Outcomes from the 2012 Homelessness Australia Conference

An evidence based policy paper
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Introduction
Homelessness Australia hosted the 7th National Homelessness Conference from 5-7 September 2012 at the Melbourne Convention and Exhibition Centre.

Over 750 delegates attended the conference with over half of these also participating in the pre-conference workshops that were held on Wednesday 5 September.

It is always difficult to measure the lasting outcomes of events such as a national conference. We know that each conference provides an opportunity for workers in the homelessness sector to connect with others in the broader community sector and Federal and State/Territory Government representatives.

This is important at any time but the 2012 conference took place in the context of the current funding environment with the first iteration of the National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness nearing conclusion and increased activity from the sector around what we may want to see incorporated into the next National Affordable Housing Agreement.

This provided delegates and speakers with an opportunity to reflect on the increased activity and significant reform that has occurred in the homelessness space over the past four years. This was the rationale behind the two plenary panel sessions consisting of State and Territory Government representatives on the first day of the conference proper and sector respondents on day two.

We know that the conference offers participants a chance to hear about and share examples of best practice and models that are working to prevent and/or respond to or end homelessness for people. This is an important means of stimulating ideas and thoughts about how we may be able to add value to policy and practice in our own services/workplaces.

We know that participants have stated that they derived a great deal from both the keynote presentations of the international keynote speakers and the various workshops.

The lasting benefits and medium term outcomes of an event such as a national conference however are harder to measure and are in many ways intangible.

This paper presents a snapshot of some of the findings from papers presented at the Homelessness Australia conference. It will also canvass some of the feedback received from delegates.

In doing so we hope to identify the key messages that delegates took away from the 7th National Homelessness Conference and articulate these in the following pages.
Delegate profile/evaluation forms
The 2012 7\textsuperscript{th} National Homelessness Conference evaluation was done in September and October 2012. 101 evaluations were received, with more than 75\% done online through survey hosting website Survey Monkey.

Over half of the respondents were from specialist homelessness services, with ‘other’ community organisations, peak bodies, academics and governments also represented. There was a 50/50 split of HA members/non-members.

How people heard about the conference was an even mix between colleagues, conference flyers and emails. Others heard about it through HA staff, the HA website and HA publications.

The vast majority of people who returned completed evaluation forms reported having a positive experience of the conference (just over 40\% finding it excellent and 42\% good). Some of the comments received were:

“Very well organised, extremely relevant guest speakers, superb venue and excellent food!”
“Great range of presenters, great opportunities to mingle”

The conference program was viewed positively, with approx 85\% of respondents finding it good or excellent. Most rated the international keynotes highly. The conference presenters were also mostly rated “good.”

In terms of improvement some of the suggestions were:

“More alignment with the national strategy in presentation and a focus on the NAHA”
“Didn’t like the half hour sessions: they were not long enough”

The workshops
For the first time, Homelessness Australia decided to incorporate a series of eight workshops into the conference program itself, extending the duration of the conference proper to three days.

The workshop themes were as follows:

- Hidden humpies: cultural barriers of homelessness for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples with disabilities. Facilitated by Jodi Saxton-Barney.
- CHPA Workshop- Emerging Strategies for ending homelessness. Presented by Nan Roman, National Alliance for Ending Homelessness, USA.
- Homelessness and Disability workshop. Facilitated by Hanover Welfare Services and the University of Adelaide.


WESNET workshop: Technology safety in a digital world: safety planning around technology misuse. Presented by Karen Bentley and the Women’s Services Network.

NYCH Workshop. Charter of Rights for Young People. Presented by the National Youth Coalition for Housing.

What are the professional development needs of the homelessness sector? Presented by Dr Angela Spinney from the Swinburne Institute.

The workshops were well attended, in particular those that were hosted by our three international keynote speakers and Hidden Humpies. Homelessness Australia received a significant amount of positive feedback about all of the workshops and the decision to incorporate the workshops into the conference schedule has been well received.

**Emerging strategies in ending homelessness**

This workshop was presented by Ms Nan Roman in conjunction with the Council to Homeless Persons Australia (CHPA).

It provided an opportunity for participants to hear from Nan Roman about service models, methods of engagement and strategies for ending ‘chronic’ homelessness that have emerged in the United States over the past fifteen years.

The discussion focussed on a number of the following themes:

**Housing First**

Participants heard from Nan about the Housing First model, which has emerged as a response to chronic homelessness over the past two decades and has more recently been implemented as a response to family homelessness in the United States.

Housing First is an approach to ending homelessness that centres on providing homeless people with housing as quickly as possible – and then providing services as needed. This approach has the benefit of being consistent with what most people experiencing homelessness want and seek help to achieve.

Housing First programs share critical elements:

- A focus on helping individuals and families access and sustain permanent rental housing as quickly as possible without time limits;
- A variety of services delivered to promote housing stability and individual well-being on an as-needed basis;
• A standard lease agreement to housing, as opposed to mandated therapy or services compliance.

While all Housing First programs share these critical elements, program models vary significantly depending upon the population served. For people who have experienced chronic homelessness, there is an expectation that intensive (and often specialised) services will be needed indefinitely.

For most people experiencing homelessness, however, such intensive services are not necessary. The vast majority of homeless individuals and families fall into homelessness after a housing or personal crisis that led them to seek help from the homelessness assistance system. For these families and individuals, the Housing First approach is ideal, as it provides them with assistance to find permanent housing quickly and without conditions. In turn, such clients of the homelessness assistance networks need surprisingly little support or assistance to achieve independence, saving the system considerable costs.

Participants heard about the different iterations of ‘housing first’ approaches to ending homelessness, and how these were applied to particular groups in different locations and situational contexts across the United States. They were then invited to consider and share examples of ‘housing first’ and other models of housing for people experiencing homelessness that have been established here in Australia and to explore which elements were transferrable.

Critical time intervention
Participants heard from Nan about the ‘critical time intervention’ case management model.

Critical Time Intervention (CTI) is an empirically supported, time-limited case management model designed to prevent homelessness in people with mental illness following discharge from hospitals, shelters, prisons and other institutions. This transitional period is one in which people often have difficulty re-establishing themselves in stable housing with access to needed supports. CTI works in two main ways: by providing emotional and practical support during the critical time of transition and by strengthening the individual’s long-term ties to services, family, and friends. Ideally, post-discharge assistance is delivered by workers who have established relationships with clients during their institutional stay. CTI was originally developed at Columbia University and New York State Psychiatric Institute with significant support from the National Institute of Mental Health and the New York State Office of Mental Health. The model is now being widely applied and tested in the US, Europe and South America.

The model is of particular relevance here in Australia because there is evidence of comparatively high rates of mental illness, particularly severe and persistent mental illness amongst people experiencing homelessness. In addition, the policy articulated in The Road Home of preventing exits into homelessness from institutions recognised that this was a
major driver of homelessness. In addition to preventing exits into homelessness from mental health settings, the policy calls for additional effort to be devoted to the prevention of exits into homelessness from corrections, juvenile justice, alcohol and other drug treatment and statutory care settings. It is widely believed that people in these settings also experience higher rates of mental illness than other Australians, so again the critical time intervention approach to case management could add value here in Australia.

**Progressive engagement**
Participants were also afforded the opportunity to discuss the progressive engagement approach to addressing homelessness which is recognised as best practice by the National Alliance to End Homelessness.

Progressive engagement is a nationally recognised best practice in addressing homelessness, which provides customised levels of assistance to families and preserves the most extensive interventions for households with the most severe barriers to housing success. Progressive engagement is a strategy to enable service delivery systems to effectively target resources.

Progressive engagement refers to a strategy of starting with a small amount of assistance for a large group of people and then adding more assistance as needed. The National Alliance to End Homelessness has featured Progressive engagement as an important strategy in the national implementation of the HEARTH Act.

**Permanent supportive housing**
Participants also heard from Nan about models of permanent supportive housing that are working to end homelessness for people who have had long term experiences with the ‘shelter system’ in the United States and histories of sleeping outside.

Permanent Supportive Housing is a very new concept in the Australian context but it was no doubt useful for participants to have the opportunity to engage directly with the United States peak body and discuss with each other how this model of ending homelessness for people might look in Australian cities and towns.

**Values led: How are homeless led charities staying close to the mission?**
This workshop was led by Mark McGreevy from Depaul international, a large Catholic homelessness provider operating in a number of countries including the United Kingdom, Ireland, France and the United States. Depaul International, (previously Depaul Foundation) was formed in 2004 following the expansion and success of Depaul UK (previously Depaul Trust), an organisation founded in 1989 to respond to the growing number of young people sleeping rough on the streets of London.

Mark explained the values that guide the work of Depaul international and the services that operate under its auspice. In the case of Depaul these values can be traced back hundreds of years and are grounded in the works of Vincent De Paul and the Daughters of Charity.
The workshop focussed on the values that underpin the work of charitable and not for profit organisations. Participants were encouraged to think about the values underpinning the work of Homelessness Australia and their own organisations and to think about how these values and the overall goals and mission statement guide and influence the work of an organisation.

Mark focussed on the following questions during the course of the workshop:

What are organisational values? Usually they are something created by founders but what happens to them when the founders move on?

Why are they important? They are not really about what we do but they are certainly about why and how we do it! Are they displayed everywhere or are they buried in the corporate plan and lying on a shelf?

How do you ensure that they are taught and caught? That assumes you do have an intentional programme which explains and makes them real to staff. It also assumes that workers refer to the values in day to day practise.

Finally, how do you refresh the understanding of values and ensure you are maintaining them? How do you review and audit values?

The workshop was incredibly well received with participants providing positive feedback on the discussion stimulated about the values that underpin the work of an organisation and the impact that this can/could and should/does have on service design and delivery.

**Walk proud, dance proud: A shelter based intervention for on-reserve first nations families in Canada**

In this workshop our international keynote presenter, Alison Cunningham detailed the service delivery model that the Canadian and Alberta Governments funded that focussed on a holistic response to the resolution of family violence in First Nations communities. The model was of particular interest to participants because it focussed on working with men who were perpetrators of violence as well as women and children. The model Alison described was delivered by the Alberta Council of Women’s Shelters and the five ‘First Nations’ shelters.

There were a significant number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participants in the workshop, who felt that they gained valuable insights into an international model of working to end family violence in Aboriginal communities.

Workshop participants said the workshop offered a fresh international perspective of the intersection between policy and practice in a community setting.
**Hidden Humpies**

This important workshop examined homelessness amongst Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people with disabilities. Presenter Jody Saxton-Barney emphasised that the phenomenon of homelessness amongst Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians was an old phenomenon and not a new story. Jody herself experienced homelessness in her early life in Queensland and explained that it (homelessness) is an experience all too common to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in Australia.

That said the workshop dovetailed nicely with emerging research on homelessness and disability which was the focus of another workshop. We are beginning to understand that people with disabilities are at increased risk of sub-optimal housing outcomes and homelessness. We also know that Aboriginal Australians are dramatically over-represented in both Census data on homelessness and data on the use of specialist homelessness services.

The workshop examined the incidence of disability amongst Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and the need to be treated with dignity that all people are entitled to.

The facilitator shared examples of discrimination suffered by Aboriginal people in housing that were either because of, or exacerbated by, their disability.

Jody explained the work undertaken by her consultancy and proposed that there were three elements that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people needed to secure to begin to address dislocation, discrimination and exclusion:

- Belonging, both as an individual and to one’s culture
- Access to services (culturally responsive) and support
- Inclusion through shared responsibility for community life and services.

Participants were afforded a unique opportunity to experience the narrative processes of cultural engagement and advancement in addressing the survival and service needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people living with disabilities who are experiencing homelessness.

Evaluations demonstrated that the workshop was extremely well received by participants.

**Key note presentations**

The international keynote presentations were very well received by delegates.

Nan Roman spoke broadly about the range of strategies that have been, and are being implemented in the United States to end homelessness for people.
This included a particular focus on aspects of the ‘Housing First’ model, who it works well for, who it may not work as well for and the challenges and successes of permanent supportive housing.

Attendees also gained some insight into the operation of the shelter system in the United States as well as recent homelessness trends there.

While Nan was in Australia, Homelessness Australia liaised with Departments and other organisations in the homelessness sector and assisted with the coordination of meetings with Nan. This provided an important forum for the exchange of ideas and an important opportunity for the establishment of a dialogue between Australia and the United States.

Mark McGreevy spoke positively about the role of homelessness organisations and the importance of staying true to the mission.

He outlined what he sees as the top ten issues facing homelessness agencies today, offering a global perspective.

He re-affirmed that it is important to conceive of homelessness as a process, not as a static thing. He explained the ETHOS typology which is used in Europe to categorise groups of people in states of homelessness, housing exclusion and marginal housing.

He talked about the work of DePaul International and how in his experience, homelessness is the end result of multiple disadvantages and system failure.

He emphasised the importance of working together noting that in his experience there is too much competition between agencies. Leaders need to know each other on a personal level.

As with Nan Roman, Homelessness Australia assisted to facilitate additional meetings between relevant providers and Mark. This is another (less immediately tangible) benefit/outcome of the conference.

Our third keynote speaker, Alison Cunningham for the Centre for families in the justice system in Canada presented on Friday morning.

In the US and Canada Violence against Women and Homelessness are two different sectors. Homelessness is less well resourced leading to very big blockages. In VAW, the number of beds and shelters are increasing, but half the admissions are readmissions.

Best practice is not just What, but How, with Whom and When.

Dichotomies:

- Feminist/Clinical: in Canada mental health services are not available, are not residential, so there is an increased need for clinical practice
• Fragmentation/holistic - shelters need to be generalist
• Ending DV/meeting the payroll
• Meeting the Need/spreading ourselves too thin
• Grant Funding/Core Funding – The majority of funding in Canada is for Projects
• Staff safety/funding constraints
• Woman centred/women centred
• Our needs / client needs
• End homelessness/creating homelessness – can only stay for 21 days

Alison also made the point, that whilst it all gets very stressful it is important to smile –“fake it till you make it”.

Panel sessions

State of Play: The State & Territory Implementation Plans
This panel session provided State and Territory bureaucrats with the opportunity to present the achievements and challenges relating to implementation of the NAHA and NPHA. Unfortunately, there was no opportunity for questions which led to a poor rating from those who completed evaluation forms.

State of Play: Peaks respond to States and Territories
A number of representatives from peak bodies responded to the State and territory comments and provided their own assessment of progress, and what lies ahead, in the homelessness sector.

The numbers game
A range of experts in data collection and the Census talked about the review of “Counting the Homeless”, the upcoming release of Census data relating to homelessness, exploring issues relating to counting people who are experiencing homelessness in the Census and work on the definition of homelessness. Key groups such as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders, and young people, were likely to be under-represented and this generated healthy debate.

Concurrent streams

Youth
The presentations in the youth stream were as follows:

Youth 102: Youth crisis accommodation and support – Steve Vicino (Housing SA) & Wendy Malycha (St John’s Youth Services), SA.

An Aspirational Community: building motivation in Foyer – Jethro Sercombe, Anglicare WA
Ladder (un) Ltd – David White, National Program Manager, Ladder

What’s the Plan: facilitating transition for young people leaving care – Dr Joseph McDowall, CREATE, QLD.

Inner-city Youth @ Risk Project: from bed to beyond, exit pathways for high needs young people – Cindi Petersen & Beverley Aufai, NSW.

Transgender youth – Ms Elizabeth Ceissman NSW.

Participants in this stream learned about new and innovative models of support for young people that have been made possible through new funding agreements such as the National Affordable Housing Agreement (NAHA) and the National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness (NPAH).

The innovative youth 110 service model that has revolutionised the provision of short-term accommodation for young people in the Adelaide CBD was the focus of the first presentation in the youth stream.

St John’s Youth Services has operated in Adelaide for more than thirty years and had until recently been providing crisis accommodation in two separate congregate facilities under a model of care in an accommodation environment that was growing increasingly unsustainable. The new model sees young people accommodated in motel/apartment style self-contained accommodation in a mixed tenure development featuring rental tenancies and home purchasers. Rather than being treated as ‘clients’ in a conventional sense, the models takes information from the young people in the same way as if they were guests of a hotel/motel.

That said, participants learned that each young person receives a tailored level of support hours per week depending upon their assessed level of need and the factors that led to their experience of homelessness. The model was one of partnership building in design and delivery and was successful due to the support of the SA Cabinet, Government, the Adelaide City Council and the NGO sector.

The new funding environment (NAHA, stimulus and NPAH) also made the long overdue modernisation of the St John’s model possible.

Two other presentations in this stream focussed on ‘Foyer’ models that support young people to end their homelessness and transition to independent living, with security of tenure and mentoring offered in exchange for the young person remaining engaged in education, employment or training.

Participants heard about the Foyer model in Leederville in Western Australia which has opened alongside an existing Institute of Technology. The model is the largest Foyer in Australia with ninety-eight self-contained units of accommodation. The support component
is managed by Anglicare WA while Foundation Housing does tenancy management. The model aims to motivate clients to reach beyond welfare dependency.

Participants also heard about the proposed expansion of the Foyer partnerships model funded by the Australian Football League (AFL) and State and Territory Governments. Participants learned about the integrated housing and support model that is being delivered through the Ladder program and the challenges and successes of the roll out of the model to date.

The CREATE foundation delivered a presentation about facilitating the transition to independent living for young people exiting state care. CREATE continues to report that more than one third of participants experience homelessness within a year of leaving state care and more than two thirds report not having or not being aware of a leaving care plan.

The Inner-city youth at risk project is collaboration between a broad range of Government and non-Government agencies and service providers in Inner-Sydney and Kings Cross. The partnership is being delivered through a Homelessness Action Plan (HAP) and has three components; brokerage, social housing and outreach sweeps. The presentation included a DVD which gave an overview of the project’s operations and included perspectives from two young people that had been assisted.

Finally, there was a presentation about the challenges faced by transgender youth.

**Children**

Presentations in this stream were:

‘Let’s Play!’ – Deanna Rohrsheim, Deborah Lockwood and Katrina Power, Together 4 Kids, SA.

Children and homelessness: The way forward for policy and practice – Dr Shelley Mallett, Hanover Welfare Services, Victoria.


Baby, it’s cold outside – Wendy Bunston and Karen Glennen, Royal Children’s Hospital and Barwon South West Children’s Program., Victoria

Time for a change – Kedy Kristal, Patricia Giles Centre, WA.

Delegates who attended the concurrent sessions in the stream ‘homelessness and children’ heard about:
• ‘child focussed’ models of support
• the way forward for policy and practice
• child centred needs assessments
• therapeutic interventions with children who have experienced family violence
• children’s experiences of homelessness services
• infant care in a homelessness context, and
• counselling techniques specifically for children who have experienced violence within a family unit.

In the new Specialist Homelessness Services Data Collection children are counted as ‘clients’ of specialist homelessness services in their own right. This is having and will continue to have important implications for service delivery. Many services are thinking about how they support children and the new data collection allows services to better record how they are meeting the needs of children to whom they are delivering support. The data tells us that most young children accessing specialist homelessness services are in the care of a mother who is escaping domestic and family violence. However, little is known or at least little comes through in the data in the way of information about the needs of children in specialist homelessness services or the impact of losing the family home on them.

A number of the presentations in this stream shed some light on the experiences of children in homelessness services in particular the audio-visual presentation entitled ‘How high can we go?’ This presentation gave a voice to children and the audio-visual medium enabled them to share their experiences of homelessness and life in homelessness services directly with participants.

Other presentations focussed on what good and best practice might look like in working with children in the homelessness and family violence sectors. One presentation focussed on the development of a collaborative model between the health, mental health and homelessness sectors that has created a refuge for infants that supports infant health and wellbeing and ongoing development. In essence the presentation explored ‘what makes a home’ for an infant.

Other presentations highlighted the shift in practice that has been occurring in homelessness services over the past decade and in particular over the past five years as the interim targets centred on children in the White Paper and children being counted as clients in their own right drive practice and service delivery changes.

**Culturally and Linguistically Diverse People**
This stream focussed on responses to homelessness amongst people from Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CaLD) backgrounds.

The Presentations in this stream were:
Innovative responses to homelessness amongst refugee youth – David Keegan, Settlement Services International

Homelessness in the growth corridor, everyone’s responsibility, a whole of community response to the early prevention of homelessness for CaLD communities – Cheryl De Zilwa, Windermere Child and Family Services.

*Family violence in CaLD communities: issues, barriers, needs and gaps* – Maya Avdibegovic, In Touch Multicultural Centre Against Family Violence, Victoria.

Participants in this stream heard from practitioners who are delivering innovative and community-wide responses to homelessness amongst people from Culturally and Linguistically Diverse backgrounds, particular people who have re-settled in Australia as humanitarian entrants.

One of the presentations focussed on addressing homelessness amongst recently arrived young people with refugee status using localised models of care. Challenges noted in the presentation included; language barriers, minimal knowledge of bureaucratic and other service systems and limited independent living skills. By harnessing the power of leaders in emerging communities and drawing on shared resources, they seek to deliver culturally appropriate care and support to the young people to get and keep them housed.

Participants were presented with an overview of the service models as well as data on housing and support outcomes and an outline of how the housing partnerships were formed. They also gained a greater understanding of the issues that can lead to homelessness as well as the support services that are available to individuals and young people from refugee backgrounds.

Other presenters talked about clusters of humanitarian entrants and new migrants in the growth corridors in Melbourne and the importance of coordinated multi-agency responses and the strengths based model of case management to ending homelessness for humanitarian entrants and people from CaLD backgrounds.

**Sector Issues**
The presentations in the sector issues stream were as follows:

*Pay Equity* – Sally McManus, Australian Services Union, NSW.

Australian Charities and not-for-profit-Commission – Dr Tessa Boyd-Caine, ACOSS, NSW.


*What does ‘adequate’ mean anyway?* – Paul O’Callaghan – Catholic Social Services, ACT.
The NSW Homelessness Action Plan: what have we learnt? Where are we going? – Digby Hughes, Homelessness NSW.

Continued evolution or intelligent design; protecting sector diversity and maintaining viability – Travis Gilbert, Homelessness Australia, ACT.

**Older Australians**

The presentations in the older Australians stream were:

*Alcohol use disorders and acquired brain injury among older people who are homeless* – Dr Lucy Burns, National Drug and Alcohol Research Centre, NSW and Dr Elizabeth Conroy, University of Western Sydney, NSW.

Alcohol abuse and the older person: a specialised model of care – Dr Alice Rota-Bartelink, Wintringham, Victoria.

*Home at last* – Jeff Fiedler, Housing for the Aged Action Group, Victoria.

*Housing Crisis and older Victorians* – Ms Trish Westmore, St George Community Housing, Dr Shelley Mallett, Hanover Welfare Services, Victoria.

A predictable crisis of homeless older single women presents an opportunity for a new affordable housing model – Dr Andrea Sharam, Swinburne Institute, Victoria.

*Elderly homelessness: it’s a shame*: Ms Sharon Daley and Mr Richard Silcock, Uniting Care – Aging, NSW.

Older Australians are a group that is of increasing concern for the homelessness sector as the population ages and home ownership rates among older people continue to decline.

Two presentations in this stream focussed on older people with alcohol use disorders and acquired brain injury, arguably more stereotypical cases of homelessness. People in this group could be said to have more complex needs and be more difficult to house.

Other presentations focussed on what has become an emerging area of concern for the homelessness and housing sectors in recent years. They presented evidence of a looming crisis in housing affordability and its implications for Australia as growing numbers of baby boomers enter retirement age.

**Practice Issues**

The presentations in the Practice issues stream were:

Stories of success: provider knowledge of what works with homeless people – Yvonne Thomas, James Cook University, QLD.

Developing pathways to employment for adults experiencing homelessness – Mr Richie Goonan and Ms Jenny Hope, Hanover Welfare Services, Victoria.
The Geelong Project – Associate Professor David Mackenzie, Swinburne Institute and Mike Kelly, Time for Youth, Victoria.

Measuring the vulnerability of people who are street homeless in four Australian Cities - Felicity Reynolds, Mercy Foundation, NSW.

Central Coast regional specialist homelessness service assessment and referral centre – Laurie Maher, Coast Shelter, NSW

Two communities, two contexts: localised approaches to delivering the Reconnect program – Annette Hawkins and Jacqueline Grozinger, Mission Australia, Queensland.

Under 1 Roof: A case study of service integration – Ms Fiona

Research
The research stream included the following presentations:

Are boarding houses disappearing? – Professor Chris Chamberlain, RMIT, Victoria.

Families making it home – Professor Karen Healy, University of Queensland.

How to stop them coming back? Reducing repeat use of refuges – Dr Angela Spinney, Swinburne Institute, Victoria.

Unintended Consequences: the impact of service delivery systems on homelessness in the Nepean-Blacktown region – Associate Professor Michael Darcy, University of Western Sydney, NSW.

Pathways through and out of homelessness: A tale of two client groups – Dr Angela Spinney, Swinburne Institute, Victoria.

Miscounting the homeless: Dr Anne Jenkins and Alice Tibbetts, Community Services Directorate, ACT.

Reproductive health needs of women experiencing homelessness in Sydney – Dr Joe Buskirk, Drug and Alcohol Research Centre NSW.

J2SI: 24 month social and economic outcomes: Implications for Practice – Sue Grigg Sacred Heart Mission Melbourne, Victoria.

Dignity in Marginalisation – Dr Justin Barker, Australian Catholic University

Rights and Legal
The presentations in the Rights and Legal stream were as follows:

People experiencing homelessness and on-the-spot fines: It’s not fine! – James Farrell, Deakin University Law School.
A better lease on life: improving Australian Tenancy Law – Ms Sally Watson – Tenants’ Union of Queensland.

_Tipping the balance to ‘homefulness’ in Queensland_ – Kelly Sciacca and Joe Wright, Mission Australia, Queensland.

**Domestic and Family Violence**  
_Economic Abuse: whose responsibility is it?_ Fiona McDonald – Good Shepherd Youth & Family Service, Victoria.

Working with men who use violence towards family members: enhancing women’s safety and men’s accountability – Robyn Trainor and Alan Thomson, Centre for non-violence, Victoria.

_Safe response for Aboriginal families_ – Ingrid Scicluna, Department for Communities & Social Inclusion, SA.

Sanctuary or SHLV? Comparing UK & Australian responses to enable women to stay at home – Dr Angela Spinney, Swinburne Institute.

_Staying home, leaving violence_ – Caroline Long and Nicky Miller, South East Women’s & Children’s Services, NSW.

Preventing violence against women, new initiatives in working with the media – Ms Alison Macdonald and Fiona McCormack, Domestic Violence Victoria.

**Consumer Stories**

Presentations in the Consumer Stories stream were:

Real Issues with real outcomes: Reducing youth homelessness with long term support – Jane Lazzari, Hope Street Youth and Family Services, Victoria

_Stories of housing stress_ – Ms Sarah Toohey, Australians for Affordable Housing, Victoria.

Client participation, communications and the media: Homeground’s journey- Daniel Scoullar, Homeground, Victoria.

**Indigenous**

Presentations in the Indigenous stream were:

When opportunity knocks, open the door: addressing homelessness through collaborations and community housing growth – Karen Walsh, St George Community Housing, NSW

Factors influencing wellbeing during homelessness of Indigenous Australians – Ms Yvonne Thomas, James Cook University, Queensland.

SA Intervention orders – Danielle Bament, Department for Communities and Social Inclusion, SA.

Why am I still homeless in my country – gaps in Indigenous service delivery – Neville Highfold, Centacare, SA

**Housing models**

Pathways to Recovery – Mr Zed Tintor, B Miles Foundation.

50 homes, 50 lives campaign in Hobart – Dr Jed Donoghue, Salvation Army, Tasmania.

Way2home – An integrated approach to ending homelessness

Keeping a ‘home’

Making do on rent assistance: who CRA fails and how Adrienne Barrett, Tenants Union, Tasmania.

Open for Inspection? Private rental stress in Melbourne’s eastern metropolitan region- Dr Jenny Higgins, Wesley Mission (Vic).

Affording the costs of making it home – Tenar Dwyer McAuley Works, Victoria.

**Single people**

50 Lives, 50 Homes – Karyn Walsh and Jim DeCouto, Micah Projects, Queensland

Findings from the Michael Project – Martin Thomas, Mission Australia & Dr Elizabeth Conroy, University of Western Sydney.

Educating women out of homelessness, Joanna Ellis, Catherine House, SA.

**Economic Research**

The cost of rough sleeping – Dr Kay Wilhelm, St Vincent’s Hospital, NSW.

The politics of homelessness research – Dr Anne Coleman, University of Tasmania.

The real costs of homelessness for young people – Dr Monica Thiekling Swinburne Institute, Victoria and Professor Paul Flatau, University of Western Australia.

**Conclusions**

**Networking**

One of the most significant outcomes of the conference which should never be underestimated is networking opportunities with other professionals in our industry. Service
providers, consumers, academics, peak bodies and government representatives all come together for significant interaction, both formal and informal. For example, FAHCSIA used their conference exhibition stand to promote the Connecting the Dots project (formal interaction) and WESNET engaged with Telstra (a sponsor) regarding possible collaboration on technology safety training (informal networking).

**Branding and positioning**

In the process of planning and delivering this conference, including media coverage of the event, Homelessness Australia and its sponsors and participants receive significant positive coverage. This brands Homelessness Australia as a professional organisation and an expert in our sector, and other sponsors, supporters and participants get flow on benefits from this.

**Learning**

Let’s not discount the actual knowledge that participants take away from a conference.

The quality of information presented can vary from presenter to presenter but overall, forms a pattern of information and awareness-raising that can assist in professional development, the germination of new ideas, and opportunities for practice improvement.

**Our Niche**

In an environment where professional conference providers are entering into providing homelessness-themed conferences, the National Homelessness Conference provides the most cost-effective and wide-ranging option. Professional providers charge a premium rate which is generally only feasible for government employees and very large service providers. The National Homelessness Conference caters to a broader range of attendees including people who have previously experienced homelessness, and encouraging smaller and remote providers to attend through subsidised places and travel assistance.

It is unique in that it brings a diverse range of people together including Government employees, sector practitioners, peak bodies, small and large organisations, researchers mainstream services, and people who are or have experienced homelessness. This allows for broader participation than may otherwise be the case at other conferences.

The money spent and raised through the National Homelessness Conference goes into scholarship/discounted places to the conference, travel assistance, engaging very high quality international speakers – in other words, back into our own sector, not into the profits of a large company.

**Ending homelessness**

The National Homelessness Conference is part of the overall efforts to prevent, respond to and ultimately, to end homelessness in Australia. It supports The Road Home pillars and links with government agendas.
International engagement
Being able to bring out international keynote presenters opens up opportunities for engagement with peak bodies and service providers overseas. The opportunity to facilitate side meetings for Department representatives and service providers offers opportunities for ongoing international collaboration and engagement. The benefits of this are ongoing and could provide a platform for Australia to host an international homelessness conference in the future.

Endnotes

i http://www.endhomelessness.org/pages/housing_first (accessed December 2012)