A Message from the Minister

I am proud of the work we have collectively undertaken to make serious inroads to end homelessness. The importance of this work is clear: while a lot of good work is done in this area now, we have to do things differently if we want to turn around the lives of some of our most vulnerable citizens.

There has been a renewed focus on social policy development within the McGowan Government, including a critical analysis of where our community can improve effort. Underpinning this renewed focus has been a commitment to seek innovative solutions, support collaboration, focus on outcomes, build from an evidence base and, most importantly, place people at the heart of our response.

Work to develop the state’s first 10-year strategy to end homelessness has been an exemplar project in demonstrating this commitment. I thank the chair and the members of the Supporting Communities Forum; the Supporting Communities Forum Homelessness Working Group and its members, led by co-chairs Michelle Andrews (who replaced outgoing Department of Communities Director General Grahame Searle in February 2019) and Debra Zanella; the Western Australian Alliance to End Homelessness; the Western Australian Council on Homelessness; and the Department of Communities, for their efforts to trial new ways of working.

We now have a solid foundation to build upon. This Directions Paper synthesises the work done to date and provides an opportunity to consider our next strategic direction. It is informed by consultation with service providers from across the state, academic research, engagement with the community, and insights from people with lived experience.

Change will take time, but if we remain committed to working together to look for opportunities to continuously improve, we will succeed. I thank all who have been involved in this work so far and look forward to the next steps in developing Western Australia’s 10-year strategy to end homelessness.
A Message from the Co-chairs of the Supporting Communities Forum Homelessness Working Group

The 10-Year Strategy on Homelessness is an opportunity to transform how we respond to homelessness collectively for a few compelling reasons:

- It is the first time in many years that there is funding certainty for specialist homelessness services under the National Housing and Homelessness Agreement
- It is the first time since 2012 that Western Australia has had a strategic framework for homelessness
- The Supporting Communities Forum\(^1\) is overseeing development of the Strategy to bring new ways of thinking and working together to the process.

To tackle the complex drivers of homelessness we need to create a strategic framework that aligns different parts of the system and merges our efforts. To be successful, we require united action from all levels of government, the community services sector, industry, and community leaders and representatives.

As members of the Supporting Communities Forum, and co-chairs of the Supporting Communities Forum Homelessness Working Group\(^2\), our aim is to deliver a whole of community Strategy that:

- Is responsive to the feedback received from communities across regional and metropolitan Western Australia
- Defines the role of and sets out clear actions for state government agencies, local government, business and the community sector to help address and prevent homelessness
- Puts Western Australia on the path to ending—not managing—homelessness.

We are excited to share this Directions Paper with you and some of the ideas we think will bring lasting and meaningful change.

We would also like to take this opportunity to thank those who have taken the time to contribute to the process so far. Your input and feedback have been invaluable and it is our hope that this Directions Paper will continue the conversation.

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1 The Supporting Communities Forum brings together leaders from the community services and public sectors to support the implementation of the state government’s Supporting Communities Policy. More information about the Supporting Communities Forum can be found [here](#) and at page 8 of this paper.

2 The Supporting Communities Forum Homelessness Working Group is one of the seven working groups that was established by the Supporting Communities Forum. More information about the Supporting Communities Forum Homelessness Working Group and its role in developing the Strategy can be found [here](#) and at page 8 of this paper.
The images used on the cover and pages 2, 6, 20 and 25 are part of the Youth Affairs Council of Western Australia (YACWA) Home Is Where My Heart Is project, where young people experiencing homelessness captured photos of what home means to them.
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Introduction

According to the 2016 Census there are an estimated 9,000 people who are experiencing homelessness in Western Australia each night. Despite the annual investment in homelessness programs and services, the current system does not always offer effective responses and the consequences for individuals and communities when it fails are devastating.

Homelessness leaves a stain. A stain on your soul and mental wellbeing. You feel different and unimportant, even after getting off the street. The mental effects of homelessness last a long time. It’s 20 years this year since I got off the street and I still suffer from the effects from my time sleeping rough.

– Anonymous (lived experience)

The Department of Communities is leading the development of a 10-Year Strategy on Homelessness (the Strategy) in partnership with the community services sector. The Strategy will be a true whole-of-community plan which acknowledges that homelessness is a shared responsibility and clearly assigns accountability.

This Directions Paper is an important step along the road to the development of the Strategy. Its purpose is to share the work that has been done so far and to gain your views on how to better support those who are at risk of, or experiencing, homelessness. Your feedback will be used to inform the Strategy, which will be finalised in mid-2019.

The goal is to create a Strategy that places people at the heart of our response and shifts away from managing homelessness towards ending homelessness. This is reflected in the strategic vision:

Everybody has a place to call home and is supported to achieve stable and independent lives.
Future Directions

The Strategy will focus on three areas:

1. Sustainable pathways out of homelessness

2. Prevention and early intervention


There are three proposed directions for each focus area.

The focus areas and directions for the Strategy draw directly on feedback from the consultation sessions, perspectives from people with lived experience, and the ongoing partnership with the community services sector and peak bodies. This valuable information has been used throughout this Directions Paper, with thoughts and ideas from the consultation sessions identified by the geographic location that they are from and personal reflections from individuals with lived experience of homelessness identified using their first name (unless the individual has chosen to remain anonymous).
Future directions at a glance

Focus Area 1: Sustainable pathways out of homelessness

**Direction 1.1:** Create and trial different types of housing and accommodation that addresses the diverse needs of people across the homelessness continuum

**Direction 1.2:** Make more beds available in low-barrier crisis and short-term transitional accommodation

**Direction 1.3:** Improve service delivery through innovation and collaboration

Focus Area 2: Prevention and early intervention

**Direction 2.1:** Focus on families and young people to break cycles of homelessness

**Direction 2.2:** Better support for people who have recently exited homelessness or whose tenancies are at risk

**Direction 2.3:** No exits into homelessness from government institutions including prisons, hospitals and out-of-home care

Focus Area 3: System transformation

**Direction 3.1:** Implement a No Wrong Door approach to service delivery

**Direction 3.2:** Implement integrated, whole-of-government responses to homelessness

**Direction 3.3:** Roll out consistent, trauma informed practice across programs and services
Your Feedback

Feedback is sought on the proposed directions for the Strategy, in particular:

1. What is the best way to provide advice to government on emerging issues and trends on homelessness over the life of the Strategy?

2. How can the Strategy help stakeholders and services in your area to collaborate and work together?

3. How can the Strategy support better data collection on outcomes for individuals?

4. Are these the vision, principles and focus areas that you would like to see in the Strategy?

5. What actions would you like implemented as a priority under each focus area in the Strategy?

6. Are there any cohorts that are missing?

Information about how to make a submission is at the end of this paper.
Housing first is an evidence-based approach to addressing chronic homelessness and rough sleeping which holds that the provision of housing to people who are experiencing homelessness should not be contingent on them first meeting certain readiness requirements.

Housing first can mean responding quickly with crisis or transitional accommodation in the first instance. This does not imply that this is the best long-term option for an individual or family, but it does recognise that shelter is a first priority. Once a person is housed, assistance can be provided to identify individual needs and seek appropriate longer-term accommodation and support.

The five core principles of a housing first approach are:

1. **Access** – People are provided with assistance to obtain safe, secure and permanent housing as soon as possible, with no requirement they demonstrate that they have addressed personal issues before being deemed ‘ready’ for housing.

2. **Choice and self-determination** – People are able to exercise some choice in relation to the housing they access (subject to local availability) and can decide which supports they use and when.

3. **Recovery** – There is a focus not just on meeting a person’s basic needs but on supporting their recovery.

4. **Individualised supports** – There is a recognition that each person requires a set of supports tailored to their individual situation.

5. **Social and community integration** – There is assistance to help people to integrate into the community and participate in meaningful activities.
Our Process

The Department of Communities has been working to develop the Strategy since mid-2018 and the final Strategy is expected to be delivered by mid-2019. Development of the Strategy has involved not just thinking about innovative solutions to homelessness but testing new ways of government and the community services sector working together, with the Strategy being designed in partnership with the Supporting Communities Forum Homelessness Working Group.
### Timeline

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Month</th>
<th>Event</th>
<th>Event</th>
<th>Event</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>June 2018</td>
<td>Supporting Communities Forum Homelessness Working Group Planning Day</td>
<td>Homelessness in Western Australia: A review of the research and statistical evidence released</td>
<td>Development of Directions Paper</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July 2018</td>
<td>Draft vision and principles developed</td>
<td>Face-to-face consultation and engagement across regional and metropolitan Western Australia</td>
<td>Conversations with service providers, peak bodies and people with lived experience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>August 2018</td>
<td>Online Survey</td>
<td>Development and finalisation of the 10-Year Strategy on Homelessness</td>
<td>Monthly meetings of the Supporting Communities Forum Homelessness Working Group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>September 2018</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>October 2018</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>November 2018</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>December 2018</td>
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<tr>
<td>January 2019</td>
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<td>June 2019</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>July 2019</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>August 2019</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The Supporting Communities Forum Homelessness Working Group

The Supporting Communities Forum was established in 2017 to guide implementation of the Supporting Communities Policy and demonstrate the importance of partnerships and collaboration between government and the community services sectors to solve complex problems. The Forum reports regularly to the Community Safety and Family Support Cabinet Sub Committee and annually to the Premier.

Homelessness was identified by the Premier as a key priority for the Forum in 2018 and is the subject of one of the seven working groups that were established by the Forum:

1. Government procurement processes of community services
2. **The State Homelessness Strategy** (known as the Supporting Communities Forum Homelessness Working Group)
3. Data sharing and linkage
4. The outcomes framework for community services in Western Australia
5. The biennial ‘Our Communities’ Report
6. Communicating the Forum’s work
7. Collaborative practice both within government and with the sector.

The Strategy is being developed through a genuine partnership between the community services sector and government. The Supporting Communities Forum Homelessness Working Group is co-chaired by Department of Communities Director General, Michelle Andrews (who replaced former Director General Grahame Searle in February 2019), and Ruah Community Services CEO, Debra Zanella. Members of the Working Group have been drawn from the community services sector, peak bodies and government agencies. The role of the Working Group is to oversee the development of the Strategy and make decisions on key elements including focus areas, outcomes and whole-of-community targets.
Other partners

In addition to the Supporting Communities Forum Homelessness Working Group, there are other related key partners in the development of the Strategy.

**The Western Australian Alliance to End Homelessness**

The Western Australian Alliance to End Homelessness is comprised of members of the community services sector in Western Australia. This Directions Paper builds on the significant work done by the Alliance, including their ‘10-Year Plan to End Homelessness in Western Australia 2018–2028’. Several members of the Alliance sit on the Supporting Communities Forum Homelessness Working Group and this overlap ensures that the efforts of the two groups are co-ordinated. The Strategy will also clearly outline where government has responsibility and where the community or business sectors are best placed to lead, including how to work with the Alliance to involve the business and philanthropy sectors and leverage resources beyond those of government.

**The Western Australian Council on Homelessness**

The Western Australian Council on Homelessness (WACH) is an advisory council to the Minister for Community Services. The WACH has had input into the development of this Directions Paper and will continue to provide advice and recommendations as the Strategy develops. Several members of the WACH also sit on the Supporting Communities Forum Homelessness Working Group to ensure alignment between the two bodies.
Relationship to other strategies

Across the Department of Communities, state and local government, and the community services sector there are other strategies, plans and initiatives that are currently being developed or implemented that relate closely to the Strategy.

Related strategies and initiatives being developed and implemented in Western Australia
Overview of the Data and Evidence


A detailed overview of the research and data relating to homelessness was commissioned by the Department of Communities. The report Homelessness in Western Australia: A review of the research and statistical evidence is available on the Department of Communities website and is a key part of the evidence base informing the development of the Strategy.

What is the scale of the problem?

On Census night in 2016 there were an estimated 9,005 people who were homeless in Western Australia, 58% of whom were male and 42% of whom were female. However, many people experiencing homelessness are hidden and not counted in the statistics meaning that the true figure is likely to be higher.

Of those who were homeless on Census night in 2016:

- 1,083 (12%) were living in improvised dwellings, tents, or sleeping out
- 1,054 (12%) were in supported accommodation for the homeless
- 1,950 (22%) were staying temporarily with other households
- 991 (11%) were living in boarding houses
- 51 (1%) were in other temporary lodgings
- 3,871 (43%) were living in ‘severely’ crowded dwellings.

Compared to the 2011 Census there has been a slight decrease in the overall number of people who are homeless in Western Australia, down 2% from 9,191 people. The number of people living in severely crowded dwellings fell 7% from 4,153 people in 2011 to 3,871 people in 2016.

Despite this slight decrease in the overall homeless population in Western Australia, there has been a rise in the most visible and acute form of homelessness since the 2011 Census—rough sleeping. The number of people living in improvised dwellings, tents or sleeping out in Western Australia increased 17%, from 929 people in 2011 to 1,083 people in 2016.
What does homelessness look like across the state?

Homelessness looks different across Western Australia, varying throughout inner-city, suburban, regional and remote parts of the state. Rough sleepers tend to congregate around the inner-city, where most services and emergency accommodation are located, while overcrowding is highest in the north of the state.

The following table shows where each of the 9,005 people who were homeless on Census night in 2016 were located and the type of homelessness they were experiencing:

Table 1: Number of homeless persons in Western Australia by statistical area level 4 (SA4), ABS Census of Population and Housing, 2016

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area</th>
<th>Persons living in improvised dwellings, tents or sleeping out</th>
<th>Persons in supported accommodation for the homeless</th>
<th>Persons staying temporarily with other households</th>
<th>Persons living in boarding houses</th>
<th>Persons in other temporary lodgings</th>
<th>Persons living in severely crowded dwellings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bunbury</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>201</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>110</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mandurah</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perth – Inner</td>
<td>278</td>
<td>387</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>108</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perth – North East</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>142</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>341</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perth – North West</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>280</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>499</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perth – South East</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>296</td>
<td>229</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>769</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perth – South West</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>124</td>
<td>260</td>
<td>280</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>222</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wheat Belt (incl. Albany)</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>149</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>139</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outback (North)</td>
<td>228</td>
<td>125</td>
<td>224</td>
<td>129</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>1,157</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outback (South)</td>
<td>148</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>217</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>448</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
What are the main drivers of homelessness in Western Australia?

There is no single cause of homelessness. There are complex and diverse pathways and risk factors across various demographic groups and across the life cycle that can lead to homelessness.

In 2017–18 specialist homelessness services in Western Australia assisted an estimated 23,739 people. The top five reasons for seeking assistance from specialist homelessness services were:

- domestic and family violence (43%)
- financial difficulties (37%)
- relationship/family breakdown (23%)
- housing crisis (22%)
- inadequate or inappropriate dwelling conditions (18%).

The *Homelessness in Western Australia: A review of the research and statistical evidence* report shows that other common individual and structural drivers of homelessness include: trauma; physical and mental illness; substance use problems; poverty and labour market disadvantage; and interactions with the justice system.

How are different cohorts affected?

**Women and children affected by family and domestic violence**

Family and domestic violence is the leading cause of people seeking assistance from specialist homelessness services in Western Australia. In 2017-18, 45% of people who accessed specialist homelessness services in Western Australia had experienced family and domestic violence.

**Aboriginal People**

On Census night in 2016 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people made up only 3.1% of the total population of Western Australia, yet 29% of people experiencing homelessness identified as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander. Of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who were homeless in Western Australia on Census night in 2016, 68% were living in severely crowded dwellings. A further 14% were living in improvised dwellings, tents or sleeping out.

In 2017–18, 42% of the people assisted by specialist homelessness services in Western Australia were Indigenous.
Children and young people

Of the 9,005 people who were experiencing homelessness in Western Australia on Census night in 2016, 21% (1,921 people) were aged between 12 and 24 years. This represents a decrease of 11% from 2,163 people in 2011. However, youth homelessness services have reported that within this cohort they are seeing a growing number of LGBTIQ+ young people who are homeless or at risk of experiencing homelessness as well as a lack of appropriate responses for vulnerable young single women.

In 2017–18, young people aged 15–24 who presented alone made up 13% of people assisted by specialist homelessness services in Western Australia.

Older people

Older people are a small but growing cohort within the general homelessness population in Western Australia. Older women in particular are at special risk of homelessness due to lower lifetime incomes, many years of unpaid caring responsibilities, small superannuation payouts, relationship breakdown and the consequences of domestic violence.

On Census night in 2016, 17% (1,500 people) of people experiencing homelessness in Western Australia were aged 55 years and older, a 5% increase compared to 1,434 people in 2011. In 2017–18 people who were aged 55 years and older made up 9% of all people assisted by specialist homelessness services in Western Australia, up from 5% in 2011–12.

People experiencing repeat homelessness

The objective of assisting people who are homeless is to re-establish their capacity to live independently and achieve sustainable housing. However, despite receiving support from a specialist homelessness service some people experience repeat episodes of homelessness.

Specialist homelessness services capture data on people who change status from being homeless, to not homeless, and back to homeless during each reporting period. In Western Australia in 2017–18, 5% of all people who were assisted by a specialist homelessness service experienced homelessness more than once in the reporting year.

People exiting institutions and care into homelessness

People exiting institutions and care comprise a small but growing cohort of people who are homeless. In 2017–18 people leaving care (this includes hospital, rehabilitation or out-of-home care) made up 2.5% of people assisted by specialist homelessness services in Western Australia, an increase from 2.1% in 2011–12. People exiting custodial arrangements made up 1.7% of people assisted by specialist homelessness services in Western Australia in 2017–18, compared to 1.4% in 2011–12.
Veterans
Veterans have been identified as an emerging cohort of people experiencing homelessness. In Western Australia 0.5% of people who were assisted by a specialist homelessness service in 2017–18 (107 people) identified as current or former members of the Australian Defence Force.

People from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds
People from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds make up a significant minority of people accessing homelessness services. In 2017–18, 12.7% of people accessing specialist homelessness services in Western Australia identified as being born overseas. The top three regions that people were born were Sub-Saharan Africa (563 people), Oceania and Antarctica (508 people) and South-East Asia (444 people).

People with a disability
People with a disability or long-term health issue (i.e. those who report that they sometimes or always need help or supervision with one or more core activities including self-care, mobility or communication) made up 2.9% (684 people) of those assisted by specialist homelessness services in Western Australia in 2017–18.

Case Study: Adelaide Zero Project

The Adelaide Zero Project is a collaboration between government and the community that aims to end street homelessness in inner-city Adelaide and ultimately end homelessness in South Australia.

The Project takes a ‘functional zero’ approach – aiming to achieve a situation where the number of people who are homeless at any point in time does not exceed the capacity of the system to house them. Achieving functional zero indicates that the homelessness system is working efficiently and effectively.

The Adelaide Zero Project Implementation Plan 2018–2020 sets out a timeline for the project and allocates responsibility for delivering elements of the project to participating organisations. Initiatives that will support the Adelaide Zero Project include the creation of a ‘by name list’ of rough sleepers, a commitment to the consistent collection and sharing of data, and the Aspire Social Impact Bond which will be used to fund outreach services.
Costs of Homelessness

Homelessness costs the community, and these costs extend beyond the direct provision of accommodation and support services to people who are experiencing or at risk of experiencing homelessness.

The *Homelessness in Western Australia: A review of the research and statistical evidence* report outlines how homelessness is associated with high unemployment and high reliance on government income support and low taxation payments as well as higher rates of healthcare utilisation and interaction with the justice system. This report found that

‘...investment in responses to address homelessness is a highly justified use of funds, especially when considering the long-term economic and human costs of not intervening’

and that acting to prevent and reduce homelessness can generate significant cost savings to government and the community and results in benefits not just in terms of financial outcomes but in improved quality of life for individuals.
The costs of homelessness
Examples of the costs of homelessness across government.

**Health**
People who are homeless will often utilise hospitals in place of primary care. According to the Clinical Senate of Western Australia’s 2016 *Homelessness – No fixed address – Can we still deliver care?* Final Report each of the 94 chronic high acuity street homeless people seen by the Mobile Clinical Outreach Team spent an average of 47 days per year in hospital, equating to an estimated $5.5 million spent annually on hospital treatment for this small cohort alone.

**Communities**
People experiencing or at risk of experiencing homelessness access a wide range of other services provided by the Department of Communities that assist vulnerable children, young people, families, and people with a disability. Homelessness affects the ability of people to access these services, which increases the lifetime costs of support and results in poorer outcomes.

**Justice**
The 2016 *Cost of Youth Homelessness in Australia* research briefing found that the cost of homeless young people to the justice system is an average of $9,363 per person per year. This is $8,242 per person per year more than a young person who is unemployed but not homeless.

**Mental Health**
Mental health and homelessness are strongly associated. Homelessness can act as a trigger for mental health issues and vice versa. Secure housing allows people to focus on mental health treatment and rehabilitation.

**Education**
Young people who are homeless or at risk are less likely to finish school than their peers. The 2016 *Cost of Youth Homelessness in Australia* research briefing found that more than two thirds of the homeless and at risk young people (69%) had not completed secondary school to Year 12. A separate 1999 study by the National Centre for Social and Economic Modelling found that the total social cost of early school leaving to the Australian economy was estimated to be $4 billion dollars per year (adjusted to 2016 Australian dollars).

**Police**
Police resources are used to respond to people who are experiencing homelessness, who are more likely than the rest of the population to be both the perpetrators and the victims of crime.

**Specialist Homelessness Services**
The Department of Communities spends approximately $85 million each year on Specialist Homelessness Services that are delivered across Western Australia.
The Homelessness Service System in Western Australia

What does the current homelessness service system look like?

The Department of Communities is the lead agency responsible for homelessness in Western Australia. Each year the Department of Communities spends approximately $85 million dollars on specialist homelessness services that assist families, women and children affected by family and domestic violence, young people and single adults. This includes family and domestic violence crisis accommodation and support, homelessness accommodation and support, outreach, and housing and tenancy support workers.

In addition to the specialist homelessness services that are funded by the Department of Communities, there are other systems at the local, state and commonwealth levels that interact with the homelessness service system:

- State government agencies including Justice, Mental Health, Health, and Education fund and deliver programs and services that directly impact on people who are at risk of or experiencing homelessness
- The Commonwealth Government administers income support payments and Commonwealth Rent Assistance
- Local government services such as libraries and rangers provide assistance to people who are at risk of or experiencing homelessness and in some regions local governments are directly involved in the provision of homelessness services and accommodation.

Homelessness is more than a housing problem

It is clear from the consultations for the Strategy and the Homelessness in Western Australia: A review of the research and statistical evidence report that homelessness is more than a housing problem. People find themselves at risk of or experiencing homelessness for many reasons and require a range of supports in addition to safe, appropriate and affordable housing.

Across all tiers of government there are services that are working to address the direct effects of and underlying drivers of homelessness. Services are available across the homelessness continuum, from prevention and early intervention through to crisis, transitional and then long-term responses. However, existing responses tend to be clustered at the crisis part of the continuum.
### Housing and support across the homelessness continuum

Mapping the balance of current homeless-specific and whole-of-community accommodation and support.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Housing and support services</th>
<th>Homelessness accommodation and support services</th>
<th>Prevention</th>
<th>Early intervention</th>
<th>Crisis</th>
<th>Transitional</th>
<th>Long term</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Assertive outreach</td>
<td>Phone assessment and referral</td>
<td>Housing and tenancy support</td>
<td>Subsidised private rental</td>
<td>Social housing</td>
<td>NDIS/Disability supports</td>
<td>Employment and training services</td>
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Creating an effective whole-of-community response

The effectiveness of the homelessness service system is reliant on how it interfaces with other systems and must involve more than just reacting when people are in crisis. The Strategy will look at how to create an effective whole-of-community response to homelessness that coordinates efforts across all levels of government and the community sector. Key elements of this are:

- **Focussing on outcomes** – An outcomes framework will be developed for the Strategy that sets out what outcomes for communities and individuals will be achieved and how these will be measured and evaluated. The outcomes framework will be aligned with the whole-of-sector outcomes framework being developed by the WA Council of Social Service through the Supporting Communities Forum.

- **Working towards visible targets** – The Strategy will set targets that will apply not just to the Department of Communities but to other state government agencies and community sector partners as well. Where appropriate targets will be place-based, with local communities to have a say in designing targets for their region.

- **Creating clear lines of accountability** – Although the Department of Communities is the lead agency with responsibility for homelessness, many of the actions needed to prevent and respond to homelessness sit outside its direct sphere of influence. Accountability for achieving the aims of the Strategy must be shared across government and the community sector and the Strategy will clearly articulate which agencies and partners are responsible for what.
Community Consultations for the Strategy

About the consultation process

Face-to-face consultations for the Strategy were held throughout Western Australia during September and October 2018. The consultation process was designed to gather input from across the state and to capture the views of different types of stakeholders within each region, consistent with the whole-of-community approach to the Strategy.

Workshops were held in Broome, Kununurra, Port Hedland, Karratha, Geraldton, Albany, Kalgoorlie, Bunbury, Cockburn, Joondalup and the Perth CBD. A separate event for the youth sector in Perth was also held as well as targeted, locally run sessions in Mandurah and Newman. Sessions were open to the public and widely publicised through social media and the networks of service providers and peak bodies including Shelter WA, WACOSS and YACWA. Care was taken to ensure that organisations and individuals representing Aboriginal people, young people and other priority cohorts that the Strategy will target were invited.

Summary of key findings

Over 300 people attended the consultation sessions, including service providers, state and local government agencies, community members and people with lived experience. The consultation process generated a wealth of information about what homelessness looks like in different parts of Western Australia and how existing responses can be improved. Individual reports for each session were also completed and are available on the Department of Communities website.

Below are some of the key findings from the consultation process. While many of the issues and ideas raised are not new, they provide important insights and complement existing data on homelessness.

1. **Homelessness looks different in every community**

While common themes emerged throughout the consultations, the experience of homelessness was different in each region and was influenced by factors such as geography, climate, demographics, and the local economy. People in the Kimberley and Pilbara cited an acute shortage of housing as one of the main causes of homelessness in their community. The private rental market was either small or non-existent, with available properties also in demand by industries like mining and tourism, and there was insufficient public and community housing. In other regions, such as the northern suburbs of Perth, the undersupply of permanent housing was not a strong theme. People felt that what was needed was better co-ordination of services to ensure that the right supports are available when and where they are needed.

“[Provide] appropriate accommodation based on the needs and wants of the community.”
– Kununurra
2. **A range of housing options are needed**

People who are homeless or at risk of experiencing homelessness were recognised as a diverse group with highly individualised needs. Poorly designed housing that does not suit the needs of individuals and families was cited as contributing to homelessness and people felt that there should be a range of long-term and well-designed housing available that suits the needs of different cohorts, such as large families and people with a disability. Housing must be tailored to the geography, climate and culture of the region that it is in, as well as energy efficient in order to keep running costs down for people on low incomes.

3. **Make services accessible and integrated**

People spoke about the need for services to collaborate and work together to provide holistic, wrap-around support that addresses the needs of families and not just individuals. Communities also want services that are physically accessible, especially in regional and outer metropolitan areas where there are limited transport options for those who cannot drive or do not have access to a private vehicle.

The desire for accessible and co-ordinated services was frequently expressed in requests for community hubs or one-stop shops where services are co-located and people can access a range of services at once. Another way of addressing the lack of service co-ordination that was proposed was advocacy or support workers who can assist people to navigate their way through the service system.

4. **Government agencies need to work together to reduce barriers**

Organisations and individuals expressed frustration at barriers that prevent people accessing help, such as needing identification or being required to complete overly complicated forms, and felt that government agencies should be doing more to lead the way in reducing or eliminating these obstacles.

In regional and metropolitan locations people stressed the importance of using technology thoughtfully to streamline service delivery and make information more accessible, rather than to create additional barriers. Moves away from face-to-face service delivery in favour of online and telephone methods by agencies such as Centrelink and the National Disability Insurance Scheme were cited as presenting additional difficulties for groups such as older people, people with poor literacy, people on low incomes and people living in remote areas with limited internet and mobile phone coverage.
5. While there are examples of good practice, most programs and services need to become more culturally aware and trauma-informed

In regional and metropolitan locations across Western Australia, Aboriginal people reported that existing services are not always culturally adequate. While there were many examples of good practice, the need for culturally sensitive service models, more Aboriginal people working in the system, co-design of programs and services in partnership with Aboriginal people and more Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations delivering services was a consistent theme.

While cohort specific responses to homelessness are important, it was also acknowledged that Aboriginal people and people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds need a choice between accessing specialist or mainstream services. There is also an acute need for more interpreters for Aboriginal people and people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds to improve access to services.

Trauma was identified as the underlying cause of many of the drivers of homelessness and the importance of consistent, trauma-informed practice was a key theme across the state. Some organisations are using principles of trauma-informed care and other organisations are not, with this lack of consistency undermining efforts to address the impact of trauma within the community.

6. Shelter and safety is a priority for people who are sleeping rough

“People won’t ask for help when [they are] not understood”.
– Newman

“Respect and enable Aboriginal people.”
– Geraldton

Homeless people just get moved along way too easily. They are seen by everyone as a threat. But all we want is somewhere secure and safe.
– George (lived experience)

For people with lived experience of homelessness, personal safety was at the front and centre of their concerns. People said that they needed a safe place to go at night or during the day where they would be able to rest and store their belongings.

The need for more low-barrier accommodation was a consistent theme throughout the consultations, particularly accommodation that can be accessed by people with mental health issues and people affected by alcohol and other drugs. A shortage of low-barrier accommodation for young people was also reported.
7. **Services should be person-centred, with the flexibility to help people for as long as they need it**

The needs of the individual should be at the centre of responses to homelessness—supports should be tailored to the needs of the individual rather than a one-size-fits-all approach.

People also felt strongly that there should not be time limits on the provision of accommodation or support services. Services must have the flexibility to be able to assist an individual for as long as they need to help prevent people cycling through repeat episodes of homelessness.

8. **Give communities a say in designing their own solutions**

Just as the experience of homelessness was different in each region, so were the solutions needed to tackle it. People—including people with lived experience of homelessness—emphasised that they wanted their voices to be listened to and to be active partners in developing solutions for their community.

In regional areas in the north of the state there was an appetite for greater responsibility for homelessness services to be given to District Leadership Groups and for trialling place-based funding.

9. **Integrated and accessible mental health and drug and alcohol services are vital**

Across the state, there needs to be more work done to better integrate mental health services and drug and alcohol services with mainstream homelessness services. People felt that government agencies and community organisations frequently work in silos which need to be broken down so that mental health and drug and alcohol services are connected. In regional areas services must be geographically accessible so that people do not have to travel long distances or leave their homes to access them.

“Empower us to help people in our own communities”

– Joondalup

“Intensive ongoing support and outreach over long periods of time would provide the consistency and continuity needed to assist people in feeling safe and secure.”

– Cockburn

Drugs and homelessness are so interrelated and it's a vicious cycle people get caught in. You get your benefit payments, spend it all on drugs in the first few days then find ways to survive for the rest of the fortnight.

– Lance (lived experience)

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3 The Department of Communities has established District Leadership Groups in the East and West Kimberley, Pilbara and Goldfields regions to support regional services reform. The groups are responsible for developing and leading on-the-ground responses to achieve local outcomes and include representatives from the community sector, industry, Aboriginal community-controlled organisation, and all levels of government. More information about District Leadership groups can be found [here](#).
10. Educate the community about homelessness to reduce stigma and shame

Throughout the consultation process many people with lived experience shared deeply personal stories of how they had been viewed by mainstream society while homeless and the lasting affect that this had on their sense of self-worth. Shame, pride and personal stigma were cited as a barrier to accessing services by individuals and services providers alike, and there is a need for more community education to debunk myths around homelessness.

“Address stigma—real and perceived—and discrimination so that people can access and receive services that meet all their needs.”

— Cockburn
Results of the online survey

The Department of Communities conducted an online survey to complement the face-to-face consultations for the Strategy. The survey was available online from 5 November 2018 until 14 December 2018 and promoted to service providers, peak bodies, community members as well as to people who had attended the community consultations. People were encouraged to share the survey widely with their networks.

The full results of the online survey can be found on the Department of Communities website.
### People with lived experience

People cited more than one reason for becoming homeless, but the leading cause was **family and domestic violence**.

Over half the respondents had been homeless for **1–3 years**. One had been homeless for more than **10 years**.

The majority of people who responded to the survey would usually **stay with family and friends or in their car**.

Most were alone when experiencing homelessness, but three people indicated they **had their children with them**.

#### What did you need help with the most when experiencing homelessness?

- Safe and affordable housing
- Access to facilities to keep clean
- Support services and assistance with obtaining rental bond payments
- Short stay accommodation

#### Where do you go to seek help?

Not all respondents knew where to go for help, but common answers included:

- Hospitals
- Family or friends
- CrisisCare
- Drop-in centres
- Centrelink

### Other Respondents

State and local government employees and community members responded to the survey under this category.

**45 people** indicated that they had **provided support to someone experiencing homelessness**.

**What are the top three things the Strategy should focus on?**

- Service coordination
- Affordable and appropriate housing
- Crisis accommodation

Only **20%** of respondents thought that existing services in their community are addressing the needs of people experiencing homelessness well.

**What are the barriers that prevent your community from helping people who are experiencing homelessness?**

- Insufficient funding for services
- Lack of appropriate housing
- Lack of coordination among services
- Lack of understanding of homelessness
Future Directions

This part of the Directions Paper outlines the work that has been done so far on the development of a strategic framework for addressing homelessness. The proposed vision, principles and focus areas for the Strategy build on the evidence base and the feedback received during the consultation process.

**Vision**

Everyone has a place to call home and is supported to achieve stable and independent lives.

In this context, a home is somewhere that is safe, secure and appropriate for a person’s needs. Stable means people are supported to maintain their housing and can put down roots where they live and be connected to their local community. Independent means individuals are empowered to make decisions and take control of their own lives.

**Principles**

A set of principles has been developed to guide the whole of community approach to addressing homelessness in the Strategy. These principles are:

1. **Ending homelessness is everyone’s responsibility**
   Responsibility for ending homelessness is shared by businesses and individuals, the community services sector, and all levels of government. There is a common understanding of the individual and structural causes of homelessness.

2. **Housing is a foundation for life**
   There is a shared commitment to the value and benefits of a housing first approach, recognising that access to appropriate, safe and affordable housing is fundamental to wellbeing.

3. **People’s needs are at the heart of our responses**
   People’s needs and lived experience are at the centre of service design and delivery. People are treated with dignity and respect, with a focus on supporting their individual strengths.
4. There is a No Wrong Door approach to service delivery
People are provided with appropriate and timely assistance regardless of where they enter the homelessness system. Agencies and services work together to maximise the use of available resources and deliver the best outcomes for people.

5. The right solutions are delivered in the right places
Efforts to prevent and respond to homelessness are flexible and tailored to local conditions. Programs and services are co-designed with consumers and communities. Innovation is encouraged.

6. We do what we know works
Programs and services are evidence-based and responsive to examples of best and emerging practice, especially in relation to culturally appropriate and trauma-informed practice. We acknowledge what is already working well and support good service models.

7. We hold ourselves accountable for achieving outcomes
Commitment to the Strategy is shared across government and the community services sector. We report against outcomes and targets to demonstrate our progress.

Focus Areas
The focus areas describe the high-level changes that will be achieved over the life of the Strategy and will guide where resources will be directed and what actions will be taken. The focus areas for the Strategy are:

1. Creating sustainable pathways out of homelessness

2. Prevention and early intervention

3. Transforming the existing homelessness service system to create an integrated, person-centred system.
Focus Area 1:
Sustainable pathways out of homelessness

This area concentrates on addressing the existing homeless population by creating lasting and sustainable pathways out of homelessness and preventing re-entry into homelessness, with the aim of ending or substantially reducing—not managing—homelessness over the life of the Strategy.

Direction 1.1: Create and trial different types of housing and accommodation that addresses the diverse needs of people across the homelessness continuum

People who are experiencing or at risk of experiencing homelessness are not a homogenous cohort and they require different kinds of housing and support. For some, long-term and intensive support is required while other people may be able to quickly transition to independent living with little or no support. One of the main priorities for the Strategy will be looking at ways to create diverse housing options which reflect the varied needs of people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness in each part of Western Australia, taking a housing first approach where appropriate.

Actions being considered under this direction include: considering an expanded role for lodging houses; implementing a private rental brokerage scheme; and looking at new, evidence-based housing models for Western Australia such as a Common Ground housing model.

Direction 1.2: Make more beds available in low-barrier crisis and short-term transitional accommodation

Consultations for the Strategy highlighted the shortage of crisis beds across the system, particularly low-barrier accommodation that can be accessed by people who are also experiencing mental health problems or affected by alcohol or other drugs. This results in people who are seeking emergency accommodation being turned away and rough sleeping, potentially leading to further exposure to trauma. Contributing to the shortage of beds is the problem of people becoming ‘stuck’ in crisis or transitional accommodation because of a lack of permanent housing options they can move onto.

The Strategy will look at ways to make more crisis beds available across the system, including more low-barrier accommodation, with the aim of making inroads into ending rough sleeping and chronic homelessness.

Actions being considered under this direction include: exploring new models or expanding existing models for crisis and/or low-barrier accommodation and support; working to eliminate bottlenecks that prevent people moving out of crisis and transitional accommodation and into permanent housing.

“Creative, supportive, and alternative housing options for people with diverse needs are required.”
– Albany
Direction 1.3: Improve service delivery through innovation and collaboration

In every location across regional and metropolitan Western Australia during consultations for the Strategy people spoke about the need to improve service delivery to ensure that services are accessible, and people do not have to repeat their story multiple times when seeking assistance. The Strategy will seek innovative solutions to improve service delivery and make services more coordinated and person-centred.

**Actions being considered under this direction include:** making smarter use of technology; supporting services to increase their utilisation of case management models (using housing first principles where appropriate); rethinking the role of meals and day centres.

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**Case Study: Changes to Western Australian tenancy law to support victims of family and domestic violence**

The Western Australian government has passed changes to the *Residential Tenancies Act* that will create new options for renters who are affected by family and domestic violence.

The changes, which will come into effect on 15 April 2019, will allow victims of family and domestic violence to:

- End a tenancy agreement without going to court and with as little as seven days’ notice
- Apply to court to have a perpetrator’s name removed from a lease
- Make a rental home safer through lock changes or security upgrades
- Allow the court to assign costs to the perpetrator for damages to the property or unpaid rent resulting from family and domestic violence
- Seek removal from, or avoid being listed on, a tenancy database if the listing was because of family and domestic violence.

Family and domestic violence is the leading cause of homelessness in Western Australia and victims can suffer significant hardship when they are forced to leave their home. These changes to the law aim to prevent pathways into homelessness by giving victims of family and domestic violence better protection within the context of a residential tenancy, including whether to stay in a rental home by excluding the perpetrator or moving to safer accommodation.
Focus Area 2: Prevention and early intervention

This area targets improving existing homelessness prevention and early intervention responses in the short term and directing more resources towards this in the longer term as inroads are made into addressing the existing homeless population.

Direction 2.1: Focus on families and young people to break cycles of homelessness

There is an intergenerational aspect to homelessness; the evidence demonstrates that experiencing homelessness as a child or young person makes someone more likely to experience homelessness as an adult. Investing in young people and families is therefore crucial to preventing homelessness among adults and the Strategy will look to strengthen responses to youth homelessness.

**Actions being considered under this direction include:** assessing whether there is a gap in services for emerging cohorts such as LGBTIQ+ young people; evaluating whether there is a case for the expansion of successful models already operating in Western Australia.

Direction 2.2: Better support for people who have recently exited homelessness or whose tenancies are at risk

The Strategy will consider how to improve support for people who have been recently housed or whose tenancies are at risk to prevent entry (or re-entry) into homelessness. This includes ensuring that supports are person-centred and are in place for as long as the individual or family needs them, and this applies not just to tenancy support but to other types of support as well such as financial counselling or mental health support. This direction will contribute to prevention and early intervention as well as creating sustainable pathways out of homelessness.

**Actions being considered under this direction include:** providing more trained housing support workers, including more Aboriginal housing support workers; ensuring that support services are culturally appropriate and meet the needs of Aboriginal people and people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds including delivery by Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations.

“Prioritising early relationships and strong families can minimise issues leading to homelessness.”
— Joondalup

“Address the causes of homelessness—free financial budgeting services, family relationship strengthening, mental and emotional resilience.”
— Kalgoorlie

“When individuals and families are placed in public housing, they require culturally appropriate, intensive support to help them maintain a home and be financially sustainable.”
— Broome
**Direction 2.3: No exits into homelessness from government institutions including prisons, hospitals and out-of-home care**

Release from state care, including prisons, hospitals and out-of-home care, is a time of high vulnerability and many people exit the system into homelessness. The Strategy will look at how to improve the support provided to people who are leaving state care so that no individual exits into homelessness.

**Actions being considered under this direction include:** support for the Home Stretch pilot to extend the leaving care age; requiring state government agencies including Justice, Health and Communities to ensure that all individuals who are exiting their care go to stable accommodation with tailored support; introducing across-agency reporting on homelessness indicators.

> When I left prison, there was no support. They just came and told me I was being released, with no notice, and I was walked out with nowhere to go. It’s been a struggle ever since… What really would have helped me earlier on is better exit planning. I needed support to be more prepared leaving prison. If I had that, I probably would have been much better off.

— Anonymous (lived experience)

**Case Study: Private Rental Subsidy**

The New South Wales government’s Rent Choice program supports households to access safe and affordable housing in the private rental market.

It provides a time-limited rental subsidy for up to three years and facilitates access to support services, including training and employment opportunities, to build capacity for independent living. The program is not intended for people who require long-term housing assistance or who have long-term support needs.

There are several types of Rent Choice products that are available for young people, veterans, people escaping family and domestic violence, and other cohorts. To be eligible for Rent Choice a person must be able to demonstrate a capacity to sustain their tenancy in private rental accommodation and in most cases also be homeless or at risk of homelessness and eligible for social housing. The subsidy is paid directly to the landlord and the rate of payment decreases over time to prepare the person to pay market rent at the end of the program.
Focus Area 3: System transformation

This area emphasises transforming how government and community sector agencies work together to deliver homelessness services to create an integrated system that responds to the needs of individuals and communities.

Direction 3.1: Implement a No Wrong Door approach to service delivery

During consultations for the Strategy people in locations across regional and metropolitan Western Australia described how difficult and complex the homelessness service system can be for both the individuals seeking help and the people working to provide it. The Strategy will look to address this by delivering a No Wrong Door approach to service delivery across the homelessness service system.

Significant work has already been done in partnership with the community services sector to define what No Wrong Door means and the tools that are needed to deliver it. Further information about the work that has been done on a No Wrong Door approach can be found at the end of this section.

Direction 3.2: Implement integrated, whole-of-government responses to homelessness

Homelessness is not an issue that sits neatly within a single government portfolio and people who are experiencing homelessness often have needs that cut across the responsibilities of agencies such as Heath, Justice, Education, Mental Health and Communities as well as local government. The Strategy will look at how to improve responses to homelessness across government and ensure that government is modelling best practice in terms of across-agency collaboration and coordination.

Actions being considered under this direction include: setting consistent, whole-of-government targets to reduce homelessness with CEOs held accountable through mechanisms such as performance agreements; introducing information and data sharing protocols across government agencies and departments; and improving the links between homelessness services and mental health and drug and alcohol services.

Direction 3.3: Roll out consistent, trauma informed practice across programs and services

People who are homeless experience trauma at a greater rate than the rest of the population and consistent trauma informed care is essential for healing and for addressing the underlying issues that lead to people becoming homeless. The Strategy will look at examples of best-practice in trauma informed care and treatment and how to ensure that this is applied to specific cohorts and across the homelessness service system.

“Bureaucracy and red tape gone would make it easier for 'clients' to navigate the systems.”
- Joondalup

“Have a co-ordinated, focussed, targeted, collaborative approach to service delivery that includes partnerships, so we are all rowing in the same direction.”
- Karratha

“[We need] dedicated trauma informed therapeutic services available in each town for children, women, men, families and service providers.”
- Kununurra
A No Wrong Door Approach to Service Delivery

During consultations for the Strategy, many organisations and service users described the current homelessness service system as difficult to navigate, with people being passed between services and having to tell their story multiple times. Implementing a No Wrong Door approach to service delivery was suggested as one way to address these issues, with the Department of Communities playing a critical role in overseeing and coordinating system-wide reform.

What does No Wrong Door mean?

On 13 November 2018, the Department of Communities held a targeted workshop to explore the concept of a No Wrong Door approach in the context of the development of the Strategy. At the workshop it was agreed that the main elements that should underpin a No Wrong Door approach are:

- individuals experiencing or at risk of homelessness can access the support they need quickly and easily
- needs are assessed at the first point of entry. If assistance cannot be provided an individual will be directly connected to a service that will support them
- parts of the system are connected so that people do not need to tell their story multiple times
- workers are appropriately trained and organisations are resourced to deliver a No Wrong Door approach.

How do we get there?

Implementing a No Wrong Door approach will require both government and the community services sector to adjust the way that they currently operate. Changes needed to support a No Wrong Door approach that were identified at the workshop are:

- implementing consistent, system-wide protocols around information sharing, assessments and referrals between agencies. This could involve the development of a common assessment tool that can be used across agencies
- changing the way that services are delivered by increasing collaboration and flexibility across the sector
- making smarter use of technology through initiatives such live bed-counts, databases, and mobile phone apps.

The meaning of No Wrong Door and the tools needed to achieve change will be further explored and tested as the Strategy is developed.

“The presence of complex pathways is a barrier for people in the region. People can’t just walk in and get what’s needed and there is much time spent on re-telling personal stories and experiences.”

– Port Hedland
How to Make a Submission

Service providers, government agencies, local governments, people with lived experience of homelessness and other interested stakeholders are invited to provide feedback on the proposed directions for the Strategy. Feedback will be incorporated into the Strategy, which will be finalised later in 2019.

Submissions should focus on the discussion questions on page 4 of this paper and be emailed to homelessness.strategy@communities.wa.gov.au or mailed to:

Attn: Homelessness Strategy Team
Department of Communities
99 Plain Street
East Perth WA 6004

All submissions must be received by 4pm on 17 May 2019. When making your submission please indicate if you do not wish for it to be published on the Department of Communities website.

If you have any questions or would like to discuss an alternative way of making a submission please contact us at homelessness.strategy@communities.wa.gov.au.