FEEDBACK ON THE SUBMISSION TO THE NATIONAL HOUSING AND HOMELESSNESS PLAN ISSUES PAPER

Upstream Australia is a NFP charitable platform formed to lead advocacy around place-based collective impact reform of Australia's response to youth homelessness.

The academics and sector figures associated with Upstream Australia are the developers of the 'Community of Services and Schools' model of early intervention or COSS Model and have contributed to research and development and policy on homelessness in Australia.

Upstream Australia considers that the present Australian Government's commitment to a National Housing and Homelessness Plan (NHHP) along with the next National Housing and Homelessness Agreement (NHHA) is an opportunity for significant reform of the status quo which has failed to do more than manage homelessness as a social problem. On reflection, the 2008 White Paper, *The Road Home: a national approach to reducing homelessness*, turned out to be a lost opportunity. That was 15 years ago.

This time there have been two Australian inquiries into homelessness during the COVID Pandemic followed by a Productivity Commission review of the previous National Housing and Homelessness Agreement. The Commission's report, *In Need of Repair*, argued that 'the NHHA had limited impact on preventing and reducing homelessness' and that this should be a major priority under the next agreement.

The Upstream Australia network is primarily focused on young people, who are a vulnerable cohort and one of the largest number of individuals who experience homelessness. Young people have their whole life ahead of them, so serious disadvantage and vulnerability may have long-term impacts, even life-long consequences.

Our feedback consists of this response detailing 10 reform propositions and some attached articles. Also, we have prepared 10 Strategy Briefs that unpack these 10 propositions further and provide advice with additional resources. The 10 Strategy Briefs are for the use of the DSS planning team and not for publication due to copyrighted materials in the packages.

Proposition 1:

ENDING HOMELESSNESS REQUIRES MORE THAN SPECIALIST HOMELESSNESS SERVICES – A WHOLE-OF-GOVERNMENT APPROACH.

Other departments are also implicated in the drivers of homelessness and contain opportunities to provide complementary funded responses to risks of homelessness and post-homelessness support. A whole-of-government approach requires formal coordination and cooperation at all levels of government relevant to service delivery, and requires a framework that provides a conceptual basis for the cooperation across government departments, operationalised in terms of responsibility and 'parts' in the whole.

For young people, a formal partnership between 'Education' and 'Community Services' departments is necessary for early intervention - e.g., the COSS Model - but arguably a strategic service system reform places young people at the centre of interventions and supports focused on the most vulnerable young people.

> Develop the National Housing and Homelessness Plan [NHHP] as a 'Whole-of-Government' framework and strategy.

Proposition 2:

PLACE-BASED COLLECTIVE IMPACT REFORM

Homelessness, as with other wicked problems, is associated with disadvantage that is resistant to amelioration whereby improved outcomes are achieved and the problem is steadily reduced. This is the case with 'youth homelessness'.

The articulation of 'collective impact' by John Kania and Mark Kramer in 2011 combined the concept of community-building, or community development which has a history going back to the 1970s, with a focus of social problem solving and the achievement of measurable outcomes.

The Collective Impact framework emphasises a community vision for a changed system, shared measurement, stakeholders working together to provide mutually reinforcing activities and interventions, transparent and continuous communication, and finally dedicated specialist backbone support, which for the COSS Model is provided by Upstream Australia as the innovation developer.

That the National Housing and Homelessness Plan propose a shift during the next NHHA from the existing status quo of crisis management to a place-based collective impact approach for young people, incorporating prevention, a local crisis response, and community-based housing options.

Proposition 3:

ENTRY POINTS INTO THE SPECIALIST HOMELESSNESS SERVICE SYSTEM

Multiple regional entry points are a measure that shifts Specialist Homelessness Services to a more place-based operating system. While it does not create a deeply integrated local service system, it does foster collaboration amongst services and requires cooperation.

Is a single-entry point adequate? A single-entry point will be able to direct people to available accommodation somewhere within a city or even a state but that tends to facilitate transience.

Should there be only generic entry points and or specialist entry points? In the Victorian homelessness system, some communities decided to have a separate youth entry point.

Do entry points provide an early intervention response? In general, the answer is 'no', however, there is an argument that a funded early intervention worker stationed at the youth entry point would strengthen the overall early intervention response.

Entry Points into the Specialist Homelessness Service system – Develop regional and sub-regional youth entry points for homelessness services as a place-based system reform initiative based on the Victorian experience with Opening Doors.

Proposition 4:

PREVENTION OF YOUTH-HOMELESSNESS

Australia was the first Western country to articulate 'youth homelessness' as a distinct social issue beginning in the early 1980s and despite a lot of expressed policy concern and inquiries, what has been done as a result has been very under-developed.

In 1998, a Prime Minister's Taskforce on youth homelessness adopted an early intervention perspective leading to the world's first early intervention program, Reconnect, which continues to the present day at the same level as in 2003 – a legacy program with a longevity of more than 20 years (?).

The status quo for how Australia responds to youth disadvantage (homelessness, early school leaving, mental health, and young people who have been in out of home care (OoHC) costs hundreds of millions of dollars every year. There is a compelling economic argument for reform. The promising COSS Model is a well-developed architecture and tested methodology with demonstrably significant measurable outcomes, which cost benefit analyses demonstrate is cheaper than business as usual.

That the NHHP incorporate a major policy and strategic emphasis on 'prevention of homelessness', especially for young people, but for other cohorts in the homelessness population as well. For young people, the most promising system change approach is place-based and the 'Community of Services and Schools' model of early intervention or COSS Model that has demonstrated how it is possible to achieve place-based community-level outcomes in reduced risk of homelessness and reduced entry into the homelessness service system.

Proposition 5:

DEVELOP SOCIAL HOUSING FOR YOUTH AS YOUTH-SPECIFIC SOCIAL HOUSING FOR HOMELESSNESS OR AT-RISK YOUNG PEOPLE.

Young people experience the highest rate of homelessness according to the Australian Bureau of Statistics – nearly double the overall rate of homelessness for the Australian population, twice the rate of people 55-64 years, and three times the rate for 65-74 year-olds.

Despite the expressed demand from young people presenting to homelessness services - about 15 percent of all clients and six out of ten of all single individuals who seek help - young people (15-24 years) are only about 3 percent of the main tenants of social housing, and 4.7 percent of tenants of community housing (a slightly better outcome).

The problem of young people's access and the mismatch of need with the supply of appropriate supported housing, unfortunately, in large part, is because low-income young people with support needs do not readily fit with the business model of the mainstream community housing sector. What works for low-income adults and families does not work well for young people on the lowest income entitlements and with various developmental issues and needs.

> Priority development of 'social housing for youth', with an appropriate needs-based allocation of housing funds to develop accessible supported housing, linked to exits from the SHS crisis system in each community, or a supported housing option available to at-risk young people able to live independently and for whom it is not possible to live with any of their family.

Proposition 6:

YOUTH FOYERS MODEL: EDUCATION + SUPPORTED ACCOMMODATION

The concept of linking support, accommodation, and education, training, and/or employment is a vitally important component of transitional support to independence for vulnerable young people.

Youth foyers are a model of supported housing from the United Kingdom and France developed mainly as a response to youth unemployment around the beginning of the 1990s.

In Australia, foyers have been developed as part of the youth homelessness response. Foyers were strongly advocated through the National Youth Commission (2008) and there has been a steady development of foyers in all jurisdictions since then.

The foyer concept is that education, training, or employment is a criterion for residency at a foyer but supported accommodation is part of the package. Typically, an Australian foyer houses about 40 young people aged from 16-24 years, for up to two years, supported by about 11 on-site staff.

So far, the Australian foyers have been developed as special programs and in most cases as relatively high-cost built facilities.

> Develop more foyer-like supported accommodation, linked to education programs, as a housing option for young people leaving homelessness crisis services, in appropriate community settings, but more strictly as a supported housing exit option from homelessness crisis services.

Proposition 7:

RESPONDING TO CBD ROUGH SLEEPING APPROPRIATELY, PROPORTIONATELY, AND SYSTEMATICALLY IN THE NATIONAL HOUSING AND HOMELESSNESS PLAN.

According the Australian Bureau of Statistics, people sleeping rough comprise some 7636 individuals, about one third in the CBDs of Australia's capital cities out of the total 122,494 people estimated to be experiencing homelessness on Census night 2021 - 6.2%. Australia and the USA use very different definitions of homelessness, but an inter-country comparison correcting statistics for how homelessness is defined differently reveals that homelessness in the US is about 10 times the rate in Australia.

The policy focus on 'rough sleeping' cannot possibly reduce and prevent homelessness and it is misleading to claim that this approach is the way to end homelessness. Ending the homelessness of some individuals sleeping rough in the inner city is not the same as ending homelessness as a social problem.

People experiencing homelessness continually come into the city, and the more attention that is given to responding to homelessness in the CBD, the more people will gravitate to the CBD.

The US concept of 'functional zero' being promoted as the new way to 'realistically' end homelessness in Australia is slippery when it comes to whether homelessness is framed as the CBD rough sleepers, or the population of people defined as homelessness in Australia. The claims of the functional zero lobbyists about success in US cities need to be examined critically in terms of whatever evidence is actually presented.

Analysed appropriately and correctly, using Australian concepts and definitions, homelessness in the United States has not significant been reduced and the US homelessness system has not been able to develop a strategy around prevention to any extent.

> The response to inner-city rough sleeping needs to be systematic, focused on outreach engagement with the most chronic individuals with high and complex needs and with a practice goal of achieving Housing First supported housing with continuous follow-up; most rough sleepers who are not in this minority should be assisted to engage with homelessness and other services in communities (not the CBD) elsewhere, where there is some connection for those individuals.

Proposition 8:

CARE AND PROTECTION - HOME STRETCH - LEAVING CARE SUPPORT

The link between being a client of the Out-of-Home-Care system and a higher risk of experiencing homelessness has been well established since at least the 1990s. An estimated 30-60 percent of care leavers experience homelessness within 2-3 years of leaving care.

The Home Stretch campaign over nearly a decade has now achieved a policy for extended leaving care support until 21 years in every state and territory jurisdiction.

There is an extensive body of research on the care and protection system. Key extant issues are how might better outcomes be achieved and what is the appropriate level and extent of state responsibility for young people who have been in the care of the state.

> That
>
> (a) the Commonwealth-States/territories develop a common needs-based leaving care support model and package that ensures that no young people ageing out of care and who need to move to independent living will experience homelessness, and
>
> (b) homeless children under 15 years of age are guaranteed an appropriate response.

Proposition 9:

SUPPORT FOR HOMELESS YOUNG PEOPLE EXITING CRISIS SERVICES INTO PRIVATE RENTALS.

The levels of income that homeless young people are able to access has been widely acknowledged as seriously inadequate in the contemporary housing market. There has been an upward adjustment of Commonwealth Rental Assistance which is an improvement but not sufficient under the circumstances experienced by most young people exiting homelessness services. Various jurisdictions have programs to provide supplementary support for low-income private renters. Victoria has the Private Rental Access Program (PRAP), and NSW has Rent Choice Youth. A review of these programs is necessary and a more standard adequate approach adopted across all jurisdictions.

> That a Commonwealth-States/territories NHHP development project be undertaken to formulate a supplementary support package for homeless young people leaving crisis accommodation for private rentals based on the Rent Choices Youth initiative in New South Wales

Proposition 10:

IMPLEMENTING TENANCY SUPPORT EFFECTIVELY

Tenancy support as prevention is not a new concept or initiative. In Victoria, the Social Housing Advocacy Support program (HASP) has been rebranded as Tenancy Plus and now includes assistance to tenants in community housing. At-risk tenants can be assisted with a support plan to maintain their tenancy. In NSW, there are Early Intervention and Tenancy Support Services which, like in Victoria, are mainly deployed on a regional basis. The issue is not about the concept of tenancy support but access to this kind of support. Many people present at homelessness services having already lost their tenancy and become homeless. How can access to tenancy support be developed more systemically and become a more systematic program?

> That tenancy support is articulated as a key prevention strategy, but that the Commonwealth and the States/territories commission a research and development project to advise on the variation across cohorts, and in terms of where and how tenancy support applies in the course of the experience of homelessness.

THE COSS MODEL IN HOMELESSNESS POLICY DISCOURSE

INTRODUCTION

During the Covid-19 Pandemic, there were two parliamentary inquiries into homelessness which provide a complementary picture of the status quo of homelessness policy, programs, and issues in Australia.

As the 2018-2023 National Housing and Homelessness Agreement (NHHA) expires at the end of 2023, the Productivity Commission undertook a review of the NHHA, producing a strongly critical report calling for reform.

These three key official policy documents strongly raised homelessness prevention and early intervention, and highlighted the significance of the Community of Services and Schools (COSS) model of early intervention

INQUIRY INTO HOMELESSNESS IN VICTORIA

On 7 June 2019, the Legislative Council agreed to the following motion:

That this House requires the Legal and Social Issues Committee to inquire into, consider and report, within 12 months, on the state of homelessness in Victoria, and in particular, the Committee should:

- provide an independent analysis of the changing scale and nature of homelessness across Victoria;

- investigate the many social, economic and policy factors that impact on homelessness; and

- identify policies and practices from all levels of government that have a bearing on delivering services to the homeless.

The Final Report, released March 2021, details the findings and recommendations of this Inquiry.

The Committee reported on the COSS Model on pages 158-166, drawing from the written submission by Upstream Australia and several other collaborating

organisations and from verbal testimony given by

Several other written submissions to the Inquiry highlight the significance of the COSS Model and/ or recommend that the COSS Model be scaled up to additional sites, such as for example:

Gippsland Homelessness Network

"Keep children in school: The stability of school is a protective factor against chronic homelessness, it raises self-esteem, a positive social identity and leads to employment. By extending youth accommodation options to initiatives such as the Geelong Project's COSS (community of schools and services) Model and Youth Foyers the number of young people cycling through the housing and homelessness system will be reduced, the number of young people completing education qualifications and participating in employment will be increased." (p. 24)

Youth2 Alliance

"The Y2 Alliance was heartened by the successes of the Geelong COSS model." (p.8)

Bass Coast Shire Council

"Associated opportunities. Council is also collaborating with agencies and service providers in relation to the following opportunities: Partnering with service providers and local schools to implement the 'Geelong Project'. This initiative facilitates the assessment of risk factors for homelessness with young people in their school environment, and early intervention initiatives through service providers." (p. 9)

Council to Homeless Persons

"While primary prevention measures for homelessness are not particularly widespread, they have been shown to be effective. This effectiveness has been demonstrated both internationally… and in Victoria, where The Geelong Project screens the homelessness risk of all students in a small number of low socio-economic status public schools, an initiative that has been shown to reduce youth homelessness." (p. 23).

Mission Australia

Recommendation: "Increase funding for evidence based services that address youth homelessness such as the Youth Foyer or the Community of Schools and youth Services (COSS) model." (p. 3)

The Committee described the Geelong Project as follows: "The Geelong Project is a homelessness prevention program that seeks to identify young people from disadvantaged backgrounds who may be at risk of homelessness in later life" (p. 158) ... The model which underpins the Geelong Project is called the 'community of schools and services' (COSS) model" (p.159).

The Committee stated that "the COSS model should be expanded to other parts of the state. The evidence presented suggests that it will have substantial benefits, including reducing the incidence of youth homelessness and providing overall cost savings" (p. 166).

The Committee put forward the following recommendation:

Recommendation 19

That the Victorian Government provide funding and support for the expansion of initiatives linked to the Community of Schools and Services model, with a minimum expansion to seven pilot sites that will include four metropolitan sites and three regional sites. (p. 166)

INQUIRY INTO HOMELESSNESS IN AUSTRALIA

Following a referral from the Minister for Families and Social Services, Senator the Hon Anne Ruston, and the Assistant Minister for Community Housing, Homelessness and Community Services, the Hon Luke Howarth MP, the Committee resolved on 11 February 2020 to conduct an inquiry into homelessness in Australia. The Final Report, released July 2021, details the findings and recommendations of this Inquiry.

The committee reported on the COSS Model on pages 166-167, drawing from the written submission by Upstream Australia and several other collaborating organisations.

The committee noted that other written submissions advocated for "increased funding for early intervention programs including the COSS model". Several other written submissions to the Inquiry highlight the significance of the COSS Model and/or recommend that the COSS Model be scaled up to additional sites, such as for example:

Australian housing and Urban Research Institute

"A number of Australian communities (Albury, Northern Rivers and Mt Gambier and Geelong) have implemented place-based early intervention models using the regional, 'community of services and schools' model. Similar models are also being implemented internationally in Wales, Canada and the United States… Core to its success has been screening the entire school population for vulnerability on a number of indicators, incrementally re-engineering practice towards high collaboration across schools and services, a youth-centred family-focused practice and working at a community level using a pooled workforce of youth and family workers… There is potential to adapt Reconnect so that is is [sic] operated using a community based place based approach. (p. 48)

"Youth. Although this group already has services, continued work in improving preventative interventions is of high importance because of the need to prevent intergenerational homelessness… This means moving to a networked, flexible systems based approach which can respond to those at risk as well as those in crisis: Redesign systems from a siloed individual program approach towards a focus on a coordinated network of community-level organisations responsible for planning, access and outcomes measurement, using the 'community of services and schools' model, drawing on the learnings of the Geelong Project." (p. 10)

Mission Australia

"The Community of Schools and youth Services (COSS) models, is an effective early identification model for young people at risk of or experiencing homelessness." (p. 20)

The Queensland Youth Housing Coalition

"Educational supports. In terms of educational supports for marginalised young people, the Queensland Youth Support Coordinator program/service delivery model and the Geelong Project are worthy of note." (p. 8)

Mallee Family Care

"Youth Homelessness. Early intervention not only saves money in the long term but also prevents the consequences of homelessness for many young people. The most promising evidence-based approach is the Community of Schools and Services (COSS) Model implemented as part of local system reform along collective impact lines… It has generated interest nationally and internationally and we would welcome discussion about broader expansion within our region." (p. 19)

Social Futures

"Another well regarded approach to early intervention and prevention is the 'community of schools and services' or COSS approach, initially established in Geelong. This model offers an integrated place-based 'collective impact' form of support for vulnerable youth and families…" (p. 15)

Yfoundations

"Recommendation 8: More investment is needed into early intervention, including Communities of Schools and Services (COSS) models. Funding and expanding early intervention programs could save young people from the harmful effects of homelessness, school disengagement, and poor mental health." (p. 6)

In the section 'Committee comment', under the subheading 'Prevention and early intervention', the Committee acknowledged that 'prevention and early intervention are critically important elements of efforts to overcome homelessness' (p. 206) and that 'prevention and early intervention initiatives represent the most effective and cost-efficient approaches to addressing homelessness' (p. 206). The committee then states:

4.229 While there was general support among stakeholders for existing early intervention programs such as Reconnect, evidence to the inquiry also suggested that the effectiveness of these programs could be improved with better coordination and cooperation across governments and services sectors, and with local community organisations. (p. 206)

4.230 The Committee therefore considers that there is a role for the Australian Government to work with the states and territories and others to identify opportunities for a more integrated approach to prevention and early intervention, which focuses on 'place-based' approaches. (p.206)

4.231 This should include the development of a strategic framework for prevention and early

intervention, and work to identify what structural supports may be required to facilitate a broader rollout of 'place based' programs across Australia. It could also include funding for research and pilot programs, including programs based on the COSS model. (p. 206-207)

The committee put forward the following recommendation:

Recommendation 27

4.234 The Committee recommends that the Australian Government work with state, territory and local governments and community organisations to develop a more integrated 'place-based' approach to homelessness prevention and early intervention. This should include:

- establishing a national strategic framework for prevention and early intervention, setting out targets, roles and responsibilities, data collection and reporting requirements, and evaluation;

- identifying the structural support and resources required to support 'place-based' programs; and

- funding for 'place-based' research and pilot programs. Recognising the importance of stopping homelessness early in life, the Committee further recommends that there be a particular focus on prevention and early intervention of youth homelessness. (p. xxvi)

PRODUCTIVITY COMMISSION 2022 REPORT, *IN NEED OF REPAIR: THE NATIONAL HOUSING AND HOMELESSNESS AGREEMENT*

Released 30 September 2022, this review examined how well the Australian Commonwealth and State and Territory jurisdictions "have achieved the objectives, outcomes and outputs set out in the [National Housing and Homelessness] Agreement, and the suitability of the Agreement for the future." The review stated that "the NHHA has had limited impact on preventing and reducing homelessness" (p. 203).

Young people are a key priority target cohort in the NHHA. Under the heading 'Early Support for Young People', the review states that "while prevention and early intervention is important for all cohorts, it is particularly important for young people" (p.208). In identifying programs for the prevention of youth homelessness, the review states that an "example of a promising program is the Community of Schools and Services (COSS) model (box 6.8).

Box 6.8 - Community of Schools and Services Model

The Community of Schools and Services (COSS) model is an approach to early intervention in youth homelessness where schools and community services collaborate to screen students and identify those at risk of homelessness to provide them with support. The COSS model has four core foundations:

- Community collaboration - early intervention workers and school welfare staff make referral decisions together. The COSS model promotes community collaboration as a necessary condition for improving the local support system.

- Early identification through population screening - all students participate in the screening process and complete the Australian Index of Adolescent Development survey every year. Their responses are used to compute a series of three indicators to rigorously identify which students are at-risk of homelessness or disengagement from school.

- Longitudinal outcomes measurement - there is a whole of community approach to measuring outcomes for young people. Outcomes are measured across the community cohort of at-risk young people over time.

- Flexible and responsive practice framework - there are three levels of responses: active monitoring; short-term support; and wrap-around case management for complex cases. Where case work is required, it takes a youth-focused and family-centred case management approach. Schools and services will work together with the young person and their family.

The Geelong project is the first program to apply the COSS model. An evaluation found that between 2013–2016:

- the number of adolescents entering the SHS system had declined by 40 per cent
- the number of adolescents leaving school early had declined by 20 per cent
- disengaged from school had declined by almost 50 per cent.

The social return was estimated to be $5 for every $1 invested. The COSS model has since been adopted in different communities, including The Albury Project and The Mt Druitt Project.

Source: MacKenzie (2018, 2020).

The Inquiry into Homelessness in Victoria recommended that the Victorian Government fund the expansion of the COSS model to more sites (LCLSIC 2021). As part of prioritising prevention and early intervention in the next Agreement (recommendation 6.1), governments should expand support for young people at risk of homelessness." (p.209)

The Productivity Commission Review recommended that 'prevention and early intervention programs should be a higher priority under the next Agreement' and that 'Australian, State and Territory Governments should establish a separate pool of funding for prevention and early intervention programs to address the causes of homelessness for the main 'at risk' cohorts, including but not limited to people leaving health and correctional facilities and care, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, young people and people needing support to maintain their tenancy'.

CONCLUSION

Each of these policy documents discussed in this brief strongly raised the need to prioritise homelessness prevention and early intervention, in recognition that the status quo of services is not working to prevent or reduce homelessness, or 'turn off the tap'.

The Community of Schools and Services (COSS) Model of early intervention has featured favourably in these three key policy documents.

Implementation of quarantined funds for prevention, dependent on the quantum of those funds, may just be the high-level breakthrough policy setting to achieve a higher priority for early intervention in practice and ultimately achieve a more balanced homelessness system.

REFERENCES

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Redesign of a Homelessness Service System for Young People: A Place-based Agenda for System Change

The problem of youth homelessness is not in recession. Today, we spend more on homelessness services and assist more people seeking help because they are already homeless or about to become homeless than ever before. Every year about 40,000 young people on their own aged 15 to 24 years of age are supported and/or accommodated by Specialist Homelessness Services (SHS). Many other children and young people also experience homelessness as members of a family group.

This article discusses the findings and proposals of a new Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute (AHURI) research project, *Redesign of a homelessness service system for young people*[1] that is part of a wider *AHURI Inquiry into an Effective Homelessness Service System* and which includes cognate studies of two other population cohorts — older Australians and families. The project aimed at identifying and proposing measures that could, if implemented, reduce youth homelessness and lead to improved outcomes for young people who experience homelessness.

A premise of the youth homelessness research was that the most promising initiatives for system change are most likely to be found in some form somewhere among the many programs and services across Australia. Using purposive sampling, key informants were sought in community settings known for promising initiatives or innovation. Our approach to redesigning the homelessness system was not about constructing some imagined utopian future but about finding practical reforms and measures that promise to lead to better outcomes, especially where there is a strong evidence-base. These reforms are not just about changes to the SHS but what can be done prior to homelessness and for young people recovering from homelessness.

What is a System?

The idea of 'a system' is used loosely to talk about education systems, biological systems and the homelessness service system. If we want to understand the homelessness service system, then young people should be at the centre and all the parts of the system ought to interact because that is characteristic of a real 'living' system.

Taking this as a foundational premise, our research was strongly informed by systems thinking that conceptualised the 'system' as a place-based community of interventions, programs and institutions that affect young people, and are, in turn, affected by young people — an ecosystem around young people that extends beyond the SHS system. Of course, government policies, departmental guidelines, funding and contract management practices — and how these are conceived and implemented — also affect the local system, and what happens for the young people who need and seek help.

One way of conceptualising a system is the stock and flow model: the stock being the number of young people in the SHS and flow being the number of young people moving into and out of homelessness. This is a widely applied system concept which, in this context, directs attention to the ecosystem of related activities, processes, institutions and programs beyond the SHS system that are relevant to addressing homelessness.

Thinking about the homelessness service system in this way reframes how to imagine the provision of services. This system rethink shifts from thinking in terms of state-wide siloed programs implemented top-down in specified locations, to place-based approaches that work within a geographical community, mobilising community stakeholders and leaders to address specific issues and social problems in their community:

> *Place-based approaches seek to reform the usage and implementation of the resources available to a community to address specific social issues in that community, such as youth homelessness. Place-based approaches do not aim to focus*
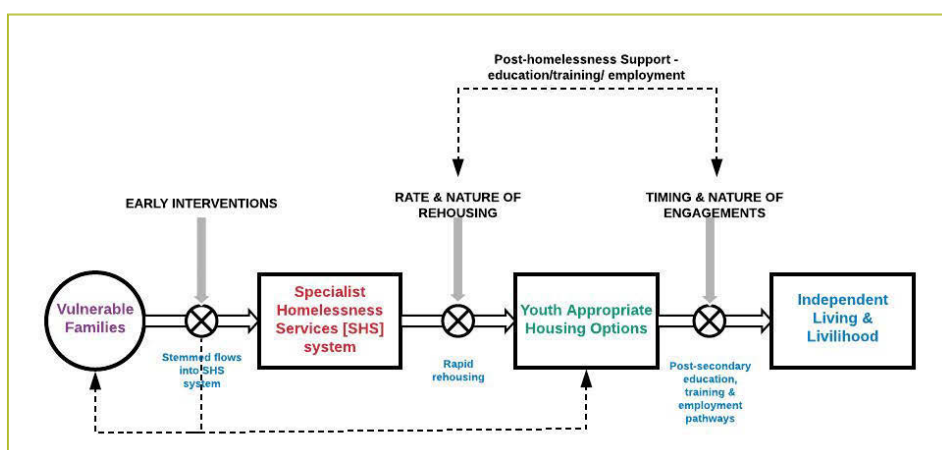
Stock and Flow Diagram

primarily on targeting individuals or groups according to program criteria, but rather, on bringing a community together to reform local systems to better redress issues such as youth homelessness.[2]

VCOSS has boldly advocated this same paradigm shift in its publication, Communities Taking Power:

Place-based approaches can be the key that unlocks the great power communities hold to develop and deliver innovative local solutions that help overcome entrenched poverty and disadvantage.[3]

A useful way to conceptualise system dynamics is a stock and flow diagram. The 'stock' — which is the SHS system, which is depicted in red and is the number of young people who become homeless and for whom the local service system has the capacity to support and/or accommodate. The 'flows' are the streams of young people becoming homeless and entering and leaving SHS.

The front-end perspective is about whether it is possible to reduce the 'flow' of young people becoming homeless by identifying who are they; why they become homeless and what measures could begin to reduce the number becoming homeless?

The back-end perspective is how to effectively and efficiently move young people who have become homeless and been assisted in the SHS system into situations where they are no longer homeless. If returning home with family members is not an option — and it is not an option for many — then moving as quickly as possible into a sustainable housing situation is the imperative.

The Main Findings
There are few surprises in the findings from fieldwork.

- The known drivers of homelessness such as family conflict and domestic violence have not abated; more young people are now referred to care and protection services than were a decade ago; housing affordability has not improved; and the issue of inadequate youth incomes and benefits remains.

- Young people leaving out-of-home care (OOHC) into independent living arrangements are particularly vulnerable to experiencing homelessness.

- Between 40 and 50 per cent of young people exiting homelessness services move into situations of further homelessness.

- The developmental needs of adolescents and young adults are an issue in terms of the support work — but also, particularly in terms of how young people might struggle to cope with a fully independent living situation.

- Engagement in education and training — as well as supported pathways towards employment — are a crucial factor in the future options that homeless young people may or may not have.

- Housing options for homeless young people are a subset of a broader housing affordability issue affecting the community and young people generally. Access to social housing remains highly problematic, and the very idea of youth-specific and youth-appropriate housing is under-developed at a policy level.

- On the ground crisis workers frequently say: 'we need more crisis accommodation' but while this is understandable from a lived experience perspective,
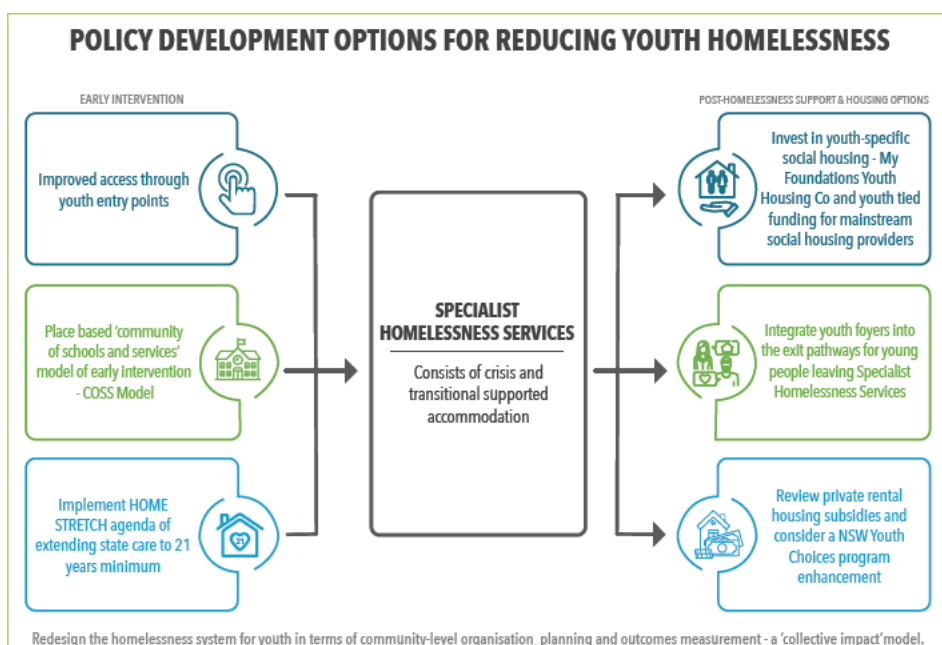
and perhaps intuitively, it does not amount to a cogent policy reform agenda informed by systems thinking.

An Agenda for System Reform
When the most compelling measures are considered this comes down to six key policy reform options. This is not all that there is to do, however implemented together and systemically, these would have a significant measurable impact by reducing youth homelessness with a problem end-point within a realistic line of sight.

Redesign systems with a focus on community-level organisation, planning, access and outcomes measurement
A homelessness service system for young people conceptualised as a community-level ecosystem of institutions, services, programs and supports, rather than purely the SHS, leads to consideration of new ways of joining up services and linking homelessness service providers with mainstream agencies, such as schools and educational programs. The focus becomes local programs, not centrally managed discrete siloed programs. Also, within a pre-crisis early-intervention framework, risk of homelessness and homelessness as experienced by young people is more evidently linked with other emerging adverse issues in young people's lives, such as early school leaving, mental health issues, or drug and alcohol issues. In practical terms,

POLICY DEVELOPMENT OPTIONS FOR REDUCING YOUTH HOMELESSNESS

EARLY INTERVENTION / POST-HOMELESSNESS SUPPORT & HOUSING OPTIONS

Improved access through youth entry points

Place based 'community of schools and services' model of early Intervention - COSS Model

Implement HOME STRETCH agenda of extending state care to 21 years minimum

SPECIALIST HOMELESSNESS SERVICES — Consists of crisis and transitional supported accommodation

Invest in youth-specific social housing - My Foundations Youth Housing Co and youth tied funding for mainstream social housing providers

Integrate youth foyers into the exit pathways for young people leaving Specialist Homelessness Services

Review private rental housing subsidies and consider a NSW Youth Choices program enhancement

Redesign the homelessness system for youth in terms of community-level organisation, planning and outcomes measurement - a 'collective impact' model.

Policy Options Diagram

community-level early intervention works across issues and thus needs to be cross-sectoral project.

Improved access through Youth Entry Points

A practical structural and organisational reform that potentially offers an efficiency dividend would be to develop local Youth Entry Points on a regional and sub-regional basis in all Australian jurisdictions. Entry points (Opening Doors) are an established feature of the SHS system in Victoria, and serve to simplify contact with and access to homelessness services. The entry point is provided by a group of services that meet together as a community-based network — and this serves to foster greater cooperation among local and regional providers. Although several communities in New South Wales (NSW) have created their own local entry points and South Australia maintains a central Youth Gateway, no other jurisdiction has so far adopted the Victorian innovation.

Invest in early intervention and prevention

There is a clear policy imperative to implement 'early intervention' to reduce the flow of young people into homelessness. The National Housing and Homelessness Agreement (NHHA) explicitly identify 'children and young people' as a priority cohort and 'prevention and early intervention' as a key focus. The long-standing Reconnect program embodies practice experience, while the pilots of the 'community of services and schools' (COSS) model of early intervention provides both an experiential and research-evaluation evidence-base for implementation to scale.

The COSS model is a place-based model for supporting vulnerable young people and families to reduce disengagement from education and early school leaving, and to help where family issues are heading towards a crisis and possible homelessness — as well as other adverse outcomes. The outcomes achieved by *the Geelong Project* (TGP) of a 40 per cent reduction in adolescent homelessness and, at the same time, a 20 per cent reduction in early leaving from school and education demonstrate what a place-based approach is

capable of achieving, and this is what has generated major interest nationally and internationally.[4]

The success factors of the COSS model seem to be:

- Local community leadership in one of the participating key stakeholders, ideally the lead agency responsible for early intervention support.

- Construction of a formalised 'community collective' via a vision-directed community development process.

- Population-screening that can proactively identify vulnerable youth and families before the onset of crises.

- A flexible practice framework that can efficiently manage proactive support to at-risk youth and their families, while still able to be efficiently reactive when crises occur.

- A single-entry point into the homelessness support system for young people who become homeless.

- A data-intensive approach to risk identification, monitoring and outcomes measurement using Michael Barber's 'deliverology' approach to using data.[5]

A systemic scale-up of this model of early intervention, incorporating and subsuming the Reconnect program work force, would itself have a major impact on the front-end flow into homelessness.

Extend state care support until 21 years

The disturbing relationship between OOHC and homelessness has been understood since the mid-1990s.[6] There have been many leaving-care initiatives and projects over the past two decades. Good practice knowledge about after-care support is well-developed — yet the net national effort to prevent this cohort of young people from entering homelessness has been inconsistent and remains inadequate.

The need to do more is the main message of the Home Stretch

Campaign which is 'a national campaign seeking to extend the current leaving care arrangements for young people in state care until age 21 years',[7] but on the basis of robust needs-based standards of care and support.

The Victorian Government has adopted the Home Stretch policy and programmatic requirements for 250 young people over five years. This investment of $11.6 million investment is significant, even if is not available to all young people leaving the care system. Based on the high proportion (variously reported as 30 to 60 per cent) of homeless young people who have been through OOHC, a full and effective implementation of the Home Stretch agenda in all Australian jurisdictions would have a significant impact on the number of young people becoming homeless.

Invest in youth-specific social housing for young people

Homeless young people on their own are over half (54 per cent) of all single people who seek help from homelessness services, but they are only 2.9 per cent of principal tenants in social and public housing in Australia.[8] The current business model of mainstream social housing means that providers are often reluctant to accept young residents because of their low and insecure incomes, and because they are regarded as high-risk tenants. What incentives or changes could increase the proportion of young people as residents in mainstream social housing is not clear, but if funding for youth housing were to flow to mainstream providers, those properties would need to be specifically quarantined for young tenants.

Another innovative option is provided by the Myfoundations Youth Housing Co. Ltd (MFYH) initiative in NSW. MFYH is a property manager that works in partnership with youth agencies that provide support to the company's social housing residents in the community. An innovation within the innovation is Transitional Housing Plus, a support model premised on a gradual preparation of young residents for independent living in private rental properties.

Over the first five years, MFYH has gone from three staff, an operating revenue of $300,000, 74 properties and 100 tenants, to 15 staff, an operating revenue of $4.8 million, 300 properties under management and 885 tenants 'housed with support available for those who want and need it' over that period. Nearly all residents (95 per cent) are engaged with support services, and about 85 per cent are engaged in education and training or employment.[9] The company was created to eventually expand Australia-wide — but that would require further government investment in other Australian jurisdictions through public housing stock transfers and a realistic share of new social housing investment funding, as well as private co-investors willing to partner with MFYH.

Integrate Youth Foyers into the exit pathways for young people leaving Specialist Homelessness Services

The Youth Foyer model has been widely accepted and supported as a housing model for at-risk or homeless young people, as it addresses their education, training and employment support as a condition for access to this type of supported accommodation. Over the past decade, Foyers have been established in many jurisdictions and there are now some 15 Foyers, or Foyer-like projects, which support about 500 young people (16 to 25 years) at-risk of homelessness or recovering from homelessness. As Youth Foyers are a relatively expensive model, there are some questions that need to be considered:

- Should Foyers strictly provide a pathway for young people recovering from homelessness? Or should they take in a wider population of at-risk youth?

- Are Foyers necessarily congregate facilities — as is currently the case — or would a dispersed set of units in a community connected to a nearby community hub be a cost-efficient option?

In terms of the place of Youth Foyers in a redesigned homelessness service

system for young people, their contribution to post-homelessness ('breaking the cycle') outcomes would be strengthened if intake were restricted to young people exiting the SHS system.

Enhanced support attached to Commonwealth Rental Assistance

Private rental remains a housing option for many homeless young people who cannot live with family members and who leave SHS accommodation and need independent housing. Commonwealth rental assistance is a major part of the social policy mix that is relevant to the response to homelessness. The levels of the rental subsidy and the youth allowance and Newstart benefits available to young people are matters of continuing public controversy. A promising initiative coming out of NSW is the *Rent Choice Youth* program that provides additional support to participate in education and training and encouragement to gain employment with the goal of eventually affording private rentals without assistance.

Putting it all Together

Successful policy reform and system change needs to be managed and sustained over the time it takes for the change to be fully implemented, likely to be at least a decade. The core of the reform agenda is to shift to a place-based, cross-sectoral approach to service provision. This can be trialled in pilot communities

and implemented developmentally. However, the funding and management of innovation pilots will need to be different from standard departmental program management practices. Reform is a challenge not only for schools and service providers on the ground but governments and departments higher in the hierarchy. Innovation in implementation might include a stronger approach to achieving measurable outcomes, a community-based approach to data management and pooled funding of the development process along the lines of a prime provider model. Stability is manageable because the status quo of programs and current practices can continue while new communities come on board when ready for change.

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Upstream Australia

Why Don't We Have a Strategic Approach to Ending Homelessness?

Generally, when social issues are regarded as a high priority, Australian governments develop social policy strategies that report against progress milestones. Examples include the *National Suicide Prevention Implementation Strategy*, the *National Drug Strategy 2017–2026*, and the *National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children 2010–2022*. These strategies have had bipartisan support. It has to be asked: why no strategy has been advanced to address homelessness?

The 2008 Rudd Government's *White Paper, The Road Home: A National Approach to Reducing Homelessness*[1] still stands as probably the most outstanding official policy document on homelessness yet advanced in Australia. The Rudd Government boldly declared that homelessness was a national priority.

By way of some pre-history, prior to the White Paper, the National Youth Commission's (NYC) report,

Australia's Homeless Youth[2] argued for the first time that *'with the right policy settings and progressive investment the goal of eliminating homelessness is achievable'*.

The homelessness sector was so optimistic about the direction of the White Paper. While it was not a strategy as such, it clearly implied that the next step would be a strategy and a plan for how, by 2020, homelessness would be addressed, and measurably reduced.

However, no such strategy ever saw the light of day. Instead of a homelessness strategy, there was a major piece of administrative reform involving the consolidation of several Commonwealth/ state/territory special purpose programs under a smaller number of broad Commonwealth/state/ territory agreements that reformed and simplified the pre-existing Supported Accommodation and Assistance Program (SAAP) arrangements and operations.

Today, the tattered remnants of the White Paper are subsumed under the current Federal Government's

National Housing and Homelessness Agreement (NHHA). Indeed, since the White Paper, homelessness has not been a high priority for governments of both political persuasions.

Is Government to Blame?

While government priorities and policies shape what is possible at any point in time, there are also other factors and other actors who bear some responsibility for the failure to address homelessness. If one is capable of reflexivity and self-criticism, culpability can be found closer to home in the homelessness and community sectors.

One issue is that the public tends to think of homelessness in terms of people sleeping rough on the street, and perhaps begging outside of supermarkets, simply because — although this is the smallest cohort of homeless people — it is the most visible. The vast majority of people experiencing homelessness are in some form of temporary shelter most of the time, but they are homeless, nonetheless. Media reporting on homelessness mostly serves to reproduce this problem. While there are periodic public awareness campaigns that attempt to change this public perception, the public is frequently assailed by some private charities that reinforce the notion that homeless is rough sleeping. Indeed, some advocates argue that responding to rough sleeping is the way to end homelessness.

There are also those who argue that solving homelessness is purely and simply an issue of housing — 'homelessness is a housing problem'. However, young people and families generally do not end up homeless because of a housing problem. If they do become homeless, then clearly

they have a housing problem. This line of advocacy makes a powerful claim because of the under-investment in social housing and the unaffordability of housing more generally. However, as a policy argument, it is a simplification of a more complex issue. Frame a problem simplistically and all you will get is a simplistic and therefore less than adequate response.

Finally, in the community sector there is a competition for scarce resources, where advocacy around the needs of young Australians must compete with those who seek to retain a focus on street homelessness, family homelessness, or vulnerable older women who are at risk of homelessness. Given scarce resources, this competitive marketplace is understandable and largely unavoidable. However, this has created an environment where special interest groups and some agencies indulge in excessive marketing and social media propaganda where glossy brochures and social media posts are splashed around that don't say much or report hard outcomes. Unfortunately, all this serves to misdirect government decision-making and undermine genuine efforts to develop an evidence-based homelessness strategy.

Calls for a Homelessness Strategy

For many communities, community service agencies and workers, the issue of homelessness has never ceased to be a high priority. After a long hiatus, the youth homelessness sector has begun to more assertively raise its collective voice. In early 2019, a *National Report Card on Youth Homelessness* was delivered, calling for a national youth strategy.[3] In March 2019, a National Youth Homelessness Conference, convened by Youth Development Australia in partnership with other youth sector leaders, issued a Communique that called for a Strategy Plan for Ending Youth Homelessness, and highlighted four key areas for strategic action — 'early intervention', 'rapid rehousing', 'engagement with education, training and employment opportunities' and 'extended state care'.[4]

During the COVID-19 pandemic, in June 2021, a reconvened virtual National Youth Homelessness Conference revisited the same issues but with a focus on what to do next. There was a consensus from the attendees that a strategy and strategic action was needed to make a significant difference to youth homelessness. A proposal for a strategy to end youth homelessness was advanced as a joint project of all Australian governments with non-government stakeholders and partners that would map out the strategies that could actually begin to reduce youth homelessness. Despite some encouraging interest from state and territory jurisdictions to fund such a venture, and support from with the community sector, the proposal has yet to find a federal government minister responsible for housing and homelessness who sees $400,000 as a value for money contribution in leveraging a major $1.2 million strategic and collaborative initiative.

The Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute (AHURI) reports on the redesign of the homelessness service system (2020) stand as the most recent research effort to rethink a homelessness response that could end homelessness in Australia. The main report, *Ending homelessness in Australia: a redesigned homelessness service system*[5] drew on three research sub-projects that examine the needs, issues and evidence relevant to young people,[6] older Australians[7] and families[8] becoming homeless. The main argument of this important research is for a radical rebalancing of the SHS — including:

- *'a focus on prevention and early intervention rather than a crisis response'*

- a *'duty to assist protocol'*

- a Housing First commitment for those experiencing homelessness

- *'an adequate supply of social and affordable housing'*

- a changed role for universal welfare services in relation to the SHS

- a reorganisation of services around place-based collaborations.

In addition, two major government reports have been tabled: the *Inquiry into homelessness in Victoria* report[9] in March 2021 and the Federal Government's *The Inquiry into homelessness in Australia* report[10] in August 2021, which discuss many of the same policy ideas.

As mentioned above, there is growing interest in the community sector about having a guiding homelessness strategy. In Victoria, for example, Melbourne City Mission commissioned a report from AHURI, the *2021 Final Report: Towards a Youth Homelessness Strategy for Victoria*[11] that recommended:

- *'a youth-specific lens'*

- *'an intersectional perspective … for both systems and populations'*

- a *'person-centred approach'*

- *'early and effective intervention … to mitigate longer term consequences'*

- that *'housing solutions are fundamental'*.

Most recently, as Australia heads to a federal election on 21 May 2022, Stephen Nash, a 30-year veteran of the homelessness and housing sector and the new CEO of Kids Under Cover penned a passionate but well-crafted and pointed argument in The *Canberra Times* (30 March 2022) that 'Australia needs a national strategy on youth homelessness'.[12]

Is Anyone Listening?

If homelessness became a high priority in social policy, then homelessness would be the issue that Australia used to have. Few Australians would actually experience homelessness due to an adequately funded, flexible, and outcomes-driven early intervention and prevention sector. Those that did become homeless would have crisis support and accommodation when they needed it but then be rapidly rehoused in a range of social and affordable housing options.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, Australia did relatively well by shelving partisanship and undertaking quite innovative, if sometimes costly, measures while bringing

the Australian community along. One can only ponder the disaster that would have happened if we had responded to the COVID-19 pandemic in the same way we respond to homelessness?[13]

There is a developing consensus amongst key stakeholders of the need for a national homelessness strategy in Australia.

Is anyone in Canberra listening?

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Youth Homelessness and Early School Leaving: The Twin Peaks of Youth Disadvantage

██████████████████████ Upstream Australia

Youth homelessness and early school leaving — twin peaks indeed! The problems of youth homelessness and early school leaving are intimately related, but you would not think so by examining how Australian policy and programs deal with these conjoint issues.

The response to youth homelessness remains largely a crisis response. Early interventions models are few despite compelling outcomes and economic evidence that highlights that a shift to early interventions would stem the flow of young people experiencing homelessness, relieve pressure on the crisis system, and also achieve educational dividends.

Early school leaving is framed as a school problem with various programs managed through departments of education, despite the fact that research shows that some two-thirds of the factors that contribute to educational achievement, or under-achievement, are due to non-school factors, such as family and community issues.[1]

Diagram 1 describes the dynamics of youth homelessness and early school leaving in a simplified model: Students who become homeless while still at school are highly likely to leave school early; and early school leavers, even if homelessness is not a presenting issue at the time they leave school, are more likely to experience homelessness at some stage in life. Both cohorts are at-risk of experiencing significant disadvantage longer-term and possibly life-long.

Youth Homelessness

Young people (aged 15 to 24 years) who present to Specialist Homelessness Services alone, that is, not as part of a presenting family/group unit, are a particularly vulnerable cohort and account for 15 to 18 per cent of all SHS clients between 2011–12 to 2018–19. In numbers, this is about 44,000 individual clients every year.

Young people presenting to the SHS alone in the most recent reporting period, 2020–21, reported several other risk factors,[2] which further illustrate the extent of their vulnerability:

- 59 per cent had been previous clients of the SHS at some point

- 71 per cent of these young people were not enrolled in any form of education of training at the time of presentation

- 48 per cent of the young people reported experiencing mental health issues

- family and domestic violence experiences were reported by 36 per cent

- 14 per cent of the young people reported drug and alcohol issues

- about 30 per cent of this cohort identified as Indigenous.

Young people (19 to 24 years) as an age cohort experience the highest rates of homelessness as estimated using Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) census data, while young people aged 15 to 24 years are the smallest proportion of main tenants across all social housing programs. This is a major discrepancy between the need for housing and access to social housing as a viable option.[3]

The total costs of health services and the justice system due to young people experiencing homelessness is about $17,868 per person per year, or a total annual cost to the Australian economy of $626 million.[4] These costs do not include the additional lifetime impact of early school leaving and low engagement with employment — which also has a financial impact on the economy.

As we argued elsewhere:

'The cruel reality is that the current homelessness service system cannot of itself reduce youth homelessness in Australia. We cannot delude ourselves in thinking that doing more of the
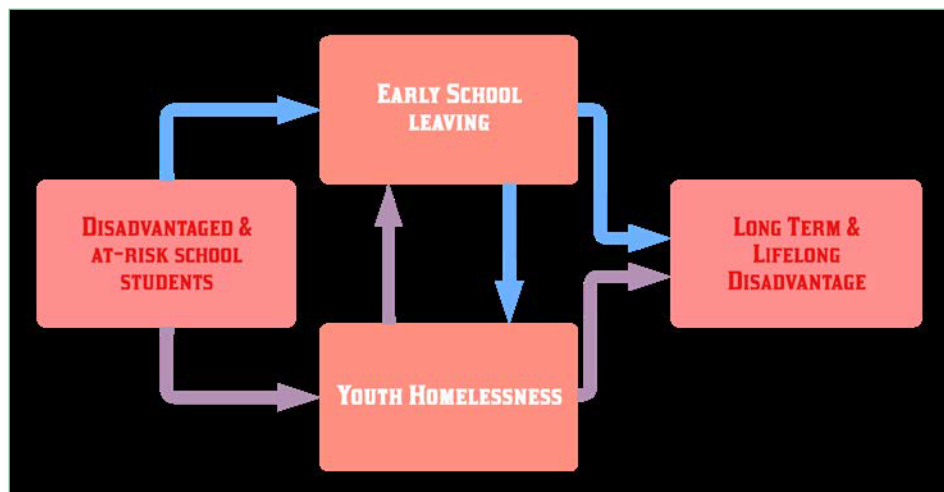
Diagram 1: Early School Leaving and Youth Homelessness

same will reduce and end youth homelessness. Youth homelessness remains an issue in Australia in part because of what we continue to do, but also because of what we do not seem to be able to do.' [5]

Early School Leaving

A significant minority of young Australians leave school without completing their Year 12 qualification and those who do not recover the equivalent of a Year 12 qualification by the age of 24 remain disproportionately disadvantaged longer-term, and even for the remainder of their life, with consequences including limitations to employment and employability, and increased risks for future homelessness. The problems of transition from school to work have tended to become more intractable and challenging for an increasing number of young people due to creeping employment insecurities, technological change, and the changing nature of work and the economy.

Early school leaving accrues high fiscal and social costs to the government and community. Early school leaving amounts to a fiscal annual cost of $8,400 per person and a social cost of $15,400 per person. Over a lifetime, this accumulates to a fiscal cost of $334,600 per person and a social cost of $616,200 per person. In total, over a lifetime period, the cost of early school leaving amounts to a fiscal cost of $12.6 billion and a social cost of $23.2 billion.[6] Youth homelessness is part of the huge social cost that accumulates relentlessly.

There are several useful sources of data (although with limitations), on early school leavers and what happens to them. A National Centre for Vocational Educational Research report analysing Longitudinal Surveys of Australian Youth data[7] found that:

a) about three quarters (75 per cent) of the students who left school before completing Year 12 had re-engaged with some form of education by the age of 25, mostly VET programs

b) about half (51 per cent) of the student who re-engaged with some form of education after leaving school early, entered apprenticeships and traineeships; another one-third (34 per cent) completed other VET courses.

c) the majority of disengaged young people who re-engaged with education after leaving school early do so within six months

d) parental support for further education and young people's positive plans were key factors in their re-engagement in education and training;

e) low socio-economic status was a major predictor of a lack of re-engagement.

Table 1 offers a model profile based on several available data sources.

The cohort of early school leavers who experience the most difficulty in transitions to employment are about 20 per cent of all early school leavers, although this is probably somewhat of an under-estimate of the size of the most vulnerable section of the early school leavers cohort.

Lessons from Victoria

There is a diversity of responses in the various state and territory jurisdictions to student wellbeing and welfare issues, including early school leaving and homelessness. The Victorian Government has been a leader in building welfare/wellbeing supports for vulnerable students. Over many years, the

Victorian Department of Education and Training (DET) has been actively embedding more student support resources into schools. The Geelong Project as the prototype of the 'Community of Schools and Services' (COSS) model of early intervention was first pioneered in Victoria and enthusiastically supported by the Minister of Education James Merlino. A business case was considered under the Victorian May 2022 budget and the Geelong Project funding was extended and a proposal for other additional Victorian COSS communities remains extant for further consideration.

When students leave school early, at a crude level, whatever schools have been struggling to provide by way of support is relieved — the 'problem' goes way. As pointed out earlier, early school leaving is framed as a school problem, which in part it is, but by making it solely a school and Department of Education problem is limiting in its approach. Is this really the only and best way to make a difference?

The Victorian Government's Education State reform agenda was and is an ambitious high-level policy for improving Victorian education. As part of this agenda, in 2016, Minister Merlino launched the Navigator program as a response to young people disengaging from school and leaving before completing Year 12. The initial investment was $8.6 million from 2016–2018 and a total of $52 million over six years to 2022. The outsourcing to community

Table 1: A profile of early school leavers

Early School Leaver Sub-Cohorts in Australia	Sub-Cohort Proportions of all early school leavers
Majority will transition straight into another education or vocational education course, training or apprenticeship, or employment.	50 per cent
Significant minority will not continue in further education or training but will transition straight into full-time or part-time employment.	30 per cent
Minority will be unemployed when they leave school but looking for work — essentially these young people are unemployed. At-risk of becoming NEET.	15 per cent
Minority will be not in the labour force, employment, or training. Transition straight into NEET.	5 per cent

agencies with the expertise to work with families as well as young people was a promising move, rather than just creating jobs within DET. However, no deep collaboration was developed between DET and DFFH around new structures and processes for cross-sectoral program administration and support. There were serious operational flaws in the program design.

The Victorian Auditor-General Office (VAGO) excoriated the Navigator program in its March 2022 report,[8] concluding that after five years, that *'DET cannot demonstrate Navigator is an effective intervention at a program level or that it is delivered equitably'*. Several recommendations were suggested for improving access and effectiveness.

A constructive critique of the status quo of many departmental programs (including Navigator), is that top-down siloed responses to address the complexity of disadvantage are architecturally and methodologically designed to fail or deliver with low effect. Top-down siloed responses fail to enable place-based and collective impact responses, such as developed through the COSS Model, where much greater responsibility is shifted to collectives of schools and agencies supported by real-time local data.

We have a Minister passionate about improving education, a place-based discussion paper issued by the Victorian Government in 2020, and Victorian communities engaged in active reform advocacy and community building. And yet, we are trapped in a bureaucratic logic within which it is hard to reimagine anything but top-down siloed program responses. When it comes down to the level of program implementation, government departments congenitally persist in reproducing the silo problem and deploying programs which have low effect and/or high costs.

The Victorian experience provides some salutary lessons for other jurisdictions.

Early school leaving and youth homelessness are intimately linked problems. Therefore, the responses should also be linked. The challenge of a cross-sectoral/cross-departmental response is a difficulty that has yet to be faced. If we are to seriously test out how much more can be achieved for our most vulnerable young people, this is a difficulty we must confront. The problem of departmental silos, while challenging, is not unsolvable. A compelling way to overcome this challenge is via government funding collective impact initiatives. Is that not something a reformist government is capable of attempting?

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Thinking About a Strategy to End Homelessness!

██████████████████████ Upstream Australia

The COVID-19 pandemic lockdowns served to highlight the problem of homelessness in Australia, specifically the issue of rough sleeping, because where do you lockdown people who have no home and are sleeping in the street or their car?

As leading academic experts on housing have commented, amid broader 'devastating economic and social consequences' for Australia's housing sector, 'the COVID-19 crisis has only served to highlight deep and long-standing fault lines' producing triple crises of 'rising homelessness', 'growing queues for non-market affordable housing' and 'pervasive affordability problems' in the private rental market.[1] There is a substantial body of research evidence on both homelessness and housing in Australia (see AHURI Homelessness Inquiry projects).[2] So, it is not as if we don't know what to do to address this problem.

A change of government is often an opportunity for change. At the 2022 National Housing Conference, the new Minister for Housing and Homelessness, Julie Collins, announced the formation of a National Housing Supply and Affordability Council (NHSAC) and promised 'a comprehensive reform agenda' guided by a national housing and homelessness plan responsible to Cabinet.[3]

Over the period of the pandemic, two parliamentary inquiries were conducted: an *Inquiry into Homelessness in Victoria* in March 2021[4] and an *Inquiry into Homelessness in Australia* in July 2021.[5] These inquiries were followed by the Productivity Commission's 2022 review of the current National Housing and Homelessness Agreement, (NHHA) *In Need of Repair*.[6] The very title of the review encapsulates its key message.

Along with some others, we have been advocating for a national strategy for youth homelessness as part of a strategy to end homelessness in Australia.[7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13]

So, what would a youth homelessness strategy look like?

A strategy to manage the problem of homelessness is basically the status quo. It's not called a strategy; it is just what is being done under the current NHHA.

A strategy to end homelessness is different. Homelessness is not a congenital condition; it is a circumstance that many individuals and families find themselves in at some stage in their lives. There are multiple cohorts of people at-risk of homelessness and who experience homelessness. In 2020–21, 278,300 adults and children were assisted by homelessness services.

The architecture of a youth homelessness strategy must include prevention and early interventions ('turning off the tap') as well as crisis interventions of accommodation and support, and post-vention support and affordable housing options as young people recover from homelessness, as depicted in Figure 1.

Universal Prevention	Secondary prevention	Crisis intervention	Post-vention
Measures directed to whole populations. Family support; improved student support in schools; more inclusive schools; anti-poverty measures.	Selective prevention: focus on groups known to be more at-risk of homelessness; LGBTQI youth; young people leaving care; Indigenous young people; young people in low-income or single parent families. Indicative or targeted prevention (or early intervention): identification of individuals and families prior to crises — that is, The Community of Schools and Services (COSS) Model.	Specialist Homelessness Services (SHS) crisis refuges or support delivered during homelessness crises; outreach to rough sleepers.	Housing options and support for those recovering from homelessness. Rapid rehousing into supported housing, such as My Foundations Youth Housing or foyers; Housing First models.

Figure 1: The architecture for a youth homelessness strategy

The architecture for a youth homelessness strategy depicted in Figure 1 is premised on a sub-strategy for youth homelessness, given that adolescents and young adults have developmental needs and life course issues different from other adult cohorts.

Nevertheless, the architecture can be broadly applied to other cohorts within the homeless population except that content under universal and secondary prevention will, in particular, be different.

A homelessness strategy must have goals and targets and sufficient needs-based funded practical measures to achieve those targets and goals over specific periods of time. Just like the National Mental Health Strategy or the Family and Domestic Violence Strategy, a homelessness strategy must be developed and sustained over the long-term, even as governments change.

Homelessness is a complex issue. An effective homelessness strategy will need to be a whole-of-government strategy and obviously homelessness services and housing are key components. However, for young people, education is highly relevant. Health, specifically mental health and drug and alcohol issues, and justice affect all cohorts. A key question is how could a whole-of-government strategy be structured and delivered in an effectively integrated way? Whether policies achieve significant outcomes is determined by what actually happens at the community level, so how place-based approaches might be accomplished under a homelessness strategy is a critical set of issues for policy implementation.

Recent Historical Prevention and Early Intervention Policy Landscape

The case study of the Victorian policy landscape in Figure 2 shows that early intervention and prevention has been in the policy discourse for more than two decades.

In terms of federal youth homelessness prevention, the Reconnect program, the world's first early intervention program for young people at risk of homelessness, was a notable achievement when it was first rolled out in 1997. The last independent evaluation of Reconnect was 2003, although there was a departmental review in 2012. There are some serious limitations in the program design — there is no systematic method of identifying young people, thus a response is reliant on referrals from professionals/trusted adults — which inevitably means that many at-risk young people remain hidden or simply unreferred. It is possible that Reconnect has contributed to a plateau in the number of young people seeking help because of homelessness and that it is achieving creditable outcomes — but we just don't know. Some 25 years later, we are entitled to ask what can be done beyond Reconnect.

Looking back over the past 20 years from the standpoint of young people, Australian policy history is a story

2000	A Victorian Homelessness Strategy in 2000, promising a 'whole-of-government' response followed by *Youth Homelessness Action Plans Stage 1 and 2* which prioritised some good initiatives for young people.
2010	In 2010, an election year, a Victorian Labor Government proposed *A Better Place: Victorian Homelessness 2020 Strategy* declaring that: 'we want to not just manage, but prevent and reduce, homelessness. Preventing and reducing homelessness will not be easy, but we must act now'. Alongside this proposed strategy, was the 2010 *Positive Pathways for Victoria's Vulnerable Young People: A policy framework to support vulnerable youth*, also known as the Vulnerable Youth Framework, that articulated a cogent strategic approach for multiple youth issues including homelessness. Sadly, this policy got lost somehow as politics and policy moved on.
2011	There was a change of government at the November 2010 election in Victoria. The Baillieu Liberal Government produced the *Victorian Homelessness Action Plan 2011–2015*, announcing a 'fresh approach' and proposing 'action and setting the foundation for reform, with a focus of prevention and early intervention, innovation and partnerships'. Thus, there was a high degree of continuity in terms of policy rhetoric about early intervention.
2011–2015	The Innovation Action Projects provided initial funding for The Geelong Project implementation of the COSS Model, as a youth homelessness innovative early intervention and prevention model, along with Melbourne City Mission's Detour project, offering earlier intervention through an enhanced casework approach.
2014	At the December 2014 election, a Labor Government returned and the Government's agenda for homelessness was expounded in the Victoria's *Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Action Plan* which was committed to reducing the 'incidence and impact of rough sleeping' but also by 'intervening early to prevent homelessness'.
2018	The Victorian Government provided $1.2m for The Geelong Project, the first COSS Model pilot site in Australia based on evidence showing significant outcomes reducing homelessness.
2020	The *Inquiry into Homelessness in Victoria* report argued that 'Victoria's Homelessness Strategy must be reoriented away from crisis management' to 'early intervention' and 'the procurement of sufficient long-term housing'. The announcement of the $5.3 billion Big Housing Build represented a major initiative around social housing in Victoria.

Figure 2: Victorian youth homelessness prevention and early intervention, 2000–2020

- a commitment to firm targets for new housing supply, facilitated by planning reforms and better co-ordination of infrastructure

- better targeting of the $16 billion governments spent each year on direct housing assistance to people in greatest need

- transfer of the nearly $3 billion for first home buyer schemes to preventing homelessness

- trial of a housing assistance model that provides equivalent assistance to people in need regardless of whether they live in public, community or privately-owned housing

- testing of innovative ways to help people at risk of homelessness sustain tenancies in the private market

- assistance to social housing tenants to move to the private rental market.

of early intervention repeatedly articulated as policy rhetoric but seriously under-developed in terms of practical early intervention programs and initiatives, alongside the long-standing status quo whereby young people have great difficulty accessing social housing or adequate Commonwealth rental assistance in private rental situations. [14, 15, 16, 17]

The Future Prevention and Early Intervention Federal Political Landscape

The 2021 Federal Inquiry into Homelessness identified prevention and early intervention as the first of three main areas for reform: 'prevention and early intervention represent the most effective cost-efficient measures to address homelessness … acknowledging the value of work done to date through integrated 'place-based' approaches … further work to support, strengthen and integrate prevention and early intervention programs'. [18]

The 2022 Productivity Commission Review has recommended that *'prevention and early intervention programs should be a higher priority under the next Agreement'* and that *'Australian, State and Territory Governments should establish a separate pool of funding for prevention and early intervention programs to address the causes*

of homelessness for the main "at risk" cohorts, including but not limited to people leaving health and correctional facilities and care, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, young people and people needing support to maintain their tenancy'.

Implementation of quarantined funds for prevention dependent on the quantum of those funds may just be the high-level breakthrough policy setting to achieve a higher priority for early intervention in practice and ultimately achieve a more balanced homelessness system.

What About the Great Housing Challenge?

The 2022 Productivity Commission assessment of the existing and previous national housing and homelessness agreements is that they have been ineffective in achieving the stated goals of housing policy — *'a funding contract not a blueprint for reform'*. But what are the next steps in reform? The Productivity Commission advises that the next agreement should focus on improving *'affordability in the private rental market'* and *'targeted housing assistance'*. Specifically:

- a review of Commonwealth Rent Assistance to improve its adequacy and targeting

While these are all supportable measures, they are proposed in relation to the next agreement rather than the much longer term. The Productivity Commission's Review discussion of social housing is more concerned about its problems and limitations than the long-term benefits of significant long-term investment in social housing where government directly or indirectly develops, manages and supports many individuals and families to enter social housing when they need it, but move on when their needs change. Perhaps the issue of investment in an increased supply of social housing has been left to the NHSAC. However, the idea of trialling a tenure neutral rental assistance has merit.

And what about young people more specifically? Adolescents and young adults on their own (that is, not part of a presenting family unit) seeking homelessness assistance represent about 15 to 18 per cent of the total population that sought help from Specialist Homelessness Services (SHS) from 2011 to 2021, or about 42,000 to 44,000 individuals. About one third leave SHS crisis services into homelessness, and

only 2.8 per cent are the main tenants in the social housing sector.[19] About one third exit the SHS into private rental, but mostly into great rental affordability stress. The young people cohort experience multiple individual and structural disadvantages compared to other homeless cohorts.[20]

A Strategy to END Homelessness

It would be remiss of us not to highlight the issue of what 'ending' homelessness actually means. In Australia, we understand and define 'homelessness' as a continuum of experiences and situations ranging from being at-risk, to rough sleeping. In Australia, we do not just understand and define 'homelessness' as rough sleeping.

Of course, there is a need for crisis responses. But the point is that the status quo of the current crisis-orientation of the SHS system cannot, and is not intended to, end homelessness. This of course is in no way a reflection on the quality of crisis workers. However, Australia's experienced crisis workforce is working in a system designed to produce minimal outcomes that prevent people from becoming homelessness, or from relapsing back into homelessness.

From a systems-thinking — and logical — perspective, there is no possible way to end homelessness with policies, interventions, and funding directed at largely crisis responses and the targeting rough sleepers.

A strategy to end homelessness and a balanced approach must be primarily committed to prevention and early intervention (to stem the flow into homelessness), effective responses to rough sleeping and community-based crisis services, and an increased commitment to social and affordable housing capable of rapidly rehousing people who experience homelessness.

Summary

For a long time, homelessness as a social issue has muddled along without the driving commitment from a national government working closely with the state and territory jurisdictions. The meaningful evidence for what creates a watershed in a

social problem is having a strategy for how to deal with the problem, or at least a cogent long-term plan. Difficult social problems are never solved within the term of any one government, so bipartisanship and continuity over the long-term are necessary. Typically, frameworks across a range of social problems involve prevention and early interventions, a responsive crisis capacity, and post-problem options — a balanced approach that has yet to be implemented for homelessness.

There is no denying that the social housing deficit in Australia has been created by the neglect and under-investment by Australian governments over some 40 years. The cost of redressing this shortfall is many billions of dollars. Homelessness has never been a highly contested political issue and, while there has been continuity in funding crisis services through the Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP) and SHS, homelessness prevention and early intervention and affordable housing have not been accorded a high priority.

In need of repair indeed! The Productivity Commission has opened some important questions about reform of housing and homelessness in Australia. The report is by no means a blueprint, but the challenge is to mobilise the existing extensive research and evidence base on homelessness and housing, the input into two homelessness inquiries, and much of the advice about reforms, to produce a coherent homelessness and housing strategy or plan that will, ultimately, be able to actually end homelessness.

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Developing a Strategy to End Homelessness: Why Has Prevention Been So Difficult?

███████████████████████ Upstream Australia

We are drawing closer to a new National Housing and Homelessness Agreement under the Federal Labor Government. After a review of the current Agreement, the Productivity Commission's August 2022 report, *In Need of Repair*, issued a strongly expressed critique that it *'does not foster collaboration between governments or hold government to account … [being] … a funding contract not a blueprint for reform'*. The new agreement and the proposed National Housing and Homelessness Plan are proposed as *'an opportunity for governments to work together on a national reform agenda'*. The report argues that, in terms of homelessness, prevention and early intervention are key elements of the reform agenda.

Clearly, prevention and early intervention are major strategic issues for the response to homelessness. While this is an accepted premise with few detractors, the implementation of early intervention and prevention remains underdeveloped. So then why has so little government attention, planning, and funding been applied to 'turning off the tap' for the various cohorts in the homeless population?

The most common health sector prevention framework uses primary or universal prevention directed at the population broadly, secondary prevention directed to known at-risk cohorts (selected prevention) or identifiable individuals (indicative prevention), and tertiary prevention, which aims to prevent a problem re-occurring.

By way of translation, a somewhat more nuanced framework has been applied in the homelessness sector. Selected and indicative prevention are generally referred to as early interventions in Australia. Secondary prevention covers the range of supported accommodation and other interventions in the Specialist Homelessness Services system. Tertiary prevention refers to supportive housing models and other initiatives that seek to arrest the slide back into homelessness by people attempting to recover from homelessness.[1]

Some Lessons from the Health Sector

As a principle, prevention has become incorporated into modern health and social care strategies. In the health area, vaccines have been the safest and most effective way of preventing diseases such as polio, diphtheria, whooping cough. It is widely proven and understood that effective prevention does involve cost savings when the cost of prevention is compared to the costs of treatment (that is, the cure). However, Australia spends about $180.7 billion annually on health expenditure but only about $2 billion on prevention (1.34 per cent) or $89 per capita.[2]

Nevertheless, far more attention has been paid to cost-effectiveness and cost benefit analysis of interventions in the health sector. In the United Kingdom, the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence has been evaluating and documenting the cost-effectiveness of preventative health interventions for some 15 years. In the United States, the Washington State Institute for Public Policy has been identifying evidence-based policies and intervention across various areas including juvenile justice, child welfare, health care, and education.

The health area, despite notable successes and a growing evidence base for prevention science, has a record of failing to convince politicians and key decision-makers of the wider economic value of prevention. A major shift to invest more in prevention has yet to take place. In Australia, the per capita spend on prevention has hardly changed in recent years.[3]

Why Has it Been so Difficult to Shift the Dial Towards Prevention?

The logic of prevention is impeccable. The evidence base for the cost effectiveness of preventive measures is compelling and growing. Could it be a version of the urgent-important dichotomy? The political imperative for governments to respond to hospitals and critical medical care is a powerful and urgent pressure that comes from the sector itself as organisations and services raise issues about wait times and the constraints under which they work. By comparison, prevention is an important idea, but not regarded as urgent. Urgency trumps importance. Prevention reform is continually de-prioritised as practical decisions about implementing policy are made.[4]

Homelessness Prevention and Early Intervention

People who experience homelessness in Australia are a diverse population of sub-cohorts: People experience homelessness for different periods of time during their lives; for many, it is a relatively short period but for others it may be chronic circumstances that they experience and re-experience

multiple times. Young people/adolescents and young adults are a sizable cohort and, for them, the consequences are most likely to be endured for the longest time.

A housing crisis is usually not the cause of young people and families becoming homeless in the first place but, once homeless, if there is no going back, then a young person or a family definitely does have a housing problem. Of course, more broadly, Australia does have a serious lack of affordable housing and social housing on a scale that is not readily redressed in the short-term.

Building on previous work,[5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10] our primary focus is the prevention/early interventions that reduce and ultimately will be able to end youth homelessness. In a simplified form, Diagram 1 shows how the onset of homelessness for adolescents is intimately related to early school leaving. Students in secondary schools who become homeless while still at school are highly likely to leave school before completing Year 12. Young people who leave secondary school early may not be dealing with a homelessness crisis at this time, but they are more likely to experience homelessness later. A majority of adults who seek help from the Specialist Homelessness Services system turn out to be early school leavers. Young people, who

age out of the out-of-home care system are particularly vulnerable to poor social outcomes including homelessness, involvement with the criminal justice system, poor health, and heavy reliance on the welfare system post-care.

Early school leaving, youth homelessness and young people leaving out-of-home care are three deeply connected areas. There are recent credible Australian cost-benefit estimates available for each area, undertaken using different methodologies.

The first is the Australian Research Council-funded *Cost of Youth Homelessness in Australia* research. This research followed a sample of 394 young people over three years gathering specific information about their use of health and justice services, but excluding those associated with not finishing school. The research paid particular attention to measuring the demand driven health and justice costs due to young people experiencing homelessness. The annual per capita cost in 2016 dollars was found to be an average of $17,868 per person per year, or $14,986 per person per year more than unemployed youth. These costs do not include the additional lifetime impact of early school leaving and low engagement with employment. In

the published research report, for the 41,780 young people aged 15 to 24 years who were clients of Specialist Homelessness Services in 2014–15 and presented alone rather than in a family group, the total cost to the Australian economy of additional health and justice services was an estimated $747 million annually or $626 million annually more than for young unemployed youth. This exceeded the total cost (approx. $619m) of providing Specialist Homelessness Services to the 256,000 people (young and old) assisted by the system over the same period.[11]

The second major research program is the 2017 *Counting the Costs of Lost Opportunity in Australian Education* from Lamb and his colleagues.[12] Fiscal and social costs were estimated for both early school leaving and disengagement from work and study in the post-school years. For those individuals who miss out on completing secondary education, costs are generated because it affects their vocational prospects and their earned income and job opportunities. But it also affects decisions and behaviours affecting health, marriage, parenting, and their participation as Australian citizens. These costs accumulate as individuals who miss out progress through adulthood and throughout their working lives.
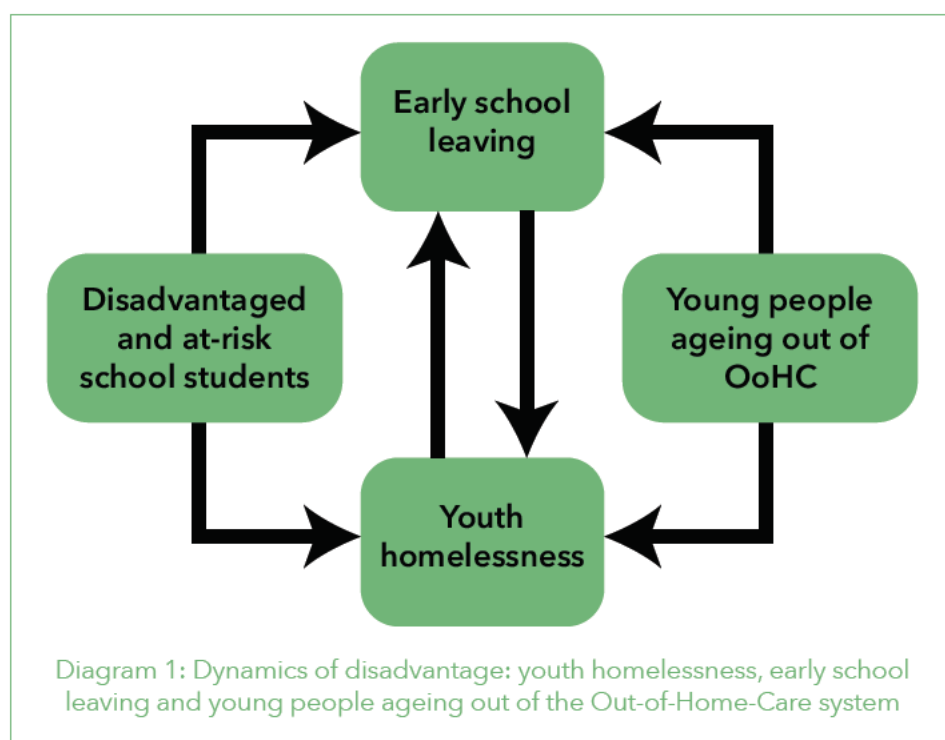
Costs to Australian taxpayers include reduced taxation revenue as well as increased public expenditure in the criminal justice, health, welfare systems, housing, and income support, and other services. Also, there are costs both to the individual and the community (social costs), in terms of personal earnings, the social consequences of crime and excess burden of higher taxes required for additional social services. The *Counting the Costs of Lost Opportunity* economic model estimated costs based on a range of data sources from research and published statistics. The model built economic profiles for early leavers in comparison to those who completed Year 12 or equivalent qualifications, and for disengaged young people in comparison to

Diagram 1: Dynamics of disadvantage: youth homelessness, early school leaving and young people ageing out of the Out-of-Home-Care system

Cost-Benefit Study	Av cost/ person/ year	Av cost/ cohort/ year
Cost of Youth Homelessness in Australia (2016)	$16,159	$675m
Counting the cost of lost opportunity in Australian education (2017)	$26,049	$981m
Analysis of future service usage for Out-of-Home-Care leavers (2018)	$27,144	$103m

Table 1: Cost Benefit estimates for youth homelessness, early school leaving and out-of-home care leavers, updated to 2020 prices

other young people. The quoted figures are 2014 prices. The annual cost per early school leavers was $8,400 fiscal and $15,400 social costs, amounting to a fiscal cost of $315.3 million and $580.7 million annually and $12.6 billion fiscal and $23.2 billion social costs over a lifetime. The costs are greater for young people who end up disengaged from work and education in their 20s.

The third study undertaken by Miller and Dixie from Taylor Fry in 2018[13] was commissioned by the New South Wales (NSW) Office of Social Impact to estimate the lifetime cost of government services used by young people, who have left the out-of-home care system between 1996–97 and 2014–15, and who were aged 14 to 18 years when they left. The cost-of-service usage over 20 years for an out-of-home care leaver was estimated to be an average of $496,000 per person. For the entire NSW cohort of 16,279, the total cost was estimated to be approximately $8.1 billion over the 20 years after exit from out-of-home care. The cohort of 1,386 people who exited in 2013–14 was estimated to cost some $683 million over the following 20 years. This was a NSW only study, so the cohort described in the report is only about one third of the total Australia-wide out-of-home care cohort.

Table 1 provides average annual per capita figures and annual cost estimates for the entire annual cohorts in each case, calculated from the results in these three studies and updated to 2020 prices.

The above figures cannot be simply added up because the cohorts are not entirely mutually exclusive, but for young people entering and leaving care, becoming homeless and leaving school early are deeply cognate issues which in total probably amount to something like an estimated $1.5 billion per year.

In Summary
The logic of prevention is well-known and prevention and early intervention are explicitly referred to in various policy frameworks. The experience of the health sector, which is about the wellbeing of everybody, not only a minority of the population, should remind us about the difficulty of the reform challenge.

In terms of early recognition of 'youth homelessness', Australia led the way. Reconnect was a world-first early intervention program for homelessness. More than sufficient research has been done over the past 30 years. Yet, homelessness prevention and early intervention initiatives struggle for funding priority. Parsing this problem a little further, there is the political issue of short-term exigencies and doing the numbers beyond the next government budget; and on the other side, the urgent everyday realities of a crisis management approach tend to stifle the importance of systemic reform. The great dilemma, which should really be viewed as an opportunity, is that we, as departmental officers, sector leaders, and workers, are all part of the problem in various ways, but potentially also agents of its solution.

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Front and Back-end Reforms to End Youth Homelessness in Australia

██████████████████████ Upstream Australia

The Australian homelessness sector and governments from both sides of politics have led on several fronts — certainly not laggard by international standards. However, homelessness and youth homelessness continue to be a significant social problem in Australia.

Homelessness, like many social experiences and issues, exists on a continuum, see Figure 1. We acknowledge that homelessness is a complex and troubling experience and that the category of 'homeless' can include several different types of experiences. But for the purposes of simplicity in this short article, a continuum of homelessness can be conceptualised as having three main stages:

1. front-end/pre-homelessness

2. homelessness

3. back-end/post-homelessness.

A key contributing factor for the relentlessness of homelessness in Australia lies in the policies, programs, funding, and efforts directed towards crisis-approaches focused largely on the very small minority of people who are rough sleeping. The Australian approach to homelessness has not directed adequate attention and funding at prevention and early intervention (front end/pre-homelessness) nor rapid, supported housing (back end/post-homelessness) solutions.

As Australia works towards the new National Housing and Homelessness Agreement (NHHA) and National Housing and Homelessness Plan (NHHP) it is essential to have input from the homelessness sector and well as from critical outsiders such as researchers and evaluators. This article forms part of our input into this process.

We have been advocating for some time for a national strategy for youth homelessness as part of a strategy to end youth homelessness in Australia.[1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8] A strategy for ending youth homelessness is not reproducing the status quo which witnesses thousands of young people each year slip into homelessness and then be exited from the system straight into a situation of homelessness. Ending youth homelessness will require system change – front and back-end reforms.

Using data from national datasets, we make the case for these front- and back-end changes that are so desperately needed to actually begin to end youth homelessness.

Front-End/Pre-Homelessness
The size of the youth homelessness problem can be enumerated in two national data sets — the Australian

Stage on homelessness continuum	Front-end/Pre-homelessness	Homelessness	Back-end/Post-homelessness
Description	Young person's risk status increases, and they become 'at-risk'.	Young person is homeless.	Young person is recovering from homelessness.
Intervention Types	Selective prevention: focus on groups known to be more at-risk of homelessness: LGBTQI youth; young people leaving care; Indigenous young people; young people in low-income or single parent families. Indicative or targeted prevention (or early intervention): identification of individuals and families prior to crises – that is, The Community of Schools and Services (COSS) Model.	Specialist Homelessness Services (SHS) crisis refuges or support delivered during homelessness crises; outreach to rough sleepers.	Housing options and support for those recovering from homelessness. Rapid rehousing into supported housing, such as My Foundations Youth Housing or foyers; Housing First models.

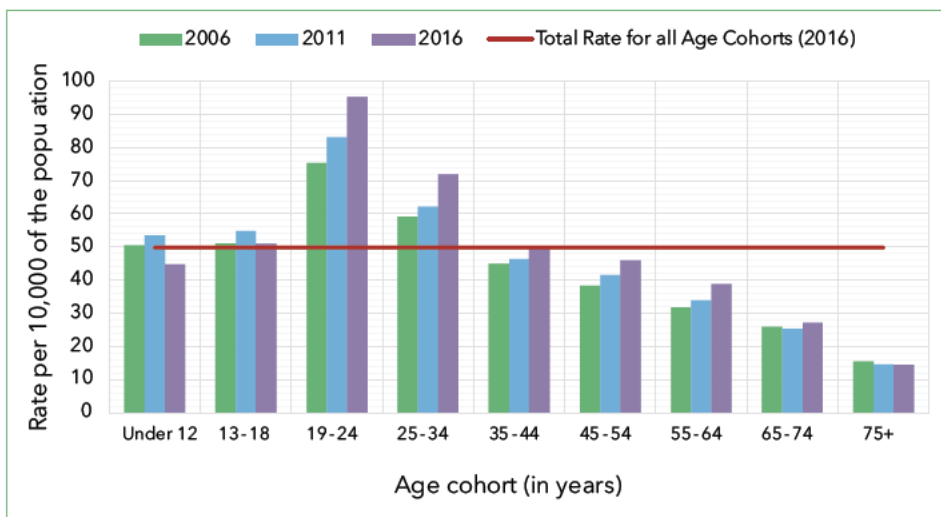Figure 1: Policies and programs directed at stages of homelessness

Figure 2: Homeless persons by age cohort (in years) and by rate per 10,000 of the population: 2006, 2011, and 2016

Bureau of Statistics (ABS) Census and Specialist Homelessness Services client sets – which will be briefly discussed in turn.

National Rates of Homelessness

From national Census data, the ABS publishes estimates of the homeless population in Australia.[9] The ABS data from 2006, 2011 and 2016 clearly shows that, from a national perspective, young people are over-represented in the homeless population — and this is acknowledged to be an underestimation with the 19- to 24-year-old age cohort consistently being the highest cohort per 10,000 of the population counted as homeless in the last three Census counts, see Figure 2.

The results of the 2021 Census to be released later this year, including an update on the rates and prevalence of homelessness, will possibly reflect the impact of COVID-19 on homelessness cohort rates.

Specialist Homelessness Clients

Data collected by Specialist Homelessness Services (SHS) is not an indication of the homelessness prevalence rates in Australia. This data captures the numbers and proportions of clients who access homeless support and/or accommodation services through an SHS agency. It is important to note that not all people who approach SHS services receive support — there is a proportion of unmet need. Comparing this data by age cohort over several reporting periods,[10] see Figure 3, it is clear that young people (aged 15 to 24 years) remain a significant proportion of all SHS clients.

Young people (aged 15 to 24 years) who present to the SHS alone, that is, not as part of a presenting family/group unit, are a particularly vulnerable cohort. To be clear, the data on young people presented in Figure 3 is for all young people in the 15 to 24 years cohort, regardless of whether they presented alone
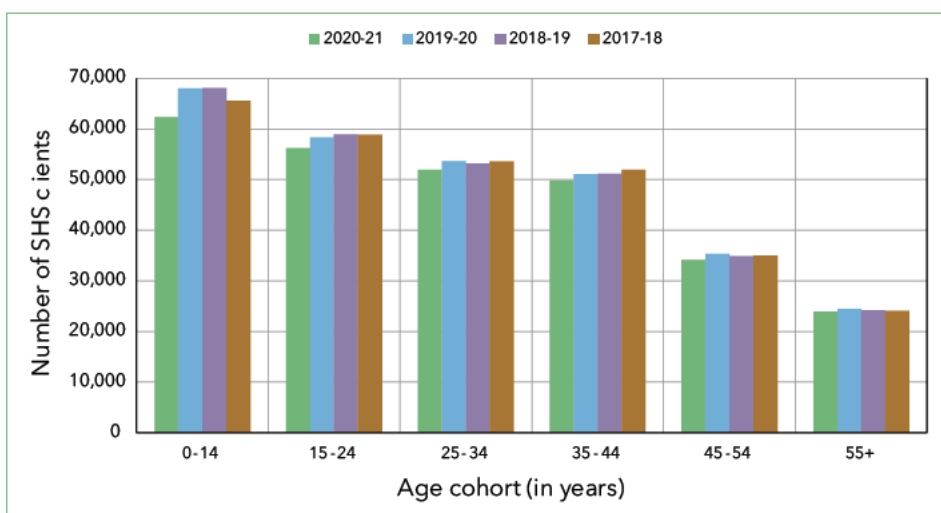
or as part of a group/family unit. The young people who presented alone accounted for 15 to 18 per cent of all SHS clients between 2011–12 and 2020–21. In numbers, this is about 44,000 individual clients every year.

Young people presenting alone also report several other risk factors including: being previous SHS clients, not being enrolled in any form of education or training, experiences of mental health issues, experiences of family and domestic violence, and/or drug and alcohol issues.

The Prevention and Early Intervention for Youth Reform Challenge

Census data reveals that young people are over-represented in the homelessness population and SHS client numbers show that children and young people are the largest cohorts by age to present to the SHS for support.

The impacts of homelessness on young people are lifelong, and negative consequences can mean that this cohort experiences disadvantages when trying to transition to independent adulthood, which can result in, for example, reduced education attainment, un/under-employment, and welfare dependency. In addition to these negative impacts on the individuals, the economic costs of youth homelessness are long-lasting and mount to significant sums to the government over this cohort's life.

From this data, one can summarise that, from a national strategic perspective, not enough is being done for young people in terms of prevention and early intervention – youth homelessness rates have increased every time over the last three Censuses and youth presentations to the SHS remain somewhat stable, but not reducing.

Australia has the Reconnect program, but as we have argued elsewhere,[11] there are some serious limitations in the program design. There is no systematic method of identifying young people, thus a response is reliant on referrals from professionals/trusted adults, which inevitably means that many at-risk young people remain hidden or simply unreferred, and thus unsupported. It is possible
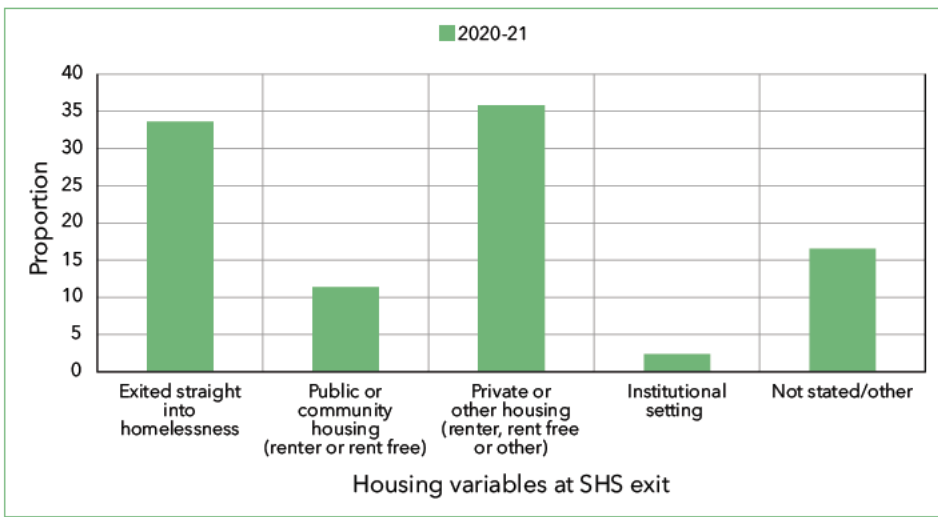

Figure 3: SHS Clients by age cohort: 2020–21, 2019–20, 2018–19, 2017–18

Figure 4: Young People who Present Alone to the SHS — housing outcomes at SHS discharge: 2020-21

2014, with young people as main tenants accounting for an average of 2.9 per cent over this seven-year period. Young people, as shown in Figure 5, are consistently the smallest cohort of main tenants.

Young people aged 15 to 24 years presenting alone to the SHS for support represent 15 per cent of all SHS clients. Yet, young people aged 15 to 24 represent only 2.9 per cent of all social housing main tenants. It seems that young people are not able to access social housing as main tenants as easily as other age cohorts.[13, 14, 15, 16]

The Social Housing for Youth Reform Challenge

Broadly, the affordability of housing has become a mainstream problem. Under-investment in social housing, and an escalating cost for Commonwealth Rental Assistance, which for young people delivers an inadequate level of subsidy, are major challenges to redress because of the cumulative large costs involved.

The social housing status quo is not working for most young people. A major reform around access to supportive housing for young people is needed.

In terms of beginning to redress the housing problem in Australia, the formation of a National Housing Supply and Affordability Council announced by Federal Housing and Homelessness Minister Julie Collins last year is a welcome and overdue initiative. The Government's commitment of 30,000 new social housing

that Reconnect has contributed to a plateau in the number of young people seeking help from the SHS and that it is achieving creditable outcomes — but we just don't know as there is no recent public evaluation data. Nearly three decades after its implementation, it is time to ask what lies beyond Reconnect.

This makes for a compelling case for young people to maintain their priority cohort status in the new NHHP. The new NHHP should prioritise funding of evidence-based prevention and early intervention programs which include indicative/targeted prevention so that young people can be identified and supported prior to a homelessness crisis.

The Back-End/ Post-Homelessness

Data on the housing situation on SHS exist for youth presenting to the SHS alone and young people as main tenants in social housing will be explored in the following.

Young People Presenting to the SHS Alone — Housing Situation at Exit

A particularly troubling set of statistics is the housing situation at SHS exit for young people who present alone to the SHS. For those young people who presented to the SHS alone and who ceased receiving that SHS support in the 2020-21 reporting period, the outcomes are not indicative of a system that is working well, see Figure 4. One third (33.6 per cent) of these young people were discharged from the SHS straight into a situation of homelessness. For another 16.5 per cent of this cohort, their housing status was 'not stated

or other' at discharge — presumably their housing status was unknown (?).

Young People as Main Social Housing Tenants

The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare's *Housing Assistance in Australia* Reports[12] detail data on the tenants in social housing. On 30 June 2020, there were 399,827 main tenants in 'ongoing' social housing (meaning that the tenancy has not been concluded) across three social housing programs (that is, public housing, state owned and managed Indigenous housing, and community housing). Only 11,435 of the main tenants, or 2.8 per cent, were young people aged 15 to 24 years. The majority (54.3 per cent) of social housing main tenants were older people aged 55 years and over.

The proportion of young people aged 15 to 24 years as main tenants has remained relatively stable since
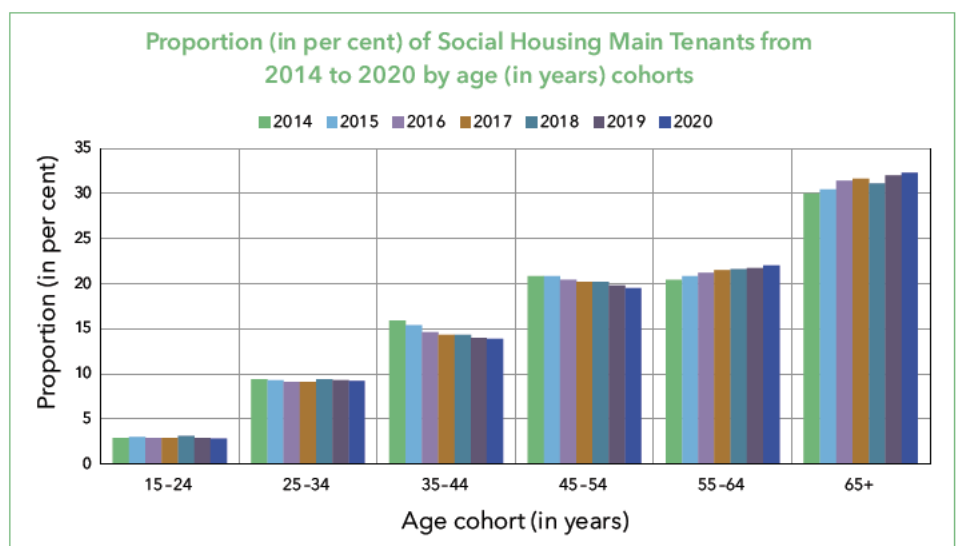

Figure 5: Social Housing Main Tenants by age cohort: 2014-2020

properties is a good start, but, from the standpoint of young people, that is not going to be much benefit if they cannot access social housing.

Generally, it is not intended that social housing for youth is a long-term destination. Social housing for youth needs to support young people to transition into independent adulthood. The most promising breakthrough has been the development of the My Foundations Youth Housing company in New South Wales, which has shown that it is viable to provide a social housing option for homeless young people on low margins with support partners — and achieve great outcomes for those young people. However, ultimately a national provider is needed. From a strategic perspective, there could be many providers of specialised social housing for young people. However, there is the need to be mindful of achieving the economies of scale required.

The question for a the upcoming NHHP is what needs to be done to expand social housing for youth in all jurisdictions on a rapid but realistic developmental five to 10-year trajectory.

Conclusion

The success of the new NHHP will depend on getting the reform agenda right and then how the states and territories implement that agenda. Three key components to the new NHHP reforms must be:

1. A priority for reforms that achieve significantly improved outcomes for young people.

2. Prevention and early intervention to stem the flow of young people into homelessness services — to finally start 'turning off the tap'.

3. Supportive housing options for young people whose experience of homelessness cannot be averted, to prevent a relapse back into homelessness and to support transitions to independent adulthood.

The development of the new NHHP is a once in a decade opportunity to reform the homelessness system — a system which is not working anywhere well enough for young people. We must ensure that this new plan is the beginning of the end of youth homelessness, and not just a freshened-up maintenance of the status quo.

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Thinking About a Child and Youth Homelessness Strategy: Lessons from the Productivity Commission's Report, *In Need of Repair*

███████████████████ Upstream Australia

Introduction
Australia is again about to embark on a national housing and homelessness strategy. The creation of the Supported Accommodation and Assistance Program (SAAP) in 1985 was such a moment, and a seminal milestone, but it was early days and there was little strategic clarity. Homelessness in Australia is more of a social problem now than it was then! The 2008 White Paper, *The Road Home: a National Approach to Reducing Homelessness*[1] was another such moment but, in retrospect, a case study in disappointment, political neglect, and under-delivery by successive federal governments over the next decade. It's not that progress wasn't made but the extent and complexity of the problem has raced ahead of our policy and program response and, for much of the time, no seriously coordinated effort between the Federal Government and the various state and territory jurisdictions with the community sector has occurred. This time there are high hopes for some real change.

The Albanese Federal Government has promised a National Housing and Homelessness Plan (NHHP) in the form of a 10-year strategy with *'key short, medium and longer-term reforms'* to increase the supply and affordability of housing and reduce homelessness. Work is underway to develop a new National Housing and Homelessness Agreement (NHHA) and, as that work is being done, NHHA funding has been extended by one year.

A Child and Youth Homelessness Strategy is the theme of this edition of *Parity*, and it is thus an opportunity to think about what strategic reforms and initiatives might be needed to make a real difference for children and young people.

Suggestions from the Productivity Commission

The timely publication of the Productivity Commission's review report, *In Need of Repair*[2] produced a particularly telling critique of the existing current NHHA:

- *'little evidence that the NHHA has led to better homelessness outcomes'*

- *'despite the support for priority cohorts, little progress appears to have been made in addressing homelessness amongst these groups'*

- under the current NHHA *'homelessness in Australia has not improved'*.

While all state and territory jurisdictions have homelessness strategy documents that reference reform areas and priority cohorts, there is currently no robust accountability required against goals and specific targets.

The Commission agrees with including prevention and early intervention as a reform area in the NHHA, given the current crisis-focused nature of the homelessness service system and the benefits of prevention and early intervention (chapter 5; section 6.4). However, while better outcomes and commitment to service program and design are essential to preventing and addressing homelessness, they are not 'reform areas'. A commitment to service program and design that is evidence-based should be 'business as usual' for all government policy and achieving better outcomes should follow from reforming the system to focus on prevention and early intervention, Housing First support, and better tailored support to key groups (section 6.4).

So, how might this be done? The Commission provided a short list for what could be included in a future NHHA (Section 6.4):

- addressing the structural factors that lead to homelessness

- shifting the homelessness service system from being crisis-oriented to one more focused on prevention and early intervention

- scaling up Housing First to better support people experiencing homelessness with complex needs

- addressing gaps in support for key groups improving the funding and contractual arrangements for SHS.

Priority Cohorts: Responding to Need and Difference
The national priority homelessness cohorts in the current NHHA are as follows:

- women and children affected by family and domestic violence

- children and young people

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people

- people experiencing repeat homelessness

- people exiting institutions and care into homelessness

- older people.

The Commission found that there is support for the concept of priority cohorts in the NHHA and NHHP and some stakeholders argued for additional priority groups. A problem

is that the criteria for identifying priority cohorts is not consistent. Should it be based on high rates of homelessness for certain groups, such as Indigenous Australians or children and young people or should it be based on higher needs and vulnerability of people seeking help? Or is inconsistency not important? Finally, it is not clear that state and territory governments are required in any robust and accountable way to respond to progress with the priority cohorts.

The Commission concluded that 'little progress appears to have been made in addressing Homelessness amongst these (priority) groups' and responds to this confusion and inconsistency advising 'that the next Agreement, instead of having priority cohorts, should include an outcome covering improving outcomes for groups at highest risk of homelessness'. This is supportable since, in terms of practice, the nature and complexity of need of individuals and families approaching SHS agencies for help is what matters most in that moment. However, there are major

differences in the support work for children and families or for young people compared to older adults, which depends on developmental factors as well as on the complexity of need on a case-by-case basis.

The caveat is that the strategic questions about priority reforms and system change are a major qualification. If we get the reform agenda right and ensure that it is funded adequately and implemented strategically in the NHHA and NHHP , then we can look forward to actually beginning to reduce youth homelessness in Australia. If not, and we fail the reform challenge, then Australia's homeless response is likely to fall short of making any significant difference over next five to 10 years.

Priority Reforms and System Change
The strategic reform agenda proposed in the Productivity Commission report comes down to *'prevention and early intervention'*, Housing First support for highly vulnerable individuals with complex needs and *'better tailored support to key groups'*.

In terms of *'prioritising prevention and early intervention in the next Agreement (Recommendation 6.1), governments should expand support for young people at risk of homelessness'*. Also, given that prevention and early intervention were previously raised in prior jurisdictional strategies and plans but little was done, *'a separate pool of funding'* for this reform area is suggested.

Supportive housing is a major issue for any long-term reform for all cohorts in the homeless population. That comes down to the supply of both social housing and affordable housing in the private rental market as well the policy and funding balance between rental assistance for private rental versus increased supply of social housing. For young people, access to social housing has been a highly restricted option and that has to be changed. Over the past decade, there has been major investment in Youth Foyers but without being integrated into the local homelessness service system for intaking clients. Without that kind of accountability, Foyers will not contribute significantly to homelessness outcomes.

Tailored support could include specialised facilities and support for young families, dedicated support for young people leaving care or custodial institutions, or more generally to tenancy maintenance. The response for children presenting alone, 15 years or younger, who seek help or are referred to homelessness services, involves some major policy and practice issues and remains a problematic and difficult area for agencies and practitioners.

There are good examples of progress in some instances on all the above, but no strong evidence of systemic change because a systemic approach to reform has not been pursued, a point made by the Commission. The big question is what might a systemic approach look like?

Place-based Approaches

In Chapter 11 on 'Housing Outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people', the Productivity Commission finds great merit in place-based approaches as *'a key tool to enable self-determination as governments support the transfer of power and resources to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and organisations to pursue their economic, social and cultural priorities'* and a way of *'support*[ing] *communities and organisations to identify and work towards priorities and outcomes that reflect community aspirations'*.

A Victorian discussion paper, *A Framework for Place-based Approaches: The Start of a Conversation about Working Differently for Better Outcomes*,[3] also makes the case for shifting to place-based approaches:

- allow for holistic and systematic approaches, for example by linking housing with health and education

- employment and social participation outcomes at the local level

- support community engagement

- focus on individual community strengths

- build community connectedness and resilience

- identify where capacity strengthening is required

- provide targeted responses.

Place-based approaches are highly advantageous. The Commission makes a strong case for place-based approaches but only for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. Specialist Homelessness Services are delivered in places somewhere, but generally do not rise to meet the criteria of a robust place-based approach. Why can't reform around place-based approaches be more broadly considered?

The hypothetical example below illustrates the logic of the argument about refocusing reform around a place-based architecture and more integrated local system of service delivery:

> A hypothetical state/territory government could invest $10 million in building a new Youth Foyer in one community, fund ($3–4 million over three to four years) for a Community of Schools and Services (COSS) Model initiative in another community and invest (some $6 million) in an additional social housing project specifically for young people somewhere else entirely. These three significant initiatives for young people involve multi-million-dollar funding to establish and operate, but they have no community synergy because they are located in dispersed places in the state/territory. There is housing and homelessness need everywhere so agencies can easily make a case for why it should come to their area. Yet too often scattergun top-down decision-making is used, based on some political considerations, but not a place-based approach to system change.

In the context of supporting the strategic importance of prevention and early intervention, the Inquiry into homelessness in Australia acknowledged 'the value of work done to date through integrated place-based approaches' and recommended *'a more integrated place-based approach to homelessness prevention and early intervention'* (Recommendation 27).

The COSS model of early intervention provides a place-based collective impact architecture and a rigorous methodology for local system reform. The Victorian Opening Doors entry point model is also a place-based initiative that brings a range of SHS services into more integrated cooperation.

Place-based reform is definitely relevant to youth homelessness because most young people are part of a community where they live, go to school and grow up. This is the interacting 'system' that needs to be reconfigured around a more integrated service system. Think of how transformative it would be when significant measurable reductions in youth homelessness could be achieved in a number of communities. There could be no greater incentive for wider reform, place by place, community by community, than reform that relies on mobilising and harnessing community capital.

Conclusion

As Australia works towards the development of a new NHHP, there is an opportunity to consider what strategic reforms and initiatives are needed to make a difference — a measurable difference — for children and young people. There are many lessons we should take from the recent Productivity Commission's report: priority reforms and system change which actually begin to reduce child and youth homelessness, involving a place-based approach, including prevention and early intervention, and social housing for youth options, wrapped around and deeply connected with the local SHS.

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The National Housing and Homelessness Plan: Thinking About the Response to Rough Sleeping

████████████████████ Upstream Australia

When the public think about homelessness, what generally comes to mind is an image of someone sleeping in a doorway or alley or a city park and maybe someone begging for money in the street with a sign identifying themselves as 'homeless'. Most often, media stories on homelessness tend to highlight people in dire circumstances and without shelter. Photographic images tend to be of people rough sleeping. This is what reproduces the typification of homelessness as 'rooflessness'. In Australia, unlike the United States (US) for example, a broad definition of homelessness is used and accepted that recognises situations of temporary shelter and substandard housing as homelessness. In terms of how homelessness is understood in Australia, rough sleepers are a small proportion of the total homeless population, being individuals in a situation overnight without shelter. Most people experiencing homelessness are sheltered somewhere.

In the development of a National Housing and Homelessness Plan (NHHP) and the next National Housing and Homelessness Agreement (NHHA), it is an appropriate time to reflect critically on both the positives and negatives of Australia's current homelessness response. There have been some notable achievements. In many respects, Australia has led many other Western countries, however that seems to be under-appreciated. In Australia, there has been too often a kind of 'cultural cringe' that looks elsewhere, particularly to the US or United Kingdom, for ideas rather than embracing home-grown innovation and creativity.[1]

The US is still the world's largest economy and a leader in many fields — but in homelessness policy and programs? Our reflections on US responses to homelessness are informed by several fieldwork excursions to the US in the past decade that included visits to shelters and homelessness services and speaking with various sector leaders. As well there is the considerable US literature on homelessness.

Comparing Homelessness in the US and Australia

The US Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) is responsible for reporting to Congress on the extent of homelessness in the US. Every year, point-in-time (PIT) estimates of people experiencing homelessness in the US are undertaken in late January during winter. The count consisted of 233,832 people unsheltered and 348,630 people staying in shelters for the homeless — a total count of 582,462.[2] A research team led by Kim Hopper has estimated that the PIT count of unsheltered people missed about half the people in this situation.[3] The US statistics do not include people as homeless who are temporarily staying with other households (that is, couch-surfing or temporary crowded living). A HUD survey has estimated

that between 2.7 to 3.3 million households were 'doubled up' (a term for sharing the housing of others for economic reasons).[4] Others have estimated that 3.7 million individuals were doubled up.[5] In 2016 the US National Alliance to End Homelessness estimated that nearly seven million individuals were 'doubled up' in 2014.[6] The US definition of homelessness does not include 'doubled up' as a category of homelessness nor people in Single Room Occupancy (SRO) accommodation or rooming houses or trailer parks.

Is it possible to align the statistics of homelessness in the US with Australia? In Australia, there is an Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) Census homelessness strategy, an effort to enumerate rough sleeping throughout the country and a methodology to estimate the extent of homelessness using a much broader definition than in the US. Any comparison has some caveats and scope for error given different definitions, methods, and limitations. That said, these caveats would tend to increase rather than reduce the inter-country differences.

Despite the limitations of comparing inter-country statistics and correcting for the difference in how homelessness is defined in

	United States (2022)	Australia (2021)
Unsheltered	233,832	7,636
Homeless shelters	348,630	24,254
Staying temporarily with other households	3.7m–7m	16,597–64,492
Total homeless population	4.3–11.3m	31,890–80,377
Rate per 100,000 population	13–34	1.3–3.2

Table 1: Comparing PIT estimates of homelessness, Australia and the US[7]

the two countries, homelessness in the US is at least 10 times the rate of homelessness in Australia.

New York has one of the most extensive and well organised responses to homelessness and statistical monitoring. In December 2022, there were 68,884 adults and children in New York shelters staying for an average of 439 days or more than one year. There were 15,143 families including 21,805 children and 24,359 adults. Over the past two decades, the shelter population has nearly doubled, from 38,415 in July 2003.[8] In January 2022, the Homeless Outreach Population Estimate (HOPE) survey identified 3,439 people who were unsheltered and homeless in New York.[9] However, the number of unsheltered homeless in New York State has been an average of 4,060 since 2008 and was 4,038 in 2022.[10]

In the US, 28 per cent or 161,548 homeless people counted in 2020 were in California and half of these people were unsheltered.[11] Contrary what is sometimes claimed, most were Californians and only one in five were from out of state. However, in a US context, claims about reducing homelessness in particular cities have to be treated with some caution because people experiencing homelessness can migrate from one place to another or move into sheltered situations that are not classified as homelessness in the US but would be in Australia.

Do Definitions Matter?
Rough sleeping in the central business districts (CBDs) of Australian cities remains an ongoing issue of community concern. However, one of the unfortunate features of policy advocacy in Australia has been to look to the US for models for how we should respond to homelessness in general, and rough sleeping in particular. As a result, models and practices based on what is done in New York or Chicago or San Francisco have been advocated for adoption in Australia. While the possibility of their relevance and applicability should not be dismissed, we need to remember that because street sleeping in the US is such a visible and prevalent issue, US homelessness policy has been focused primarily on 'literal homelessness' — that is, people sleeping in unsheltered

situations or in shelters for the homelessness. By contrast, in Australia, the understanding of homelessness and its definition has been a broader concept including a range of sheltered situations not regarded as a safe and secure in terms of the minimum community cultural standard for a home in Australia. This definitional difference has informed and shaped some different policy priorities in how the response to homelessness in Australia has been developed to Australia's benefit, we would argue.

Although there is advocacy and research around a broader understanding of the complexity of homelessness in the US, that has not shifted policy and program definitions of homelessness to any major extent. There have been some progressive policy changes in the past decade, but the US statistical counts are based on literal homelessness and the shelter system remains the predominant form of supported accommodation for the homeless. Overall homelessness in the US has increased over the past nine years.

The US Homelessness Service System
In the US, the homelessness service system is predominately a shelter system of typically multi-story buildings with dormitories and cubicles, but which generally do not provide separate private facilities. Altogether, in 2023, there are 11,379 shelters, an increase of 1.8 per cent from the previous year, employing some 155,984 workers.[12] By contrast, by the early 1990s in Australia, city homelessness shelters had been redeveloped into facilities with private rooms.

A policy definition of literal homelessness has its consequences. In the US, the focus on young people is minimal and the prevention agenda underdeveloped. The National Alliance to End Homelessness [NAEH], an advocacy coalition 'committed to preventing and ending homelessness in the US' states that 'the solution to homeless is simple — housing' and advocates rapid rehousing and Housing First. The NAEH undertakes sophisticated advocacy, yet the focus is largely on responding to homelessness after it has occurred to move people as quickly as possible into housing.

Given the extent of the homelessness problem in the US, there has been little attention to thinking about prevention as a way of stemming the flow into homelessness.[13])

Affordable and supported housing are major issues in the US, as in Australia, but the complexity of the problem and its solutions cannot be simply reduced to a single post-homelessness dimension. However, supportive housing and Housing First are notable developments for responding to the chronically homeless and those who have exhausted every other option and ended up on the streets. The problem is that the supply of supported housing and social housing has not been sufficient to significantly impact on homelessness as a social problem in either the US or Australia.

Responding to Rough Sleeping in Australia
So, what can be construed from examining how the US responds to homelessness? It is obvious that Australia should not refocus the Australian homelessness response on rough sleeping as the way of ending homelessness. Of course, in Australian capital cities, the small number of individuals who are chronically homelessness and often with high and complex needs definitely do require a systematic outreach and supported housing response. However, context matters. Politics and the employment and social welfare environments are different in the US and Australia. Unlike American cities with a lot of high-rise development which began in the 19th Century, Australian cities are large suburban sprawls with relatively small city centres.

Nowadays, there are an increasing number of apartment residents in CBDs, but they are of course not the source of rough sleepers in the inner-city. Permanently ending the homelessness of chronically homeless people who are sleeping rough in Australian cities is an imperative on several grounds, but this is not the same as ending homelessness per se.

The following table distinguishes different sub-cohorts of people who turn up sleeping rough in the inner city.

People whose homelessness and rough sleeping is relatively recent (Category 1) need an early

	Categories of 'rough sleepers'	Duration of homelessness	Duration of 'rough sleeping'	Appropriate response
1	Recently homeless rough sleepers	Short-term	Short-term	Early Intervention
2	Long-term homeless recent rough sleeper	Long-term	Short-term	Rapid return to SHS supported accommodation
3	Intermittent rough sleepers	Long-term	Relatively short-term (maybe many episodes)	Homeless crisis services and social housing
4	Chronic rough sleepers	Long-term	Long-term even if across several episodes	Long-term supported housing for high needs residents

Table 2: A typology of responses to rough sleeping, the inner capital cities, Australia[14]

intervention response to reconnect them back in communities where they have had prior relations and supports, as far as that is possible. For adolescents and young people this should prioritise and explore whether family reunification is possible but re-establish other supportive relations and ensure safe and secure living situations as well as re-engagement with education.

For the smallest cohort of chronically homeless individuals with high and complex needs (Category 4), outreach and supported housing and Housing First is a necessary inner-city response. Sacred Heart Mission's *Journey to Social Inclusion project*[15] in Melbourne has demonstrated how relationship-based intensive support and housing can effectively end the homelessness of people for whom recovering from homelessness would not be possible by their own efforts and without ongoing support. Also in Melbourne, Wintringham began providing a Housing First option for older homeless men and women long before the concept of 'Housing First' was invented. Both of these local initiatives deserve a wider systemic implementation.[16]

The inner-city is a unique place and unlike other community places. While there needs to be a systematic and coordinated response to rough sleeping in the inner-city, support services need to be predominately developed in the communities where people first become homeless or where they have prior connections and not in the CBD because people go there. Relatively few women and children escaping family and domestic violence turn up sleeping rough in the inner-city, but in any such cases, safety and support may not be best provided in their community of origin.

So, what does this mean for the National Housing and Homelessness Plan? A key concept of an agenda for change needs to be place-based and more integrated support services. This will shift more responsibility to communities and involve a systemic and collective approach to integrated service provision within local communities — prevention and early intervention, crisis support and rapid rehousing pathways to social housing and post-homelessness support — which when implemented as 'collective impact' is systematically and strongly outcomes-focused. In such a reform framework, responses to rough sleeping can be appropriately configured and resourced.

Endnotes

1. The term 'cultural cringe' was first discussed by Arthur Phillips in *Meanjin Quarterly* (Summer 1950) who commented that 'the Cringe mainly appears in an inability to escape needless comparison' or constantly worrying about what might be happening overseas that is better than what is being done in Australia.
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4. Eggers F, Moumen F (Econometrica Inc) 2013, *Analysis of Trends in Household Composition Using American Housing Survey Data*, Department of Housing and Urban Development, Washington DC.
5. Richard M, Dworkin J, Rule K G, Farooqui S, Glendening Z and S Carlson 2022, 'Quantifying Doubled-Up Homelessness: Presenting a New Measure Using U.S. Census Microdata', *Housing Policy Debate*, vol.32 issue 6, pp. 915–939
6. National Alliance to End Homelessness website — https://endhomelessness.org
7. The comparison in Table 1 excludes the 'boarding house' category in Australia, which is not classified as homelessness in the US. It provides figures for people living 'doubled up' in the US as temporarily housed and equivalent to the combined category for Australia of people temporarily sheltered outside of the Specialist Homelessness Services system and overcrowded households, which are classified as homelessness under the ABS statistical definition.
8. Coalition for the Homeless 2022, *New York City Homeless Municipal Shelter Population, 1983–Present*, NYC Department of Homeless Services, New York.
9. Homeless Services 2022, *Homeless Outreach Population Estimate 2022 Results*, New York, Department of Social Services.
10. National Alliance to End Homelessness 2023, *SOH: State and CoC Dashboards*, New York State, https://endhomelessness.org/homelessness-in-america/homelessness-statistics/state-of-homelessness-dashboards/?State=New per cent20York
11. Senate Housing Committee 2020, *Fact Sheet: Homelessness in California*, California State Senate, Sacramento, https://shou.senate.ca.gov/sites/shou.senate.ca.gov/files/Homelessness per cent20in per cent20CA per cent202020 per cent20Numbers.pdf
12. IBIS World 2023, *Community Housing and Homeless Shelters in the US – Number of Businesses 2005–2029*, https://www.ibisworld.com/industry-statistics/number-of-businesses/community-housing-homeless-shelters-united-states/#:~:text=There per cent20are per cent2011 per cent2C379 per cent20Community per cent20Housing,increase per cent20of per cent201.8 per cent25 per cent20from per cent202022.
13. National Alliance to End Homelessness, Washington DC, https://endhomelessness.org
14. Coleman A, MacKenzie D and B Churchill 2014, *The Role of Outreach: Responding to Primary Homelessness. (A Report for the National Homelessness Research Program, FAHCSIA, Commonwealth of Australia)*, Swinburne University, Melbourne.
15. Sacred Heart Mission, *Journey to Social Inclusion*, Melbourne, https://www.sacredheartmission.org/service/housing-support/journey-to-social-inclusion/