government investigate the impact of short-term accommodation on the availability of housing in the long-term rental market.

Supported

In response to the Economics and Industry Standing Committee Report 7, *Levelling the Playing Field: Managing the impact of the rapid increase of short-term rentals in Western Australia*, the Department of Mines, Industry Regulation and Safety – Consumer Protection (Consumer Protection) is developing a registration scheme for short-term rental accommodation in WA.⁴

⁴ Government of Western Australia, Short term rental accommodation:
<https://www.wa.gov.au/organisation/departments/departments-of-planning-lands-and-heritage/short-term-rental-accommodation>

Consumer Protection is currently preparing a Bill for consideration by the WA Parliament which will be followed by the implementation of a registration scheme.

18. A majority of the Committee, consisting of Hons Peter Collier, Dr Brad Pettitt and Steve Martin MLCs recommends:

- a) The Department of Communities conduct a stocktake of underutilised public housing properties throughout the state.
- b) Utilisation rates for public housing properties be included in the Department of Communities' Annual Reports.

Supported in Principle

Public housing utilisation rates are regularly reported and published through the Productivity Commission's Report on Government Services. WA's public housing utilisation data is consistent with national average and has improved over the last five years.

Information regarding vacant public housing has previously been provided to the Committee. The State Government provides regular updates regarding public housing stock to Parliament.

Communities manages a public housing rental portfolio of approximately 36,000 dwellings in WA and aims to relet vacant properties as soon as possible, after ensuring they are in clean, safe, and working order.

Public housing occupancy rate is always a single point in time number that fluctuates for a range of reasons. Properties may be awaiting acceptance of offers from applicants or undergoing maintenance repairs or refurbishment prior to new occupants moving in. This also includes properties that have been spot purchased, which may require refurbishment to be brought up to clean, safe and working order.

Levels of occupancy fluctuate by region for a range of reasons, including whether there are higher levels of ageing stock, or where stock may be located in areas of low demand.

To relet a public housing property involves multiple steps including inspection of the property, undertaking required maintenance works and allocation to an applicant on the waitlist. The overall time to relet a vacated, tenantable property can be impacted by a number of factors and complexities.

Public housing properties are mostly allocated once it has returned from maintenance and is available for the prospective tenant to go and view the property once an offer is made. They may be allocated whilst the property is undergoing maintenance, but this would depend on the level of maintenance required and potential timelines for work completion.

19. The Department of Communities expedite the replacement of the current process of priority assistance for public housing with a 'needs assessment' process, so that the process more accurately identifies priority need for housing assistance.

Noted

Work on a needs-based assessment would require significant change to the current model and extensive consultation across jurisdictions and the sector are required to ensure appropriate outcomes are achieved for those on the waitlist.

20. The Department of Communities publish online monthly public housing waitlist data, state-wide and where possible by region, including but not limited to:

- a) Number of households in social housing
- b) Number of households housed into social housing during the month in question
- c) Occupancy rate of social homes
- d) Turnaround times for vacated social homes
- e) Average time to house public housing applicants and priority listed applicants
- f) Applicants as a proportion of social homes
- g) Social housing vacancy

23. The Department of Communities reform the operation of the social housing waitlist to allow greater transparency and access of information to applicants, including providing to each applicant:

- a) the number of suitable homes available in the applicable region
- b) the approximate expected wait time.

Supported in principle

The State Government supports the reporting of waitlist and public housing stock data, which is regularly made publicly available. No other State or Territory routinely makes available public housing data to the level of detail requested.

Through the National Housing and Homelessness Agreement (NHHA), there has been agreement to focus on high level data collection and sharing between States, Territories and the Commonwealth. The State Government is committed to working with States, Territories and the Commonwealth on improving data collection and sharing changes.

Approximate expected wait times are provided to applicants when requested to assist them to manage their housing decisions while in an average expected wait period. Applicants are advised that wait times are only a general indicator at point in time.

Wait times can vary significantly due to a range of factors, and are influenced by the individual housing needs and circumstances of an applicant and personal decisions whether to accept a property offered to them.

Factors that are considered when identifying the most suitable property for the next available applicant, which may also influence wait times include, but are not limited to:

- Whether the applicant is wait turn or priority listed;
- Whether the applicant has agreed to be housed in community housing as well as public housing;
- Considerations regarding specific locations, for example, if an applicant needs to be close to hospital to easily access treatment on a frequent basis;
- Whether an applicant needs to be in a ground floor apartment or requires modified rooms, such as a bathroom due to mobility issues; or
- Whether an applicant needs access to a yard due to considerations associated with a service animal.

As such, it is not practical and may be misleading to suggest to an applicant a number of suitable homes available in the applicable region for a number of reasons, including changes in personal requirements and homes are offered on a closest best fit based on the information provided.

The State Government will continue to monitor and assess data collection and publication processes, noting changes to data management systems is a long-term project and is made significantly more complex by the large number of regions in WA.

The Government notes this recommendation does not have a direct impact on social housing supply or service delivery to support vulnerable West Australians and that administrative changes are unlikely to add any additional housing but requires additional resources.

21. The Department of Communities review, develop and publish a new Housing Options Assessment Form that triages applicants on the basis of need, before requiring them to provide supporting documents and complete a complex Form.

Not Supported

The Department of Communities introduced the Housing Options Assessment to enhance the service offering to customers, providing tailored information to clients in relation to potential housing products or services they may be eligible for.

Individuals are not required to provide substantive evidence or supporting documentation at the time of completing the Housing Options Assessment.

The assessment is available to anyone who is seeking housing assistance and can be completed in person at any Housing Office, or by filling out the form online and emailing it to Communities. Proof of identification, income and supporting documents are not required to complete the assessment to receive housing advice.

Following receipt of housing information from a Housing Options Assessment, should a client decide to submit a public housing application they are assisted to complete a housing application form which is pre-populated with information provided at the Housing Options Assessment stage. Any outstanding information along with supporting documentation is required at this point.

Communities supports and acknowledges the need for ongoing review of the Housing Options Assessment form to ensure it serves as an in providing accessibility to information and supports to applicants which will continue to be undertaken.

The State Government notes the Committee recommends increasing Housing Application data collection while also requesting the form be simplified. This option will create a greater administrative burden and reduce the information needed to appropriately assess the need of social housing applicants.

22. The Department of Communities:

- a) investigate the current barriers to public housing applicants created by requirements for identification documents, and how those barriers could be removed
- b) take steps to remove those identified barriers.

Supported in principle

The Committee seems to be unaware of the current application process and the removal of identity barriers for individuals.

Communities Identity Policy includes considerations for clients who are unable to provide documents due to extenuating circumstances.

The policy is supported by the Identity Verification procedure and Identity Verification Framework which define extenuating circumstances for application of the policy in practice.

The Evidence Requirements Fact Sheet available through the Housing website also stipulates that alternative options are available for Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander clients and clients in extenuating circumstances which includes homelessness.

For example, Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander applicants may confirm their identity by providing one of the following documents:

- A reference from a recognised Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander organisation
- A reference from an Elder
- A letter from a person authorised to witness a statutory declaration as defined in the Oaths, Affidavits and Statutory Declarations Act 2005

23. The Department of Communities reform the operation of the social housing waitlist to allow greater transparency and access of information to applicants, including providing to each applicant:

- a) the number of suitable homes available in the applicable region
- b) the approximate expected wait time.

See recommendation 20.

24. The Department of Communities ensure:

- a) all avenues of communicating with an applicant are attempted before an application is removed from the waitlist
- b) any application for public housing which is withdrawn for 'no contact' is automatically reinstated with the original listing date, if the applicant requests

Supported in principle

Communities' Application Management Policy states that all applications are to be reviewed on a regular basis, which is supported by the Application Reviews procedure which stipulates multiple attempts to contact the applicant must be made prior to any application being withdrawn.

All reasonable attempts to communicate with the applicant through direct contact, contact with a Next of Kin, listed advocates or support providers, along with any other contacts Communities may be aware of, must be made and recorded against the application prior to any withdrawal.

Applications withdrawn as a result of 'No Response' occur where there has been significant attempts made to contact the applicant and there has been no engagement. However, applications may be reinstated at the request of the applicant without the need for appeal within twelve months of the withdrawal date.

It should be noted that individuals may choose not to notify Communities when circumstances change, or they no longer require housing assistance. Therefore, reassessment of the application is essential to the integrity of the list ensuring applicants remain eligible for assistance.

25. The Department of Communities expedite the independent review of operational practices regarding evictions from public housing, and publish the review's interim and final results.

Supported in principle

Eviction is a last resort for the Department of Communities. Communities works with tenants to ensure they are given every opportunity to rectify the issues impacting on their tenancy. This includes making appropriate referrals to supports and programs such as Thrive, which provides support to public housing clients.

Where a tenant is at risk of eviction, Communities will increase their contact with the client and link them with relevant support services to help address the issues impacting their tenancy and, in most cases, people remedy the issues impacting their tenancy.

Due to the State Government's sustained efforts to support tenants and reduce evictions, there has been a steady decline in evictions.

	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20	2020- 21	2021-22	YTD
Bailiff Eviction	315	293	159	167	93	7*	43	47

Table 1.

The review is progressing, including consideration of an independent body to have visibility of and provide feedback on any outcomes of the policy review.

26. The Department of Communities collect and retain data on the number of people on the public housing waitlist and priority waitlist who identify as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander.

Supported in principle

The State Government does not support a mandatory requirement for people to disclose their ethnicity or ATSI status for eligibility to social housing.

Communities does collect and retain data on the number of people on the public housing waitlist and priority waitlist who identify as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander.

When applying for public housing, it is voluntary for applicants to disclose whether they identify as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander (ATSI). Applicants in WA are not required to disclose their ethnicity when applying for public housing.

To support tenants who have disclosed their ATSI status, Communities provides culturally appropriate supports as well as engages service providers to help deliver sustainable, longer term supports.

27. The Western Australian government increase long-term funding and support for Aboriginal Community Housing Organisations, including supporting organisations to become registered as tiered community housing providers.

28. The Western Australian government require housing and homelessness services provided to Aboriginal People be culturally informed and led.

Supported

The State Government, through Communities has provided funding of \$150,000 to Shelter WA, to deliver the Aboriginal Community Housing Organisation (ACHO) Sector Strengthening Project to support capacity and network-building of ACHOs in WA. The project will also facilitate ACHOs working towards achieving registrations under the WA Community Housing Regulatory Framework by providing them with policy and procedure template kit.

Communities co-hosted an ACHO Sector Strengthening Summit with Shelter WA and the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Housing Association (NATSIHA) on the 18 and 19 July 2023. Communities funded ACHOs from regional and remote areas to come together for the first time to discuss priorities for their sector, including establishing a WA ACHO Strategy and ACHO Peak Body.

A WA ACHO Strategy is being developed by Communities in collaboration with Shelter WA and the ACHO sector, to inform the WA Government's implementation of the Closing the Gap Sector Strengthening Plan. The strategy will provide a high-level roadmap to guide capacity building and growth of the ACHO sector for the next 10 years, including support for ACHOs becoming registered as tiered community housing providers.

As part of the Social Housing Economic Recovery Package the State Government has provided over \$22 million for the delivery of new builds, refurbishments and maintenance to ACCO's and ACHO's across the state, including critical maintenance that is being undertaken in remote communities, as detailed in the table below.

Organisations	Funding Stream	Approved Funding
Aboriginal Community Housing Limited	Remote Aboriginal Communities Maintenance	\$4,833,587.09
Echo International on behalf of Barrel Well Community	Remote Aboriginal Communities Maintenance	\$601,833.00
Kurrawang Aboriginal Christian Community Incorporated	Remote Aboriginal Communities Maintenance	\$1,890,808.00
Jamukurnu-Yapalikurnu Aboriginal Corporation (formerly known as WDLAC)	Remote Aboriginal Communities Maintenance	\$5,989,773.00
Menzies Aboriginal Corporation	Remote Aboriginal Communities Maintenance	\$294,695.55

Ngaanyatjarra Council Aboriginal Corporation	Remote Aboriginal Communities Maintenance	\$3,337,571.13
Aboriginal Biodiversity & Conservation Foundation	Refurbishment	\$4,012,022
Mawarnkarra Health Service	Refurbishment	\$497,909.00
Murchison Region Aboriginal Corporation	Refurbishment	\$239,567
Noongar Mia Mia	Refurbishment	\$191,542
Southern Aboriginal Corporation	Refurbishment	\$742,207
The Goldfields Indigenous Housing Organisation (GIHO)	Refurbishment	\$147,490.00

Table 2. List of ACHO and ACCO SHERP Recipients

As a signatory to the National Closing the Gap Agreement the State Government is committed to eliminating the gap in outcomes between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australians.

Communities is the lead agency responsible for Socio-Economic Outcome 9 - Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people secure appropriate, affordable housing that is aligned with their priorities and need.

Priorities under the Strategy and the WA Housing Strategy 2020-2030 seek to improve Aboriginal wellbeing with direct impact on achieving whole-of-government priority targets, including Closing the Gap Socio-Economic Outcome 9.

Since the launch of the Strategy, the State Government has implemented a number of programs to deliver ACCO-led culturally appropriate housing and homelessness support Aboriginal people experiencing homelessness and/or seeking housing assistance including:

- Aboriginal Housing First Support Service
- Boorloo Biddee Mia
- Funding for the delivery of three additional Aboriginal Short Stay Accommodation Services

The following strategies outline the Government's commitment to elevating the empowerment of Aboriginal people and building a self-sustained ACCO sector.

This includes the Aboriginal Empowerment Strategy sets out how the State Government will direct its efforts towards a future in which all Aboriginal people, families and communities are empowered and choose their own futures from a secure foundation.

The Strategy outlines a high-level framework for future State Government policies, plans, initiatives and programs that contribute to better outcomes for Aboriginal people, built around genuine partnerships and engagement with Aboriginal people, strong accountability, and culturally responsive ways of working.

Additionally, Communities' ACCO Strategy 2022 – 2032 has been developed to respond to the need to improve the way that Communities procures and delivers services to Aboriginal children, families, and communities, while supporting the empowerment of ACCOs through creating opportunities to deliver place-based culturally appropriate services across WA.

Through collaboration, the ACCO Strategy will drive the way that Communities and Aboriginal people work together to ensure a collective approach to improve service delivery. Communities' approach will support ACCOs to build a self-sustained sector that lasts for generations to come.

29. The Department of Communities' commissioning process for homelessness services be informed by all of the priorities of All Paths Lead to a Home: Western Australia's 10-Year Strategy on Homelessness 2020–2030, including Housing First.
30. The Department of Communities include in new homelessness services contracts a provision for the necessary costs of safe and effective service delivery such as adequate staffing levels and security.
31. The Department of Communities review the extent to which existing indexation provisions in homelessness services contracts adequately reflect the costs of service delivery.
32. The Department of Communities' commissioning process deliver homelessness services contracts that accurately reflect the costs of contemporary service delivery.
33. The Western Australian government provide funding for homelessness services that adequately reflects the cost of transitioning from existing service delivery models to a full implementation of Housing First.

Supported in principle

The State Government has already implemented a number of initiatives that are aligned with the Housing First approach, with further new co-designed pilot programs currently being evaluated, including:

- Housing First Homelessness Initiative
- By Name List and A-Z methodology
- Djuripiny Mia 100 Supportive Landlord Model
- Boorloo Bidee Mia
- Koort Boodja

- HEART and the Safe Perth City Initiative

It should be noted that Housing First approaches, in line with the first Action Plan are first being implemented in areas of immediate need, targeting people experiencing chronic homelessness.

As previously mentioned, Communities has commenced a commissioning process that seeks to transition the current homelessness service system to an integrated place-based person-centred approach that aligns with the Strategy and responds to the changing needs and pressures facing WA. As such, future funding decisions for homelessness services will be informed by this process and the implementation of the Strategy.

As part of the Agency Commissioning Plan Communities is working in collaboration with the sector, Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations (ACCOs), Elders, people with lived experience and government agencies to improve the current homelessness service system.

New homelessness services contracts will be developed to be consistent with the partnership principles and behaviours outlined in the Delivering Community Services in Partnership Policy and will include provision for the necessary costs of safe and effective service delivery.

The WA Government Indexation Policy for the Non-Government Human Services Sector (Indexation Policy) was endorsed by Cabinet in 2015 and revised on 1 July 2019. In consultation with the Community Services sector the State Government, implemented a blended rate of the Wage Price Index, with an 80 per cent weighting, and the Perth Consumer Price Index (CPI), with a 20 per cent weighting.

The 2023-24 indexation rate is 4.11%. The price index used is the latest available actual data for the Perth CPI and WA WPI as published by the Australian Bureau of Statistics.

34. The Department of Communities include an improvement and innovation clause in all contracts for the delivery of homelessness services.

35. The Department of Communities evaluate the effectiveness of any current improvement and innovation clauses in homelessness services contracts as part of the South-West commissioning trial.

Supported

Communities added improvement and innovation as guiding principles to all homelessness services contracts in May 2022. These guiding principles were accepted by the sector, and will be included in the future planning, design and delivery of community services.

36. The Department of Communities commissioning process for homelessness services develop options for ongoing collaborative approaches involving multiple

service providers that take into account the costs of delivering collaborative services.

See recommendation 4

37. As a matter of urgency, the Western Australian government fund more crisis and transitional accommodation state-wide.

Supported

Since the launch of the Strategy, the State Government has delivered significant investment into specialist homelessness accommodation services, representing additional capacity to accommodate up to 155 people experiencing homelessness in WA.

Additional support through brokerage is included as part of a number of homelessness service agreements. Brokerage provides flexible funding to service providers that can be used to appropriately help individuals, including the provision of crisis accommodation where needed.

The State Government recognises it may not be practical to service crisis accommodation in every region across WA, and that this recommendation does not reflect the demand or need in many regions. It is noted that crisis and transitional accommodation is also not suitable for all cohorts and therefore stable housing solutions are more practicable to meet the needs of diverse cohorts.

The State Government is prioritising investment and progressing on its clear commitment to the Strategy and Housing First Approach.

Short-term crisis and transitional accommodation services are an important element of the homelessness service system, the State Government recognises that access to safe and stable housing with wrap around supports is central to the implementation of Housing First approaches and is prioritising significant investment into long-term housing solutions.

This is demonstrated by the implementation of the landmark partnership program with Housing Choices 'Djuripiny Mia 100'. The program will deliver 100 homes across Perth, Peel and Bunbury.

To compliment Djuripiny Mia 100, the State Government announced the Regional Supportive Landlord in the 2023/24 State Budget to provide 100 supportive landlord homes for people experiencing rough sleeping in regional WA.

The State Government invested in a range of other initiatives to increase short-term accommodation including;

- Funding to increase capacity at St Bartholomew Future Homes and Brown Street Homelessness Accommodation facilities to boost short and medium term supported accommodation. The funding will assist St Bart's in expanding the availability of

homeless accommodation in Perth by 18 new beds and enabling them to offer specialised case management and support.

- Koort Boodja which, consistent with a Housing First approach, provides low barrier supported accommodation. Koort Boodja was established following the success of Uniting WA's Beds for Change initiative.
- Announced in January 2021, funding to Youth Futures to deliver a new Teenagers in Need of Crisis Accommodation facility in the Perth northern suburbs for young people experiencing, or at risk of experiencing, homelessness.

38. The Western Australian government fund more 24/7 crisis services offering engagement and referral.

Noted

The State Government notes it is not practical to deliver additional 24-hour homelessness engagement and referral services as many homelessness services do not operate 24-hours a day. Furthermore, intake processes are carefully managed by specialist homelessness services to ensure the safety of all clients and staff.

However, EntryPoint, delivered by Centrecare Inc is a free assessment and referral service available to assist people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness to access a range of accommodation and support options, including individuals and families escaping domestic violence. The service operates state-wide, providing homelessness assistance in regional areas.

Communities Crisis Care Unit also delivers the Crisis Care Helpline providing after hours information and referrals for people experiencing crisis and advice around homelessness services. People experiencing Family and Domestic Violence may also contact Crisis Care to discuss accommodation assistance and support services. Crisis Care is a free state-wide 24-hour service.

The Women's Domestic Violence Helpline is a state-wide 24-hour service. This service provides support for women, with or without children, who are experiencing family and domestic violence. This includes information and advice, referral to local advocacy and support services, liaison with police if necessary, assessing the child's experience if there are children in the family and support in escaping situations of family and domestic violence. The service can refer women to safe accommodation if required.

39. The Western Australian government fund another Kalgoorlie Summer Support Hub, a successful collective impact support and engagement centre in Kalgoorlie.

Supported

The Kalgoorlie Summer Response Strategy has been funded until 30 June 2024, future funding will be assessed through budgetary processes.

40. All people experiencing homelessness in Western Australia have access to a case manager.

Not Supported

It should be noted that while effective case management is an important tool for addressing homelessness, not all specialist homelessness services utilise a case management model and not all people experiencing homelessness require or choose to work with a case worker.

It is necessary to have a range of supports available to individuals that address different needs and requirements, including services that can assist clients who do not want to work with a caseworker.

41. The Department of Communities collaborate with local governments to coordinate homelessness services in local government areas through a Local Communities Coordination program or similar

Noted

The State Government notes local governments in large city areas have a greater capacity to engage and collaborate with stakeholders in responding to homelessness. Most local governments are well placed to facilitate the delivery of housing projects, working with their local communities and State Government.

The State Government is committed to strengthening coordinated and collaborative responses to homelessness that put people at the centre. Communities continues to work to work alongside local governments and support them in responding to homelessness through the delivery of coordinated outreach. The HEART program and Communities Homelessness Coordinators work with local governments in key locations to deliver on the ground homelessness responses in areas of need.

Additionally, State government has established the Housing First Homelessness Advisory Group which is comprised of diverse community and Government sector experts. The 17-member Advisory Group features representation of service providers and advocates from across the sector, Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations, Local Government, and lived experienced.

Further, Rough Sleeper Coordination Groups have been established and rolled out across the Housing First Homeless Initiative regions including Bunbury, Rockingham, Geraldton, Mandurah and Perth metropolitan area. These new arrangements deliver a more coordinated Housing First approach, improving homelessness responses.

The purpose of the RSCGs is to facilitate collaboration across agencies to address support, accommodation and housing needs for people experiencing homelessness, specifically rough sleeping or chronic homelessness.

Members of the RSCGs include representatives of community services relevant to the target cohort operating within the locality. This includes homelessness, health, mental health and drug and alcohol services. The aim is to strengthen collaboration between government and community service organisations to facilitate greater contribution to and understanding of the By-Name List, in particular, the needs of people experiencing homelessness in each community.

42. Wherever possible, the Department of Communities consult people with lived experience of homelessness in the design and delivery of homelessness services.

Supported

The Strategy is a whole-of-community response developed in partnership with the community services sector, people with lived experience and all levels of government. Conversations, interviews and online feedback from people with lived experience formed key aspects of the evidence base of the Strategy to ensure their voices are heard, elevated and experiences inform policy and service responses.

The Housing First Homelessness Advisory Group is also comprised of diverse community and Government sector experts. The membership also includes people with personal or family lived experience of homelessness and those who deliver or have delivered services in regional and remote areas of WA.

As part of the Agency Commissioning Plan, Communities is working in collaboration with the sector, Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations (ACCOs), Elders, people with lived experience and government agencies to improve the current homelessness service system, including transition to a Housing First approach that aligns with the Strategy.

43. The Western Australian government increase funding for peer support workers in homelessness services.

Supported in principle

The State Government notes individuals with complex needs often require services with trained and qualified staff with specialist skills to ensure the safety of clients and staff.

Consideration of the roles of peer support workers will be given where it is appropriate and there is demonstrated need.

44. The Western Australian government extend funding for medical respite centres for people experiencing homelessness in areas of the state other than central Perth.

Noted

The East Metropolitan Health Service has been working in partnership with a Consortium to pilot the 20-bed medical respite centre (MRC) centrally located in Perth, led by Homeless Healthcare (HHC), Ruah Community Services and Uniting WA since 2021. Evaluation findings of the current pilot project will inform future planning and proposals for short term post-hospital accommodation such as medical respite centres outside of central Perth.

45. The Western Australian government allocate funding for:

- a) crisis and supported accommodation for pregnant women and mothers with newborns experiencing or at risk of homelessness
- b) antenatal outreach services and follow-through support for pregnant women experiencing homelessness.

Noted

Women experiencing homelessness who are pregnant are recognised as one of the most vulnerable cohorts, where support and accommodation options are prioritised.

Communities funded outreach services work closely with existing services, including Homeless Health Care, the Royal Perth Hospital Homeless Team and the Street Doctor, referring women for medical care where possible. Outreach to increase engagement with existing antenatal services is also provided through the King Edward Memorial Hospital Strong Links program; and the Newborn Drug and Alcohol Service (WANDAS) with access facilitated through hospital staff on a case by cases basis.

46. The Western Australian government fund the continuation of the Mental Health Pathways Project or a similar program.

Supported in principle

Strengthening the integration of responses to prevent and end homelessness for key systems including, health, mental health, corrective services, education, housing and child protection is a key priority of the Strategy.

Communities continues to engage with other state government agencies and community service providers to strengthen pathways to appropriate accommodation and support services for people experiencing homelessness and mental illness.

47. The Western Australian government expedite the construction and completion of the proposed Aboriginal short-stay accommodation facilities in Perth, Geraldton and East Kimberley and investigate the demand for short stay facilities in other regional areas.

Supported in principle

The State Government is committed to the three additional Aboriginal Short Stays in Perth, Geraldton and Kununurra. The design of these facilities requires targeted engagement with Traditional Owners, Aboriginal Organisations and potential future users of the facility.

The Perth Aboriginal Short Stay will be located in Cannington and is in the build design phase with Architects Iredale Pedersen Hook preparing concept designs. Communities has been engaging with a diverse range of stakeholders from around WA, who may use the Perth facility, and this engagement has been positive and will ensure best practice design for the buildings and the service.

Building designs have been finalised for the Geraldton Aboriginal Short Stay. Communities is currently negotiating with a building contractor. Development of the Kununurra Aboriginal Short Stay is in the schematic design phase.

48. The Western Australian government increase funding for tailored prevention, support and accommodation services for young people experiencing homelessness.

49. The Western Australian government substantially increase investment in youth homelessness services, specifically programs that identify young people at risk of homelessness and provide tailored support or connect people to appropriate supports.

50. The Department of Communities develop a targeted, co-designed youth homelessness response.

Supported in principle

In the last financial year, the State Government budgeted \$22 million into youth homelessness services, noting that youth crisis and transitional accommodation represents over 34 per cent of the total capacity across specialist homelessness accommodation services including adults and families.

In the 2021-22 State Budget, the Government committed \$37.2 million to expand Home Stretch WA into a permanent, State-wide program. Home Stretch WA is a voluntary program to help young people leaving care at 18 to transition to independent living by providing extended support and resources until the age of 21. Home Stretch WA provides options for young people such as the Staying on Agreement and Subsidy to ensure young people can stay in their care arrangements until the age of 21, as well as access to a Housing Allowance to help them afford a broader range of living arrangements when they move from their care arrangement. When accessing this financial support, there is an emphasis on providing the young person with the skills and supports they need to secure and maintain safe and stable housing. These payments are administered by the Department of Communities.

In alignment with the National Housing Homelessness Agreement, the Strategy recognises young people as a key cohort with a focus on early intervention and prevention.

The Strategy seeks to develop tailored responses for young people experiencing, or at risk of, homelessness. More broadly, the Department of Communities At Risk Youth Strategy 2022 - 2027, acknowledges the importance of support for young people with complex and multiple problems who are most at risk of requiring intervention and aims to work with these young people, their families, and communities to improve their futures.

Focus Area One, 'Partnerships, collaboration and integrated responses' and Focus Area Two, 'Targeted initiatives to improve long term outcomes', of the At Risk Strategy include Outcomes and Actions that acknowledge and address the importance of connecting at-risk young people with a variety of supports across government agency and sector initiatives to strengthen culturally and trauma informed responses for at risk young people.

51. The Western Australian government take all steps necessary to ensure people with mental illness who are discharged from hospitals, correctional facilities or institutional care receive a comprehensive mental health discharge plan, and have access to transitional housing.

Supported in principle

The Strategy recognises people experiencing or at risk of homelessness often interact with services across government including those funded or directly provided by Justice, Mental Health, Health, Education and WA Police Force.

As the lead agency responsible for homelessness in WA, Communities is working collaboratively to drive collective responses, including across multiple systems such as health, mental health and justice.

The mental health discharge planning from correctional facilities is a shared responsibility of the Department of Justice Primary Health Services, the Mental Health and Alcohol and Other Drug Branch (MHAOD) and the State Forensic Mental Health Service (SFMHS)

Prison In-Reach Transition Team (PIRTT) services provided by the North Metropolitan Health Service.

The PIRTT provides a specialised mental health transition service for persons who are within six months of release and who will require ongoing specialist care in the community. The Department of Justice's MHAOD branch have policies and procedures in place to encourage timely and effective discharge planning.

Discharge planning is a routine element of care provided by Health Service Providers to support transition from Hospital to other services. Patients identified as experiencing homelessness are supported by social workers and other staff involved in hospital discharge to facilitate linkage of people experiencing homelessness to established services, community resources, health care and other supports.

The Department of Health and the Mental Health Commission collaborate with Communities on issues related to discharge including referral pathways for complex individuals in the homelessness system to mental health accommodation services.

52. The Western Australian government improve dedicated pathways for access to public housing tenancies and accompanying support for individuals exiting prison and other custodial settings.

Supported in principle

As previously mentioned, strengthening the integration of responses, including information sharing across government is a key priority of the Strategy.

As the lead agency responsible for homelessness in WA, Communities is working collaboratively across the sector and Government, to drive collective responses, including across multiple systems such as health, mental health and justice.

Approximately two thirds of prisoners who engage with Transitional Managers are identified as requiring assistance with housing. Housing services offered include providing linkages and referrals to relevant accommodation services, temporary transitional accommodation, pre-release tenancy skills and post-release tenancy support.

When under consideration by the Prisoner Review Board for release to parole, prisoners are assisted by the Department of Justice's Adult Community Corrections in preparing a parole plan, which includes identifying suitable accommodation. The requirement for a prisoner to have suitable accommodation upon release is a primary consideration of the Prisoners Review Board in determining suitability for release to parole. If a prisoner released from prison on community supervision is homeless, adult community corrections will provide information about temporary emergency accommodation options and assist with applications where necessary.

53. The Department of Communities determine whether reporting requirements in homelessness services contracts allow for the optimal use by the Department of the data that service providers report to the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare.

Supported

Specialist Homelessness Services data collected by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare is regularly used by Communities to understand homelessness in WA.

The Specialist Homelessness Services collection is a national collection. Services funded under the National Housing and Homelessness Agreement (NHHA) are required to participate. The usual reporting tool is the Specialist Homelessness Information Platform which is provided free to agencies by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. Agencies can elect to use their own systems if they are certified as being SHS compatible.

As previously mentioned, a key objective of the Agency Commissioning Plan is to work towards a reduction in administrative burden with contracts.

Communities has commenced a commissioning process that seeks to transition the current homelessness service system to an integrated place-based person-centred approach that aligns with the Strategy.

54. The Western Australian government fund a state-wide extension of the By Name List.

Supported in principle

The Committee appears to misunderstand the functionality of the By Name List. The By Name list collects comprehensive data on rough sleeping homelessness for a defined geographical area. This information supports an understanding of what is contributing to increases and decreases in homelessness and enables Communities and local service providers to adjust local interventions to better plan for ending homelessness. The By Name List captures localised data and is not intended to provide one global figure.

The State Government recognises the value of regular and up to date data to track rough sleeping in the community to ensure coordination of appropriate outreach and support. By Name Lists are usually operated within a defined area where there is a prevalence of homelessness.

55. The Department of Communities and Department of Justice collect data about the post-release accommodation status (including homelessness) of people exiting prisons and other correctional facilities in Western Australia.

56. The Department of Communities and Department of Health collect data about the post-release accommodation status (including homelessness) of people exiting mental health facilities in Western Australia.

Supported in principle

The Western Australian government notes that prisoners released from prison to freedom have no requirement to provide a residential address as they are no longer subject to a legal order. This recommendation may not be practical to enforce as it may contravene an individual's rights.

As previously mentioned, strengthening the integration of responses, including information sharing across government is a key priority of the Strategy.

As the lead agency responsible for homelessness in WA, Communities is working collaboratively to drive collective responses, including across multiple systems such as health, mental health and justice.

The Department of Justice is exploring options for improved data collection for post-release accommodation (including homelessness) of people exiting prisons and other correctional facilities.

The Department of Health recently commissioned Deloitte and the UWA Centre for Social Impact to clarify the definition of homelessness being used across WA Health and review the trends in hospital use by homeless patients. Outcomes have included identifying options to better align definitions with national data sets, and analysis of hospital use for homeless patients between 2015-2022. WA Health is exploring next steps to progress work related to data collection for homeless patients.

57. The Department of Communities obtain access to the data collected in public housing applications (including demographic factors, housing situation and whether applicants identify as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander) for the purpose of informing homelessness service delivery.

Supported

This recommendation appears inconsistent with other recommendations to simplify the housing application requirements.

Communities utilises a range of data sources to understand homelessness in WA and to inform policy and key initiatives aimed at reducing homelessness, including data provided by clients on public housing application forms.

It is important to acknowledge the limitations on this data source as most applicants have a roof over their head while they wait to be housed. However, some of these applicants may be experiencing housing stress.

It is also important to note that the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander field is not a mandatory option for tenants to indicate as to whether they identify as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander. Applicants for public housing in WA are not required to identify their ethnicity when applying for housing assistance.