

Budget Submission

Contact

Tony Keenan
CEO – Launch Housing
T: 03 - 9288 9628
E: tony.keenan@launchhousing.org.au

Dr Heather Holst
Deputy CEO – Launch Housing
T: 03 - 9288 9680
E: heather.holst@launchhousing.org.au

Nicola Ballenden
General Manager Research, Service Development
& Advocacy – Launch Housing
T: 03- 9288 9801
E: nicola.ballenden@launchhousing.org.au

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About Launch Housing

Two of Melbourne's largest and most respected housing and homelessness services, Hanover Welfare Services and HomeGround Services, merged in July 2015 to create a new organisation Launch Housing. Launch Housing has a single, unambiguous focus - to end homelessness in Melbourne and beyond.

The merger boosts capacity and strengthens the response to growing demand on our services. It will mean that we can better serve the people who need housing, but also work with clients, government and the community to change the drivers of homelessness.

Launch Housing delivers services to around 20,000 households each year from 14 sites across Melbourne. In addition to housing and support, Launch Housing will continue the important role of research and policy development, its cutting edge not for profit real estate agency, as well as education, employment and training services and a broad range of health services.

With a combined history of 75 years, Launch Housing comes from a strong shared position of:

- delivering high quality housing and support services;
- providing a strengths based approach by investing in peoples' skills, abilities and talents;
- undertaking research for evidence informed practices; and
- influencing change through advocacy to governments and the community.

There is a clear alignment in the values of Hanover and HomeGround and at the core of those values is the belief that everyone has a right to a home.

Launch Housing will undoubtedly be Victoria's strongest independent voice on homelessness and largest provider of housing and homelessness services.

1. The need for a system focus on homelessness

Homeless services have been bearing the brunt of policy shortfalls in many areas for a long time now and yet have generally been overlooked as a source of information for policy makers. For example, the Services Connect reforms overlooked the centrality of homelessness to many people's difficulties and sought to establish access arrangements that did not build on the highest volume access points that the Victorian social services system already offers in the homelessness system.

By analysing the pathways that have brought people into homelessness, much could be learned about better service interventions upstream and about the wider policy settings that could have removed the stressors that made each person homeless. For this reason, Launch Housing supports the implementation of the NDIS and eagerly awaits the reforms that will flow from the Royal Commission into Family Violence, but also urges a deeper investigation of the contemporary causes of homelessness in Victoria. We also know that specialist homelessness services must remain a substantial plank of the service offer to people in need in Victoria.

Homelessness services require much more government focus on service delivery effort to rapidly assist the most vulnerable Victorians. We have seen the Opening Doors reform to the access arrangements and consequently some progress on better alignment of resources to demand but this lost momentum since 2010.

There is much more work to do to improve the consistency of high quality responses by all entry points to the personal crisis of homelessness, including assist in access to the necessary resources from all relevant sectors.

As just a few examples:

- Not all homelessness service and affordable housing resources are made available to access points for best matching clients.
- The resourcing of access points is not adequate for the work they are required to perform, either the volume of assessments, the follow up work, or the matching of resources to clients.
- The technology of the resource register that supports Opening Doors is now nearly 10 years old and has never moved past “Version 1”, creating inefficiencies and blind spots for the workers running the system.
- Consistency has reportedly diminished between access points since the peak of the Opening Doors reform in 2009, so that a person will get a very different quality of service depending on where they seek assistance – some will receive assistance with a public housing application, others won’t; some are well linked into tertiary services such as mental health and drug and alcohol.

The homelessness system is certainly not as piecemeal as it was before Opening Doors, but the advantage it delivered has not been consolidated and nor has it been developed to keep pace with broader changes.

It is also many years since the big base of case management service investment has been examined and reworked to be fit for current purpose. It is widely acknowledged that the newer programs introduced in 2010 under the National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness are generally more fit for purpose, although there has been legitimate criticism by the Auditor General of poor program oversight in too many cases. Melbourne Street to Home is one such program that Launch Housing is proud to lead. It is also apparent that the new programs introduced through the Victorian Innovation Action Projects in 2011-12 and the youth foyers have delivered well.

There is an opportunity to better align the investment in case management with the current demand in terms of location, target group and delivery methodology. Over the medium term we need to swing the system much more to “Housing First” rather than a pathway approach and we need to match intensity of response to need – Rapid Rehousing, lighter interventions for the many and in depth Supportive Housing for the fewer highly complex situations. Once this work is well underway, we will be able to see where the resourcing shortfalls are that must be addressed.

Recommendation 1: The Government should fund further research into the contemporary causes of homelessness within Victoria with a specific focus on system failures (ie where the failure of other systems eg mental health, family violence) that result in homelessness.

Recommendation 2: The Government should continue the work on the homelessness access system to improve consistency of service offering, efficiency and service gaps.

Recommendation 3: The Government should work with the sector to develop technology and resources to support more consistent and efficient practice and resource allocation to support homelessness access points.

Recommendation 4: The Government, together with the homelessness sector, needs to develop a homelessness strategy that focusses on “Housing First” and ‘rapid rehousing’ rather than the existing pathway approach.

2. Affordable housing investment

No homelessness responses can succeed without an adequate supply of affordable housing that is purposefully directed to those most in need.

It is heartening to see the Victorian government's interest in affordable housing. We recognise that growing affordable housing is best undertaken in combination with the necessary federal measures, but urge the Victorian government to activate all policy strategies at its disposal even if this federal partnership falls short.

According to US economist [David Rosen](#), who led a review of the \$7 trillion spent in the US on federal finance, tax, lending, spending and regulatory programs and policies, the place to start on an affordable housing strategy is a standard definition of 'affordable housing'. The next step would be to calculate current and projected need for affordable housing, by subtracting housing need from the current available stock.

The cost of owning or renting a home includes the rent or mortgage payment, along with property taxes, and unit maintenance. A household can also incur onerous transport costs, particularly where they live far from employment and have limited access to public transport. Internationally, affordability is usually defined as housing costing no more than 30-35% of household income, adjusted for household size. In Australia the accepted measure of housing stress is where households in the lowest 40% of income, spend more than 30% of their income on housing.

For households earning less than 30% of their area's median income, private market housing will almost certainly be out of reach without some form of subsidy. For instance, in metropolitan Melbourne, the [average weekly income](#) is \$1,333. A little over 11% of households in Melbourne (159,000 households), [earn less than \\$400 a week](#) which is 30% of the area median income. These households could only afford to pay a maximum of \$133 on rent or mortgage repayment a week, and less than [1% of current rentals in Melbourne are available at those](#) prices. Social housing constitutes 3.5% of total housing stock in Victoria, and most of it is occupied by these low income households. So at the most basic level, affordable housing would be seeking to fill that shortfall of over 150,000 units in Melbourne alone, as well as building for future affordable housing needs.

After calculating housing need, the next requirement for an affordable housing strategy would be to identify all potential revenue sources for affordable housing. These could be direct funding from national, state and local governments, but also indirect funding through tax rebates, low or no cost land, or mechanisms like reduced parking requirements or expedited planning approvals (which cuts land holding costs and uncertainties). There are a plethora of mechanisms used in other countries that could be adopted here. For instance, in the US, the Low Income Housing Tax Credit has, since 1986, allowed private investors to obtain tax credits in return for a 10 year investment in constructing or rehabilitating low-income rental housing. The stable and politically bipartisan program injects about [US\\$6 billion per annum into capital for affordable housing](#). If a small proportion of the current Australian negative gearing tax credit were re-allocated towards investment in social housing, a similarly scaled program could be instituted in Australia. Similarly, if government guaranteed a 6% return in social housing investment, how much of the [\\$2 trillion held in superannuation funds](#) could be unlocked?

Supportive housing— the provision of high quality, permanent housing with the associated supports delivered into the housing - underpins the delivery of assistance to the chronically homeless in Europe and North America and should be seen as key to ending homelessness here however Australia has been slow to support it. There was some investment in Common Ground models, including Elizabeth Street in Melbourne, but this has stalled and must be reinvigorated.

Launch Housing has developed enormous expertise in this area through Elizabeth Street and the youth foyers and has several new projects on the drawing board: a families project in Coburg; a second Common Ground for a redeveloped Haig Street Southbank in conjunction with crisis accommodation and private housing; and another Common Ground at the Queen Victoria Market development depending on the outcomes of the City of Melbourne developer selection process.

Recommendation 5: Victorian Government should lead the development of an affordable housing strategy specifically targeting those at risk of homelessness. This would include

- ***Clearly defining affordability.***
- ***Identifying housing need by area and setting a target for increasing the supply of affordable housing.***
- ***Developing innovative regulatory and funding models (e.g. inclusionary zoning social impact bonds, expedited planning approvals, government guarantee for investments into social housing by institutional investors) to increase the supply of affordable housing.***
- ***Recognise and resource supportive housing models.***

3. Government response to the Royal Commission into Family Violence

Unravelling the toxic and damaging connection between family violence and homelessness should be a key priority of the Government's response to the Royal Commission into Family Violence.

Family violence is a major driver of homelessness. Analysis of Launch Housing data suggests that up to 6 in 10 of Launch Housing clients, many of them families with young children, are seeking help as a consequence of family violence. Family violence already causes significant harm to its victims, the vast majority of whom are women and children. But becoming homeless on top of this exacerbates this trauma and brings a new range of disruptions to these vulnerable families.

Significantly, Launch Housing data suggests that a large proportion of our clients have not sought help from either the police or family violence services. In a recent snapshot of client data from our Dandenong service around 60% of clients had not sought the assistance of police and around 70% had not sought the help of family violence services.

This has a number of implications. Firstly, it means that homelessness services become a first point of contact for many of the most vulnerable families experiencing family violence. Secondly, it means that our system is manifestly failing to reach these families before they are in abject crisis and in a situation where they have lost their housing. We prioritise the needs of these families and we are quite effective at managing an immediate crisis, although services are always stretched. We can find safe accommodation although it is often temporary.

The way housing support is currently configured means that women and children are often displaced and are forced to move from one transitional housing situation to another, sometimes for a periods up to a year or more. This makes it difficult to access other support programs and severely disrupts children's engagement in education. The consequence of this is that the harm caused by family violence can continue to cast a shadow over a family long after the violence ends.

Our view is that the Government needs to focus on three key policy areas in order to start to properly address the issue of family violence and homelessness.

Support victims of family violence to stay in their own homes

Firstly, wherever possible, measures should be taken that support victims of family violence to stay in their own homes. Earlier preventative engagement with police, legal advice and family violence services would be helpful to families in this situation as would more consistent enforcement of family violence intervention orders. Programs that specifically aim to identify these families early and work with them to retain their housing can also be helpful – an example is the Families@ Home pilot program offered in Whittlesea. Sometimes, this also means finding affordable housing for the perpetrators of family violence so that mothers and children can stay in the family home.

A great example of this is the Families@Home pilot program which has worked to keep families who are experiencing violence at home while removing the perpetrator. Kildonan Uniting Care works with the family and Launch Housing finds housing options for the perpetrator enable women and children to stay in the family home.

Recommendation 6: Fund 'Safe at Home' programs to allow the victims of family violence to be supported within their own homes whenever possible.

Recommendation 7: Increase funding for programs to remove perpetrators of violence from the family home and rehouse them as way of keeping women and children safe.

Recommendation 8: Fund an action research project to find out why women presenting at homelessness services don't contact police or family violence services and develop mechanisms for increasing engagement with these services as a way of preventing homelessness.

Rapidly rehouse families who have experienced family violence

Secondly, where these families do become homeless, or remaining safely at home is not an option, they need to be rapidly rehoused in long term, affordable housing. This gives them a firm base on which to access services, attend school and rebuild the rest of their lives.

Mostly, public housing is not a viable option for these families, Victoria has only about 3% of social housing stock, one of the lowest rates in the country. Even if families are eligible for public housing it may be many years until they can get access which may result in moves throughout transitional housing in the interim.

Instead, mechanisms such as private rental brokerage, where organisations like ours work with private real estate agents to facilitate access to private rental properties is another part of the solution. Launch Housing provides a range of private rental programs from philanthropic funds as well as a share of the \$2m per annum Housing Establishment Funds (HEF).

Launch Housing also offers subsidised housing through two philanthropically funded head leasing programs – New Directions and Ridge Rental Access – and through HomeGround Real Estate which passes lower rents through to tenants from landlords who are willing to accept below market rentals. At the time of writing, there are 11 head leased properties and 120 subsidised rental properties. This is essentially access to affordable private rental without the brokerage requirement.

Our experience in delivering private rental brokerage programs to families fleeing violence suggests that there are a number of key factors that increase the long term success and sustainability of these programs:

- Rapid rehousing is key – the longer a family is homeless, the harder it is to end their homelessness. Existing health and financial problems deteriorate and families lose social connections. Children lose their connection with school.
- Financial assistance in meeting bond payments and subsidising rents for a period of time increases the stability of tenancy in private rental.
- Partnership between family violence services and housing services based on shared resources, a focus on safety, collaboration and a common practice framework is important.
- Employment is very helpful in terms of assisting women to sustain economic independence and stable housing. Often economic abuse co-exists with other forms of family violence (Good Shepherd and Wyndham Legal Services 2015) and sustaining economic independence lessens the risk that women will return to a violent relationship. Collaboration with Jobactive providers and other employment services are helpful however suitable employment outcomes (and arranging affordable childcare) take time. There may also be scope for a more specialised employment response for this group (see next section on employment).

A great example of a private rental brokerage model that focusses specifically on families who have experienced family violence is the Rapid Re-Housing Brokerage Program which was introduced in 2015 with support from the REA Group. The program aims to provide flexible brokerage funds to assist women and children escaping family violence. The fund is available through five partner agencies: Launch Housing, Kildonan UnitingCare, Justice Connect, Ruah Community Services, Perth; and Micah Projects, Brisbane.

Ideally, rental subsidies to ensure affordable rent (where rent is no more than 30% of income) should be available for a more extended period of time than is currently available under the existing rental brokerage schemes to allow families to re-establish themselves.

‘Wraparound’ employment and training services for mothers and school engagement services for children should also be included (see next sections).

Recommendation 9: Increase support for private rental brokerage programs so that families who are victims of family violence can be rapidly rehoused.

Recommendation 10: Include longer term rental subsidies combined with ‘wraparound’ employment and education support for mothers who require it as a result of their youngest child reaching school age.

Introduce measures to ensure that children who become homeless because of family violence get special supports to continue their education.

Thirdly, we need to ensure that these families have access to a range of services that support them to recover from the physical, emotional and often financial trauma of family violence.

Experiences of homelessness and family violence have negative impacts on children's health and wellbeing including limited school engagement and ability to develop relationships with peers (Moore & McArthur, 2011; Murphy, 2011 cited in Baker 2015). The high mobility inherent in children's experiences of homelessness often impedes their consistent engagement and participation in education (Moore & McArthur, 2011 cited in Baker 2015). Furthermore, experiences of homelessness or unstable housing often require children to make multiple school moves. It has been estimated that when such disruptions occur to children's education their academic progress is set back by four to six months (Murphy & Tobin, 2011; Wynne & Ausikaitis, 2013 cited in Baker 2015). Homeless children are more likely to have high levels of absenteeism from school as well as reduced academic success (Fantuzzo et al., 2012). It is clear that there are cumulative negative impacts to a child's learning and their educational and social attainment, without taking into consideration additional risks homelessness poses to children's overall physical and psychological wellbeing.

The AIHW annual survey of specialist homelessness services has found that many children aged 5-14 were not enrolled in education. Across all services, fourteen per cent (14%) of clients aged 5-14 were not enrolled in education—the largest proportion were aged between 5 and 6 (44%).

In Victoria, children in crisis or temporary accommodation are not guaranteed access to the local school, and schools may feel ill equipped to adequately meet the needs of these children (Martin 2014). In effect, this can mean that children in this situation can be denied their basic right to free public schooling.

One example of a program that could be usefully expanded is the Homeless Children's Specialist Support Service funded under the National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness (NPAH) which provides a range of integrated supports to children who have experienced homelessness and/or family violence. Currently, children can only access this program from four DHHS regions. In 2010 under the National Partnership Agreement, Launch Housing (previously Hanover Welfare Services) was one of three agencies across the state, funded to provide a specialist response with the aim of helping children re-connect with education, overcome trauma and improve their long term outcomes.

DHHS objectives of the HCSSS service response are:

- To provide a flexible and immediate response to improve the support outcomes (including improved engagement with education) for children accessing the homelessness service system, thereby decreasing the impact of trauma on both their immediate and long term emotional and physical wellbeing;
- To reduce the stress on parents by assisting them to resolve the support issues of their children, and enhancing their capacity to resolve their own support issues;
- Enhance the understanding and capacity of the Homelessness Service Sector to respond appropriately to the support needs of children who are experiencing homelessness within a systematic, family orientated framework;
- To improve access to specialist and mainstream support resources for children and families experiencing homelessness;
- To increase inter-service collaboration and communication, making the best use of resources available to improve the outcomes for children and families in the Homelessness Service System.

Launch Housing has since secured philanthropic funding to add further programs where needs and gaps had been identified, particularly in terms of engagement in school. This small pilot aims to;

- Support for families who are residing in City Gate or like accommodation to enrol their children in school as well as consistently build positive relationships with local schools.

- Offer groups for parents to build their skills on their child's education including homework, navigating the educational system in turn parents would have peer support from other parents in a similar situations.
- Build positive relationships with key schools and welfare officers/ coordinators
- Parents and care givers will feel empowered and confident in their children's education needs including homework
- Parents/caregivers will learn necessary skills to provide assistance with children's homework through group work
- Parents/caregivers attending group work and feel supported by other parents and peers in a similar situation

Access to education is a right for all children, yet for these vulnerable children circumstances beyond their control mean that their engagement with education and their academic achievement can be at risk. This, in turn can lead to compounding the disadvantage that they have already experienced through homelessness and, often, family violence.

While homelessness organisations work to reengage children and their families in education this is not something that the homelessness sector can achieve on its own. Initiatives need to be in partnership with the education Department.

Recommendation 11: Increase funding for the Homeless Children's Specialist Support Service to be delivered in all DHHS regions.

Recommendation 12: Ensure that the Children and Youth Area Partnerships specifically include all homeless children in the region when determining priorities for re-engaging in education, even when these children may only be temporarily housed in the area.

Recommendation 13: Provide funding to the Department of Education to enable 2 teachers to be seconded to each Homeless Children's Specialist Support Services (HCSSS) in each DHHS region in order to:

- ***Develop and deliver programs to enable children to catch up on missed learning***
- ***Develop and deliver evidence based programs (such as Reading Recovery) to improve the literacy and numeracy of children who have experienced homelessness***
- ***To work with schools to develop re-entry to learning plans for children when they re-enter schooling***

Recommendation 14: Consider a short term subsidy to be paid to schools to support children who have experienced homelessness to catch up and integrate into school. (The subsidy could pay for uniforms, tutoring, counselling).

4. Employment and Homelessness

Launch Housing believes that, for many of our clients, sustainable employment is vital to ending homelessness and we have a long-standing commitment to supporting our clients to find employment and to engage in education and training.

Launch Housing has experience delivering a range of employment services including:

- Commonwealth JSA (until 2015).
- Pilot employment programs such as Building Stable Lives (until 2014)
- State Government employment programs such as Aspiring Women (until 2015).
- Youth Foyer.

It is worth noting that Commonwealth employment services have recently been overhauled. While the previous JSA system had a variety of deficits in terms of its effectiveness for people experiencing homelessness, changes introduced under the new Jobactive system are likely make meaningful employment assistance even more difficult to access for the most disadvantaged job seekers, including people experiencing homelessness. These include:

- A move to mainstream rather than specialist providers. Launch Housing had been a provider of Commonwealth employment services specifically to people experiencing homelessness and had achieved good outcomes¹ and developed specific expertise in this area. However we, and other specialist providers, were not successful in the recent tender round (November 2014). All providers are now generalist providers and there is no incentive within the new system for them to partner with agencies, like Launch Housing who are funded to provide other supports.
- A much weakened focus on training, particularly at the basic levels (Certificate 1 and 2). Most education outcome payments have been removed- education outcomes are only paid for 15-17 year olds attaining not less than a Certificate 2. This is a real disadvantage for jobseekers with very low levels of formal education who require access to basic training, for example, multiple courses at Certificate Level 1 or 2.
- Less flexibility around reclassifying job seekers according to complexity. Under the previous system many clients (around 30% of clients in Launch Housing JSA employment programs) had to be reclassified as the Centrelink assessment was inaccurate – for example Centrelink failed to recognise that many clients were homeless at the time of assessment. Job providers will no longer be able to reclassify clients and will have to apply to Centrelink (DHS) for reclassification.

Through our experience in delivering employment services as well as our extensive research we are aware of what works in terms of delivering effective employment, education and training services for people who have experienced homelessness. Key elements of an effective employment response for people experiencing homelessness include:

- Intensive case management and support that might include one on one mentoring and counselling and assistance to address the social and practical barriers to work.
- Access to specialised and tailored training to build basic foundation and vocational skills such as numeracy and literacy (Cert1 or 2) as well as practical skills such as gaining a driving licence. Many clients require support to attend training to improve work readiness in terms of skills, attitudes and behaviours.
- Strong relationships with employers and lengthy periods of on the job support for both the employee and employer. For example strong relationships with employers and continuing on the job support were key to placing women in sustainable employment within our Aspiring Women program.
- Engagement with housing support services in addition to employment services. Unsurprisingly, access to stable housing improves employment outcomes.

¹ Clients participating in Launch Housing (exHanover) employment programs who had also experienced homelessness was able to find sustainable employment 27% of the time compared to 4% for homeless people with standard JSA Providers (AIHW data 2013-14).

We would recommend that the state government fund a number of supplementary programs for specific groups of disadvantaged jobseekers, including people experiencing homelessness, who are currently being ill-served by the current Commonwealth Jobactive system. These include:

1. **Single parent households who have fled family violence** – These families have been able to access housing through a private rental brokerage agreement. Sustainable employment for this group will be a key to sustaining housing. While many will be required to register with Jobactive providers (Commonwealth funded) once their youngest child turns 8, in many cases these programs will not be sufficient to re-engage these women in the labour market. A range of supplementary services (eg supported, tailored basic training, support finding affordable childcare, access to real work experience and on the job support) will increase the likelihood that these women can find sustainable work.
2. **Young people leaving care** – this group struggle to get access to stable, affordable housing and is at high risk of homelessness and disengagement from both education and the labour market. In order to successfully negotiate the transition to adulthood this group should be entitled to an integrated package of support that addresses their needs for housing, education and training and employment. Some may also need support with mental health and other health needs as well as support to develop independent living skills. For some (although not all) of this group, access to private rental brokerage together with a rental subsidy until the age of 25² could provide access to the stable housing that will give this group a firm base from which to engage in further training or employment. Others will need a model of supportive housing such as the youth foyer.

With stable housing and support this group will be more able to participate in the employment education or training that is required to secure their future, although it should be recognised that housing alone, is not enough. They should be offered access to tailored programs that meet their needs as well as support to access training. The new Commonwealth Transition to Work program aimed specifically at supporting disadvantaged young people to secure employment could also be beneficial for this group.

3. **Jobseekers who have experienced homelessness, are on Newstart Allowance and been unemployed for over 12 months.** – Evidence indicates that once a person moves into long term unemployment, their chances of regaining work diminish greatly. This will lead to increased costs the state and, if the person is experiencing homelessness, a high risk of them becoming long term homeless. This cohort will be required to register with a JobActive provider who will be unable able to provide the full suite of services that may be required to find and keep sustainable work. However the right types of support in finding work is essential to ensure that this group can sustain their housing, particularly if they are in private rental. The state government could fund a range of complementary support services such as access to basic training, intensive case management, access to real work experience and on the job support that would increase the likelihood that this group will find sustainable work.

It is also important that any new pilot programs are underpinned by rigorous data collection and evaluation.

² One model that the State Government could consider is a Secure Tenancy Guarantee Scheme that would provide every care leaver with a 'tenure security guarantee' - a rental subsidy that would ensure they pay only 25 per cent of their income on rent until the age of 25. Access to stable housing will give this group a firm base from which to engage in further training or employment. (A similar recommendation has been made by the Council to Homeless Persons in their pre Budget submission).

Recommendation 15: *That the State Government consider funding a range of supplementary services (eg tailored basic training, intensive case management, access to real job experience and on the job support) that will increase the likelihood that disadvantaged jobseekers, including people who have experienced homelessness are able to find and sustain employment.*

These programs should be offered to:

- *Single parent households who are in private rental and have fled family violence,*
- *Jobseekers who have experienced homelessness, are on New Start Allowance and have been unemployed for 12 months or more.*

Recommendation 16: *That the State Government fund an integrated package of support, including housing for young people leaving state care. Private rental brokerage together with long term rental subsidies could be considered for some young people leaving care as long as this is provided as part of an integrated package of support.*

Recommendation 17: *That rigorous data collection and evaluation be included as part of the trial of any new approaches.*

5. Tenancy Support for People at Risk of Homelessness

The Social Housing Advocacy and Support Program (SHASP) was introduced across Victoria in 2006 in response to a recognition of growing complexity within the cohort of public housing tenants and the need for additional support to prevent eviction (and consequent homelessness).

The SHASP program was a mix of both short term support and longer term more intensive support. Launch Housing, together with a range of other providers delivers the program which provides intensive case management that supports clients to manage their tenancies. Case management might include assistance to address financial issues and rent arrears, hoarding and squalor, address anti-social behaviour and support engagement with mental health and drug and alcohol services.

The evidence shows that this program is very effective in maintaining tenancies with vulnerable clients. A report produced by SHASP providers in 2014 found that the vast majority (60%) of clients (1020 across the SHASP program) sustained tenancy, with 18% still supported. Only 3% were evicted or relinquished their tenancy.

In 2010 funding to the program was unexpectedly cut by the then Minister for Housing, Wendy Lovell. The funding cuts took place over a two year period that saw the overall funding for SHASP across the state drop by 38%, from \$7.4 million in 2009 to \$4.7m in 2010. The consequence of this funding cut has been:

- An increase in evictions from public housing. A 2013 request made by Greens MP Colleen Hartland, has shown that there was a drop in evictions when SHASP was fully funded with an increase of (39%) over the three years following the funding cuts.
- The DHS's annual report for 2012–2013 cited tenants in arrears had risen from \$12 to \$15.1 million from 2012 to 2013. At an annual program cost of \$4.7 million, SHASP's capacity to assist tenants to address this debt is certainly cost effective.
- Once evicted, these tenants are almost always evicted into homelessness. It is worth noting that each eviction is estimated to cost around \$34,000 (including support to exit homelessness). This is compared to an average cost per client of \$2000 for the SHASP program.
- There is much less scope for prevention and early intervention to support tenancies. The funding cut necessitated a change in the service model so that only the most complex clients could be seen. Prior to the cuts, the program had a caseload of 8,000. The case load is now 2,400 of cases requiring more intensive support.

Recommendation 18: That SHASP funding is restored to pre-cut levels as soon as possible.

Recommendation 19: That new funding is allocated to allow the SHASP client cohort to be expanded to include tenancies at risk within community housing

Recommendation 20: That new funding is allocated to allow the SHASP client cohort to be expanded to support the establishment and maintenance of high risk tenancies within the private rental market

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