

Homeless South Australia:

A 2015 Stocktake of Homelessness Issues in South Australia

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Introduction

Homelessness has been at the forefront of public policy debate in South Australia since 2002 when the Rann Labor Government was formed and established its social inclusion initiative. Following the election of the Rudd Labor Government in 2007 homelessness took a new, national, perspective with the release of a Green and a White Paper on the topic, and the introduction of the National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness (NPAH). Other initiatives such as the National Affordable Housing Agreement (NAHA), the National Rental Affordability Scheme and some of the expenditures under the Closing the Gap arrangements targeting Indigenous health, have also addressed homelessness. Along the way we have seen formal targets set for homelessness – at both a national and state scale, as well as uncertainty over the continuation of the funding of some programs. Most recently, the Australian Government has begun a process of re-examining the nature of Australian federalism and has canvassed the transfer of full responsibility for housing and homelessness services to the states and territories (Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet 2015 p.84). At the same time the number of homeless persons in Australia – and South Australia – has increased, while the stock of social housing declined by 21,000 units between 2004 and 2014 (SCRGSP 2015 p. 18)) with more than 150,000 households remaining on the housing waiting list. The waiting list for social housing now represents roughly 0.5 households for every social housing dwelling. This yawning gap between the supply and demand of social housing has emerged despite annual public sector expenditures on housing assistance of \$10bn across the two tiers of government.

The Australian Government's interest in the reform of the Australian federation reflects its broader unease with the nation's social, economic and political trajectory for the 21st Century. This reflection is accompanied by a more specific concern with the future of Australian housing and homelessness amongst academics, non-government organisations, policy makers and even the Reserve Bank. It is time to take stock of how homelessness finds expression, and also time to reflect upon its broader impacts on society. As a community we need to reconsider how policies and programs can be reshaped to produce better housing outcomes for the most vulnerable within society, and how we can mobilise a wider range of community resources to meet the needs of the homeless. Homelessness is not simply an issue of adequate housing, it intersects with the mental health sector, policing, the regulation of public spaces, the provision of support for young people at risk, the processes associated with leaving institutions and issues of ill-health, disability, the hollowing out of labour markets, Indigeneity, and domestic violence. This paper considers homelessness in contemporary South Australia, and reflects upon the major policy initiatives that have emerged over the past decade and a half. Finally, it examines the prospects for the future and the types of actions – involving governments, the homelessness sector and the broader community – needed to both address immediate needs and bring about fundamental and positive change in the longer term.

Homelessness and Housing Affordability

Homelessness and poverty is a major challenge in South Australia with the state over-represented relative to the nation in the lowest income groups, with a high percentage of its population dependent upon statutory incomes (Shanahan 2013). Despite relatively low incomes, South Australia is also confronted by a crisis of housing affordability, a problem that has been evident since the year 2000 (Beer et al. 2007). Historically low interest rates over the past several years have contributed to house price inflation, as has the structure of taxation arrangements and the influx of foreign capital into Australian property markets. To a certain degree, South Australia has been unaffected by these trends, but houses prices have continued to grow, with the median house price in Adelaide in June 2015 standing at \$532,000, up from \$340,000 in 2006. Escalation in house prices have contributed to rent increases, with the median rent in Adelaide in June 2015 sitting at \$410 per week (realestate.com.au 2015).

Many vulnerable South Australians are trapped by circumstances and events that can result in them becoming homeless:

- The highest levels of housing stress are found in the private rental sector where households often spend more than 30 per cent of income on their rent, with some vulnerable households spending in excess of 50 per cent of gross household income (Beer and Faulkner 2011);
- Tenants are further disadvantaged by the insecurity associated with private rental housing, with many forced to move involuntarily. Forced moves represent a shift in living arrangements that carries substantial relocation costs which in turn can tip some into homelessness. Slatter and Beer (2003) estimated there were 10,000 evictions in South Australia each year;
- A small but significant majority of households fall out of home ownership, often because of relationship breakdown (Beer and Faulkner 2011). Some women remain in the family home but lack sufficient income to service their mortgage, eventually surrendering their home and becoming homeless (Gwyther 2007);
- Violence in the home may force a woman – and children – to leave the family home at short notice;
- New arrivals into Australia may be especially vulnerable in the housing market, particularly if their visa arrangements do not permit them to find paid employment;
- Persons with psychiatric disabilities often struggle to maintain their tenancy;
- Access to public rental or social housing has become more difficult over the past 15 years as providers have been forced to allocate limited resources to those most in need;
- Immigrants, Aboriginal South Australians and young people are likely to encounter discrimination in the private rental market; and
- Persons leaving institutions – including the Guardianship of the Minister or incarceration - find securing accommodation especially difficult.

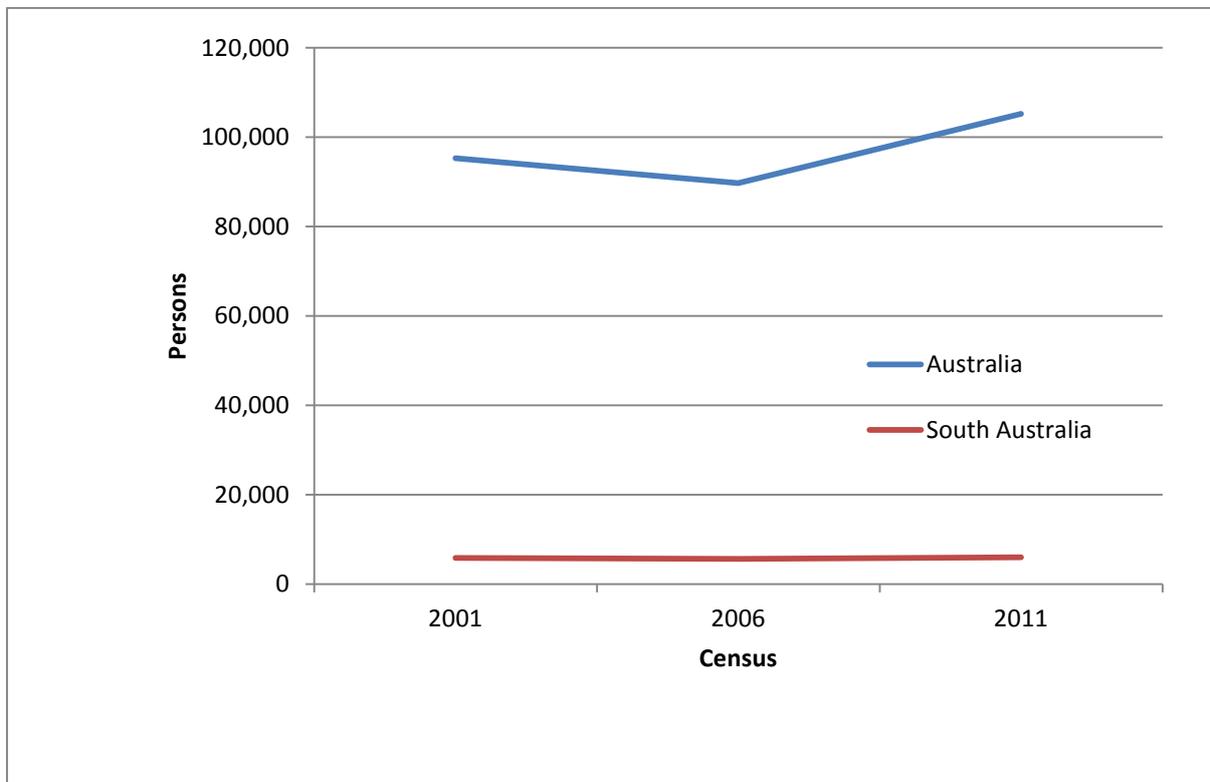
The ABS estimated that at the 2011 Census there were 105,237 homeless persons in Australia, or 49 homeless persons per 10,000 Australians. On the same census night there were 5,985 homeless South Australians, some 38 homeless persons per 10,000 South Australians one of the lowest levels in Australia, but still unacceptably high. Importantly, while the number of homeless persons increased by 10 per cent across Australia between 2001 and 2006, it rose only 2.4 per cent over the same period across South Australia (Figure 1). The 2011 Census enumeration showed that more than one third of the population homeless were resident in over-crowded or significantly over-crowded accommodation, and a majority of this population were Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islanders. Persons living in supported accommodation for the homeless were the second largest group of homeless persons, followed by persons staying temporarily with other households (couch surfers) and persons living in boarding houses. Importantly, the homeless are a young cohort with 60 per cent aged under 35 years, while Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders constituted 25 per cent of the total.

Persons born overseas represented 30 per cent of the homeless population at the 2011 Census, having risen from 24 per cent at the 2006 Census. As Tually et al. (2013) observed, recently arrived humanitarian arrivals – and by implication other arrivals on less formal arrangements – are often exposed to a harsh rental market, limited services and difficulties in securing paid employment. Many end up living in cramped or inappropriate accommodation, while others struggle to find housing at all.

There is often a public perception that homeless equals rough sleeping, but at the 2011 Census only six per cent of the homeless were sleeping rough – that is, sleeping in an improvised dwelling, tent

or sleeping out - and of this group, 40 per cent were men with 59 per cent aged between 25 and 54 years, and 19 per cent under 25 years.

Figure 1. Homeless Persons, 2001, 2006 and 2011 Census, Australia and South Australia.



Source: ABS 2011

The identification of groups amongst the population of homeless persons provides a relatively static set of insights into an issue as complex and challenging as homelessness. Over the past decade a number of studies have shed greater light on both the factors associated with homelessness and the pathways into being without a home. Importantly, there are strong associations between homelessness and:

- Poor mental health;
- Previous periods under state care – the Guardianship of the Minister;
- Family breakdown and the re-partnering of one or both parents;
- Having parents who were homeless;
- Intellectual disability or cognitive impairment;
- The need to flee because of violence in the home; and,
- Being an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander.

Homelessness is therefore a complex combination of housing-related factors – the capacity to sustain a home, having a sufficient income and/or tenancy history – as well as a product of personal wellbeing and health.

An Emerging Policy Framework

Homelessness and Social Inclusion

The 2002 election of the Rann Labor Government signalled a significant re-emergence of homelessness as a priority of governments and the community. The establishment of the Social Inclusion Board reflected international policy trends, especially the British Blair Labour Government's focus on social exclusion and focused on building 'the community of the State' (Cappo 2009 p. 5). Foundation priorities included addressing:

- Homelessness;
- Drug abuse;
- Aboriginal health and wellbeing;
- Youth offending;
- Mental health; and
- Disability services.

Critically, homelessness was one of the first priorities of the Social Inclusion Board and its associated initiatives, and by 2009 the Board claimed an impact in reducing rough sleeping in South Australia by five per cent, and this occurred against the backdrop of a national increase in rough sleeping of 19 per cent (Cappo 2009 p. 17). Significantly the Social Inclusion Board noted the Government's commitment to reduce homelessness by 50 per cent over the life of its term (Government of South Australia 2004 p. 3) and sought to do so by:

- preventing homelessness amongst populations known to be at risk;
- intervening early with those at immediate risk of homelessness;
- minimising the length of time people spend homeless; and
- improving the integration and co-ordination of services.

The Rann Government's prioritisation of homelessness was further articulated in the South Australian Strategic Plan, first released in 2004. The plan enunciated a commitment to halve the number of rough sleepers in South Australia by 2013 (<http://saplan.org.au/targets/10-homelessness>) but in 2012 the South Australia's Strategic Plan Audit Committee concluded that it was unclear that this goal would be achieved. Modest improvements in rough sleeping rates were achieved between 2001 and 2006 – as measured by the ABS, but it was uncertain that more substantial gains would be delivered over the subsequent intercensal period. Critically, homelessness does not appear as one of the seven strategic priorities of the Weatherill Government (Government of South Australia 2012).

A New National Interest in Homelessness

In 2007 the election of the Rudd Labor Government resulted in a renewed national commitment to homelessness. The Prime Minister took leadership of this issue personally, arguing that

We [the government] don't believe homelessness is something which a country as wealthy as ours in the 21st century can just ignore.
– *Prime Minister Kevin Rudd 2008*

The Australian Government's renewed focus on homelessness resulted first in a Green and then a White Paper (FaHCSIA 2008a and b). In developing its response to the 2008 Green Paper, the Australian Government sought to introduce reform at two levels: first, there would be substantial investment in the supply of affordable housing for individuals and families confronted by

homelessness; and second, the government set out to improve the ways in which ‘mainstream’ services respond to homelessness across the health, welfare, housing, education and justice portfolios. As an example, Centrelink introduced both training for its staff on homelessness and implemented a homelessness ‘flag’ within its client database in order to provide better services to vulnerable persons. The central goal of these reforms was to address the causes of homelessness early, while assisting those who experience homelessness into more secure circumstances as quickly as possible.

The multifaceted approach to addressing homelessness was reflected in the development of three key implementation strategies:

- “Turning off the tap” – effectively stopping new entrants into homelessness through a mixture of measures aimed at prevention and early intervention. There was an explicit focus on addressing the causes of homelessness, with attention paid to vulnerable and high needs groups.
- Improving and expanding services by enhancing the capacity of government and non-government services to provide appropriate assistance to the homeless. This strategy sought to maintain already-established specialist homelessness services as providers of temporary crisis accommodation, while also reforming mainstream services across all sectors – in order to achieve ‘joined up’ service delivery. The explicit goal was to reduce the incidence of homeless people being referred from one fragmented service silo to another without receiving appropriate help.
- “Breaking the cycle” of repeated homelessness amongst special risk groups, through a combination of social housing supply and personal support services. This strategy centred on three groups considered at particular risk of cycling ‘in and out of’ homelessness: people vulnerable to chronic homelessness (including older people and Indigenous Australians), rough sleepers and children.

The White Paper articulated a set of initiatives intended to achieve the central goals of the homelessness policy reforms. These are summarised in Box 1.1.

Box 1.1. Policy and Programmatic Initiatives Under the Homelessness White Paper

Turning off the Tap

- **Supporting the tenancies** of people in private rental and public housing;
- Expand funding for the **Reconnect Program**, to assist an additional 9,000 young people at risk of homelessness to reconnect with their families;
- **No Exits into Homelessness Strategy** to provide housing and appropriate assistance to people leaving custodial care, hospitals, mental health and drug/alcohol services;
- **Safe at Home initiative** to support women and children to remain safely in their own homes following family violence;
- **Personal Helpers and Mentors Program** to provide community mental health services to 1,000 vulnerable Australians, including people experiencing homelessness;
- **Employment of 90 Community Engagement Officers** within Centrelink, to help connect people at risk of homelessness to vital services and housing, and
- **Supporting 2250 families at risk of homelessness to remain housed.**

Initiatives to improve and expand services

This strategy involves a **'no wrong door'** service delivery agenda, and is targeted at streamlining the provision of appropriate housing, employment, health and welfare assistance to people at risk of or experiencing homelessness. The initiatives specified here are not especially concrete, but the White Paper indicates there will be a focus on:

- establishing quality standards for specialist homelessness services through new legislation;
- building a **workforce development strategy** for specialist homelessness services;
- testing new funding models, and
- **improving IT infrastructure** to join up different services.

Breaking the cycle

- **Assertive outreach programs** for **rough sleepers**;
- **A Place Called Home** initiative to build 600 new homes for people and families facing homelessness. Up to 4200 new public housing dwellings and upgrades to 4800 existing dwellings in **remote Indigenous communities**;
- A four year roll-out of aged care places and capital funding allocations for **specialist facilities for older people at risk of homelessness**; and **improvements to services for older people who are homeless**, and
- 2700 new build social housing dwellings earmarked for people experiencing or at risk of homelessness.

Reforming Homelessness Services in South Australia

The engagement of the Rudd and Gillard Labor Governments with the issue of homelessness was a catalyst for further change in South Australia. In part, this reform process was stimulated by the injection of new funds under the National Partnership Agreement on Housing (NPAH), with additional monies injected by both the national and South Australian Governments. The NPAH was a result of the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) meeting in December 2008, with \$1.1 bn provided nationally over the four years to June 2013. South Australia's approach to the implementation of the NPAH involved substantial reform in terms of the allocation of resources, the use of information technology to facilitate the delivery of better services, and the monitoring of outcomes. The South Australian Implementation Plan for the Partnership Agreement on Homelessness (2009) set out a number of principles to inform this process of reform:

- A housing first approach to provide safe and secure housing as a first step to ending homelessness;
- The consolidation of services to achieve economies of scale and reduce duplication in provision;
- The regionalisation of services to provide consistent high quality services in each South Australian region;
- The enunciation of a 'no wrong door' philosophy that ensures that clients receive a consistent response regardless of where or how they access the service system;
- Standardised best practice case management and integration of services;
- The separation of tenancy management and support provision to minimise the potential for conflicts of interest;
- Culturally competent responses to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people;
- Priority for the safety of women and their children; and
- Acknowledgement of children as clients in their own right.

The process of reforming the homelessness sector in South Australia aspired to a new philosophy or program logic: it sought to create a better integrated suite of homelessness services and a sector which prioritised the needs of women and children fleeing violence. At a practical level, reform resulted in the consolidation and standardisation of services and the establishment of Regional Homelessness Roundtables of service providers. The Roundtables – alongside other homelessness consultative groups - were then represented on a newly-created body, the SA Homelessness Strategic Group (HSG). Additional funding was provided to meet demand in identified 'hot spots'. One of the most significant changes was the introduction of a 24 hour a day, 7 days a week Homelessness Gateway Service to complement the Domestic Violence and Youth Gateway services already operating. These services were established to assist individuals throughout South Australia gain access to the services that they need. A second key innovation was the introduction of the Homeless to Home (H2H) database which was introduced as a mechanism for both monitoring outcomes and provide a mechanism to ensure continuity in service provision to homeless persons as they move between services. The H2H system was developed to allow twice yearly monitoring of outcomes and reflected a shift from monitoring throughputs – which was a feature of the previous Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP) – to measuring achievement. Finally, the reforms included the introduction of formalised case management plans for individuals, for the entire period of their need.

A Reformed Homelessness Sector

The period since 2002 has been one of substantial change in the homelessness sector, with both the Australian Government and the South Australian Government leading processes of fundamental change. Indeed it could be argued that the SA Government's social inclusion initiatives and homelessness policies were an important precursor to national policy innovation. Previously,

homelessness was conceived in a more restrictive fashion, with policies and funding emerging from the 1980s under the Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP) and little attention paid to the links between homelessness and other policy domains, such as employment or disability. Indeed, prior to 2002 questions relating to the homeless population were rarely linked to the broader consideration of housing policy. The reformulation of the homelessness sector is undeniable over the past 13 years, but to what impact?

Social Ventures Australia (2013) undertook a limited review of the impacts of the 2009 homelessness reforms using a technique called Social Return on Investment (SROI). They concluded that the South Australian reform process had already resulted in a number of positive impacts, including the introduction of better systems for case management, a greater number of persons in supportive housing, fewer people turned away from homelessness services, a greater number of individuals assisted and improvements in service quality, including greater consistency across regions and target groups, a higher level of collaboration amongst providers and greater accountability and auditing oversight to ensure high-quality outcomes. They also anticipated a number of other benefits to emerge, including growth in housing options for the homeless, fewer people becoming homeless as a result of the implementation of early intervention measures, fewer people sleeping rough, a reduction in the total volume of homelessness, better data and stronger links to mainstream services. Their analysis suggested the reform process had made a measurable contribution to the wellbeing of individuals and society, valued at just over \$20,000 per individual assisted.

Others commentators have been more critical of reform to the homelessness sector, with many of these critiques extending back to the first reforms from 2002. The Independent Community-Wide Homelessness Administrators Group (2011) has noted that the reform process introduced since 2009 has carried with it substantial costs for many agencies. The focus on preferred providers and achieving economies of scale in provision has been controversial at times, and the H2H program has been contentious, especially with respect to the time and cost of data input by frontline workers (ICHAG 2011). At a more fundamental level, there has been a great deal of concern with the 'target and audit' culture associated with policy innovation. Attempts by the Social Inclusion Board to focus on those sleeping in the open and the associated use of a 'rough sleeper count' focused on the City of Adelaide to measure change, have been especially controversial (ICHAG 2011). Some have argued that such measures are deeply flawed and likely to result in a distorted view of the true incidence of homelessness in South Australia.

Policy or industry change is always accompanied by some degree of 'friction', and it is important to ask, what have been the impacts of homelessness reform after four years? Recent data produced by the South Australian Government's Department of Communities and Social Inclusion (DCSI, 2015a and b) suggests that a number of substantial gains have been achieved, with evidence of system-wide improvements. Firstly, it is important to appreciate the scale of the challenge confronting the homelessness system in South Australia. Data from DCSI (*forthcoming*) suggests that over the year 2014-15 the homeless services sector provided 29,508 periods of support to 22,832 individual clients, 14 per cent of whom were aged under nine. Importantly, while the sector as a whole provided 29,508 instances of support, approximately one in three interactions with the homelessness sector involved multiple agencies, such that there were 39,783 individual interactions with the agencies in the sector (DCSI 2015).

The services provided to homeless persons in South Australia are fundamental to the wellbeing of the most vulnerable within the state. Some 35 per cent of persons seeking services do so because of domestic or family violence, 29 per cent are affected by mental health issues, 28 per cent were already homeless when they sought assistance and three per cent had a non-psychiatric disability (DCSI 2015). Other data (2014) data show that just over one quarter of all recipients of homelessness support were Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islanders, and 38 per cent of cases for this

population group involved family violence. In 2014 organisations providing services to the homeless received 44,000 requests for assistance with housing, and of this total 55 per cent were for assistance to sustain a tenancy or prevent tenancy failure, approximately 25 per cent were for short term or emergency accommodation and ten per cent were for long term housing. In most instances agencies reported they were able to meet housing needs, but one quarter of requests for long term housing assistance could not be met. Clearly there is a need for housing assistance for vulnerable people that includes the provision of accommodation in the longer term. There is also a clear need for support that helps people remain in their current tenancy and deal with emergencies.

Public sector expenditure on homelessness in South Australia is modest by any standards: DCSI (2015) estimates that in 2015 state and federal outlays on homelessness services will total \$57 million, which is small relative to state budget of \$6bn. This finite level of resourcing supports 40 organisations – four government and 36 non government – who have 96 agency outlets between them. Data on the number of services provided and total public funding for the sector suggests that each sector-wide service provided to a homeless person costs just \$1,931. It is possible this figure overestimates public sector per capital expenditure, as the available data for 2014-15 suggests that total individual support periods provided in 2014-15 may total approximately 36,000, suggesting a lower level of government expenditure per individual agency support of \$1,432. These estimates do not include other resources made available to the homelessness sector, including an agency's own resources, philanthropic allocations, special purpose government outlays from other programs, donations, etc.

Recent analysis by DCSI (2015a) suggests the features formally introduced as part of the reform process in 2011 have had positive impacts. Using data from the H2H system, DCSI investigated whether assessments and case plans impact on the housing outcomes clients as they leave services, and – ideally – terminate their engagement with the sector. Using data for the period 1 July 2014 to 31 March 2015 DCSI was able to examine the impact for both rough sleepers and others in contact with the homelessness system. They categorised outcomes as either sustainable, not sustainable or a return to/entry into rough sleeping. These were defined in accordance with how sustainable housing is measured as a performance indicator for the sector. All results presented below were statistically significant (it is highly unlikely that they are due to chance).

The DCSI (2015) analysis concluded rough sleepers who received a formal assessment as part of their interaction with a homelessness service were:

- more likely to exit into sustainable housing;
- less likely to exit into housing that is not sustainable; and
- less likely to exit back into rough sleeping than those who do not receive an assessment.

The same relationship was evident for rough sleepers who received a case plan, compared to those who did not and all the results were found to be statistically significant. The data also showed – and was again statistically significant – that rough sleepers who did not receive a case plan or an assessment were more likely to revert to sleeping outdoors.

Other clients of homelessness services – that is, those who have not been sleeping rough – were also found to benefit from the conduct of an assessment and the development of a case plan. These processes were found to result in a higher percentage moving to sustainable housing after their dealings with a homelessness service. The research found homeless persons who were not rough sleepers at the point of engagement with homeless services received assessments and case plans at a higher rate than those sleeping on the streets or in equivalent circumstances. DCSI (2015a and b) has noted that the process of assessment and the development of a case management plan is part of

best practice within a case management framework and that agencies are asked to ensure 80 per cent of clients receive this formalised assistance. Currently, however, only 56 per cent of rough sleepers receive assessments and 40 per cent case plans. Other clients are more likely to receive these forms of assistance, with 65 per cent in receipt of an assessment, and 51 per cent receiving a case plan. The conclusion we can draw from this analysis is clear: at least some of the initiatives introduced as part of the reform of the homelessness sector have undoubtedly had a positive impact – and others may have had equivalent impacts which are as yet undemonstrated – in terms of the delivery of assistance to the homeless and those at risk of homelessness.

Conclusion

The homelessness sector in South Australia in 2015 is very different to the sector evident at the start of the 21st Century. It has undergone a period of substantial change that has resulted from both increased policy attention at the state and national scales, as well as a formal process of reform. At times the reshaping of the sector has been challenged and there have been evident transition costs as individual agencies and the sector as a whole has transformed. To a degree, such tensions are an inevitable consequence of increasing professionalisation and accountability within the sector – processes that reflect both broader trends in public administration in Australia and increased government investment. The available evidence suggests that change has delivered benefits for the homeless: there is evidence that persons in need of assistance are now better directed as they approach services, and that the practices of agencies – including assessments and the development of case plans – deliver better outcomes for individuals and families. However, significant tensions remain within the homelessness sector and these include the lack of sufficient resources to meet current need, the potential for a substantial increase in demand for homeless services as South Australia experiences a difficult period of industry transition over the coming three years, and an on-going vulnerability to shifts in political mood that has the capacity to strip away much needed resources.

Fragmentation and division is a challenge for both the homelessness sector and the effective provision of support to vulnerable individuals in South Australia. The specialist homelessness services discussed in this paper are but one part of a wider network of agencies – non government, philanthropic, advocacy organisations, faith-based bodies *et cetera* – that provide assistance to vulnerable South Australians and are *de facto* or *de jure* interacting with homeless individuals and those at risk of homelessness. While many of these agencies have infrequent, or small-scale, engagement with the homeless, in aggregate their impact is profound: allocating resources, shaping behaviours, providing opportunities and influencing public debate. A more integrated approach would most likely deliver substantial benefits to individuals at risk. To a degree, fragmentation has been institutionalised by the process of tendering for the provision of homelessness services. When given the opportunity to articulate its vision for a new, more efficient, future, the homelessness sector highlighted the fact that tendering processes made collaboration between services difficult, were an impediment to innovation, reduced diversity within the sector and resulted in high ‘transaction’ costs as a result of contract management obligations (SHS and Housing SA 2014).

Shifts in the priority government awards to homelessness is a clearly evident risk to the homelessness sector. NPAH funding from 2009 provided the resources needed to help reform the sector in South Australia and boost service delivery. However, there has been considerable uncertainty regarding funding since the initial funding period, with one-year funding extensions initially, and a two-year funding extension announced in 2015. The funding future is uncertain, but security of funding is essential for the effective delivery of homelessness services (SHS and Housing SA 2014). The Australian Government’s policy initiative on the reform of the Australian Federation has formally identified housing and homelessness policy as one area for change, including – potentially – the Australian Government abrogating responsibility in this field and calling upon the

states and territories to guide and fund this policy domain (PM&C 2015). There is, however, the possibility of a new Federal engagement with housing and homelessness with the Minister for Social Services, The Hon Scott Morrison recently outlining his vision of 'compassionate conservatism' and noting that:

There are few issues more important to ensuring the welfare of Australians than housing.

Housing provides the stability and certainty needed for individuals and families to deal with the many challenges they face – unemployment, the breakdown of relationships, a place to care for those who need care, a place of refuge from violence and the list goes on.

.... You will find housing failures at the centre of most social service challenges. It is either a cause or consequence (Morrison 2015).

Morrison's vision suggests a focus on working in partnership with others – the non government sector, the other tiers of government and the private sector – to help individuals and families transition through difficult times. His emphasis is also on solving, not servicing, misery. It is a philosophy entirely consistent with the principles and practices of the homelessness sector in South Australia.

The homelessness sector in South Australia is confronted by other challenges that are more local in their focus rather than national. Perhaps most importantly, South Australia has entered a period of economic transition that will take a number of years to work through. While the fall in the value of the Australian dollar will help the State's recovery, much economic damage is unavoidable as General Motors Holden (GMH) and associated suppliers cease operations by 2017, as the Australian Submarine Corporation (ASC) sheds staff, and the mining sector slows. The impacts on the state economy will be profound, and those most affected will be the vulnerable within society. We can anticipate greater levels of family breakup, domestic violence, young people leaving the family home before they are ready, an on-going crisis of housing affordability for many and greater demands on the full spectrum of welfare services, including homelessness services. We know from the research literature that these events can have long term impacts, with some individuals affected for decades and some homelessness transmitted across generations (Flatau et al. 2010). Both the H2H data and reports from the sector across South Australia clearly demonstrate there is a greater demand for homelessness services than can be met with the available resources. This circumstance will worsen significantly over the coming five years.

Secondly, we cannot ignore the fact that policy settings in South Australia could be significantly improved. For a number of years the issue of rough sleepers in the Adelaide Parklands – and the way it is managed by the Adelaide City Council and frontline services – has been a matter of public debate and controversy. Clearly there is a need for rough sleepers to have access to a place in which they are comfortable and close to services. It is also entirely reasonable for governments to regulate public spaces and ensure broader public safety. Some local governments across Australia deal with this difficult policy challenge well (Beer and Prance 2013), and there are policy lessons that could be transferred from other jurisdictions.

Finally we need to look to the future and how those of us who care about homelessness as a social issue can make a positive contribution to its shape and direction. South Australia may well be on the cusp of a homelessness crisis precipitated by economic restructuring, a relatively expensive housing market and fundamental change in the housing policies of governments. There is a need to maintain public interest in, and government support for, homelessness services as a priority. The provision of both acute and long term assistance to homeless persons and those at risk of homelessness generates enormous benefits for society as a whole, and public sector budgets in particular (Flatau 2007). As Minister Morrison noted, housing is the foundation of a stable life and engagement with

the world of work. However, we no longer live in an era of 'modernist' governments that seek to provide solutions to all the challenges of economy and society. They now look to work in partnership with others and the homelessness sector needs to consider the ways in which it recruits other participants into this policy domain. The key questions include: how do we attract community organisations that have not traditionally addressed homelessness into the field? What steps are needed to gain corporate sponsorship for the sector? How can the sector attract philanthropic funds? And, how do we ensure that there is an enduring narrative within the media and amongst the broader public that is broadly supportive of the sector and its efforts? These are fundamental questions, but they are issues that are critical to the wellbeing of homeless South Australians over the coming years.

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