



17 May 2019

Homelessness Strategy Team
Attn: Emma Colombera
Department of Communities
99 Plain St
East Perth WA 6004

Dear Ms Colombera,

STATE HOMELESSNESS STRATEGY – SUBMISSION ON THE DIRECTIONS PAPER

Thank you for the opportunity to respond to the Directions Paper for WA's upcoming State Homelessness Strategy. In a world of constrained resources, thinking clearly about how homelessness responses are organised is an important contribution to helping the most people in the best way possible.

This submission is in two parts:

- 1) Responses to the questions posed in the Directions Paper; and
- 2) Some general issues and opportunities relating to homelessness responses that we at St Pat's consider of importance as we consider the way forward.

Questions Posed By The Directions Paper

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

The District Leadership Groups (formerly the Regional Human Services Forums or Regional Managers Forums) should be used, as they have the capacity to develop integrated, place-based perspectives. In particular, the DLG in the south-west metropolitan region, Imagined Futures, should be considered a model. Imagined Futures brings together not just Federal, State and Local Government agencies, but also key participants in the community services sector, business and community members. The information generated in that context has both depth and breadth.

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

We suggest the following priorities:

- Using District Leadership Groups to roll out the Strategy, including, where DLGs are mature, using place-based funding models.
- More generally, approaching procurement in ways that don't undercut collaboration. Place-based funding is one option. Where government can identify a specialist agency that may not be able to manage the whole of a contract, we'd suggest using a nominated subcontractor approach. This may be particularly applicable where you are seeking to empower Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations, but could also apply where a contract may be let for a large region, but a smaller organisation is known to have specialist skills or capacity.
- Collaboration requires resources; if it's important to the success of a contract, allowance should be made for the time and resources necessary to achieving real collaboration.
 - Government must consult widely, early, and in a meaningful way.
 - Sufficient funding for Engagement Hubs (Day Centres), given their key role as a

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connector for both clients and those delivering services.

The following principles can be derived from Imagined Futures, an example of a mature, well-functioning DLG:

- a) IF is co-chaired by a CEO from an NFP, and a senior public servant from the local Department of Communities region.
- b) IF is staffed, with the position working from within an NFP (rather than government). The position undertakes the secretariat work for the RMF. The position also has a critical facilitation role both between the members of the group, and with the projects and other work the group undertakes.
- c) IF thinks of itself as a 'collective impact group', rather than just a regional managers forum. They've developed a strong shared commitment to **doing things, together**.
- d) IF has a culture of equality; just because you're a large organisation or a large funder, doesn't mean you get to have the largest voice. Among other things, this requires large orgs and large funders to share power.
- e) IF manages a brokerage pool. The members have built a culture of mutual accountability; proposals need to be good to get up.

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

We suggest the following priorities:

- Data collection and analysis requires resources; if it's important to the success of a contract, allowance should be made for the time and resources necessary.
- Data collection through contracted service providers will mostly collect data relating to people who use services. We know that doesn't cover large numbers of people experiencing homelessness (e.g. many of the more complex rough sleepers, many people couch surfing or in overcrowding, most people who are not homeless but who are at risk of it). In order to more completely understand how people are experiencing homelessness in WA, we support supplementing data collected through services with, for example, a survey consistent with the ABS's General Social Survey, with an emphasis on tracking duration of experiences of homelessness.

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

While the vision, principles and focus areas are not obviously incorrect or missing anything, we are concerned that they don't seem to have been built up from the data and consultation data, and that they don't seem to cohere into a system logic.

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

There are many new ideas that have significant merit, and warrant investigation. However, we are concerned that, at present, the homelessness response system is not sustainably funded. A system with many 'thin' services is harder to manage and, more important, harder to navigate, than a system where service delivery organisations are funded in a sustainable way.

In a world where existing services were sustainably funded and new funding was available, St Pats would prioritise:

- Investment in social housing;
- Investment in a Common Ground (i.e. long-term supported accommodation for residents with significant needs);

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- Longer term and intensive support for people experiencing chronic homelessness based, for example, on Sacred Heart Mission's *Journey to Social Inclusion* or Mission Australia's *Michael Project*.
- Significantly increased resources for mental health services suitable for people experiencing or at risk of homelessness. Examples might include increased resourcing for the Mobile Clinical Outreach Team (MCOT) attached to Street to Home, embedded mental health services in Engagement Hubs, or attaching mental health professional to outreach programs.
- A solution for clients at the very sharpest end of the spectrum; there are a small group of people whose needs are so complex that they are not consistently supported. Responding to these people will require 24-hour services, and will almost certainly require multidisciplinary teams including case management support, mental health, AOD, employment, family and social reconnection, as well as flexible approaches to housing.
- Funding for support resources that would allow at least some crisis accommodation to accept higher needs clients.

6: Are there any cohorts that are missing?

While the Directions Paper identifies Aboriginal people are severely over-represented, the proposed Focus Areas do not appear to sufficiently address the need for Aboriginal-specific responses. We think there is an opportunity to leverage the DLGs in this space, as being both a good source for knowledge, and a way of working in ongoing relationships with Aboriginal people and communities.

Themes and Issues

Integration with other Strategies

From the Directions Paper, it's clear that the intention is to develop a State Homelessness Strategy that works with other State Strategies. However, it's not clear what this will mean. Two key strategies are the Mental Health Accommodation Strategy and the State Affordable Housing Strategy. It should be made clear in the State Homelessness Strategy that we cannot end homelessness unless we are able to provide sufficient appropriate and affordable housing for the general population, and specifically, for people with mental illness.

'No Wrong Door'

The Directions Paper describes the importance of a 'No Wrong Door' approach, but in practice, we think this remains an ill-defined idea. It is worth noting that often, when referrals occur between agencies, the services receiving the referral do not have the capacity to take on the client. In that situation, the issue is not a failure of collaboration; the issue is that there are insufficient resources in the homelessness response system to effectively respond to all those who need help.

Segmentation

The Directions Paper does not provide very clear decision-making principles for targeting resources to the areas or individuals in greatest need. At present, we tend to segment resources by cohort (e.g. FDV, young people, older women, etc). Not all people within a cohort have the same intensity of need, or require the same intensity of response. We think it will be important to design services that are flexible, and to accept that measureable outcomes are also likely to vary.

System logic

The homelessness response system currently in operation is arguably the result of at least a decade of accretion and 'bolt-ons', crisis

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ST. PATRICK'S
COMMUNITY SUPPORT CENTRE

Address: **Head office**
12 Queen Victoria Street, Fremantle WA 6160
Mailing: P.O Box 115, Fremantle WA 6959
Email: admin@stpats.com.au
Phone: +61 (08) 9430 4159

responses and trials. This is made especially clear when one considers how different the homelessness responses available are in different locations in the State: some places have great services for young people, but little for people experiencing family and domestic violence. A few places have Engagement Hubs, but a high-need area like the South-East Metro does not. We are keen to see a Strategy that more clearly articulates what sort of 'system logic' we are moving to.

Thank you again for the opportunity to make submissions on the Directions Paper. I would also like to express my thanks for the opportunity to have Karyn Lochore participate in the development of the State Homelessness Strategy, and for the flexible and fruitful way your team has engaged with her ideas on matters both practical and theoretical.

If you have any further questions, please feel free to contact me on (08) 9430 4159 or mpiu@stpats.com.au.

Regards,

Michael Piu
Chief Executive Officer