

# **Australian Federation of Homelessness Organisations**



**ANNUAL REPORT  
1999-2000**



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# Overview



**The Australian Federation of Homelessness Organisations (AFHO)** was established in Canberra in 1998 to provide a coordinated and effective national response to issues of homelessness through:

- conducting research and policy development aimed at preventing and addressing the effects of homelessness;
- consulting with homelessness agencies on national public policy issues;
- educating the community on issues relating to homelessness; and
- providing a conduit for communication between government and the community.

***AFHO's vision is to proactively research, develop and promote national policy relating to homelessness and the diverse range of people it effects.***

From late 1998 to August 1999 AFHO served as a mechanism to draw together the independent work of the Council for Homeless Persons Australia (CHPA), the National Youth Coalition for Housing (NYCH) and the Women's Services Network (WESNET). In August 1999 these founding members proposed a number of major changes to the operation of AFHO including:

- The establishment of a new Board of Management in 2000 involving an independent chairperson, CHPA, NYCH and WESNET representatives and Indigenous, Non-English Speaking Background and rural and remote positions;
- a new staffing structure comprising one Executive Officer, one Policy Officer and one Administrative Officer; and
- a commitment to further develop opportunities for members to get involved in AFHO's work.



## Constitutional Objectives



AFHO's Constitutional Objectives are:

- (a) To provide an effective national voice on homelessness and related issues by fulfilling the following objectives:
- (b) To undertake actions, research and policy aimed at:
  - (i) developing and promoting the association's policies;
  - (ii) preventing or ameliorating the extent and effect of homelessness;
  - (iii) educating the community on the issues related to homelessness.
- (c) To provide a structure which facilitates joint work between the organisations so far as joint work is consistent with the individual purposes, objectives and policies of each organisation.
- (d) To provide a structure which receives funding on behalf of the organisations and distributes the funding to the organisations.
- (e) To provide a structure with sufficient safeguards to:
  - (i) protect the autonomy of each organisation;
  - (ii) protect the financial, legal and policy interests of each organisation;
  - (iii) prevent and resolve disputes arising between the organisations.



# Chairperson's Report



For a national representative organisation that has been in existence for less than two years, the extraordinary amount of work that has been undertaken by various staff and Board members in ensuring that AFHO provides a vibrant, credible, and valuable service for all stakeholders is truly remarkable. It is therefore with great pride that I present this second annual report.

As foreshadowed in my report last year, a major review of the structure and operations of AFHO was undertaken in the early part of this financial year, with financial assistance from the Commonwealth Department of Family and Community Services. Change was planned in all aspects of AFHO operations, with financial arrangements leaving each of the three member organisations with extremely limited resources. In light of the severe reduction in operating capacity experienced by WESNET, CHPA, and NYCH, the courage of each of these organisations must be acknowledged.

A principal element of the changes undertaken was the recognition that AFHO needed to develop a nationally recognisable identity, whilst retaining the policy development roles of the founding members. The vehicle for achieving this aim has been the employment of skilled and dedicated staff, whose work since February of this year has resulted in the production of submissions, policies, briefing papers, articles and information packages of the highest quality. To Sally Watson (Executive Officer), Annie Butkus (Policy Officer) and Macushla Hares (Administration Coordinator), I offer congratulations on a fantastic effort.

In addition to the core work undertaken by AFHO, Sally has worked on a research consultancy investigating the impact of Mental Health issues among clients of the Supported Accommodation Assistance Programme (SAAP), and AFHO has accepted opportunities for representation in a variety of forums and meetings. These have included the Australian Council of Social Services (ACOSS) Social Housing forums; National Shelter meetings; a range of meetings with Ministers, Shadow Ministers and Departmental officials; and liaison meetings with other peak organisations.

The highlight of the AFHO year undoubtedly was the official launch of the organisation at Parliament House, Canberra, by the Federal Minister for Family and Community Services, Senator Jocelyn Newman on May 25, 2000. The launch coincided with the release of a Discussion Paper on a National Homelessness Strategy, and I would like to acknowledge the generosity of the Department of Family and Community Services which hosted the day.

The year ahead will be busy as AFHO staff, together with our members, further develop AFHO policies in a range of areas. In addition, the reform agenda of the Federal Government will see work undertaken on Welfare Reform; on the National Homelessness Strategy; and on changes inherent in the SAAP IV Agreement. Taxation changes may well have an impact on Federal/State financial arrangements and AFHO will carefully monitor and analyse the direction taken on Special Purpose Grants and the future of such programs as the Commonwealth State Housing Agreement.

A major feature of the work undertaken by national organisations such as AFHO is the need to constantly modify and amend workplans as new initiatives or changes to existing arrangements, are implemented by government. Crucial to the setting of priorities is the work undertaken by Board members, and in particular the Executive. Electronic communication has simplified the flow of information, but I would particularly like to acknowledge the dedication and enthusiasm of all members of the AFHO Board, and to thank each and everyone for the support extended to me.

I would also like to place on record my appreciation of the support each Board member receives from their employing agencies. It is this support that facilitates the sustained input of each member of the Board into AFHO operations, without which AFHO cannot function.

As we embark on another busy and productive year, I extend my congratulations to all associated with AFHO for a most successful completion of a difficult but rewarding twelve months. I offer also, my very best wishes to you all as we enter the next millennium.

Ginny Hewlett.  
AFHO Chairperson



# Priorities



The key issues that AFHO will focus on in the coming year are outlined below.

## **A new SAAP Agreement between the Commonwealth and States**

As we enter this fourth SAAP Agreement, (SAAP provides supported accommodation for people who are homeless or at imminent risk of becoming homeless), AFHO will work closely with all key stakeholders – service providers, government and other peak organisations to implement the strategic directions of SAAP IV and ensure that these new policy directions result in improved outcomes for homeless people.

## **The National Homelessness Strategy**

The Government has announced its intention to develop a National Homelessness Strategy to address the significant issue of homelessness in Australia. AFHO will work hard to encourage Government to deliver on this long-awaited Strategy and will contribute regularly throughout its development to ensure that it does provide real benefits to homeless people.

## **Housing Assistance**

Housing and homelessness are inextricably linked. The Commonwealth State Housing Agreement (CSHA) is the instrument through which public and community housing is delivered to low income earners throughout Australia. The future of housing assistance once the current CSHA expires in 2003 is a major concern for AFHO and its constituents. AFHO will continue to input to the housing debate through membership on the National Council of National Shelter and through participation in the Social Housing Forums convened by ACOSS.

## **Indigenous Homelessness**

Indigenous people are especially vulnerable to homelessness and are significantly over-represented in SAAP's client population (13%) compared with their proportion of the total Australian population (2%). The causes and experiences of homelessness are somewhat different for Indigenous people than non-Indigenous people. The impact of colonisation and dispossession and the resultant destruction of Indigenous culture has left a lasting legacy of disadvantage and discrimination for Indigenous people, including making them more susceptible to homelessness. AFHO is committed to engaging and working with Indigenous communities to address these significant issues.

## **Mental Health and Homelessness**

Mental illness increases an individual's vulnerability to housing loss. Recent research highlights the needs of homeless people with high and complex needs and makes recommendations for enhancing the SAAP service system to better respond to the needs of this client group. The Commonwealth Government has recently funded a national research project to examine the linkages between mental health services and SAAP services in order to improve services for people who are homeless with a mental illness. AFHO is a member of the successful team, in conjunction with Craze Lateral Solutions and St Vincent's Hospital in Melbourne, undertaking this research.

## **Welfare Reform Agenda**

Homelessness is fundamentally a consequence of poverty. Those who do not receive adequate financial assistance, or do not receive any financial assistance at all, are at great risk of homelessness. Therefore, welfare reform is of critical interest to AFHO as the impact of any changes to income support arrangements has significant implications for homeless people. AFHO will closely monitor the welfare reform process and continue to advocate on behalf of homeless people within this agenda.



## What is the size of Australia's homeless population?

According to an analysis of 1996 census data published by the ABS in late 1999 there were an estimated 105,300 homeless people in Australia last census night.

Of the 105,300 homeless people on census night in 1996, only 12,900 (12%) were staying in services funded through SAAP. SAAP, jointly funded by Commonwealth and State Governments, provides funds for around 1,200 crisis services to homeless people around the country.

Last year 90,700 homeless people gained access to SAAP funded services. Some of these individuals returned to services two or three times over the year so that services actually supported 163,200 people on separate occasions over the year.

It is estimated that up to 116,400 requests for homeless services (SAAP) could not be met during 1998-99.

## Who is homeless in Australia?

While we don't have accurate information on the characteristics of the entire homeless population in Australia, we do know something about the characteristics of those who used services to the homeless last year (SAAP funded services):

- ❖ more women (54%) than men (46%) used these services;
- ❖ more young people than older people depended on SAAP. 36% of service users were under 25 years of age and 87% were under 45 years of age;
- ❖ Indigenous people were highly over-represented at 13%, compared with their 2% proportion of the Australian population;
- ❖ people from non-English speaking backgrounds constituted 11% of all people who used SAAP services; and
- ❖ up to 65,800 children accompanied adults in SAAP services over 1998/99.

## Why are people homeless in Australia?

The key risk factors for homelessness in Australia are:

- ❖ unemployment (91% of SAAP service users are unemployed or not in the labour force);
- ❖ poverty (93% of SAAP services users rely on government incomes or have no income);
- ❖ lack of affordable housing; and/or
- ❖ discrimination in obtaining housing or employment or both.

Family conflict and unemployment are key factors in youth homelessness. For women, domestic and family violence are key factors in homelessness. Unemployment, lack of suitable long-term accommodation, and low vacancy rates in the private rental market are important factors in family homelessness.

Displacement as a result of white settlement and policies of segregation and assimilation, discrimination, and low incomes are important factors in Indigenous homelessness.



# AFHO Activities 99 - 00



Because AFHO was first established in October 1998, this financial year (1999-2000) represents the first full year of AFHO operation. From July-December 1999 AFHO continued to act as a coordination mechanism for the work of our founding members CHPA, NYCH and WESNET. In practice this meant that the majority of AFHO operational funds were distributed to our founding members to undertake the generalist, youth and women's aspects of the overall AFHO workplan to address homelessness. However, a structural review of AFHO in August 1999 resulted in substantial change to the way the organisation operated. From January 2000 AFHO retained most of its operational funds for the employment of a consolidated AFHO secretariat staff team. This meant that allocations to founding members were reduced markedly. From January, these organisations received minimal funds to undertake consultations with their members in order to inform the work of AFHO.

A full secretariat staff team was employed by March 2000. Macushla Hares continued as the AFHO Administrative Coordinator, Sally Watson was appointed as the Executive Officer and Annie Butkus was appointed as the Policy Officer.

Over 1999-2000 AFHO, in its changing operational guises, undertook a significant amount of work in the following broad areas:

- submissions to government;
- representation of the national homelessness sector at a range of government and non government meetings;
- participation in national research projects;
- provision of information to AFHO constituents; and
- management and governance related activities.

## **Written Submissions**

Over 1999-2000 AFHO provided a range of written submissions to government including:

- a response to SAAP's National Coordination and Development Committee *"Consultation Paper on the SAAP Strategic and Administrative Framework"*;
- a response to the report *"Homelessness in the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Context and its Implications for SAAP"*;
- a response to the report *"Appropriate Responses for Homeless People whose needs require a High Level and Complexity of Service Provision"*;
- two submissions to the GST Start Up Assistance Office for funding to provide training for SAAP agencies in implementing the GST;
- two submissions to the Welfare Reform Reference Group. First, in response to its terms of reference and second in response to its Interim Report.

## **Meetings and Forums Attended**

AFHO has managed to represent the national homelessness sector at a wide range of government and non government meetings and forums over the year.

The government convened forums we have been represented at include:

- a Commonwealth Advisory Committee on Homelessness (CACH) forum to discuss the SAAP Strategic and Administrative Framework Paper;
- a Family and Community Services (FaCS) workshop on the Strategic and Administrative Framework for SAAP 2000-2004;
- an *"Early Intervention and Homelessness Forum"* convened by the CACH;
- a SAAP Data and Research Advisory Committee (DRAC) workshop on *"Measuring Homelessness"*;
- a DRAC forum regarding the proposed Special Data Collection on clients without income;
- the Social Capital Think Tank 3 *"Social Capital and Strong Communities – Whats the Link?"* convened by FaCS;

- a Partnerships Against Domestic Violence (PADV) Forum on children and young people in Melbourne; and
- the Youth Pathways Action Plan Taskforce Forum in Brisbane.

In addition AFHO has been represented on the Partnerships Against Domestic Violence (PADV) Early Intervention Advisory Group and has undertaken ongoing liaison with Ministerial and Departmental staff in the Family and Community Services portfolio and other relevant portfolios.

Non Government forums AFHO has contributed to and participated in over the past year include:

- a National Housing Conference – Reform and Renewal in Social Housing;
- a South Australian Conference on Homelessness;
- an ACOSS forum on welfare reform;
- an ACTCOSS forum on welfare reform;
- a number of National Shelter board meetings;
- a number of ACOSS Forums on Social Housing; and
- a Darwin forum for Northern Territory SAAP workers to discuss SAAP IV.

AFHO has also been involved in the management of GST training assistance to low income and Crisis accommodation providers in conjunction with the Community Housing Federation of Australia and the National Organisation of Aboriginal Housing. More generally AFHO has been heavily involved in ongoing consultation with organisations relevant to the core and project work of AFHO including: ACOSS, National Shelter, the Community Housing Federation of Australia, the National Community Housing Forum, the National Welfare Rights Network and academics interested in homelessness and housing.

### **Participation in National Research**

In early 2000 AFHO became a minor partner in an existing partnership between Craze Lateral Solutions and St Vincent's Hospital (Melbourne) to undertake Commonwealth funded research into outcomes for people who are homeless with a mental illness. AFHO was involved in the organisation, facilitation and recording of a number of state/territory based consultation workshops for this project, as well as general day to day management aspects of the project.

### **Provision of Services and Information to AFHO Constituents**

Over 1999-2000 AFHO convened a range of meetings to facilitate membership discussion, debate and policy development on homelessness. There have been two national meetings of the youth, women's and generalist homelessness sectors respectively, with representation from all states and territories, and there have been three face to face AFHO Board meetings over the year. In addition there have been regular meetings by teleconference of the AFHO Board of Management, Executive Committee and Sub-Committees.

In addition to the organisation of national meetings within the homelessness sector, AFHO has provided SAAP services and other interested parties with regular written information on policy issues of contemporary significance to homelessness by:

- generating AFHO Update Bulletins for monthly distribution to the sector via Parity Magazine (CHP Victoria Publication);
- resourcing the preparation and dissemination of newsletters to the youth and women's membership;
- developing specific articles on homelessness for Parity, the National Community Housing Forum (NCHF) newsletter, various state Shelter newsletters and the ACOSS Impact magazine;
- developing and distributing an AFHO Launch Kit;
- developing briefing papers for the AFHO, NYCH, WESNET and CHPA boards on Welfare Reform, SAAP IV, the National Homelessness Strategy, Indigenous Homelessness, AFHO Policies and AFHO Policy Development;
- generating a number of media releases on topics such as State and Commonwealth Government signing of the SAAP Memorandum of Understanding, National SAAP data

figures, the National SAAP Evaluation Report, the Interim Welfare Reform Report, the Stronger Families and Communities Strategy, the Federal Budget and the AFHO Launch; and

- ongoing development and monitoring of the AFHO Website.

### **Management and Governance Related Activities**

The AFHO board and staff have spent a lot of energy over the past year attempting to refine the structure of this new and developing organisation. Work in this area between July and December 1999 included the development of Discussion Papers on the future of AFHO, regular meetings of the AFHO Structural Consolidation Group and full board participation in a significant Structural Review and Planning meeting held over three days in October 1999. Since January 2000 attention has been paid to developing a new board structure and redrafting the AFHO constitution in line with structural changes proposed for the organisation.

In addition to this structural development which is so critical for new organisations the AFHO board and secretariat have continued to undertake general organisational managerial responsibilities including:

- drafting annual budgets and generating and scrutinising monthly financial reports;
- developing position descriptions and employing an Executive Officer and Policy Officer;
- developing organisational policies, procedures and guidelines;
- relocating the AFHO office to new premises;
- developing an annual Strategic Plan; and
- reviewing and consulting upon the AFHO membership structure.

### **AFHO Activities 2000-2001**

2000-2001 will be an important year for AFHO in terms of both organisational development and policy issues.

A new board incorporating new positions for an independent chairperson and Indigenous, Non-English Speaking Background and rural and remote representatives will be elected in November 2000.

A review of the Commonwealth Government program, the National Secretariat Program, that provides operational funds to AFHO is due for completion in December 2000. The organisation's funding security beyond December is unknown at this stage, and this is likely to cause a range of management 'nightmares' over the coming year.

SAAP IV will be introduced and it will be important for AFHO to participate in the ongoing development of the program and to monitor the different directions the program is likely to take in different states and territories. Specifically, there will be a review of the national SAAP data collection that AFHO will need to get involved in.

The development of the long announced and much awaited commonwealth National Homelessness Strategy will take place over 2000-2001. AFHO will need to provide submissions to this Strategy, and resource the sector to participate in it.

Finally, the ongoing agenda for welfare reform in Australia will be of important significance to AFHO because of the role income support plays in the lives of homeless people and those at risk of homelessness.



# Founding Members



## National Youth Coalition for Housing (NYCH)

*NYCH was established in 1982 to prevent and alleviate youth homelessness in Australia by:*

- providing coordination and resourcing to services for young homeless people nationally;
- monitoring government policy and service developments relevant to youth homelessness;
- undertaking policy development and research on youth housing/homelessness; and
- lobbying government and the broader community to take the required steps to reduce youth homelessness in Australia



## Women's Services Network (WESNET)

*WESNET was first funded in December 1994 to improve and promote high quality service provision for women and children who have experienced domestic violence, and women who are homeless for any other reason. WESNET's main objectives are to:*

- provide a national voice for State and Territory women's homelessness services;
- organise and maximise the skills of women's homelessness services nationally;
- strengthen and inform the tradition of women developing and running services for women who are subjected to male violence; and
- undertake policy development and research on domestic violence and women's homelessness.



## Council for Homeless Persons Australia (CHPA)

*CHPA was established by State and Territory Networks in 1996 following concern that the needs of single adults and families experiencing homelessness were being overlooked by both Government and the wider community. The aims of CHPA are to:*

- advocate to achieve social justice for people who are homeless;
- undertake policy development in pursuit of the purpose of the organisation;
- facilitate information exchange between members;
- initiate and sponsor national research projects on homelessness and related issues;
- support and develop the capacity of State and Territory networks; and
- work in partnership with members and government to improve the quality of services available to people who are homeless.



# Treasurer's Report



In a year that has been full of organisational change, I would like to thank Sally Watson (Executive Officer) and Macushla Hares (Administration Coordinator) for the huge amount of time and effort that they have put into the financial management of the organisation. Their hard work has certainly made my position as Treasurer much easier than it would otherwise have been.

## **Core AFHO Funds**

AFHO Received a total of \$301,101 from the National Secretariat Program (NSP) (formally the Community Sector Support Scheme) during the 1999/00 financial year. AFHO also received \$3,000 for its involvement in the Department of Family and Community Services funded project '*Improving Outcomes for Homeless People with Mental Illness*'. AFHO will continue its involvement with the project in the 00/01 financial year.

AFHO has finished the financial year with an operating deficit of \$14,360. The main areas of expenditure have been on salaries, national board meetings and office operation expenses.

## **AFHO Funding of NYCH, WESNET and CHPA**

In August 1999 a meeting was convened by the AFHO Board of Management to review the structure of the organisation. Two decisions made at this meeting had significant financial implications for AFHO, NYCH, WESNET and CHPA, they are as follows:

- The sub-contracting arrangement between AFHO and the participating organisations would cease as of 31 December 2000;
- from 1 January 2000 new reduced organisational resourcing arrangements between AFHO and each participating organisation would commence with each being allocated funds for the purpose of consulting with their constituencies, the outcomes of these consultations will drive the ongoing policy agenda of AFHO.

The participating organisations will retain their individual incorporated status's and will continue to seek project funding for issues related to their constituencies.

## **National Secretariat Program Review (NSP)**

In June 2000 AFHO was notified by the Department of Family and Community Services that a review of the NSP would commence in July 2000. As part of the review a discussion paper on future funding structures was released along with an invitation for organisations to submit responses to the discussion paper by 30 September 2000. Findings and recommendations of the review are due to be released before December 2000.

An offer to extend the period of the 1999/00 contract until 31 December was received, and AFHO, after consultation with other services funded through the NSP, accepted.

A positive outcome for AFHO from the review would be the continuation of funding at the current level and preferably guaranteed for a period of greater than a year. Ultimately however, an increase in the level of funding would provide AFHO with resources to be directed into other critical areas, such as improving the participation of homeless people in the work of the organisation. The allocation of adequate triennial funding by the government, would also alleviate some of the pressure that the organisation currently faces in developing and committing to long term strategic workplans.

## **Auditors Report**

A copy of the 1999/00 Auditors Report for the Australian Federation of Homelessness Organisations follows this report.

***Arian Schaap***

***AFHO Treasurer 1999/00***