



St Vincent de Paul Society
NSW
good works

SUBMISSION ON THE NSW HOMELESSNESS STRATEGY & ACTION PLAN



ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

The St Vincent de Paul Society NSW acknowledges Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the Traditional Custodians of the land on which we live and work with deep respect.

May Elders, past and present be blessed and honoured.

May we join together and build a future based on compassion, justice, hope, faith, and reconciliation.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The St Vincent de Paul Society NSW (Society NSW) welcomes the aspirational systems-wide vision, principles and actions currently outlined in NSW's Homelessness Strategy 2025-2035 (the Strategy).

We recognise that realising this vision depends not only on collective action and collaboration but on *significant investment to deliver a diverse range of appropriate and accessible housing stock*. Further, addressing the risks, drivers and protective factors of homelessness requires adequate funding for all relevant sectors, including housing and homelessness, health, justice and education.

In delivering the Strategy, associated action plans and outcomes frameworks, to truly make homelessness rare, brief and not repeated:

- All strategy stakeholders across government and civil society need to act to alleviate the drivers of homelessness (including physical and mental health, substance use issues, domestic and family violence) as well as the need for new, renewed and appropriate housing options.
- In the SHS sector, we need to collectively deliver well-resourced, focused multidisciplinary

prevention and early intervention service responses.

- We need to invest in developing a highly skilled, person-centred workforce, equipping them with the expertise to make the system change we are asking for.
- We need an SHS system that allows for flexibility, innovation and creativity in system improvement.

To meaningfully achieve the goals outlined in the Strategy, further to our 2025/2026 Pre-Budget submission,¹ we call upon the NSW Government to:

- Provide a 30% increase in SHS funding to support transition to a new commissioning and strategic pathway, including a dedicated workforce development package to build capacity to meet the needs of clients with complex needs.
- Invest \$2 billion per year for the next 10 years to grow accessible social housing, with the goal of achieving 10% of all housing stock dedicated to social housing by 2050.
- Increase investment in affordable housing beyond the 10,000 homes proposed under the

National Housing Accord² to meet the growing demand among low-income households and address homelessness effectively. This investment should include priority allocation to ACCOs and other Aboriginal-led housing services.

In achieving the 10 year vision of the Commissioning Plan, the Society NSW looks forward to being an engaged, active member in the state-wide system of connected local systems as a SHS provider and participant in local governance structures.

KEY PRIORITIES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

There are nine guiding principles listed in the Strategy. The consultation requests input on their prioritisation.

In the view of The Society NSW these principles provide a solid foundation to deliver the Strategy's vision, however we note that meaningful progress will remain very challenging whilst our housing and homelessness system simply does not have sufficient appropriate, diverse stock to meet demand (including in crisis and transitional housing), rental subsidies and social security payments are inadequate to meet costs, and other support sectors are underfunded.⁹

Fulfilment of some principles, including *Housing is a human right, integration of Housing First principles and prioritisation of prevention*, requires ongoing, transformative action that may only be fully realised later in the Strategy's rollout.

As such, the Society NSW believes that in the Stabilise and Transition phases of the Strategy rollout, the following principles be front of mind in implementing service and system reform:

- Person-centred principles are embedded in policy and practice;

- The workforce is strong and supported;
- Service planning and delivery is flexible, localised and joined-up; and
- People with lived experience inform service design.

The consultation document further requests input on the priorities for action, and the opportunities and risks associated with these, under each Strategy focus area: that homelessness is rare, that it is brief, and that it is non-recurring.

We make the following seven recommendations in light of our responses to these questions. That the NSW Government:

- 1 Fund SHS caseworkers to operate out of community hubs, with in-community services (including Vinnies Vans), and in collaboration with CHPs and TA providers.
- 2 Invest in rolling out or funding existing soft-entry hubs that co-locate services across all regions in NSW.
- 3 Provide a 30% increase in SHS funding to support transition to a new commissioning and strategic pathway, including a dedicated workforce development package to build capacity to meet the needs of clients with complex needs. It is important that the

current investment made by SHS providers in critical infrastructure and housing stock, where services are located, is recognised by the NSW Government.

- 4 Foster trust and transparency between government and non-government stakeholders through collaborative workforce initiatives, for example through staff secondments and co-location.
- 5 Increase investment to meet actual costings of current programs targeted to supporting people with complex needs, including Assertive Outreach and the Continuing Coordinated Care Program.
- 6 Consult local stakeholders to understand how best to develop strategic housing allocations and incentivise downsizing for social housing residents in under-occupied homes.
- 7 Ensure support for people leaving government-funded NGO services, including residential rehabilitation, who may be at risk of experiencing homelessness, and set targets to incentivise an elimination of exiting government services into homelessness.

INTRODUCTION

The Society NSW welcomes the opportunity to provide comment on the NSW Government's NSW Homelessness Strategy 2025-2035 (Strategy) and how best to achieve better outcomes for people at risk of and those experiencing homelessness.

We do this because our vision is for a more just and compassionate society, a society that prioritises people who are vulnerable, marginalised and experiencing disadvantage.

As one of NSW's major Specialist Homeless Service (SHS) Providers, the Society NSW remains committed to achieving the Strategy's vision to ensure that homelessness is rare, brief and not repeated.⁴ To realise and empower the dignity of every person in our community we must work together to deliver a homelessness system that shifts focus to localised, person-centred, multidisciplinary responses. International practice has shown that where political consensus drives shared vision, impact measurement and adequate funding, reducing homelessness to functional zero is possible.⁵

In the last financial year, the Society NSW's Housing and Homelessness Services assisted a

total of 7,292 people across the state. Of these, 30% cited domestic and family violence as the main reason for seeking assistance. Others came to us seeking support because of housing stress, high rents, financial crises, current inadequate or inappropriate housing or because of a lack of family or community support.

The issues raised in the background papers to the Strategy are mirrored both in the growing demand for the Society's services and from feedback from frontline staff, members and volunteers. As *Factsheet 2: Why Change* is needed highlighted crisis-focussed responses, complicated service navigation, chronic shortage of long-term housing and private rentals and a lack of sustainable supports to maintain tenancies are leading to poorer outcomes for people at risk-of and those experiencing homelessness.

This submission will respond specifically to the questions outlined in the long-form consultation paper, however, the Society believes that in developing solutions to best achieve the vision outlined by the Strategy, the NSW Government needs to provide additional, ongoing investment and resource allocation to the SHS system, SHS workforce and supply of stock across all housing types and regions.⁶

CONSULTATION BACKGROUND

This submission was developed following multiple internal consultations conducted in January 2025 with senior leadership, managers and frontline staff from all the Society NSW's Housing and Homelessness Services.⁷

These teams cover sites and services across rural, regional and metropolitan areas. In addition, the submission draws on consultation with our Domestic Violence managers and frontline staff from the Society NSW's statewide 10 domestic and family violence refuges.

SECTION 1

GUIDING PRINCIPLES OF THE STRATEGY

SECTION 1: GUIDING PRINCIPLES OF THE STRATEGY

CONSULTATION QUESTIONS:

What do we need to consider as we implement services and system reform guided by these principles over the next 10 years?

Which principles should be prioritised and why?

The principles provide a solid foundation to deliver the Strategy's vision, however any actions and outcomes implemented under the Strategy should always be considered in the context that at present, our housing and homelessness system simply does not have sufficient appropriate, diverse stock to meet demand (including in crisis and transitional housing), rental subsidies and social security payments are inadequate to meet costs, and other support sectors are underfunded.⁸

Fulfilment of some principles, including Housing is a human right, integration of *Housing First principles and prioritisation of prevention*, requires ongoing, transformative action that may only be fully realised later in the Strategy's rollout.

As such, the Society NSW believes that in the Stabilise and Transition phases of the Strategy rollout, the following principles be front of mind in implementing service and system reform:

- Person-centred principles are embedded in policy and practice;
- The workforce is strong and supported; and
- Service planning and delivery is flexible, localised and joined-up; and
- People with lived experience inform service design.

ALIGNING PRINCIPLES, FUNDING AND OUTCOMES ACROSS SECTORS

Meaningfully embedding these principles in policy and practice will only be possible with adequate, sustainable funding to both the SHS and other sectors. As the Strategy is a whole-of-government response it is crucial to recognise the interdependency of achieving the outcomes envisioned in this Strategy in the context of other sectors' resourcing, strategies and goals.

Specific focus sectors must include:

- Health, with a specific focus on mental health services;
- Substance use treatment services and programs;

- Out-of-home care;
- Child protection;
- Corrective services, with specific focus on juvenile detention;
- Education; and
- Community inclusion initiatives.

One of the inhibiting factors affecting the success of Finland's Y-Foundation program was the under-resourcing of other health and social services.⁹ With the under resourcing of other sectors and lengthy waiting periods for support programs, including residential rehabilitation and mental health services,¹⁰ the risk of people entering or remaining in a cycle of repeated homelessness is increasing.¹¹ This is particularly concerning as the number of people presenting with complex needs to SHS providers is increasing across the country.¹²

This trend brings further harm to clients and pressure on the system as it has long been clear that the impact of homelessness compounds existing issues of trauma, violence, mental health issues and increases demand for health, justice and welfare services.¹³

SECTION 1: CONTINUED

Aligning and embedding the principles that guide the strategy with other NSW sectors' existing strategies and action plans (as outlined in Figure 4 of the draft Strategy) and *adequately resourcing every sector* to collectively achieve better outcomes for all people seeking support through different channels is pivotal to fulfil the aspirations of these principles in practice. Alignment also requires some virtual integration and physical co-location of systems and liaison resources in community.

To better facilitate a truly integrated, holistic system requires long-term alignment in funding arrangements and building in flexibility in contracting to allow providers the opportunity to allocate funds according to need to the specific needs in their area. This is particularly relevant for providers that offer multiple services across housing, homelessness and health.

PERSON-CENTRED PRINCIPLES

In the implementation of the Stabilise and Transition phases, all stakeholders must support developing flexible, adaptable support pathways for different people with different needs. At times, this may require de-prioritising other principles.

For example, in establishing support plans or considering appropriate social housing offers for

people, it is vital to recognise that some people who have experienced trauma or long periods of homelessness may find certain housing environments triggering.¹⁴ This is particularly relevant for the small cohort of people who experience repeat homelessness and who need immediate support to address the drivers of their homelessness, including mental health conditions or substance use issues. They must feel safe and empowered before transitioning to long-term housing.

A STRONG AND SUPPORTED WORKFORCE

The sector's workforce is currently not adequately resourced to meet need. The burnout rate across SHS staff is high, caseloads are heavy, relationships with government agency staff are strained and the award rate for staff is too low to meet the same housing and cost-of-living pressures that the people they assist face.¹⁵

There needs to be increased funding to both *adequately compensate staff and grow the capacity of the workforce* by attracting newcomers to the sector who are highly skilled, trained and have multidisciplinary expertise. To provide continuity of service for clients requires significant investment in an SHS workforce development package and fostering improved partnerships with Homes NSW and other government agency staff.

All stakeholders should consider how the sector can develop and foster a truly multidisciplinary workforce, both within and across organisations, integrating expertise from alcohol and other drug staff, mental health experts and primary health providers. Studies from the UK have shown the value of teamwork, integration and collaborative learning within a multidisciplinary workforce in delivering holistic, person-centred care.¹⁶ Australian researchers have also suggested in the context of aged care, establishing core competencies across a multidisciplinary workforce will enhance outcomes.¹⁷

JOINED UP SERVICE DELIVERY

Service delivery must be joined up both within the housing and homelessness sector, between SHS providers, Homes NSW and Community Housing Providers (CHPs), as well as with other sectors, including health and corrective services.

Strategy consultations have recognised that historically, with competitive tendering processes and a lack of transparency, engagement with the SHS sector was curtailed and collaborative relationships harmed.

SECTION 1: CONTINUED

The Society welcomes this learning and recommends that SHS providers be closely consulted and engaged to successfully deliver new programs and services.

Innovation and flexibility in funding is a crucial element in providing truly person-centred and place-based responses to homelessness. For the Aboriginal-led homelessness sector, researchers have found that flexible approaches to funding led to better outcomes as responses were tailored to “local variation in need, context and service delivery style”.¹⁸

MEANINGFULLY EMBEDDING LIVED EXPERIENCE IN SERVICE DESIGN AND DELIVERY

Frontline staff agreed that integrating the views of people with lived and living experience (LLE) into service design and delivery is crucial for a successful housing and homelessness system.¹⁹ However, in implementation the NSW Government should first consider the models of best practice integration of LLE in the system by considering existing frameworks, such as the framework developed in conjunction with the Mental Health Commission of NSW.²⁰

JOINED UP' SERVICE DELIVERY

Domestic Violence Services in St George Sutherland and Macarthur ‘

The Society NSW’s homelessness and domestic violence services in St George Sutherland and Macarthur regions have developed internal and external localised partnerships and collaborative initiatives to improve outcomes for victim-survivors. These include:

- Sutherland and St George Homelessness Assertive Outreach Collaboration: The Collaboration conducts a fortnightly patrol, including representatives from the Department of Communities and Justice, Wesley, Society NSW, Hopefield, Orana, NSW Health, South Eastern Sydney Local Health District, Project Youth and three local councils. The Collaboration holds monthly Case Coordination Meetings to identify people sleeping rough and coordinate supports for them. In turn, this has fostered closer working relationships between organisations who provide active referrals between them to ensure targeted, rapid responses.
- Co-location of St George Sutherland Outreach at the Hurstville Southern Suburbs Housing Office: A fortnightly arrangement through which Society NSW case workers operate out of the Housing Office to coordinate referrals for people

seeking temporary accommodation or those who have been identified as needing more intensive supports. The partnership has resulted in positive relationship building with agency staff, a forum for clarification and increased efficiency in processing and actioning applications.

- Macarthur Homelessness Steering Committee and Campbelltown ‘Hub’: The Committee established the hub as a ‘one stop shop’ of services to reduce barriers to accessing support for women and children in the area. Representatives from Centrelink, Homes NSW, Settlement Services International (Local Area Coordinator for the National Disability Insurance Agency), NSW Health, Uniting, legal advocacy services and other local charities attend. The hub provides a person centred, soft entry, holistic service response for vulnerable people in the community.

SECTION 2

STRATEGY FOCUS AREAS

SECTION 2: HOMELESSNESS IS RARE

CONSULTATION QUESTIONS:

To make homelessness rare, what should NSW prioritise for action and why?

What opportunities and risks are there for implementing actions under this outcome?

What types of target(s) would be most useful to measure our impact and why?

As discussed, in making homelessness rare it is critical to significantly increase the range of quality accessible housing types in NSW and this should be an ongoing priority.

Likewise, tackling the drivers of homelessness beyond housing stress and availability of housing stock, such as domestic and family violence, substance use issues and mental health conditions, requires long-term transformative actions that will make homelessness rare for many cohorts.

These interventions include men's behavioural change programs and state-wide community prevention measures to address substance use dependency.²¹

However, as these transformative actions are implemented throughout the *Transition and Transform* stages of the Strategy, existing services and organisations need to be linked up and funded to allow people access to support and programs to maintain a tenancy and prevent homelessness.

This involves investing in in-person supports in the community, going to people where they are at, identifying need and connecting them to the right supports at the right time.

Too often, SHS providers are called in too late to support people to maintain their tenancies. When CHPs identify a tenant as being at risk, they should be obliged to notify SHS immediately in order to establish early intervention supports, before a matter is referred to a tribunal.

IN COMMUNITY SUPPORT

Investing in existing integrated, collaborative initiatives and soft-entry service points (such as Vinnies' 'Fred's Place in Tweed Heads) that target people who have fallen through the gaps, will improve local awareness and access to information about available supports and serves to enhance the continuum of supports available.²² SHS caseworkers should be equipped with resources to work in community at community hubs, with CHPs and Homes NSW staff, or attached to Vinnies Vans and other community outreach activities.²³

This will allow them to identify people at risk of homelessness and link them with the right supports early and support them in application processes. This may also include providing information about relevant subsidies, repairs and tenancy advice, other programs that may facilitate further opportunities, including through training and education (for example through the Rent It Keep It program). However, the Society NSW notes that existing subsidies are insufficient in a market where rental affordability is at a record low.²⁴

SECTION 2: CONTINUED

'FRED'S PLACE' ONE OF THREE VINNIES COMMUNITY HUBS IN NORTHERN NSW

"Very often, when people come to us, they've tried everything else," says Femke Romeijn, Team Leader of Homelessness and Housing at Fred's Place in Tweed Heads.

"We tend to deal with people that are being excluded and not fit within the eligibility criteria and they just have nowhere to go and then they come here. And then we advocate really hard and really strong and quite regularly we get amazing outcomes," she says.

Fred's Place is a drop-in service for people experiencing homelessness and other kinds of disadvantage that sees 80-125 people arrive looking for help and serves up to 200 meals every day.

"We've got legal aid tenancy and advice; the needle and syringe program; we've got Centrelink; we've got the homeless health outreach team which consists of a psychiatrist, mental health nurse, mental health social worker and they come here three days a week. We have financial counsellors, the RSPCA comes here to support pets that people may have, the NDIS comes once a fortnight.

Femke says that of everything Fred's Place does, there is one thing that stands out.

"When I speak with the people that we assist, they all say that they feel really welcome and safe and supported, and they can be who they are. Within the community, where wherever they go, there's judgment and there's no safe space to be – to be able to provide a place to just be yourself I think is the most amazing thing that we do here."

APPLYING FOR SOCIAL HOUSING

Applications for social housing are burdensome to people applying, caseworkers and other support people assisting them.²⁵ The heavy load of collecting appropriate identification and supporting documentation is preventing or delaying eligible people from entering the NSW Housing Register sooner. Integrating systems with myID, as in Victoria,²⁶ will allow for quicker collation of documentation needed across multiple applications and prevent blockages in accessing supports when people need them.

KEEPING VICTIM-SURVIVORS OF DOMESTIC AND FAMILY VIOLENCE IN THEIR HOME

For many women and children fleeing domestic and family violence, there is simply no choice but to leave the home. While Staying Home Leaving Violence has paved the way in shifting this dynamic, at present there are no specifically resourced housing options for perpetrators who have left the home to further the program's positive outcomes.²⁷ Housing a perpetrator at a fixed address of an appropriate standard and location will mitigate the ongoing risk of harm to women and children.

SECTION 2: CONTINUED

EXIT PLANS FOR PEOPLE NEEDING TAILORED SUPPORTS

People leaving hospitals, residential rehabilitation programs, out-of-home care, correctional institutions and supported living facilities are all at greater risk of experiencing homelessness.²⁸

Impactful exit planning should begin directly after admission into an institution. To invite collaboration across all sectors, funded services should be required to initiate exit planning when a person first engages with an institution. People should have a support plan in place, informed by the person and relevant experts (medical professionals and support persons), with built in links to services and supports.

The Society NSW believes targets to eliminate exiting into homelessness and contractual requirements across sectors to initiate exit planning at entry are shared across relevant departments, agencies and providers to improve accountability and compliance.²⁹

INTEGRATING SERVICE RESPONSES

Many stakeholders are not meaningfully engaging people receiving or needing support to stay in their home or those seeking a new home. There has been concern that some CHPs are not being held accountable for failing to support tenants to remain housed with appropriate supports in place. The role of the Housing Appeals Committee should be closely reviewed to consider whether making recommendations binding on Homes NSW and CHPs might be appropriate.

Assigning specific responsibilities to stakeholders, strengthening accountability measures and identifying other stakeholders who may prevent successful implementation of the Strategy's actions is a crucial step in creating a culture of collaboration across the sector.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1 Fund SHS caseworkers to operate out of existing community hubs, with in-community services (including Vinnies Vans), and in collaboration with CHPs and TA providers.**
- 2 Invest in rolling out soft-entry hubs that co-locate services across all regions in NSW.**

SECTION 3

HOMELESSNESS IS BRIEF

SECTION 3: HOMELESSNESS IS BRIEF

CONSULTATION QUESTIONS:

To make homelessness brief, what should NSW prioritise for action and why?

What opportunities and risks are there for implementing actions under this outcome?

What types of target(s) would be most useful to measure our impact and why?

To ensure that homelessness is brief, and that people receive the right supports when they need them, solutions should focus on centring a responsive person-centred and place-based approach by leaning on the expertise of the SHS workforce.³⁰ To truly embrace the workforce's expertise and lived experience requires trust, flexibility, innovation and creativity.³¹

Evidence domestically and internationally shows that housing solutions with timely, tailored support works over the long-term and many of the actions identified in this focus area will serve to collectively promote these solutions.³²

System improvements need to be informed by longitudinal data capture of housing outcomes to understand the factors impacting whether a

person has retained their original housing solution or secured another adequate housing option.³³ The responsibility to capture and process these outcomes rests collectively with SHS, CHPs, Homes NSW and other stakeholders in other sectors, including health and justice.

It is positive to see that TA will be reformed as part of the *Stabilise* phase of the Action Plan, with the shift towards delivery by homelessness and housing sectors, however any reform requires adequate resourcing to be effective. TA should only be considered temporary policy response, when the SHS system cannot meet need. When the SHS system is adequately resourced and has sufficient crisis options to meet need, TA will become redundant.

Additionally, it is crucial that all Housing Offices implement policy consistently as at present people are facing dramatically different housing outcomes due to the inconsistent application of policy by their local Housing Office. This includes misapplication of TA guidelines and the eligibility requirements for social housing.

CASE STUDY: NAVIGATING TA AND FINDING ACCOMMODATION IN THE PRIVATE RENTAL MARKET

Nancy (a pseudonym) and her son were rejected from TA after 33 days after declining a social housing offer in Western Sydney. The family rejected the offer as the son would have to relocate schools and the mother experienced chronic health issues that prevented her from travelling long distances to other supports in her area. The family were also declined the Private Rental Subsidy (PRS) at their local Housing office despite meeting eligibility on paper. The rejection letter stated that the mother was not trying to 'resolve her homelessness' because Nancy was not inspecting 3 properties per day in person, despite the requirement for in-person inspections not being included in her support plan.

After applying for TA from another Housing Office, Nancy and her son were approved for 7 nights additional TA and subsequently approved for the PRS. In that time, they were able to secure a private rental property.

SECTION 3: CONTINUED

MEETING THE NEEDS OF DIFFERENT COHORTS

With an increasing diversity of cohorts seeking assistance from the SHS sector,³⁴ there needs to be an increase in the flexibility of funding for providers to ensure accessibility of a range of crisis accommodation options. These include accommodation that meets the needs of specific cohorts, including people with disability, families with young children, mothers with teenage boys, people with pets, couples without dependants, transgender people and people from CALD backgrounds.

Additionally, certain cohorts struggle to access crisis accommodation including temporary visa holders and New Zealand citizens. As Homelessness NSW have recommended, additional funding for crisis accommodation for these cohorts should reflect the additional costs associated with longer support periods and more constrained exit pathways than apply to other cohorts.³⁵

In relation to delivering high quality crisis/transitional accommodation with no barriers to access, it is important to recognise that many crisis accommodation sites require eligibility requirements to maintain safety and security for all residents.³⁶ This Strategy should facilitate development of diverse housing options (e.g. core and cluster model) that are designed to meet a variety of needs and cohorts. This will allow a move away from sites where shared accommodation severely constrains providers in terms of the mix of residents and whether the needs or behaviours of some may present conflict or risk for others.

It is crucial to increase the supply of diverse accommodation options available to meet the increasing demand. However, certain sites should retain eligibility criteria to maintain the best interests in the mix of residents receiving support from that specific site.

SUPPORTING FIRST NATIONS PEOPLES IN THE SHS SYSTEM

All First Nations people experiencing homelessness should have access to culturally appropriate services delivered by the Aboriginal led homelessness sector and non-Aboriginal SHS partners who have embedded cultural safety into their services.³⁷

The Society notes that there is a separate consultation to develop a 'standalone Action Plan for Aboriginal people' and so defers more substantive comment to this process.

SECTION 3: CONTINUED

SOCIAL HOUSING OFFERS

Across NSW, the offers being made to social housing applicants are very often inappropriate or unsafe and the two offer rejection policy is being used as a punitive tool, coercing people to accept unsuitable housing.³⁸ This leads to significant delays, exits into homelessness and disempowerment for people who feel forced to accept housing that does not meet their needs. An inappropriate housing offer will often jeopardise people's ability to maintain a tenancy long-term and the risk of repeated periods of homelessness increases.

While stock of quality, appropriate social housing remains low, it is vital Homes NSW staff collaborate to find the most appropriate housing solution in an area by first seeking direct input and guidance from, among others:

- The applicant,
- SHS caseworkers supporting the applicant,
- Treating medical professionals, and
- Support persons (including family and friends).

The most dignifying action stakeholders can take is to empower a person's choice and control in their long-term housing solution. At present, the voice of social housing applicants is lost in the determination of appropriate social housing offers, and with heavy bureaucratic burdens in 'proving their needs' through medical evidence, the process itself is becoming punitive and traumatising.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3 Provide a 30% increase in SHS funding to support transition to a new commissioning and strategic pathway, including a dedicated workforce development package to build capacity to meet the needs of clients with complex needs, and reflect the costs of critical infrastructure and assets currently funded by SHS providers. It is important that the current investment made by SHS providers in critical infrastructure and housing stock, where services are located, is recognised by the NSW Government**
- 4 Foster trust and transparency between government and non-government stakeholders through collaborative workforce initiatives, for example through staff secondments.**

SECTION 4

HOMELESSNESS IS NOT REPEATED

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CONSULTATION QUESTIONS:

To ensure homelessness is not repeated, what should NSW prioritise for action and why?

What opportunities and risks are there for implementing actions under this outcome?

What types of target(s) would be most useful to measure our impact and why?

Supporting people into a home that not only meets their specific and changing needs but is also a place they feel safe and proud of, is critical to avoid multiple episodes of homelessness.³⁹

This need is urgent. Currently, 63% of people accessing SHS nationally have accessed a previous service in the past 10 years and at the end of their support period 34% of SHS clients remain homelessness.⁴⁰

EASING THE BURDEN ON THE SHS SYSTEM THROUGH INTEGRATION WITH OTHER AVAILABLE SUPPORTS

Many people with complex needs, who urgently require a package of supports to address multiple needs, are often misreferred to the SHS system.⁴¹ Other systems and sectors, including the National Disability Insurance Scheme, Aged Care system, mental health and alcohol and other drugs, are better placed and funded to support these cohorts.

For example, frontline staff described how older people diagnosed with dementia have often been referred to the Society NSW, when they would receive appropriate support via the aged care system through Aged Care Packages or the Commonwealth Home Support Program.

“The homelessness sector can’t be all things to all people. We do have other sectors that have been adequately funded to provide ongoing support.”

- Senior Leader from Society NSW Services Team

The misdirection of these cohorts to SHS providers reveals significant gaps in the virtual integration of different state and Federal systems and liaison between organisations, agencies and staff.⁴²

Siloes between these stakeholders are deeply entrenched, but they need to be urgently broken down for integrated, holistic and multidisciplinary responses to be truly effective. Again, it must be reiterated that the interdependency and integration of these systems relies on adequate and aligned funding between sectors.

SECTION 4: CONTINUED

STRATEGIC HOUSING ALLOCATION

Despite an ongoing shortage of appropriate social and affordable housing, social housing tenants sometimes occupy dwellings that are inappropriate to their household's needs over time, making it hard to find long-term solutions for those exiting homelessness.⁴³

For example, for a single tenant to occupy a five-bedroom house after this person's children have relocated, presents a challenge in balancing costs, fair distribution of a scarce resource, against the person-centred principle of allowing family homes to remain just that. However, when housing does not match tenants' specific needs, there is a potential barrier to waitlist applicants remaining in unstable housing situations for longer periods of time. As client cohorts change over time, the allocation of social housing must be considered strategically with a localised focus, and tenants who do need to free up space should be incentivised to do so.⁴⁴

FUNDING EXISTING MULTIDISCIPLINARY RESPONSES AND PROGRAMS

Existing programs within the homelessness system, including Assertive Outreach, Sustaining Tenancies in Social Housing and the Reintegration Housing Support Program, and programs in other sectors, including NSW Health's Continuing Coordinated Care Program, provide proven positive outcomes for people with complex needs at risk of or experiencing homelessness.⁴⁵ These programs need to be rolled out across the state and expanded to meet local need.

COMMUNITY BUILDING ACTIVITIES

Community development and inclusion initiatives provide a positive safety net and a sense of collective responsibility and stake in finding holistic and local solutions for people experiencing homelessness.⁴⁶ Community activities, particularly those delivered in-person, including gardening, cooking and playgroups, offer a point of connection for people. By embedding these

initiatives in their communities and service systems, where they are housed, they can become aware of and access timely supports that may assist them in maintaining their housing. Community building happens best when it is delivered where people are now. The Vinnies Vans Van Outreach Case Worker model attempts to do just that, demonstrating that even hard to reach communities will embrace support when delivered in an accessible way.

SECTION 4: CONTINUED

BUILDING COMMUNITY AND CONNECTION VIA THE VINNIES VAN

Anna (pseudonym) is a local resident to the Waterloo area. Anna makes up part of a larger CALD community of elderly women who frequent the Vinnies Van, but do not typically engage with larger SHS support around their tenancies due to language barriers. Anna slowly began to engage with the Vinnies Van Outreach Case Worker following several months of rapport building. Anna identified long-term issues with maintenance in her property, which she struggled to submit to Homes due to lack of English communication skills. Anna also identified wanting to complete a housing transfer from her property, as well as additional concerns around child protection matters in place with her grandson.

Through extensive advocacy and assistance, Anna was provided with maintenance work to her property, as well as a priority housing transfer which resulted in an offer.

In addition, she was connected to local legal services who have assisted her with child protection advocacy. Anna has since referred more than ten women from her local elderly CALD community she's a member of to the Vinnies Van Outreach Case Worker, resulting in two housing transfers, one complete renovation of a property, and one successful housing of a couch surfer into long term social housing.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- 5 Increase investment in current programs targeted to supporting people with complex needs, including Assertive Outreach and the Continuing Coordinated Care Program.**
- 6 Consult local stakeholders to understand how best to develop strategic housing allocations and incentivise downsizing.**
- 7 Ensure support for people leaving government-funded NGO services, including residential rehabilitation, who may be at risk of experiencing homelessness. and set targets to incentivise an elimination of exiting government services into homelessness.**

CONCLUSION

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The Society NSW looks forward to collaborating with Homes NSW and other government agencies in the ongoing development and implementation of the Strategy, its associated Action Plans and Outcomes Measurement and Reporting Framework.

The Strategy is a pivotal guide in directing efforts to make homelessness rare, brief and not repeated, however successfully achieving its goals requires transparency, deep consultation, evidence-based solutions and collaboration between SHS and other non-government providers, government departments and agencies, including Health, Education, Communities and Justice and people with lived and living experience.

To achieve these goals requires:

- 1 Sustainable investment and resource allocation to the SHS and other sectors,
- 2 Significant increase, supply and upgrades of appropriate housing stock,
- 3 Ongoing investment in long-term, multidisciplinary responses, and
- 4 Integration of flexibility, innovation and creativity in working together with the SHS workforce in system improvement, service design and delivery and commissioning.

We remain committed to working with others to realise the dignity of each person ensuring they remain connected to their local community, with access to tailored supports and services when they need them, to maintain their own safe, appropriate home throughout their lives.

Working together, we can deliver a more just and inclusive NSW because everyone matters – every day.

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SUBMISSION ON THE NSW HOMELESSNESS STRATEGY & ACTION PLAN



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