



# POLICY BRIEFING # 3 : MAY 2008

Pre Conference policy briefing papers for the NYCH Workshop at the 5<sup>th</sup> National Homelessness Conference 21-23 May 2008

## THE WAY FORWARD ...



## ... a 10 POINT ROAD MAP FOR YOUTH HOMELESSNESS IN AUSTRALIA

### **COST : \$1 Billion over ten years.**

**“The cost of not doing what needs to be done will be a large cost to the community into the future.”**

The NYC has estimated that : “In terms of preliminary costings where there is existing evidence or a sufficient basis for making estimates, it would cost approximately cost \$1 billion in new money over a decade, \$100 million in the first term of the new Federal Government after the 2007 election result, and approximately \$20 million additional funds every year. This notional estimate excludes the costs associated with a reform of the care and protection systems around Australia, and the additional services required in mental health and drug and alcohol fields to more effectively service the significant group of their clients who are homeless young people. The total cost of redressing the affordability of housing for young people could not reasonably estimated at the time of this report, but it will be a considerable sum, and also, the cost of reformed employment services for homeless young people has not been estimated.

*“ The development and implementation of a framework and a national action plan on homelessness is imperative. One of the lessons from the past ten to fifteen years on how homelessness has been addressed is that policy has been unevenly attended to and there has been no planned approach. Within a no-growth budget, there has been good cooperative oversight of SAAP, but JPET and Reconnect have been developed separately. There is no common data collection and decisions are not strongly coordinated. The following 10 points comprise what might be called a ‘roadmap’. They are not the only areas for attention but they are must do strategic areas. Implementing the core 10 points of the Roadmap would change the face of youth homelessness in Australia. This will be a complex developmental process requiring policy multi-tasking and new ways of connecting different areas of policy and programs – but all the core ingredients need to be in play. In the first term of the new Government, \$100 million per year would make that possible and demonstrate to the Australian community that ‘homelessness’ is one of the Government’s highest priorities for national action.”*

*(“Australia’s Homeless Youth” NYC 2008)*

# TEN POINT ROAD MAP

Adapted from the "Australia's Homeless Youth" Report (NYC April 2008)

## 1. Develop and implement a national framework and National Homelessness Action Plan

Australia needs a new commitment from Commonwealth and state and territory governments on homelessness, a national framework and a national action plan, including:

- A national aspirational horizon the goal of eliminating youth homelessness by 2030;
- Appropriate structures and processes designed to work across election cycles in a bipartisan way;
- Specific targets over the short, medium and long-term;
- Strategies that set out realistically how targets will be reached.
- A youth-centred focus for service provision and programs;
- Review and public monitoring so that progress can be recognised and problems identified against the needs of homeless young people.

## 2. Affordable housing for young people

An affordable housing crisis has developed as a result of decades of policy neglect and under-funding. There will need to be: (a) a multi-billion dollar investment in public and community housing; (b) taxation incentives to encourage affordable private rental housing, and (c) explicit policies and housing form designs and locations that facilitate access for young people. The NYC is concerned that the interests and needs of young people are appropriately addressed under a new National Affordable Housing Strategy and that the hard work of undertaking planning based on the leading edge Australian housing research is done.

**The NYC recommends: - the development of a new national affordable housing strategy for Australia, with explicit attention to the needs of young people and in particular disadvantaged young people.**

## 3. Refocus service provision on building and resourcing 'communities of services'

The way governments and departments divide up geographical areas for funding and program delivery is confusing, contradictory and uncoordinated, with little progress since the Burdekin Report in 1989. Building 'communities of services' will require all government departments to work towards agreed compatible geographical templates based on actual communities of people. Large Local Government Areas or clusters of small LGAs are probably the closest spatial unit to actual communities. Community capacity building has entered the rhetoric of the community services, but there is a challenge in how it could be achieved in practice. Building effective local service systems will require resources to advance beyond the current status quo. The exemplars of the School Focused Youth Service or the Youth Support Coordinators combined with some of the Queensland education coordination reforms point the way forward. Ultimately whatever is done needs to be available to all communities.

**The NYC recommends: An estimated minimum funding goal of \$30 million per year, but implemented over 10 years would require \$3 million/year of additional funds. "is is a conservative position that could serve as a realistic starting point. This initiative will require: - a refocus of Commonwealth and State/ Territory funding for services and programs on a common community level template; - the provision of cross-sectoral/ cross-departmental resources to support the development sustainable 'communities of services'.**

#### **4. Prevent homelessness by supporting 'at-risk' families**

*If at-risk families are assisted in a flexible, practical needs-based way before they become homeless, then homelessness can be prevented. A small program known as HOME Advice has demonstrated that this is possible in nine out of 10 cases. About one third of all SAAP clients are families with nearly 55,000 accompanying children, Preventive support to assist at-risk families using a proven model would have a major impact on the number of families entering SAAP. The HOME Advice evaluation estimated that a conservative minimum of \$36 million would be required but suggested more realistic funding of \$60-90m per year.*

**The NYC recommends: An investment of \$4.5 million per year of additional funds would achieve a position of \$60 million dollars over a decade. - progressively expand the HOME Advice program as a preventive response to homelessness for families at risk of becoming homeless to at least \$60m per year.**

#### **5. Resource early intervention for at risk young people.**

*School-based early intervention responses for recently homeless young people, such as the Reconnect program and other related early intervention support services, have been effective in reducing homelessness. Researchers found that the reduction in the number of homeless 12-18 year olds from 26,060 in 2001 to 21,940 in 2006 is mostly attributed to 'early intervention'. Early intervention works but not enough is being done to have the effect it could have,*

**The NYC recommends - treble Reconnect (from \$20m to \$60m per year) to reach a larger proportion of the at-risk population and ensure that every community in the nation has sufficient early intervention capacity to impact on the number of young people at-risk of homelessness or recently homeless**

#### **6. A new national approach for the care and protection of children in all states and territories**

*Australia's Care and Protection system is in crisis. The Commonwealth Government to date has had little responsibility for care and protection, which has been a state responsibility. State programs are under-resourced and leaving care support needs major development. "e lack of a national cooperative approach and timid reform in the face of potentially adverse media are major barriers. A courageous and radical national review of care and protection is urgent. It is not possible to estimate how much this would cost, but it is likely to require a significant increase in current expenditure. Young people who have been in State Care are heavily over-represented in the population of homeless youth. Immediate action is required.*

**NYC urges immediate action including:**

- a full Human Rights and Equal Opportunity inquiry to expose the issues and develop proposals for a national response. - a strengthening of care and protection for at-risk 12-17 year olds;**
- urgent remedial attention to staff resources and incentives for experienced staff to remain in a critical but difficult area;**
- leaving care support on a needs-basis for all young people exiting care and protection.**

#### **7 Ensure supported accommodation is accessible in all communities**

*Supported accommodation (ie SAAP) remains a core component of Australia's response to homelessness and an exemplar of innovative diversity by international standards, despite being in a no real growth position for over a decade. Strengthening this sector will ensure that every community has the capacity for a supported accommodation response to youth homelessness. An estimate for an adequate extent of community based supported accommodation might well be closer to \$500-600 million per year compared to \$348m currently, and youth services would comprise approximately \$170 - 200 million annually.*

**About one third of SAAP services are for young people so approximately an additional \$50 million for youth services would be required to:**

- expand supported accommodation using a national community template to ensure that every community can adequately provide supported accommodation for young people in need.**

## **8 Redevelop employment, D&A and mental health programs for homeless young people**

*Employment is central to a sustainable livelihood for homeless young people. A continuum of labour market support programs need to be developed which address education barriers to employment and prepare young people for training, provide vocational training and assist young homeless people to engage with the labour market. The absence of specialist and appropriate labour market options for disadvantaged young people has ensured that homeless young people have been largely excluded from participation in the 'full-employment' Australian economy. Existing options for drug and alcohol services or mental health services are too often unable to provide timely assistance and treatment or are unable to accommodate young people while they are dealing with drug and alcohol issues. Drug treatment services for young people are uneven around Australia. In Victoria, drug services are funded to a level of \$15-16 million per year. An additional \$5 million per year would achieve state-wide coverage as well as providing sufficient outreach services at current levels of need. Other states spend less than Victoria. The proposed expansion of both mental health services and drug and alcohol programs will serve not just homeless young people but any young person, who need this kind of assistance. A large amount of public funds are expended already in Job Network and on unemployment benefits. While we have not costed the employment support required by homeless young people a major part of these funds could be found by reallocations of expenditures elsewhere. To respond in these crucial areas,*

**the NYC calls for:**

- the development a national system of accessible drug and alcohol services for young people. National funding of an estimated \$100m would be required to deploy a system adequate to meet existing need, with an urgent need for \$20m initially.**
- the development of a national program at an estimated cost of \$25m, to work intensively with homeless young people who have mental health issues, their families and the workers who support them.**
- the construction a continuum of employment programs for homeless young people incorporating JPET and offering appropriate foundation education, training, vocational options as well as new models of supported employment that build new links between support, accommodation, and education and employment programs.**

## **9 A new form of youth housing which links housing to education, training and employment programs**

*An Australian version of the UK/ European Foyer youth housing model should to be developed to link accommodation with other support, particularly education and training. Other initiatives should include accommodation for homeless school students, and 'boarding school' projects linked to Indigenous communities. The total extent of this type of housing will need to be assessed in terms of need and demand and what the sustainable expansion of this housing might need to be. One third of the homeless are young people. Based on the Government's election promise of housing for the homeless,*

**the NYC argues that:**

- one third of the \$150 million committed for housing for homeless people should be applied to develop a new layer of youth housing that is connected to education, training and employment.**

## **10 Post-vention support**

*Returning to homelessness is common for young people because even after they find housing, problems can reoccur. Post-vention support would ensure that recycling back into homelessness is minimised. A new type of flexible, tailored, post-vention outreach support will ensure young people can sustain their independent living arrangements. It will radically improve the outcomes of supported accommodation programs. Every homeless young person moving beyond supported accommodation should be able to access this kind of support. We have estimated that a substantial national capacity could be created for \$35 million. Implemented over 10 years this would be \$3.5 million of additional funds every year for a decade.*

**The NYC proposes that:**

- all young people moving from SAAP into some form of independent living should receive needs-based outreach support (an estimated \$30-50m per year would be required for a fully developed national response.**