

Feedback Submission (17/5/2019)

Dept. of Communities Directions Paper for the 10-Year Strategy on Homelessness WA 2019-2029



UnitingCare West (UCW) believes that communities thrive when everyone can enjoy a life of belonging, hope, and purpose. Building on this vision, UCW strongly supports the mission to end homelessness in Western Australia.

UCW is encouraged by the vision, principles and focus areas outlined in the Department of Communities' Directions Paper for the 10-Year Strategy on Homelessness. This is UCW's formal response to the Directions Paper.

Our current primary focus is to end rough sleeping in the Perth CBD and surrounds, with crisis intervention as a priority. UCW believes we have the right model, resources and the expertise to fulfill this goal while collaborating with other services who can manage further steps in the homelessness journey.

For the last 12 months, UCW has been developing stronger internal and external referral pathways. We've ensured we listen to the people experiencing homelessness, especially chronic rough sleepers, the chronic homeless and newly homeless people. We have made the necessary internal changes to ensure we can adopt person-centered approaches to our services. We have enabled better access to accommodation services and the realisation of a trauma-informed engagement centre, focused not only on essential services but also on community learning and upskilling, and a collaborative outreach approach.

We believe that the whole sector needs to work in a truly collaborative way, working together to complement our strengths and achieve positive outcomes for individuals. This can be achieved by the co-design of a service pathway across the sector, inclusive of people experiencing homelessness and service providers.

A major component of this collaboration will be investigating and using resources and facilities efficiently, employing strategies such as No Wrong Door across all services, and accurately mapping what is required over the next five years to end rough sleeping and reduce obstacles to services responding quickly and with dignity. We also require a focus on longer-term initiatives to end the cycle of homelessness and support people in long term affordable housing, reconnecting them with communities and creating employment and training opportunities with an understanding of past experiences and trauma.

Empowering individuals to create change in their own lives involves engaging their own strengths and resilience, for example utilising a Recovery College model such as the successful service delivered in London by St Mungo's (www.together-uk.org/southwark-wellbeing-hub/the-directory/9064/st-mungos-recovery-college).

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

Annual reviews of the 10-Year Strategy with a combination of feedback from service users, services and stakeholders with questionnaires, surveys, community consultation session and visits to services should be carried out to assess progress.

Collaborative reporting twice-annually should be provided to demonstrate progress against agreed targets for the year. This would include the collection of shared data that would enable open and transparent reporting on the current situation, such as KPIs on increased crisis bedding. Interim response meetings can be proposed to the group to address urgent emergent issues identified in reports. This reporting could be integrated with or replace existing funder reports.

Independent Ombudsman role should be created to address conflict and mediation. This role would also be involved in quality audits of service providers by people with lived experience; either in the industry as a service provider or as a client. An example of a similar approach is the previous Disability Services Commission's Standards Monitoring Unit.

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

The WA Government may consider replicating a place based, collaborative model such as Victoria's State-wide Homelessness Networks, (www.nwhn.net.au/Home/Victorian-Homelessness-Networks.aspx) which are funded through DHHS to bring services together to share information, and identify common needs and gaps in homelessness service provision.

The Networks assist in establishing and maintaining close working relationships in order to promote and support the best possible responses to homelessness within a regional context. Each network is made up of members from homelessness and family violence agencies funded through the Specialist Homelessness Support (SHS) Program.

The Networks have both grass roots and strategic goals. They fulfil a critical role in capturing and examining front-line homelessness service delivery issues through ongoing and regular consultation and communication with members. The Networks also assist to build service system capacity by identifying and developing potential solutions to address gaps and barriers.

A key role for the Networks includes strategic communication with consumers, member agencies, peak bodies and all levels of government on the issue of homelessness and its impacts in Victoria.

Integrated Services – shared outcomes/deliverables - In reference to focus area 1.3 (Improve service delivery through innovation and collaboration), there is an identified need for

better integrated outreach in the CBD across UCW, Ruah, Anglicare, 55 Central, Tom Fisher House, City of Perth & Street to Home providers.

Currently, UCW and Ruah are reviewing their approach to supporting rough sleepers in Northbridge. This allows UCW, utilising Tranby, to focus on the more complex and crisis rough sleepers, while Ruah supports more planned or 'appointment-based' responses for rough sleepers who have less acute needs. UCW has also varied how Street2Home operates to promote more service linkages via outreach and warm referrals.

Shared data - There is recognised need in the industry and among providers operating in Perth for a more accountable reporting process. Capturing and sharing daily statistics across service providers can identify risk areas with unmet needs and service denial in the face of vacancies. Currently, the SHIP data collection/reporting system is utilised but does not work well for all services. A review of the SHIP system and possible alternatives would be recommended as part of the strategy.

Code of Ethics - UCW suggests the development of a Homelessness Services Code of Ethics similar to the Youth Workers Code of Ethics: <https://www.yacwa.org.au/sector-support/code-of-ethics/> developed by YACWA. This would be applicable across the entire sector and be included in the induction process for volunteers and student.

Shared Training - Victoria's Eastern Homelessness Network (EHN) has a shared training calendar for workers in the homelessness sector (www.ehn.org.au/training). The Strategy should support these such resources which provide shared, common training across providers (staff and volunteers). Wherever possible, the minimum training should involve people with lived experience in training content and delivery.

A standardised industry training minimum requirement would improve efficiencies, create consistency, and allow for greater collaboration between services. An additional benefit of a minimum level of training would be increased opportunities for development in skill sets for many staff and increased opportunities to transition between services, improving average experience levels. Overall, a standardised industry training minimum requirement would foster a collaborative understanding of the challenges and requirements different services face.

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

Current data collection processes are service-specific and not widely adopted. Research is required to identify a standardised process for data collection that can be applied broadly across all services within the industry.

There is a requirement for more accountable reporting from service providers to identify numbers and characteristics (e.g. demographics) of client engagements each day, week and month. Within this, service rejections must be noted and the causes for these rejections identified to improve transparency of acceptance protocols and service delivery in general.

Robust data collection can help address risks such as services cherry-picking 'easier' clients to meet contract KPIs and challenge the validity or detrimental impact of using base numbers as KPIs.

There is an inherent risk in applying a universal use of tools in initial point of contact interactions (to triage clients and refer them on to services). It would be more viable for services to use different tools and triage assessments to reduce barriers to services. Some tools are more appropriate in different circumstances - the VI-SPDAT for example, involves over 100 invasive questions, and using only this triage assessment can create a barrier for some cohorts, particularly individuals with acute mental health issues, in poor cognitive ability or in immediate crisis.

We recommend common referral forms and sharing of information (with consent) across providers to limit individuals having to 'retell their story'. The current system (SHIP) captures some data but it is not fit for purpose for all services. The 'By Name' List is a proposed database that could be shared by all services to provide real time data on individual rough sleepers, facilitate coordination amongst providers and target individuals based on needs. Such a program would be a huge benefit with collaboration and government support.

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

UCW supports the vision of the Strategy and believes that everyone has the right to safe, secure, and appropriate accommodation. We also support the recognition that housing is a journey for some people experiencing homelessness, and that a suitable choice of different housing and accommodation options should be offered to suit the needs of all people.

UCW is a strong advocate for individuals that are transitioning from homelessness to be supported to connect to their local communities - so that they can make empowered decisions in their own lives. We believe that there is a greater need to focus on the resilience and strengths of people experiencing homelessness and empower them to be seen as capable and contributing citizens.

UCW believes that addressing homelessness takes a whole of community approach. We also believe that there is increased need to develop the relationship between community members and the corporate sector as a way to grow understanding, encourage collaboration and break down the misconceptions of the issues and barriers that lead to homelessness. The seven principles identified in the Strategy echo this approach.

UCW agrees that ending homelessness is everyone's responsibility, and would welcome closer relationships with alternative and unidentified partners who have, perhaps, not been considered previously. UCW would support a trauma-informed approach be adopted not only in support services but also across all levels and departments in government. We would also encourage this approach to be shared more broadly with stakeholders and the corporate sector, helping

create an understanding that homelessness can happen to anyone and fostering a culture of empathy and compassion.

Housing First - UCW shares the commitment to the value and benefit of a housing first approach, which identifies housing as a foundation for life, and we believe that this model can be successful for a large cohort of people experiencing homelessness. However, this principle requires a complementary understanding that people currently experiencing homelessness may not be prepared to transition straight into housing. There needs to be improved understanding that some people will not choose housing, and respect that we will need to offer other accommodation options and levels of support for those people.

The Housing First Principles, which are currently only applied by certain organisations, need to be embraced by all housing providers to create a shared vision and foster understanding and consistency for clients. This misalignment is a major barrier to securing housing for people in need and results in clients with complex needs failing housing placements.

Focus on strengths (not needs) - UCW strongly supports Principle Three but would like the focus to be on people's strengths, rather than their needs. UCW values the insight that people with lived experience bring to the table, not only by sharing their story but also by contributing to how services are designed and providing feedback on how services operate.

The No Wrong Door approach is a concept that UCW has already embraced with the trial of an engagement and referral role within the engagement hub team. The No Wrong Door approach should not just be present in the crisis space, but throughout the whole pathway, with touch-points from outreach through to housing and reconnecting to community.

It should be a response that all services must opt-in to, even when an individual's needs change or increase in complexity. Services that take on this approach should be assessed and made accountable for upholding this throughout their services.

Innovation is definitely the key to ending homelessness and breaking the cycle of re-entering the homelessness system. Organisations need to embrace innovation and co-design with consumers and communities. UCW has started this process with client-led committees and we look forward to broadening this in other areas.

To assist in streamlining services with other agencies and reducing conflicts due to competitive funding, it is imperative for the Strategy to carry out a co-designed mapping exercise measuring success by differing agencies with different cohorts. We acknowledge that there are many services achieving fantastic outcomes, but would like to highlight the importance of ongoing accountability to remaining culturally appropriate and trauma-informed.

This also feeds into Principle Seven, supporting reporting against outcomes and targets to demonstrate progress. UCW supports the three focus areas and the possibilities that each area presents.

Sustainable Pathways out of Homelessness resonates well with UCW's integrated homeless service goals. While we support the approach of providing, supporting and trialing different types of housing and supports, we believe that a reallocation of resources may fill identified gaps in the system. The need for more crisis beds, low-barrier accommodation and short-term transitional accommodation is key for people's softer entry into permanent accommodation and for building trusting relationships with complex clients.

The improvement of service delivery through innovation and collaboration is another key area of conversation within UCW, especially regarding the Tranby engagement hub and the internal pathway from outreach through to transitional accommodation, focusing on rough sleepers, chronic homelessness and people newly experiencing homelessness.

Prevention and early intervention is a key factor to not only reduce the cycle of homelessness, but also to prevent individuals from entering into homelessness all together. Although we do not have a dedicated homeless youth service, we support any initiative that will stop young people graduating into adult services and reduce the increasing pressure in an already breaking sector.

The need for extra support for people existing hospitals and prison is also imperative to reduce pressure on engagement hubs and accommodation services.

Focus Area Three brings the necessary system transformation with significant need to create an integrated system that works together and reduces further traumatisation to the individual. The implementation of a No Wrong Door approach is a welcomed response, especially with the complimentary approach of an integrated whole-of-government response to homelessness that crosses over many disciplines.

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

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

Since there is not a one-size-fits-all solution, choice and control to suit multiple needs is a priority. This is one of the most challenging factors in ending homelessness.

There must be a focus on Aboriginal-specific accommodation design, created and managed by Aboriginal people and experienced organisations with a pre-existing relationship to that community. An initial step on this direction will require mapping of current resources to identify true gaps in housing and accommodation, and a review of current resources available in the sector. This initial mapping will need to examine the appropriate use of the resources currently available, such as whether crisis accommodation is being used for individuals presenting in crisis.

As an example of why mapping is required, there is currently an urgent and fast-growing need for female trauma-informed transitional and crisis accommodation services with complementing financial counseling services operating with education and employment programs.

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

UCW would endorse a low-barrier youth accommodation service helping support a better transition from rough sleeping young people to longer-term transitional accommodation. This model could be adopted by youth crisis accommodation services or newly created spaces. A clear definition of crisis and low-barrier is required, as this needs to be applied across the sector so that each service is working with the same focus and consistency. We support with replication of the successful Tom Fisher House low-barrier accommodation, especially for certain groups such as Aboriginal people and youth.

Direction 1.3: Improve service delivery through innovation and collaboration

There exists a need for Safe Night Spaces to operate in the Perth CBD and surrounding areas on both weekdays and weekends, opening from 7pm to 7am. Such a service would exist as at least three separate models of operation to cater to women-only, youth and non-segregated adult individuals.

The purpose of the model is to decrease the risk of further trauma for complex clients who may be unable to transition straight into housing from rough sleeping circumstances. This model could be implemented in different locations and adapted depending on local needs. The suitable support and resources, we believe this model could be a five-year interim solution to rough sleeping and allows for housing stock to become available and processes to be developed to improve the availability of housing services for complex clients.

Aligned with this approach, UCW's Tranby engagement hub would extend its operating hours, (currently 7am to 12pm, 6 days a week), to 7am to 7pm, 7 days a week. This would create a system of consistent coverage and provide further opportunities for intervention and support.

Ruah and UCW are collaborating on a joint service model to provide an engagement hub model for individuals experiencing homelessness across two sites. One site will function as a crisis intervention space and the other as a planned response site for long term support and housing needs. A joint submission has been submitted separately from this response.

UCW is currently working towards a holistic service model that focuses beyond the familiar essential services, such as showers and meals, towards community learning platforms on general life and wellbeing with a graduated approach towards work readiness and employment. This has already underway through community learning workshops and social enterprise initiatives.

Focus Area 2. Prevention and Early intervention

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

Specialist services and approaches are required to support families break the cycle of homelessness without penalising people for being homeless or integrating families into mainstream homeless services. There is a need to create safe crisis accommodation options for families with easily navigated pathways into housing.

UCW is leading a collaborative outreach response which focuses on rough sleepers and includes complex young people, integrating case management with housing support (effectively Street to Home for youth). We also support the development of a Foyer-type model that works with complex young people, creating safe accommodation and developing pathways to employment and training. The current Foyer model does not allow access to young people unless they agree prior to entry to employment and training, which is a barrier to many young people with complex issues.

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

There must be a focus on housing support without time restrictions and with a choice of day and/or evening support. As previously stated, UCW has a current focus on creating support services that encourage community connections and develop inclusive community activities. A potential support improvement would be trauma-informed training for all community and government housing departments to work in a person-centered way, focusing on learning and educating. In addition, we endorse further training to facilitate culturally appropriate responses to housing breaches through acknowledgment and consideration of family connections and traditions.

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

Early intervention engagement programs in school environments would raise awareness of opportunities to support and contribute to an end to homelessness. This would also be central to destigmatising homelessness.

UCW supports the need to raise the age of young people exiting out of home care to support 18-25 year olds and improve the provision of education and training as early intervention against the risk of homelessness in the future.

Early intervention programs should be collaborative efforts. There is an additional need for greater collaboration between government institutions and community organisations to create coordinated support - starting prior to exiting remand or health institutions to create continuous support systems.

Focus Area 3. System Transformation

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

An investment in Apps that identify and respond to rough sleepers would support a No Wrong Door approach. One example is the Street Link App, a mobile App and phone line that allows members of the public to connect support services to precise locations of people who are rough sleeping in the UK and Wales (www.mungos.org/homelessness/are-you-worried-about-someone-sleeping-rough).

Strengthening the No Wrong Door approach would be support for the **By Name List** - a collaborative approach to capture, in real-time, rough sleepers' information to create a centralised database for services to refer to, creating a coordinated access system.

There is an urgent and important imperative for a revised 'Entry Point'. This system for people who are at risk of, or who are experiencing homelessness, to make initial contact to access services is currently operating ineffectively. In its present capacity as a phone service (with long waiting times), it can act as a significant barrier to individuals with disabilities and mental health issues and may complicate verbal communication.

All service models could include 'concierge' teams that are dedicated to work in a No Wrong Door approach. This would include an intake team that can act as a first point of contact to assist with referrals and respond swiftly to issues.

Training across the sector would be necessary to create a collaborative one way of working with in the No Wrong Door approach creating consistency for individuals regardless of contact point.

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

In UCWs current experience, one of the major barriers to supporting an individual out of their homeless circumstances is the silo structure of government organisations.

For example, Mental Health and Drug and Alcohol services who, despite falling under the umbrella off the Mental Health Commission, do not collaborate in their roles and redirect individuals with complex, multifaceted needs back and forth between their departments. This can result in people disengaging from vital services due to frustration and confusion.

A solution could be the creation of a 'super team' with representatives off DOA, mental health services, and trauma experts to assist complex individuals to access services. In a similar vein, a committee including representatives from invested government departments and the community sector may identify and support those complex individuals who require a multifaceted approach to assist people transitioning from homelessness.

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

UCW believes that working with complex individuals holistically and addressing their mental health and AOD issues is essential to a successful transition from homelessness. This is a time-intensive process and requires service providers to have consistent approaches and innovative methods of service delivery.

Instead of services in silos, mental health and AOD workers should be part of responsive outreach teams and located in engagement hub teams, creating consistent practice and specialist roles. The timeliness of interventions in crisis situations related to AOD and mental health is an urgent priority area for improvement.

Trauma-informed practices need to inform changes to policy, especially in government departments, specifically as this pertains to the three strike rule currently enforced by the Department of Communities. Evidence has shown that this perpetuates a cycle of homelessness for individuals with severe trauma-related issues. Mandatory trauma-informed training should be included in training contracts.

6. Are there any cohorts that are missing?

UCW is currently focusing on strategies for people who are in housing and who need to be supported with local community integration, aimed at reducing isolation and lack of social connection. Evidence shows that social isolation causes mental health issues, which may lead into a re-entry into homelessness. This will hopefully take the pressure away from services such as Tranby, health services, and other specialist crisis services.

This can be easily replicated in different communities through local government, inclusive of an understanding of trauma informed practice and inclusive of complex backgrounds. Engaging people in community activities, building connections and increasing people's capacity to integrate into communities and local services can decrease social isolation. Focusing on developments for these people will be a critical element in the success of the Strategy and in breaking the cycle of homelessness.

Furthermore, UCW has recently identified veterans as an emerging demographic in the rough sleeping community. We are developing our focus on identifying veterans and including them in daily statistics, leading to customised service responses.