



# Homelessness Australia

*Creating a framework for ending homelessness*

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Submission to the Child Protection Discussion Paper  
“Australia's children: safe and well”.

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## Introduction

Homelessness Australia is the national peak body for the homelessness sector. We represent more than 1,000 agencies as well as individuals and others who work with homeless people. Our policy work is guided by three reference groups which provide advice about key issues and represent diverse parts of the homelessness sector.

They are:

- The Women's Services Network (WESNET)
- The National Youth Coalition for Housing (NYCH)
- The Council to Homeless Persons Australia (CHPA)

We welcome this opportunity to make a submission to the Child Protection Discussion Paper, "Australia's children: safe and well".

Our submission focuses on the integration of child protection with homelessness and other services, as well as the prevention of young people from transitioning from care into homelessness.

### **Summary of Recommendations**

- Develop a national framework of consistent principals, policies, and definitions that will determine which programs are responsible for meeting the various needs of children and young people.
- Provide support programs that ensure the rate of people leaving state care and subsequently becoming homeless is significantly lowered.
- Ensure communication and working partnerships are established across related programs, organisations and policy areas.
- Fund programs to meet demand and ensure adequate and professional levels of service.



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## Developing a national framework to promote cooperation and consistency

The National Youth Coalition for Housing previously published a report entitled “States of Neglect”. The report presents an analysis of child protection legislation and the link between child and youth homelessness. It details how each State/Territory presents different definitions of children, youth, or young people who are at risk, and that each interfaces differently with SAAP in its own jurisdiction. In NSW for example, it was stated that SAAP had become a “de facto residential of Out of Home Care”.<sup>1</sup>

In addition, Homelessness Australia has received anecdotal evidence of women and children being turned away from emergency accommodation systems due to excess demand and confusion over jurisdictional issues, as well as reports of young mothers with children receiving tents and blankets from charity groups because of a lack of accommodation options.

Homelessness Australia is thus fully supportive of the need for a national framework as realised in the Child Protection Discussion Paper.

A national framework is needed to determine which programs and departments are responsible for the protection of children and families, and to ensure consistent policy and procedures nationwide. This will enable working relationships to be more readily formed between stakeholders and service providers in the field of child protection.

To successfully provide for the care and protection of children, a number of organisations, programs and departments must work together.

As an example of cross program partnerships, the data sets for (SAAP) and Child Protection could possibly be combined in the future<sup>2</sup>. Homelessness Australia is pleased that the Child Protection Discussion Paper itself states that “there needs to be close links between the national framework for protecting children and the White Paper on preventing homelessness”<sup>3</sup>. We strongly support this recognised need for linkages between frameworks and programs.

Similar links will need to be established between child protection, health and education.

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<sup>1</sup> National Youth Coalition for Housing, “States of Neglect”, 2003.

<sup>2</sup> AIHW, “Linking SAAP, child protection and juvenile justice data collections”, Accessed on the 1<sup>st</sup> July 2008 at <http://www.aihw.gov.au/publications/csi/lscpajjdc-afs/lscpajjdc-afs.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> Accessed on the 27<sup>th</sup> of July 2008 at [http://www.facsia.gov.au/family/child\\_protection\\_discussion\\_paper/ChildProtectionDiscussion%20PaperFINAL.pdf](http://www.facsia.gov.au/family/child_protection_discussion_paper/ChildProtectionDiscussion%20PaperFINAL.pdf)



## Recommendations

- Develop a national framework consisting of consistent principals, policies, and definitions that determine which programs are responsible for meeting the needs of children and young people.
- Promote communication, cooperation and partnerships between related organisations, programs, and departments. For example, between health, education, homelessness services, child protection, juvenile justice, etc.
- Establish links with other programs, and consolidate activities where possible, for example, by combining SAAP, Child Protection, and Juvenile Justice data sets, and similar projects.

## Support programs and “leaving care” services

Young people transitioning from care are more likely to suffer a range of setbacks compared to the general population<sup>4</sup>.

It has been established that young people leaving care are more likely to:

- Have lower levels of education
- Be unemployed or underemployed
- Be incarcerated or involved in the criminal justice system
- Experience homelessness or live in unstable housing arrangements<sup>5</sup>

The same report also states that in one study, half of the group of young people who had left care had experienced a period of homelessness.<sup>6</sup>

The developmental shift from adolescence into adulthood is a challenging period under ideal circumstances, and those transitioning from care are likely to face even greater challenges.

Integrated support services need to be funded and available for young people transitioning from care. These services need to be provided without cutting people off due to time limits or age restrictions, so that support can be continued for young adults who have left care.

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<sup>4</sup> Dr Joseph McDowall for CREATE Foundation Limited, “Report Card Transitioning From Care”, March 2008.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid, p 16



The Create Foundation lists seven “pillars” in which young people will need support services while transitioning from care<sup>7</sup>.

These foundational support programs need to be developed in the following areas:

- Relationships
- Education
- Housing
- Employment
- Life Skills
- Identity, Youth Engagement, Emotional Healing
- Financial Support

Services need to offer continued support past the period where a person leaves child protection, as young adults still need considerable support to transition to independent living. For example, Youth Allowance offers support to young people until they are 25 years old. At a minimum, services would need to have the capacity to support young people for a similar time period on their path to independence.

This will be an important part of developing a new approach to homelessness.

**Recommendations:**

- Programs need to be available and ensure young people transitioning from care have the necessary skills and support to enable them to lead independent lives.
- Support needs to start before a person leaves care. Successful programs require support to look past the definitions of “child”, and allow support to continue to be received by young people and young adults after they have left care.
- Support programs should be built around the “seven pillars” of support for young people transitioning from care.

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid, p 13-15.



## Adequate funds, implementation, and targeted resourcing

A request that Homelessness Australia has heard from service providers is that the government ensures that regardless of what form a new child protection scheme takes, it must include adequate funding and targeting of resources to ensure services can meet demand.

The Create Foundation report that scrutinised the transitioning of young people from care suggests the following:

“It would seem desirable for Governments that haven’t already done so to aim for a more explicit statement of budget allocation for care-leaving support to reduce the uncertainty and make expectations clearer, and minimise the need for discretionary judgments. This would lead to a more equitable distribution of support funding for transition from care across Australia.”<sup>8</sup>

The same report also finds that current implementation often falls short of policy and legal guidelines.

For example, SAAP data reveals a high percentage of young people, youth, and families turned away when requiring accommodation. Three quarters of couples with children, two thirds of individuals with children, and two thirds of accompanying children were turned away from SAAP services when requiring new and immediate accommodation. Although specific statistics on the age of those turned away from SAAP are unavailable, over half of all people with an unmet request for immediate accommodation were under 20 years of age.<sup>9</sup>

### Recommendations

- Programs that service children and young people must be funded to appropriately meet demand and needs of young people.
- Explicit funding arrangements need to be provided for care-leaving support for services that help young people transition from care, and lessen the risk of individuals experiencing homelessness.

<sup>8</sup> Dr Joseph McDowall for CREATE Foundation Limited, “Report Card Transitioning From Care”, March 2008.

<sup>9</sup> <http://www.aihw.gov.au/publications/aus/bulletin56/bulletin56.pdf>, accessed on 30<sup>th</sup> June 2008.