

Foundations for Change – Homelessness in NSW

St Vincent de Paul Society NSW submission

October 2016

Who we are

St Vincent de Paul Society NSW (SVDP) has been assisting marginalised and disadvantaged people in New South Wales for more than 130 years. People are assisted by SVDP either by Conference members – i.e. parish groups established in local areas to provide assistance to people experiencing disadvantage – or through specialised professional services tailored to meet the various needs of the people we assist.¹

Our services include specialist homeless services; assistance to migrants and refugees; home, hospital, prison and detention centre visitation; Vinnies Shops and assistance centres; mental health programs; disability services; drug, alcohol and gambling counselling services; financial counselling; food vans; and rural taskforce assistance.

In 2015/2016, our members provided over \$15.7 million worth of financial assistance to 60,445 people in the course of 160,918 visits. 45% of the people assisted by our members lived in private rental accommodation while 33% lived in Government housing. 16% were homeless or in temporary accommodation.

SVDP Support Services is the leading provider of specialist homelessness services in NSW. It is comprised of more than 15 programs across the state. In 2014/2015 *SVDP Support Services* provided 258,000 bed nights for people who were homeless and/or requiring supported accommodation in NSW.

In 2012, SVDP also created a dedicated housing provider. SVDP's *Amélie Housing* is primarily concerned with the development and management of affordable housing for people experiencing housing stress and disadvantage. It aims to assist tenants by linking them to required support services in a timely way, and through organisational policies and processes which give tenants at risk every opportunity to restore their tenancy and their lives.

Introduction

SVDP welcomes the Minister for Family and Community Services, and Minister for Social Housing's invitation to comment on *Foundations for change – Homelessness in NSW*.

Housing is a core human right and the foundation everyone needs for full economic and community participation. Unfortunately, for a growing number of NSW residents this right is not a reality.

As an organisation that is at the forefront of the response to homelessness in NSW, we are concerned by the growing number of people experiencing or at risk of experiencing homelessness across the state. Some groups, particularly older women, are increasingly affected and confronted with the limitations of the homelessness service system. For some women, the lack of services and housing options available to them means staying in inadequate dwellings which are unsafe or with a violent partner.

¹ See [St Vincent de Paul Society NSW Annual Report 2014-2015](#).

New South Wales can do better. We have the strongest economy and the strongest budget position of any state in Australia, and home approvals have reached record highs.² These positive macro-economic indicators provide a unique opportunity for NSW to invest in homelessness prevention and create more pathways into housing.

This submission presents twenty recommendations to address the key issues raised by *Foundations for change – Homelessness in NSW*. It references a number of previous contributions we have made to inquiries from the Commonwealth and NSW Governments³ and follows the thematic order of the discussion paper.

Our response is guided by our values and pragmatism. As a lay catholic organisation, we are committed to offering people “a hand up” and aspire to an Australia transformed by compassion and built on justice. We also recognise that Governments must be accountable to taxpayers and that social policies must be guided by evidence on the most effective public investments.

Delivering more affordable housing would answer both the moral and budget imperatives – it would ensure that NSW residents live in dignity, increase the effectiveness of homelessness services and reduce the needs for and spending on homelessness, emergency and corrective services.

Evidence shows that the effectiveness of specialist homelessness services is largely dependent on the availability of housing that is affordable for people on lower-incomes – housing that is also stable, well-located (close to jobs, public transport, educational, health and other services), appropriate (for family size, disability, ageing, cultural and other needs), safe and enabling. As a matter of priority, we recommend more investments into social housing, amendments to the planning system to deliver more private rental options and changes to the *Residential Tenancies Act* to promote more stable tenancies.

As highlighted in *Foundations for change*, early intervention, prevention and collaboration are critically important. This is why we make practical recommendations to improve specialist homelessness services (SHS), including developing a protocol for more effective responses to the risk of homelessness by mainstream services, and explore reform options beyond SHS.

Early intervention and prevention can be promoted through cross-departmental collaboration and investments in appropriate support services. For instance, post-release requirements for people exiting the criminal justice system can be identified early on and plans made accordingly. Early intervention can ensure fewer people enter or return to the corrections systems. We believe that some of the considerable resources allocated to building more prison cells in the last budget should be reinvested in marginalised communities to prevent crime and homelessness.

As an organisation that strives to give people a “hand-up”, we agree that people must be placed at the centre of the response to their homelessness and empowered through adequate services that build their capacity to seize social and economic opportunities. The availability and accessibility of support, education and training opportunities is critically important.

² NSW Budget 2016-2017

³ This includes: [Homelessness services: considerations for funding and policy reform, August 2016](#); Submission to the Productivity Commission Inquiry into Human Services: Identifying sectors for reform, August 2016; [Submission to Senate Economics Committee regarding the Inquiry into Affordable Housing, 2014](#); [Submission on ‘Social Housing in NSW: A Discussion Paper for Input and Comment’, 2015](#); Submission to the Legislative Council Select Committee on Social, Public and Affordable Housing, Inquiry into Social, Public and Affordable Housing, 2014.

Finally, we share *Foundations for change's* view that to effectively prevent and reduce homelessness requires a whole of community approach. Our own experience has shown that collaboration between specialist homelessness service providers, philanthropists, corporate actors and mainstream services can improve client outcomes. However, we have significant reservations about the Commonwealth Government and Productivity Commission's approach to opening competition in the human services sector. The needs of people who are at risk of or experiencing homelessness are best served by community organisations and Government agencies whose primary goal is to achieve the best outcomes for them. We caution against allowing for-profit providers to deliver Government funded homelessness services.

Summary - SVDP recommends that the NSW Government:

Creates more pathways into housing by

1. Adopting clear targets for the delivery of social and affordable housing
2. Urgently building new social housing units to reduce the social housing wait list
3. Including inclusionary zoning and value-capture mechanisms in the planning legislation to boost the supply of affordable private rental housing
4. Amending the Residential Tenancies Act 2010 to increase the security of tenures and limit rent increases
5. Advocating for changes to Commonwealth rules that distort the housing market in favour of investors

Promotes community and corporate engagement by

6. Promoting partnerships between homelessness services providers but limit Government-funded homelessness services delivery to not-for-profit organisations

Improves exit planning by

7. Adopting a housing first and non-time-limited service delivery approach

Empowers people by

8. Ensuring education & training services are appropriately funded and linked to support
9. Placing people rather than housing units at the centre by granting community housing providers the ability to re-classify the tenure of a particular dwelling

Fosters collaboration by

10. Developing a protocol to promote more effective responses to homelessness and the risk of homelessness by mainstream services

Promotes prevention and early intervention by

11. Re-allocating resources for building prisons to community services and prevention
12. Ensuring budget decisions are consistent with homelessness prevention and crime reduction objectives

Builds better referral pathways by

13. Making sure Link2Home provides more comprehensive information for referrals to SHS providers
14. Providing annual reports on SHS on a regional basis, and annual reports on Link2Home's service delivery

For groups at higher risk, the NSW Government should

15. Commit to funding evidence-based early intervention and affordable housing models such as Staying Home, Leaving Violence and Start Safely
16. Develop a specific Aboriginal homelessness strategy
17. Develop a comprehensive strategy to address the homelessness of older women and adopt the recommendations contained in *A Plan for Change: Homes for Older Women*
18. Deliver more accessible housing, transport and services for people with disability
19. Promote collaboration to ensure the effectiveness of the NDIS
20. Adopt a housing first approach to rough sleeping

Creating pathways into housing

Foundations for change – Homelessness in NSW recognises that the lack of affordable housing is a structural factor contributing to homelessness that needs to be addressed.

Delivering more social and affordable housing

The lack of affordable housing in the private rental sector – i.e. housing that takes up less than 30% of one's income – is the primary obstacle to finding pathways out of homelessness and often a barrier to people leaving domestic violence. It is putting pressure on social housing and a cause for 'bottle necks' in homeless crisis accommodation. The evaluation of the Homelessness Action Plan found that the lack of affordable housing was a consistent challenge to interventions designed to prevent and respond effectively to homelessness.⁴

The impacts of the lack of affordable housing in the private rental sector are compounded by inadequate welfare payments. Less than 1% of rental homes in Greater Sydney and the Illawarra Region being appropriate and affordable for households on Government income support payment.⁵

Building on *Future Directions*, the NSW Government can deliver more housing that is affordable for households on lower incomes— housing that is also well-located (close to jobs, public transport, educational, health and other services), appropriate (for family size, disability, ageing, cultural and other needs), in decent condition and housing that enables economic and social participation.

First, adopting clear targets for the delivery of social and affordable housing would ensure consistency and accountability of government interventions, and assist other stakeholders in planning for the future. Local Government Area targets for the provision of new affordable rental dwellings should be included in all future metropolitan and regional land-use plans.

We are concerned that the new metropolitan strategy for Sydney, 'A Plan for Growing Sydney', includes a target for 664,000 additional homes over the next 20 years, yet no targets for affordable rental housing (targets that would help to ensure that lower-income households are able to enjoy the benefits of 'a strong global city, a great place to live'). SVDP has engaged with the Greater Sydney Commission on this matter.

Second, considerable investment is needed to reduce the social housing wait list, which exceeds over 60,000 applicants. Housing NSW's analysis (as referenced in the 2013 Auditor's General report) estimated that an additional 25,000 social housing properties over 10 years would be required to simply maintain the share of social housing.⁶

Third, the planning system can be enhanced to harness the construction boom for the delivery of housing that is affordable for people on lower incomes. Simply increasing the general housing supply is unlikely to result in an increase in *affordable housing* unless the planning rules are changed. With 75% of lower income renter households experiencing rental stress, it is clear that under the current regulatory framework the private market is unable to deliver housing options for all members of the community.

⁴ Homelessness Action Plan – Summary of evaluation findings authored by AHURI Research Synthesis Service for Housing NSW May 2013.

⁵ [Anglicare, 2016 Rental Affordability Snapshot, April 2016.](#)

⁶ NSW Auditor-General, *Making the best use of public housing*, Audit Office of NSW, July 2013, pp 11 and 16.

The NSW Government should require that *at least* 15 per cent of new private residential developments be set aside for affordable housing. Inclusionary zoning has been used successfully in numerous jurisdictions, including in South Australia where the state's Housing Plan delivered 1223 affordable homes in 2013 alone, with a further 2793 affordable homes committed to be built in future developments.⁷ The Greater Sydney Commission's current proposal to adopt inclusionary zoning with a 5-10% requirement is largely insufficient.⁸

For major urban redevelopment projects and developments on Government-owned land, higher mandatory target requirements would be sensible. With clear mandatory targets, Urban Growth NSW projects could boost the supply of affordable housing. The 'Parramatta Road Urban Transformation' project alone could deliver up to 40,000 homes over the next 30 years, but none of these will be affordable unless the Government adopts inclusionary zoning requirements. The Bays Precinct and the Central to Eveleigh Urban Transformation programmes could also deliver large numbers of affordable housing close to transport, jobs and services.⁹

The Glebe Cowper street redevelopment project provides a perfect example of a redevelopment that includes social housing, affordable housing and mainstream private rentals. This could be replicated on a state-wide scale.

NSW planning law should also extend requirements for developers of higher-density sites to provide developer-contributions for affordable housing, where they have benefited from increased land values due to rezoning (under the principle of 'value sharing').

Accessing and maintaining stable tenancies

In addition to increasing the supply of social and affordable housing, promoting stable tenancies is key to preventing homelessness and promoting pathways into long term sustainable housing.

The Residential Tenancies Act 2010 is a barrier to stable tenancies. It should be amended to increase the security of tenures and limit rent increases, particularly in the context of home ownership rates going down.

The ability of landlords to end tenancies without grounds is a major source of uncertainty and instability for tenants. It also undermines the ability of tenants to rely upon their rights when needed. We believe that sections 84, 85 and 94 of the Residential Tenancies Act 2010 should be amended to ensure residential tenancy agreements may only ever be terminated with grounds.

The law should also include provisions that limit rent increases and allow for a consideration of what is reasonable, where disagreements about rent increases are concerned.

Beyond housing, the availability and the quality of wrap-around support services can greatly contribute to successful long-term pathways into housing. Significant trauma histories and mental and physical health issues often result in some people needing long term support to be able to maintain a tenancy. Unfortunately, there are significant barriers and limited capacity for a number of people to access non time-limited support services, which can result in relinquished social housing properties; exits due to incarceration, hospital stays; and evictions relating to poor living skills, unsocial activities or lack of social housing support.

⁷ See [AHURI, Increasing the supply of affordable housing for low income tenants.](#)

⁸ See Greater Sydney Commission, October 2016. Greater Parramatta and the Olympic GPOP Peninsula.

⁹ See [Urban Growth NSW, Central to Eveleigh Urban Transformation & Transport Program.](#)

Fixing macro-economic policies

The NSW government can also play a part in advocating for changes to the Commonwealth macro-economic policies that have contributed to high house prices and rent inflation. St Vincent de Paul Society recently released *The Ache for Home* report in which we proposed recommendations to boost the supply of social and affordable housing. They include:

- Adopting changes to negative gearing and capital gains tax rules, which have benefited investors to the detriment of those who simply need a home to live in;
- The creation of a \$10 billion social and affordable housing fund;
- Increasing Commonwealth assistance.

Inadequate income support, which is a key contributing factor to homelessness factor, should also be addressed. An increase in the Newstart allowance is recommended to reduce poverty and support access to housing in the private rental market.

Pathways into housing – Recommendations:

The lack of affordable housing and tenure protection are major barriers to exiting homelessness. In order to remove such barriers, SVDP recommends that the NSW Government:

- 1. Adopts clear targets for the delivery of social and affordable housing**
- 2. Urgently builds new social housing units to reduce the social housing wait list**
- 3. Adopts inclusionary zoning and value-capture mechanisms to boost the supply of affordable private rental housing**
- 4. Amends the Residential Tenancies Act 2010 to increase the security of tenures and limit rent increases**
- 5. Advocates for changes to Commonwealth rules, including tax concessions, that distort the housing market in favour of investors rather than home occupiers**

Community and corporate engagement to prevent and reduce homelessness

The Government, human services providers, community organisations and corporations all have a role to play in preventing and reducing homelessness.

The Rapid Rehousing Project is one of many examples of collaboration between the homelessness system, government and real estate agencies (non-government).

Another example is the partnership between the SVDP family services unit's *Vincentian House* and Beaumont Consultants' Job Club where people experiencing homelessness or at risk of homelessness can access a professional recruitment company to support resume preparation, become job ready and access employment options. Employment builds self-esteem and allows the person to feel connected with society. It can also lead to better outcomes with housing mobility.

Other examples within the Inner City include initiatives from SVDP's Ozanam Learning Centre where courses and workshops provide support to people who may be alienated by the mainstream job search agencies providers.

An increase in local community initiatives in the private sector such as employment pathways and traineeships are important to not only provide opportunities, but also to encourage community

participation and shared social responsibility. Partnerships work particularly well when they are led by the Government, which ensures ‘buy in’ from the private sector.

While we welcome corporate engagement through partnerships, we have significant reservations about the Commonwealth Government and Productivity Commission’s approach to opening competition in the human services sector. We believe that the needs of people who are at risk or experiencing homelessness are best served by Community organisations and Government agencies whose primary goal is to achieve the best outcomes for them. We caution against allowing for-profit providers to deliver Government funded homelessness services.

It is critical that the not-for-profit sector’s ability to create distinctive value is not further eroded by market reforms, and that the pursuit of economic efficiency through greater competition does not come at the expense of community connections, collaboration, specialisation, and citizen voice.

Community and corporate engagement – Recommendations:

The Government, human services providers, community organisations and corporations all have a role to play to prevent and address homelessness. We recommend strengthening partnerships between homelessness service providers but caution against allowing for-profit providers to deliver Government funded homelessness services.

Better exit planning

Early intervention and prevention are critically important when considering exit planning from statutory care, juvenile justice, correctional services and medical and psychiatric facilities and require whole-of-government approaches.

SVDP supports a Housing First approach to exit planning, particularly for people exiting prison. Release to temporary accommodation or crisis accommodation places people in immediate stress, which contributes to increasing re-offending rates and deteriorating health and well-being. A Housing First approach with an intensive support function would contribute to reducing homelessness and reoffending.

Non-time-limited flexible service delivery approaches are also critical to successful exits from out-of-home or statutory care. Greater opportunities to re-engage with support are needed. For example, many young people accessing support may need a stable base to return to as they move from education streams to employment streams. Evidence shows that being able to access support that one is familiar with as part of an ongoing and staged exit plan greatly improves outcomes for young people. This constitutes a safety net as young people go through casual/permanent part-time employment while undertaking training/educational opportunities.

Please also refer to the *Embedding early intervention and prevention* section below as it contains elements that are relevant to exit planning.

Exit planning – Recommendations:

Adequate exit planning from statutory care, juvenile justice, correctional services and medical and psychiatric facilities improves the effectiveness of the homelessness, justice and health systems. SVDP recommends a housing first and non-time-limited flexible service delivery approach where appropriate.

Empowering people through education, training and employment

SVDP agrees that education, training and employment opportunities are essential to preventing homelessness and empowering people. The experience of SVDP's Ozanam Learning Centre shows that adult education programmes can contribute to improving client outcomes. This includes learning modules on healthy relationships, AOD, living skills and therapeutic strategy for self-regulation (e.g. meditation), building self-confidence and resilience.

An inter-departmental Government approach should be adopted to ensure that there is adequate funding for such services, including for vocational education. We are concerned about the current levels of public funding and reforms that have affected access to TAFE.

Empowering People – Recommendations:

Education, training and employment opportunities are essential to preventing homelessness. A cross-departmental approach is recommended to ensure that such services, particularly vocational training, are appropriately funded and linked to support.

Putting people at the centre of responding to homelessness

SVDP supports a client-centred approach, which models the way our services and programs are provided. The client-centred approach adopted by *SVDP NSW Support Services* mirrors the adoption of the person-centred approach by the NSW Department of Ageing, Disability & Homecare (ADHC) in 2011.¹⁰ This approach centres on each person we assist. Each person determines their path and is an active partner in any solutions identified. With this approach, we aim to:

- Reduce the need for the client to repeat their story each time they access a service/program;
- Reduce the need for the client to repeat needs assessments; and
- Prevent the client from presenting to/attending the wrong service or program (eligibility).

The availability of long-term housing options is a strong determinant of the effectiveness of person-centred approaches and our experience shows that transitions from different types of housing (crisis, transitional, social, affordable, mainstream) can have highly disruptive effects, particularly on families. Delivering more affordable housing is a pre-requisite for any new strategy aimed at preventing and reducing homelessness (see section above *Creating pathways into housing*).

To help bring about lasting solutions to disadvantage, we propose that community housing providers gain the capacity to re-classify the tenure of a particular dwelling (and therefore, how its housing costs are calculated) in order to enhance tenant outcomes.

The property could change its categorisation from social housing to affordable housing to (limited-equity) homeownership, or back—without households experiencing the social and economic costs of moving, and without the household having to break established ties to community and supports from local services. This would mean that the community housing provider would be able to take into account the available alternative housing options for a particular household, and be more responsive to their holistic needs. The community housing provider would have a choice of enhancing participation and independence, or where appropriate, providing more intensive supports to help sustain a tenancy and create stability. We propose that community housing providers be

¹⁰ SVDP NSW Support Services, Client-Centred Service Delivery Model Operations Manual.

accorded this flexibility provided that the overall numbers of social and affordable housing dwellings in that provider's portfolio do not change within a financial year.

This approach would provide individualised supports to tenants to help them overcome the lack of opportunities and exclusion that characterise and perpetuate disadvantage.

People-centred – Recommendations:

The availability of long-term housing options is a strong determinant of the effectiveness of person-centred approaches and we therefore recommend that the NSW Government delivers more affordable housing and that community housing providers be allowed to re-classify the tenure of a particular dwelling.

Embedding early intervention and prevention

SVDP very much agrees with the discussion paper that prevention and early intervention are paramount.

Services such as Link2Home should have more specialist trained staff to assess and identify people at risk so as to enable quick responses to meet their needs. This may include accommodation or just support options. Currently Link2Home is at risk of becoming an after-hours TA response only, limiting the options for collaboration across the service sector.

Early intervention can also be considered via funding to educational services such as the SVDP Kids Engaged in Education Program, which works with at risk/homeless children and families to ensure the children are not traumatized through the homelessness experience and do not fall into the intergenerational homelessness cohort.

More broadly, SVDP believes that prevention starts very early on with adequate investment in health, mental health, education and other community services that build resilience. Greater access (and ease of access) along with stronger collaboration with mental health services; alcohol and other drug services, training and educational services through SHS are also recommended.

The Society warmly welcomes a focus on justice reinvestment as a policy perspective on crime with the trial programme in Bourke. A fresh perspective around criminal justice has been desperately needed, and the Society looks forward to working with government on its justice reinvestment approach, to help shape a fairer and more effective criminal justice system in New South Wales.

However, we are concerned that decisions from various departments are inconsistent with better exit planning and prevention objectives. This includes significant increases in resources allocated to building more prison cells in the last budget and the defunding of educational services that empower those in custody to better access employment on release.

Early intervention – Recommendations:

To embed early intervention and prevention, SVDP recommends reallocating resources from building prisons to building communities strength and resilience (justice reinvestment) and ensuring budget decisions are consistent with homelessness prevention and crime reduction objectives.

Strengthening collaboration

SVDP has learnt through its SHS and Temporary Accommodation programs that the best outcomes for clients often come as a result of an increase in collaboration across the service systems, including through Memorandums of Understandings and partnerships with Health, Community Services, Community Housing Providers, Housing NSW and other support providers. These partnerships ensure all services are equally aware and responsive to services capacity, allowing for greater flexibility, joint responsibility and accountability.

SVDP recommends the development of a protocol for more effective responses to homelessness and the risk of homelessness by mainstream services in order to 1. embed early intervention and prevention practices within the mainstream services; 2. promote referrals to Link2Home by all state and local government authorities who may have contact with people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness; and 3. enhance collaboration between services across all sectors.

This new protocol would supplement the NSW Government's Protocol for Homeless People in Public Places. Signatories to this new protocol could include the agencies that are signatories to the Protocol for Homeless People in Public Places (Housing NSW, Community Services, the Department of Premier and Cabinet, NSW Police Force, the Office of Environment and Heritage, NSW Health, RailCorp, State Transit Authority of NSW, the Sydney Harbour Foreshore Authority, the Sydney Olympic Park Authority, Aboriginal Affairs and Ambulance Service of NSW). Other agencies could include, for example, the Department of Education, the Department of Justice, and the Office of Local Government. This new protocol could include a system-wide definition of homelessness, prevention, and early intervention and crisis responses, to help drive collaboration between services.

Collaboration – Recommendations:

SVDP recommends developing a protocol to promote more effective and efficient responses to homelessness and the risk of homelessness by mainstream services and supplement the NSW Government's Protocol for Homeless People in Public Places.

Building Effective Referral Pathways and Processes

There are limitations to current referrals from Link2Home to Specialist Homelessness Services. Link2Home often provides limited information such as contact details about people seeking assistance to SHS staff. This often leads to people seeking assistance having to tell their stories numerous times, which may add to the ongoing trauma they may experience and create frustration and a feeling they are not being heard.

Mainstream services need to be part of a service system that is efficient and breaks down barriers to ensure people needing assistance are able to receive support when they need it. This timely support when put in place early may stop evictions from housing and accommodation, or allow supports to be wrapped around the person prior to moving into their own accommodation.

Effective referral pathways – Recommendations:

Link2Home should provide more comprehensive information for referrals to SHS and other service providers. Mainstream services should have in place referral pathways that allow timely and relevant support to those people who need it.

Using data to improve services

To identify best practice and evidence-based service delivery to improve service provision, it is recommended that FACS:

- Reports annually on SHS on a regional basis (that is, by FACS district)—This would enable better tracking of regional trends in homelessness and the risk of homelessness, and facilitate comparison with regional trends in other indicators of disadvantage; and
- Reports annually on Link2Home’s service delivery, including the source of telephone contacts to Link2Home by FACS district and by type of agency—This would complement the abovementioned SHS reporting by FACS district, and would also enable better tracking of the role of mainstream services (such as health facilities, schools and corrective services) in preventing and responding to homelessness).

Data – Recommendations:

SVDP recommends that FACS reports annually on SHS services on a regional basis and also reports annually on Link2Home’s service delivery, including the source of telephone contacts to Link2Home by FACS district and by type of agency and outcomes achieved.

Groups at higher risk of experiencing homelessness

Australia is a diverse nation. Each person has different characteristics and experiences that make them unique. Diversity encompasses all things which make people unique such as culture, religion, gender-identity, sexuality, disability, beliefs and other characteristics. SVDP embraces diversity through inclusive services and programs in which all people in need are made welcome and the individuality of each client is incorporated into the services they receive.

As highlighted in the discussion paper, some groups are at particular risk of homelessness and appropriate responses should be provided to respond to their needs in a tailored manner, and address the underlying factors that affect them.

Children and young people

Holistic programs such as the Kids Engaged in Education Program are an opportunity to specifically target the needs of children and young people experiencing homelessness within their family unit to address both immediate trauma, and support education, empowerment and resilience as they grow up – also focusing on prevention of the intergenerational cycle of homelessness.

A focus on young people including joined up approaches TEI, OOHC, specialist homelessness services and then with broader youth service system is required.

Aboriginal homelessness and CALD

Cultural and linguistic diversity requirements should be imbedded in the provision of services.

SVDP shares the concerns of Homelessness NSW that *Going Home Staying Home* has resulted in a reduction of specialist responses to Aboriginal homelessness despite considerable evidence that they lead to better outcomes for Aboriginal clients.

The development of a specific Aboriginal Homelessness strategy which promotes self-determination and community controlled service delivery is recommended.

Domestic and family violence

Domestic violence is a major factor affecting women's homelessness. Evidence consistently shows that two types of assistance are clearly critical in terms of supporting women affected by domestic and family violence¹¹:

- **provision of safe, secure and affordable housing;** and
- **provision of a continuum of individualised and open-ended support, including outreach services, that wraps around women and their children in a range of areas** (therapy, health, life skills, housing assistance et cetera) for as long as they need it.

SVDP recommends that the NSW Homelessness Strategy commits to reviewing the current service gaps in domestic and family violence accommodation services and commits to funding evidence based early intervention and affordable housing models such as Staying Home, Leaving Violence and Start Safely.

Older Women

Community organisations, including the SDVP's self-funded service at *Our Lady of the Way*, struggle to meet the growing demand for assistance from older women.

SVDP supports the analysis and recommendations contained in *A Plan for Change: Homes for Older Women*, which was developed by the Older Women's Housing and Homelessness Group and endorsed by Homelessness NSW, the Women's Housing Company, the Mercy Foundation, YMCA NSW, NOVA, Tenants' Union NSW, Shelter NSW and SVDP NSW.¹²

Older women should not be homeless in Australia in 2016. It is not acceptable that there is currently no NSW Government priority for addressing the housing needs of older women, despite increasing evidence that the numbers who are homeless, or living in housing stress, is growing.

The causes for older women's homelessness are well-known. Most older women have not been chronically homeless, but have experienced an event that has led to their homelessness such as death of a spouse, divorce or family breakdown. Older women who are homeless do not generally present complex needs or require support, but have lower incomes and fewer assets than men.

Most importantly, single older women are one of the most marginalised groups in the housing market – in the private rental market, in the social and affordable housing markets, and even in the homelessness service sector. When they are homeless older women find it much harder than older men to access homelessness services because many of those services are targeted to men, families and rough sleepers. They also rarely get access to priority social housing as they are homeless as a result of their low incomes, not as a result of complex needs.

In the context of an ageing population and decreasing rates of home ownership, the problem of older women's homelessness will increase unless the NSW Government takes action.

¹¹ Flinders Institute for Housing, Urban and Regional Research, 2008. [Women, Domestic and Family Violence and Homelessness: A Synthesis Report](#) and [Royal Commission into Family Violence Report, 2016](#).

¹² See Homelessness NSW, [A Plan for Change: Homes for Older Women](#).

In particular, *A Plan for Change: Homes for Older Women*, identifies six recommendations:

- 1. A NSW Government commitment to develop a comprehensive strategy to address the homelessness of older women**
- 2. Funding for the development of two new affordable housing projects for older women**
- 3. Making the private rental sector a viable long term option for older women**
- 4. Improving the way that the housing and homelessness service system responds to and supports homeless older women**
- 5. Developing a targeted mixed equity model for older women**
- 6. Securing the financial independence of older women**

In addition, we must ensure that older generations have access to flexible workplaces and just conditions that will allow them to work or to retire with dignity.

Rough sleeping and chronic homelessness

Based on our extensive experience working with people who are sleeping rough, SVDP supports a Housing First approach.

Mental illness and homelessness

An individual's mental health crisis almost never occurs in isolation: it is intertwined with housing stress, employment options, race, gender, class, place, and the success or otherwise of previous mental health interventions. We call for a new approach to mental health in Australia that recognises these intersectional issues, and focuses on community education and early intervention.

First, the Society believes that more must be done on early intervention in mental health care. We have consistently argued that early intervention and education is far more beneficial – personally, economically, and socially – for a range of social issues, including homelessness, and criminal justice engagement.

Secondly, more must be done to support frontline emergency services for people in crisis.

Finally, high turnover (discharge) rates from psychiatric in-patient units mean that patients return to the community with only temporary accommodation, inevitably leading to their presentation at Society facilities. Often their needs for healthcare and accommodation support are complex, requiring specialized interventions. The Society can and does play an important role at certain points in this continuum of support, but clearly cannot and should not be the sole provider of all services. Strong, responsive partnerships are essential with other agencies, and more must be done to ensure that people have supportive housing arrangements in addition to their mental health treatment plans.

People with disability

People with disability are not a uniform group and services should be tailored to their specific needs.

A lot can be done to promote accessibility across the board. This includes delivering more affordable, suitable and accessible housing. SVDP regularly comes across people with mobility challenges living in poorly accessible dwellings that contribute to further isolating them.

Beyond dwelling characteristics, it is important that housing be located near accessible public transport and that efforts be made to build strong communities, particularly in social housing, so people at risk can be identified and supported early by their neighbours and local community.

Access to services and information in accessible formats can also be promoted (easy read, large print, braille, audio). SVDP has seen instances of Housing NSW communicating with visually-impaired clients solely by mail.

The personalisation of services also requires assistance to navigate a complex system to avoid getting transferred from one service to the next.

More collaboration and information sharing between housing, health, and disability services is also required. In the context of the NDIS, effective collaboration between Government departments and between all stakeholders will be essential to the effectiveness of the NDIS. Some of the scheme's shortcomings, particularly for clients who are not considered of highest need category, can be complemented by additional support from the NSW Government.

Employment opportunities for people with a disability should also be promoted.

Leaving prison and homelessness

Please refer to previous sections on *better exit planning* and *prevention*.

Veterans

While the provision of services to Veterans is a Commonwealth responsibility, SVDP believes that the NSW Government must play a role in ensuring joined up service provision.

Groups at higher risk – Recommendations:

Appropriate responses should be provided to respond to the needs of groups who are at higher risk of homelessness in a tailored manner, and address the underlying factors that affect them. SVDP recommends that the NSW Government:

1. Develops a specific Aboriginal Homelessness strategy which promotes self-determination and community controlled service delivery
2. Commits to funding evidence-based early intervention and affordable housing models such as Staying Home, Leaving Violence and Start Safely
3. Adopts the recommendations contained in *A Plan for Change: Homes for Older Women*
4. Adopts a housing first approach to rough sleeping
5. Delivers more accessible housing, transport and services for people with disability
6. Promotes collaboration to ensure the effectiveness of the NDIS