

Reducing homelessness in Queensland

Homelessness is a serious issue affecting Queenslanders from all social and economic groups, which impacts on the whole community.

To address this issue, the Queensland Government has committed its support to the national objectives of reducing homelessness outlined in the Australian Government's White Paper on Homelessness: The Road Home. The Government is implementing a range of improvements to support service providers and other stakeholders who are working to help people end their homelessness.

For specialist homelessness service providers, these improvements will result in:

- additional services in high-need regions to increase the overall level, range and type of support available to people who are homeless
- assistance for all service providers to help them better coordinate and focus their joint efforts
- increased access to significantly more social housing for people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness, and
- changes to funding programs and policies to better support service delivery approaches that have been demonstrated as effective.

Through the National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness (NPAH) new funding over five years has been provided to improve the current system. However, this funding alone will not be sufficient to achieve a significant reduction in homelessness.

Tackling homelessness in Queensland will depend on sustained effort from stakeholders across the entire service system, including mainstream services, to revitalise and improve the delivery of well-targeted and integrated support to people who are experiencing homelessness.

Over the five years of the NPAH, Queensland will contribute \$149.5 million and the Australian Government \$135.1 million for new and enhanced initiatives. The interim targets for the five years to 2013 include reductions of:

- 7% in overall homelessness
- 25% in rough sleeping, and
- 33% in Indigenous homelessness.

The Queensland Government has developed an Implementation Plan setting out new initiatives and services which will make a substantial contribution towards reducing homelessness. The plan identifies more than 30 initiatives to be funded through the NPAH and delivered by five different agencies.

Since the introduction of the plan in July 2009, work has focussed on finalising costings and service delivery models for the new initiatives and developing new service agreements, guidelines and funding packages. Most Queensland initiatives under the NPAH will be delivering services by mid 2010.

A Place to Call Home

As at 31 March 2010, 35 homeless families have been accommodated through the *A Place to Call Home* initiative, a joint federal and state/territory initiative that aims to:

- provide tenancy and other support services for up to 12 months to stabilise each tenant's circumstances and ensure a long-term tenancy
- remove the need for households to relocate to another property once intensive support is no longer required, and
- stop people moving in and out of homelessness.

Queensland will provide at least 143 dwellings over five years to June 2013 for people who are homeless. Referrals and support are provided through the Department of Communities Child Safety Services' Referral for Active Intervention and Family Intervention Services.

Supported accommodation for young people

A new apartment complex in Woodridge, developed through the Logan Youth Foyer Support Service, is providing much needed housing and support for 22 young people.

The Logan Youth Foyer Support Service provides supported accommodation and case management for young people who are homeless, or at risk of homelessness, where this is compromising their engagement in education and training.

Based on the Youth Foyer model, this initiative will assist young people to:

- achieve education or training outcomes
- increase capacity for independent living
- increase connectivity and sense of belonging within their local community
- reconnect with family where appropriate, and
- transition to independent accommodation.

Expansion of RentConnect

RentConnect, an innovative service designed to help Queenslanders access housing in the private rental market, is now available at Housing Service Centres in Robina, Logan, Fortitude Valley, Buranda, Chermside, Ipswich, Toowoomba, Maroochydore, Caboolture, Bundaberg, Rockhampton, Mackay, Townsville and Cairns.

The Department of Communities developed RentConnect to help people find and secure a tenancy in the private rental market. Specialist RentConnect Officers provide clients with practical information and advice which assists them to:

- understand the process of finding a suitable rental property
- learn how the rental application process works
- prepare an application to secure a home in the private rental market
- understand the documents they need to rent a property, and
- connect with local real estate agents and community services.

Brisbane Common Ground Initiative

South Brisbane has been announced as the proposed location for the Brisbane Common Ground Initiative.

This initiative will provide long-term housing and support assistance to people who are chronically homeless to assist them to regain stability and independence. It is based on the 'Common Ground' model which combines affordable housing with on-site support services that promote health and economic independence.

The apartment complex at 11-15 Hope Street will incorporate flexible communal spaces, 24/7 concierge and support services. Tenants will be a balanced mix of homeless people and those earning low incomes. Tenants will receive tailored support based on their individual circumstances for as long as they need it.

The Brisbane Common Ground Initiative will accommodate approximately 145 tenants.

Full service delivery will commence mid 2011. However, support will be available for the target group, together with assistance to settle into permanent accommodation, during the first years of operation in 2009-10 and 2010-11.

Street to Home

The Street to Home team for Brisbane commenced in April 2010.

Street to Home is a new service model to support people living on the streets to move into housing, with the aim of ending their homelessness permanently. Assertive outreach teams will provide people with the support they need to move and settle into permanent accommodation.

Teams will be set up in Townsville, Cairns and Gold Coast with a phased implementation from 2010. A rural and remote service is proposed to commence in 2011-12 in a location yet to be determined. All teams will be fully operational during 2011-12.

Youth Housing and Reintegration Service

Youth Housing and Reintegration Service (YHARS) support providers have now been appointed for Townsville, Rockhampton and Toowoomba, and tender processes are under way for the selection of support providers in Mt Isa and Hervey Bay.

YHARS will assist young people aged 12 to 20 years who are homeless or at risk of homelessness, to transition to greater stability and independence (where appropriate). Support focuses on family and community living, maintaining tenancies and linking young people with education and employment.

In Townsville, Toowoomba, Rockhampton and Inala the YHARS funded service providers will also provide an After Care Service to assist young people from across the state transition from the care of the child protection system.

After Care Services provide brokerage funds that can be used to address the needs of young people requiring extra support to live independently. Young people accessing the After Care Service will also receive case management services to assist them with their transition to independence. The After Care Service will target young people who are 18 years and are leaving care or recently left care.

The YHARS support service will have access to a range of accommodation options appropriate to clients' housing needs. This includes a supervised community accommodation facility in Townsville for young males exiting detention, community-managed youth studios to assist young people at risk of homelessness to remain at home, and Transition to Independent Living Units.

Supervised Community Accommodation

A supervised accommodation facility is being established in Townsville. This service will target young males aged 16 to 18 who have exited youth detention and who require specialist support to assist them transition to independence.

These young men will be accommodated for up to a maximum of six months and provided with case management and support tailored to their individual needs. They may be linked with the Youth Housing and Reintegration Service in Townsville to ensure ongoing support and access to longer term accommodation options.

HomeStay Support

A selection process is underway for services in 16 locations to build on the success of the existing Homelessness Early Intervention Services for people living in social or private housing.

HomeStay Support services will assist people who are at risk of becoming homeless to maintain independent accommodation. Clients will be supported to address social and financial issues putting their tenancies at risk. Services will provide both early intervention and post-crisis support to assist clients to improve their social supports and connect to their families, friends and community.

The services will be established in the following regions: Townsville, Toowoomba, Cairns, Atherton Tablelands Brisbane (three services), Rockhampton, Mount Isa, Mackay, Nambour, Hervey Bay, Beenleigh, Pine Rivers, Acacia Ridge/Inala and Ipswich.

Post care support for young adults with a disability exiting out-of-home care

Services will be delivered by 12 Transition Officers based in government departments and three Transition Officers based in non-government agencies located in South East Queensland.

Ten Transition Officers (based in Disability Services) have been recruited, and have already delivered support to 92 young people in the period to March 2010.

This program, which will assist approximately 300 young people annually, is available in the following regions: Gold Coast, Logan, Brisbane, Moreton, Toowoomba, Sunshine Coast, Maryborough/Bundaberg, Rockhampton/Gladstone, Townsville/Mackay and Cairns.

This new program will provide a continuum of care to young people with a disability who are turning 18 years of age and who are exiting the care of the state to community-based living and independent adult life.

The Transition Officers will work directly with young people to develop independent living skills, provide assistance with behaviour support, link to employment activities and help facilitate and maintain ongoing support that is appropriate to the young person's needs. This will help mitigate the risk of homelessness for program participants.

Transition Officers will also work with young people with a disability prior to leaving care to ensure early planning for adult disability support services, access to appropriate housing, individual assessments and linking with other specialist services, especially in relation to managing challenging behaviours and developing the skills necessary for adult life.

Service system coordination and community action planning

A process is under way to select a service provider to establish non-government positions to help local service systems respond more effectively to homelessness. The positions will assist in establishing greater collaboration and integration of service delivery at a local level.

The Queensland Government will also ensure that government agencies work in partnership with the non-government positions to improve service delivery and maximise outcomes from existing and new investment across government and the community.

In addition, a Homelessness Community Action Planning Project Officer has been appointed within the Department of Communities for a time-limited project to develop best practice methodology for community-wide planning to reduce homelessness, and to assist in the development of local plans for reducing homelessness.

Community action planning will engage government, business, non-government sectors and the community and will embed business principles and accountabilities for reducing homelessness. A framework for community action plans will be developed for use at a local level.

Homelessness information management program

Work is underway within the Department of Communities to establish a project that will test and develop new information systems to improve client pathways into and through homelessness services. The new information systems will include a common assessment tool and a vacancy management system.

The Queensland Government will also consider developing a case-mix framework for funding that identifies the cost of supporting clients and provides a basis for better alignment of resource allocation with client need and service capacity.

The rollout of a case-mix framework would support the implementation of the vacancy management system, which would assess daily the capacity of services to accommodate clients of different levels and type of need.

Queensland strategy for reducing homelessness

This 10-year strategy for reducing homelessness will provide a common vision and approach for homelessness services and other service providers and stakeholders who are directly or indirectly working to reduce homelessness in Queensland. The strategy will align closely with the national directions in *The Road Home*.

Work is underway to identify how to ensure that strategy will deliver a more integrated model of service delivery, a better focus on performance and outcomes, and leverage off approaches that have been demonstrated as effective.

The development of the strategy and the consultation process remains a priority for the Queensland Government. A discussion paper will be released in late 2010 and regional forums will be held shortly afterwards. The launch of the strategy is planned for early 2011.

Commonwealth update

Personal Helpers and Mentors

The Commonwealth Personal Helpers and Mentors (PHaMs) program is aimed at improving services available to people affected by mental illness and increasing opportunities for recovery for people whose lives are severely affected by mental illness.

Seven new remote sites were identified nationally as part of Round 4 of program funding. Three of these sites are in Queensland: Aurukun, Doomadgee (including Mornington Island) and Yarrabah.

In addition, 10 new sites have been identified nationally under the mainstream servicing component of Round 4 funding. One of the 10 sites is in Toowoomba, Queensland.

Weekly Centrelink payments for vulnerable customers

Since April 2010, Centrelink has been making weekly payments available to its most vulnerable customers, including people who are homeless. The legislative amendments to enable this were passed by the Commonwealth Parliament in March 2010.

Homelessness Delivery Review Board

The Australian Government has established a Homelessness Delivery Review Board to oversee delivery aspects of the Australian Government's homelessness reform agenda in line with the White Paper targets. The Board is scheduled to meet every six weeks.

The National Compact

The National Compact was launched by the Prime Minister on 17 March 2010. It supports the development of a new and stronger relationship between the Australian Government and the not-for-profit sector.

National Quality Framework

First stage consultations for the National Quality Framework were undertaken in February, March and April 2010, and included workshops in Townsville and Brisbane. The consultations were targeted to people experiencing or at risk of homelessness and the organisations that deliver services to them.

Discussions at the workshops scoped key concepts of a National Quality Framework.

The framework will underpin major homelessness reforms and will support ongoing improvement and better integration of services delivered by specialist homelessness and mainstream organisations to people experiencing or at risk of homelessness.

The second consultation stage will occur later in 2010 after all Housing Ministers have considered feedback received from the initial consultation. These consultations will seek feedback on several possible options for a National Quality Framework, the transition issues associated with those options and the sector support that may be required to implement them.

Reports on the first stage consultations will be available on the FaHCSIA website by 30 June 2010.

Centrelink Community Engagement Officers

In December 2009, Centrelink introduced a national network of 90 Community Engagement Officers (CEOs) to work with people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness who find it difficult to access mainstream Centrelink services.

The 90 CEOs will develop strong, collaborative relationships with local and state governments and non-government services which assist those who are homeless (such as crisis accommodation services).