

9th May 2019

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

Dear Team,

As a key provider of homelessness services Vinnies WA is pleased to have the opportunity to provide feedback to you on the Directions Paper for the 10 Year Strategy on Homelessness.

Our two services, Tom Fisher House and Passages Youth Engagement Hubs operate under the low barrier model of Low Threshold and Change as well as providing Trauma Informed Care and Therapeutic Crisis Intervention strategies for our clients.

Passages Youth Engagement Hubs located in both Perth and Mandurah, provide marginalised and at-risk youth aged 12 - 25 with a safe and positive place to access support services. Passages Hubs are a joint venture between the St Vincent de Paul Society and the Rotary Club of Perth and Mandurah and currently receive no ongoing government funding. The Hubs focus on accessibility and inclusion for the greatest number of young people in need, enabling some of the hardest to reach youth populations to overcome disadvantage and realise their full potential.

Tom Fisher House identifies the important role of intensive intervention for those who have been without a home for long periods of time and the imperative need to work in a system of care with other specialist services. We provide free overnight accommodation with few barriers to entry and a place of engagement in which an individual's life impacting issues can be identified and supported. On any given night we accommodate up to 12 adults (singles and couples) and even have room for friendly fur companions. The service can provide up to 7 nights stay and is open between 5:30pm and 8:30am every night of the year and is funded by Department of Communities: Child Protection and Family Support and St Vincent de Paul Society.

Working collaboratively in the interest of each individual is integral to ensuring the right support measures for people whom are experiencing or whom are at risk of homelessness. It is apparent that the Homelessness System is stretched to capacity and that continued roll over of service contracts has done little to enable system and service reform to better meet the needs of our most vulnerable people. We welcome the opportunity to be part of the work in improving the system.

Please find attached Vinnies WA's response to the Direction Paper.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Sandy McKiernan".

Sandy McKiernan
Executive Manager,
Specialist Community Services

Response to Directions Paper for the 10 Year Strategy on Homelessness

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

Utilising established models such as Regional Managers Forums and cohort specific meetings where collaborative approaches already exist and there is a common goal and an equal power base. Where possible have joint facilitation/chairing opportunities across government and NGO's and seek opportunities to embed Department of Communities staff/project people, providing tangible evidence of collaborative intent

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

A large amount of collaboration exists; however, it is often not always strategically aligned as knowledge gaps of other services can be a challenge. Service mapping and referral pathways are not well understood in the sector beyond the few big services.

There is not sufficient funding allowance to enable collaboration with the right people attending meetings/forums/workshops. Funding to backfill staff that are operating at direct service level provision is required as these staff are the most knowledgeable but are often unable to attend due to lack of backfill/relief opportunities. Alternatively, we close services to allow for attendance which impacts upon service delivery – neither option provides good outcomes.

Passages Hub model provides unique opportunity for other services to provide in-reach to our client base. There can be barriers to this when funding parameters are too narrow for the agencies often forcing them to work outside of their funded contracts to ensure a service continues, e.g. – a visiting health service lost funding in the Mandurah region for their mobile service and chose to continue to visit Passages anyway as there was no other service option available for our clients.

3. How can the strategy support better data collections for individuals?

Optimal data collection is expensive, investment into comparable data systems that are not only for state/federal funded services is important to improving data collection. Current data capture is limited to funded agencies and amalgamation of data can be difficult if data integrity and definition are not aligned.

Support for the By Name List initiative to understand the breadth and change in the rough sleeper cohort will enable live data to be able to shared and better understood. This is critical to being able to make change at a systems level.

Data capture about couch surfing and overcrowded dwellings is limited. Consider collecting data that encompasses a wider group (beyond the Registry/Census) with an emphasis on tracking duration of homelessness.

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

Overall the paper does cover off on the key areas and issues however the overall service model is not easily understood with the interplay between sectors, agencies and departments not being mapped. Although there are multiple related strategies that will impact the homelessness strategy (pg. 10), there is no clear mapping or pathway on how these intersect other than that they exist.

Given how critical housing access and affordability is to addressing homelessness there is an insufficient consideration of this in the paper. The Housing Strategy must address this and it is essential for this aspect of the strategy to link into the Homelessness strategy. In the same vein, the Mental Health Accommodation Strategy which was released for feedback has limited direct link to the Directions Paper and the role services such as Psychiatric Hostels play in providing supported accommodation for people with mental illness who would otherwise be homeless

The Directions Paper also doesn't articulate what system logic and architecture we would be moving to i.e. it is not clear what a cohesive, coherent and effective system should look like and how it would "hang together". The system we have currently is extremely fragmented and based on historical haphazard service development and there is no identifiable system logic – without a clearly defined system logic and architecture to work towards there is a risk that this situation will remain.

The inclusion of the need for low barrier crisis accommodation is very positive and given the effectiveness of the Low Threshold and Change model we are very pleased to see it included in the paper. It should be noted however that that low barrier crisis accommodation is a very specialized and costly operation and is designed for very specific target groups so it is critical to ensure that there is a spectrum of services and accommodation available as not all homelessness needs are complex or long standing.

The future system needs to be calibrated toward service need and service intensity. Some parts of the service system are more complex and require greater resourcing and others less. This aligns with an individualized approach

It would also be helpful to consider some of the language used in the paper and the way parts of the service system are labelled e.g. day centres/night shelters. Whilst we understand that these are historical references these framings don't reflect the complexity and specialisation of the service models.

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

Before introducing and funding new models it is important to sustainably fund existing services that are proven to be effective and will be part of our ongoing service system. A system with many 'thin' services is harder to navigate and likely to be less sustainable than a system with services that can properly do what they're being asked to do.

Address how the state will work towards meeting the demand of the housing shortage in a clearly articulated, measurable plan that has ending homelessness as a core principle

6. Are there any cohorts missing?

Despite strong data recognizing the risks and needs to Aboriginal people, there appears to be limited Indigenous specific initiatives or focus on this most vulnerable group.